IN THIS ISSUE:

**Issue Theme:**
The Ongoing Significance of John Wesley for United Methodism

*Wesleyan Faith: A Contemporary Reflection*
Josiah U. Young III

*Wesley’s Prescription for “Making Disciples of Jesus Christ”: Insights for the Twenty-first-Century Church*
Randy L. Maddox

*Myth, American Culture, and Sanctification*
Mark Emery Reynolds

*Recovering Human Nature through Christian Practice*
Kenneth H. Carter, Jr.

*Itinerancy Is Dead—But It Can Live Again*
John G. McEllhenney

**Outside the Theme**
The Church’s Mission in Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century
F. Thomas Trotter

**The Church in Review**
Clergy Burnout
Carlyle Fielding Stewart III
Karen D. Scheib

**A Word on the Word**
Lectionary Study
R. Grace Imathiu

**Issues In:** Congregational Conflict
K. Brynolf Lyon

**Book Reviews**

*Beyond the Ordinary: Spirituality for Church Leaders,* by Ben Campbell Johnson and Andrew Dreitcer (Eerdmans, 2001) *Reviewer: Diane Luton Blum*

*Strategies for Brief Pastoral Counseling,* ed. by Howard W. Stone (Fortress, 2001) *Reviewer: Vergel L. Lattimore*

*Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness,* by Clark H. Pinnock (Baker, 2001) *Reviewer: Thomas Jay Oord*

NEXT ISSUE:
“Making Disciples of Jesus Christ”
Quarterly Review’s mission is to provide a context in which clergy, scholars, and laypeople can critically examine the theological issues, challenges, and demands of Christian ministry. QR’s website broadens its mission by adding features that help facilitate global dialogue about these issues.

The website features information about
• The purpose of QR
• Editor
• Editorial board
• The table of contents of the current issue
• How to subscribe to QR
• How to obtain permission to reprint articles
• How to submit articles to QR
• Free sample article
• Articles from past issues in our QR Classics section
• Links to online journals, seminaries, and other organizations

Additionally, QR has an online bulletin board. We invite you to post your thoughts, questions, and feedback, as well as hear what others have to say.
Quarterly Review (ISSN 0270-9287) provides continuing education resources for scholars, Christian educators, and lay and professional ministers in The United Methodist Church and other churches. QR intends to be a forum in which theological issues of significance to Christian ministry can be raised and debated.

Editorial Offices: 1001 19th Avenue, South, P.O. Box 340007, Nashville, TN 37203-0007. Manuscripts should be in English and typed double-spaced, including notes.

QR is published four times a year, in March, June, September, and December, by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry of The United Methodist Church and The United Methodist Publishing House. Periodicals postage paid at Nashville, Tennessee.

Subscription rate: $24 for one year; $44 for two years; and $60 for three years. Students: $16 for one year; $30 for two years. For all subscription orders, single-copy orders, and change-of-address information, contact Cokesbury toll-free (800) 672-1789, M–F 7:00 A.M.–6:30 P.M. CST and Saturday 8:00 A.M.–4:00 P.M. CST. Inquiries may also be sent in writing to the Cokesbury Subscription Services, P.O. Box 801, Nashville, TN 37202-0801.

Postmaster: Address changes should be sent to The United Methodist Publishing House, P.O. Box 801, Nashville, TN 37202-0801.

QR is printed on acid-free paper.

Lections are taken from Revised Common Lectionary (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992).

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

Quarterly Review
Spring 2003

Editor: Hendrik R. Pieterse
Email: hpieterse@gbhem.org
Web site: http://www.quarterlyreview.org
Copyright © 2003 by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry and The United Methodist Publishing House
Contents

Editorial
Living Faithfully, the United Methodist Way ........................................... 5

ISSUE THEME:
The Ongoing Significance of John Wesley for
United Methodism

Wesleyan Faith: A Contemporary Reflection ................................. 7
Josiah U. Young III

Wesley’s Prescription for “Making Disciples of Jesus Christ”:
Insights for the Twenty-First-Century Church .............................. 15
Randy L. Maddox

Myth, American Culture, and Sanctification ............................... 29
Mark Emery Reynolds

Recovering Human Nature through Christian Practice .................. 45
Kenneth H. Carter, Jr.

Itinerancy Is Dead—But It Can Live Again .................................... 59
John G. McEllhenney

Outside the Theme
The Church’s Mission in Higher Education in the
Twenty-first Century ................................................................. 71
F. Thomas Trotter

The Church in Review
Clergy Burnout

Carlyle Fielding Stewart III ....................................................... 78
Karen D. Scheib ................................................................. 78
A Word on The Word

Lectionary Study
   R. Grace Imathiu ................................................................. 85

Issues In: Congregational Conflict
   K. Brynolf Lyon ................................................................. 97

Book Reviews

Living Grace: An Outline of United Methodist Theology, by Walter Klaiber and Manfred Marquardt (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001)
   Reviewer: Kenneth L. Carder ................................................... 104

Beyond the Ordinary: Spirituality for Church Leaders, by Ben Campbell Johnson and Andrew Dreitcer (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001)
   Reviewer: Diane Luton Blum ................................................... 105

Strategies for Brief Pastoral Counseling, ed. by Howard W. Stone
   (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001)
   Reviewer: Vergel L. Lattimore ................................................... 107

Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness, by Clark H. Pinnock
   (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001)
   Reviewer: Thomas Jay Oord ................................................... 108
The year 2003 marks the three-hundredth anniversary of the birth of the founder of Methodism, John Wesley. This historic event provides Methodists with a felicitous opportunity to reflect on the continuing influence of their forebear in the faith. Not surprisingly, Methodist media abound with announcements of efforts and projects aimed at commemorating, celebrating, and interpreting Wesley’s life and ministry.

The scope of these efforts is impressive: an inaugural music festival at Oxford University, where Wesley was a student and fellow; a fourteen-day “immersion experience” in England for “Wesley pilgrims”; a historical convocation to celebrate Wesley’s “life and legacy”; a special edition of BBC television’s “Songs of Praise” devoted to celebrating Wesley’s birth; several scholarly conferences aimed at interpreting Wesley’s theological contribution; and many more. This is not to mention the many religious publications whose efforts to honor this remarkable eighteenth-century Anglican priest take the form of thoughtful conversation about the ongoing significance of his theological and spiritual legacy for the twenty-first century.

Quarterly Review joins these worthwhile efforts at remembering, celebrating, and reflecting. Thus, this spring issue examines and assesses the ongoing significance of John Wesley’s life and thought, particularly for those in the Methodist family who call themselves United Methodists.

The five theme essays all critically reflect upon key aspects of Wesley’s theological vision, thought, and practice and assess ways to articulate their continued intellectual cogency and unleash their power to inspire practices of personal and social holiness befitting disciples of Jesus Christ.

A central accomplishment of Wesley’s was to insist that faithful discipleship is holistic—a way of being that intentionally integrates head and heart, reason and piety, personal and social life and refuses to succumb to the
Enlightenment’s dichotomous construal of individual and communal existence. In different ways, the essays in this volume all wrestle with the task of how to craft a form of holistic discipleship in the Wesleyan mode that will allow the church to be a beacon of hope and its people instruments of transforming grace amid the immense and often heart-rending challenges of the twenty-first century. For this task, says Randy Maddox in his essay, Wesley’s “prescription” is unequivocal: Insist on a form of life characterized by the dynamic interplay of doctrine and discipline—formation in a distinctively Christian worldview and unremitting participation in specific practices that Wesley called “means of grace”—and propelled to maturity through the discipline of self-denial. Kenneth Carter, Jr., carefully examines the formative role of the means of grace in shaping human beings in the imago Dei—a journey of transformation Wesley and his followers call “sanctification”—to argue for a distinctively United Methodist way of life centered in four such practices: singing, testimony, searching the Scriptures, and generosity with the poor.

Mark Reynolds inquires how United Methodists can retrieve the doctrine of sanctification for our postmodern present. Using the category of myth, Reynolds analyzes the personal and social myths that shape American life and then construes sanctification as an alternative myth that issues in a thoroughly countercultural form of discipleship. For Josiah Young, such a countercultural existence is possible for United Methodists only if they are willing to use the resources of their Wesleyan faith—catholic spirit and Christian perfection—to be a force for progressive change in a “world house” rendered dysfunctional by the ongoing scourge of racism.

In his provocative essay, John McEllhenney argues that Wesley’s vision of the itinerancy—men on the social margin ministering to persons on the social margin—has died in American Methodism. To recover their founder’s vision, United Methodists must allow new Wesley-style itinerancies to be imagined that will minister to persons who feel themselves marginalized by mainstream United Methodism—persons such as the gay and lesbian Christians who exist on the fringes of America’s homophobic culture.

May this tercentenary celebration of John Wesley’s birth prompt a renewed quest for forms of discipleship that express the best of United Methodism’s Wesleyan heritage.

Hendrik R. Pieterse is editor of Quarterly Review.
John Wesley declared the world his parish in a letter he wrote in 1739 to the Reverend James Hervey. Hervey had wanted Wesley to refrain from preaching to those “who [were] none of [his] charge,” the Calvinist especially. Wesley wrote to Hervey:

If you ask on what principle . . . I acted, it was this: a desire to be Christian; and a conviction that whatever I judge conducive thereto, that I am bound to do; wherever I judge I can best answer this end, thither it is my duty to go. On this principle I set out for America; on this I visited the Moravian Church; and on the same I am ready now (God being my helper) to go to Abyssinia or China, or whithersoever it shall please God by this conviction to call me.¹

Wesley’s desire to be a Christian—his sense of the power of the religion—moved him to try to influence the world for the better. Whether Methodists today can follow Wesley’s intentions depends on their being a force for progressive change in the United States and the world. In those places where Methodism is such a force, Methodists appear as peculiar to their compatriots as Wesley did to Hervey.

My purpose in this essay is to suggest how Wesleyan faith can empower Methodists to become “peculiar”—to become forces for progressive change in the United States and the rest of the world. To this end, I will focus on the problem of racism.
Wesley’s “Catholic Spirit”: Faith and the Problem of Racism

The world faces a host of problems today, one of which is racism. Its history is long. In Wesley’s day, the problem centered around the enslavement of Africans, which Wesley passionately opposed. In his letter of 1791 to the celebrated abolitionist, William Wilberforce, Wesley states,

Dear Sir,

Unless the divine power has raised you up to be as Athanasius contra mundum, I do not see how you can go through your glorious enterprise in opposing that execrable villainy which is the scandal of religion, of England, and of human culture. Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you? Are all of them together stronger than God? O be not weary of well doing! Go on, in the name of God and in the power of his might, till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away before it.

Reading this morning a tract wrote by a poor African, I was particularly struck by that circumstance that a man who has a black skin, being wronged or outraged by a white man, can have no redress; it being a “law” in all our colonies that the oath of a black against a white goes for nothing. What villainy is this?

That he who has guided you from youth up may continue to strengthen you in this and all things, is the prayer of, dear sir,

Your affectionate servant.²

Many hold that the United States has moved well beyond its ugly past, but in their book By the Color of Our Skin: The Illusion of Integration and the Reality of Race, Leonard Steinhorn and Barbara Diggs-Brown point out that integration today is merely virtual and “enables whites to live in a world with blacks without having to do so in fact.”³ The media—television, for instance—proffers a certain disingenuousness and dishonesty, which prevents this nation from coming to grips with reality.

According to genetics professor Luigi Luca Cavalli-Sforza, whose pioneering work has exposed the view that racism is mired in prejudice rather than genetic differences, one such reality is that

while marriage between whites and Americans of Asiatic, Amerind, and Polynesian derivation (in the Hawaiian islands) is more common, marriage
between black and white Americans has increased very little since the first steps toward equal rights were taken. As the geneticist Curt Stern pointed out many years ago, if skin pigmentation were irrelevant in selecting a marriage partner, the color gap between black and white would disappear with two to three generations. The fact is that the cultural and economic differences are still too strong, and awareness of skin color is too ingrained, for the situation to change with satisfactory speed.\textsuperscript{4}

According to Cavalli-Sforza, the reason for this marginalization is that the black body, through no fault of its own, reinforces a certain spiritual vacuity in the nation. Socioeconomic contradictions (consider the gross inequities of the public school system) allegedly reflect the “fact” that whites are more intelligent than blacks. Allegedly, then, the fact that blacks lag behind whites academically is born of a certain necessity. As Cavalli-Sforza points out, however, such “necessity” masks the injustice that disables blacks, so that whites can feel superior. He attributes such feelings of superiority to unhappiness—“the unhappiness of the social group that feels superior.” Cavalli-Sforza goes on to argue convincingly that “unhappiness, whatever its source, generally stimulates the search for a scapegoat, who is always somebody weaker.”\textsuperscript{5} (The use of weaker here signifies the reality of injustice, the fact that blacks are undermined by an unfair system. It does not signify that whites are inherently stronger than blacks.)

Steinhorn, Diggs-Brown, and Cavalli-Sforza suggest to me that racism is an ethical and thus a spiritual problem to be overcome through education and, in the case of the church, through a humane spirituality. Wesley is instructive: in his sermon “Catholic Spirit,” he suggests that the true Christian is “filled with the energy of love.” This energy raises certain questions: “Is thine heart right towards thy neighbor? Dost thou love, as thyself, all mankind without exception?”\textsuperscript{6} How utterly impossible to be a United Methodist with any integrity if the church fails to answer those “catholic” questions—at every turn and in every conceivable context—given the ugliness of our historic and present contradictions. Indeed, Wesley’s sermon is helpful as it suggests the diversity that should reign in the church today. His appropriation of a biblical question—“Is your heart as true to mine as mine is to yours?” (2 Kings 10:15)—features prominently in the sermon.

On one level, Wesley’s appropriation of this question is problematic. Given the context of 2 Kings 10:15, which serves as the basis for Wesley’s
message, I can neither endorse the violence of Jehu nor the theology that upholds the extermination of the line of Ahab (2 Kings 10:10-11; 1 Kings 21:21). On another level, though, putting aside the problematic exegesis, I can appreciate Wesley’s appropriation of Jehu’s question to Jehonadab, “Is your heart as true to mine as mine is to yours?” Wesley is trying to assert that Christ transcends our spiritualities insofar as they are but opinions of a certain sort. Christ transcends them by virtue of the fact that he is the love incarnate that joins us together as justified and sanctified images of God. Christ thus belongs to all of us, and the inverse is also true. For God who sends Christ into the world is no respecter of persons. The very plurality of the category *person* suggests that there is an astonishing diversity in Christ: Christians justified by Christ and sanctified by the Spirit are quite different from one another—i.e., the “particular modes” of being in God “are almost as various as among the heathen [sic].” Wesley thought that these particular modes were externals that should not prevent the forging of internal solidarity among persons for Christ’s sake. So “how,” asks Wesley,

shall we choose among so much variety? No man can choose for, or prescribe to, another. But every one must follow the dictates of his own conscience, in simplicity and godly sincerity. . . . Nor has any creature power to constrain another to walk by his own rule. God has given no right to any of the children of men, thus to lord it over the conscience of his brethren; but every man must judge for himself, as every man must give an account of himself to God.7

Those committed to diversity recognize the power of Wesley’s argument that “every one must follow the dictates of his own conscience, in simplicity and godly sincerity.”

**“The Dictates of Conscience” and the Legacy of Malcolm X**

Wesley’s “dictates of conscience” reminds me that I have been molded as much by Malcolm X as by the Methodist church. His untimely death deprived my community of a brilliant teacher on the threshold of realizing his potential as a force for worldwide good. Freed from the narrow chauvinism of the Nation of Islam, Minister Malcolm’s critical eye focused on progressive alliances with all the world’s people who radically opposed racial and economic injustice. He especially identified with Africa, the
bedrock of the cultural and global dimensions of his worldview. In promulgating a certain Pan-African consciousness, Malcolm tried to expose the problem of Euro-American hegemony within the minds of black Americans. To use Wesley, however heuristically, one might well say that Malcolm held uncommon opinions “indeed quite peculiar to himself.” The fact that I find many of his ideas compelling likely makes me as peculiar to many Methodists as Minister Malcolm himself was. Still, many of his opinions—his Pan-Africanism, for instance—are inextricable from my Methodist identity. I, then, feel compelled to appropriate this little bit from “Catholic Spirit”: “I do not mean, ‘Be of my opinion.’ You need not: I do not expect or desire it. Neither do I mean, ‘I will be of your opinion.’ I cannot: it does not depend on my choice: I can no more think, than I can see or hear, as I will.” I would not expect most white Methodists—or a good number of the black ones, for that matter—to uphold the legacy of Malcolm X, as I do. For the sake of a catholic spirit, however, I do think that all Methodists should appreciate that Malcolm’s legacy is still instructive. The depth of the problem of racism in the United States makes it so; to name but a few issues: the problem of racial profiling; the disproportionately high incarceration of black males; the inequities of public education; the discrepancies in income; the unfair lending practices of banking institutions; the undermining of affirmative action; the ongoing marginalization of the black underclass; the waxing frustration of the black middle class. Indeed, what Malcolm X said to those whom he called “sincere white people” rings true today: “In our mutual sincerity we might be able to show a road to the salvation of America’s very soul. It can only be salvaged if human rights and dignity, in full, are extended to black [people].” And to all people!

**Going On to Perfection for the Sake of Our World House**

Today, racism is a factor in global poverty, terrorism, genocide (as exemplified recently in Rwanda)—I could go on. Indeed, Martin Luther King, Jr., thought racism was at the heart of the world’s dysfunction. I think it continues to be the case. King writes that racism’s “vicious grasp knows no geographical boundaries. In fact, racism and its perennial ally—economic exploitation—provide the key to understanding the international complications of this generation.” Racism and other forms of social injustice fragment what King called the “world house.” This metaphor signifies that all people belong to one “household”—planet earth—and so ought to live in
peace with justice, for what divided house can remain standing?11

King’s “world house,” which expresses his concern for the world’s well-being, reminds me of John Wesley’s declaration, “The world is my parish.” Both suggest to me that we cannot begin to deal with global problems such as racism until we address the fact that Americans are by and large unconcerned with what Wesley called in his letter to Hervey “the glad tidings of salvation,” namely, certain “catholic principles”: the reformation of the wicked, confirmation of the virtuous, and instruction of the ignorant.12 If Methodists were focused on those principles, they would stand out as beacons of conflict resolution. As it is, the church—especially in its scholarly life—still struggles with its own diversity. To me, this indicates that many Methodists have not come to grips with—or do not yet want to understand—the irritating particularity that Wesley would have them develop for Christ’s sake and for the sake of the world. Still, our ancestor, John Wesley, calls us to actualize a catholic spirit that models Christian perfection to a world house that is our parish.

For Wesley, perfection did not mean that our opinions, our spiritualities, are themselves infallible. Nobody knows everything or does everything right. We are not always agreeable, either; for the differences we embody are real and always threaten to endow our particularities with a little too much of an edge. I think it fair to say that such an edge is what Wesley meant by an infirmity—“that of calling [one’s] brother, ‘Thou fool,’ or returning ‘railing for railing.’”13 Indeed, the process theologians remind us that bad vibes cling to us as they did to our predecessors, and only the decision to channel them into a force for good will allow us to pass along to posterity feelings that are more humane and hospitable than those of our ancestors. “Bad blood” can be purged from the heart and so need not be an impediment to perfection in our Wesleyan faith.

The vast differences of our convictions need not undermine a catholic spirit. And what, after all, is this spirit if not the conviction that the Holy Spirit has made it possible to overcome the sin that carries enmity to the grave? The commitment to perfection, the praxis that enables one to say to the other, “Give me your hand”—which is the devotion to Christian ethics—is indeed the outward form of this spirit. Wesley calls it “‘ceasing from sin,’ if it be interpreted in the lowest sense as regarding only the outward behaviour.”14 But far more significant than this basic cleanliness of intent and conduct is Wesley’s sense that one who would be perfect is, by grace,
averse to the devil. According to Wesley, 1 John 3:8-9 makes the point: “Everyone who commits sin is a child of the devil; for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. Those who have been born of God do not sin, because God’s seed abides in them; they cannot sin, because they have been born of God.”

