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HENDRIK R. PIETERSE

It seems stewardship has become the latest favorite concept of pundits and gurus of all stripes and persuasions. A cursory search of the library of a major research university in the city where I work produced more than 270 books and resources devoted to the theme of stewardship. To be sure, many of these books deal with biblical and theological treatments of the topic—no surprise there. What is noteworthy is the array of books that apply the stewardship theme to a decidedly nonreligious issue or field of study: management and leadership development, environmental conservation and ecological preservation, politics—even management of nuclear stockpiles. What is going on here?

Part of the appeal of the stewardship theme to those outside the church might well lie in the fact that the concept resonates with a set of moral and ethical assumptions about what is required for all life on our planet to flourish (indeed, to survive)—assumptions that are increasingly shared among religious and nonreligious folks alike. Two of these assumptions suggest themselves with particular urgency today: (1) All life, human as well as nonhuman, is interconnected in a fragile and increasingly threatened ecology of relationships. (2) Precisely because of this, all of us bear direct responsibility for nurturing and caring for this delicate web. And this responsibility must penetrate and find expression in all aspects of our life together—from personal relationships to financial institutions and the market to our interaction with the nonhuman creation.

Surely Christians should make common cause with this call for responsible stewardship—and many do. But, as the essays below articulate in a variety of ways, our call to stewardship as Christians is a theological issue before it is an economic or political or ecological one. As Judith Smith
LIKE GOOD STEWARDS OF THE MANIFOLD GRACE OF GOD

points out, "Stewardship is the expression of our discipleship in response to God, the giver of life and the source of all we have and are and will be." Stewardship begins with a recognition that all of life is God's gift, thus making a commitment to care for this gift the disciple's only fitting response. But, as Stephen Webb forcefully argues, for this responsibility to be an expression of generosity rather than obligation, Christian stewardship must be grounded in the triune nature of God. Patterned after the perichoretic flow of the divine life, stewards give because they receive and receive because they give; and thus they discover their being—and their reason for being.

Yet, while the divine generosity is extravagant and prodigious, its aim is that all may receive what they need, thus linking the responsibility of stewardship ineluctably with the imperative for justice. This prompts David Krueger to explore "whether and how the notion of stewardship might be embodied effectively within the economic context of our time." Setting for neither unthinking accommodation to the dictates of the market economy nor wholesale rejection of it (which always seems tinged with disingenuity), Krueger offers Christian stewards a way to live with integrity in the market-based economies of our twenty-first-century world.

David Field finds the stewardship symbol wanting as a comprehensive description of the relationship between human beings and nonhuman creation, arguing that it "can obscure the complexities and fractures of human society and the way in which these impact our relationship with the nonhuman creation." While not abandoning this time-honored concept, he critically and creatively retrieves its strengths in the service of an "ecological trinitarian ethic."

While the crucial connection between stewardship and leadership is obvious enough, it is surprising, says Bruce Birch, how little attention has in fact been paid to leadership as an issue of stewardship. Through a close reading of the Hebrew Bible, Bruce then proceeds to address this lacuna in the church's life with an insightful "theology of leadership as stewardship."

The call comes to all of us to be "good stewards of the manifold grace of God." May the generosity of our response be a fitting testimony to our triune God, who is simultaneously Giver, Gift, and Giving.

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Hendrik R. Pieterse is editor of Quarterly Review.
Preachers are often pressured by their congregations to limit their sermons about gift giving to the season of Christmas and to the annual stewardship campaign. This is unfortunate, because Christians are called by the gift of God's grace to be givers all the time. Indeed, the act of giving is not only the primary moral responsibility for the Christian life but also probably the fullest way we have of thinking about the nature of God. We can give cheerfully to others because God has given so much to us; and when we give to others, we participate in the very life of God. When we think about such giving, we are drawn into the mystery that is the triune nature of God. Giving, then, is not only the most important Christian practice but also one of the principal sources for theological reflection on the question of who God is.

Nevertheless, thinking about giving can be as hard as the act itself. For example, what does the doctrine of the Trinity have to do with stewardship? And how can theologians help people to think more clearly about the importance of being generous? The intellectual labor of theology cannot convince people to give more. That is the job of the church, which, through its rituals and preaching, enables believers to participate in the graceful mystery of God's triune nature. But how can they be inspired by theology to become more cheerful givers?

Although many people think of theology as a speculative enterprise with little relationship to concrete and everyday practices, theology at its best is a second-order discipline. This means that theology emerges from and is dependent upon the mundane details of Christian life. Theology is itself a gift from God, because God encourages a response from us not only of praise and worship but also of contemplation and reflection.
Theology, then, is a way of deepening Christian practices by thinking through the gifted character of all reality. The task of the theologian is to convince Christians that the life of giving is more than just a bothersome moral obligation. By demonstrating the theological richness of the basic act of giving something to somebody, theologians can persuade Christians that giving is a way not just of acting but also of knowing. That is, theologians can offer believers a fuller context for their giving, which should help them to be more articulate about something they already practice.

Simply put, in giving the Christian comes to know God more intimately by participating more fully in the life of the body of Christ. Giving is, therefore, an act that is both practical and cognitive. It is a way of doing something in the world that also changes the way in which we see the world. In giving, we see the world as God's gift and we experience ourselves as recipients of an abundance of giving to which we want to respond in kind.

I suggest that the church is the place where we come to know God precisely because it is an institution that is sustained by giving. People come together in the church for the basic purpose of celebrating God's gifts, and Christians remember those gifts through the act of giving to others. Christians are not necessarily more generous than other people, although they should be. But they are a people who have a special relationship toward giving. A Christian is someone who puts gratitude into practice through generosity. A Christian returns God's gifts by participating in the life-giving body of Christ, which is the church, and thus comes to know God more fully.

A Spiritual Matter

The connection between giving and the Trinity is actually outlined in 2 Corinthians 8, where we have one of the most concrete discussions of generosity and sharing that the Bible provides for us. In this letter, Paul was concerned that Gentile Christians express their love in practical ways for their Jewish brothers and sisters in Christ in the mother church at Jerusalem. Paul writes to remind the church of Corinth about their earlier pledge to support a relief fund for Jerusalem Christians.

Already the radical sharing among Jerusalem Christians that was practiced in the earliest days of the church (see Acts 2:44 and 4:34) is becoming a memory; an ideal, a model, that the church clings to but cannot live up to. Some scholars speculate that the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were experiencing acute poverty because, after their conversion, they were cut off...
from relatives, society, and even employment. They had exhausted their internal resources and needed help in caring for their neediest members.

In his second letter to the Corinthian church, Paul shows how the practice of generosity is both a spiritual and a material task. In these thoughts from Paul we have the makings of a real theology of generosity—the idea that in gift giving we can reflect most precisely on just how the spiritual and the material come together. Paul believed that the first community of Christians in Jerusalem were still blessing all other Christians through the gifts that were given to them during God's Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Such spiritual wealth should be supported with monetary aid.

The key to this text is that Paul intermingles the sensitive and practical subject of giving away money with language about God's own generosity and the need for the Corinthian church to maintain a loving and mutual fellowship. Gifts should overflow from the church just as God's grace has spilled over in Jesus Christ. Paul makes clear that these gifts should be voluntary, a bounty and not an extortion. He praises the Macedonians who have been through hard times and yet "have been so exuberantly happy that from the depths of their poverty they have shown themselves lavishly open-handed" (2 Cor. 8:2). What they gave, significantly, was themselves, and thus "their giving surpassed our expectations" (8:5).

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instinctively understood that language. Corinth was a booming commercial
center, and Paul himself was a craftsman who integrated his work with his
ministry, so his employment of economic language is not surprising.

Paul’s world, however, was quite different from ours. He wrote to an
audience that lived in an economy of scarcity rather than abundance and
where economic growth and the distribution of goods was severely limited.
Although trade was prevalent and there was a growing class of merchants
and craftsmen, most people still worked in agriculture and were bound
through inheritance to the place of their family in society, aided by rela­
tionships based on reciprocity. Even in the cities, large-scale acts of benevo­
lence were possible only for the wealthy, and such acts were institutional­
ized in patron–client relationships. Patrons were supposed to demonstrate
their wealth and power through occasional acts of generosity to their cities
(to maintain the sacred cults of the local deities) and to their workers (to
keep them from starving and to allow them to participate in public festi­
vals). In many cases, only patrons could afford to be gift givers, and they
did so as a sign of their wealth and power. The workers or clients, in turn,
were supposed to give their loyalty and submission to their patrons as a
sign of their gratitude for these gifts. Generosity, then, formed the back­
bone of a hierarchical society that allowed for little social mobility and kept
the powerful and the poor firmly in their place.

Paul radically transforms these ideas about gift giving through his
understanding of God’s boundless grace. For Paul, God’s grace is over­
whelmingly different from the Corinthian economy of scarcity. Compared
with the Hellenistic emphasis on hierarchy and submission, the extrava­
gance of God’s giving through Jesus puts everyone on the same level. God
is our patron, but God gives in order to enable all of us to give. Grace
destabilizes all societal patron–client relationships, leaving no basis for
anything other than equality and mutuality. We are all clients of God and
thus owe God thanks. What Paul emphasizes is our need to collaborate
with God’s abundant grace. Debt is not something to be ashamed of,
because our very indebtedness to God enables us to spend so freely.

Three points about giving emerge from this text. First, the economy of
Christian living is based on abundance, not scarcity, precisely because God’s
grace is so extravagant and free. Any economist will tell you that goods and
resources are always in scarce supply relative to demand, which means that
we must compete for our share of the pie—and there will never be enough
of the pie to go around. God works on different economic principles. Grace is a fund freely distributed, driven by a dynamic of proliferation and fecundity. Everything that we are is a gift: to be at all is to be grateful.

Second, the foundation of this new economy is Jesus Christ. This economy is based on an exchange in which God gives us God's own self in order to generate spiritual wealth and power for us. Not only was Jesus poor in his earthly life; but the Incarnation is itself an example of voluntary poverty, since God was willing to give up the privileges of divinity in order to take on the limitations of human form and assume the life of a Jewish peasant. Giving is the currency of the new creation inaugurated by Christ.

Third, the result of this new economy is a new community, the church. Abundance is demanding. When God gives, God expects us to keep on giving and not to store away those gifts for safekeeping. Grace is an action, a force, that compels the continuation of what God has given. Grace, then, has a material—we could even say, political—shape and form. Grace moves in the world; it is the momentum that keeps God's goods in constant circulation, lest we think they are our own. The good news is that we can give to others because we have already given ourselves to God.

The result of this giving is a new community of givers who not only support one another but also let their gifts overflow the boundaries of the church—just as God's grace spills over into our own laps. The church is an institution that survives and thrives due to giving. What a strange place this is that is created and sustained only through acts of generosity! The church is not productive in the sense of contributing anything to the national economy. We do not "make" anything at church. All we do is hear the Word and gather around the Table. The church is productive, then, in the sense that it creates a community of givers, indeed, an economy of giving that is made possible only because God graciously accepts our gifts.

These three points—about the abundant love of the Creator who gives to us through the suffering of the Son in order to inspire a community of givers—obviously already entail the idea that God is a threefold being within a unity of overflowing love. My commentary on Paul's letter demonstrates my argument that the act of giving, which can be so simple, actually illuminates one of the most complex and intimidating Christian doctrines—the threeness of the divine. When we give, we realize that we are not isolated individuals, independent of the actions of others. And when we experience God as the source and the goal of our giving, we know that
CHRISTIAN GIVING AND THE TRINITY

God too does not exist apart from the world as a majestic but lonely being who is self-contained and unaffected by others. The Spirit of Giving teaches us that God is dynamic and communal. Thus, rather than being a speculative and obscure theory about the inner life of God, the doctrine of the Trinity is actually the most practical and fundamental of all Christian beliefs.

The Return of the Gift

Of course, Paul's letter to the Corinthians was written in the ancient world, when the importance of giving was much more crucial to everyday life. Indeed, in the ancient world, gift giving was a matter of survival, because people depended on the constant circulation of goods in order to surmount the harshness of their environment. Those who had more were expected to give to those who had less. Otherwise, they would be subjected to all sorts of bad luck, evil omens, and personal curses. In fact, one of the pleasures and privileges of being wealthy was the ability to give lavishly to others. Much like today, the wealthy displayed their power by distributing food and other gifts to the poor. Many of those occasions for giving were made formal and official through elaborate rituals, where the giving would be accompanied by singing, dancing, and other community activities. Every gift was an opportunity to celebrate, because the community could survive only through the regular exchange of gifts.

The United States is a country founded upon the daily practice of generosity. The third-sector, nonprofit, organizations that make America so great are completely dependent upon the free generosity of those who have nothing directly to gain from their support. Nevertheless, giving in the U.S. is becoming an increasingly difficult activity. Part of the problem is that in a country with so many blessings, many people are isolated by the very wealth that keeps them from depending on one another's gifts. For many of us, giving is set aside for birthdays and Christmas, but we do not practice it in habitual ways. Giving is not a part of the fabric of our lives, perhaps because we are so busy earning and spending in order to stay afloat or get ahead. We live in a society where there are plentiful material goods; so gift giving no longer plays such a crucial role in our survival. Indeed, many people today are deprived of life experiences that could usher them into the joy that comes from generosity. We are pushed from our youngest years to be independent from others; so we do not value the
gratitude that comes from being a receiver of gifts.

Since most of our friends are not dependent on our gifts for their survival, gifts are more an expression of personal identity than a matter of community concern. When we shop for someone else, we look for something that will make our gift special. We want it to say something about us—our taste or our skill in getting just the right thing. Sometimes, we buy things that have no use whatsoever—a pretty item whose only purpose is to be displayed or stored away where it will rarely see the light of day—because we know that our friends and family already have everything they need. At other times, however, we buy gifts that are functional and practical, because we don’t want to waste money on something that nobody really needs. In the not-too-distant past, people made their gifts by hand, not only because they couldn’t afford to shop at the stores but also because the effort they put into an item made it special. Today, handmade items are becoming increasingly rare, and they are not prized as highly as store-bought goods. Nowadays, it is hard to buy somebody something they couldn’t buy themselves, and picking out the right object is a difficult task. It is easier to give a gift certificate or even just cash. Giving has lost much of its personal touch and intimacy.

Thus, in our capitalistic culture, buying and selling are more fundamental than giving and receiving. The hard logic of the market has replaced the soft and fuzzy warmth of charity. Simply put, we know how to shop. But do we know how to give? It shouldn’t surprise us that we often do not know what the role of giving in our lives really is. When gifts become just another kind of commodity to be traded in the market, and when giving becomes another way of meeting a demand after analyzing the demographic data, then gift giving hardly seems distinguishable from the economic exchange that controls so much of our lives. How do we practice a life of selfless giving that is different from the profit-driven motives of the market?

Such worries, interestingly enough, can be found in the very beginning of American history, when the Puritans first landed in Massachusetts. Lewis Hyde, in a fascinating book on giving, observes that in 1764, when Thomas Hutchinson wrote his history of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, he discussed a term that he said was already widely used. The term was Indian giver or Indian gift. “An Indian gift,” he said, “is a proverbial expression signifying a present for which an equivalent return is expected.” Many people still use this term today, calling someone an Indian giver if they expect their gift to be returned.
The early settlers must have been puzzled by the behavior of the Indians. Hyde asks us to imagine this scene: An Englishman visits an Indian. They sit together by a fire and the Indian tries to make his visitor feel at home. The Indian shares with his visitor a pipe of tobacco—a pipe that is carved with symbols of all the tribes of that area and that has circulated among these various tribes as a symbol of peace and friendship. The pipe would stay with one tribe until the tribe felt it was appropriate to pass it along as a sign of alliance and allegiance. At the end of the meeting, the Indian gives the Englishman the pipe. The Englishman is thrilled: a genuine Indian article! It is something to send home as evidence of the exotic peoples in this new world and proof of the adventures of the brave settlers. Or, maybe better yet, he'll use it as a conversation piece, something to show off to his neighbors and pass on to his children. Maybe it will end up in a museum someday, or maybe he will collect enough of these objects to have his own private collection.

Months later, some representatives of another tribe visit the Englishman. To his surprise, they seem anxious about the pipe. His translator suggests that if he wants to show goodwill toward them, he should offer them a smoke and let them keep the pipe. He is upset by this. How could they be so uncivilized as to want to take back something they have already given to him? What kind of people are they? Don't they know anything about the rules of civilized behavior? Out of such experiences came the term Indian giver, because the Indians seemed to want to keep their gifts in circulation, not content to let the white man keep them for himself.

What the Indians thought of the white folks is not recorded. Hyde speculates that they might have called us “white-man givers,” or, better, “white-man keepers.” The instinct of the white man was to keep the gift, to remove it from circulation in order to turn it into private property, while the Indians thought that all gifts were given in order to be given away again, not kept. For Indians, a gift has value only to the extent that it keeps on moving, creating obligations and commitments, creating new communities among those who both receive and give. Indians understood that when you are given something, you are under the obligation to give it back, not keep it.

We can learn a great deal today from traditional cultures where giving was at the center of life. But it also must be said that the Puritans, at their best, understood the fundamental power of sharing. They treated the church as a kind of primitive tribe that was totally dependent on the giving of its members. When John Winthrop composed a sermon in 1630 aboard the ship
that brought him to Massachusetts, he set down the characteristics of the Puritan mind. He also conveyed the ideal of sharing that would provide a foundation for the church and enable the church to play such a significant role in America. For Winthrop, the need for generosity was a puzzle that emerged from deep reflection on the injustices that God apparently permits in this world. Winthrop could conclude only that God has allowed disparities of wealth in humankind so that "every man might have need of [each] other, and from hence they might be all knit more nearly together in the bond of brotherly affection." Poverty was nothing more than an opportunity to build the kind of community that God was planting in the new world of America. Winthrop thought that poverty made sense only if Christians accepted the idea that God has made a covenant with us—a promise to be with us that obligates us, in turn, to be with one another.

Thus, the question of how we should give gifts is not just a question of personal etiquette—something we need to teach our children so that they know how to act at birthday parties and at Christmas. Instead, it is a question that gets at what it means to be a Christian and even at the very nature of God. Especially today, in a culture of plenty, people need to learn how to give, and the church should be that place—a beacon of generosity—where giving becomes real through habitual practice.

The Being of Giving

I have argued that any conversation about Christian giving should lead directly to the topic of the Trinity, but many readers may still be skeptical about this claim. That is understandable, because many discussions of the Trinity traditionally have focused on an intratrinitarian level, sorting out the internal relations within the Godhead. Such theology begins from above, in a deductive manner, and thus can seem abstract and unrelated to ordinary problems and concerns. More recent work in theology has begun from below, with Christian life and liturgy. Indeed, all portraits of the Trinity should emphasize the point that the great Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner formulated as an axiom, namely, that the economic Trinity (the technical term for God's action in the world) is identical to the immanent Trinity (God's nature as it is eternally in itself). We know God because we know how God acts in history. In other words, God is what God does. If we begin with the premise that God is a giver, then we come to the conclusion that we cannot know God without experiencing that
giving ourselves—both in gratitude to God and in generosity to others.

The Trinity is the structure not only of God’s own being but also of how God organizes God’s relationship to the world. The Trinity tells us that God’s being is not static and remote. Instead, God is essentially other-related, ecstatic, and passionate. Such fecundity makes God’s life our own. God is for us because God’s love spills out into the world and invites us, through baptism, to take the plunge and ride the current of God’s movement in history. Of course, we are not God, and we live in a fallen world, where separation and isolation are usually the rule; but the doctrine of the Trinity reminds us that the origin and goal of creation is togetherness and community, not competition and loneliness. God’s very being, then, illustrates how no individual person stands alone. God is God because God is not a simple individual but instead is a full and creative set of relationships that generates an overflowing fountain of love.

God’s being is in giving. Giving is who God is. Our personhood is a result of God’s giving, just as God is God because God gives. In the ancient world, only people who could give (because they owned property) were granted the full rights of personhood. According to the logic of the Trinity, however, we are all persons precisely because we are the recipients of somebody else’s giving. To be is to be derived and thus obligated and dependent; and to give is to acknowledge that what we are has come from not only countless others but also the Ultimate Other, who has given us everything. Giving, then, is a matter of catching the wave of a force that can drown our selfishness even as it sustains our individuality. Giving is the gift God gives us so that we, too, can become a part of God’s unfolding life.

In many ways, God’s giving is the opposite of the market economy that emphasizes profit, private possession, and consumption. God’s giving does not abolish all of these things, as if God does not want us to build a world from the resources of nature and to enjoy what we have been given. Nevertheless, the divine economy does exert a pressure on the human economy; it asks us to share what we have so that all may prosper from the many gifts of God’s creation.

All gifts follow a basic structure: someone gives something to somebody. There is a giver, there is the object given, and then there is the result of the gift—in the form of gratitude to the giver, pleasure taken in possession of the gift, and the receiver’s being energized to give something to others so that the cycle continues. Christian teaching about grace suggests that God
STEPHEN H. WEBB

is not just a giver, merely one part of the giving process. God does not give something to us and then stands back and watches what we do. Instead, God encompasses the whole trajectory of the gift. God is thoroughly involved in the origin, use, and return of God's gifts. God is giving, so much so that in the process of giving we see the life of God; and in analyzing the life of God, we learn something about the movement of the gift.

In reading Paul's letter to the Corinthians, I emphasized three points about giving that suggest God's own threeness with regard to generosity. Now I want to return to those three points and more explicitly reflect on the Trinity from the perspective of the model of gift giving. What does our experience of the gift teach us about the nature of God?

First, God is the giver—the giver of all gifts. This does not mean that God is a permissive giver who gives us everything we want, so that anything goes. Instead, God gives us what we need, not what we desire. God's giving is not random or reckless, even though it is wanton and prodigious. God's giving is undeserved, which is what theologians mean when they talk about God's grace as being free and unmerited. God is extravagant and exuberant, an excessive giver who is the source of all that we are and all that we have. God even gives us our ability to give—one of our greatest gifts.

Second, God is the given—the one whom God has given to us and all that makes that gift possible. Giving is a process and an event, a surprising occasion that shocks us with how much we have to lose if we do not acknowledge how much we have been given. God's gift in Jesus Christ makes sense of all of God's other gifts. It is the paradigmatic gift that orders and organizes God's giving. True, the gift of creation seems to precede the gift of Jesus Christ, but creation is given to us only as the precondition for this more fundamental and primary gift. The gift of creation does not always seem like a good gift. Nature can strike us with as much violence as with benefit and joy. Only in the event of Jesus Christ do we come to understand what kind of gift God is. In Jesus, we see that God squanders all that God has in order to endow us with God's presence. God gives, then, not just from an initial abundance but also from a shared sense of suffering and separation. God has entered into history and God understands the factors that make giving so difficult. Jesus' death signifies that all giving is a kind of relinquishing or letting go that enables us to give in without giving up. Every gift is both a death and a rebirth, a loss that allows us to return to ourselves strengthened and reborn.