Wesley’s claim is open to dispute. Wesley obviously believed that some of us can be quite sinless—he believed that strongly in the power of grace, his problematic sublation of Jew to Christian notwithstanding.15 Still, the sinlessness I find compelling concerns the big picture—the world house, in fact. What Martin Luther King wrote shortly before his assassination in 1968 is true: racism goes to the heart of our world’s dysfunction. This is so because racism is at bottom a suicidal impulse within the human race—a death instinct, to make an allusion to Sigmund Freud. To that extent, the recent horror of Rwanda was not just peculiar to that part of the world but also reflects our American divisiveness. (The popular notion that the Rwandan holocaust was due to African culture, qua “tribalism,” is false. In truth, the genocide stemmed from the colonial importation of racist values alien to Rwanda but indigenous to a context such as the United States.) If we would take steps to remedy our own enmity—to become “sinless” in this respect—we might help others bury the hatchet and live in peace with justice. If we would just see the urgency of it—the waste of human potential; the love affair with opulence; the lack of basic nutrition, education, and opportunity around the world—then we could stop ourselves from yielding to worldwide practices that destroy innocent babies and children in our own ghettos and in the world at large.

Perhaps Methodists, with their Wesleyan faith—catholic spirit and Christian perfection—can provide leadership. The peculiar people called Methodists would then be in the position to pose questions to the world—questions their founder has taught them:

Do you show your love by your works? While you have time, as you have the opportunity, do you in fact “do good to all [persons],” neighbors or strangers, friends or enemies, good or bad? Do you do them all the good you can; endeavoring to supply all their wants; assisting them both in body and soul, to the utmost of your power?16
In the tradition of John Wesley, Methodists would be able to assert to the world that only affirmative responses enable one to say to another, “Your heart is true to mine as mine is to yours.”

Josiah U. Young III is Professor of Systematic Theology at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, DC.

Endnotes

5. Ibid., 243.
7. Ibid., 383.
8. Ibid., 385.
10. Ibid., 202.
11. Martin Luther King, Jr., Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community? (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968).
15. Wesley writes: “[W]hossoever would bring down the Christian dispensation to the Jewish standard, whosoever gleans up the examples of weakness recorded in the law and the prophets and thence infers that they who have ‘put on Christ’ are endued with no greater strength” make a profound mistake. See “Christian Perfection,” in Outler, 261.
Wesley’s Prescription for “Making Disciples of Jesus Christ”: Insights for the Twenty-First-Century Church

RANDY L. MADDOX

This is the religion we long to see established in the world, a religion of love and joy and peace, having its seat in the heart, in the inmost soul, but ever showing itself by its fruits, continually springing forth, not only in all innocence . . . but likewise in every kind of beneficence, in spreading virtue and happiness all around it.²

Is there a more appropriate longing for the church as Christians stand at the outset of a new millennium than this one voiced over a quarter of a millennium ago? Or does it strike us as hopelessly idealistic? John Wesley clearly did not consider it unrealistic when he articulated this as the driving vision of Methodism. If his current descendants do, it may be because we have lost touch with Wesley’s wisdom about how to cultivate such Christ-like lives in the world.

The most focused presentation of Wesley’s mature wisdom on this central mission of the church is a late sermon titled “Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity.” The sermon opens with Wesley’s charge that the reason Christian communities around the globe had done so little good in the world was that they were producing so few real Christians. He then identified three factors of typical church life that together account for this lamentable state: first, in too few churches did members attain any adequate understanding of Christian doctrine; second, many of those churches that provided members with doctrinal formation lacked corresponding provision of appropriate Christian discipline; and, third, of churches that provided both doctrine and discipline, there remained in most a broad absence of the specific Christian practice of self-denial.³
Most observers of church life would likely agree that Wesley’s description remains broadly applicable today. What might be less clear is the point and perceptiveness of his diagnosis of this situation or his corresponding prescription for effectiveness in raising up authentic disciples of Jesus Christ. What makes doctrine so significant? What does Wesley mean by discipline? And why did he specifically highlight self-denial? Probing these questions may prove instructive for our consideration of how to fulfill the Christian mission in and for the world today.

The Vital Role of Doctrine in Christian Life

The first question we must ponder is why Wesley identified doctrine as foundational to the formation of real Christian life and character. To comprehend this we need to recall that he imbibed through his Anglican tradition the early church’s appreciation of theology as a practical discipline. This appreciation recognizes that we humans are “meaning-seeking creatures.” We are not content for life merely to happen; we struggle to make sense of why it happens. We do not typically act out of mere impulse; our crucial choices about how to act are guided by convictions about the ultimate nature and purposes of life. The pattern of these orienting convictions is our functional worldview. Thus, the early church understood the primal dimension of Christian theology to be the worldview that orients believers’ lives in the world. As Paul put it, Christians perceive things rightly and act appropriately only when they have the “mind of Christ” (see Philippians 2). That this involves holistic dispositions, not merely intellectual convictions, is evident from Paul’s parallel emphasis on Christians nurturing the “fruit of the Spirit” (see Galatians 5).

Paul’s appeal for Christians to emulate the mind of Christ reflects the reality that this orienting worldview is not unilaterally infused by God at one’s conversion. It must be cultivated as part of the intentional process of growing in Christ-likeness. This need defines the second dimension of theology as a practical discipline—the task of forming/reforming a Christian worldview in believers. Since the worldview in question is holistic, this task has proven to involve a variety of activities aimed at invoking and shaping beliefs, affections, and character dispositions. The case of the early church is particularly revealing in this regard. Their theological energies were dominated by the task of forming a Christian worldview in new believers; and they pursued this task with a clear sense that the cultures within
which they lived were bent on instilling quite different worldviews. In this context they prized most highly as “theologians” those—who crafted such practical-theological materials as hymns, liturgies, catechetical orations, and spiritual-discipline manuals. These materials established the rhythms and provided the deep narrative that served to instill Christ-likeness in believers’ hearts and minds.

Wesley’s self-understanding as a theologian reflects this early-church model. His literary efforts focused on providing his Methodist people with the same types of practical-theological materials. For example, recognizing the role of “life narratives” in forming and expressing one’s worldview, Wesley particularly exhorted his Methodists to live in the story of Christ and the stories of exemplary Christians (a rich set of which he provided for their reading), so that their orienting narrative might be reshaped in keeping with the pattern of Christ. Likewise, sensing the formative impact of those favorite songs that embed themselves in our memories and being, he carefully edited a series of hymnbooks as resources for sustaining and shaping Christian faith.

In this practical-theological work it is clear that Wesley devoted careful attention to more than just questions of what type of materials had most effective impact. He readily engaged as well the normative dimension of theology as a practical discipline. As a case in point, his diagnosis of the inefficacy of Christianity focused particular attention on the importance of cultivating a proper understanding of Christian convictions about our human condition and God’s gracious provisions for our need. His broad-ranging ministry convinced Wesley that a major reason why churches were nurturing so few real Christians was the prevalence of an inadequate notion of the “salvation” that Christianity proclaims. This salvation was too often restricted to the forgiveness of sins. On these terms, “making disciples” involves little more than encouraging unbelievers to exercise justifying faith.

Nothing was more central to Wesley’s lifelong ministry than challenging this anemic conception of Christian salvation. For him, it focused too one-sidedly on the theme of Romans 1–3, where our most basic human problem is the guilt by which we “fall short of the glory of God” (3:23) and the crucial aspect of salvation is God’s unmerited gift of justification. It failed to do justice to another central biblical theme that can be represented by Romans 7–8, where the deepest impact of sin is our spiritual
debilitation (“I can will what is right, but I cannot do it” [7:18b]) and the gracious gift of God is the empowering and healing presence of the Spirit. Wesley consistently tried to weave these themes together in his instruction on sin, grace, and salvation, as in the following quotes:

Two-fold Nature of Sin: Guilt and Disease
[Our sins], considered in regard to ourselves, are chains of iron and fetters of brass. They are wounds wherewith the world, the flesh, and the devil, have gashed and mangled us all over. They are diseases that drink up our blood and spirits, that bring us down to the chambers of the grave. But considered . . . with regard to God, they are debts, immense and numberless.⁴

Two-fold Nature of Grace: Mercy and Power
By “the grace of God” is sometimes to be understood that free love, that unmerited mercy, by which I, a sinner, through the merits of Christ am now reconciled to God. But in this place it rather means that power of God the Holy Ghost which “worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” As soon as ever the grace of God (in the former sense, his pardoning love) is manifested in our soul, the grace of God (in the latter sense, the power of his Spirit) takes place therein. And now we can perform through God, what to [ourselves] was impossible . . . a renewal of soul after His likeness.⁵

Two-fold Nature of Salvation: Pardon and Healing
By salvation I mean, not barely (according to the vulgar notion) deliverance from hell, or going to heaven, but a present deliverance from sin, a restoration of the soul to its primitive health, its original purity; a recovery of the divine nature; the renewal of our souls after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness, in justice, mercy, and truth. This implies all holy and heavenly tempers, and by consequence all holiness of conversation.⁶

The general point of these quotes should be clear, except perhaps for the last line quoted. It is puzzling in part because modern readers think of “tempers” almost exclusively as emotional outbursts. Wesley is using the term here in a sense common in the eighteenth century, where temper referred to an enduring character disposition (toward good or evil actions). The remnant of this earlier meaning comes through when we speak today of tempered metal, which has been strengthened and given a characteristic
shape. The line is also puzzling if we do not know that in the eighteenth century the word conversation referred to all one’s outward actions, not just one’s verbal discourse. Wesley is assuming here that our actions normally flow from our most characteristic inclinations or dispositions. As such, Christ-like action in the world must be grounded in the transformation of our existing unholy tempers into holy tempers.

Thus, the first prescription Wesley would offer his present descendants is to take seriously the task of cultivating in our communities a biblically grounded and theologically balanced sense of what it means to be a Christian, in order that we might be more effective in making real disciples—that is, believers who are not content merely with being forgiven but embrace responsively the lifelong journey toward full Christ-likeness!

The Contribution of Regular Participation in the Means of Grace

But how do we become different? Wesley would be the first to insist that careful doctrinal formation alone cannot effect this change. Transformation into Christ’s likeness is made possible only by God’s empowering and renewing grace at work in our lives. That is why Wesley moves from emphasis on doctrine in his diagnostic sermon to insisting that development of real Christians also requires discipline. The type of discipline Wesley had in mind is clear; he gave it official form as the three General Rules of his movement. All those who desire to seek salvation in its full biblical sense are exhorted to (1) do no harm, (2) do as much good as they can for others, and (3) regularly participate in “all the ordinances of God.”

The third exhortation reflects Wesley’s conviction that regular participation in the means of grace is essential for nurturing Christian life. He repeatedly denounced the folly of those who expect growth in faith and holiness without regular participation in the means through which God has chosen to convey grace. He often explained this connection with an early Christian proverb: “The soul and the body make a [human]; the Spirit and discipline make a Christian.” This proverb points toward the dual benefit—Spirit and discipline—that Wesley believed we derive from regular participation in the means of grace.

The SPIRIT and Discipline Make a Christian

Wesley’s early sermons are primarily reminders of the duty to live like Christ. In these sermons he reflects the model of spirituality he learned at his
mother’s knee and that was most broadly represented in the Anglicanism of his youth. This model identified the greatest obstacle to holy living as the “passional” dimension of human life—i.e., those emotional reactions, instincts, and the like that are not a product of our rational initiative and are not under fully conscious control. The normative corollary was that proper choice and action are possible only as we subject this passional dimension of life to rational control. This is admittedly not an easy task, but it was assumed that through exhortation and regular practice—empowered by grace—we could habituate an increased aptitude for maintaining righteousness.

As he sought to live out this inherited model of Christian spirituality, Wesley became increasingly convinced of its inadequacy. He learned by hard experience that rational persuasion alone cannot resist, much less overcome and heal, irregular appetites and passions. As a result his consuming question became not “What would God have me do?” but “How can I do what I know God would have me do?” In particular, “How can I truly love God and others?” In the events leading up to Aldersgate Wesley was repeatedly reminded of the biblical theme that God’s gracious acceptance precedes and provides the possibility of holiness on our part. Then, when he experienced a deep assurance of God’s pardoning love at Aldersgate, he found himself enabled to love God and neighbor as he had so unsuccessfully longed to do. This experience of having “the love of God shed abroad in one’s heart” became central to his mature model of Christian life.

Wesley’s articulation of this mature model was aided by his embrace of the empiricist swing in eighteenth-century British philosophy. For empiricism, truth is experienced receptively by the human intellect rather than being preexistent within it or being imposed by reason upon our experience. In terms of the dynamics of human willing, this philosophical conviction led to the parallel insistence that humans are moved to action only as we are experientially affected. To use an example, they held that rational persuasion of the rightness of loving others is not sufficient of itself to move us actually to do so; we are ultimately inclined and enabled to love others only as we experience being loved ourselves. Wesley’s crucial application of this truth became his insistence that it is only in response to our experience of God’s gracious love for us, shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, that our love for God and others is awakened and can grow.

In this insistence Wesley was giving concrete embodiment, as a model
of Christian life, to the abstract affirmation that grace is prevenient to holy living. Grace is identified not as some extrinsic “gift” but as the very presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The human will is not seen as a reservoir of inherent volitional power but as a capacity to be affected and to “reflect” what we experience. Thereby the freedom to live Christ-like lives is grounded not in our own capacities but in God’s empowering encounter with us. Yet our integrity or accountability is preserved because, while we do not have the capacity to self-generate love, we do have the capacity (what Wesley called “liberty”) to stifle responsive loving.

The foundational assumption of Wesley’s revised model of Christian life, then, was that this life is responsive in nature—not only at its beginning but also all along the journey. This comes through clearly in one of his most extended descriptions of the dynamics of the Christian life:

The life of God in the soul of a believer . . . immediately and necessarily implies the continual inspiration of God’s Holy Spirit: God’s breathing into the soul, and the soul’s breathing back what it first receives from God; a continual action of God upon the soul, the re-action of the soul upon God; an unceasing presence of God, the loving, pardoning God, manifested to the heart. . . . [But] God does not continue to act upon the soul unless the soul re-acts upon God. . . . He first loves us, and manifests himself unto us. . . . He will not continue to breathe into our soul unless our soul breathes toward him again; unless our love, and prayer, and thanksgiving return to him.8

A second prescription that Wesley would offer us, then, is to encourage—and provide means for—experiencing this enlivening presence of the Spirit in our communities, in order that we might nurture believers who “reflect” God’s love in their engagement with the world.

The Spirit and DISCIPLINE Make a Christian

To be sure, this reflection is not inevitable. Note in the passage just quoted how directly Wesley moves from the affirmation that grace is responsive to the insistence that it is also responsible—if we do not re-act, God will cease to act. This integral connection was crucial to Wesley’s mature model of Christian life, and he defended it vigorously against the tendency of some of his evangelical colleagues to cast divine grace and human responsibility in a polar relationship. As he reminded his followers, even Saint Augustine
(who provided the seeds of the tendency toward this polarization in Western Christianity) insisted, “The God who made us without ourselves will not save us without ourselves.”

Wesley’s sermon “On Working Out Our Own Salvation,” based on Phil. 2:12-13, is his most extended effort to allay the fear of some strands of Western Christianity about emphasis on the “co-operant” nature of God’s gracious work in our lives. In this sermon he repeatedly underlines the primacy of God’s gracious initiative in the whole process of salvation: It is only because God is already at work in us, empowering and inclining us, that we can work out our salvation. But Wesley then rejects any suggestion that our working is an inevitable result of God’s grace: If we do not responsively put God’s gracious empowerment to work, God will cease to work. The ultimate reason for this is that, for Wesley, God is more fundamentally like a loving parent than like a sovereign monarch—God will not finally impose our obedience.

This reference to obedience provides occasion to probe further what Wesley meant by the “discipline” he identified as crucial to forming real Christians. In our present setting, the word discipline most typically refers to the punishment one receives for lapses in obedience. The main exception is in the realms of athletics and music, where “discipline” is often used to refer to practices that one engages in regularly in order to develop the capacity, or “freedom,” for desired behaviors to flow forth naturally. Here the issue is not immediate reward and punishment but long-term impact. Failure to practice means increased difficulty (and less reliability) in attaining one’s desired goal. This sounds more like what Wesley intended when he argued that without a thorough experience and practice of the tenets of loving God, loving our neighbor as ourselves, and the like, all efforts toward a Christian life will be “utterly vain and ineffectual.”

As this suggests, Wesley had more in mind than individual acts of obedience when he encouraged his followers to cooperate with God’s grace. He was particularly concerned that they engage in formative practices that could help provide greater “freedom” and reliability for holy actions. Here we need to underline one aspect of Wesley’s mature insights into the dynamics of human willing. While he insisted that our affections are responsive, he did not consider them to be simply transitory. On the contrary, repeated engagement naturally focuses and strengthens them into enduring dispositions toward similar response in the future, i.e., into

22 QUARTERLY REVIEW
either holy or unholy tempers. Accordingly, Wesley made clear to his followers that God does not typically infuse such holy tempers as love, patience, and meekness instantaneously; regenerating grace awakens in believers only their “seeds.” For these seeds to strengthen and take shape, they need continuing gracious energizing by God; but they also need to be exercised and improved by regular engagement in the practices of the Christian life.

Thus, a third prescription that Wesley would offer his current heirs, if we hope to witness more disciples attaining significant maturity of Christ-likeness, is the importance of helping those in our communities appreciate the progressive “freeing” impact of formative spiritual disciplines.

The Spirit AND Discipline Make a Christian

As a practical theologian, Wesley was not content with merely instructing his people in the doctrinal convictions of the empowering affect of the Spirit and the freeing effect of formative disciplines. He recognized the importance of providing concrete opportunities to experience the Spirit and to engage in formative practices—and that selection and design of these opportunities were central to his theological task.

The impact of Wesley’s mature convictions about Christian life at this practical-theological level is clear. His earliest writings, operating out of his inherited “habituated rational control” model of moral choice, emphasized Scripture reading, sermons, and prayer (all of which address us intellectually) as the means to insure Christian living. By contrast, lists of recommended means of grace after Aldersgate are both more extensive and more diverse and include items ranging from such universal Christian practices as fasting, prayer, Eucharist, and devotional readings to more distinctively Methodist practices like class meetings, love feasts, and special rules of holy living. The balance of items on these later lists reflects Wesley’s bifocal concern that his people not only experience the empowering presence of God but are also formed in the character of God. Their pattern was crafted to provide Wesley’s followers with both Spirit and discipline.

The degree of intentionality with which Wesley considered the effective balancing of the means of grace is particularly evident in his 1781 sermon “On Zeal.” While praising the broad eighteenth-century evangelical awakening for renewing religious zeal in Britain, this sermon offers Wesley’s perception that their zeal was not as beneficial as it ought to have
been because it was too often focused on peripheral matters rather than on those most central to Christian life. As a corrective, Wesley offered the following sketch of the relative value of the various aspects of Christian life:

In a Christian believer love sets upon the throne, namely love of God and [other humans], which fills the whole heart, and reigns without a rival. In a circle near the throne are all holy tempers: long-suffering, etc. . . . . In an exterior circle are all the works of mercy, whether to the souls or bodies of [others]. By these we exercise all holy tempers; by these we continually improve them, so that these are real means of grace, although this is not commonly adverted to. Next to these are those that are usually termed works of piety: reading and hearing the word; public, family, private prayer; receiving the Lord’s Supper; fasting and abstinence. Lastly, that his followers may the more effectually provoke one another to love, holy tempers, and good works, our blessed Lord has united them together in one—the church.10

Wesley then exhorted his readers to devote more zeal to engagement in the various works of piety than to advocating their particular branch of the church, more zeal yet to works of mercy, even more zeal to the holy tempers, and their greatest zeal of all to love of God and neighbor.

Wesley’s emphasis on the works of mercy in this passage deserves special attention. Note first his insistence that they are means of grace. He recognizes that they are more commonly viewed as duties, which we undertake because it is what God commands or because they help others. Without denying these dimensions, Wesley calls us to consider that we need to engage in works of mercy for our sake as well. They are another of the life-giving practices that God has graciously designed to empower us, to give us the mind of Christ, and to help shape our holy tempers!

Wesley not only places works of mercy among the means of grace; he also assigns them a more immediate relation to forming holy tempers than works of piety! This relative assignment does not mean that he would easily acquiesce to forced choices between engaging in works of mercy over works of piety. The empowering and formative impact of both are essential to nurturing holiness. However, it appears that he believed works of mercy make a unique contribution to well-rounded Christian formation and that he was particularly worried that his followers were neglecting their benefit.

At least part of this unique contribution is that certain key virtues
constitutive of the holy life are best awakened and strengthened into enduring patterns by works of mercy. Consider the example of compassion. We must usually experience hardship ourselves to be able to identify with the hardship of others. But we must also experience true suffering on the part of another person. It is not enough, for example, to send money dutifully in response to reported need. Authentic compassion can only take form through open encounter with those in need. This is why Wesley emphasized visiting the sick and needy even more than he did offering them aid. He recognized that failure to visit was a major cause of the lack of compassion that lay behind withholding aid.

In this light, Wesley would surely counsel his contemporary descendants, fourthly, that Christian communities that encourage and model participation in a well-rounded and balanced set of the means of grace—specifically including works of mercy—will be much more effective in nurturing disciples who emulate the compassion of Christ.

**The Pivotal Place of Self-Denial in Discipleship to Christ**

The glow of such high hopes provides an appropriate backdrop for returning to Wesley’s diagnostic sermon, where it is clear that he had learned by sad experience that the provision of a carefully balanced set of the means of grace did not guarantee the transformation of those in his societies. He charged that it was ultimately a lack of the specific practice of “self-denial” that hindered so many of his followers from becoming fully disciples of Christ.

To appreciate the pivotal role that Wesley assigns to practices of self-denial, we need once again to consider his insight into human willing. We noted earlier that he came to evaluate the conception of the will as an inherent capacity to initiate action to be naive and misleading. His mature alternative equated the will with the “affections,” or our human capacity to be affected and to respond in kind. The obvious worry to raise about this alternative is determinism. Wesley’s way of acknowledging the impact that life experiences, formative influences, and our environment have upon us, without rendering us totally determined by these, was to insist that along with our responsive affections (i.e., our will) God has graciously endowed humans with “liberty.” By this he meant our modest but crucial capacity to inhibit specific responses of our will.

The inhibiting capacity of liberty is what makes humans morally and
spiritually responsible for specific actions. It also makes us accountable for
the dispositions or tempers that may underlie our actions (both by facili-
tating acting in certain ways and by constraining alternatives), since these
temps were formed by prior repeated instances of inhibiting or allowing
responses.

It is crucial to note how Wesley distinguishes liberty from the freedom
we need to live the Christian life. Liberty is simply our graciously gifted
ability not to act on our impulses. It provides at most freedom from the total
determinism of unholy tempers; it has no inherent power to initiate alter-
native holy acts. The freedom for these alternative responses comes through
our affections as we experience God’s further gracious gift of loving
encounter. And yet here again liberty has a role to play—we can inhibit our
response to these gracious encounters and stifle their character-trans-
forming effect, or we can welcome them and allow them to form progres-
sively the holy tempers that provide us with more consistent and enduring
freedom for holy acts.

Wesley’s conviction of the importance of self-denial relates to this role
of liberty in relation to our dispositions. His sermon on self-denial stakes
out perceptively our situation. When we begin to engage the spiritual life,
we find that we are not starting on pristine terms. We are already prone to
clannishness, greed, sloth, and other unholy tempers; and we recognize
that these gain increasing ascendance over us as we allow them to be
expressed. For Wesley, self-denial is basically exercising our gracious
capacity of liberty to resist these unholy tempers.

Wesley is quite careful to make the point that neither self-denial nor
the stronger language of “taking up the cross” should be taken to imply
practices like tearing our flesh or wearing iron girdles or anything else that
would impair our bodily health. They do not involve deprecating our true
human nature but resisting the distorted inclinations that have come to
characterize our lives through various influences. As Wesley focused it, we
“deny our own will where it does not fall in with the will of God.”11 We resist
expressing our unholy tempers in order to prevent their further strength-
ening and, more importantly, to make room for reflecting instead the life-
transforming love of God and neighbor that we encounter in the means of
grace. Given Wesley’s conviction that our own sense of well-being flows
from this love of God and neighbor—true happiness is inseparably united
to true holiness—self-denial can be seen as most truly a form of self-care!
Having defined self-denial, Wesley moves on to stress how integral self-denial is to effectual participation in the means of grace. Those who will not resist at all their unholy tempers in response to God’s awakening overtures neglect the means of grace and squander their potential revitalizing power. Newborn Christians who do not continue to resist unholy tempers that remain in their lives often fade in their engagement of the means of grace, dramatically curtailing, and sometimes forfeiting, their renewing effect. And the many Christians who resist only selective unholy tempers tend to engage the means of grace in a haphazard manner, preventing the full transformation of their lives into Christ-likeness. A specific example Wesley highlights is how little we are likely to engage in works of mercy until we begin to curb intentionally the cravings we have nurtured for “luxuries” in clothing, food, and the like. It is this connection between self-denial and participation in the full range of the means of grace that leads Wesley to charge that if anyone is less than fully Christ’s disciple, it is always owing to the lack of self-denial.

If self-denial is this crucial, how can we help it to become a more consistent characteristic of our own lives and those of our fellow disciples? Part of Wesley’s response is to stress again the empowering effect of practicing self-denial. His pastoral advice is that young Christians ought not to despair when they recognize that they lack universal self-denial. Rather, they should begin practicing some type of self-denial. As they live in this practice they will find God’s grace increasing their facility, and they will be able to broaden it to other areas.

While recognition of the progressive nature of the journey is helpful, Wesley would be the first to protest limiting one’s advice to this admonition. It could encourage a very individualistic and isolated spirituality! By contrast, one of Wesley’s most central pastoral convictions was that authentic spiritual formation cannot take place “without society, without living and conversing with [others].” This is what led Wesley to create corporate structures to provide his Methodist people with mutual support for their spiritual journey. The most basic structure was the class meeting, and one of its central values was the balance of encouragement and accountability it provided. It served as a concrete embodiment of God’s gracious probing work that sensitizes us to remaining unholy tempers and God’s corresponding gracious, assuring work that enables our responsive self-denial and the resulting increase of holiness in heart and life.
One final advice that we might take from Wesley, then, is that Christian communities that provide intentional corporate support for the progressive journey of becoming sensitive to and resisting our distorted dispositions will be more likely to nurture disciples who finish their course with joy and who contribute to the good and the joy of those around them.

This is the kind of religion we truly long to see established in the world!

Randy L. Maddox is Paul T. Walls Professor of Wesleyan Theology at Seattle Pacific University in Seattle, Washington.

Endnotes

1. This article is extracted from an essay prepared for the United Methodist Bishops’ Taskforce on Theological Education. The complete essay, with full documentation, can be found online at http://www.pulpitandpew.duke.edu/maddox%20paper_9-23-02.pdf.
According to John Wesley, Christian ministry was about revival. In concrete terms, this meant preaching to save souls and organizing societies to support the people called Methodists in the necessary pursuit of sanctification. Wesley understood sanctification as the continual therapeutic process of healing the distempered soul through the renewal of the image of God. The purpose of this process was the gradual empowerment of human beings to respond to God’s grace so that they could increasingly fulfill the law of love given by Jesus in the greatest commandment. As the goal of this healing and empowering process, sanctification was understood as the divine restructuring of the depths of our consciousness, making love the primary and controlling temper that guides all of our thoughts, words, and actions. In this sense, sanctification, for Wesley, was a journey of intensification into holiness, with both a personal and a social dimension.

As Methodism in America gradually became a mainline denomination, it faced the pressures to accommodate to dominant cultural trends. As a result, many churches lost Wesley’s vision for sanctification and acquiesced to distorted notions of individualism. In modernity the doctrine of sanctification, in large part, was translated into a narrow teaching on personal morality; and in postmodernity it became irrelevant at best and immoral at worst.

It is my contention that United Methodists will struggle to live lives faithful to God unless they creatively retrieve and live out a Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification in a way that is relevant to a postmodern and pluralistic context. Sanctification is central to a scriptural understanding of discipleship; it is also fundamental to a United Methodist self-understanding of faithfulness as the way we live out the implications of our baptism, from which we derive our true identity in Christ. Pursuing the life of sanctification opens us to personal and social transformation and gives us a public voice that runs counter to the dominant myths of culture.

So how do we creatively retrieve this essential teaching of the church? First, we must understand the context in which we live (in our case, contemporary American society). To this end, I employ the category of
myth as an analytical and interpretive tool. Myth shows how people construct a sense of personal and social identity. Then, I restate the doctrine of sanctification in such a way that it helps us to live faithfully to the sort of world that myth helps us to describe. I argue that sanctification can function today as nothing less than an alternative myth, giving rise to a countercultural understanding of world and practice of life.

What Is Myth?

Far from mere fantasy, myth is the process by which we make sense of the world. According to Rollo May, “Myths are narrative patterns that give significance to our existence. . . . Myths are like the beams in a house: not exposed to outside view, they are the structure which holds the house together so people can live in it.”¹ Myths are formed as an expression of the way we understand our inner selves in relationship to the outside world. Furthermore, they express, guide, and motivate personal and social beliefs, values, and morals through narrative and, therefore, drive toward continuity, even though they are open to reinterpretation in ever-new contexts. As such, they become powerful symbols woven into a story that speaks to us in the depths of our existence. According to May, personal and societal health depends on myths because they engage our whole person, function to relieve neurotic guilt and excessive anxiety, and assuage loneliness.

We can better understand myth when we consider it in relationship to memory. After experiencing a significant personal or communal event, we form it in memory like soft clay in the hands of a potter. As the memory is worked and reworked into a myth, it is related to past events and used to guide future action.² Once we see how a person or a society forms and reforms a significant event, adding color here and details there, we can understand how a person or society is oriented towards life. Myths are used to organize experience in a creative process of memory to bring coherence and meaning to existence.

Understanding how myths influence the deep structure of human existence is important when we consider the doctrine of sanctification, because sanctification, as Wesley understood it, involves being freed not only from the guilt and power of sin but also from its “root.” From what we have seen thus far, the root of our thinking, acting, judging, and relating is largely grounded in our core belief systems construed as myth, which has conscious and unconscious, social and personal consequences.
The Formation of Personal Myths

Modern psychology has helped us to understand how we create, continually reinterpret, and live out personal myths. Our personal myths—which shape the way we interpret and narrate our identity, relationships, needs, and the general meaning of our lives—are largely the products of our families of origin. Depending on a child’s perception of significant events in his or her life within the family system, he or she will make fundamental judgments about self-worth and the world around him or her and internalize them as objectively true beliefs. Furthermore, one’s basic sense of self-worth, whether good or bad, will structure one’s emotional foundation and color all of one’s thoughts, feelings, and actions.

We also make judgments about people in general and whether or not we are going to trust others to meet our basic needs. If as children we are nurtured in healthy ways emotionally, physically, and spiritually, then we usually develop a basic sense of trust in our relationships with others; we will feel loved, and as people that are loved, we will trust that our needs will be met. Things can, of course, go terribly wrong somewhere along the way, either inside or outside the family, which can result in the loss of trust in people; but the early years of development remain crucial.

Those who feel basically bad and unworthy of love, for whatever reasons, fear that others will not meet their needs, and so they develop an orientation of distrust and turn inward. In isolation, they look for things that can be depended upon and can comfort and give a sense of nurturance. If we distrust people and in isolation are convinced that we must find ways to comfort and nurture ourselves because no one else will, then it becomes very difficult to engage in genuine intimacy. Furthermore, this isolation and distrust can lead to the internalization of anger, resentment, rage, fear, self-pity, guilt, or depression—in Wesley’s terms, bad tempers, dispositions, and affections.

Finally, we take this intrapsychic and spiritual material that is constructed out of these basic judgments about self and others and weave together a myth about ourselves, our place in the world, and the meaning of our lives. This basic myth is then continually worked and reworked, interpreted and reinterpreted, as new experiences are processed, assigned meaning, and woven into our personal story. As mentioned above, the myth usually operates below the level of immediate consciousness, determining
our basic posture toward the world and significantly influencing our thoughts, actions, and interpretations of new events. Of course, the culture in which we are raised will influence all those who play a significant role in our lives; and as this culture is communicated to us in innumerable ways, we will internalize many of its values and interpretations of existence.

There are several reasons why this analysis is important in trying to retrieve the doctrine of sanctification for our day. First, many Christians claim to have experienced the forgiveness, love, joy, and peace of God in a way that bestows on them a sense of sacred worth; yet, in quiet moments of honesty, they are plagued by a pervasive and diffuse sense of being guilty, sinful, and unworthy of love. This prevents the grace of God from really registering on their consciousness in a way that brings an enduring change to their self-image. Second, we cannot share what we do not have. If we do not continually experience and respond to the blessings of God, then we will find it increasingly difficult to be faithful witnesses to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Third, people who fear abandonment or lack the ability to trust and develop intimate relationships with others will find it very difficult to trust and completely surrender their lives to God and to trust God to meet their needs. They will miss the whole point of discipleship: intimacy with God through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Some people profess a close and nurturing relationship with God and live spiritually disciplined lives on the outside, but deep down struggle with feelings of being abandoned by God. Without an enduring sense of intimate connection to God, which requires deep trust, the life of discipleship becomes another form of enslaving legalism and an attempt to make ourselves worthy of salvation.

If sanctification is to address the root of sin, then it must surface and engage these personal myths. What stories control our lives? Are they the stories we tell ourselves about our parents and other significant people, or is our identity grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ? This is not to say that the gospel will always be in contradiction with the other myths that are shaped in our families or that the gospel necessarily negates all other stories. The real question is this: Do we try to fit the gospel story into our own personal stories, or do our personal stories find their meaning as they are considered as a part of God’s larger story and action in the world? Do my personal values interpret, qualify, and limit the gospel, or does the gospel interpret, qualify, and limit my personal myth? These are difficult
questions, the answers to which are not always readily and directly accessible to our thinking. Furthermore, we cannot stop with these personal and interpersonal dimensions of sanctification, for to do this would run the risk of transforming a rich and holistic teaching of Wesley’s into a narrow code of personal morality—a constant danger since the birth of our nation. Thus, we must press on to ask about cultural myths.

The Formation of Cultural Myths and American Individualism

According to the authors of *Habits of the Heart*, in 1833 Massachusetts relinquished the last vestiges of religious establishment, after which religion was relegated to the private sphere of human existence, even though churches remained concerned about the whole of life and religious language continued to appear in political discourse. By the 1850s, with the rapid growth in Methodist and Baptist numbers, religion became increasingly privatized in the context of revivalism. As time passed, religion increasingly focused on individual and voluntary associations. Denominational membership became fragmented and religion came to function as a conveyor of morals that would help maintain self-respecting and self-controlled individuals in a competitive world. With the increasing segmentation of society along public and private lines came a corresponding distinction between the sacred and secular spheres of existence. By the late nineteenth century, the private and public sectors of existence moved from being distinct to being increasingly discontinuous as they were organized in a way analogous to the bureaucratic organization of industrial corporations. As this happened, the public sphere came to be dominated by utilitarian individualism—the idea that everything external to the self is to be organized as a means to ensure the greater ends of the individual. Furthermore, the private sphere came to be dominated by expressive individualism—the notion that personal identity is to be found in various practices of creative self-expression.

This late modern period emphasizes three primary values: self-reliance, self-determination, and self-realization. The goal of human life is the liberation and fulfillment of the individual, and the self becomes increasingly detached from the larger society, including the church.

These shifts in culture reflect the birth of a new sense of selfhood modeled on the notion of exchange. The self, many Americans are convinced, is grounded in the ability to choose; for example, to choose one’s
job so as to afford a choice of lifestyle. It is also thought that the self is free to choose its own values according to individual judgment in terms of what allows the most exciting challenges and personal satisfactions. The self becomes its own universal ground and the source of all religious meaning. Moral rules are rendered instrumental as utility replaces duty and self-expression dethrones authority. The authenticity of the self is grounded in self-approval. The goal of life is to break free from family, community, church, and inherited ideas to discover the meaning of life in order to become one’s own person. This orientation shows a kind of forgetfulness in American culture. We forget our heritage and our ancestors, as well as our descendants; and we isolate ourselves from our contemporaries. Finally, this individualistic concept of self has proved to be compatible with religious pluralism. Diversity of religious belief and practice is allowable because religion has been rendered a matter of private choice—with the proviso that such beliefs and practices not violate the moral standards of the community.

Also reflected in these cultural shifts is a change in interpersonal relating: now relationships with others are often based on market exchange or therapeutic contractualism. On the first model, people either become resources to be organized for profit, prospective clients, or other means to personal gain. On the second model, people relate to others as a client relates to a therapist. Displacing more ancient notions of friendship, most interpersonal relationships today are based upon a “giving–getting” model that depends on a cost–benefit analysis in relation to one’s own self-realization, wants, and satisfactions. These models of interpersonal relationship can support, at best, very weak commitments in a culture that overemphasizes free choice and encourages contractual intimacy, interpersonal relating based on calculation, and procedural cooperation in private and public life.

All of these cultural shifts and their concomitant values are woven into corporate myths, such as the myth of the American dream, and are related to some of the same issues raised earlier when considering personal myths. However, we are now talking about national identity, value, and meaning. American myths answer questions about what it means to be an American and what values, attitudes, and beliefs are expected of Americans. Our national myths also reveal what visions direct our country. They address how we should relate to other countries in the global community and how we perceive our national needs, wants, and interests. Our myths also advocate a certain way of relating to the natural world. Myths lie deep within
our culture and find expression in representative characters and heroes, which are concrete living examples of these myths. Our cultural myths disclose what we as a nation find meaningful, valuable, beautiful, and true.

Although religion is very diverse in our contemporary context, a common assumption seems to be that religion is largely a private matter. Our corporate myths all seem to be grounded in American individualism. Furthermore, as religion has become privatized and personalized, the doctrine of sanctification (if mentioned at all) has often been reduced to personal morality. The problem with this reduction is twofold. First, when principles of discipleship are reduced to personal prohibitions and applied with the force of will power, the result is a new type of legalism that proves to be enslaving. Enslaving legalism can never issue in true discipleship, which promises freedom only through radical self-surrender. The second danger can be seen in the person who picks and chooses personal principles through calculation and a cost–benefit analysis in relation to personal satisfaction. This approach tends to erase the details that would allow for any recognizable form of Christian sanctification, and the doctrine becomes irrelevant.

A more daunting problem has to do with the emergence of postmodernity. Because the life of discipleship got so entwined with individualism and the modern conception of the self in America, when these ideas were called into question by postmodern thinkers the doctrine faced serious problems. World wars, mass genocide, and the fear of nuclear annihilation are just a few things that have traumatized Western civilization in the twentieth century. Such events have raised questions about the optimism of modernity and its hope in progress and have helped us to realize that we have much larger problems than cursing, smoking, and drinking. Once we became aware of these serious threats, not only to us as individuals but also to our entire species and the planet we inhabit, much of the concern for personal morality seemed petty.