Third, God is the giving—the entire process of the gift, including our
ability to return what God gives. Christian theologians often depict an isolated and independent God at the beginning of history and a well-organized society of dutiful worshipers at the end of history. But, if God is the very process of giving, then God grows and changes as God directs the destiny of giving in all of its various expressions and manifold destinations. In any case, it is important to note that God's grace does not dissipate in the act of giving. When we give, we often feel tired and exhausted, because something has been taken from us; but God's giving is the very source of God's power. God's giving makes life possible and it takes shape in the lives of those who are empowered to respond to God's grace. It is even important to say that the community of those who so respond makes God's giving productive and prolonged.

Without the continuation of the gift, it perishes. Thus, our giving is a very real participation in the ongoing life of the Trinity. Such giving is imaginative act, because to give is to think about how the world could be if God were all in all. Giving then, does not create an elite community of those who are wealthy enough to give to others. Instead, giving advances toward that mutuality of supportive love that is the essence of the Trinity. Everyone can give, because what we give is really given to us and thus our own: and yet nobody has the right to be proud of what they give, because all that we have has been given to us precisely in order to be passed along. As the old hymn says, “We give thee but thine own.” Yet, what we pass along is more than what we received, because we add to the gift: and our capacity to augment the gifts of God is itself one of God’s greatest gifts. Indeed, the honor and joy we take in making more out of the gifts God entrusts to us is one of the chief motivations for charity.

What I am calling God-the-giving is what is traditionally called the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is traditionally depicted as the unity of God, the mutual love that bonds the Father and the Son. Unfortunately, such a portrait of the Holy Spirit can reduce it to a closed and static idea of an already-completed love. Such a love may be observed by others, but it is hard to know how we can participate in it without completely losing our identity. It would be better to talk about the Holy Spirit as the source of our gifts—the very gifts that make the church possible and our witness to the world persuasive. As Paul writes, “God’s love has flooded our inmost heart through the Holy Spirit he has given us” (Rom. 5:5). The Spirit, then, not only circulates between Father and Son but also, precisely because
their love is so powerful, overflows into the world. Moreover, it is important to note that the Spirit does not circulate in the world in terms of the personal and private areas of human emotion. The power of the Spirit is precisely that it draws us out of ourselves by empowering us to give.

The Spirit is hard to name and understand, because all giving involves us in projects that are out of our control and beyond our manipulation. Giving is a risky venture that forces us to be open to the uncertainties of the future and the needs of others. The Spirit gives us the courage to let go of what we have in order to become something more. The shape of the Spirit, then, is the community of the church as it anticipates the restoration of the whole cosmos to God's original intentions. The power of the Spirit is, in a significant way, in our hands, because the Spirit is the potential for giving that is actualized in our sharing. We thus participate in the growing life of God when we give to others.

Giving is thus sacramental in the sense that it is a visible manifestation of God's grace. For many congregations, the offering is something to be hurried through, while organ music quietly plays in the background, letting us pretend that nothing is happening. Instead, the offering should be seen as one of the climaxes of the worship service. In Baptism and Eucharist, symbolized by the bowl or lount and the Communionware, we receive from God; but in the offering, symbolized by the empty plate, we give to God by giving to others. The empty plate is God's gift to us of our ability and opportunity to give. That is why the offering should involve a procession forward to the Table instead of a passing of the plate, so that the offering will literally entail the movement of the laity as we respond to God's call. In the early church, Christians would bring forward all sorts of gifts during the offering, including money and food, in order to share with those in need. That they also brought forward the elements of the Lord's Supper—the bread and wine—emphasized the relationship of our communion with God and our communion with others.

We enter into the love of God, then, not through some emotional state or intellectual decision but when we give to others. The gifting community of the church is the way in which the Father's love for the Son finds a pleasurable completion in the sharing of God's gifts to all who want them. The Spirit gives not for ecstatic intoxication or individual reward but for the broadest vision of the good, building up the body of Christ. The Holy Spirit is the life of the gift, the way in which it moves and proliferates beyond
anyone’s ability to control it. Such giving replenishes as it is passed along.

Generosity, then, does have a theological foundation. To give is to demonstrate the reality of God, to abide in the hope of God, and to rest in God’s promises. More than that, to give is to know God. When Jesus approached the Samaritan women and said, “Give me a drink” (John 4:7), he said something that was as radical as it was simple. Men would not have spoken to unfamiliar women in those days and Jews would not have approached Samaritans, yet Jesus gave this woman the opportunity to give to him. God asks us to give in very simple and direct ways, and in that action, we know who God is.

We name God through our giving, we proclaim God through our giving, and we love God through our giving. To give is to know God as we participate in the mysterious circulation of the Holy Spirit. Now more than ever, Christians need to be clear about what is at stake in all of the debates over charity, welfare, and compassion. In the Christian economy of grace, to give is to receive, because in giving we receive the spirit of Christ and in letting go of our gifts we witness the blowing of that spirit where it will.

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Endnotes

2. All Scripture references are from *The New English Bible* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1970).
Stewardship and Discipleship

JUDITH E. SMITH

When my son, Tobie, was twelve years old, I left a stressful job and took a year off to bring my workaholic life back into balance. The decision was a difficult one to make, because it had great economic consequences for our family. Doing without my income for a year would require us to make some drastic changes in our lifestyle, but we all agreed that it would be worth it. And indeed it was! During that year there were many times when Tobie was not sure that we had made the right decision. His need to have a mother who was more available and less stressed had been a primary consideration and he was all in favor of it— theoretically. But when I had said, “No, Tobie, you can’t have/do—, because we can’t afford it” one too many times, he was ready to retract his support.

Several months into the year, I heard myself saying those words “we can’t afford it” one more time and it suddenly became clear. I had slipped into a comfortable pattern of explaining every “no” by reminding him of our limited financial resources, when the truth was that I would have said no to many of those requests even if our resources had been unlimited. No matter how much money we had, there were a great many things that this twelve-year-old wanted to have and do that were not supported by our values. I had to stop hiding behind an easy answer if I wanted Tobie to understand the commitments out of which our household was trying to live.

How we make choices is a spiritual issue. Those of us who seek to be Christian disciples make a conscious decision to follow Jesus Christ even when there is great cost. Our discipleship begins with conversion, a change of mind and heart. Our commitment is expressed not in a single action, nor even in a number of actions over a period of time, but in an entire way of life. Stewardship is the expression of our discipleship in response to God, the giver of life and the source of all we have and are and will be. It has the power to change the way we understand and live our lives.

As disciples who practice stewardship, we recognize that God is the origin of our lives and the giver of all our many gifts. We are recipients and caretakers of what God has given. We are grateful for what we have received.
and eager to cultivate our gifts out of love for God and one another. But for many of us, the beginning of the twenty-first century seems to be a difficult time in which to live as faithful disciples. Our culture is often in conflict with the values of the Christian faith. We struggle to know how to live out our faith in the ordinary, daily routine of our lives. We wonder how to deal with issues such as faithful use of time and money, care for the earth, personal and family relationships, and political involvement.

A steward is a person given the responsibility for the care and management of something that belongs to another. It implies both faithful action on the part of the steward toward the owner and trust on the part of the owner toward the steward. To be a steward in God's household assumes that God, as the Creator, is the owner of the household and everything that we have is given in trust. We do not own anything. This is a fairly radical concept in a culture in which ownership is everything. What does it mean for us not only to believe but also to act like God is the owner? What would our everyday lives look like if we took this seriously? How we use those gifts is a mark of our faithful discipleship, and the image of the steward can guide us in understanding the shape of that discipleship.

Our lives are shaped largely by our ordinary, everyday activities. When we ask what it means to be a faithful disciple, we are asking what our Christian faith has to do with our work, our personal relationships, how we spend our money, and the way we raise our children. Simple daily practices shape our lives—practices such as family prayer, recycling our newspapers, listening to someone who needs a friend, saying "I love you" to members of our household. Our longing to be faithful stewards of God's great and good gifts will lead us to particular ways of ordering our lives, all of which shape who we are.

What are the practices that shape our lives? Do they help us live as faithful disciples? Are they responsive to God's active presence? Becoming faithful stewards in a culture that is built on practices of consumption, stress, and materialism is not easy. One model for thinking about faithful living in the Christian community is found in Acts 2:41-47. This account of the early church suggests three characteristics of a community of disciples that can inform our lives.

**Hospitality**

The early church's hospitality is displayed in their fellowship, their breaking bread together "with glad and generous hearts" (v. 46), and the growth of
their community. In our day and time, hospitality has been domesticated into gracious entertaining of those who are most like us, whereas the biblical understanding of hospitality has to do with welcoming strangers and aliens. These are not the ones we know, the comfortable ones, the ones that look and act like us. Saint Benedict said to his monks, "Let everyone be received as Christ." This kind of hospitality is not so easy. To offer hospitality is to provide a place where strangers are welcome and where they are accepted as they are and not asked to become like us.

As more and more of us are isolated in our homes and neighborhoods, it is difficult to find ways to welcome strangers. A few years ago our congregation became part of a program to provide warm places to sleep for homeless individuals during the winter. Fixing and serving dinner, spending the evening talking and watching television, staying overnight with our guests, and then providing breakfast have been wonderful ways of entertaining "angels unaware," as the writer of Hebrews says. In this weekly process we have discovered one of the other truths of God's hospitality: often the guest becomes the host and we become not only the bearer but also the recipient of gifts. The stories told around the dinner table—stories of pain and struggle, stories of courage and faith—have broadened our understanding of the strangers in our midst. They have motivated us to seek long-term solutions in our communities, and they have given us courage and faith to endure in our own struggles.

Some time ago, my husband and I were teaching a Sunday school class, exploring the church's position on homosexuality. This is not an easy topic in our largely upper-middle-class church. There were tensions among the participants and opinions differed widely. Toward the end of the session, one of the participants in the class spoke up and identified himself as a gay man. He told us that our congregation is not always an easy place for him to be, but he said that he finds "pockets of hospitality" in the congregation—places where he feels welcome and accepted for who he is. The participants listened differently to one another after he spoke, and many of us left that session determined to enlarge those pockets and increase our hospitality.

Hospitality means we take people into the space that is our lives and our minds and our hearts. It is the way that we can confront some of the barriers that separate us from others. Our efforts to take others in can help to dismantle racism and classism and other kinds of prejudice. Who are the strangers and aliens among us? What does it mean to welcome them, to give
them space to be who they are and to become ready to receive the gifts that
they bring? These are the questions that we must answer if we are to be
faithful disciples of Jesus Christ and stewards of the world God has given us.

Being busy makes it difficult to be hospitable. Often our hearts and
minds are so full of the stuff that crowds our lives that we do not even see
the stranger. We have to stop and pay attention and remember that every­
thing we have belongs to God. If being a disciple of Jesus Christ involves
looking at his life and his teachings and modeling our lives after his, we
discover that hospitality is the attempt to open up closed places. In his
openness to tax collectors and other outcasts, Jesus confronted the closed
minds of his day. In his transformation of the popular image of a military
Messiah, Jesus confronted the religious leaders of his day. When our minds
become open to the gospel, we are able to let go of the fears and prejudices
in our own lives.

Our lives are shaped by small daily acts. Hospitality grows in our lives
when we go out of the way for someone else at least once a day. It has to
be practiced regularly or it will not be there when it is needed most. These
are not grand gestures that happen on rare occasions but a way of life that
welcomes those who are strangers and aliens in our midst.

Sharing Gifts

The second characteristic that we find in Acts 2 is that the disciples shared
all of their goods with one another (see Acts 2:44-45). If we are to be stew­
ards of all that God has given us, then that must include our money and
other material goods, as well as the personal and spiritual gifts that God
has given us.

When we talk about stewardship in the church, we usually think about
the money we give to the church, either through the fall finance campaign
or a capital funds campaign—and those are important parts of our steward­
ship. What we rarely talk about is whether our discipleship has anything to
do with the rest of our money. Talking about money and the way we spend
it is very difficult to do in church. One study shows that it is the last place
people want to talk about money. They are more comfortable talking
about it with friends and coworkers than with people at church.

If a steward is one who cares for something that belongs to another, and
if we believe that everything belongs to God and we are the caretakers, then
that includes our money as well. Once again the issue is ownership. Who is
the owner and who is the steward? In our culture, the most difficult part is to believe that our money does not belong to us. The description of the early church in Acts 2 indicates that the community held all things in common. We quite quickly reject that as unrealistic in our day and time. But once we have rejected that possibility, it is too easy to drop the issue instead of wrestling with what the stewardship principle might mean in our own lives.

The culture in which we live is focused on the good of individuals rather than on the good of the community. The "American way" is to support the freedom of the individual to do what he or she wants as long as it doesn't harm someone else. We want as few restrictions as possible and we certainly do not think that anyone should tell us how to spend our money. And yet, many of us know well that the accumulation of material goods does not lead to the happiness and fulfillment that the advertisers would have us believe. Sondra Wheeler suggests that this philosophy of individualism has contributed to the success of our consumer culture, but it has also encouraged us to accumulate more and more "stuff." We hear the same message over and over again: happiness is secured by possessing more and more things. And yet, we know it does not work. Many people express a sense of frustration with the hectic pace of life today and the shallowness of material satisfactions. Wheeler reminds us, however, that it is important to acknowledge the benefits of our economic system. The standard of living in industrialized countries is greater than it has ever been, and all of us are the beneficiaries of the wide number of choices that we have in our lives. These choices have given us opportunities for growth and fulfillment that those who have gone before have not had. In addition, she suggests that consumer capitalism contributes to improvement and innovation because of the incentives that it creates. Technical and scientific progress is certainly not all bad and has made our lives better in a variety of ways. "Both our individual liberty and our material prosperity are genuine goods, goods in which we as Christians have a special stake grounded firmly in our regard for human beings as embodied and made in God's image."

Having said this, Wheeler goes on to remind us that these benefits are very unevenly distributed and that maximum output rather than fair distribution is at the center of our consumer culture. Fair distribution is at the heart of the passage from Acts 2. Members of the community shared their goods in common not for some abstract reason but so that the goods available could be distributed to those who have need. That is the heart of the
question that we must ask ourselves when we think about the ways that we spend our money. We talk often about the biblical practice of tithing, but we seldom remember that the primary reason for the tithe in the Old Testament is to give to the poor. Unfortunately, in our culture the word tithe conjures up images of legalism, compulsion, and fund-raising to support the programs and ministries of the church. Neither is the tithe aimed at providing for the poor nor do we very often view it as a joyous spiritual exercise that has more to do with celebration than budgets.

For those of us who want to live as faithful disciples and stewards of God's gifts, we must decide how to care for the gift of money that we have received. If you were to ask me about the things that matter most to me, I would talk about family and friends, love and support in hard times, the congregation that nurtures and sustains me in my journey, my love of nature and gardening, and long walks in the woods near my house. If you ask me what I pray for, I would tell you I pray for those who are sick and suffering, those who are poor and homeless, those in the world without adequate food and medicine and protection and freedom. I pray for peace in places of conflict and for justice in places of injustice. I wonder if you would be able to tell that those are the things that matter most to me if, in response to your question, I hand you my checkbook. If I am to make faithful decisions about my money, then I must spend my money in the places that I pray for, the places that give me real joy.

But material gifts are not the only gifts God has given us. All Christians are called to ministry in Christ's name and everyone is given personal and spiritual gifts. These gifts are not given just to the individual; they are given to the whole body of Christ. And these gifts are not intended for use just within the church. They may be expressed in our secular jobs, our volunteer commitments, and our families. God calls people to use their gifts as teachers, gardeners, architects, attorneys, homemakers, secretaries, truck drivers, and everything else that you can imagine. And God gives us the radical freedom to say no. Rather than contribute our gifts for the good of the community, we can reject our gifts, allow them to remain dormant, or employ them for our own selfish gain. The word vocation comes from the Latin vocare, to call. We need to listen carefully to hear God's call to us; and as we listen, we need to remember that God's desire for us is for our greatest fulfillment. God will not call us to something that does not make use of our greatest gifts. Frederick Buechner says, "The kind of work God
usually calls you to is the kind of work (a) that you need most to do and (b) that the world most needs to have done. . . . The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet."

Each of us explores that question again and again: For what was I born? For what is God claiming me? Our particular call comes to a real and unique person to live on behalf of God, as an expression of God’s love. God wants to use us exactly as we are, not some ideal image. And God’s call is always consistent with the gifts God has given us. It may stretch those gifts or push us to discover some that are deeply hidden, but it is always consistent with those gifts. Elizabeth O’Connor, in Eighth Day of Creation, says that the church is to be a gift-evoking and gift-bearing community. This means that we are to call forth the gifts of other persons and enable them to grow into wholeness of life. Our gifts are on loan to us and we are responsible for spending them in the world, investing them in God’s creation. And, again, the passage from Acts reminds us that our gifts are given not only to us but also to the community. We never live out our call in isolation; we always live and act together.

One of the primary purposes of the church is to help us discover our gifts and then hold us accountable for being good stewards of those gifts. O’Connor calls those people who nurture and call forth our gifts “patrons of gifts.” These are the people in our lives who can see things in us that no one else sees, who can call forth the sometimes deeply hidden gifts. And then the community confirms those gifts by taking them seriously and recognizing their authority. In one church, someone heard several people mention that a friend of theirs, a young woman in the congregation, was so easy to talk to when they had personal struggles. She always seemed ready to listen. The church affirmed this gift by offering to send her to get some formal training in counseling and then referring to her people who had need of a listening heart. Few of us can look back without seeing people in our past who have been our patron saints. And those people enable us to become patrons of the gifts of others.

Keeping Sabbath

The description of the early community in Acts talks about the way they spent their time—time in the Temple, listening to the teachings of the apostles and praising God. The keeping of Sabbath in the Jewish and Christian traditions has to do with the way we use time. Once again our under-
standing of stewardship calls us to remember that the time we have belongs to God and not to us. It is easy for me to talk about the way I use “my time” and forget that time, like everything else, is a gift of God. We are not the owners of anything that we have—including our time—and Sabbath-keeping is the practice that can guide and shape our faithful use of God’s time.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, Sabbath-keeping, a principle embedded in the Ten Commandments, has two sources: creation and exodus. From the creation story comes our understanding of Sabbath rest, found in Exod. 20:8-11. From the Exodus story comes our understanding of Sabbath justice, found in Deut. 5:12-15. The Sabbath commandment calls us to pause, rest, and remember our dependency on God. God is the Creator, and we are the creatures. We are to abstain from productive activity and remember that we did not create the world. Because Sabbath reminds us of that relationship, the traditional Jewish Sabbath rules forbid doing anything that demonstrates our mastery over creation. If we do such things, we just might forget who is the creature in this relationship. I used to be confused by the Jewish Sabbath laws. I knew that their purpose was to prohibit work, but some of the prohibited activities didn’t seem very much like work to me. Then I learned that it has to do with the purpose of our activity. If the purpose is to show our human mastery of the world by our own skill, then it violates the intent of Sabbath. This is the time to remember our dependence on the Creator, to stop and pay attention to God.

But this rest to which God calls us is not for us alone; it is also for all of creation. Having experienced slavery in Egypt when the relentlessness of work prevented Sabbath rest, the Hebrew people were to be sure that they never prevented that rest on the part of others. Even those who did not practice their faith— the strangers and aliens in their midst, the animals who worked their fields—all were to be given rest. We no longer have a common day of rest and so our Sabbath-keeping has become a private affair. We must think together about what it means in our time to keep Sabbath for ourselves and protect it for others.

The busyness of my own life leaves me hungry for the rest that is promised in Sabbath-keeping. But everything in my world seems to work against this practice. Work hours and stress are up and sleep and family time are down for all categories of working Americans. We receive a constant flood of messages from the media urging us to spend more
money and to do more work—keep our homes cleaner, buy more clothes, accumulate more things. And so grocery stores stay open all night, shopping malls sell seven days a week, and entertainment options are available around the clock. We work hard and then come home and collapse in front of the TV, hoping it will numb our senses and help us rest. But the real reason we cannot rest is that we have lost an understanding of what rest is; and too often the church has not helped us, scheduling committee meetings on Sunday afternoon and violating the purpose of Sabbath. This happens, of course, because it is difficult to find time for meetings during the week; but part of what we are attempting to do on the Sabbath is to shift our priorities away from the priorities of the week. In most of our churches we do not see a distinctive way of life that distinguishes us from others in the culture. We have lost the religious significance of rest.

To even consider instituting the practice of Sabbath in our own lives is very difficult. I was speaking about this subject to a group recently when one of the men in the group interrupted me angrily and said, "I want to call a halt to this whole discussion! This is the most ridiculous thing I have ever heard. This is impossible. No one can do this anymore. We shouldn't even be talking about this." He is right about the difficulty. Everything in our culture pushes against it. The culture says that we are production machines and that we rest only to increase our productivity. In order to keep the Sabbath, we must change our whole social perspective. There is no formula for how to go about this, and we cannot do it alone. Without support from other, like-minded, people, we will find it difficult to stand against the social pressures. The pastor at the church mentioned above came up to me after the discussion and said that he had been looking around the room at all of the young men with families that he knew would leave church that Sunday and go directly to the office. The one who wanted to halt our discussion was one of those, and the pastor said it was creating great stress in the man's family. To act as if the world cannot get along without our work for one day is truly arrogant. And refraining from work on a regular basis should teach us not to demand excessive work from others.

It is important to be clear that the need to refrain from work on the Sabbath does not in any way denigrate the work we do. It, too, is a gift from God. In fact, the traditional Jewish prayers at the beginning and end of the Sabbath thank God for the blessing of work. As with so many things, the richness is in the balance. Not working on one day is related to working on
the other six days. Keeping Sabbath affirms the value of work as an important dimension of our lives as we celebrate the gift of rest with God and others.

In order to begin a practice of Sabbath-keeping in a culture that no longer has a day set aside, we must first decide when our Sabbath will be. When I was pastor of a local church, Sunday could not be my Sabbath. My day was filled with management tasks that prevented me from letting go of control. Even the morning worship had only brief moments of Sabbath because of my preoccupation with the details of the service. And so I had to find another time, including midweek worship at a neighboring congregation. I am no longer in that position, so I can keep Sabbath on Sunday. I am not always good at doing it, but I do have some sense of what it entails. I begin my day with worship, the work I bring home stays in my briefcase on Sunday, and I spend relaxed time with family and friends, writing letters, taking a walk in the woods near our house, or reading a good book. All of that helps me to remember my dependence on God.

But the justice part of Sabbath-keeping is not as easy for me. When I was growing up, no stores were open on Sunday and most people were able to have the same day of rest. But today retail businesses flourish on their Sunday revenues. Workers are to get their rest on some other day. Since we no longer share a common day off, rest has become a private affair. I know I cannot have much influence on those issues in the wider culture, but it also seems important not to fully accommodate myself to it. And so I try to keep a discipline of not shopping on Sunday. It is not easy. The temptation to run to the grocery store is sometimes great. But somehow it helps my Sabbath-keeping to say no to that small part of our consumer culture.