If sanctification is reduced to personal morality and personal morality comes to be seen as petty, then sanctification as personal holiness becomes irrelevant. Furthermore, given all the serious global problems we face, those who continue to focus almost exclusively on personal issues are not just guilty of triviality; they come to be seen as insensitive, selfish, and sectarian people who are either blind or callous to the indescribable sufferings of the world. At best, they are seen to be complicit in the mass
suffering, inequality, and death perpetrated all around them. In postmodernity, the doctrine of sanctification, defined as personal morality, becomes not only irrelevant but also offensive—it borders on immorality itself.

Given these challenges, it should be obvious that, if we want to recover a viable doctrine of sanctification for our day, we will need to examine the myths of American culture in a way analogous to our personal myths. As we consider these myths and think about their relationships to one another and to people’s personal myths, two problems clearly emerge that need to be addressed by the doctrine of sanctification: the disintegration of myth and American willfulness.

Throughout the development of modern America, but especially today with the postmodern attack on metanarratives, we have seen the disintegration of myths. In modernity, hegemony was given to rationalistic language and myth was linked with religion, fairytales, and magic and was disregarded as ornamental at best or deceptive at worst. In postmodernity, we get a recovered sense of the importance of narration and myth, but no one, grand narrative is allowed to dominate. To better understand this phenomenon it will be helpful to look at three categories used by James Fowler in his discussion of faith and relationship: polytheism, henotheism, and monotheism.5

Polytheism is characterized by a pattern of faith and identity that lacks a single center of value and power that is transcendent enough to focus and order a person’s life. The polytheist is divided by many minor centers of value and power and has a fragmented sense of self. The henotheistic pattern of faith and identity suggests trust and loyalty to one god by investing deeply in one transcending center of value and power, which gives a focal unity to personality and outlook. However, the center is inappropriate or false; it is not something of ultimate concern, but an idol. The third pattern of faith and identity—radical monotheism—offers a transcendent center of value and power that is neither a conscious or unconscious extension of personal or group ego nor a finite cause or institution. “Rather, this type of monotheism implies loyalty to the principle of being and to the source and center of all value and power.” It does not negate less-universal or less-transcendent centers of value and power, but relativizes and orders them.6

This schema shows that the problem of the disintegration of myths in America is not the complete lack of myths; rather, in large part the problem is related to the fact that most Americans today, given the effects of global-
ization, are participants in multiple communities and exposed to many
different myths from various religious, political, social, and cultural tradi-
tions. The disintegration of grand narratives makes it difficult to organize
these various and often competing myths into one coherent story that can
give us a unified sense of identity and can guide our actions. For the most
part, especially during times of good fortune, Americans tend to be
polymythic: they freely make choices from the cultural storehouse of myths,
depending on which ones best suit their desires and goals at a given time;
and they arrange these myths in a variety of functional combinations.7

More recently, American public leaders have tried to reverse this trend
toward fragmentation by appealing to the “war on terrorism.” “United we
stand” is the new American motto, and President Bush has tried to expand
this phrase to include the world community. During times of national crisis
we need myths that can create a sense of unity and patriotism. Thus, in
times of trouble Americans tend to be henomythic insofar as we make our
country the center of value and power, personally and socially.

Some of the consequences of the disintegration of myth are loneliness,
nervousness, guilt, anxiety, and loss of meaning, direction, and purpose.
The main way we deal with all this anxiety and loss leads us to our next
problem: American willfulness.

In our flight from anxiety, Americans tend to grasp for control. As a
whole, we are preoccupied with controlling our own destinies. As self-
reliant and self-determining people, we try to master and control our
circumstances, relationships, and feelings. We assume that our destinies
rest squarely on our own shoulders: success or failure in life is our own
doing. This assumption leads either to pride or to self-hatred, respectively.
Part of this self-preoccupation drives us to focus on our uniqueness as indi-
viduals and to define ourselves in contrast, or even in opposition, to others,
the world, and, for those who are religious, God. One consequence of our
desire to master, control, or manipulate existence is our anxious desire to
find our “true” selves, achieve self-realization, and carve out our own iden-
tity, free from all past and present influences. We want to be “self-made
men” in all respects and then gloat about it. Our lives are typically charac-
terized by constant striving and doing, and we are spoiled with instant
gratification, which retards the cultivation of more mature values and atti-
tudes such as care, generativity, and wisdom.8 In all our striving, we forget,
resist, ignore, or actively work against the wonder of life and the God that
makes everything good possible. Looking out for number one and taking care of ourselves is the American way of life; no wonder that surrender has become a dirty word.

**Sanctification as Countercultural Myth**

In light of these personal and social challenges illuminated by the concept of myth, how can United Methodists retrieve an understanding of sanctification that will enable them to live faithfully in the postmodern context we described above? In addressing this question, I turn again to the category of myth, this time to construct a view of sanctification as a “countercultural” myth in the Wesleyan mode. However, it is important to supplement the largely sociological and psychological analysis thus far with a theological examination of the problem that sanctification seeks to undo.

According to Wesley, the fall of humanity has led to the corruption of the image of God. By sinning, we forfeit the image of God and take on the image of the devil by turning inward and making ourselves the center of the universe. In pride, we become a god unto ourselves and relate everything to ourselves, making our needs and wants of ultimate importance. Thus we subject everything external to our self-will, forcing it to serve as a means to our distorted sense of happiness.

At first, convinced that we are the creators of our own moral values and not accountable to the objective moral law of God, we may not realize that the freedom we gain through self-assertion is counterfeit. But eventually our own best creative efforts fail to fulfill our unquenchable desires and to assuage our guilt. So we inevitably fall into despair and begin to doubt that change is possible. With this deterministic outlook, we resign ourselves to our natural state of corruption and refuse to be responsible to the gracious empowerment of God, which intends to make us like Christ. In order to make sense out of these two conflicting self-images, we weave them into a coherent narrative, which gets buried in the deep structures of our consciousness and becomes, unwittingly, the script by which we live our daily lives. Here, sin gets deployed into a powerful personal myth that shapes the deep structures of our feeling, thinking, and acting.

Although this personal myth brings a sense of continuity to these conflicting images, these images still produce conflicting “tempers,” which manifest themselves in conflicting thoughts and actions. On the one hand, the idolatrous aspect of our personal myth leads to pride, lust, envy, greed,
gluttony, anger, and malice. On the other hand, the despairing aspect of our personal myth leads to sloth, guilt, shame, fear, and depression. As these conflicting tempers wage a war inside of us, we give increasing importance to our personal myth by continually shaping and reshaping it in an effort to force a unified sense of happy selfhood. But since this personal myth is fundamentally grounded in a lie, it never quite works; deep down inside we feel a pervasive and diffuse sense of bondage, anxiety, and unhappiness. We tweak our personal myths further to defend against these uncomfortable realities, and soon we are so self-deceived that we do not even realize how miserable we really are. In short, fallen humanity is characterized by a “distempered” soul, and the evil tempers that drive our sinful thoughts and actions spring from and are perpetuated by false personal myths.

Furthermore, since we are all constituted by an intricate and delicate web of relationships, both interpersonal and social, our distempered souls wreak havoc on our fellow human beings and the natural world. Also, the emergence in society at large of conflicts analogous to the personal dimension of life necessitates the production of false cultural myths to give coherent meaning to corporate life and to assuage mass anxiety, bondage, and unhappiness. In this sense, myth functions at the root of personal and social sin.

Sanctification, in contrast, is primarily the process of healing a distempered soul by rooting out false and deceptive myths. It is the therapeutic process of surrendering the enslaving myths that provoke us to pride and rebellion and contaminate our souls with spiritual sickness. Sanctification heals us from this spiritual sickness by restoring us to true knowledge of ourselves, God, and the world and to true virtue, freedom, and happiness. It is a continual process likened to spiritual respiration. After justification and regeneration, two opposing principles are still at work within us, rendering our best actions a mixture of good and evil intentions—hence, the need to rely upon God’s grace moment by moment for the renewing of our souls in the likeness of God. Continually, God’s grace empowers us to be more honest about who we are and to surrender our doubt, fear, and sinful words, works, and tempers. In so doing, we are empowered to surrender the false myths that deceive us into thinking we do not need God, giving rise to idolatry and despair. However, this requires nothing less than learning to trust God’s view of us as invaluable children of God, God’s unconditional love for us that grants forgiveness and renewed intimacy with God, and God’s vision
for our lives as holy and happy partakers of the divine life. In other words, God reveals a true, liberating, healing, and countercultural myth that leads us to holiness, happiness, and eternal blessedness—and it is this story that should control our lives. It is this powerful and life-transforming myth, given by God and embodied in and lived out by Jesus Christ and applied to our hearts in the power of the Holy Spirit, that enables us to live out the goal of sanctification: utter love of God and neighbor. Immersing ourselves unremittingly in this countercultural myth gives us a pattern of identity and faith that is radically monotheistic.

Our understanding of sanctification as countercultural myth must push beyond the individual and into the various relationships that constitute our interpersonal and corporate lives. This becomes clear when we connect sanctification with the biblical theme of discipleship. Jesus talks about the life of discipleship in terms of the reign of God’s righteousness, God’s power of life against death—the kingdom of God. As we look to God’s self-revelation in the life-act of Jesus, we see that the kingdom of God is good news—the proclamation of justice, mercy, and liberty for the children of God. The kingdom is about the love of God for sinners and the promise of the new creation. Jesus’ message is about a new exodus of enduring freedom, a message of joy, victory, and salvation. It is about God’s power for life against death as the power of the nihil, of nothingness.10

For Christians, this means that our lives have a definite determination: we are called to live a life of suffering love in radical obedience to God and in self-disposing service towards others. We are to embody the pattern of Jesus’ existence in self-emptying love.11 Participating in the self-giving love of God prompts us to respond with self-giving. We are to live as agents of healing and catalysts for abundant life in relationship to others and to the world.

The fact that the kingdom of God cannot be reduced to personal morality is clear in the Gospel of Luke, where Jesus proclaims the purpose of his coming in the synagogue at Nazareth (4:16b-21). In this passage, Jesus clearly connects his message of God’s kingdom with the Jewish year of Jubilee, which was about liberty and return, freedom and restoration, forgiveness and fresh starts.12 Clearly, the Jubilee implies the need for social and ecological reform. It reminds us that everything we enjoy in this life belongs to God, that our well-being is bound up in community, and that our future depends on whether or not we are good stewards of that which has been entrusted to us.
By connecting the year of Jubilee with his proclamation of the kingdom of God, Jesus not only brought the power of God and the justice of grace to individuals but also taught that these were signs of the messianic Kingdom that will culminate in the new creation. God’s kingdom, interpreted in light of Jubilee, is the messianic year of liberty that begins the messianic time—time without end. A close reading of the Bible makes clear that the kingdom of God speaks to all the spheres of human existence: personal, interpersonal, social, and ecological.

Jesus’ main claim is that the kingdom of God has been inaugurated. Christians have been entrusted with the promise that this divine reign has broken into the world in Jesus’ life and ministry. As disciples of Jesus engaged in God’s sanctifying work, we are to do our part in every aspect of our existence to make this world more like the kingdom of God. In this way, God, through transformation in sanctification, makes us signs of the messianic kingdom. As we embody our witness to God’s reign through the renewal of the divine image in us, our lives point backwards to the in-breaking of the Kingdom and the messianic signs in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. As God makes us messianic signs by conforming our ways of being in the world to the Kingdom, our lives become living promises of the consummation of the new creation. As Wesley taught, God renews the earth through renewed human beings, as we participate in and act as “the channel of conveyance’ between creator and the rest of creation, so that ‘all blessings of God flow through him’ to the other creatures.” Wesley was therefore in good company when he claimed that there is no holiness without social holiness.

The good news is that willfulness is not the only way we can orient ourselves to life. The essence of the gospel and the main thrust of sanctification can be captured in a term used by Gerald May—willingness. Willingness focuses on self-surrender—letting go of our obsession with self-definition, self-reliance, and self-assertion and giving ourselves completely to God. This attitude is captured in the ancient spiritual discipline of submission. Willingness says yes to mystery and being alive in each moment in vibrant relationship to God. We gain a sense of wholeness and authenticity in life as we recognize that we are already a part of God’s life and history and as we commit to continually turning our lives over to the power of God, willingly and continuously responding to God’s grace by participating in the divine life. We are freed to notice the wonder in life.
and live in a posture of unceasing prayer, actively and passively. Willingness is clearly taught by Jesus: we lose our life if we try to gain it but gain it if we are willing to lose it (Matt. 10:39). In addition, we are commanded to deny ourselves and take up our cross (Matt. 16:24). As taught, embodied, and modeled by Jesus, the Christian life is not self-focused; rather, it manifests itself in radical surrender and obedience to God, as well as in service to others. Insofar as American culture overemphasizes utilitarian and expressive individualism and interprets its core values through the lens of willfulness, its basic orientation toward life is antithetical to the orientation and values communicated by the New Testament narratives. Therefore, any biblical—and United Methodist—notion of sanctification must offer resources for critiquing the distortions of American individualism and willfulness. Furthermore, it must reclaim the values of self-surrender and willingness. It must also struggle with the appropriate relationship between passive and active expressions of love, given all the dangers of unhealthy forms of selflessness that feminist scholars have cautioned us about in recent years.

**Conclusion**

All interpretations of sanctification are contextual, unless one is merely repeating Wesley and ignoring the need to make his teachings relevant for today. The discoveries in psychology discussed in this article regarding the deep structures of human identity and how identity is organized around myths are part of our contemporary context and should be engaged when thinking about sanctification. This is particularly the case, as we have seen, when trying to discern the roots of human sin. This also means that the church needs to engage in practices consistent with her tradition—practices that can surface our personal myths and critically engage them with the good news of the gospel.

As by God’s grace they become free from these enslaving myths, Christians need to be taught the meaning and rhythms of the sanctified life—the new, countercultural myth they are invited to inhabit. Thus, it is very important that congregations be taught how Christian identity is grounded in Baptism and how growth as children of God is nurtured in the Eucharist. In addition, churches should be more intentional about teaching the spiritual disciplines as a way to genuine freedom, life, and joy in the Holy Spirit and in encouraging their practice; for example, within the context of Covenant Discipleship groups. We need to be reminded that
spiritual discipline is not primarily about *doing* but about *being with*—being with God in loving relationship so that God can transform us.

Furthermore, any enduring doctrine of sanctification must resist the tendency to reduce the church’s rich teaching about God’s sanctifying grace to personal morality. If our teaching is to be biblical and Wesleyan, it must expand the notion of sanctification to include interpersonal healing through the difficult process of reconciliation and of building up Christian friendships and working toward political and economic justice and ecological reform. Such an opening-up of the doctrine could benefit from a conversation with liberation theologians and eco-theologians and a more serious treatment of the biblical theme of stewardship.17

Finally, the church must highlight and emphasize practices in her tradition that can surface cultural myths and judge them by the standard of Scripture. In this regard, our churches could benefit from a rich theology of worship that understands Sunday morning as a time when, as they honor and praise the one, true, living God revealed in Jesus Christ, worshipers can be weaned away from the cultural idols that dominate, distort, and consume their lives.18 In addition, the church could also encourage ministry at the margins of society where the dominant cultural myths, constantly jostling for hegemony, are called into question and even shattered in the face of the poor.

All these practices emerge from a biblical and Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification and provide continual resources for developing and sustaining such a rich doctrine. These considerations are only a beginning as we try to reinterpret what sanctification might mean in the twenty-first century, but such considerations are important if the doctrine is to have any significant influence on the generations to come.

Mark Emery Reynolds is pursuing a Ph.D. degree in theology at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee.

Endnotes

2. Ibid., 66.
3. The following description of the development of American culture and its
4. Ibid., 127.
6. Ibid., 23.
7. I have coined the terms polymythic, henomythic, and monomythic for the purpose of relating Fowler’s treatment of faith-identity patterns to the organization of cultural myths.
8. Bellah, xi.
13. Moltmann, 120.
17. For an in-depth treatment of the meaning of Christian stewardship from a United Methodist perspective, see the Winter 2002 issue of Quarterly Review.
I serve a congregation that is typical of many healthy mainline churches in North America. We worship God. We sing—mostly hymns, sometimes a chorus. We offer care to those who are in the midst of crisis. We gather in small groups—sometimes to learn, at other times just to meet one another. We serve those in need in the larger world.

While we acknowledge our similarities to other mainline denominations, we also know that there are important respects in which we are not like them. For instance, unlike the Pentecostal megachurch nearby, we do not raise our hands in worship; and, contrary to the conservative Baptist congregation down the block, we ordain women to the ministry.

This raises an important question: Is there a Christian way of life that is distinctively United Methodist? Most United Methodists would answer yes. The more difficult question is this: What makes this way of life distinctive? In responding to this question, one is soon confronted with several more questions: What practices constitute the Methodist way of life? Does this way of life shape human nature in particular ways? Do specific practices form us as people in ways that we can explain theologically?

It is clear from these questions that any view of a distinctively United Methodist way of life must be grounded in theological anthropology. For theological anthropology allows us to articulate the key components of our way of life: the nature of human beings as created in the image of God, the nature and function of God’s grace in the work of salvation, and the relationship between human nature and practice in the Christian life. In what follows, I suggest a theological anthropology rooted in Wesleyan theology and practice in order to outline a uniquely United Methodist way of life.

Human Nature and the Image of God

Any theological anthropology, including a United Methodist one, necessarily begins with this question: What is human nature in the light of God’s grace? The United Methodist understanding of human nature is shaped by
Wesley’s writings about the *imago Dei*—the image of God—which is his primary way of describing the process of salvation in our lives. The image of God—the relationship between God and human beings—is a gift from God, enacted because of the “character of God, his intention for humanity, his action to achieve his purpose.”¹ We are made for God, and we do not fulfill our humanity apart from the experience of divine presence.

And yet, while God draws us into communion, we resist God. We tend to ignore our vocation of communing with God and growing into God’s image because our love turns into self-love. We turn from the worship of God to self-idolatry, to *homo incurvatus in se*.² We exchange “the truth about God for a lie” (Rom. 1:25) and ignore reality, which is always oriented toward God. Thus the image of God is distorted.

So is created a fundamental paradox: we are drawn to God and yet we resist God. The divine image in us marks our capacity for God; yet the sin in us keeps God at a distance. This internal struggle is at the heart of a Wesleyan understanding of human nature.

For Wesley, freedom from this internal struggle, i.e., salvation, means nothing less than the restoration of the *imago Dei* in us—a process he calls “sanctification.” Since the *imago Dei* is distorted but not destroyed, human beings are able to turn toward God through the prior operation of God’s grace.³ For Wesley, this “prevenient” grace motivates us to participate in Christian practices even *before* explicit faith. This relationship between prevenient grace and practices as means of grace is evident in the following comment by Wesley on the Eucharist: “The Lord’s Supper was ordained by God to be a means of preventing [prevenient], justifying or sanctifying grace . . . [Thus] no fitness is required at the time of communicating, but a sense of our state, of our utter sinfulness and helplessness.”⁴

As we will see shortly, for Wesley, and for United Methodists, participating in Christian practices becomes a means of restoring the *imago Dei*—and constitutes our understanding of sanctification. Moreover, the sanctified life is a *disciplined* life, characterized by faithful engagement with a distinct set of Christian practices. Thomas Langford comments,

Wesley was aware that new birth into Christ can degenerate into sentimental emotionalism, ineffective religiosity, or irrelevant piety. The new person still lives in the flesh, and in the world, so the necessary corollary to liberation is discipline; the sanctified life is shaped by God’s demands and human faithfulness.⁵
The Formative Role of the Means of Grace

Thus, the sanctified life is shaped by experience and discipline, a dynamic Wesley called “practical divinity.” Very early in the life of the Methodist movement, Wesley realized that the promise of sanctification depends vitally on faithful practice of the means of grace. In the minutes from the second Methodist annual conference in August 1745, he makes this clear:

Q. How then should we wait for the fulfilling of this promise [entire sanctification]? A. In universal obedience, in keeping all the commandments, in denying ourselves and taking up our cross daily. These are the general means which God hath ordained for our receiving his sanctifying grace. The particular [means] are prayer, searching the Scripture, communicating and fasting.6

To be sure, Wesley acknowledges the potential abuse of the “general means,” the “forms” of religion: “[S]ome began to mistake the means for the end, to place religion rather in doing those outward works, than in a heart renewed after the image of God.” Later, however, he insists that the opposite extreme has become reality. Many have come to despise or discount the ordinances, divorcing external behaviors from spiritual realities.7 Wesley alludes to yet another perspective on the means of grace: those who have enthusiastically received the gospel, who “are usually restless in their awakened state. Trying in every way to escape from their sins, they are always ready to grasp at any new thing, any additional proposal that promises them relief or happiness. They most likely try nearly all of the outward means of grace, only to find no comfort in them.”8

My hunch is that most pastors have encountered persons like these in their congregations. There are those who are immersed in the activities and programs, the structure and organization of the church, with little interest in the spiritual life. There are others who sense that the Christian life must always be extraordinary and spontaneous; and then there are those who chase one religious fad after another, but with little depth of habit. This comes near to Langford’s earlier judgment of Christian experience as “sentimental emotionalism, ineffective religiosity, or irrelevant piety.”

Yet, for Wesley, sanctification is a process by which men and women come to a deeper and more profound understanding and experience of grace—a journey that is “a long obedience in the same direction,” to use
Eugene Peterson’s memorable phrase. All of us know people in our congregations who are solidly on this journey. We also know that they faithfully practice the means of grace.

Wesley defines the means of grace as prayer, individual and corporate; searching the Scriptures; and receiving the Lord’s Supper. He rejects the idea that these means could be understood as “seeking salvation by works”; instead, they are “my waiting on God by the means he has ordained, and expecting that He will meet me there, because he has promised to do so.”

In prayer we commune with God; indeed, this is a primary dimension of what it means to be created in God’s image. In the reading of Scripture we are encountered by the Word of God, which is both human and divine. In receiving the Lord’s Supper we acknowledge the material creation (bread, wine) as blessed by God and as a sacrament, as an “outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.”

From what has been said thus far, it is clear that, for United Methodists, an inextricable link exists between human nature in the light of God’s grace and the means of grace—the practices through which God’s presence works in our lives. Wesley suggested, perhaps even required, a specific set of practices for the Methodist people. I agree with Wesley that congregations are shaped by Christian practices. And yet, pastors know from their own experience that congregations often have particular traditions that shape in unique and often conflicting ways how these practices are understood and implemented in the church.

We all know that we often do some things in the church as routine activities without understanding the historical basis for doing them. The fact is, though, that Christian practices like Holy Communion or a healing service or hymn singing are rooted in sustained reflection on Scripture and tradition. We can also do things in routine ways that are shaped more by the culture than by Christian tradition, by the patterns of a secular environment more than by the faith. For example, some Christians may be more influenced by an achievement-oriented and self-serving lifestyle than by practices such as hospitality, even though the external behaviors may appear to be very similar. Wesley would describe such people as having the outward form of religion without the appropriate inward disposition.

These divergent understandings and practice of Christian practices raise this question: Just what do we mean by “Christian practice”? I find Craig Dykstra and Dorothy Bass’s definition helpful: Christian practices
are “things Christian people do together over time in response to and in the light of God’s active presence for the life of the world.”

This definition is helpful for illuminating the peculiarly United Methodist way of life I am recommending. This way of life, the life of sanctification, consists of a dynamic interplay of certain practices done “together over time” and “God’s active presence”—an interplay through which human nature itself is transformed “for the life of the world.” In what follows, I single out four of these practices. To be sure, there are many more, but for me these four “means of grace” are at the heart of a Wesleyan vision of human nature and exemplary of a uniquely United Methodist way of life.

Toward a United Methodist Way of Life

Singing

In singing their faith, Methodists have been shaped by the hymns of Charles Wesley. Indeed, these hymns are in themselves a “little body of experimental and practical divinity,” meditations on, for example, divine grace.

And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Savior’s blood!
Died he for me? who caused his pain! For me? who him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be, that thou, my God, shouldst die for me.

There is in these words a deep and profound sense of human sin, and a corresponding awe and wonder about the gift of grace. This grace is evident in hymns testifying to the Incarnation (“Hark! The Herald Angels Sing”), which leads a passion (“O Love Divine, What Hast Thou Done?”) that is rooted in forgiveness (“’Tis finished! the Messiah dies”). And yet the life and death of Jesus are followed by the miracle of resurrection; and thus on Easter we sing, “Christ the Lord Is Risen Today!”

As human beings we share in the death and resurrection of Jesus. This is life in God’s grace. And grace always leads us into service, as made explicit in the hymn “A Charge to Keep I Have.” The liturgical year begins with anticipation of the coming of Jesus Christ and is completed in the desire, never fully realized in this human pilgrimage, of the coming Kingdom. Charles Wesley’s Advent text carries within it a profound statement about the future of humanity: “Born thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a king, born to reign in us forever, now thy gracious kingdom bring.”

Here a Christian practice leads us to the awareness of “God’s active pres-
ence for the life of the world.” In these hymns by Charles Wesley one senses a vision of human nature. And yet there is a problem in our tradition. Despite John Wesley’s insistence that we should “learn these tunes before you learn any others; afterwards learn as many as you please,”16 our singing is sometimes shaped by other streams of Christian tradition, from revivalist gospel to contemporary praise to social gospel—music that does not always possess the depth of doctrinal richness found in the writings of Charles Wesley.

Testimony
Another important practice for us has been testimony: speaking the truth about what God has done in our lives. Undoubtedly the most prominent example of testimony in our tradition was that of John Wesley himself, particularly his account of an experience at a meeting on Aldersgate Street in London on May 24, 1738, when he uttered those famous words: “I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ.” Albert Outler surmises that “this is easily the most familiar passage in all Wesley’s writings. In the Methodist tradition, it stands as the equivalent of Paul’s experience on the Damascus road and Augustine’s conversion in the Milanese garden.”17

Wesley’s Aldersgate testimony has elicited a variety of appraisals from his followers. While acknowledging that it has been a “sacred event for United Methodists,” Roberta Bondi argues that the effects of an “Aldersgate spirituality” are “very destructive,”18 for two reasons: First, such a spirituality ignores the complexity of human life and describes an end point of the Christian life that cannot be experienced at its beginning. Second, “deep attitudes of the heart come a little at a time through a long process of practice, prayer, training, and especially God’s grace.”19

Pastors can confirm Bondi’s comments from their own experience in the congregation. The person who has an instantaneous, life-transforming experience is an exception. The vast majority of people experience growth in grace over time through faithful, ongoing engagement in spiritual practices. And many pastors have had the experience of listening to parishioners who have become discouraged because they have not had an “Aldersgate-type” experience that brought assurance and inner peace. Life is more complex than that. Even John Wesley came to realize that a single experience is not enough. Albert Outler notes, “In the six months after ‘Aldersgate’ [Wesley] reports numerous instances of acute spiritual depression, equal in severity to anything preceding.”20
David Lowes Watson argues that Aldersgate was a powerful affirmation of the works of piety in the Christian life but then insists, “If we interpret that moment of illumination and assurance 250 years ago as both the power and the form of our Christian discipleship,” we commit a serious error. The experience might serve as the power of Christian discipleship, but that is only “half of the equation.” The form of Christian discipleship, “which [Wesley] was always at pains to stress as concomitant with the power, was that which would either render grace effectual in a Christian’s life, or would quench it.”

Bondi’s and Watson’s evaluations of Wesley’s Aldersgate testimony are persuasive; yet there is a broader context to the experience. In journal entries prior to Aldersgate, Wesley notes that he had been reading the New Testament; he attended worship at Saint Paul’s Cathedral in London, where the anthem was taken from Ps. 130 (“Out of the deep have I called unto Thee, O LORD”); he gave spiritual direction; he fasted and took the Lord’s Supper as often as possible. Is it not better to interpret Wesley’s Aldersgate experience within the framework of these additional practices? After all, as Dykstra has noted, “engagement in the church’s practices puts us in a position where we may recognize and participate in God’s grace in the world.”

The power of Wesley’s testimony is that it conveys the grace of God, which comes to us as a gift. Its limitation is that it does not, at least in the form in which it is given in our tradition, adequately expose the surrounding practices that both make the experience possible and help to sustain it.

Generosity with the Poor

The poor were at the heart of John Wesley’s ministry and theology. The Methodist movement began among the poor of eighteenth-century England. And yet, from the beginning, sustaining a relationship with and generosity toward to the poor was a struggle for the Methodists. Bishop Kenneth Carder reflects on John Wesley’s sermon “Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity.”

The Christian gospel has within it the seeds of ineffectiveness. Christian faith leads to diligence and frugality, which in turn often result in wealth and worldly success. Wealth and success then lead to the presumption of self-sufficiency and independence. In other words, affluence and success made the early Methodists less responsive to the gospel of grace.
What practices could sustain relationships with the poor and generosity toward them? The rules of the United Societies included the expectation of “doing good, by being in every kind merciful after their power; as they have opportunity, doing good of every possible sort, and, as far as possible, to all men.”24 These practices were best carried out within class meetings, gatherings of Christians for the purpose of mutual accountability. Indeed, the class meeting was a kind of laboratory for the relationship between doctrine and discipline.

Not only was generosity to the poor a part of the corporate and institutional life of the early Methodists, it was at the core of the church’s proclamation. Carder notes, “Wesley’s preaching elicited the most positive response among the poor and marginalized.”25 Generosity to the poor was a part of Wesley’s practice as evidenced in his proclamation, his missionary activity, and his ordering of the church’s life. These practices were deeply rooted in his theology of grace and its congruence with a practice of generosity with the poor. Theodore Jennings suggests that the development of this practice was at the heart of the resolution of Wesley’s vocational crisis and is the key, to a greater degree than the Aldersgate experience, to understanding Wesley’s life.26

A few years ago I participated in the beginning of an ongoing relationship between a North American congregation and the Evangelical Methodist Church of Bolivia. Our orientation was led by a missionary who had served in Bolivia, primarily in the area of healthcare. When the Bolivian government allowed the Methodist Church to begin mission work, in the 1920s, it was exclusively in healthcare and education. The educational strategy was to educate the elite children and young people of Bolivia, with the hope that such a mission would benefit the lives of the larger society. Two schools, the Institutos Americanas (one in La Paz, the capital city; the other in Cochabamba) were established. Over a period of fifty years these schools had trained many of the country’s leaders, including presidents and cabinet officials. Yet, most missionaries and Bolivian Methodists concluded that such a strategy had effected little change in the church and in the society. And so an alternative strategy was developed, in which the focus would be on the poor and on the local congregations of which they were a part. The result was the renewal of Methodism in Bolivia. For me, this seems almost to be a modern-day parable of Wesley’s movement in eighteenth-century England.
One of Wesley’s most-quoted statements comes in an essay written near the end of his life, entitled “Thoughts upon Methodism,” in which he writes, “I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid, lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power.”

Let’s take Wesley’s warning to heart and ask: how are United Methodists in danger of becoming a “dead sect,” exhibiting “faith without works” (James 2)? Again Wesley provides the clue: “I fear, wherever riches have increased, the essence of religion, the mind that was in Christ, has decreased in the same proportion.”

Our early Methodist experience should teach us that the practice of generosity with the poor goes hand in hand with an understanding of human nature as “graced.” Thus, the poor are able to hear a message of grace apart from works—as good news.

However, the poor can teach us a deeper understanding of our doctrinal heritage. Kenneth Carder’s assertion is both prophetic and liberating:

The poor, therefore, were not only the beneficiaries of Wesley’s proclamation of grace, they were channels of that grace to Wesley. The poor and marginalized helped to shape the central theme of his preaching: God’s prevenient, justifying and sanctifying grace which transforms individuals and societies.

Much of my ministry has been carried out in settings “where riches have increased.” Wesley’s preaching and teaching on this subject are rich in their treatment of the various New Testament traditions identified by Sondra Ely Wheeler: wealth can be a stumbling block (“Thoughts upon Methodism”); it can be a competing object of devotion (see Wesley’s reflection on Jesus’ insistence that “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” [Matt. 6:21]); and wealth can be a resource for human needs (“The Use of Money”).

**Searching the Scriptures**

In his sermon “The Means of Grace,” Wesley identifies searching the Scriptures as an ordinary channel of God’s grace. Searching the Scriptures provided the means by which the early Methodists measured belief (“found the grace of God”) and practice (“thoroughly furnished unto all good works”). For Wesley, searching the Scriptures includes meditating upon
them and listening to sermons and lectures, and he gave specific guidance about this essential Christian practice. It is in searching the Scriptures that we discover the movement of God's grace in our lives. For Wesley, God's grace starts us on a journey whose goal is the full restoration of the divine image in us. The journey begins with a recognition that we are sinners; leads on to repentance and then to faith, acceptance of God's gift of regeneration, and new birth; and finds its completion in the restoration of the image of God. This dynamic process of sanctification is a journey in holiness: inward holiness (the love of God) and outward holiness (the love of neighbor).

Searching the Scriptures is much more than mastery of content (information). It is the process of “hearing, reading and meditating” by which the Christian experiences reproof, correction, and training in righteousness (see 2 Tim. 3:16-17); thus, this practice leads to transformation. In my ten-year experience as a teacher or coteacher of Disciple Bible study, I have seen men and women transformed by a disciplined and sustained reading of Scripture. They come to see themselves in relationship to the God who makes a covenant with Israel; they confess their own temptation to break covenant with God and to ignore the voices of the prophets; they sense the call of Jesus to become disciples; they struggle with the fear and confusion associated with his death and participate in the disciples' amazement at the Resurrection; they reflect on the expansion of the gospel to those who are outsiders, and they struggle with the issues facing the earliest churches, from sexuality to materialism to power. Finally, they engage in an exercise in which spiritual gifts are identified, and they share the Lord's Supper together in a service based on John Wesley's covenant service. While Disciple is an ecumenical study (it is never identified as United Methodist, and the scholars represent a range of traditions, including Jewish and Roman Catholic), its method can be traced back to a practice of intentional study of Scripture that Wesley identified as a means of grace. Many of the participants in Disciple testify that the discipline of searching the Scriptures has deepened their experience of grace, while, for others, it has opened their lives to God's grace for the first time.

**Recovering Human Nature through Christian Practices**

My contention is that John Wesley contributed a profound understanding of human nature to the history of Christian theology, one that was truly “a third alternative to Pelagian optimism and Augustinian pessimism with
The human flaw, original sin, made practices necessary, for without them a disciplined life was impossible; the human potential, sanctification and the renewal of the imago Dei, gave to the practices a motivational power and an intellectual rationale. Thus, Wesley’s theology was grounded in practice; indeed, his theology took shape in lectures to annual conferences, responses to the questions of preachers, establishment of rules for class meetings, sermons, hymns, and doctrinal responses to other communities. I have identified four practices that were integral to the early Methodist movement: singing, testimony, generosity to the poor, and searching the Scriptures. Other practices could be added to this list: observance of the Lord’s Supper, private and corporate prayer, fasting, healing ministry, class meetings, and Christian conferencing.

The four practices have an intimate relationship with Wesley’s understanding of human nature, and, in like manner, they address fundamental human needs: worship of God with our entire selves, being truthful people, seeing the equal status of all people as graced creatures before God, and grounding our experience in God’s speech to us. These four practices, I have suggested, helped to shape a Wesleyan vision of human nature and, together, constitute a United Methodist way of life.

The question that arises for United Methodist pastors today can be stated as follows: Do these continue to be our practices, and, if so, do we do them well? That is a judgment I will leave to others. But I would insist that the loss of these practices, and others identified with our tradition, will lead to an impoverishment of a United Methodist way of life—of our worship, our witness, our service, and our study. And the recovery of these practices will connect us with the good news of God’s grace. The moral philosopher Alasdair Maclntyre writes of the necessity of “a telos which transcends the limited goods of practices by constituting the good of a whole human life.” Our human tendency to substitute “means of grace” for grace and form for power leads us to confuse institutions with practices. The challenge for us United Methodists is to find the proper balance between telos and practices. As we have seen, John Wesley has profound wisdom for how to accomplish this. The overriding telos of the Christian life, says Wesley, is the restoration of the imago Dei. However, this goal is possible only when we engage in basic Christian practices, among them singing the faith, giving testimony to God’s grace, exercising generosity to
the poor, and searching the Scriptures. Our practices anticipate the ultimate practice of God, an action that will restore human nature and complete the unfinished work of grace.

Finish, then, thy new creation; pure and spotless let us be.
Let us see thy great salvation perfectly restored in thee;
changed from glory into glory, till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee, lost in wonder, love, and praise.38

Kenneth H. Carter, Jr., is pastor of Mount Tabor United Methodist Church in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

Endnotes
2. Ibid., 35.
13. Wainwright, 201.
15. Ibid., 196.
19. Ibid., 25.
28. Ibid.
30. See Sermon XXIII in *John Wesley’s Forty-four Sermons*.
33. See ibid.
34. See John Wesley, “The Way to the Kingdom,” in John Wesley’s Forty-four Sermons, 79ff.
36. See Wesley’s sermon “On the Means of Grace” for a discussion of the Lord’s Supper; on fasting, see his sermon on Matt. 6:16-18 (Sermon on the Mount), in John Wesley’s Forty-four Sermons, as well as the General Rules in the Book of Discipline; on healing ministry, see “Healing Services and Prayers,” The United Methodist Book of Worship (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992), 613ff; on class meetings, see Watson, Covenant Discipleship; and on the subject of Christian conferencing, see Kenneth L. Carder, Living Our Beliefs: The United Methodist Way (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1998), 90.
Itinerancy Is Dead—But It Can Live Again

JOHN G. McELHENNEY

John Wesley’s itinerancy died sometime in our Methodist past. The precise date cannot be fixed. But my best guess, judging from the state of rigor mortis, is that death occurred more than a hundred years ago.¹ So let us bury it and call our United Methodist plan by its proper name: an appointment system for matching churches and clergy.

It is appropriate, however, before we entomb itinerancy, to pay tribute to it. Most simply put, Wesley’s itinerant system used men of the social margin, who were unacceptable for ordination in the Church of England, to go out to persons living on the spiritual margin, men and women who were not being reached by the established church.

Wesley’s itinerancy functioned as a supplement to, not a replacement for, the ministry of the Church of England.² Methodist preachers did not supplant the parish priests; they did what eighteenth-century Anglican clergy were failing to do. But as the itinerants did those things, they needed the parish priests to carry out the responsibilities assigned to them.

Among the parish priests’ tasks were these: they led the prayer-book services of morning and evening prayer; they celebrated the Lord’s Supper and administered the sacrament of Baptism; they presided at weddings and funerals, offered pastoral care, and assisted the poor. As university-trained men, they guarded Christian tradition and interpreted it for their age.

Wesley, commenting on the Church of England, said, “I hold all the doctrines of the Church of England. I love her Liturgy. I approve her plan of discipline, and only wish it could be put in execution.”³ Putting spiritual disciplines into practice was something that Anglican clergy did not do well in Wesley’s day. Neither were they good at reaching persons who did not darken the doors of their churches.

Some people stayed away from church because of distance. The burgeoning Industrial Revolution was creating new ad hoc towns, yet it took an act of Parliament, not a bishop’s decision, to create a new parish.
Hence, many people lived and worked where there was a long walk to church.

Others felt uncomfortable in their neighborhood church. Class distinctions relegated them, at best, to the status of stepchildren in the family of God. The clothes they wore, the words they spoke, the lives they lived—all set them apart from the ladies and gentlemen who danced at the manor house and prayed in the best pews.