In his book Sabbath Time, Tilden Edwards tells about a family with teenage children who decided as part of their Sabbath commitments that they would not criticize each other on Sunday. As the months went on and they kept this commitment, they realized that more and more of their children's friends were coming over on Sundays and just hanging around. No one had talked about this commitment, but somehow these teenagers knew that this was a good place to be. The practices we choose will vary for each of us, but for all of us keeping Sabbath will transform the time as we learn to pay attention to God, let go of control, and remember that we are the creatures not the Creator. Keeping that balance will also help us refrain from worrying on the Sabbath. Of course, we cannot keep all of our
concerns and cares from our mind, but we can decide that we will not do the things that cause us to worry—paying bills, preparing tax returns, and making lists of tasks to do. Instead we will do things that nurture our relationship with God and with others: have special family meals, turn off the television, play games together, spend time alone in silence, refrain from answering the phone for a period of time, invite someone lonely to dinner, read the lectionary lessons together before Sunday worship, and visit shut-ins or those in nursing homes or prison.

Conclusion
The practices that are offered here—hospitality, sharing of gifts, and keeping the Sabbath—are only a small beginning for disciples who long to be faithful stewards of God's great and good gifts. They call us to be faithful to a tradition that reminds us that our homes, our time, and our resources do not belong to us. We are stewards of what belongs to God. Whether we are artists or engineers, homemakers or physicians, all of us who love God and the world that God made are called to be a transforming presence in that world—stewards in the household of God.

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Endnotes
5. Ibid., 34.
Leadership as Stewardship

BRUCE C. BIRCH

Mention the word stewardship to the typical pastor or layperson and the response will have something to do with the annual budget campaign. At the very least, stewardship will be associated with money and economics. This, of course, is far too narrow a field for the rich biblical and theological concept of the role of the steward in the community of God's people.

A steward is one who has responsibility for the care and use of resources that belong to another. The role of the steward has a long history of biblical and theological development in the church, rooted in the understanding that all we have and all we are is the gift of God's grace. We are created in the image of God and given the gift and responsibility of the care of all creation (Gen. 1:26-30). The land itself belongs to God, and we are not owners but tenants, stewards responsible for it (Lev. 25:23). As stewards, we are not simply custodians of the earth and all its resources. We are actively urged to the responsible use of these resources in covenant community—a community of stewards—that models the faithful use of God's gifts to make justice, righteousness, and shalom visible in the world. We are intended to use God's gifts fully, as the parable of the talents makes clear (Luke 19:11-27).

The parable of the talents and other key passages dealing with economic issues became the primary focus of thinking about stewardship and the role of the steward in the church, especially in the twentieth century. Fortunately, the church today is experiencing something of a recovery and renewal of the broad and central role of the steward in the church. There are many helpful publications available (see the reading list at the end of this article). The programs and conferences of the Ecumenical Center for Stewardship Studies have had an important, broadening impact and have resulted in renewed and expanded attention to stewardship issues in various denominational bodies. Finally, there is an increasing attention to stewardship studies in the curricula of theological schools.

For United Methodists, this shift toward a broadened awareness of the centrality and scope of the concept of steward may be seen in the publica-
tion and widespread use of a new curriculum, *Steward: Living as Disciples in Everyday Life*. This twelve-week study offers a biblical grounding for understanding the steward's role as related to our use of God's gifts in all of the communities that mark our everyday lives as disciples: creation, church, family, politics, economics, and time.

**Toward a Theology of Leadership as Stewardship**

Even in the climate of renewed understanding of the wide implications for stewardship in the church, there has been little apparent attention to leadership as an issue of stewardship. Leadership is a hot topic in the life of the church today. Church publishers have produced a long list of titles concerned for leadership and are eager for more. Much of this attention is focused on appropriating insights from the burgeoning literature on leadership in the secular world. Corporations and church bodies alike are eager to hold conferences and seek expertise in the quest for the secrets to the development of leadership. Theological schools are adding leadership development to the curriculum and establishing centers for church leadership on their campuses.

In spite of this lively attention to leadership development, few in the church have suggested that leadership is fundamentally a stewardship issue. In leadership we are focused on the personal gifts that God has given to individuals who present themselves as potential leaders. We are concerned with the manner in which personal gifts are combined with the gifts of God's grace and made available as resources in a given context to produce faithful and effective ministry. A good leader is a good steward of personal and contextual gifts of God's grace in advancing the work of God's kingdom.

Most of the attention to leadership, whether in the corporate or in the ecclesiastical world, has focused on skill development for individual leaders and on contextual analysis as an aid to the choosing and development of the appropriate skills. Studies of leadership are of a divided mind on what is most crucial in the emergence of leadership. Some defend theories based on the individual traits and inherent qualities of particular persons. In this view, leadership depends most on the qualities of "great persons" who emerge to lead. Such persons would always impact events as leaders. Others suggest that leadership is the product of events in a given historical context. In this view, the right person is available at the right place and time; and this convergence of context, event, and person produces leader-
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An equally gifted person in another context would not necessarily emerge as a leader. The biblically-based traditions of the church suggest that theories of leadership need to be understood as theologies of leadership. Leadership for the community of God's people has never been a matter of persons or events alone or even of the combination of these. Behind the emergence of all leaders for the community of God's covenant people is the working of God's purposes. Divine providence is at work raising up the right people and shaping the course of events.

The Bible is not a story of God's supernatural imposing of divine will on human history, nor is it a story of the watchmaker God who sets human events in motion and withdraws to let them run their course. The Bible is a story of God's involvement with human agency in the creative and redemptive purposes of God. Divine providence and human leadership are inextricably linked in the biblical story, and the course of historical events is altered. God says to Moses, "I have come down to deliver... So come, I will send you..." (Exod. 3:8, 10). After the great deliverance from bondage in Egypt, the text reports, "So the people feared the LORD and believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses" (Exod. 14:31). The power of the Holy Spirit, giving birth to the church at Pentecost, certainly requires the human agency—the leadership—of the apostles, as the Book of Acts makes clear.

In our biblical tradition, leadership is not a personal achievement of skills to be managed but a calling to be received and nurtured. Likewise, leadership is not a product of events but a divine avenue for the shaping of those events. Leadership is a gift of God's grace and, therefore, can appropriately be seen as an arena for our stewardship of that gift.

What would leadership development in the church (a great current concern) look like if we viewed it as a stewardship issue rather than as a skill development issue? It would take on at least the following contours. The issue would shift to the identification and cultivation of God's gifts in persons rather than on mere gatekeeping for those seeking commissioning or ordination. Development of leadership would become less the earning of degrees or certification of skills than of developing whole persons and their unique gifts. Skill development would be integrated with concern for personal wholeness, spiritual formation, and biblical/theological grounding in the effort to view leadership as an outgrowth of our stewardship of God's gifts. Leaders would become stewards of their own gifts for leader-
ship in the community of stewards that uses God's gifts to extend God's kingdom in the world.

The Hebrew Bible—Stories of Leaders as Stewards

The Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) is constantly concerned with the issue of leadership and insistent that the leadership of God's people is exercised as a representative of God's leadership; thus, as leaders, we are stewards. As a teacher of the Hebrew Bible for many years, I have become convinced that the understanding of leaders as God's stewards contained in its pages can be helpful and challenging to our contemporary discussion of leadership in the life of the church. Below, I share some perspectives drawn primarily from the stories of leadership in the Hebrew Bible. Similar helpful perspectives can be drawn from the rich Gospel testimony to Jesus' ministry, the stories of the apostles, and the insights of Paul and the other writers of the New Testament. But those lie beyond the scope of this article.

The following are elements of a biblical theology of leadership as stewardship. Each element is briefly illustrated by a biblical story or stories.

Openness to God's Call

In the community of God's people leadership is not a career choice; it is a calling. Story after story in the Bible makes clear that it is God's initiative that raises up leaders for the community of faith. Thus, leadership comes as a gift and a challenge—to represent God's ultimate sovereignty in the midst of the people, to be a steward.

God's call is to various roles of leadership—clan leaders, covenant mediators, judges, prophets, priests, kings. All of these roles are to be seen as vocations initiated by God. Sometimes persons attempted to take these roles on their own initiative and then the story is always tragic. Abimelech (Judg. 9) tried to make himself king and died a tragic death. Saul was God's king, anointed by the prophet Samuel (1 Sam. 9–10); but he chose to follow his own initiatives rather than God's initiatives. As a consequence, he was rejected by Samuel (1 Sam. 15:10-31) and lived out a sad and, finally, tragic life thereafter (1 Sam. 31:1–13). The false prophet Hananiah proclaimed the optimistic message the people wanted to hear rather than the word of God and was confronted and condemned by the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 28:1-17).

Those God called did not always look like the most promising material. One has to wonder if many of these persons would have passed muster.
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before the ministry qualifications boards of today's denominations. Abraham and Sarah were far too old. Samuel, Saul, and Jeremiah were too young. Moses was a fugitive murderer. David did not even come to the candidates' meeting! Gideon was hiding in a winepress to thresh grain when God called him to be a "mighty man of valor" (Judg. 6:11-12). Solomon took office in a bloody purge. Isaiah thought he was unworthy. Ezekiel couldn't think of anything to say. Saul hid from the examiners. Samson had "boundary issues" with women.

To their credit, most of these people were aware of their shortcomings and liabilities; and they objected that they couldn't possibly be the person God wanted for leadership of God's people. The clue to God's perspective, and perhaps to our own efforts to raise up leaders, may be found in David's story. When all of the most promising sons of Jesse have been presented and found wanting, Jesse mentions his eighth and youngest son—a mere boy, out tending sheep. David is summoned and found by the prophet Samuel to be the one God intended. Samuel explains by saying, "[T]he LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). And David is a "man after [God's] own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14). This suggests that perhaps committees and boards looking for leader-stewards should look less for finished products than for evidence of the orientation of the heart to God. Perhaps we should look less for certainty about someone's gifts for leadership and more for willingness to answer the call, in spite of uncertainties.

Development of God's Gifts

The recognition and affirming of God's call does not mean the abandonment of the effort to encourage, promote, measure, and judge the development of other appropriate gifts for leadership. God puts those God calls through tests, development of skills, difficult on-the-job learning situations, and serious challenges—but often with the admonition "I will be with you" (Exod. 3:12; Judg. 6:16; cf. 2 Sam. 5:10), not with "I will be waiting for you at the other end if you get through this process." Many of the stories of those God calls are stories of the development and growth of leadership qualities, but never as a mere development of human skills. What develops is also the spiritual connection to the God who calls. "Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the LORD and with the people" (1 Sam. 2:26).
God even rejects some of those who are called because they fail to fulfill their potential and lose touch with God's guidance and presence. Samson, Saul, and Solomon are examples of this. Even David is severely judged for his failures, although not ultimately rejected. They failed to be responsible stewards of their own gifts and of the gifts of the communities entrusted to them.

Reliance on God's Power alongside Human Power

It is clear in the biblical stories of leadership that human abilities alone are not sufficient to accomplish the purpose for which God has raised up leaders. One mark of an effective leader is the recognition that beyond the sum total of our own powers is the power of God accomplishing God's purposes through us.

One of my favorite stories to illustrate this is the story of Gideon (Judg. 6-8). After being convinced that he is, indeed, the "mighty man of valor" God seeks, and after mustering out 32,000 men at arms, Gideon is told by God that this is far too many men, and God has him send all but three hundred home. With these three hundred men Gideon is to deliver Israel from a great horde of Midianites—and they are to be armed with lamps and horns! None of this makes any sense in human managerial terms, but God states directly, "The troops with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand. Israel would only take the credit away from me, saying, 'My own hand has delivered me'" (Judg. 7:2). The ultimate source of power for deliverance comes from God acting through Gideon and the seemingly inadequate three hundred men with lamps and horns. The lesson is this: Church leaders with a sense of the magnitude of the task for ministry in a massively broken world will truly realize that their own skills are little more than lamps and horns, waving and tooting in the face of overwhelming odds. It is the power of God working through them that gives the hope of making a difference.

If leaders in the church are but stewards of this divine power, then it is important to stay in touch with the reality of our source of power in God. The story of David (1 Sam. 16-2 Sam. 24) suggests that prayer is a vehicle for this connectedness. Read quickly and superficially, David's story could be seen as one of human power, sought and gained through shrewd use of abilities for political and military leadership. But, read carefully, David's story suggests that behind his human powers for leadership lay a connection to...
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divine power. We have already spoken of David's call to kingship through Samuel; but as we read the stories of David's rise to kingship, his conflict with Saul, his friendship with Jonathan, his narrow escapes, his shrewd judgments, and his consolidation of the kingdom after Saul's death, there is one constant, important background: David prays and gives praise to God. In situation after situation, from Goliath to his desire to build a house for God, David seeks connection to divine power and refuses to rely only on his own (e.g., 1 Sam. 17:45-47; 23:4; 26:22-24; 2 Sam. 6:14-15; 7:18-29). He understands that the kingdom has come to him as God's gift; he constantly receives the future from God and uses his abilities as the steward responsible to the giver of the gift. And the text tells us repeatedly that God was with David (e.g., 1 Sam. 18:12, 14, 28). For David, this changes when he uses his power to take Bathsheba and kill her husband Uriah (2 Sam. 11:1-27). His story shifts from gift to grasp, from blessing to curse, from receiving the kingdom from God to managing it for his own purposes. And in this part of the story, he no longer prays or praises God. He returns to prayer only when he has almost lost everything in the rebellion of his son Absalom. At the end of his life, David records a song (see 2 Sam. 22:1-51; also Psalm 18) that recalls the elements of prayer and praise that marked much of David's life.

Leadership as stewardship requires the constant disciplines of prayer, praise, trust, and obedience, which allow the recognition of the source of our power in God and not in our own abilities. When the prophet of the exile despairs that there is nothing to proclaim because "all people are grass" and perish and do not endure, the reminder is that "the word of our God will stand forever" (Isa. 40:6-8). The source of enduring power is in God and God's word, not in our own abilities. Recognition of this is a key element in leadership as God's stewards.

Willingness to Speak and Hear the Truth

We have already mentioned the sin of David in the matter of Bathsheba and Uriah. Here we must draw attention to the story of Nathan the prophet, who confronted David with his abuse of power, declaring, "You are the man!" (2 Sam. 12:7).

Note, first, that both Nathan and David are leaders, called by God to their tasks as God's stewards. The theological theme here is God's judgment—a theme often avoided by the church as negative and difficult. The point is, however, that God's judgment is not simply a matter of separating
the good guys from the bad guys or "us" from "them." Leaders as stewards must see themselves in both roles in this story.

We must be willing to speak the truth to power. Nathan confronts even the king. This could have meant his death, as would have been common in the ancient world. If, in our leadership, we represent God, then we must speak the truth about those who abuse power, although these may often be our colleagues or parishioners. The unfolding tragedy of covered-up abuses by some priests in the Roman Catholic church ought to be a cautionary tale on leadership to us all.

But David is also God's man. He models the ability to hear the truth spoken to us and about us: "You are the man!" And his response is to accept this difficult truth in repentance. Psalm 51, the great psalm of penitence, is described in its superscription as the response remembered by the tradition for David in this moment. As leaders in the church, we are not, hopefully, guilty of adultery and murder, as was David; but as faithful stewards, we have to hear the difficult truths about our failures and the failures of our institutional structures in the church, if we are to respond in constructive repentance. The Hebrew word for "repent," shuv, in its root means "to turn," to go another direction, to move toward a new future. Sometimes we are so busy being Nathan in the story, pointing to the truths others need to hear, that we fail to hear the truth about ourselves and, thus, we lose the opportunity for repentance and a new future.

Compassionate Engagement with the Community

Leaders as stewards of God's people are given responsibility for the care of the community they lead. This is an enormous act of trust on God's part. These are God's people, called into being by God's love and justice and covenanted to seek God's desire for wholeness (shalom) in all of creation.

One of the values of conceptualizing the role of leader as steward is that it becomes harder to think of leadership as an end in itself. A steward is automatically oriented to the gift entrusted to his or her care. Various forms of careerism in ministry, where leadership is described as a succession of positions (often hoped to be bigger and better), do not fit well with the concept of steward, where our gifts for leadership are nurtured for the sake of the community entrusted to us rather than for the advancement of our careers.

Jeremiah is a wonderful example of this quality of compassionate engagement with the community. He had to speak God's word through a
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difficult period in the kingdom of Judah. At times he could be encouraging, as in the time of Josiah's covenant reforms; but for much of his life he was called to speak a message of judgment and warning. What was impressive about Jeremiah was the deep compassion for and engagement with the community out of which these words were spoken. The passages known as the "confessions of Jeremiah" (scattered throughout chs. 11-20) show the pain and anguish of the prophet over the dangers facing his people and his struggle over his own calling to speak a word of warning to them. There is no glib word of accusation here. During the siege of Jerusalem that will end in the destruction of Jerusalem, Jeremiah purchases land to express his hope for the future. He chooses to remain among the devastated survivors and to preach of hope and renewal for the future (chs. 31-33).

In general, the prophets model a deep engagement with the community they serve as they speak God's word of judgment and hope. Moses' constant role as mediator and intercessor for Israel in the wilderness is another clear example of leadership that has the community's welfare as its primary focus.

The best passage to express this compassionate engagement with the community comes, strangely, not from a leader in a formal role but from a Moabite woman called Ruth. She chose compassionate engagement with her mother-in-law, Naomi, without regard for her own interests and, in so doing, engaged with Naomi's community and changed its future. Her words have not often been applied to leadership in ministry but could well be so applied:

Do not press me to leave you
or to turn back from
following you!
Where you go, I will go;
where you lodge, I will lodge;
your people shall be my people,
and your God my God.
Where you die, I will die—
there will I be buried.
May the Lord do thus and so
to me,
and more as well.
If even death parts me from you! (Ruth 1:16-17)

Equipping for the Task

This element of leadership as stewardship was left near the last, not because it was unimportant but because it is the most common element in discussions of leadership. There is a tendency to think of leadership as simply the acquisition of particular skills. By now, I hope it is clear that leadership as God's stewards involves much more than skill development. Nevertheless, it is important that leaders equip themselves for the tasks given to them and that they organize the life of the community for effectiveness in the community's mission.

Good stewardship as leaders requires disciplined learning from the traditions of our faith, other experienced leaders, and the world in which we live. The preaching of the prophets makes clear how deeply engaged they were with the testimonies and traditions of the generations of faith that went before them. Moses was called to recognize the God who called him as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In great speeches at crucial moments in Israel's life, leaders revealed themselves as stewards of the story of God's saving grace: Moses (Deut. 26); Joshua (Josh. 24); Samuel (1 Sam. 12); Nathan (2 Sam. 7). When the community was in danger of losing its identity following exile, Ezra brought them the scroll of the book of the laws of Moses and read it to them to make the story known again. Knowing and teaching this story is part of the task for leaders as stewards of God's people.

Leaders in Israel were often mentored through the experience of others called by God to leadership. Joshua served long years with Moses. Samuel was raised by Eli, the priest. Both Saul and David were brought to leadership and held accountable by Samuel, and Nathan continued to serve David after the death of Samuel. Moses became a mentor and supervisor by delegating his own authority in Israel to other elders and did so at the advice of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian (Exod. 18). Elisha served an apprenticeship with Elijah before inheriting his mantle.

Leaders are also equipped by learning from the wider world of which they are a part. Moses was raised and educated as an Egyptian. David served with the Philistines and incorporated the Jebusite city of Jerusalem into his kingdom. Solomon became renowned internationally for his...
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wisdom and learning, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and many other prophets showed a deep and insightful understanding of world events in their time. Nehemiah served the Persian king before coming to the aid of Jerusalem. Ezra brought the scroll of the Torah from the centers of Jewish learning that remained in Babylon even after exile.

In short, God's call is the initiative to lead as stewards of God's community of stewards; but it is only the beginning of a vocation that requires cultivation of qualities of character and equipping for the task.

Conclusion

This brief discussion is only the beginning of a biblical theology of leadership as stewardship. I confined myself to perspectives from the Hebrew Bible and, even there, only scratched the surface. Jesus, Paul, and the apostles in the New Testament have much to teach us of leadership as stewardship. My hope is that this article may stimulate some additional thinking about the effect on theories of leadership development in the church if we were to think of leaders as stewards.

Stewardship as a framework for leadership development reminds us of the divine grace that undergirds all our abilities and efforts. Leadership in the church is not career development or institutional management. It is the use and development of our personal abilities as gifts given through God's grace and returned to the service of God's grace as stewards serving God's people and their mission in the world. Anything less is a house built by human resources alone—on sand (Matt. 7:24-27).

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For Further Reading

The following resources have been helpful in writing this article and would be excellent further reading for those who wish to explore the subject more deeply.


BRUCE C. BIRCH


Christian Stewardship in the Market Economy

DAVID KRUEGER

This essay considers whether and how Christians can participate in a market economy in ways that are consistent with the demands of their faith. More specifically, we consider whether and how the notion of stewardship might be embodied effectively within the economic context of our time. Most of the hundreds of millions of Christians around the globe today also live in societies that we would more or less characterize as "market based." To argue that Christians cannot live their lives with at least moderate levels of integrity within market-based economies is to condemn virtually all of us to a level of ethical failure that would demoralize us to the point of despair or make our faith irrelevant to central features of our lives.

There is no single answer to the question of whether Christian stewardship can be effectively embodied in a market-based society. Christian faith communities are far too diverse in their visions of the Christian life and their social ethics to suggest a single, coherent notion of stewardship. H. Richard Niebuhr's classic typology of relationships between Christ and culture illustrates this irreducible pluralism. And market-based societies across the globe are far too diverse in their structural and moral dimensions to suggest a single, appropriate strategy for Christian engagement in economic life. Market-based economies around the world are many and varied and thus defy easy moral generalizations. A society's history, cultural peculiarities, demographics, and form of government—all affect the performance of its market-based economic institutions. Economic practices in the U.S., the Netherlands, and China, for instance—all market-based societies to a greater or lesser extent—are by no means the same; nor might our strategies for exercising Christian stewardship in them be the same.

For Christians attempting to exercise stewardship in market-based economies like the U.S., most moral challenges are not profoundly new. Our society's basic values, institutions, rules, and practices have evolved without dramatic disruption since our nation's founding. We take for
granted fundamental social institutions and values, such as democracy, the rule of law, private property, limited liability corporations, a generally coherent system of business regulation, a strong culture of business enterprise and invention, and a generally strong educational system that supports a market-based economic system. For North Americans, events such as the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the implosion of the Soviet Union were not cataclysmic. They merely broadened the global reach of the market-based system to which we are accustomed. Yet, for hundreds of millions of people around the globe, the last decades of the twentieth century have brought revolutionary, wholesale social transformations in economic life. Old values, rules and norms, institutions, and regulations governing the production and distribution of goods and services have been discarded and replaced by others. Surely Christian stewardship in such contexts looks dramatically different than it might have a generation ago.