Those marginalized men and women were the persons Wesley trained his itinerants to reach. And they were effective in doing so for a number of reasons. They were utterly committed to Christ and unflinching in their loyalty to Wesley. They were young and unmarried and as poor and unschooled as many of the men and women they tried to reach. Finally, and of considerable importance, the itinerants were socially unacceptable to the parish clergy, which, of course, made them particularly acceptable in the homes and hearts of people who were themselves socially inferior in England’s rigidly stratified society.

Methodist itinerants, men of low rank and uncertain breeding, ministered among men and women who felt as if they too did not fit in anywhere. Unlike their ancestors, who were rooted in the same parish and social class for centuries, the men and women to whom Methodism appealed were rootless. The traditions that measured every step taken by their ancestors lacked authority for them.

People who had been long settled in work, home, and church were on the move in eighteenth-century industrializing Britain. They were seekers in every aspect of their lives: jobs, places to live, social status, belief in God. For those unsettled women and men, Wesley’s itinerants were prophets of a God who had singled out for divine favor a people living on the Egyptian margin, a God whose Messiah had sent out seventy itinerants and ordered them to live on handouts.

Wesley’s itinerancy was effective because it was a ministry of unsettled persons for unsettled persons. The only difference between the preachers and the people they contacted was this: The preachers were unsettled seekers who had been found by God, whereas the people were unsettled seekers who did not know what they were looking for.

**Itinerancy in America**

The same pattern held true in America: Methodist itinerants sprang into
their saddles and rode out in search of men and women who lived too far from the nearest church to participate in its worship services or who were alienated from their nearby church for social or theological reasons.

Growing numbers of Americans responded positively to Methodism for the same reason that it gained ground in Britain: there was something apostolic about the preachers. They were utterly committed to Christ and unflinching in their loyalty, first, to John Wesley, later, to Francis Asbury. In addition, they were young and unmarried and as poor and unschooled as many of their converts. Finally, they were unacceptable to the leaders of American society, both clergy and lay—which made Methodist itinerants particularly welcome in the homes and hearts of persons living on America’s margins.

While the itinerants were similar on both sides of the Atlantic, the ecclesiastical situations in which they worked were vastly different. In Britain, as we have seen, Wesley and his preachers presupposed the liturgical, sacramental, pastoral, and intellectual ministries of the Church of England. But in the New World, with a few exceptions, there were no priests of the Church of England to provide the prayer-book worship and sacraments upon which Wesley’s understanding of Methodism depended. Therefore the itinerants had to assume priestly tasks—first, on an ad hoc basis, which Asbury denounced, and later on a foundation constructed by Wesley.

In September of 1784, Wesley devised a constitution for American Methodism. He instituted an ordained ministry, supplied a prayer-book liturgy, and provided articles of religion. These were accepted by Wesley’s preachers in America when they met later that year, during the Christmas season, in Baltimore. Almost as soon, however, as that conference adjourned, its members revealed that they were unskilled at doing the things expected of parish priests—with the result that the ecclesiastical context within which Wesley’s itinerants ministered in Britain was missing in America.

Even though American Methodism now had ordained deacons and priests, they continued to function like lay preachers. They were good at doing what itinerants did: reaching the unreached and disciplining the undisciplined. But they threw out Wesley’s prayer-book worship and ignored his advice to administer the Lord’s Supper every Sunday. Later, when the itinerating deacons and elders settled down and moved into parsonages and remained in one place for a year or more, they began to do a somewhat better job of handling the traditional priestly duties.
In summary, itinerating Methodist preachers were remarkably successful at first, because people recognized something apostolic about them. Their faces glowed with their devotion to Christ. Their unmarried state and their willingness to live on handouts testified that they had committed sexual fulfillment and worldly ambition to God. Their movement from place to place revealed that they were men under orders. Their own position at the edge of American society corresponded to the marginal situation of, to use a crass modern phrase, their “target audience.” In short, Methodist itinerants embodied an austere Christianity that appealed to men and women who were living austere lives.4

Itinerancy began to change, however, when Methodist converts started living disciplined Methodist lives. Their hard work and penny-pinching made it possible for them to move away from the margins and edge toward the center of their communities. As they gained respectability, they became less and less comfortable with preachers who came across as hicks. Also, in the eyes of some male observers, the itinerants looked like something less than macho males. Respectable men in American society did not remain unmarried. How could you prove you were a man if you did not sire children? Also, respectable married men did not voluntarily accept poverty and gladly let their families survive on the handouts of others. How can you be a man if you do not support your family? So the Methodist preachers, not wishing to look like sexual misfits and social outcasts, began to marry and to lobby for better salaries and furnished parsonages.

Families who lived in furnished parsonages soon accumulated bits and pieces of their own—stuff that made them increasingly reluctant to change houses every year. So they favored longer appointments. At the same time, their congregants found it embarrassing to explain to their neighbors why Methodist preachers moved so often. After all, their social betters, the Episcopalians and Presbyterians, kept their ministers for long periods; even their social equals, the Baptists, did not have a new face in the pulpit annually. So the maximum time that Methodist clergy could remain in one episcopal appointment grew throughout the nineteenth century.

With Methodist preachers living for longer periods in one community, their defects became obvious. Socially, many exhibited “foot-in-mouth” disease. Intellectually, they were no match for clergy of denominations that supported higher education for their leaders. In addition, Methodist families began to send their sons—and later, their daughters—to college.
Increasingly, self-educated Methodist preachers faced pews occupied by worshipers with college degrees. So American Methodism gave in during the middle years of the nineteenth century to college-educated preachers and later to seminary-trained pastors. The result was that local church officials, enjoying the services of better-educated and socially graceful Methodist clergy, plumped for longer appointments.

The Demise of the Itinerancy

Not surprisingly, then, sometime around the close of the nineteenth century, itinerancy died. Methodist preachers ceased to itinerate in any sense that was true to Wesley’s plan. They were moderately well educated and reasonably effective parish priests. They were no longer men of society’s margins reaching out to men and women living in similar situations. Methodist pastors, who were appointed by bishops, were themselves the parish priests whose ministries Wesley’s itinerancy had been created to supplement.

Even though Wesley’s itinerancy has been dead for a century, instead of burying it, United Methodism continues to affirm it. The most recent Book of Discipline announces that “the itinerant system is the accepted method of The United Methodist Church by which ordained elders are appointed by the bishop to fields of labor.” What those words mean is that United Methodism has an appointment system, not an itinerant one.

In general, appointing pastors works better than calling them. Bishops and cabinets, if they know their ministers and congregations, can avoid some of the mistakes made when pulpit committees read résumés, check references, and listen to trial sermons. Also, when a mismatch occurs, the appointment system makes it possible to remove the pastor before irreparable damage is done.

Specifically, United Methodism has a modified appointment system—modified, because in recent years the bishop’s power of appointment has been limited by the requirement to consult with the minister and the church before fixing an appointment. More work needs to be done in this area. With so many clergy being second-career persons (some with spouses established in jobs and children in schools), the persons who bear the appointive power need to allow their decisions to mature over an extended period. One way to provide this time is to define appointment making as a year-round process. There is no reason, except history, for announcing appointments at annual conference. So why not make new
clergy–church matches whenever they are necessary?

And why not acknowledge that the parsonage system belongs to a concept of itinerancy that is dead? Certainly, there is nothing to suggest that United Methodism is growing more rapidly than other denominations because its parsonage system allows it to shuffle pastors more frequently. Therefore, church-owned parsonages could be eliminated gradually as the length of the average appointment is extended.

The first consequence, then, of burying itinerancy is the possibility of looking honestly at the appointment system and its parsonage appendage. With the blinkers of itinerancy removed, it should be possible to fashion an approach to matching churches and clergy that is appropriate to today’s world. And when that begins to happen, United Methodism may have the grace to allow a new itinerancy to be born.

A new itinerancy will echo the essence of Wesley’s, in that it will be led by a person who can articulate with extraordinary clarity the biblical way of salvation for the twenty-first century. This leader will welcome God-called men and women from the margins of American life and send them out to persons living on the margins. These messengers will not meet United Methodism’s current ordination requirements, but their Wesley-like leader will hold them accountable to the biblical way of salvation and to clear standards for measuring their evangelistic effectiveness.

Using that description, it is possible to imagine a number of new itinerant ministries. But to illustrate let me suggest a model that, as a grain of sand irritates an oyster to produce a pearl, may force United Methodism to allow something to happen that will be as innovative in twenty-first-century America as Wesley’s itinerancy was in eighteenth-century Britain. My irritating grain of sand begins with this question: Who are the people living on the margins of American society today?

**Contemporary America’s Marginalized People**

Many answers can be given to that question: the millions of persons who cannot swim comfortably in the English-language current of American life, the millions whose skin color causes them to be subjected to formal and informal profiling. New itinerant ministries may develop in response to the needs of those persons and many others living on the margins of the American way of life.

But for my illustration of an itinerancy that may irritate today’s United
Methodist hierarchy as Wesley’s irritated the Anglican hierarchy of his day, let us consider the growing number of Americans who are not living in nuclear families. Wade Clark Roof, in his book *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion*, writes, “In 1970, 40 percent of Americans lived in nuclear families with children present under the age of 18. By 1990 that percentage had fallen to 26.3, almost a fourth of which are stepfamilies, sometimes called ‘blended families.’”6 These findings mean that nearly three-fourths of all Americans are either living alone or living together in some arrangement that, traditionally, is viewed as being at the edge of social acceptance. Those who are not living by themselves are part of households that consist “mainly of gay and heterosexual cohabiters where no recognized marital or blood ties are involved.” Roof calls these households “nonfamily households.”7

What Roof says next is of particular importance for the new itinerancy that I am proposing. He notes, “The family types currently growing—singles, divorced and separated, and the so-called nonfamily households—show lower levels of involvement in, and support of, organized religion, though by no means less personal faith” than do traditional family types. Yet in the eyes of many persons living in those new households—persons who often are not without faith—“conventional religious congregations look like bastions of traditional familism and heterosexual culture.”8

What kind of messenger of God’s love is likely to be welcomed by men and women who feel that churches are fortresses of family values and hotbeds of homophobia? Not the regular clergy of a denomination that declares homosexuality to be “incompatible with Christian teaching”; that insists that “self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be . . . ordained as ministers”; that denies its clergy the right to “celebrate homosexual unions.”9 Who, then, are the possible carriers of the good news of God’s love to persons living on the edges of America’s family-values society? Perhaps the openly gay men and lesbian women whom The United Methodist Church refuses to ordain.

Homosexuals are no more acceptable for ordination in United Methodism today than Wesley’s lay preachers were acceptable for Anglican ordination in the eighteenth century. Even Wesley himself, loyal Anglican priest that he was, shuddered initially at the idea of an unordained person daring to preach. When he learned that a layman, Thomas Maxfield, was preaching in London, Wesley dug spurs into his horse and raced home,
prepared to denounce Maxfield. Susanna Wesley listened to her son and then told him that Maxfield was as surely called by God to preach as he was. “Hear Maxfield,” she counseled. Wesley heeded his mother’s advice, heard Maxfield preach, and decided that God was speaking through him. The result was that Wesley, convinced that God could use lay preachers, decided to ignore his church’s prohibition of lay preaching.¹⁰

Today’s United Methodism needs someone like Wesley—someone who is loyal to the denomination; who loves its history, doctrine, and polity; who is personally devout; who stands apart from society’s commercial values; and who is a born organizer. This new Wesley must be willing to take a great risk in order to reach persons living at the margins of America’s often homophobic society—the risk of being the instigator of an itinerancy using openly gay and lesbian Christians whom The United Methodist Church refuses to ordain.

Needless to say, there would be a significant difference between Wesley’s itinerants and the new ones. His itinerants were excluded from their church’s ordained ministry, but their style of life was not declared to be “incompatible with Christian teaching.”¹¹ Therefore, if United Methodism is to allow a new itinerancy of gay men and lesbian women to develop under the leadership of one of its ordained ministers, it must draw a lesson from its own history. Many nineteenth-century Methodists refused to condemn slavery because the Bible accepted it. Also, many nineteenth- and twentieth-century Methodists refused to accept the ordination of women because the Bible condemned it. Those positions are now seen to have been wrongheaded and morally indefensible in the light of the Bible’s overall message.

It seems unlikely that The United Methodist Church will soon reach a similar conclusion about its stance on homosexuality. Indeed, the percentage of General Conference delegates voting to retain the prohibition has been growing, from about 60 percent in 1996 to approximately 66 percent in 2000. That change resulted from a well-funded campaign that included warning General Conference delegates that the church would be split if they changed its anti-gay position.

So if a new itinerancy is to be allowed to exist at the fringes of United Methodism, a considerable number of United Methodists must entertain the possibility that they are as mistaken about the Bible as were their pro-slavery and anti-ordination-of-women ancestors. Even if they are not ready
to abandon their stance on homosexuality, they need, at least, to look again at the biblical Jesus, beginning with his genealogy in Matt. 1:1-16. That family tree gives flesh to something Jesus proposed time and again during his ministry, a new way of seeing people—not as rich or poor, pure or impure, insiders or outsiders, but as beloved children of God. Another way of making this point is to say that God used a mixed bag of men and women to provide ancestors for Jesus, such persons as Judah, Tamar, Rahab, Boaz, Ruth, David, Bathsheba, Solomon, and Ahaz.

Although the family tree of Jesus sheltered a considerable number of society’s dominators—those who determine who’s in and who’s out—Jesus himself was an outsider. He grew up in Nazareth, a place proverbial for its inability to supply good things (see John 1:46). His father was probably a carpenter, and therefore his family was from a marginalized peasant class. From a distance, he observed men who had become wealthy at the expense of the farmers and fishermen he knew intimately. No wonder, then, that Jesus became a social prophet who denounced the oppression of the poor by the rich; who welcomed all and sundry; whose family “was open-ended in that it included the poor, the children, the tax collectors, and the general riffraff of society were invited to belong.”12

Those biblical materials may be no more persuasive today than was the argument in the nineteenth century that God opposed slavery even though the Bible accepted it. What is needed, therefore, is for United Methodism’s leaders to allow something to happen that will be similar to the way the Church of England permitted John Wesley to retain his ordination, even though he was establishing an itinerant ministry that was contrary to the church’s polity. His church disapproved of what he was doing, but its bishops refrained from exercising their power to defrock him. He, in turn, maintained his loyalty to his church’s doctrinal heritage and tutored his itinerants in it. Then he used them to reach men and women who were not being reached by the church that, grudgingly, allowed his irregular ministry to proceed.

The word allow is particularly important in what I am proposing. There is no way that a new itinerancy of gay men and lesbian women could be inaugurated by General Conference legislation. Indeed, even if, miraculously, such an itinerancy were to be legislated, it would not be like Wesley’s. It would simply be one more committee-defined and conference-refined program. The whole point of what Wesley did was that it operated
at the fringes of the established church. It was deplored but allowed by the hierarchy—allowed because no one could doubt the genuineness of Wesley’s Christian faith; deplored because he was taking it upon himself to use persons who could not be ordained by his church to reach out to men and women who felt unwelcome in his church.

The proof of Wesley’s new pudding, of course, was its success: God used it. Likewise, the test of a new itinerancy—one using God-called gay men and lesbian women—will be the same as Wesley’s: does God seem to be at work in it? Are the words of the new itinerants rhyming with the spoken and unspoken yearnings of men and women living on the margins of America’s family-values society? And are their words rhyming with the Word of God made flesh in Jesus the Christ?

Conclusion

A number of new itinerancies can be imagined, each reflecting the Wesleyan model. That model, as we have seen, centers on an ordained minister of the established church—Anglican in Wesley’s day, United Methodist in ours. This leader’s loyalty to the church’s history, doctrine, and polity is unswerving, but it is accompanied by two charismatic qualities: an ability to articulate the biblical way of salvation with extraordinary clarity for the present age and a readiness to allow new occasions to call forth extraordinary ways of reaching men and women who find the established church unappealing or outright repellent.

This model could serve, of course, as the template for deploying persons from a variety of America’s margins as missioners to persons who feel themselves marginalized by mainstream United Methodism. Therefore, the example used in this article—using God-called gay men and lesbian women to reach persons who find themselves living at the edge of a homophobic culture—has been chosen as the grain of sand that may irritate the oyster of United Methodism into producing a pearl. Other new itinerancies may effectively reach persons living on other margins. But because they are likely to be less controversial, they are likely to be less attention-getting than was Wesley’s original itinerancy. So I chose the most dramatic example I could imagine, in the hope of provoking United Methodism to allow a new itinerancy to be born and in the hope too that when a new Wesley (more likely a woman than a man) appears and begins to deploy new itinerants, United Methodism will graciously, even if grudgingly, hold onto the new
movement and not let it become a separate church.

A contemporary student of the Anglican tradition, Frederick Quinn, chaplain at Washington National Cathedral, laments the Church of England’s handling of Wesley and his people called Methodists.

With any sign of flexibility or accommodation, the Church of England could have both kept this extraordinary figure and his followers as part of its fold and been enriched by their contribution, but no such offer was ever tendered.13

May similar words not be intoned a century from now about United Methodism’s failure to keep a new extraordinary figure and her followers as part of its fold.

Endnotes

1. Ten years ago, a book’s title said that itinerancy was in crisis, not dead; see Donald E. Messer, ed., Send Me? Itinerancy in Crisis (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991).
3. Ibid., 80-81.
4. The material in this paragraph and the three succeeding ones summarizes the research presented by Christine Leigh Heyrman in Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., 236.
10. Richard P. Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists (Nashville:
Abingdon, 1995), 115.
The Church’s Mission in Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century

F. THOMAS TROTTER

The Willson Lecture printed below was presented on Friday, October 18, 2002, in Nashville, Tennessee, during a banquet honoring directors and staff of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry of The United Methodist Church.

I am very pleased to have been invited to give the 2002 Willson Lecture at the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry. This lectureship was funded by one of the many faithful United Methodist laypersons who believed in the importance of higher education and the church. Over the years, the lectures have been aimed precisely at the Willson vision. I am honored to be included.

I have a vision for the church in higher education. My vision has two elements: to articulate the historic Methodist tradition of learning and to sustain and maintain the family of institutions that belong to that tradition.

The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry is central to this vision. Without considerable attention to reflection and maintenance, I fear that The United Methodist Church will continue to drift into distraction and neglect of this mission for higher education.

Like all agencies, the board from time to time has to rethink and restate its mission. The cultural environment in the new century is much different than it was at midcentury. Over time, organizations founded for missional purposes may slide into purely maintenance roles. The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry is not immune to this fate.

There are understandable reasons for this. Simply maintaining the
programs assigned by the General Conference requires energy often beyond the board’s resources. In all organizations, there is a gravity principle at work: The way we do things tends to become more central than the reasons for doing things. A bureaucracy is an organization that has become opaque to its purpose. What you see in bureaucracy is apparatus. What you don’t always see is aspiration.

Unity of purpose and vision struggle for attention. The demands of our assignments frequently overwhelm our best intentions to focus on our larger mission. Sören Kierkegaard, a popular figure when I was younger, told the story of a gaggle of geese in a farmyard. They spent their time talking about themselves, the wonders of geese, their wings, and their powers of navigation. One thing they did not do, said Kierkegaard, is fly.

My years as general secretary of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry were devoted to trying to find reasons for unity of purpose, not only in the board but also in the entire range of institutions in the church. A great enterprise in those years was the development of the vision for a university in Africa. The task was judged by many to be too far out of the box. Were not other boards responsible for missionary areas? Did not the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry have enough on its plate with domestic colleges and professional ministry? And wouldn’t the project take resources away from already agreed-on initiatives?

This board and the General Conference rose to the occasion, and a new and dramatic reality for faithfulness was created. We made Africa University a reason for expressing unity of purpose. We saw to it that each unit of the board had a significant part in the formation of the university. The Division of Higher Education took the lead but was supported by the other divisions. The Division of Diaconal Ministry focused on education and agriculture; Chaplains and Related Ministry concentrated on business administration; and Ordained Ministry led the planning of the theological faculty. When the General Conference voted to support the vision, new life surged into the board and into the entire church.

There is a connection here: a vision was realized through the unity of the board. The vision itself unified the board and its work. The important issue for all of us in general agency work, whether staff or board directors, is the creation of vision and the unity of purpose to drive mission. What new initiatives can again focus attention on what drives us in mission and faithfulness? I recommend two suggestions for consideration.
First, we need to model a style of life at the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry aimed at active reflection on the purposes of learning, institutions of learning, and the role of faith in learning. By this I mean simply that it no longer is sufficient for us to be managers and politicians. We have to show the church a new and dynamic way of being the church in mission in the areas assigned to us.

What does it mean for the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry to take seriously its Disciplinary injunction to serve as “advocate for the intellectual life of the Church”? What are the reasons for maintaining connections with more than 120 schools, colleges, and universities in times like these? United Methodists have always insisted on a learned ministry. What are the connections between learning and ordination? What is the board doing to clarify the call to ministry by women and men in a world that desperately needs servants of Christ?

This is a conversation that is not taking place anywhere else in the denomination. The church expects those of us involved in higher education to be busy with this conversation. I know there are some discrete matters that flow from our separate assignments. But there needs to be a general passion for the overarching purposes of the board.

I leave it to the officers of the board to articulate this. But I do know that it is a necessary and urgent discussion. We need to model the possibility of a passionate and coherent vision in the church in a time of increasing atomism and self-serving inattention. In a society that is growing coarse and indifferent to human need and aspiration, we can become a model of meaningful discourse for the whole church. If the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry can do this, new energy and trust will emerge.

Second, let me make a practical suggestion for such a discussion. We all know it is hard to describe convincingly the reasons for church-relatedness with our schools and colleges. What would you say were the reasons for the many fine colleges in our group to maintain their church connections? In simple times, we could say that parietal rules for student care were sufficient. A college reputedly noted in its catalog that it was “located seven miles from any known form of sin.”

For years now, the reasons have been fading and the connections have been eroding. Ken Yamada, associate general secretary of the Division of Higher Education, has called this the “rusty pipeline.” The relationships are now usually defined by the personal commitment of presidents, not by
articulated denominational programs of analysis and support.

Church colleges, once clear in their mission, have over the past half century become relatively isomorphic with the large public institutions. There is no unifying principle. Clark Kerr described the modern university as a collection of schools connected by a central heating system. While there are dedicated Christian teachers in the schools, the vast majority of faculty are products of a professional culture that defines itself on disinterested research and identification with guilds of scholars rather than with the church, its traditions, and its faithfulness.

The church schools, seeking survival, have tended to be smaller versions of the mega-university. So the schools of the church, like the mega-university, are focused on producing graduates who are more oriented toward jobs than social responsibility, toward personal autonomy than service, and toward indifference to religious traditions as defining human accountability.

The overriding question for the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry and the university world is this: What ought to be the purpose and goal of higher education in the twenty-first century?

My proposal is this: Instead of being passive about the shapes of higher education, the board ought to enter discussion with the colleges on new purposes. Instead of teaching economism (the theory that ultimately all human enterprise is determined by economics), the pursuit of wealth, and the exploitation of human resources, we should find new goals for learning institutions.

Our society is being impoverished by the tendency to suppose that technical expertise is more important than moral leadership. Our colleges generally define their disciplines vertically and not horizontally. That is, as more and more specialization is considered normative, there is less and less emphasis on making students historically, culturally, politically, and socially aware of the world. We are being “dumbed down” by our culture.

John B. Cobb, Jr., delivered the Thompson Lectures in Thailand in June 2002, on the theme of religion in education. He describes four types of schools: trade schools, research institutions, liberal arts colleges, and professional schools. Most universities and many colleges try to maintain all four of these models in various arrangements. No wonder the center cannot hold! Industrial models of organization have overwhelmed humane, purposeful communities of learners.

But Cobb envisions a fifth model. The focus of this institution would
be problem solving in the areas of the world’s deepest needs. Job training, useful in our technical society, can be done by trade schools. The professional schools of law and medicine can be built on a short liberal arts program. Research can be best done in a technological-industrial setting. The liberal arts colleges generally look to the past, our Western cultural history. This humanistic tradition of learning argues that its students become whole persons and then can function in a variety of careers.

Cobb suggests that the humanistic tradition can become richer by adding an intentional focus on problem solving to the liberal arts program. This would require major changes and would reshape the school into an institution centered on a new paradigm—service to humankind. This is his fifth model.

Cobb calls for an emphasis on problem solving. He asserts that it is time for colleges to move away from defending traditional academic disciplines. He wants schools to abandon the “passionate inquiry and advocacy in which they all began and move toward methodologically self-conscious objective study of phenomena.” The Wesleyan notion that the world is our parish should be translated into “the world is our laboratory.” Some of our schools might commit to a vocation of solving a critical world issue rather than perpetuating a weary model of self-fulfillment and careerism. In this quest they would raise up generations of graduates with moral courage, social and political competence, and a new sense of religious commitment.

I suggest that our own United Methodist family of schools might become such a community of institutions with this mission. There are four major areas (not easily amenable to the current definitions of university organization) that might be seen as models: ethnic studies, gender studies, peace studies, and environmental studies.

The family of United Methodist schools might rediscover the genius of their origins in rethinking with the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry what might be done. Schools need to be reoriented toward the need for advanced study and research that lie beyond job creation, career tracks, and technical competence. There are profound and unexamined threats that society now faces—threats that could be addressed by rethinking institutional goals and reasons for being.

We are in the midst of a deepening global crisis. Any hope of intelligent response to the crisis requires that it be unpacked, explored seriously, and new directions be identified. I do not need to outline in great detail what the global crisis is. I leave that to your responsible study. Some insti-
tutions, or a family of institutions, need to be focused on this task, which will include creating a new kind of curriculum and a new kind of informed, thoughtful, and socially active graduate.

This is a major undertaking; but it is the kind of reform of learning that Methodists understand. This is the expression of the genius of our movement, which has always intended that institutional existence be measured by the highest moral visions. The colleges of the frontier were founded to provide the nation and church with moral purpose: “Be afraid to die until you have won some victory for humankind” (Antioch College). We Methodist people founded the first college for women. We founded schools for freed slaves. We founded seminaries to insure a learned ministry. Out of a new initiative should come a generation of women and men who model a larger human and religious commitment to God’s world and to the faith we hold by daring to solve social issues in a holistic and nonfragmented way.

This is no time for timidity about faith or institutions. The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry can be the catalyst in such a new vision. The church can think again! The church must think again! We need to enlist our community of schools, colleges, and universities in exploring with us the new shapes of twenty-first-century education. This will be education for addressing critical issues of world survival.

Some of you will remember that the church came perilously close to giving up on higher education as mission in the 1972 General Conference. A resolution adopted by the Conference suggested it was time to abandon the mission of higher education and turn it over to the public universities. It seems incredible that such weariness and distraction defined the leadership in that period.

But the board elected in 1972 determined to take a hard look at the presupposition and created an independent commission to study the role, place, and history of the higher education and seminary mission of the church. The National Commission on United Methodist Higher Education presented its work to the board and the 1976 General Conference in five volumes. That report is still a valuable mine of information about our work.4

The findings of that commission were adopted by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, and the erosion of our mission was reversed. The Ministerial Education Fund, the Black College Fund, the HANA (Hispanic, Asian, and Native American) scholarship program, the revitalization of the University Senate, and the MINDS (Multipurpose...
Interactive Database System) program—all gained impetus from that study.

It may be time for this board to establish another commission to do research and collaborate with the staff and directors in a new study that will aim the board and its institutions to a dramatic program for the twenty-first century.

In early Methodism, what commended us to cultured despisers was the measure of our love for one another and of our care for the world. What commends United Methodists today? In the next period, with imagination and faithfulness, we might see the cultured despisers defining Methodists as the people who love the world enough to change it for the better through its historic care for higher education and learning.

We have a great treasure in the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry. We have in our care schools, colleges, universities, and seminaries whose assets exceed that of the denomination itself. Now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, when we expected to meet Buck Rogers, we meet instead ourselves and our daunting assignment to imagine what we can do for the church and the world in the new century.

F. Thomas Trotter was General Secretary of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry from 1973–1987. He is retired and lives in Indian Wells, California.

Endnotes

3. John B. Cobb, Jr., “Envisioning a Fifth Model.” These lectures can be found online at http://www.religion-online.org. I am indebted to him for his typology and critique, as my discussion below reflects.
Burnout is a real problem for many clergy. Often characterized by fatigue, listlessness, high anxiety, and sometimes depression, it adversely affects performance in ministry. Having served The United Methodist Church for twenty-five years (twenty of which have been in the role of senior pastor), I offer some insights on the causes and remedies of clergy burnout in the denomination.

One of the first problems of clergy burnout has to do with the working paradigm of ministry clergy have adopted as a model for service. Ministry models set expectations for ministry and provide a general set of assumptions about the why, the what, and the how of ministry. One troubling paradigm is the “Messiah” model, which expects clergy to be all things to all people. The mutual expectations of ministers and congregations are very high. On this model, the clergy person views him- or herself as a

continued on page 79

Burnout. The term evokes someone, or something, that was once full of energy and resources and is now spent, empty, and charred. The spentness of clergy burnout takes a toll not only on individuals but also on congregations, annual conferences, and the denomination as a whole. Recent studies indicate that burnout affects 20 to 40 percent of clergy at any given time in the populations surveyed. Its symptoms include physical and emotional exhaustion, a sense of helplessness, a reduced sense of accomplishment, spiritual malaise, and loss of meaning related to one’s work. While it is difficult to establish a direct, causal link between burnout and both incidences of clergy misconduct and high dropout rates in the first years of ministry, the phenomena are often related. Clergy burnout is best understood as a complex interaction of personal traits, interpersonal interaction, and contextual factors.

My primary focus here is on

continued on page 82
messiah who is always available to heal all wounds, cure all woes, and satisfy all the needs of God’s people. No clergy person can ever fulfill all of the congregation’s “messianic” expectations; thus, to place oneself in the position of messiah is a sure formula for failure and burnout. Clergy must have healthy and realistic expectations of what they are called to achieve in ministry and what they can do within the churches and the time periods they are called to serve.

The second problem leading to clergy burnout is that ministers often live in a fish bowl, with their attitudes and actions always on display. People are constantly analyzing whether pastors are “walking the talk.” Few, if any, professions place individuals under such constant evaluation. Even during recreational time clergy are under scrutiny by church members. Hairstyle, dress, shoes—all can become topics of discussion among congregants, and can create enormous pressure and anxiety. Clergy can get the feeling that they are constantly being watched, which can create paranoia and even defensiveness—and this can make both clergy and parishioners uncomfortable and unhappy. Living with these daily pressures can create feelings of vulnerability and frustration. Avoiding the tyrannies of always having to be perfect can help clergy to relax in ministry and escape some of the “stresses” of burnout.

Third, no other profession demands competency in such a variety of roles as the ordained ministry. Ministers are expected to be administrators, spiritual advisors, caregivers, healers, preachers, teachers, conflict negotiators, arbiters, lawyers, biblical scholars, church and denominational historians, visionaries, fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, confidants, psychologists, sociologists, economists, fundraisers, prophets, priests, advocates for social justice, defenders of the poor and oppressed, evangelists, spiritual warriors, truth tellers, armor bearers, and leaders of workshops, worship services, Bible studies, and church retreats. Given all these expectations—not to mention the expectation that clergy be God’s representatives—is it any wonder that some people expect clergy to be God and are disappointed when they’re not? What other profession requires and demands so many different things of one person in order to be successful?

Moreover, clergy have to be forthright, frugal, long-suffering and not long-winded. They must visit the sick; bury the dead; marry the young; preach a fresh, new, and creative sermon each week; and serve as a punching
Clergy burnout can be precipitated by service on conference boards and committees. Clergy not only must meet the expectations of their local churches but must also fulfill denominational demands. This puts some clergy over the edge. How much can one person really do? Fulfilling the demands and responsibilities of the parish are tough enough without having to carve out time for serving on an annual conference board. If I choose not to serve, will I be viewed as less than a team player? What will my bishop, district superintendent, and colleagues think of me? How will this decision affect my next appointment? How can one devote the energy needed for building the local church when one is expected to devote extensive time to denominational service? Feeling caught in the crossfire of local church work and conference service can lead to burnout.

Other causes of burnout have to do with clergy not taking enough time to rest, relax, and have fun. Some clergy forgo vacation and work sixteen- to eighteen-hour days, with virtually no time off. Let me set the record straight: ministers never really have a day off insofar as they are mentally and emotionally disengaged completely from the concerns of church life and work. Whether it is concern for a dying parishioner or stress over the church staying within its budget, clergy always have something ministry-related on their minds—and they often take these concerns with them on their vacation and days off. I have rarely had a vacation that was not interrupted by an emergency such as the death of a parishioner—and this notwithstanding the fact that the congregation has a large number of qualified clergy associates.

Thus, clergy find it very difficult to mentally disengage from the demands of the ministerial office; and this can create mental fatigue and burnout. Everyone needs time off and a break from the hustle and bustle.
of work. For the sake of their sanity and well-being, clergy must find ways to distance themselves emotionally and psychologically from their work.

One of the strengths of United Methodism is the annual time allotted for rest, vacation, and spiritual renewal. Unfortunately, many clergy do not avail themselves of the available time, and this also contributes to burnout.

What, then, can be done to counter or prevent burnout in ministry? I have five suggestions for my fellow clergy. First, have realistic and healthy expectations of what you can accomplish. Be a servant, not a messiah. You cannot be all things to all people. Narrow the scope of what you can do and help the church to understand the reasons for doing this. This will make for healthier relationships between pulpit and pew.

Second, recognize your gifts and areas of specialty. Concentrate on your gifts and surround yourself with people, including laity, who have gifts in areas of need that are not your strengths.

Third, learn how to say no without feeling guilty about it. You cannot be all things to all people or be everywhere at the same time. Make service to the congregation a priority; then choose conference responsibilities in light of this priority. It is better to decline an opportunity than to accept it and then not be able to give it your best.

Fourth, take time for yourself and your family. Do fun things. Surround yourself with people who love you and want to have a good time. Develop friendships with people who see you as human being and not simply as a clergy person. Spend time with people who share your interests. Avoid people who are uptight, stiff, and never like to have fun or see you have fun. Some people have just enough religion to make them miserable! Take time for yourself without apologizing for it. After all, you already give most of your time and energy to others.

Finally, and most important, take time for prayer and spiritual rejuvenation. A burned-out caregiver does more harm than good. Take your burdens and concerns to God and develop a healthy prayer life. As clergy, we are called upon to help others heal, but we are often in need of healing ourselves. Be honest when you are hurting and recognize your own need for personal healing.

Carlyle Fielding Stewart III is Senior Pastor at Hope United Methodist Church in Southfield, Michigan.
exploring contextual factors in the life of The United Methodist Church today that increase the potential of burnout. After exploring personal and interpersonal factors as they intersect with contextual factors, I suggest strategies for prevention and response.

Borrowing an analogy from medicine, burnout is more like a syndrome than a disease. While a disease (e.g., strep throat) has a known cause (*streptococcus* bacteria) and an accepted course of treatment (antibiotics), a syndrome has multiple contributing factors and no single course of treatment. Each case must be assessed individually. However, a physician often has some diagnostic framework that helps identify links between the various symptoms and possible causes. A theologically informed family systems perspective provides a diagnostic framework that can help us understand the complex interaction of personal, interpersonal, and contextual factors that lead to burnout.

Differentiation, a central tenet of family systems theory, provides a way to describe these personal and interpersonal factors contributing to burnout. Self-differentiation does not refer to an autonomous or isolated self but rather to a dynamic relationship between connectedness to others and a separate self. Self-differentiation includes the ability to distinguish between thought and feeling, to have a sense of one’s own guiding principles or values, and to tolerate and manage anxiety. The opposite of differentiation is fusion. One of the indicators of a higher level of differentiation in a person or system is clearly defined but flexible internal, interpersonal, and structural boundaries.

Interpersonal relationships reflect our levels of fusion or differentiation. Persons with higher levels of fusion have trouble distinguishing their own self and needs and responsibilities from those of others. Poor self-care is often a result of not being able to identify one’s own needs. Reactive distancing, or cutting off relationships, also marks fused relationships. Persons with lower levels of differentiation tend to personalize issues, fall into either/or thinking, and assign blame to self or others. Learning how to stay connected to others and maintain a less-anxious presence in the midst of conflict make a significant difference in our ability to manage interpersonal relationships and avoid burnout.

Contextual and institutional factors also contribute to burnout. Just as individuals have various levels of differentiation and patterns of func-
tioning, so do congregations and denominations. Such systems are interlocking; high anxiety in one system can impact the other, related systems. Since our personal level of differentiation is affected by the systems in which we participate, we are likely to act differently in different systems. For example, conflicts in the congregation can impact the pastor’s family. A congregation with a higher level of differentiation may help a pastor establish clearer boundaries and think more critically about situations, while a pastor and congregation both tending toward fusion can increase this proclivity in each other.

High levels of anxiety, poorly defined boundaries, and lack of a clear vision in the denomination as a whole are contextual factors that can increase the likelihood of clergy burnout. The high degree of anxiety currently present in The United Methodist Church is attributable to the number of changes the denomination is experiencing, such as a transition to new processes for ordination. Underlying our confusion about these processes are differing views of ministry. Another cause of denominational anxiety are the financial challenges that have led to significant changes in organizational structures. Increasing pressures on the itinerancy and appointive system can create a sense of competition between clergy. Such larger denominational anxiety increases the stress that many congregations already feel from local factors such as declining membership and financial constraints.

The variety of conflicts in our denomination on issues ranging from homosexuality to understandings of evangelism, mission, and biblical authority not only reflect but actually create anxiety. Conflicting views of our identity as a denomination often underlie these conflicts; yet we rarely enter into significant dialogue with one another about what it means to be church. Rather than identify conflicting views of mission in the church, we tend to argue about the structures for funding and organizing mission.

What strategies can help us reduce or even prevent clergy burnout? From a family systems perspective, the most important individual strategy is increasing one’s level of self-differentiation. Critical self-reflection can increase one’s ability to distinguish between thought and feeling, manage anxiety, and develop good interpersonal boundaries. Such reflection may occur in a number of contexts, including seminary, peer groups, or therapy. Increasing one’s level of differentiation needs to be considered part of the formational process for ministry. Candidates for ministry should be
encouraged to engage in a process of self-reflection and growth along with vocational discernment.

How might we creatively use the mentoring processes during candidacy and the probationary period to foster such self-growth? One of the difficulties with these programs is the unevenness of their development across annual conferences. Also problematic is the perception by candidates and probationers that the mentoring process is evaluative rather than formative. If mentors are seen as “gatekeepers” of the ordination process, whether or not this is their official role, candidates are less likely to reveal personal struggles.

There are also strategies for addressing contextual and institutional factors. Part of Wesley’s genius was a clear guiding vision of a dynamic interplay between personal and social holiness. It seems we have lost this dynamic interaction, and we tend to fall to one side or the other of what was for Wesley a unified vision. The lack of clear identity in the denomination only adds to pastoral and congregational confusion. While a systems perspective can help us diagnose the problem, treatment requires that we also address these foundational theological issues.

Karen D. Scheib is Assistant Professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling at Candler School of Theology, Emory University, in Atlanta, Georgia.

Endnotes

1. The Austin Theological Seminary study (2002) reports clergy burnout rates of about 20 percent in their sample of seminary graduates, somewhat lower than the 40 percent reported by Klass and Klass among pastors in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (1999). For further discussion of this research, see Michael Jinkins, “Great Expectations, Sobering Realities,” Congregations (May/June 2002).