Stewardship Defined

A steward is a person entrusted to care for something that belongs to another. Many of Jesus’ parables speak of the stewardship of money and private property. Thus, the metaphor Christian as steward implies that Christians have something of value entrusted to them by God, to be used for purposes intended by God. Most fundamentally, that “something” is a Christian’s entire being. Living in response to God’s gracious forgiveness and love, the individual believer’s entire life becomes an ethical response of service to God and neighbor. The social roles we play in life and the way we allocate our time, develop our talents and skills, accumulate and spend money, and use property and possessions—all become opportunities for service on behalf of God’s intentions. In the language of economics, these skills, abilities, and material possessions are forms of “human capital,” to be used for the sake of a vision of something greater than ourselves. We can call this vision “the common good,” “the kingdom of God,” or “love of God and neighbor.”

Yet Christian stewardship embraces human and natural “capital.” As stewards, human beings seek the well-being also of the whole community of life on earth. Thus, stewardship, in its broadest sense, implies a sense of responsibility for, and connection to, the well-being of the totality of life on earth—of which humans are but a part. To use the language of business, humans are to serve as “managers” who seek to organize the resources and functions of a larger organization (human and natural communities) for the sake of its owner.
CHRISTIAN STEWARDSHIP IN THE MARKET ECONOMY

To be effective, this metaphor requires humans to have some real knowledge, albeit partial and imperfect, of God's overall goals and intentions for the resources they manage. Effective stewards must have some sense of God's "plan" for the proper use of the resources under their control. With regard to economic life, this raises the question: how are Christians as stewards to organize the production and distribution of goods and services—the material necessities of life—for the well-being of the human community and for the long-term preservation of the earth community?

What Is a Market-Based Economy and Society?

To consider whether and how Christian stewardship might be applied to a market economy, we must identify the constitutive features of this economic system—or at least those features that seem to predominate in most well-functioning market-based societies. Thus, I contrast these empirical features with those of poorly functioning market-based societies that are morally deficient in significant structural ways. In my judgment, some of those deficiencies arise in the absence of sufficient governmental protections of market institutions and/or protections against inevitable harms that arise from unregulated market activities.

Market pricing. Most fundamentally, a market-based society allows significant amounts of free exchange of buyers and sellers to set prices of goods and services. Prices generally are fluid and rise or fall according to the willingness of buyers to buy and sellers to sell goods and services at various prices. Supply and demand reach theoretical equilibrium when equal numbers of buyers and sellers are willing to engage in a transaction at a certain price. In this sense, we tend to personify the market, describing it as having a "life of its own."

Competition. Generally, the market works well only in a context of competition among producers, which prevents monopolistic control of prices that harm consumers. Thus, we tend to claim that competition is morally good insofar as it tends to benefit society in the long run by providing goods and services that consumers want. At the same time, competition carries risk and uncertainty, insofar as a corporation's survival or a worker's job or an investor's equity is never guaranteed but is subject to the successful capacity of a firm to give the market what it wants. The market creates winners and losers.

Privatization of capital, property, and wealth. Market-based societies
allocate most economic resources according to private rather than public ownership. These resources include private property, private ownership of companies, and other forms of wealth accumulation. In general, societies adopt such institutions because these institutions meet people's economic needs more effectively than various public-sector arrangements.

**Innovation, change, and entrepreneurship.** Market-based societies, through the exercise of economic freedom, tend to be sources of economic innovation and change. Things never stay the same within a dynamic market economy. The freedom to initiate technological innovation, for instance, serves as a constant source of economic change or of what the economic historian Joseph Schumpeter called capitalism's "creative destruction."2

**Legal protections of market activities and institutions.** Markets, and the various values, institutions, and practices that cohere with them, need legal protections to insure their efficient and fair functioning. For instance, property owners need to be protected against theft or harm to their property. Investors in corporations need to be protected not only against outside fraud but also fraud from within a company's management. In myriad ways, various levels of government and other regulatory bodies seek to create and, where appropriate, revise "the rules of the game" that attempt to make the system function fairly and effectively.

**Laws and regulations to protect against harm from market activities and to limit the scope of the market.** Not only market producers and investors need legal protections but also consumers and other third-party recipients of market activities. Market activities do not "by nature" or by some "divine hand" create good and beneficial outcomes for society. They do so to the extent that they are appropriately managed and regulated by laws and other social constraints. These constraints, when appropriately organized, attempt to protect the innocent from either intentional or unintentional harm caused by market forces, institutions, and activities. Thus, a country like the U.S. has many laws and regulatory agencies that aim to protect workers, consumers, communities, and the natural environment from actual or potential harms caused by economic activity.

**Democratic governance.** My conditional affirmation of Christian participation in market-based societies assumes the existence of a democratic system of government. Democracies make market-based economies more accountable and responsive to the needs of a citizenry than do other
forms of government. For instance, democracies tend to generate market arrangements that are more transparent and thus less susceptible to bribery and corruption. They also tend to create market outcomes that are responsive to the moral aspirations and demands of citizens—for example, reduced levels of fraud and corruption, respect for human rights, and environmental protection. Contrasting a democratic market-based society such as the United States with a politically authoritarian, yet increasingly market-based society such as China highlights the differences that democratic governance can make for the proper functioning of market-based institutions and practices. (Indeed, the arguments I offer below are based on the moral assumption that democratic forms of government are more compatible with the moral demands of Christian faith than any other form of government.)

Increased globalization. A fact of market-based societies today is their increasing connectedness and interdependence across national boundaries. A globalizing arena for market-based production and distribution of goods and services has expanded greatly in recent years, for example, the deepening and broadening integration of the European Union; the continued structural transformation of previously centrally planned societies into market-based societies; the strengthening of global rules and regulations that support liberalized trade and investment, both globally and regionally; and growth rates in global economic trade that exceed growth rates in global economic product. Globalization is also spurred by dramatic pulses of technological creativity and innovation that reduce costs of production and whose uses are rarely impeded by political boundaries. Consider how developments in information and communication technologies, and more recently biotechnologies, continue to disrupt and change what, where, and how things are produced. The moral task of any market-based society in this globalizing context is to try to regulate and manage this trend in ways that benefit people in the long run.

An essential foundation of moral values. Markets cannot be divorced from a society's underlying fabric of moral values that support and, when necessary, constrain these markets. Even the economic value of efficiency—always a dominant value in a market economy—rarely goes unchecked by other values, such as concern for justice and fairness and the distributive outcomes of the market. Well-functioning market-based institutions function effectively not only when they are appropriately regulated by laws and other governmental constraints but also when their participants embody appro-
appropriate moral values and virtues, such as honesty, trust, and respect for human rights. I am not arguing that moral values—even explicitly Christian ones—are important only insofar as they are instrumental or subservient to economic activity. They are not. I am arguing only that these values have an essential place within the social fabric of a properly functioning market-based society.

**Toward an Ethic of Stewardship in a Market-based Society**

If Christian stewardship connotes a trust to manage all that is given to us by God (life, relationships, material resources, the earth’s larger community of life) for the sake of God’s intentions, how might this general and enduring imperative be embodied within the particular and historic features of a market-based society? Again, there can be no single blueprint for implementation. Our faith communities and their visions of Christian ethics are too diverse, our economic contexts too complex and multifaceted, and our visions of God’s intentions too partial and corruptible by sin, pride, and self-love for us to speak with absolute clarity and finality. Rather, I offer a handful of themes, concepts, and benchmarks informed by Christian faith that, taken together, might help Christians formulate and live a vision of stewardship within the type of market-based society described above.

**Stewardship as Acknowledgement of God’s Sovereignty**

Although Christians can and should attempt to participate in market economies with integrity and faith, we must do so with a clear faith perspective. We may properly think that a market-based society like the U.S. is morally commendable and we might even conclude that its economic outcomes, though flawed, are morally superior to other societies. However, these moral judgments must always be put in their proper place. As authors like Robert Nelson have reminded us, Christian faith can never be the implicit civil religion of mainstream economists, who might wish us to have ultimate faith in markets and economic values such as efficiency. Markets, efficiency, and the material progress that have characterized much of post-World War II Western civilization are not our salvation. At best, our allegiance to the market and our efforts to exercise stewardship within it must be conditional and penultimate. Neither is the market “heaven on earth” nor does it assume the place of God in our lives. Thus, our first task as stewards is to shun the sin of idolatry. We exercise stewardship within the market because and to the extent we think it can accomplish outcomes...
consistent with God's intentions for us and for the world. We work within market institutions to transform them into vessels for the exercise of stewardship. Thus, our participation in the market is an instrumental, not an intrinsic, good. For us, there are other pursuits that are ultimately of more value than economic endeavors. The source of value—God, our Creator, Savior, and Sustainer—stands beyond the market. At the same time, God, sovereign ruler of all that is, dwells within market economies; and, as God's stewards, we are called to pursue God's intentions for the market society.

Stewardship as the Search for Limits to the Market
Christian stewardship seeks to find appropriate boundaries for legitimate market activity. Some things are appropriately "for sale" and others are not. Knowing the difference can sometimes be difficult. We affirm the social benefit of markets because they produce and distribute goods and services more efficiently than alternative economic mechanisms. Yet, for various reasons, most Christians would argue that things such as sexual intercourse, illegal narcotic drugs, and human body parts ought not to be bought and sold. We make those arguments based upon fundamental Christian notions of human identity and dignity and the sacredness of life. Other products and services are more ambiguous. Should public education be regulated or should it be open to competition from private sources that also receive public funding? Should healthcare primarily be a market good, bought and sold by those who can afford it, or should it be a public good, whose costs are covered through taxation and subsidization for those who cannot afford it? The field of biotechnology, and therapeutic cloning in particular, raises vexing questions for the future: should cloned human organs and tissues be bought and sold in the marketplace as private goods or should they be viewed as public goods offered according to criteria other than price and ability to pay? Even more starkly, should the technology for reproductive human cloning ever be a market product? Such moral questions are complex and fraught with ambiguity for Christians seeking the meaning of stewardship.

In sum, stewardship in a market economy always demands that we inquire about the market's proper limits, not only for society at large but also for our own lives. That something is legal does not make it consistent with our vision of life.

Stewardship as Service to the Neighbor
God entrusts human stewards to use God's resources for the sake of the
neighbor and the common good. This fundamental mandate of Christian ethics cuts deeply across the particularities of our various Christian faith communities, with classic articulations by Luther, Calvin, and the Roman Catholic common-good tradition. Within a market-based society, the notion of stewardship as service to the neighbor places a strong burden of proof on the individual Christian regarding his or her intentions and motives. As stewards, we may be entrusted with many “riches”—time, skills and expertise, power and responsibility over or with others, a fabric of relationships with those around us, and private property and other forms of material wealth. Responsible Christian stewardship need not condemn any of these riches per se. Rather, it holds the steward accountable for using these riches to serve the neighbor, broadly construed. Thomas Aquinas’s classic discussion of private property makes the point well. The “owner” of private property should dwell not upon the “right of use” but upon the “right use” of this good. As an instrumental and not an intrinsic good, property is a trust granted by God and should thus be used to serve the needs of the human community, not the goals of inordinate self-love. Hence, our intentions for and actual use of our riches become essential moral benchmarks for judging our performance as stewards. The steward is always aware that greed, avarice, undue self-love, the inflated sense of self-importance, inordinate love of wealth and material possessions, and the self-deceptions and rationalizations that come with them—all lie ever-present at the entrance to the human heart. “How much is enough?” and “Does the accumulation of wealth and power aim to serve the neighbor or myself?” are questions the responsible steward must ever consider. The accumulation of wealth stands as a substantial achievement in the history of market-based societies. Indeed, creating wealth is an essential step in bringing societies and their people out of poverty. The challenge of the Christian steward, wherever he or she finds him- or herself, is to direct such riches, over time, toward God’s intentions for human community.

Stewardship as service to the neighbor can be fraught with ambiguity and clashes of interests among “neighbors.” When it comes to the nitty-gritty of defining and differentiating neighbors, it is often impossible to satisfy or advance everyone’s interests. Consider a large, publicly traded corporation that cuts costs to maintain shareholder value or survive financially in a highly competitive industry. The manager’s fiduciary duty to protect and advance the interests of shareholders may prevent much scope
of action to protect the interests of other important stakeholders, such as employees, suppliers, or local communities. One ought never to assume this general mandate of service to the neighbor is easy or seamless. Often, the best the Christian steward can do is to prioritize the “neighbors” to which one has a primary duty and wend one’s way as best one can.

**Stewardship as the Practice of Virtue**

Stewardship in a market economy becomes an opportunity for the exercise of virtue and the qualities of trust and civility necessary to sustain human community. The virtues of honesty and truthfulness, for instance, are inherent in the Christian faith and consistent with our belief in the sacredness of life and the dignity of persons. One need only consider recent financial scandals such as Enron and its public accounting firm, Arthur Andersen, to see the horrendous impact of dishonesty and deceitful actions, especially with respect to financial reporting methods. Enron’s bankruptcy and Andersen’s implosion have racked investor confidence, destroyed thousands of jobs, decimated employee retirement funds, and destroyed capital value for thousands of investors and have sent shock waves through financial markets in and outside the energy industry.

Although the full account of the legal and ethical issues surrounding the Enron case, and a growing list of other corporations, has yet to be fully revealed, several ethical, and perhaps legal, breaches seem apparent. Within a market system such as that of the United States, basic ethical norms of honesty and truthfulness are consistent with legal and professional accounting standards, which require companies not to materially misstate the true financial status of the corporation’s financial health on a consolidated balance sheet. This ethical and legal expectation of corporate managers and boards of directors is essential to protect the interests of corporate shareholders and indeed the health and stability of financial markets. This moral expectation is consistent with the systemic demand that corporations and other institutions practice appropriate levels of disclosure and transparency to protect against deception and fraud. Without these minimal standards of honesty and truthfulness (which can easily become difficult to decipher in the midst of complex accounting standards and laws), the responsible stewardship of private capital is severely damaged, with harmful consequences to numerous other stakeholders. The Enron case also seems rife with examples of greed and avarice among some Enron
senior managers, whose unethical, and perhaps illegal, pursuit of self-gain entails clear conflicts of interest with their fiduciary and corporate duties. This recent corporate debacle is but one dramatic example of the importance of basic virtues such as honesty and truthfulness—virtues that are also central embodiments of Christian stewardship in a market society.

Stewardship as the Just Management of People
Membership (employment) in a corporation is not like membership in a family. Relationships in a family are unconditional, but employment relationships are usually conditional. They are predicated upon adequate performance of tasks and responsibilities for the sake of the organization’s purposes (generally, the production of goods and/or services at a profit). Effective management of people within a work organization draws upon myriad qualities, skills, and abilities. Whether effective management is best described as an art or a science, it can serve as an authentic form of stewardship of “human resources,” whose coordination aims at a larger purpose.

Surely any Christian vision of the stewardship of people would include considerations of justice and fairness. In a dynamic market economy, managing people is often a rough-and-tumble affair, filled with imperfection and failure. For instance, unanticipated externalities and competitive pressures frequently require a company to downsize its workforce, due to no fault of terminated workers. Individuals harmed by such events often feel that fairness and justice have been ignored. Yet in the midst of dynamism and change, managers as stewards can still seek to practice basic notions of justice and fairness, especially in the form of nondiscrimination and basic respect for persons. Discrimination based upon race or ethnicity, age, gender, or sexual orientation are all harmful, and sexual harassment is a basic violation of human dignity. While such forms of discrimination and harassment are illegal in most developed market economies with strong legal sanctions and enforcements, the Christian steward sees additional motivations for avoiding discrimination and embracing diversity at work. Our view of human beings and human community is shaped by a sacred vision of love and care for humans by a gracious God and of a radically inclusive community of peace and justice. Our vision of justice at work is shaped by a much larger and more demanding vision revealed by God.

Stewardship as the Quest for Systemic Connections
Stewardship that seeks to advance the good of the neighbor and of the
community commits itself to the huge task of trying to understand the full, systemic implications of one's economic actions. This affirms the truth that all of life is connected. In an increasingly globalizing market economy, the ripple effects of economic activity in any place tend to grow and expand in complexity, making the quest for understanding daunting and perhaps finally impossible. Nevertheless, central injunctions of the Christian faith demand that we persist in this task: see the face of Christ in anyone in need; seek a radically inclusive community of peace and justice that excludes no one; be stewards of the entire earth's resources.

Moral concern for the well-being of others cannot stop at any artificial human boundary. Blue jeans assembled by the poor Pakistani mother and her daughter in a facility in Lahore, Pakistan, computer chips manufactured in China, tropical hardwood harvested in Brazilian rain forests—all become complex economic processes that call for our understanding and evaluation. The demand to understand systemic connections neither is an easy task nor implies that the steward has sufficient power or authority to make or influence changes perceived as beneficial. But it places the burden of moral proof on each of us to seek understanding that can shape our choices and sometimes influence change.

Stewardship as Care for the Larger Community of Life

Stewardship, rightly ordered, is not an artificial human endeavor that treats the earth merely as a "natural resource" to be exploited for human benefit. Our Christian conviction that "the earth is the Lord's" and that we are ordained as stewards to care for it compels us to expand our role of trusteeship to encompass the entire community of life on earth. How one rightly envisions this task is by no means fully clear. As an animal species placed within the web of nature, we are biologically driven to use resources for the sake of life. Yet, how much consumption is enough? How large ought the human species to be? How much value should we place on other species and ecosystems? If we argue, as many mainstream environmentalists and economists do, that our goal should be "sustainable development" (economic development that meets the needs of the current human generation without compromising the capacity of future generations to do the same), how will we reorder and redesign economic processes and technologies to attain this goal? Literature and developments in this field expand continuously. Practical developments within economic life (manufacturing
processes, new energy technologies, increased attention to resource conservation and protection) suggest promising trends. The debate about global warming offers a poignant example of the size and complexity of such environmental issues. Will human activities, especially those that stem from our increasing use of fossil-fuel energy sources, result in global warming? And if so, what will be its ecological consequences for humans and for the larger ecological web of life? What concrete strategies ought nations, corporations, consumers, and other economic actors to embark upon to alleviate this problem? Christians' commitment to stewardship compels them to engage these issues as serious expressions of their fundamental faith commitments.

Stewardship as an Expression of the Faith of a Church Community
Most Christian stewards are members of faith communities. The church community, in its many institutional expressions, also becomes a mechanism for stewardship. All the "resources" of a congregation become opportunities to engage in the faithful practice of stewardship. Church budgets say much about what a congregation really values. Compensation of church personnel, management structures, funding allocations—both inside and outside the narrow life of the church—for better or for worse, are all noble or flawed expressions of faith. Who holds power and how it is exercised, how the expertise of the laity is used, who is cared for and who is not, all are allocations of human resources. How a church manages its physical resources and how it uses energy and conserves natural resources are allocations of natural resources and say something about the congregation's relationship to the earth. And, finally, how a church teaches stewardship through education and worship is probably the most vital signal of intent and effectiveness.

Stewardship as Seeking Judgment, Forgiveness, and Grace
The "goods" entrusted to the Christian steward for management in the marketplace, while good, are not the ultimate good. Our relative and proximate efforts to exercise responsible stewardship, in all its dimensions, are important. While all our efforts fall far short of God's radical call of love and justice, whether we do better or worse makes a difference to the health and well-being of various neighbors in need.

At the end of the day, though, the steward is saved not by works but by faith alone. With humility, we offer all of our efforts, all that we have done
and left undone, both good and flawed, and fall on the mercy of God, seeking forgiveness and grace. Open to the divine possibility of transformation, the steward seeks wisdom and renewal for the next day, until the day when grace provides us with the promised reality of eternal life.

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Endnotes

3. See the empirical analysis of bribery and corruption compiled by Transparency International, an international nongovernmental organization that monitors levels of corruption around the globe: www.transparency.org.
4. This argument has been made persuasively by, among others, Robert Wuthnow in *God and Mammon in America* (NY: Free Press, 1994). Indeed, Adam Smith, known by many as a father of modern capitalism, argues the essential connection of markets to morality in his lesser-known text, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. by Knud Haakonssen (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
5. I have developed various of these themes in recent publications; see *Keeping Faith at Work: The Christian in the Workplace* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994) and *The Business Corporation and Productive Justice* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997).
7. For a twentieth-century Thomistic articulation of Roman Catholic natural law's understanding of the common good, including private property's proper role therein, see, for instance, Jacques Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966).
Stewards of Shalom: 
Toward a Trinitarian Ecological Ethic

DAVID N. FIELD

As humanity enters the twenty-first century, it is faced with fundamental questions as to its place within the earth community. Human intervention in and transformation of the nonhuman creation has reached unprecedented levels. The inevitable consequences of this intensifying impact will be fundamental changes in the dynamics of the biosphere and its interrelated ecosystems. We face transformations in weather patterns, floods, desertification, increased waste production, the mass extinction of plant and animal species, declines in food production, increasing consumption of nonrenewable resources, a rise in pollution-related diseases, the unpredictable consequences of genetic engineering, and so on. Humanity’s response to this situation is caught up in the power dynamics of the global political economy, intensifying and transforming existing divisions and conflicts. Responses to global environmental challenges are thus complicated by divisions between the countries of the North Atlantic Rim and the countries of the South and between Europe and the United States.

Christians face a further challenge: it is often argued that the exploitation of the earth has been legitimated and encouraged by the Christian understanding of human dominion over the earth. A popular response to this challenge has been to recover and reinterpret the concept of stewardship as the master symbol for interpreting the relationship between human and nonhuman creation. Human dominion rightly interpreted, the argument goes, means not domination but responsible, caring—even self-sacrificial—stewardship of the earth. Hence the problem is not with the affirmation of human dominion but with the way the concept has been misinterpreted.

The (In)Adequacy of Stewardship

Despite its popular appeal, serious questions have been raised as to whether steward is an adequate or even a useful theological symbol to describe the role of humanity within the earth community. At its best the symbol has significant strengths. It emphasizes that the earth belongs
to God and not to human beings, and thus human beings do not have the right to use and abuse the earth as they please. (2) It emphasizes that human beings are responsible for the way in which they use the earth and its inhabitants. (3) It emphasizes that humanity is commissioned to protect, care for, and promote the flourishing of the nonhuman creation. (4) It emphasizes the dignity and value of persons as representatives of God in creation. The symbol has thus been particularly attractive to those who are disempowered and oppressed by the dominant political and economic order. (5) The model for the steward is the self-sacrificial life and death of Christ; hence, stewardship involves a lifestyle of sacrifice on behalf of both fellow human beings and the nonhuman creation.

However, the symbol of steward has a number of negative dimensions. (1) It encourages human beings to view themselves as distinct from and even superior to the nonhuman creation. (2) It can be interpreted as facilitating an approach to creation in which human beings are understood as “managers” of creation—an image that has become more dominant as a consequence of the use of the term in the business community. (3) It is questionable whether it is possible, despite the enormous technological progress of the last century, for human beings to be responsible for the flourishing of the earth. (4) Human beings are newcomers to the planet; the rest of the earth’s creatures flourished without us and will continue to do so even if we are no longer here. Does the earth really need human stewards?

In summary, the image of steward is too anthropocentric to be useful. Further, the image is not comprehensive enough to include the multifaceted relationship between humanity and the rest of creation reflected in the biblical traditions. Moreover, stewardship terminology is not directly used in the Bible and has been rarely used in the history of Christian theology to describe the relationship between humanity and the rest of creation.

The challenge is how to retain the contribution of the symbol of the steward while overcoming its weaknesses. To do this we need to take note of a more fundamental issue: invoking a particular symbol as a comprehensive description of the relationship between human beings and nonhuman creation can create the illusion that all humans relate to the nonhuman creation in a similar way. Thus, it can obscure the complexities and fractures of human society and the way in which these impact our relationship with the nonhuman creation. Hence, any attempt to move beyond stewardship must begin with an analysis of the power dynamics of our global society.
Stewardship and the State of the Earth

Ecological transformation and degradation are not new phenomena; numerous human cultures have changed, exploited, and degraded their environment. The unique character of the contemporary condition is the extensive and intensive scale of the processes. The contemporary transformation and degradation have a global impact that is fundamentally reshaping the future of life on the earth. Advances in nuclear and genetic technology mean that the impact is transforming some of the most basic components of life as we know it. The origins of this planet-wide degradation lie in three interrelated processes: (1) the process of globalization that began in the sixteenth-century voyages of conquest and discovery and led to the development of an interrelated global economy; (2) the emergence of modern science and technology; (3) the development of modernity as a sociocultural matrix in the North Atlantic Rim, which, through the globalizing process, has impacted the entire planet. The heart of modernity is the promotion of human well-being and autonomy through the rational control, manipulation, and exploitation of the earth and its resources. The growth in human well-being was interpreted primarily in relation to the production, consumption, and possession of material goods and, hence, was measured in terms of economic growth. Such growth arises out of the manipulation, control, and exploitation of the earth through scientific and technological means. Nation-states, with their political policies, international relationships, socioeconomic structures, and government organizations, have thus configured themselves with the goal of maximizing economic growth. While the ideology of modernity claimed to pursue the well-being of all humanity, the praxis of modernity was the pursuit of the well-being of the economically and politically powerful at the expense of the earth and its less powerful human inhabitants.

It is widely recognized that modernity is in crisis and that we are living in a time of sociocultural change. However, the processes of global exploitation unleashed by modernity not only have continued but in some ways have intensified. The contemporary economic order is characterized by three important developments. The first is the new centrality of consumption. Products are designed to become obsolete; designs and fashions are constantly changed; advertising is used to constantly create demand; and competition demands the most cost-effective production of these goods. Everything, from healthcare to genetic data, has been turned
into a commodity to be bought and sold—a process dependent upon increasing exploitation, transformation, and degradation of the earth.

The second development is the emergence of transnational companies as a new planetary aristocracy whose economic power rivals that of the most powerful nations. With no loyalty to a particular state, they organize and locate their operations in order to maximize the profits for their shareholders. The result is that labor-intensive and environmentally exploitative operations are located in countries with limited labor and environmental protection legislation. Operations requiring easy access to capital resources and highly skilled workers are located in the developed economies.

The third development is the emergence of new patterns of ownership and control of capital. The characteristic feature of the contemporary economy is the separation of ownership and control capital. While extremely wealthy investors remain, ownership of capital has been democratized among the middle class, but control of capital has been concentrated in the hands of an elite group of brokers, investment bankers, and fund managers. This elite moves money around the globe at the touch of a button, with the aim of maximizing profit for themselves and their investors.

As a result of these developments, the role and power of the state have been transformed. Nations, even the economically powerful ones, have little choice but to shape their economic, social, and environmental policy in accordance with the demands of transnational companies and the whims of the controllers of capital. Despite the rhetoric of democracy, effective political control has increasingly been transferred out of the hands of the people and into the hands of an unelected elite. This situation is often portrayed as the consequence of the "natural" laws of the market; yet, it is a social construction that benefits the North Atlantic middle and wealthy classes, as well as the elite of the Third World, at the expense of the earth and its powerless and excluded human inhabitants.

In the contemporary world, we all participate in the degradation of the earth. However, we do so in vastly different ways. Consider the following example: An executive of a major company makes decisions that result in environmental transformation and degradation. Politicians facilitate this process by making the necessary legislative and administrative adjustments. An investment manager supports it by ensuring a flow of capital to that company. Numerous anonymous investors unknowingly support and benefit from it through their pension funds, mutual funds, or other invest-
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merits. Consumers actively participate through their purchase and use of the company's products. Poor workers in some deprived country work in the ecologically degrading industry out of desperation for jobs. Others, with little hope for employment, are forced to exploit marginal lands through subsistence agriculture or to hunt endangered species to ensure the survival of their families. These diverse relationships cannot be equalized or reduced to a uniform category. Further, the concept of human beings as stewards of creation is not comprehensive enough to provide ethical direction within these complex relationships.

Biblical Perspectives on Humanity and the Earth

The interpretation of Gen. 1:26-29 has dominated discussions of the relationship between humanity and the nonhuman creation; yet the Bible contains a diversity of portraits of the relationship. These diverse interpretations provide a useful starting point for reexamining the model of stewardship. In what follows, I examine five such portraits.

Creation Consummated by the Sabbath

The first creation narrative's portrait of humanity as created in the image of God has played a dominant role in the history of Christian theology. However, a careful reading of the narrative in its context opens up alternative perspectives for understanding the nature and vocation of humanity. Scholarly consensus ascribes the narrative to the Priestly source of the Pentateuch. It thus needs to be read in the context of the exile and as a component of a tradition that looked forward to the reestablishment of Israel in the land as a holy people. As such, it is characterized by a sustained polemic against contemporary non-Israelite religious ideas.

The major thrust of the theological polemic is the rejection of understandings of creation as divine or semi-divine. Yet, this does not mean that creation is to be understood as inanimate or passive. On the contrary, it participates in the process in response to God's command. Nor does it devalue creation. As sections of creation are completed, God examines them and affirms that they are good—prior to any reference to their usefulness to humanity. Upon completion, God recognizes that it is "very good."

It is in this context that concepts of the image of God and dominion over the earth must be understood. While clearly conferring a unique status on human beings, these concepts neither deny human creaturehood nor
legitimate an understanding of the nonhuman creation as a passive resource to be used and abused by humanity. In the Ancient Near East, the idea of images of gods functioned in two related ways. First, it referred to statues used in worship, which were understood to be manifestations of the gods. Second, kings (and sometimes priests) were considered to be images of a particular god, representing the interests of the god on earth. The idea thus legitimated their claims to authority and status, in contrast to the masses, who had been created to be the servants of the gods. The assertion that all human beings are created in the image of God is a rejection of the religious legitimation of a hierarchical society and an affirmation that all human beings are called to represent God's interests and reflect God's character in their dealings with the world. The related assertion that all human beings are to subdue the earth and have dominion over it is a rejection of the idea that only a certain class has a right to access and control the earth. What this entails must be understood in relation to God's purpose for creation.

In response to the chaos of pre-exilic Israel and of the exile, the Priestly tradition emphasized structure and order in the divine purpose for creation. God is portrayed as progressively fashioning a structured home with clear boundaries for the diverse creatures of the earth. This process culminates in the Sabbath, which God hallows and blesses. Hence, the biblical laws regarding the Sabbath and the related celebrations of the Sabbatical year and the Jubilee year provide a picture of God's purpose for creation. Taken together, they provide for the worship of God; rest for all human beings regardless of social status; animals and the land; the restriction of human activity that intrudes into and transforms the nonhuman creation; an appreciation of the God-given fecundity of the earth; and the establishment of equity and justice in society. Exod. 20:8-11 portrays the keeping of the Sabbath as an imitation of God's creative action and, hence, as a bearing of the divine image. One can thus argue that to be created in the image of God is a calling to participate in God's action of establishing a Sabbath for the earth.

The command to subdue the earth cannot be understood as a license to use and abuse the earth. The Sabbath and other ritual laws grounded in the Priestly understanding of the order of creation explicitly restrict use of the earth and its creatures. Further, the text implies that human beings were originally vegetarian. While the terminology is sometimes used in contexts of violence and force, it is unlikely that this is intended here, given the constant emphasis on the goodness of creation. Parallel reference to Israel's subduing
the land (Num. 32:20-32; Josh. 18:1-10; 1 Chron. 22:18) describe the conquest of its human inhabitants who had defiled the land, making way for Israel to inhabit it. Yet the land belonged to God and the people were “aliens and tenants” (Lev. 25:23) who were to relate to the land in accordance with the divine purpose. Thus, at most, the text legitimates the right of peasants to extract from the land what was necessary for their own well-being.

Adam and Eve in Eden

The portrait of creation in the second Genesis narrative probably reached its present form during the time of Solomon and can be read as a critique of the excesses of the Solomonic empire through a subversive use of temple imagery.7 Here the goal of creation is the establishment of Eden—a garden sanctuary where God and God’s creatures enjoy each other’s company.

The earth is portrayed as originally existing in a desertlike condition, without rain and without human inhabitants to transform it. Yahweh’s response is threefold: water springs up from the earth, Adam is created, and Yahweh plants a garden sanctuary. Human beings are created from the ground for the purpose of promoting the fertility of the earth. In contrast to the Ancient Near Eastern myths, which portray human beings as servants of the gods who provide for them by their manual labor, here Yahweh is portrayed as planting a garden to meet the needs and desires of humanity. The presence of God, symbolized by the tree of life, is the source of life and fertility for humanity and the earth. The task of humanity is to serve and protect the garden that Yahweh has planted.

The fecund and beautiful Eden provides for both the needs and the desires of the primeval couple. In the garden, they live in fellowship with God; in mutual vulnerability, trust, service, and companionship with each other; and in harmony with the rest of creation as they enjoyed its abundance. Yet Eden does not belong to the human couple; and their continued inhabiting of the garden was dependent on their respecting Yahweh’s ultimate authority, symbolized by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The primeval sin is portrayed as the attempt to claim control of Eden’s resources without reference to God. The account of Cain and Abel reinforces this. Abel gives the firstfruits of his flocks, thus acknowledging Yahweh’s ownership. Cain gives any portion, indicating that he claims ownership and that his sacrifice means giving from what he regards as his own. The result of sin in both cases is to disrupt the fertility of the earth.
Israel's Prophetic Hope
In the midst of hopeless situations in the life of Israel, the prophets used diverse and often surreal images to portray the hope of God's coming to renew and transform the people of God and the entire creation. God would be present with and relate to human beings in a new way; human society would be characterized by righteousness, justice, peace, and joy; the sick would be healed; the nonhuman creation would achieve an unheard-of abundance and potential; and there would be peace in the animal realm.

The prophets present numerous perspectives on the relationship between humanity and the nonhuman creation. For our purpose we note only the close relationship between human behavior and ecological well-being. For many of the prophets, human sin—particularly social injustice—is the cause of ecological disasters. The hoped-for renewal and transformation of human beings and the establishment of justice would be accompanied by the earth's overflowing with abundance.

Otherkind in Direct Relationship with God
A strongly contrasting motif to the above is found in some of the psalms and most strikingly in Job. These traditions describe a relationship between God and all creation that is unmediated by humankind. Human beings are merely one creature among numerous others created by God and with whom God relates; they are in no way superior to otherkind. In Psalm 148, plants, animals, and even the inanimate creation are described as praising God. In Job and in Psalm 104, God is described as caring and providing for all creatures without reference to humanity. God provides the wilderness for the wild animals to inhabit, unhindered by human interference. Their untamed otherness is stressed, in direct contrast to the prophetic hope for peace in creation; it is in their wildness that they glorify God.

The portrayal of the otherness of the wild animals and human kinship with them appears to be a rejection of the claim to human right to use and abuse them. The descriptions of the animals in Job are probably best understood against the background of the use of animals in the royal ideologies of the Ancient Near East. The king's position as ruler and conqueror was closely intertwined with his assertion of the right to hunt and tame. In contrast to this, Job emphasizes their freedom from humanity and its sociocultural world. Thus, when the drama moves Job from a position of patriarch to being kin to the wild animals, who remain beyond...
human control, it moves him to the margins. The consequence is a destabilizing of the traditional hierarchical social structure and a rejection of the claim of the powerful to control creation.

**Christ the Mediator and Redeemer of Creation**

Various New Testament passages, in their presentation of a christological interpretation of creation, draw on and transform many of these earlier images. All of reality is centered in Christ, who is the mediator of God’s relationship with created reality, from creation to eschaton. There are three important consequences of this interpretation of creation. (1) Jesus Christ provides the key to understanding the purpose of creation. (2) Creation has not yet achieved its purpose. In the death and resurrection of Jesus, the goal of creation has proleptically erupted into history and will be consummated in the new heaven and the new earth. God is now at work to bring all creation to its ultimate goal of union with Christ. (3) God’s relation to humanity is set within the context of God’s purpose for creation. While some passages link the eschatological destinies of otherkind and humankind (e.g., Rom. 8:22-27), in others, otherkind has its own relationship with God and its own eschatological destiny (e.g., Revelation 4–5).

The New Testament presents us with a variety of portraits of humanity. Two are closely related to the christological interpretations of creation and relevant to our interest. (1) Salvation is a process by which persons are conformed to the image of Christ, who is the image of God. Imaging God is thus the transformation of one’s life so it reflects the kenotic character of Christ. (2) Human beings are stewards, not in relation to creation or the earth but in relation to their participation in the redemptive purpose of God to bring all things into union with Christ.

**Toward a Trinitarian Ecological Ethic**

These diverse biblical images cannot be summarized or systematized into a single concept or portrait. However, I suggest that a trinitarian theology of creation provides a way of relating and integrating their diversity.

**A Trinitarian Theology of Humanity in Creation**

The doctrine of the Trinity affirms that the life of God is constituted by particularity, variety, interdependence, and reciprocity. Out of the love that lies at the heart of the Trinity, God brought into existence a dynamic and diverse community of creatures that exists in a multiplicity of interdepen-
dent relationships. While creation is distinct from God, God relates to its different creatures in a multiplicity of ways, characterized by interaction and reciprocity.

In a trinitarian perspective, the goal of creation is the comprehensive well-being or flourishing of God’s creatures as they exist in relation to God and in a variety of relationships with one another. In this way, creation expresses, in finite ways, the dynamic life of the triune God. The Hebrew word shalom is a useful designation for this goal. Shalom is often translated as “peace,” but it is better understood as comprehensive well-being. The meaning of shalom varies in accordance with the community to which it is referring. In relation to humanity, it refers to a community characterized by fellowship with God; by equity, justice, peace, and joy; and by healthy relationships with and dependence upon a flourishing nonhuman creation. The concept of healthy relationships with nonhuman creation encompasses a range of relationships that respects the integrity of the nonhuman creation in its diverse particularities. While human beings are dependent on nonhuman creatures to meet their basic needs, these creatures are not mere objects of human use. Shalom entails their flourishing in their otherness from humanity.

At its best, the doctrine of the Trinity is not abstract speculation on the being of God but rather reflection on the dynamism and diversity of God’s action in the history of Israel, in Jesus Christ, and in the church to achieve God’s purpose for creation. Implicit in the motif of creation consummated by the Sabbath and the Eden narrative, and explicit in the prophetic hope and christological interpretation of creation, is the idea that God’s purpose for creation has not been achieved. Using trinitarian concepts, one could say God is interacting with creation in its plurality as the Spirit unites it with the Logos, evoking multiform, penultimate responses to God’s purpose. While the ultimate achievement of the goal of creation awaits the new heaven and the new earth, it has proleptically broken into history in Christ and is now present by the work of the Spirit.

The diverse biblical pictures of humanity are theological interpretations of what it means to be human in the context of the diverse power relations of human society. Together, they portray an understanding of humanity that can be described by an enriched notion of the image of God. The core of this concept is the calling to represent God’s interests and reflect God’s character. It is thus to participate in God’s action to bring shalom to the earth. The form this participation takes varies according to the gifts of the
person and his or her position within the power structures of society. For the oppressed and marginalized exiles in Babylon, it was to reject the claims of the Babylonian rulers and to claim access to the resources of the earth for all people. In the Solomonic era, it was an affirmation of the calling of the peasant farmers to serve God by serving the earth and a rejection of the attempt by elites to control the earth without reference to Yahweh's requirements. For the hearers of the prophets, it was a call to establish justice and righteousness in society. For the Jobian poet, it was a call for the rich and powerful to recognize the need to withdraw and leave wild creation to itself. For the New Testament writers, it was a call to exercise one's gifts in the establishment of communities of the new creation.

In this way, human beings are indeed called to be stewards, but not stewards of the earth. They are to be stewards of their particular calling to participate in what God is doing by the Spirit to bring shalom. They are responsible before God to use their gifts to promote the penultimate actualization of shalom in their particular contexts. What this entails will depend upon their position within the power structures of a given society. Vastly different responses are required from different people in different contexts.

The Contours of a Trinitarian Ecological Ethic

While ultimate shalom, and, hence, ecological healing, awaits the eschaton, we have a responsibility to participate in what God is doing to establish penultimate expressions of shalom for the earth. Our task is to ask what it might mean to be stewards of shalom in the context of a global society characterized by social inequality and injustice, the marginalization and exclusion of powerless humans, violence and conflict, and the exploitation and degradation of the earth. In particular, what does it mean for those of us who participate in and reap the benefits of the globalizing society?

Fundamentally, such an ethic is a proactive ethic of responsibility that orients one's life toward the goal of promoting shalom in one's relationship with God, with one's fellow human beings, and with the earth. As a proactive ethic, it entails deliberate action in dependence on God's grace. As an ethic of responsibility, it recognizes that not only are we responsible before God for our decisions and actions but that, in many cases, there are no detailed directions or commands for such responsible action.

Second, it recognizes that the earth and its creatures belong to God and relate to God in a diversity of ways. Human beings are fellow creatures
responsible to God for the manner in which we relate to the rest of creation. However, the nonhuman creation has its own dignity and value to God. It is not a mere resource to be used and abused for human well-being and pleasure. Its integrity and value must be respected in our interaction with it.

Third, to affirm that human beings are stewards of shalom is to affirm that all human beings—male and female, rich and poor, powerful and powerless—have equal dignity and value and a God-given right to a limited use of the earth and its resources to meet their needs and desires. Ecological degradation and healing is thus closely related to issues of justice and injustice. Unjust socioeconomic structures lead to the exploitation of the earth, while just structures lead to its healing. We are thus required to address the economic and political structures that concentrate economic power in the hands of the few at the expense of the earth and the poor. While this entails lifestyle choices about what we consume and how we invest our finances, it also requires deliberate attempts to address the economic, social, and political structures of our societies. There will be no ecological healing until the poor, the marginalized, and the excluded are liberated and empowered to take up their responsibility as stewards of God’s shalom.

Fourth, as stewards of shalom, human beings are called to promote the flourishing and health of the earth. This includes both active intervention and deliberate withdrawal from any intervention to allow other creatures to be themselves. We thus have a duty to promote the conservation of biodiversity in general and the conservation of the last remaining wilderness areas of the earth in particular. However, human well-being, and, hence, shalom for the human community, is dependent on making use of creation. There are no simple answers as to what is legitimate intervention in and use of nonhuman creation; each case needs to be carefully examined. Does an intervention promote the life and flourishing of creation or does it lead to destruction, exploitation, and death? Issues around genetic engineering, in particular, require careful consideration as to whether or not they destroy the integrity and otherness of the nonhuman creatures.

Fifth, if the human relationship with creation is to reflect the character of God, then it must be one that shares God’s identification with the excluded and the victims. For the powerful, this means adopting the kenotic attitude of Christ. Citizens of the rich and powerful nations of the North Atlantic Rim need to actively pursue policies that will bring justice to others and healing to the earth, even though it may mean radical changes to their own lifestyles. For
those who are marginalized and excluded, it means taking responsibility to assert their right of access to and use of the resources of the earth in accordance with God’s purposes. For all, it means being willing to adopt lifestyles of self-sacrifice for the good of the earth and all its inhabitants.

Conclusion

The use of the concept of stewardship to describe humanity’s relationship with the nonhuman creation, while an important move beyond theologies of dominion, remains problematic and inadequate to meet the challenges of the postmodern world. However, the concept of stewards of shalom has greater potential for the development of an adequate environmental ethic. Like the model of stewards of the earth, it emphasizes human dignity and responsibility; yet it is more modest in its assessment of our role. We are responsible not for the earth but merely for our particular vocation as a participant in what God is doing in relation to the particular context in which we find ourselves. Yet, this in no way decreases the challenge for costly and Christlike engagement with the contemporary society in order to establish penultimate expressions of shalom.

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Endnotes

1. The most detailed exposition and defense of stewardship theology can be found in the work of Douglas John Hall. See his The Stewardship of Life in the Kingdom of Death (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985); Imaging God: Dominion as Stewardship (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986); and The Steward: A Biblical Symbol Come of Age (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990).


Whether we are aware of it or not, our sermons are theological statements, and the formation—or lack thereof—of our congregations into mature disciples of Jesus Christ with a Methodist or Wesleyan identity rises and falls with our preached theology. In this essay, I examine the loss of the theological “move” (i.e., theological exegesis) in sermon preparation and suggest (1) why its recovery is crucial to the formation of mature Christians, and (2) how we may become more intentional about preaching United Methodist doctrines and theology on a regular basis.

The Erosion of the Theological Move in Sermon Preparation

The Enlightenment—viewed as the historical process in which reason, science, and individual autonomy gradually changed the way we approach knowledge, truth claims, and the world in which we live—significantly altered the church’s understanding of Scripture, theology, and the preparation of sermons. Developments in the study of Scripture have had a major impact on homiletics. Preachers routinely rely on historical-critical biblical resources, which provide indispensable information about the historical and literary features of the text—essential for sound biblical exegesis. As we have grown more aware of human and existential elements in the Bible, historical-critical tools and methods have had a liberating and transforming effect on preaching the Word of God. Yet, the flourishing of this scholarship and the emphasis on the careful use of its resources in sermon preparation have meant that theological exegesis—our means of engaging and bringing to light the theological meanings present in the text—has become less prominent.

This situation has been exacerbated by the trend toward increasing specialization not only in the study of Scripture but also within the various theological disciplines. Starting in the mid-nineteenth century, theological
studies have been divided into four major areas—Bible, dogmatics, church history, and practical theology—and each area has been populated by teachers whose expertise is further narrowed and specialized. The compartmentalization of theological education, while subject to ongoing critique and reevaluation, continues today. Such compartmentalization and specialization has had a direct impact on homiletics, since many homiletics teachers are now trained as biblical scholars, while few are trained as historical or systematic theologians. Others, of course, are trained as homileticians (i.e., in "practical" theology). The skills brought by the biblical scholar to the task of preaching are oriented toward what the text meant in its historical context but less focused on conceptualizing and articulating its present meaning. On the other hand, and equally detrimental to homiletics, is the preoccupation of contemporary theologians with methodology, often focusing on the present situation with less concern for the historical and scriptural basis of theology. Systematic and historical theologians have become increasingly scripturally illiterate and often lack biblical imagination. Indeed, many contemporary theological works are grounded in the Scriptures only marginally. As a result of this fragmentation, neither the academic study of Scripture nor that of theology has been oriented toward meeting the needs of and possibilities for preaching the Word of God.

A brief survey of contemporary homiletics texts and monographs demonstrates the neglect of the theological move in sermon preparation. Thomas Long's excellent introduction, The Witness of Preaching (Westminster John Knox, 1989), devotes a few pages to the use of theology in preaching. David Buttrick's Homiletic Moves and Structures (Fortress, 1987) offers three or four pages on theology for preaching and an appendix covering a theology of preaching. Fred Craddock's Preaching (Abingdon, 1985) contains a full chapter on a theology of preaching but only three pages on the use of theology in preaching. In his book, The Sermon: Dancing on the Edge of Mystery (Abingdon, 1997), Eugene Lowry offers three stages of sermon preparation—attending, imagining, and shaping—but gives little attention to the theological move. Finally, Paul Scott Wilson, who is one of the more theologically concerned homileticians writing today, offers a full chapter on "theology in the sermon" in his text, The Practice of Preaching (Abingdon, 1993), yet stops short of suggesting the need for explicitly theological exegesis of the biblical text as a parallel step to traditional biblical exegesis (which less formally includes theological considerations). In his
recent Quarterly Review essay, Wilson goes further, noting, "Theological criticism may be conceived for preaching as a means of questioning biblical texts to discover what these texts reveal about the God whose word they express." One contemporary work that focuses on the importance of theology for and in preaching is Hughes and Kysar's Preaching Doctrine (Fortress, 1997), which may be more aptly titled "Preaching Theologically." Even so, this book, the writings of Paul Scott Wilson, and similar efforts at including theological exegesis constitute but a starting point for recovering the theological move in sermon preparation.

If this brief synopsis demonstrates the neglect of theology for preaching and the need to reconsider the theological move in sermon preparation, then how should United Methodists approach the notion of preaching our doctrines and theology? Do we even consider such theological reflection to be a valid step or necessary ingredient in our sermon preparation? Can a compelling argument be made for preaching in the "Wesleyan" way? There are important reasons why United Methodist preachers should consider the theological move essential to good preaching.

The Importance of Preaching Theologically

For United Methodists, the impetus to preach theologically begins with John Wesley and the early Methodist movement. There can be little doubt that Wesley's sermons were intentionally theological. In the manner of the Anglican homilies, his sermons served—and still do—as doctrinal standards; at least, Wesley understood them as containing good doctrine that should be upheld. Furthermore, the conferences of early Methodism stressed discussion of theological questions. Russell Richey points out that the first conferences emphasized the clarification of doctrine through a question-and-answer approach, though "subsequent conferences assumed those doctrinal formulations and largely confined themselves to [how to regulate our doctrine, discipline, and practice]." Moreover, although we tend to think that Methodists are free to believe almost anything, Wesley consistently distinguished between the "essentials" of the Christian faith (which he held to be invariable) and "opinions." Although he is noted for having said that Methodists should "think and let think," Wesley was no relativist; he had a firm commitment to a biblical understanding of salvation by faith and the journey implied in that salvation. Given Wesley's concern for preaching adequate and salvific theology, what might be our responsibility...
PREACHING METHODIST DOCTRINE

for preaching theologically in contemporary United Methodist churches?

To answer this question, we can turn to our shared deliberation, our "Christian conferencing" as a church: the Book of Discipline. It is no coincidence that the doctrinal standards and the church's theological task, found in Part Two of the Discipline, immediately follow the church's Constitution; instead, it signifies the importance we place on doctrine and theology in the United Methodist tradition. The doctrinal standards include the Articles of Religion, the Confession of Faith, Wesley's Standard Sermons, the Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament, and the General Rules. The Discipline explains the importance of the theological task to our lives as Christians: "We endeavor through the power of the Holy Spirit to understand the love of God given in Jesus Christ. We seek to spread this love abroad. As we see more clearly who we have been, as we understand more fully the needs of the world, as we draw more effectively upon our theological heritage, we will become better equipped to fulfill our calling as the people of God." The Wesleyan "quadrilateral"—our method for reconciling our doctrinal standards with contemporary questions and contexts—is central to this theological task. However, it is crucial to remember that the quadrilateral is our method for theological discernment and does not replace the doctrinal standards; it enables us to reinterpret them in light of our own situation and historical context. The Discipline places Methodism's doctrinal heritage in conversation with our contemporary understanding and experience. Too often we use the quadrilateral to engage particular issues without considering, simultaneously, the historical doctrines, theology, and heritage of the church. There are two layers of theological reflection that must be held together: (1) What Wesley and early Methodism held to be true based upon Scripture, tradition, experience, and reason; and (2) what any generation after Wesley holds to be true based upon its engagement of Scripture, tradition, experience, and reason. By placing the historic Wesleyan doctrines in conversation with contemporary questions, we continue to reflect upon those theological understandings that have stood the test of time, though not without subjecting them to scrutiny and ongoing discussion.

Ordination in The United Methodist Church includes writing doctrinal examinations as part of that process and answering the same historical questions Wesley asked of his own preachers. Among the questions the bishop asks of each ordinand for elder are these: "8. Have you studied the doctrines of The United Methodist Church? 9. After full examination, do you believe
that our doctrines are in harmony with the Holy Scriptures? 10. Will you preach and maintain them?"

Clearly, every elder, as well as deacons and local pastors, have an obligation, as representatives of The United Methodist Church and its teachings, to uphold the doctrines and theological teachings of the denomination. When we step into the pulpit, we are representatives of the larger body of Christ; and we participate in a theological heritage that has brought meaning to and empowered the lives of millions since the eighteenth century. From John Wesley to the combined discernment of contemporary United Methodists (as contained in the Discipline), the importance of theology for preaching is clear. To this denominational basis for preaching theologically, we can add three further reasons for recovering the theological move in sermon preparation: (1) making concrete the abstractness of theological concepts; (2) cultivating consistency and denominational identity; and (3) focusing on long-term formation.

Making Theological Concepts Concrete
Theology, by definition, is abstract. As we engage in "God talk and God walk" (our teachings that reflect upon and bear witness to God and the Christian life in God), theology is inescapably abstract, because "we see in a mirror, dimly" (1 Cor. 13:12). In other words, due to the deep mystery that is the fullness of the divine, we can speak and act of God only indirectly. While we might like to walk down the street and see God, we are able to speak of things that are only like God or to see Christlike actions. Metaphors, analogies, images, stories, pictures, symbols, gestures, and rituals help us to visualize and comprehend who God is and what life in Christ should entail.

In preaching, we must find ways to express concretely the teachings of the faith—to make visible the things unseen. The gift of language and gesture enables us to lend this specificity to our theological concerns. For example, in her sermon "One Step at a Time," Barbara Brown Taylor describes faith as a rope bridge swinging across a deep gorge. Such an image lends depth and clarity to the concept of faith. As another example, the language of "one substance, three persons" when speaking of the Trinity makes little sense to even the most schooled theologian. But we can reduce the theological abstractness by likening the Trinity to, say, H$_2$O, which may take the form of ice, water, or steam. We are given the means to speak of the things of God, albeit partially. We need not even use the
precise theological language of "sanctification," "soteriology," or "justification"; as John Wesley said, we should preach "plain truth for plain people." Even so, we must be careful to convey the theological meaning of these aspects of the faith for our contemporary congregations in a way that is both understandable and accurate. Metaphors and images enable us to reinterpret the Word in meaningful ways as our life together encounters different historical and cultural conditions.

Of course, every image, metaphor, or analogy will break down at some point; we can carry the likeness only so far before it turns from "God is like" to "God is not like." The "is and is not" of our language about God cannot be eliminated, no matter how hard we may try. Nonetheless, we must define theological words and concepts, even the seemingly most obvious ones such as "grace" or "faith," and make concrete the doctrine through imaginative renderings that will often feed both the hearts and the minds of the people. John Wesley, for example, is well known for his metaphorical version of the salvation journey in which prevenient grace is the porch, justification the door, and sanctification the rooms of the house in which we should dwell. Such concrete images and metaphors are the preacher's gifts to her or his congregation, because they offer the hearers something tangible to carry home with them, long after the flurry of words and sentences and the "amen" have come and gone. They provide the people with a concrete way to remember and reflect upon doctrines and theology.

Cultivating Consistency and Denominational Identity

While someone may dispute the need for denominational identity and consistency as being irreconcilable with a pluralistic, enlightened world, two claims for consistency and identity stand out. First, a strength of our connectional and itinerant system lies in relocating pastors who possess gifts and graces that match the needs of a particular congregation. When our denominational theology is cultivated, the transition from one pastor to the next is better facilitated, since one pastor leaves and the next arrives with the same basic theological framework intact. Second, given the fact that the Wesleyan way has proven its vitality and adaptability in representing the living and growing Word of God in the real world, we should value the empowering and life-changing effect Methodist doctrine has had on different generations and cultures. This is not to suggest that there is no need or place for prophetic voices to call the church to accountability or to
rethink our theological teachings; indeed, one of the primary functions of theological reflection is to critique and to hold our church accountable to the doctrinal standards. But theology cannot perform this function unless we have an intimate knowledge of the beliefs and practices that are normative for the denomination. In other words, our denominational identity rests in large measure upon the strength of our doctrines and our ability to teach them to our congregations. Our common Wesleyan heritage fortifies the connection and empowers our life and work together as the body of Christ.

Consider the fact that, today, the percentage of a church's members who attend Sunday school regularly can vary from 20 to 80 percent. As much as we would like every church member to attend a class every week, we know they will not. Moreover, we cannot always select our Sunday school teachers based upon their qualifications, theological education, or maturity in the faith. Usually we accept that well-intentioned, motivated, and good-hearted teachers, combined with a strong curriculum, will guide our Sunday school hour. This suggests that the weekly sermon is the primary means by which disciples of Jesus Christ are formed in the fullness of the faith. It is not enough for us to merely “make disciples” through “converting” people to the Christian faith; we make genuine disciples of Jesus Christ by forming our church members into mature Christians who are knowledgeable in the teachings and practices of the faith. If we do not preach sound doctrine, we should not expect our churches to grow in Christian maturity; someone must guide and shape that ongoing formation. As the congregation's trained theologian and primary proclaimer of the Word, the pastor is expected to be that guide and shepherd.

In guiding the formation of the congregation, the pastor must be consistent in his or her theological approach to the doctrines of the faith. Consider a practical example. Suppose this Sunday the pastor of First United Methodist Church preaches a sermon in which she suggests that God’s grace surrounds us at every moment and all we need to do is accept and respond to it. Then, the next Sunday, her sermon proclaims that there is nothing we can do to merit God’s grace—we must simply wait for God to act. Although both sermons may contain sound doctrine, unless the preacher, as the trained theologian, helps the congregation to understand that these may be two facets of God’s mysterious grace, the hearers will be left with theological confusion (assuming they are paying attention to the sermons). Thus, the preacher must be aware of the theology he or she is
preaching and ensure its consistency from week to week.

Theological consistency, in and of itself, however, is insufficient to form mature disciples within the United Methodist tradition. Theological consistency must also be based on denominational integrity and identity. We are called to preach sound United Methodist doctrine and never our own theological musings. This is so not only because we have accepted the responsibility as part of our leadership within the denomination but also because generations of Methodists have found that our Wesleyan beliefs bear faithful witness in the context of our experience of life in God. Our doctrines have enabled people to live the life of faith in a meaningful and life-giving way, despite our human errors and misjudgments. The body of Christ, as expressed in The United Methodist Church, bears witness to the validity of our teachings. Thus, we must be especially careful not to offer our own views—which have not been validated by the larger community—as representative of the denomination or of the Christian faith as a whole. Although we may wrestle with various doctrines, such as the Incarnation or the resurrection of the body, and ponder their meaning and historical value, when we step into the pulpit our commission is to represent a community of faith that holds certain "essentials" to be true. It is our responsibility to preach the doctrines held in common—what George Lindbeck defines as "communally authoritative teachings regarding beliefs and practices that are considered essential to the identity or welfare of the group . . . ." Though we may have personal doubts from time to time, the Word we bring is never our own, even as the words remain ours. Responsible preaching conveys the beliefs held in common by the church and the denomination, beliefs upon which we deliberate together in our myriad conferences.

Granted, we may differ at times on what John Wesley would call "opinions." For instance, we may disagree on whether sprinkling or pouring is the preferred way to administer the water in baptism, and we are free to preach one method over the other. But as United Methodists in a connectional system, we are not at liberty to preach or teach a personal preference for believer's baptism, as our doctrine affirms the significance and theological integrity of infant baptism. Again, it is the pastor who assumes the responsibility for forming his or her congregation in the fullness of the faith and, as an ordained or licensed member of The United Methodist Church, in the Wesleyan way of salvation—in other words, in our distinctive theological identity. As United Methodists, we are part of a community of faith that
deliberates together on what we teach and preach in our churches, even as these teachings are reexamined and reinterpreted over time. Moreover, if we as a church no longer believe that our doctrinal standards contribute to making disciples of Jesus Christ, then we should amend or remove the first restrictive rule from our Constitution and revise them.

Focusing on Long-Term Formation
For John Wesley, Christian discipleship was a long-term, ongoing process and never a product. He believed that we are either progressing along the way of salvation through God’s grace and our participation in the means of grace or we are “backsliding” and failing to grow in faith, hope, and love. The above discussion suggests that sermons, as the central way in which congregations are formed theologically, should not be viewed as one-time, discrete events. Although we do want each sermon to speak meaningfully and to facilitate an experience of God among the people, a one-time experience—no matter how profound or life changing—does not produce the same results as long-term, consistent, and careful formation of our congregations. The long-term formation provided by sound theological preaching, Sunday after Sunday, will enable and aid a congregation and its individual members to grow into Christian maturity.

As a result, the primary preacher in the congregation (or the preaching team, if the responsibilities are shared) should periodically examine the theological content of the sermons that have been preached over a length of time to assess which aspects of the Christian faith are being preached often and which are seldom covered. The preacher may want to record, each week, the theological emphasis of the sermon and review the list every few months; or it may be possible to integrate the breadth of doctrines into our sermon planning over a year or more. In any case, by reviewing the doctrines covered over a period of time, we may find, for example, that most sermons have spoken of grace while few addressed sin. Or perhaps we always preach of sin in the individual and never in the social and institutional sense. Maybe the Holy Spirit appears in our sermons only on the Sundays when we celebrate the baptism of Jesus and on Pentecost, and so on.

To repeat, the sermon is primary for forming congregations in the fullness of the Christian faith and in the United Methodist identity. Preachers have the great responsibility of ensuring that all teachings of the Christian faith, as understood and taught by The United Methodist Church, are
proclaimed over the long term. Preaching is not a one-time event but a long-term process of forming and bringing to maturity disciples of Jesus Christ.

**Speaking Practically about Preaching Theology**

My argument would be incomplete if I did not conclude with a few practical comments on sound theological exegesis—a brief "how to" for preachers who aspire to be more consistent and intentional in their preaching of theology. To help clarify the process, I offer an example (Jesus' temptation in the wilderness [Matt. 4:1-11]) of how we might move from biblical text to sermon.

Since the biblical text must be the basis and heart of the sermon, the first move in sermon preparation, after a careful reading and questioning of the text (in the original language, if possible), should be that of careful biblical exegesis, using commentaries, lexicons, atlases, and so forth. In doing so, we take note of several features of the text. Turning to our text, the Gospel is written from the perspective of Jewish Christians around the time of the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. The christological title Son of God is important throughout the Gospel and appears in our text in vv. 3. We should note that the temptation scene falls between Jesus' baptism and the beginning of his ministry. Furthermore, Matthew's order of the three temptations differs from Luke's version, in which the mountain scene precedes the Temple scene. Also, in distinction from Luke, Matthew's narrative concludes with angels waiting on Jesus (4:11), while in Luke's Gospel there are no angels and the devil simply departs "until an opportune time" (4:13). Scholars also note the parallel between Jesus' three tests and the testing of Israel in the Exodus: Israel's hunger in the wilderness (Exod. 16:3), Israel at Massah and Meribah (Exod. 17:1-7), and Israel's repeated idolatry. Jesus' first two responses to Satan's offers are quotations from the Septuagint's version of Deuteronomy; and the third connects with his reply to Peter in 16:23, when Peter rebukes Jesus' claim that he must suffer. Throughout the passage, a contrast is drawn between God's sovereignty over creation and the devil's position as ruler of the world, which is hostile to God. Finally, most commentaries offer one or more theological possibilities for the text. Ulrich Luz notes four possible interpretations of this scene: (1) the parenetic interpretation, in which Jesus is seen to withstand human temptations and remain without sin; (2) the christological interpretation, which clarifies any possible misinterpretation of Jesus as a political leader or a magician; (3) the view of Jesus as a representative of the true people of God, in keeping with
the parallels to Israel's experience; and (4) the interpretation in which the passage presents the three basic dimensions of Jesus' messiahship: prophetic, priestly, and royal.

Once the exegetical study is completed, four steps serve to guide the specifically theological exegesis: (1) identifying theological doctrines in the text; (2) choosing a doctrine, or related doctrines, for the sermon; (3) consulting theological resources; and (4) making the doctrine concrete through the exercise of the imagination.

**Identifying Theological Doctrines**

The first step is to reread the biblical text and identify doctrines or theological themes that are present. It is helpful to prepare in advance a list of doctrines, using a basic theology text, and then refer to it as an aid in accomplishing this first step. As we read, we should brainstorm. We can identify several doctrines and themes in Matt. 4:1-11, including the divinity of Jesus and/or his humanity; Jesus' temptation; God's sovereignty; the presence of evil in the world; obedience to God; spiritual disciplines; the human condition; and the Word of God in our lives.

It may be tempting to leap upon the first theme or doctrine that jumps off the page, but taking the time to explore various possibilities enables a deeper or less obvious sense to emerge. The Word we preach may arise in what, initially, seems small and unimportant. As Elijah discovered, the Word may come to us not in the wind or the earthquake or the fire but in the sound of silence (1 Kings 19:11-12). By listing as many theological themes as we can find in the text, we open ourselves to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

**Choosing a Doctrine**

The next step is to select a doctrine or related doctrines from the list. To do justice to any one of the theological themes from the Matthew passage in a single sermon requires that we narrow what we will say to a clearly identifiable theological focus. We cannot do justice to the whole of the Christian story and teachings in one sermon, but we can do a thoughtful, meaningful exploration of some dimension of life in Christ. The better we are able to clarify our theological focus, the more likely the hearers are to understand and retain the central teaching of the sermon. From our list, let us select the doctrine of Jesus' divinity, focusing on the "Son of God" language with which his baptism ends and the temptations begin.
Consulting Theological Resources

Once we have identified the doctrine or theological theme on which to preach, it is important to turn to theological resources. First, we should consult a theological dictionary to help us clarify the definition, scope, and approaches to the doctrine. For example, we may turn to Musser and Price, *A New Handbook of Christian Theology* (Abingdon, 1992) and read the entry on "Christology." In the essay, Monika Hellwig reminds us, "Christology deals with questions about who Jesus is and about why he makes the decisive difference in human destiny." She then raises questions related to his divinity and asserts, "Jesus saves is basic to the whole structure of Christology, and it assumes that there is something very wrong from which all human beings need to be saved." Then she directly addresses the title *Son of God* and how the Scriptures and Christian tradition have dealt with this claim, delving into the Chalcedonian formula and its relevance for contemporary believers. A number of contemporary scholars, Hellwig claims, have held that the "two-natures" formula is meant to serve not as a rational explanation of Jesus' divinity but rather as an indication of a mystery that can be affirmed but not fully known.

With the doctrine now in its historical and contemporary context, we clarify denominational standards related to the doctrine, using the *Discipline* and Wesley's sermons, as well as basic works on Methodist theology, such as Theodore Runyon's *The New Creation* (Abingdon, 1998) or Randy Maddox's *Responsible Grace* (Abingdon, 1994). These resources will help us clarify what our church teaches on the specific doctrine or theme. In the case of the *Son of God* title and the divinity of Jesus indicated by Matthew 4, we turn first to the *Book of Discipline*. The second article of both the Articles of Religion of the Methodist Church and the Confession of Faith of the Evangelical United Brethren Church clearly affirm Christ's divinity, but this provides little to deepen our understanding. So we turn to chapter 4 of *Responsible Grace*, in which Maddox notes that Wesley's "consistent concern was to affirm Christ's deity," though Maddox also indicates Wesley's reservations about Christ's humanity (though in no way denying it). The point for Wesley, according to Maddox, is that "God is the one who takes initiative in our salvation." Finally, we may want to turn to the writings of prominent theologians, past and present. However, if we use a definition or particular understanding from one of these theologians, we should acknowledge the source. For example, we may note that Paul Tillich speaks of God as the "Ground of
Being” and of Jesus as both the “New Being” and “the Christ”; Christ, for Tillich, is one who brings the New Being to estranged humanity. Perhaps we may draw on the language of feminist theologian Elizabeth Johnson and speak of “Jesus-Sophia” or “the Wisdom of God embodied in the flesh” to help us express the difficulties involved in using “son” language to speak of the divine. By citing these theologians when using their approaches to Christ’s divinity, we clarify for the congregation that this position may be distinct from, or in addition to, basic United Methodist doctrine.

Making Theology Concrete through Imagination

The final step in theological exegesis is the exercise of the gift of the imagination. Here the meaning of the doctrine in relationship to the contemporary setting and the particular setting of the congregation comes alive. In this instance, we may choose to use an image such as Tillich’s New Being or Johnson’s Jesus-Sophia and weave it into our sermon; but there are a number of ways we may choose to speak of the divinity of Christ or the Son of God. Perhaps we want to emphasize the irreducible mystery of Christ’s divine nature by sharing examples of mystery that permeate our lives and that we take for granted: the birth of a child, the wonders of computers and the Internet, and the ability to fly extraordinary distances in an airplane. We may choose an extended metaphor to express Jesus’ saving power, such as Jesus is the rain falling on a parched and drought-plagued land. From this image, we could, for example, refer to Jesus as living water and to human life as a desert of longings.

Long after our words have ended, the people will retain images and stories, and these imaginative renderings will help them to retain the theological understanding as they go forth into the world to live out their calling as disciples of Jesus Christ. At this point, our sermon should be taking shape within our hearts and minds and the process of outlining or writing can begin in earnest.

Conclusion

It is time to reclaim the theological move in sermon preparation. Recovering the theological move will lead not only to preaching sound theology with denominational integrity but also to forming our congregations more thoroughly and deeply as disciples of Jesus Christ. And that formative task, after all, is the very reason for proclaiming the Word of God to the people.
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Endnotes

1. The terms doctrine and theology refer to different aspects of our common beliefs. Doctrines are teachings of the church that clarify what we hold to be true and are considered normative. Theology is a broader, less authoritative, statement of belief and practice—the church’s reflection on God, humanity, and the world.


7. Ibid., ¶327.


14. Ibid.


What shape should evangelism and mission take in our multicultural, pluralistic world?

TRACI C. WEST

In much of Western history, Christian evangelism across cultural boundaries has been, at best, complicit with an agenda of conquest. At their worst, too many of these Christian mission efforts have functioned as direct mechanisms of control, helping to maintain the power and status of certain groups at the expense of others. In North and South America, as well as in the Caribbean, this history includes Christian justifications of slavery and colonization, as well as sanction for the slaughter of massive numbers of indigenous peoples who refused to accept "God and civilization."

For instance, in many of the mission endeavors in the U.S. in the nineteenth century, biblical preaching and teachings about Christian faith melded with assertions of the racial and moral superiority of whites. As one 1830s Methodist missionary explained: "The Gospel... teaches [the Negro] obedience to God, and faithfulness

ACHIM HÄRTNER

In the early 1960s, theologian Paulus Schärpf could still observe that a unique trait of Methodism was "to consider leadership in evangelization to be its special responsibility." But today there are many congregations for whom evangelism has become an unusual state of affairs. Indeed, over the years many Christians in the Western world—including Methodists—have come to view mission and evangelism as "polluted terms" to be avoided. Those who have stood up for evangelistic action were often stigmatized as theologically "backward" or as "fanatical." More recently, however, mission and evangelism are once again spoken of more frequently, openly, and positively. Widespread erosion of tradition, loss of membership, and competition among religious bodies have prompted a call for renewed reflection on the "bottom line" of the church's reason for being. Exactly ten years ago the General Conference of The United Methodist Church declared evangelism the number-one
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to the interests of his earthly master. 2 Thus Christian teachings and white supremacy formed a single, consistent message upholding slavery in many of these efforts. 3

This history demonstrates how Christian evangelism of those who were culturally alien to the missionaries served the interests of social and economic subordination. We need to discern how it is that, along with language about bringing the gospel of Jesus Christ to “poor, unfortunate heathens,” sometimes also came the brutal treatment of people in the Americas and elsewhere. How does religion—in this case, an understanding of our Christian mission to the world—become complicit in such brutality?

This legacy prompts careful consideration of how military and political goals are joined with Christian mission efforts. We need to engage in this inquiry cognizant of the varying ways in which these goals can merge. Sometimes there is an explicit and deliberate strategy, such as when political leaders appropriate Christian evangelical language as part of the political “spin” they create for the public to advance their military objectives. At other times, this fusion of religious and political goals is implicitly or more subtly accomplished—for instance, when Christian mission efforts by U.S.-based churches are intensified at the same time and in the same foreign location as a particular national political agenda is being vigorously pursued.

Perhaps it would also be helpful to focus on core faith questions; that is, to examine the ways in which sharing the Christian faith with those who are not Christian has been understood to necessarily include some claims of superiority. We have to ask ourselves hard questions about whether we feel that we have a right—and even a Christian calling—to teach others that our ways are better than theirs. In Western Christianity, fulfilling our Christian mission to the world has too often meant asserting cultural superiority. This pattern is so predominant that it still remains a confusing task for many of us from powerful Western nations to try to distinguish what it would mean to bring Christian evangelism to distant lands in a way that does not also mean bringing cultural values like capitalism and introducing U.S. or European styles of living and asserting these as superior to the cultural values that may be found in those places. Does sharing the Christian gospel have to involve assertions of our cultural superiority?

In an attempt to learn from the past, we may now recognize the need to try to sort out cultural prejudices from Christian faith. This “sorting out”
TRACI C. WIST

process can help the task of shaping an understanding of Christian mission work in this culturally diverse and religiously pluralistic world. Christians can probe the value judgments that we bring to this work, especially in African, Asian, or Arab contexts. We can ask which value judgments are rooted in God's calling to us to share our faith and which ones may be rooted in traditional biases against, or paternalistic attitudes toward, persons of color (especially those who are economically poor)—biases and attitudes to which we have grown accustomed in U.S. society. This is by no means an easy process.

Serving Christ and sharing faith in Christ certainly includes efforts to try to relieve the suffering of others in our communities and our world. It is essential to honor and continue some of the compassionate work of Christian missionaries, so many of whom have been women who have made a point of reaching out to the needs of other women. They have extended compassion to those who are facing famine, illness, the brutalities of poverty, and other catalysts of human suffering. These Christians have refused to turn away with indifference because those suffering were culturally different and geographically far from them. In many instances, intolerance with the acceptance of unjust conditions that cause suffering requires Christians to make critical judgments about the cultural conditions that contribute to that suffering. At the same time, how can we continue this Christian mission work among the suffering without judging them to be inferior because they may be culturally different from us? How do we overcome our prejudices that make certain people "naturally" seem dirty and backwards because they are not Christian, their customs are unfamiliar, they are very poor, or they don't speak English?

To overcome such prejudices, a process of dialogue is imperative. Dialogue includes listening to "the other" and bringing an openness to learning from her or him. Dialogue with those we encounter as we "share Christ" is crucial for helping Christians recognize our prejudices—the ways we can be ignorant about the customs and people who seem strange to us. But dialogue is also key in terms of our own faith journeys as Christians. Dialogue can fuel a vital spiritual process of Christian reflection on the authentic content of faith. Increased clarity about one's understanding of the faith may help to prevent Christians from mistakenly identifying derogatory value judgments based upon cultural ignorance as Christ's message. Such reflection may help to deter Christians from assuming that the
impulse to assert oneself as innately superior to the neighbor is simply part of God's plan. A dialogue encounter requires Christians to reflectively consider their response to Christ's query, "Who do you say that I am?" From this, a deepened sense of spiritual connection to God can emerge. Then an attitude of humility, together with a self-critical faith stance, informs the cultural value judgments Christians make in cross-cultural encounters.

The process of entering into dialogue can create an ethos of respect that enables criticism across cultural boundaries. It may then be possible to bring, as part of our Christian witness in a religiously pluralistic setting, a critique of customs such as the sexist treatment of women, without proclaiming that sexist behavior to be evidence of cultural inferiority. Again, a method that involves humility and self-criticism would recognize sexist views within Christianity about women's duty to be submissive, silent in the church, and so forth. This kind of dialogue can lead to solidarity across cultural boundaries. It can perhaps enable a joint critique of cultural traditions that nurture suffering within U.S. Christian churches as well as non-Christian traditions in different parts of the world (e.g., how our sexist religious and social patterns nurture violence against women).

For Christians entering cross-cultural encounters, the quality of our witness to Christ is borne out by our method of outreach and the consequences of our actions. Spiritually enlivening possibilities exist in acts of Christian outreach and service that dissent from the political and cultural domination that has been so centrally linked with Christianity's history.

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Endnotes

1. In Race and Manifest Destiny (Harvard University Press, 1981), Reginald Horsman shows how the language of Christianity and that of racial domination merged in the cultural practices of Europe and the United States.
3. An example of this from U.S. history is the justification of slavery in catechisms written in the nineteenth century by white Christian missionaries evangelizing black slaves. See Matthews, op. cit; and Jack White, Bullwhip Days, ed. by James Mellon (Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1988).
priority of the denomination's ministry, and for the last two years evan­
elism has been firmly established as a required course in the theological ed­ucation of those training to be pastors. We should, thus, embrace the fact
that in the Methodist tradition engaging in evangelism is the normal state of
affairs. John Wesley was clear that the primary task of Methodists is "to save
souls." The challenge is this: How can we keep this task before our congre­
gations without having to constantly remind them of its importance? A
question of prime importance amid the reflection and discourse about
methods and forms of evangelism today has to do with the spiritual moti­
avation of our pastors and laity for evangelistic service. Does a consensus still
exist among "the people called Methodists" that the one gospel of Jesus
Christ is for all people and that, precisely for this reason, the church turns to
those outside its walls with a real sense of urgency?

This much is clear: Only when we ourselves are convinced that we
need the gospel in order to live in freedom and in peace with God and
human beings are we prepared to share that gospel with others, both in the
church and in the world. The imperative "Do something evangelistic again!"
will never be able to create the enduring awareness that we owe everything
to God's searching love. Only thankful reflection in prayer and teaching on
the foundation of what it means to be a Christian—the love of God, which
redeemed the world through Christ—can accomplish that. Only the one
who him- or herself lives from the bread of life (John 6:35, 48) and whose
hunger for life has been satisfied by it can point others to it with credibility.

Spiritual motivation and, accordingly, formative training in evangelistic
word and work represent the most important starting points for bringing
change to what has pride of place among us. To be sure, we should affirm
that every evangelistic effort is grounded in God; but we should also show
that the most important bearers of the evangelistic task are not the annual
conferences but the local churches—more precisely, individual Christians
who find in the churches their spiritual home and who use their many spir­
itual gifts to participate in the building of God's kingdom. The future of
evangelism in our denomination depends on how serious we are in trans­
lating into action the Disciplinary injunction that the primary task and
mission of the local church is to reach out and receive all who will respond
to the gospel; encourage them in their relationship with God; invite them
to commitment to God's love in Jesus Christ; provide them with opportuni­
ties for spiritual growth; and support them to live lovingly and justly as faithful disciples.

Four concepts in the *New Testament* describe the fundamental functions of the congregation: (1) *martyria*—the verbal witness to God's actions, which takes a variety of forms, such as public proclamation and private conversation; (2) *diakonia*—the Christian's service in the church and in the world, expressing itself as an embodied compassion that includes a tough-minded political commitment on behalf of humanity and the conditions in which life is lived; (3) *koinonia*—the fellowship of diversity, which God's Spirit engenders and in which we share life's highs and lows; and, finally (4) *leitourgia*—the world-encompassing prayer, the celebration of God's holiness and love in the context of the global *oikoumene*. These four concepts encompass the divine sending of the church (*missio Dei*) in its totality. From the perspective of mission, these concepts are aspects of the goal of bringing people into, and sustaining them in, the saving, life-creating presence of God. Thus, evangelism, like mission, is an essential expression of the life of the church of Jesus Christ, since nowhere else do we encounter a fundamental testimony to God's saving action in Jesus Christ in such a concentrated manner.

Witness in word and deed must correspond to each other. Only when taken together do the proclamatory (*martyria, leitourgia*) and incarnational (*diakonia, koinonia*) aspects of evangelism yield a coherent picture and a credible invitation to life in the kingdom of God. Many well-intentioned evangelistic efforts founder when the liberating message about Christ is gainsaid at the level of interpersonal relationships or formative congregational culture. A climate characterized by more attentive and open hospitality in the churches is just as indispensable for feasible evangelism as genuine and sustained interest in people whom we come to know in private conversations or in an encounter with the Good News.

It is almost impossible to set limits on the polymorphic nature of the work of evangelism. Anyone looking for appropriate forms of evangelism will not overlook the needs of those to whom one is witnessing but will orient him- or herself to the character of the gospel itself: the liberation and the opening of one's life by God. Forgiveness and new birth constitute the foundation of a biblically grounded assurance of the future and a responsible lifestyle that is not reduced to an individualistic understanding of salvation and human flourishing. From this foundation we can respond to people's needs and concerns with concrete works of service and at the
same time seek to enter into conversation with them about the Christian faith, engaging in both with the expectation that God not only can but will change their lives—and ours! Understood this way, evangelism is not imperialistic—the attempt by the "haves" to exercise power over the "have-nots" or of the "knowledgeable" to exert control over the "ignorant." When Christians enter into honest conversation with people of different religious, ideological, and cultural views, evangelism takes the form of collective questioning and respectful wrestling with God's word and will for the particular concrete situation without, however, relinquishing that which is decisive and distinctive about the Christian faith: the centrality of Christ.

Both Christians and non-Christians live under the highly ambivalent conditions of Western culture: individualism and pluralism, the fragmentation and commercialization of life, privatization of life decisions, and the deformation of social relationships. In such times of privatized religion, diaconal and relationship-oriented forms of evangelism directed to the individual have frequently proven more promising than the mass campaigns and community projects of days past. The valuing of the individual is surely commendable, but it bears remembering that the church of Jesus Christ finds its essence also in being a "contrast culture" (G. Lohfink) by modeling healing and caring communities. The time has come to grapple with the problem of brazen individualistic views of salvation and the privatization of the faith so prevalent today. Precisely a church in which evangelism and social acts of service have never been opposites can, trusting in Christ, march confidently into the future with regard to a holistic understanding of evangelism.

—Translated from the German by Hendrik R. Pieterse

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Endnotes

Often called “The Hymn Book of the Second Temple,” Psalms may also have expressed the prayers and praises of devout Israelites and Judeans when they met together in homes and, eventually, in synagogues. The 150 individual psalms were composed over several centuries and in various locations. Their diversity in form and content attests to multiple authorship, which the later superscriptions acknowledge. These notations resist the tendency to attribute the entire book to David, forcing him to share compositional fame with guilds such as Asaph and Korah and with other notables, specifically Moses and Solomon. In all likelihood, most of the psalms were composed by unknown citizens who wished to move their deity to action on their behalf or who gladly offered thanksgiving for previous favors.

Although lament dominates the entire collection, a decisive shift to praise occurs toward its end, culminating in the call for all living creatures to praise the Lord. Besides agonizing complaint and joyous shouts we find profound meditation; reflection on redemptive events, particularly the exodus from bondage in Egypt; prophetic critique of cultic ritual; longing expressed by persons momentarily exiled from Jerusalem’s temple; requests for refuge in Zion; a wedding song; and more. Some psalms, often designated “Entrance Liturgies,” specify exactly what the Lord demands of anyone who wishes to stand in sacred precincts. Other compositions indicate the favorable circumstances accompanying those who faithfully abide by Torah.1

March 9, 2003–First Sunday in Lent
Ps. 25:1-10; Gen. 9:8-17; 1 Pet. 3:18-22; Mark 1:9-15
Psalm 25 is one of several alphabetic poems, or acrostics, the most complex of which is Psalm 119 (an extensive meditation on the divine Torah). The psalm lives and breathes in the real world. Its author seeks protection from being put to shame by enemies; such loss of honor was greatly feared in the ancient world, which held status among one’s peers in high regard. In such a
system of worth, fueled by the opposites of honor and shame, one person’s exaltation came at the expense of someone else’s humiliation. Thus, the psalmist pleads for the other person’s psychological discomfiture while requesting personal wholeness. Although this self-centered attitude is easily understood, it falls short of the demand that we love neighbors as ourselves.

The prevalence of prayers for the destruction of one’s enemies in the psalms of lament has brought considerable embarrassment to modern Christian interpreters, who remember the dominical injunction to do good to one’s enemies. When wicked persons perpetrate evil on defenseless, innocent victims, the issue becomes vastly more complex, as any number of examples from recent history demonstrate (Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot). Does such unchecked atrocity not demand human resistance? Silence in these circumstances amounts to complicity in evil. C. S. Lewis and Erich Zenger have made that point effectively; but the theological problem remains a thorny one. Those who pray for their enemies to be dismayed, however, have crossed the line that separates wishing for their repentance and hoping for their eradication.

The psalm under discussion illustrates the true nature of religious loyalty. Here a faithful worshiper both confesses to past transgression and exposes a hidden flaw: the desire for revenge. Youthful indiscretion, so the psalmist thinks, should not weigh heavily against someone in later life. Such rational argument emboldens the psalmist to request that the slate be wiped clean. In this instance, he claims the manifold promises of divine forgiveness for repentant sinners, all for the sake of the deity’s goodness. At the same time, the hidden flaw suggests that this psalmist stands in need of additional self-examination—better still, of divine searching, like that mentioned in Ps. 139:1,23: “O LORD, you have searched me and known me. / Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts.”

Language of trust abounds in Psalm 25, along with conventional expressions of the Lord’s faithfulness, compassion, covenantal love, and goodness. The psalmist seeks instruction in the divine ways, akin to the exquisite oracle whispered to endangered Israel in Isa. 30:20-21. “Though the LORD may give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself any more, but your eyes shall see your Teacher. And when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left, your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, ‘This is the way; walk in it.’” The psalmist vows to adopt a waiting stance until comparable instruction comes.
Expressions of obedience accompany those of trust. The psalmist desires to be guided along traditional paths. The stipulations of the covenant do not seem odious to the humble worshiper, who asks only to be remembered. With this word the psalmist taps into the revered story of redemptive deeds of the Lord, while urging forgetfulness of past sins. Confident that the Creator maintains justice in society and the world, the psalmist waits patiently.

The section of the psalm omitted by the lectionary (vv. 11-22) offers a more explicit prayer for help, moving beyond personal affliction to all Israel’s need. It recognizes the power of repentance and subsequent forgiveness, stresses divine sorrow and fellowship with the Lord, and mentions reciprocal eye contact between worshiper and deity. In this unit, emphasis falls on the divine name—shorthand for reputation. The sacred name Yahweh, which appears six times in 25:1-10, underlines the element of trust but, perhaps, also indicates desperation.

March 16, 2003—Second Sunday in Lent
Ps. 22:23-31; Gen. 17:1-7, 15-16; Rom. 4:13-25; Mark 8:31-38
Ancient Israelites lived in a polytheistic environment, a fact taken seriously by the authors of certain biblical texts. Psalm 82 condemns the gods for failing to administer justice on earth and announces the penalty of death. According to Deut. 32:8-9, the god Elyon allocated the nations to the several deities, while Yahweh laid claim to Jacob/Israel. In due time, the question arose: “How far does Yahweh’s dominion extend?” That query was understood both temporally and spatially, covering foreign lands and Sheol itself. Can the Lord rescue hapless victims who find themselves outside Israelite and Judean borders? Indeed, does death separate one from divine solicitude? The author of Psalm 22 dares to assert universal dominion for the God of Israel and Judah.

The first part of this psalm has been permanently associated with the last words of Jesus, understood on his lips either as a cry of dereliction or as an abbreviated confession of absolute trust in deliverance from the horror of the moment. Each understanding of the quotation guards something precious: the first emphasizes Jesus’ humanity and the necessity for divine abandonment, while the second stresses the Son’s utter trust in the Father when faced with the unthinkable.

With verse 22 lament gives way to praise, for victory has been assured. The psalmist now considers the obligation—nay, the privilege—of giving
proper thanks to the one who heard the cry of distress and acted decisively. The hidden face has come into full view, the theological importance of which has been captured forcefully by Samuel E. Balentine in his book *The Hidden God*.3 The symbolic allusion to the hiding of the divine face, borrowed from human interaction, powerfully describes the sense of abandonment precisely when one is most vulnerable. The resulting feeling of being alone elicits a cry of distress. Indeed, Patrick D. Miller uses this language as entry into the prayers of ancient Israel, especially the book of Psalms.4

The psalmist's first obligation in personal testimony centers on those living nearby—kith and kin. Once family and friends have been told the story of deliverance, the circle widens to include the whole congregation. Descendants of Jacob are called upon to join the grateful psalmist in praising the redeemer for turning an attentive ear to a desperate cry for help. Unlike Job's friends, who mistakenly concluded that extreme affliction signaled blatant offense, the Lord made no such association between suffering and sin.

Recognizing the danger of dwindling ardor over time, the worshiper promises to pay any vows made under duress. The frequent failure to keep such vows prompted the author of Ecclesiastes to state that it is better not to vow than to do so and neglect to fulfill it, thus risking divine anger (Eccles. 5:4-6). Such vows often included gift offerings, presumably for the benefit of the poor of the land. The psalmist thinks they will eat and be content. The spiritual sense of this language need not rule out a more literal reading.

The psalmist's exuberance leads to extraordinary claims. Personal deliverance points beyond a single individual and leads to a startling recognition: if the Lord turned a compassionate face towards this imperiled worshiper, perhaps that openness to cries of distress has no limit. Therefore, an audacious thought comes to expression: people from every nation will remember Yahweh and worship gladly. All peoples will adore the biblical God; nay, even the dead in Sheol will bow the knee to this universal sovereign. The events leading to such a bold claim have been discussed in detail by J. Edward Wright, who traces the emergence of belief in a blissful afterlife.5 The idea of universal obeisance was seized upon by early Christians and applied to their risen Lord, before whom all were destined to bow in adoration. As sometimes happens when the unthinkable surfaces, the Hebrew text becomes less than clear (cf. Job 19:26-27). That phenomenon rests behind the last two verses of Psalm 22, but they probably suggest universal obeisance before the Lord.
LECTIONARY STUDY

In the ancient world, a move from worshiping gods through visual representations to sole allegiance to an invisible deity was fraught with consequences. The constant assurances of divine presence and concern, made concrete by idols wrought with human hands, had to be cast aside in favor of a deity who resembled nothing in all of creation. The downside of this understanding of deity was a loss of palpable presence, which resulted in extreme anguish when adversity befell the nation or an individual and the deity seemed absent or even malicious. In those instances, the cry "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (v. 1) echoes far and near. When the invisible Lord draws near to help one who cries out in despair, the gratitude that permeates the rescued devotee knows no limits, as witnessed in this psalm's final section.

March 23, 2003—Third Sunday in Lent

Psalm 19; Exod. 20:1-17; 1 Cor. 1:18-25; John 2:13-22

Psalm 19 combines an earlier hymn to the God El with a meditation on divine teaching, torah (vv. 1-6 and 7-14). Just as the grateful worshiper in last week's psalm bears witness to God's goodness, the whole universe, according to Psalm 19, extols the glory of the Creator. Lacking a mouth and bereft of speech, the elements of nature still manage to declare a message of adoration for God. One is reminded of the unforgettable beginning of the movie 2001: A Space Odyssey, with its extraordinary linking of our small planet with the entire universe through the music of the spheres.

The voiceless nature of the tribute to El lends an element of mystery appropriate to this heavenly figure. The praise rings forth constantly, filling the two markers of time—night and day—and infusing the vast reaches of space. The comparison of such energetic worship with the sun's exuberant journey echoes mythic descriptions of the Mesopotamian sun god Shamash and nocturnal combat with the monster representing chaos. This theme occurs frequently in the Bible, especially in Psalms and Job; it also occurs in Isaiah 40–66, where Yahweh establishes order in the world. Just as everyone can feel the heat generated by the sun on its daily journey, so the mute testimony to divine glory communicates without language.

In the eyes of the psalmist, the Lord's instruction compares favorably with the divine handiwork suspended in the heavens. Both masterpieces, the universe and the revelation of God's will in Torah, evoke high praise. This thought leads to an effort to characterize the sublime instruction by
means of descriptive adjectives. The author of Psalm 119 fine-tunes this manner of elucidating the teaching, using eight synonyms for Torah and dancing through the alphabet from the first Hebrew letter to the last. For Psalm 19, the constructions consistently use the genitive, followed by a predicate adjective and a further description, e.g., "The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul" (v. 7). Like God’s servant Job, whose integrity the deity vouched for in the face of suspicion on the part of the heavenly adversary, the divine teaching has no blemish and therefore renews life for those whose energy has been sapped by adversity. The decrees possess stability by virtue of their truthfulness and hence enlighten the uninformed. The precepts are equitable, bringing joy through the assurance that justice will prevail. The commandment is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is without blemish, possessing staying power because unmixed with impurity. The divine judgments are true, altogether righteous. The adjectives combine ethical and ritual categories, just as the Torah embraces notions of holiness and morality.

Such a precious treasure surpasses those things mortals consider valuable, both fine gold and honey (v. 10). The first, gold, satisfies our need for security; the second, honey, our appetite. In a society with no sugar or sugar substitutes, the sweetness associated with honey from the honeycomb functioned as a powerful metaphor—one even applied to the land of promise. In this psalm, there isn’t the slightest hint of the later Pauline concept of an oppressive law that places an unbearable burden on God’s people. Instead, the psalmist rejoices in the law as an exquisite gift that enriches life and guides individuals in the way they should walk.

In vv. 12-15, the psalmist addresses the one who has so graciously bestowed the gift of Torah on Israel. Acknowledging that stringent demands have been placed on the recipients of the teachings, the eager worshiper characterizes the relationship with the deity in terms of servant to master. Nevertheless, the servant anticipates ample reward for loyal service, which shatters a literal understanding of the relationship. One thing does cast a pall over the servant’s enthusiasm: the possibility of offending the deity without knowing how the infraction occurred. Several texts from the Ancient Near East attest to this anxiety, treated profoundly in the book of Job. The sufferer who has fallen into a god’s disfavor has no means of discovering the specific transgression. Here the psalmist prays for forgiveness of hidden guilt. The prayer goes beyond unperceived sins, however, to
willful violation of the Torah, asking to be kept from such conduct.
Alternatively, the servant begs to be protected from arrogant individuals.
By now the psalmist has moved to addressing directly the one being praised for marvelous works. Personal pronouns emphasize the intimacy: a twofold "your servant" surrounds the objective "me," and then another "me" opens up into "I," followed by four occurrences of "my" (vv. 11-14). The personal references are broken only by a lone reference to God ("you"), who is then addressed in vocatives—"O LORD, my rock and my redeemer" (v. 14). The first metaphor—rock—refers to strength and permanence, possibly even the source from which Israel was hewn; and the second—redeemer—lifts up the compassionate relationship between the Lord and a people who once found itself in bondage. Strikingly, forgiveness makes the psalmist take on the first characteristic of the Torah, perfection (vv. 8, 14). The final petition—that the psalmist's words and meditation delight God—returns to the descriptive account of the Torah and to the unvoiced hymn of praise with which the psalm opens. This devout prayer unites word and thought; only when they exist in harmony do they indicate a person of integrity, one who is truly pure.

March 30, 2003—Fourth Sunday in Lent
Ps. 107:1-3, 17-22; Num. 21:4-9; Eph. 2:1-10; John 3:14-21
Whereas the first three psalms treated here belong to Book I, Psalm 107 opens Book V in the Psalter. The late division of Psalms into five books may have been modelled on a similar structuring of the canonical Torah, Genesis through Deuteronomy. (Recall that the Hebrew Bible has three units: Torah, Prophets, and Writings.) The dominant mood of Book V is praise.

The initial verses issue a call to express thanks for the goodness of God as manifest in redemptive acts (vv. 1-3). In short, the exile is not permanent and, hence, does not put divine goodness in jeopardy. Those who have been gathered from the ends of the earth are encouraged to proclaim the good news. The rhetoric sounds excessive; people have been gathered from all directions. Curiously, the opposite of north is the sea. The ancient Israelite took directions by facing the rising sun. The sea is therefore either the Dead Sea or the more distant Red Sea.

The biblical text often refers to removal from the Promised Land, primarily as a result of foreign conquest but also as a result of economic servitude. Naturally, the anticipation of a return came to play a major role...
in visions of eschatological redemption. The decree by Cyrus of Persia that enabled exiled Judeans to return to Jerusalem stands as a decisive moment in this dream to be freed from external bondage. The language of redemption, which derives from ransoming slaves and avenging wrongs done to a member of the family, marks the psalm’s introduction, culminating in the designation of Israel as “the redeemed” (v. 2).

Verses 17-22 continue the earlier discussion of individuals who have fallen into adversity but successfully petitioned their God for deliverance. In this particular example, those who endured suffering brought the affliction on themselves through folly and outright rebellion. The language derives from the political scene, where a person swears allegiance to a rival of the active ruler. Such open treason of a spiritual kind had extreme consequences: loss of appetite and near death. Biblical poetry frequently uses the metaphor gates to refer to the underworld, which is often associated with images of drowning in the waters beneath earth’s surface. Those who successfully negotiate this watery grave cry to the Lord for help and are heard by a compassionate ally. Often the poet uses graphic images of sinking in boisterous waters; the extreme language serves to evoke favor from above.

The cry from the depths prompted the Lord to issue a decree and to bring healing. The first of these actions—the sending forth of a word—finds fuller expression in later Jewish speculation about the divine word that descends with extraordinary force. “Your all-powerful word leaped from heaven . . . into the midst of the land that was doomed . . . and filled all things with death” (Wisd. of Sol. 18:15-16).

In the New Testament, the prologue to the Gospel of John depicts a far more benevolent divine word, now incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth. Instead of bringing death, this divine and luminous word bestows life.

The joyous word of deliverance from the throes of death issues in a ringing summons by the psalmist to magnify the Redeemer in song and in sacrificial act (vv. 21-22). The cause for celebration centers on the character of the Lord as merciful and on the marvelous acts demonstrating that abiding care. Surprisingly, the psalmist extends the wondrous deeds to all humankind rather than restricting them to Israelites, the usual beneficiary of redemptive acts. Grateful recipients of divine solicitude are now called on to offer sacrifices, indicating their appreciation for such extraordinary favor. However, inasmuch as word must match deed, they are not to stop with such tangible expressions of thanksgiving. Therefore, they are asked to sing.
about God's works (v. 22). When joyous praise accompanies cultic offerings, true worship transpires. The psalm moves nicely from a cry out of the depths to an expression of profound praise while resting in the divine arms.

Despite the intimate relationship of sin and punishment in this psalm, together with the complicating matter of human mortality, the emphasis falls on a compassionate redeemer who forgives sin and rescues those who repent. Even the exile of the elect people does not constitute a blot on the Lord's reputation for justice, given the divine tipping of the scale in favor of mercy. When that kindness reaches everyone, regardless of ethnic identity as here (the descendants of Adam=all mortals), there is cause for joyous chant.

Conclusion

For Christians, trust like that expressed in Psalm 25 derives from the gift of a revelatory word that took form among us and constitutes the ultimate act of redemption (John 1:1-3, 14). Like the mute praise in Psalm 19, this incarnate word is shrouded in mystery while simultaneously voicing God's will for those who seek guidance. The deepest mystery of all, echoed in the prayer of dereliction from Psalm 22, has not produced despair. Instead, like Psalm 107, the threat of death has receded before an unequaled power—an attentive God who stands ready to save.

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Endnotes

As the three-hundredth anniversary of John Wesley's birth approaches, Wesleyan theology seems to be on the verge of a new chapter in its history. Speaking to the theological quandary of Wesleyanism in the twentieth century, Frederick Norwood has remarked that from the time of their first involvement in the ecumenical movement, the Wesleyans "felt that they had something of their own to offer, but were not quite sure what it was." But now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Wesleyan theology finds itself poised to come into its own. In this article, I describe the complex origin of this Wesleyan tradition and its subsequent fragmentation and then introduce some of the most significant literature in the tradition's recovery. I also discuss how we in the third millennium might best appropriate this heritage anew.

Origin and Fragmentation

John Wesley left to posterity a complex theological heritage, made up of numerous disparate elements. His thought includes established and hierarchical, as well as independent, populist, ecclesiastical tendencies; an emphasis at once on the priority of divine grace and the necessity of human responsibility; a kind of early modern rationalist sensibility united with a stress upon the conversion of the affections; a concern for both personal transformation and social service; and a commitment to serious theologizing, in addition to popular proclamation and community discipline—all in the context of a pneumatological discourse that had Christ at its center.

Upon arriving in North America, the Wesleyan tradition found itself in a very different social world from the one in which it originated. This had a profound effect upon its development. As it pushed beyond the cities and went west with the successive waves of immigration, the Wesleyan tradition was stamped by the frontier; and when it later returned to the cities, it was a different creature. It had distanced itself from Wesley and his English
background—his condemnation of the American Revolution, his Tory upper-class pretensions, the formality of his liturgical and theological writings—and found leaders shaped by a very different class sensibility. These leaders led the Wesleyans in the development of a revivalist, populist, cultural identity as part of the burgeoning Evangelical movement that arose after the Revolutionary War to reassert the role of Christianity in the United States. Indeed, the Wesleyan tradition became central to the nineteenth-century Evangelical establishment, redefining its own theological concerns in the categories of the Protestant Scholastic theology that informed the struggles of the heirs of Puritanism and the Reformation to maintain their social hegemony. Rapidly growing into the largest Protestant denomination, Methodism declared itself “America’s church” and came to boast that there was a Methodist chapel in every county in the nation.

In the course of these events, the Wesleyan tradition experienced the fragmentation of the complex theological heritage bequeathed to it by Wesley, resulting in a profound change. To a large degree, it lost track of its own theological perspective and allowed the various parts of its tradition to be recast in the categories of the nineteenth-century Protestant Scholasticism that dominated the period. In this way, the heirs of Wesley became enmeshed in the modern theological travail of the Reformation traditions in North America, whose internal contradictions were even then publicly playing out in a process that would ultimately result in the social and ideological polarization of the Liberal and Conservative camps in the twentieth century. The figure of Wesley now became little more than a cipher among the Wesleyans—a name to be applied to a cause in order to confer a kind of legitimacy on a concern that represented, at best, some small part of the Wesleyan heritage. By the early twentieth century, therefore, Wesley’s offspring were profoundly divided; and the theological language in which their faith in Christ had first come to potent expression had become confused, feared, or forgotten. Thus, when called upon to respond to the theological developments of the past century, the Wesleyans were convinced that they had something of their own to offer, but no longer knew what it might be.

Recovery

The recovery of Wesleyanism’s theological heritage can be traced back to the 1930s. It was brought about by a variety of factors, not least of which is the crisis in Liberal Theology following World War I. Three books appearing
during this period marked the beginning of the discussion. The first was William Sweet's *Methodism in American History*, published in 1933 (rev. ed., Abingdon, 1953), which offered a new perspective on the history of Christianity in America. Until Sweet, that history had typically been told as the unfolding story of the Reformation traditions in the new world. But Sweet argued that the Wesleyan tradition had played a much more vital and original role than had been commonly acknowledged, raising the possibility of a new interpretation of Wesleyanism and its theology in America. The other two books dealt with John Wesley himself and how his theology might best be appropriated anew. George Cell's *The Rediscovery of John Wesley* (University Press of America, 1984, reprint) appeared in 1935 and *John Wesley and Modern Religion* by Umphrey Lee (Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1936) was published the following year. Each book raised the issue of how to interpret Wesley's theology. Reflecting the concerns of emergent Neoorthodoxy, they asked if Wesley's theology was an example of the Catholic or the Protestant theological impulse—with those categories serving as half-acknowledged surrogates for Liberal and Evangelical theologies. Cell, in what became an oft-quoted phrase, characterized Wesley's theology as but a "hair's breadth" from Calvinism. Lee acknowledged that Wesley was influenced by the evangelical doctrine of justification by faith but emphasized Wesley's high regard for human reason. Together, these publications would frame the debates concerning Wesley and Wesleyanism for decades to come.

The first step toward moving beyond these categories was taken by those who organized the production of a new critical edition of Wesley's works. The Bicentennial Edition of the *Works of John Wesley* (Abingdon, 1984–) began to appear with the sermons; and Wesley's letters, journals, and other writings had either already been published or were in the offing. The contribution of this publication is found not just in providing a reliable set of texts but also in the introductions and commentary, making this collection a virtually inexhaustible resource for the recovery of Wesley's self-understanding and theology. All Wesley scholarship must now begin here and be measured by this edition. *John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology* (Abingdon, 1991), edited by Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater, draws on the four volumes of the critical edition to provide a very helpful collection for the nonscholarly reader.

The effect of the appearance of the Bicentennial Edition has been dramatic, for it has thrown open the door to a new exploration of the whole
history of Wesley and Wesleyanism. It manifested itself first in our understanding of Wesley's life and thought. The first major critical biography of the founder of Methodism, Henry Rack's *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (Epworth [2nd. ed., Abingdon, 1993]) appeared in 1989. While admirable in many ways, one of its notable failures is its anachronistic, dismissive treatment of Wesley's theological concern and development. Those historians who have been more immediately involved in the work of the Bicentennial Edition have demonstrated a much keener understanding of the matter—as is seen in the multiple works by Richard P. Heitzenrater: *The Elusive Mr. Wesley*, 2 vols. (Abingdon, 1984), *Mirror and Memory: Reflections on Early Methodism* (Kingswood, 1989), and the more accessible *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Abington, 1993).

That perspective also shapes the contemporary exploration of John Wesley's thought. The standard survey of Wesley's theology now is *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology*, by Randy Maddox (Kingswood, 1994). Maddox's account clearly depicts Wesley as a man who took theology seriously precisely because of his work as an evangelist—and who expected others to do so as well. What distinguishes this text is that Maddox builds on the research of the last two generations and more to argue that Wesley's theology is to be interpreted not as an example of either the Catholic or the Protestant theological impulse but rather as a new appropriation of Patristic and largely Eastern theological traditions. While the Western tradition, Maddox maintains, has interpreted the human condition in forensic categories, according to which each individual is defined by the legal debt of sin owed to God—a debt that was then the object of God's act of redemption through the grace of Christ—the Eastern tradition has emphasized the provisional nature of human life as created in grace for its ultimate "perfection" or "divinization" through Christ and in the Spirit. Maddox claims that Wesley's theology reflects that Eastern understanding and, therefore, is characterized by a dynamic and positive anthropology that takes human sin seriously but takes God's grace with even greater seriousness. Thus, to interpret Wesley through the lens of the Western debates, which play off human nature and divine grace against one another, is to fundamentally misrepresent what his theology was all about and what Wesley bequeathed to those who came after him.

Paralleling these developments in the exploration of our tradition is the turn that research into the history of Wesleyanism in North America
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has taken. Frederick A. Norwood’s *The Story of American Methodism: A History of the United Methodists and Their Relations* (Abingdon, 1974), supplemented with its companion *Sourcebook of American Methodism* (Abingdon, 1982), has long served as the standard denominational history of The United Methodist Church. The story of American Methodism, as he tells it, is one of the Americanization of a distinctly British and Anglican tradition. But in recent years, another approach to Wesleyan historiography has begun to emerge. In texts like *Methodism and the Shaping of American Culture* (Abingdon, 2001), edited by Nathan O. Hatch and John H. Wigger, the terms are switched around and the question is asked how America was “Methodized” by the rise of Methodism as a dominant religious force during the formative years of the fledgling republic. Other studies have taken this same turn. In *The Methodists and Revolutionary America, 1760–1800: The Shaping of an Evangelical Culture* (Princeton University Press, 2000), Dee A. Andrews examines the impact of Wesleyanism on eighteenth-century America. John H. Wigger, in *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Popularization of American Christianity, 1770–1820* (Oxford University Press, 1998), emphasizes the influence of Wesleyanism on the popularization of American Christianity. A. Gregory Schneider, in *The Way of the Cross Leads Home: The Domestication of American Methodism* (Indiana University Press, 1993), looks at the way early American Methodism was shaped by the “domestic” images of God and Christian community that defined its construal of the gospel and how that shaped the culture of which it was a part.

What all of these studies share is a sense of loss; for in very different ways, they all tell the same story: the elements in the Wesleyan tradition that had the greatest impact upon American culture were lost or abandoned in the course of the nineteenth century, at the same time that Methodists dubbed themselves “America’s church.” Among the many recent studies that have taken this tack, two important works stand out: Lester Ruth’s *A Little Heaven Below: Worship at Early Methodist Quarterly Meetings* (Kingswood, 2000) and Russell E. Richey’s *The Methodist Conference in America: A History* (Kingswood, 1996). Each shares the concern for what has been lost in the Wesleyan tradition: Ruth looks at the constitutive role among the laity played by common worship at the quarterly meetings of early Methodism, while Richey examines the way the conference shaped the conceptual and religious world of early American Methodist preachers.
Present and Future

Thus, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Wesleyanism finds itself involved in a new way in the recovery and exploration of its own tradition. And this renewed sense of its past is leading it to contemplate how best to appropriate the tradition in the present and for the future.

Programmatic surveys of Wesleyan theology, such as *Living Grace: An Outline of United Methodist Theology*, by Walter Klaiber and Manfred Marquardt (Abingdon, 2001), and *United Methodist Doctrine: The Extreme Center*, by Scott J. Jones (Abingdon, 2002), have begun to appear. A series of collected proposals for Wesleyan theology's future has also seen the light: *What Should Methodists Teach? Wesleyan Tradition and Modern Diversity*, ed. by M. Douglas Meeks (Kingswood, 1990); *Rethinking Wesley's Theology for Contemporary Methodism*, ed. by Randy Maddox (Abingdon, 1998); and *The Wesleyan Tradition: A Paradigm for Renewal*, by Paul Chilcote (Abingdon, 2002). The thread that weaves its way through all these surveys and proposals is the desire to see the Wesleyan tradition move beyond the fragmentation it has suffered and find a renewed unity in a discipleship to Jesus Christ characterized by telling deeds and faithful words. And to truly do that, many of us believe, we must return to pneumatology and the discourse of the Spirit; for theology, as Wesley insisted, is "nothing but the grammar of the language of the Holy Ghost."3

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Endnotes

The key to appreciating these helpful volumes is found early in the preface by the editor, Roger Van Harn, who writes that their content "will provide tastes of theological exegesis for Sunday's texts that will stimulate reflection." In particular, the word "tastes" and the phrase "theological exegesis" capture the essence of the short essays (3-5 pages each), written by seventy-eight contributors. No attempt has been made to provide stylistic and theological conformity of approach, although each exegete was asked to address the same question: What does the preacher need to know about this lesson in order to preach a faithful sermon from it? Thus, each essay includes a combination of three elements: engagement with the biblical text, theological reflection, and awareness of the context in which the sermon will be spoken and heard.

The degree to which each of these elements influences the writers varies markedly from reading to reading. These essays are not what students of Scripture would know as biblical exegesis, that is, a careful, line-by-line analysis of specific texts. Instead, these are interpretive "jump starts," written specifically to aid preachers, the most serious and competent of whom struggle to speak an authentic word from their own contexts to their particular congregations through engagement with Scripture—in this case, as it has been organized for worship, reflection, and proclamation by the Revised Common Lectionary.

Lectionary preachers know the challenge inherent in providing well-organized, thoughtfully constructed worship, based upon the conversation between the season of the year, the assigned readings for the day, and their local circumstance. Sometimes, there is great congruity among these elements; at other times, there isn't. Sometimes, the readings yield a
serendipitous thematic framework; at other times, they can seem at war with one another. The lections are presented in canonical order; therefore, these volumes tend to accentuate the lections' individual uniqueness. This is the first such organization I have come across in a lectionary, and I found it both jarring and stimulating. One can read forward in each volume and gain insight on whole books (as much as the lectionary allows) while gleaning the perspectives of a variety of preachers, teachers, and scholars. As a practical matter, however, each Sunday requires the handling of three volumes, one each for the first, second, and third series of lections, with each individual lection addressed by a different exegete.

As a result of the variety of presenters the accompanying variety of theological biases in their interpretations implies a variety of assumptions about the authority of Scripture, the role of "correct" doctrine in its interpretation, the significance of literary and historical criticism, the interplay of assigned texts for a given Sunday, and the impact of liturgical organization of the Christian year.

We need look no further than the very first essay in vol. 1 to see how a given author's predilections shape its content. This essay, by Scott Hoezee, pastor of a Reformed congregation, concerns Gen. 1:1–2:4a, the first lesson for Trinity Sunday, Year A. This information, in addition to a listing of the other lections, heads the essay. (These volumes reveal the assigned psalms in parentheses, but they are not included as subjects for reflection. To do so no doubt would have meant another exegetical volume but their noninclusion also reflects the psalms' lack of status for preachers generally.) In essence, Hoezee's theological jump start for this text concerns the question, "How helpful is it to 'spin' Genesis 1 in a Trinitarian direction?" This method takes him from a two-paragraph introduction concerning the Hubble space telescope to a conversation about the Trinity and reading Genesis 1 through the lens of same, which leads to the consideration of preaching an ecological sermon on Trinity Sunday. A traditional biblical exegesis this isn't; the exegesis has very little to do with the actual text. On the other hand, as a theological interpretation of how a preacher may weave this first Hebrew lection into a Christian sermon on Trinity Sunday, it stimulates thoughtful reflection, if not necessarily agreement, from the reader.

Preacher beware: the rest of the writers may vary considerably in their underlying assumptions about the nature of the task at hand, which, in turn, can be inferred only by the astute reader. One could imagine a
lectionary study group sharpening their biblical and theological skills by deconstructing the assumptions of the various writers for any given Sunday's lections.

This professional learning could also be advanced by thoughtful consideration of the three excellent essays that append each volume: "Preaching as Worship," by Hughes Oliphant Old (vol. 1); "Preaching from the Letters," by Colin Gunton (vol. 2); and "Augustinian Preaching and the Nurture of Christians," by C. Clifton Black (vol. 3). Indeed, these are so good one could envision another edited volume that provides up-to-date analysis of the current place of preaching within the church and wider culture and how authentic faith arises from engagement with and proclamation of the scriptural witness from across the denominational and theological spectrum. Consider a teaser from Black's reflection on Augustine:

Bluntly put, there is more penetrating scriptural exegesis in the steady recitation of the Psalms by an unschooled grandmother to children of wandering minds and runny noses than in a thousand sermons delivered by a preacher whose sights are set no higher than the tallest steeple. The one nurtures caritas; the other engorges pride (611).

Consideration of such macrotheological issues, along with more disciplined analysis of scriptural texts among friends, peers, and critics, could well lead to a new dynamism in one's preaching.

Each volume is well organized and clearly presented and provides two indices for ready reference for the lections of the three-year cycle and the contributors of the three volumes. As for the contributors, while considerable denominational diversity is represented in the total, there is a preponderance from the Reformed and Presbyterian traditions, which inevitably lends a particular flavor to the project.

These essays would be most helpful alongside other textual aids and the careful reading and analysis of Scripture by the preacher. They cannot stand on their own and are not meant to. But as part of the busy preacher's handy library, they are readily recommended.

Reviewed by Stephen P. Bauman. Bauman is Senior Minister of Christ Church United Methodist in New York City.
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