2. The theoretical perspective reflected here is that of Bowen Family Systems theory. For more on this theory, see E. Friedman, Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue (New York: Guilford Press, 1985); and R. Richardson, Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership, and Congregational Life (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996).
There are preachers of the Scriptures who often insist on putting the text—any text—into its historical context, leaving it there, and preaching by drawing parallels between “us” and “them.” However, developments in New Testament scholarship challenge us to read not only “behind the text”—the world that formed and is addressed by the text—but also “within the text,” letting the text speak for itself as a complete and final work within the world it creates.

In addition, scholarship is more and more aware that there is no such thing as a value-free interpretation. Every reader brings to the text a specific “lens,” formed in a particular social location. The lens each of us brings determines much of what we see in the text, what we ignore, and what we do not see. Perhaps this fact underlines the need to read Scripture in community, so that we can “lend” one another our lenses and so learn insights we might have missed on our own. The Bible is truly the community’s book. Indeed, the writer of Ephesians insists that only as community with all the saints can readers comprehend the love of Christ in its breadth and length, its height and depth (Eph. 3:18-19).

Recent scholarship has also suggested that we learn to read “in front of the text”—that is, that we include in the exegesis of any passage a reading of the reader. Not only should the world behind the text be questioned and investigated but the reader and her or his world should also be interrogated and investigated. Thus, as we read the text in the context of its first-century world, the text returns the favor and reads us in turn, exposing us for who we truly are, with our hopes, disappointments, biases, and prejudices. Indeed, the Word does save us. It functions both as a window into the mysteries of God’s heart and as a mirror where we see our reflection and repent.

Finally, scholars speak of the “ethics of interpretation,” which means basically that we ask tough questions like the following of our interpretations and sermons. Who is hurt and who benefits from our interpretation?
How are we hurt and how do we benefit from our interpretation? In studying the lections from Ephesians below, preachers might find it helpful to read behind the text, within the text, and in front of the text, and to interrogate the “ethics” of their interpretations.

**Introductory Questions**

**Who wrote the letter?**

Scholars disagree on the authorship of Ephesians. According to some, the author is clearly Paul; after all, the letter says so! Twice in the letter, the author identifies himself as the apostle Paul (1:1; 3:1) and refers to himself as a “prisoner” for Christ (3:1; 4:1). However, in the late eighteenth century, scholars began challenging Pauline authorship on the grounds of language and style and of the impersonal character of the letter. There are those who, without necessarily arguing for either Pauline or pseudo-Pauline authorship, suggest that the author either was from the Jewish tradition or was familiar with that tradition.

**To whom was the letter written?**

This question immediately raises textual considerations. The earliest manuscripts do not contain the words “in Ephesus” (1:1) in the prescript; this phrase was inserted at a later date. The text itself provides no clear clue as to why it was written. The author addresses no particular problem or crisis. The letter does not seem aimed at opposing Gnostic teachings or advocating for the admission of Gentiles into the church or serving as an apologetic for the Christian faith. Therefore, it is most likely a circular letter to all churches, and Ephesus was one of the churches on the mailing list. So, the Letter to the Ephesians was written for the purpose of instructing and edifying Christians over a range of congregations. As such, it is as an essential, fundamental Christian text for all Christians in all places at all times.

**Why was the letter written?**

Since it does not address a specific problem or a crisis in a particular church, it is impossible to ascertain why the epistle was written. There was no major sociopolitical crisis at the time of the writing (80–90 C.E.) that might help us with this question. And so one must look at the contents of the text to determine the themes.

**Who is reading the letter?**

Each of us is located in relation to the rest of the world by circumstances
and factors we cannot change: social, personal, and familial alignments such as race, gender, and ethnicity, and nationality and economic and educational status. Together, these factors locate each of us in relation to access to power and freedom from oppression. Some scholars insist that before reading and interpreting a text, each of us should take a self-inventory. Taking time to “read oneself” helps us to understand the preunderstandings we bring to the text and how they shape what we see and receive from it. With such self-critical knowledge, the conversation between us and the text can be an honest space for the Word of God to be heard.

**To whom is the letter being read?**
One of the challenges of reading and hearing Ephesians has to do with the fact that it was written to Christians living in a world very different from ours. Ours is a world of airplanes, penicillin, and email, but also of the Holocaust, racism, and oppression. Thus, Ephesians is being read to somewhat jaded Christians for whom the division of Jew and Gentile is not nearly as real as that of Black and White, Christian and Muslim, gay and straight. The church Ephesians speaks about is truly an expression of God’s reign of reconciliation and justice. And the God of Jesus Christ of whom the letter speaks is extravagant and generous in both blessing and forgiveness. For some in the twenty-first century, this is still a vision of the church for the future, while, for others, it is simply not a true image of the church. After all, there is good evidence that the church has brought about and justified exclusion, persecution, suffering, and even death. Many people hearing the text in today’s world might be both hopeful and pessimistic about the divine nature and the significance of the church as an agent of reconciliation in today’s world.

**Who is hurt and who benefits from our reading of the letter?**
We often come to the biblical text expecting it to say what we think it will say or should say. Thus the Bible is often used to justify what we already believe. The ethics of interpretation demands that we look at the consequences of our interpretations, not just for our community but also for the entire world. For example, the hostility between Jew and Gentile features prominently in Ephesians. This alerts us to be attentive to how we use terms that refer to our Jewish neighbors today.
Growing up on the slopes of Mt. Kenya in East Africa, I always had a strong sense of identity. I was who I was because I knew beyond doubt that I belonged to my tribe and my church. These two communities were similar in their composition and in their love of stories, songs, and rituals as vehicles of instruction. Whether it was in Sunday school, in worship, or sitting by the fire late in the evening, stories that celebrated our identity were told and retold. These communal events of story telling helped me realize instinctively that my identity was closely interwoven with the identity of the communities to which I belonged. My identity was not a private matter but rather a public celebration of belonging and being accountable to a community. I learned to refrain from doing certain things because “our tribe doesn’t do that.” Other things I felt obligated to do because “that is what we do as Christians.” I grew up with the African adage, “I am because we are, and we are because I am.”

Reading Ephesians as an African Christian, I could easily summarize the theology of this letter with a new adage, “The church is because Christ is.” For the writer of Ephesians, Christ and the identity of the church are closely interwoven (1:3-14); indeed, the church’s identity is found only in and through Christ. This identity is not a private and individualistic matter; on the contrary, it is public and communal. The writer therefore not only addresses the readers using the second-person plural pronoun but also employs the language of community. For instance, he quotes a hymn (likely known to his audience) and employs the liturgy of worship, especially around the sacrament of baptism. For the writer, the vision of the church is clearly one of a community gathered around Christ and in Christ: the church is because Christ is.

For the writer, the centrality of Christ in the identity of the church cannot be overstated; the title Christ appears eight times in vv. 1-14. Christ is the agent and means God uses to create the community to whom the letter is addressed. Because of Christ, the community has been adopted as God’s children (v. 5), redeemed and forgiven. They are who they are and have what they have because of Christ. It is in and through Christ, and Christ alone, that they have come into being, are shaped, and do the things they do. So the writer talks of the blessing they have received from God “in Christ”
(v. 3). They have been chosen by God “in Christ” (v. 4) as God’s children (v. 5). God’s glorious grace is freely bestowed on them “in the Beloved” (v. 6) and they have come to know the mystery of God’s will “in Christ” (v. 9). They have obtained an inheritance “in Christ” (v. 11) and they in turn have set their hope “on Christ” (v. 12). Furthermore, it is “in him” that they have redemption (v. 7) and “through his blood” that they have found forgiveness. Clearly, for the writer, the church’s identity is wrapped up so closely in the identity of Christ that it cannot and would not exist without him.

For Ephesians, Christ is clearly and often identified with the person of Jesus. Christ is therefore not a negotiable title: Jesus is the Christ. God has done something decisive in his life, death, and ministry. Jesus’ death on the cross—his “blood”—has secured the forgiveness of sins. However, for the writer, “Christ” is a figure who is not bound by the temporal earthly existence of Jesus. Christ has primordial origins that go back before creation, before God “dug” the foundation of the world. God’s saving work in Christ was set in motion before the beginning of time. God’s intention for creation is manifested in Jesus, and, consequently, in the church—an intention bent on bringing together into one new humanity and creation Jew and Gentile, heaven and earth.

July 20, 2003—Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

**Eph. 2:11-22; 2 Sam. 7:1-14a; Ps. 89:20-37; Mark 6:30-34, 53-56**

“So then, remember . . .” (v. 11). Twice the author invites his audience to remember. And twice what they are called to remember is a dark and painful past (vv. 12-13). Peace in communities of persons who were previously divided is often fragile; and memory can be treacherous for maintaining the peace. This is true also today, where groups of people live side by side with a past often marked by colonialism, imperialism, holocaust, genocide, violence, and hatred. Remembering the past hurts; and some even speak of avenging the past. The writer is surely courting an emotive history when he reminds his readers of their painful past in which ethnic slurs (such as the pejorative “c-word” [circumcision]) abounded across communities to belittle and humiliate. Some people might argue that when it comes to some past atrocities, it is best to forget. “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it!” “Let sleeping dogs lie!”

Yet the writer of Ephesians asks a community of faith comprised of both Jews and Gentiles to remember when they lived apart and separated—
divided into “us” and “them” based on the physical marking of circumcision (v. 11). Circumcision separated the “covenant people”—God’s family—from outsiders. Jews were circumcised; Gentiles were not. Thus, one either belonged to God’s people or one did not. Needless to say, circumcision is a gendered marking; thus, only men carried the symbol of belonging to God’s family on their bodies. Because of the pain involved for adults, few Gentiles would lightly convert to Judaism.

The writer not only reminds the Ephesian community that in Christ their ethnic separation has been overcome but also invites them to remember their former lives without Christ. Having already shown that their identity is to be found only in Christ (they are because Christ is), it is clear that life without Christ is no life at all. The writer maps out life without Christ: It is a life of alienation and hopelessness, of being a stranger and without God. It is marked by disenfranchisement and abandonment. To be excluded from God’s “commonwealth” (v. 12) renders one without the rights afforded to “citizens” (19); hence, one is without voice and outside the concern, even the sight, of the community. To be without God, says the Ephesian writer, is to be “uncivilized” and lacking that which makes us human. Some in the church community might therefore feel justified in ignoring such “outsiders.”

The landscape of disenfranchisement, alienation, powerlessness, hopelessness, and inhumanity that the writer paints is the reality for many in our world today. Of the world’s 6 billion people, 2 billion live without the basic rights of having daily bread, clean water, and medicine. Eight hundred million, most of them children, go to sleep hungry every night. These persons are truly excluded from the commonwealth of being human. The sheer numbers and the problems are overwhelming, driving many of us who have so much into inertia or guilt. What has more breadth, length, height, and depth than these divisions in our world?

For the writer of Ephesians, Christ is able to break down the wall of division between groups of people (v. 14), putting to death through the cross their mutual hostility. Christ has brought a way of forming community that was radically different from the interpretation of the Mosaic law. Although God had given the good law, in the hands of some interpreters, the law had been misused into becoming a deadly and fixed symbol of exclusiveness—an iron curtain of division. With Christ’s abolishing the law, Christ himself defines the meaning of being human. This “new humanity” (v. 15) is a trans-
formed community—the body of Christ—where those who were previously divided are reconciled. Reconciliation has to do with transformation and sanctification, with new ways of being, acting, and relating to others. The church as the expression of the new humanity is where Christ’s rule of peace, reconciliation, justice, and authentic joy reigns. The church has been given a ministry of reconciliation and thus stands prophetically against a world short on shalom—the peace that is God’s salvation. Christ our peace was able to do that which no one imagined possible: he brought down the dividing wall and left in its place not amnesia but peace enough to be able to remember without bitterness.

Remembering helps us stay focused amidst the mundane. By inviting his readers to remember the past, the author, using a set of contrasts, brings into focus what his readers might be tempted to take for granted. What they lacked before, they now have. In the past, they were “aliens . . . and strangers” (v. 12), but now they are no longer so (v. 19). Before, they were excluded from God’s commonwealth (v. 12), but now they are “citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God” (v. 19). What no one could do, God has accomplished through Christ Jesus. He is God’s “but now.” The cross is the bridge that closes the abyss between the past and the present.

July 27, 2003—Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Eph. 3:14-21; 2 Sam. 11:1-15; Ps. 14; John 6:1-21

“For this reason,” writes the author, “I bow my knees before the Father” (v. 14). Something—a reason, a rationale—prompts him to respond to God on bended knee. He does not give advice or preach or quote a hymn; rather, concern for his audience prompts him to pray for them.

The writer is anxious that, on hearing of his suffering on their behalf, his audience would “lose heart” (v. 13). Losing heart is the greatest challenge facing the church. It means giving up, surrendering, on the part of those who have been involved in the struggle for justice for a long time. When we struggle on for any length of time without seeing a ray of hope or change, even the most persistent and optimistic among us can and do become weary—we can lose heart. The same language of “losing heart” also appears in the Lukan parable of the persistent widow and the unjust ruler (Luke 18:1-8). According to Luke, the parable is to illustrate the “need to pray always and not to lose heart” (v. 1). In both passages—the powerless widow facing unjust legal power and the excluded Gentiles, whose advocates are
harassed and imprisoned—the situation seems desperate beyond hope. Under such circumstances, even the most persistent can lose heart.

For Ephesians, like for Luke, the key to such situations is prayer. Prayer is the medicine that heals discouragement. In Luke’s parable, Jesus teaches about prayer by pointing to a life lived with an inner source of strength. Day after day, the widow claims justice from one who seems ill-equipped to provide it. It is this inner source of strength that the writer of Ephesians prays and intercedes for on behalf of his audience. His prayer is that God “may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through [God’s] Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love” (vv. 16-17).

Surprisingly, the writer does not pray for a miracle, either for himself or for his situation. His intercession is not for a change of heart on the part of those who exclude his audience because they are Gentiles or for power to destroy or hurt his enemies. On the contrary, the author prays for strength in “your inner being with power” (v. 16). This “inner being” is the very core of who they are—their very identity. The strengthening brings clarity of vision and understanding and purpose, so that, while everything around them falls apart or looks an impossible feat, they are clear and strong about their purpose. Being strengthened in their inner being means they do not need outside affirmation. They know who they are.

Empowered in their inner being, the Ephesian church will also know whose they are: they belong to Christ. The author prays for the nurturing of their identity through Christ who “dwell[s] in your hearts through faith” (3:17). Indeed, their hearts are now the dwelling place and the seat of Christ. The hearers of this letter, excluded as they might be from the society, are not powerless. However, their power is not political or religious. It is the power of identity—knowing who they are and whose they are. Believers share in the life of Christ, who lives in them in the daily routine of lives committed to justice and accomplishing in them far more than they can imagine (v. 20). Their lives are changed not by outside intervention but by the witness of the Christian community. It is not what is going on outside the church that speaks the last word but the reality of Christ within them. The author’s prayer changes not their circumstances but their attitude. The daily struggle of their lives continues, but now with renewed clarity of purpose, because they know that Christ has already won the battle of breaking down the walls of separation, hatred, and fear.
Nevertheless, there can be no boasting or arrogance on the part of believers. After all, Christ’s presence in their hearts roots and grounds them in love (v. 17). Thus, the prayer asks for power to know the love of Christ—a love like the Ephesian Christians have never known. This love is without boundaries because its “breadth and length and height and depth” surpass all knowledge (v. 18). Perhaps the author is testifying to his own experience of this love, through which “the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (3:6). To be rooted and grounded in such a love is to be filled with the fullness of God. It is to live in a community of faith without boundaries—a community of “them” and “us.”

**August 3, 2003–Eighth Sunday after Pentecost**

**Eph. 4:1-16; 2 Sam. 11:26–12:13a; Ps. 51:1-12; John 6:24-35**

For the second time, the writer identifies himself as a “prisoner in the Lord” (v. 1; see also 3:1). For him, his divine calling is to advocate for the inclusion of the Gentiles in God’s commonwealth (3:5-7); and, to some degree, he sees his imprisonment as an outward indication of this inner commitment. He expects his audience to be likewise totally committed to their calling. So it is not surprising that, sandwiched between this self-description as prisoner for Christ in 3:1 and 4:1, we find the writer’s prayer for his audience’s growth in inner strength (3:16-21). In the same way that he has remained singlemindedly committed to his calling, even to the point of imprisonment, he now implores, begs, and beseeches his audience to live a life “worthy of the calling to which [they] have been called” (v. 1).

The author reminds his audience of the character and challenge of their calling. Their calling from God in Christ demands a life of holiness, lived without blame in love (1:4). Fundamental to this calling is the unity of their life together as a community. It is this unity and harmony that make them different from other institutions, fellowships, and groups. Their life together in unity and harmony is the outward witness of their inner life, grounded and rooted in Christ. Therefore, the challenge of the holy life they are called to live concerns more than personal salvation; it concerns the difficult task of working for the community’s salvation—the salvation of relationships. In their life together, it is their Christ-like ways of relating to one another “with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with another in love, [and] making every effort to maintain the unity of the
Spirit” (vv. 2-3) that give witness to their identity as a holy people.

For the writer, maintaining unity is the heart of the matter. No human community is without the struggles of personal relationships; so it should not surprise us that the Ephesian audience had similar struggles. It is possible that the occasional word or action caused anger and resentment. No wonder, then, that later in the letter, the writer urges hearers to forgive one another (v. 32). He concedes the reality of anger but urges them to not “let the sun go down” on their anger (v. 26). Indeed, it is clear from the laundry list of things they are to “put away” in their new life in Christ that the audience of this letter is struggling with the issues to be found in many communities: bitterness, wrath, wrangling, slander, malice, evil talk (v. 31). Given the nature of being in community in such circumstances, it would be easy to consider their calling to live a holy life together as impossible. However, in Christ and with Christ all things can and do come together in unity and harmony.

Christ is central in the life of the community of faith. The writer urges his audience to make every effort to “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (v. 3). The “peace” the writer is urging his audience to maintain is not just “an absence of war” or simply “being nice.” He is urging for the very presence of Christ in their relationship, for it is Christ who is our peace (2:14). Christ is the one who breaks down the walls that keep us apart and becomes the glue that joins two previously alienated groups into one (2:15). This message of peace is the only one there is, and the writer directs it to both those who were once “insiders” of God’s household and those who were once “outsiders” (2:17).

To live in a bond of peace with one another is to live bound to one another in Christ, not by virtue of our personality traits or the gifts we may have. For the author, believers have no way of leaving one another or “escaping” the community. We cannot be severed from one another because to do so would sever that which holds us together—Christ. One cannot leave and begin another community because there is “one body and one Spirit . . . the one hope of [our] calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all” (vv. 4-6).

To be the kind of community the writer of Ephesians is talking about does not mean living as a homogeneous “blob” where everybody is the same. Differences in ability do exist. Different persons are equipped to carry out different tasks. For the author, the emphasis is on the “grace” of
these abilities, that is, on viewing them as gifts given for the benefit of the church. They are not given to benefit the individual to whom they are given; rather, they are given to strengthen the body of Christ. This point is all the more important when we note that the letter includes leadership functions in the church among the gifts: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers. Like all the other gifts, the leadership functions are given for the sake of equipping and building the Body, not for gaining status or celebrity.

The writer places particular emphasis on the leadership of the community in its teaching and pastoral ministry, possibly because the Ephesians were exposed to a multiplicity of doctrines and to “trickery” and crafty scheming (v. 14). In such times, the gifts of interpreting and teaching correct doctrine are crucial. These ministries build up the body of Christ into maturity through unity and knowledge of the Son of God. Again the emphasis is on the community; the gifts equip everyone, not just some. And so the author urges his hearers to “grow up” in their identity as those who are grounded and rooted in Christ (v. 15). They must no longer be like children, influenced and enthralled by every new wave of thought, or like an empty gourd bopping in the ocean, “tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind” (v. 14). Instead, they are to recognize that they all have the same vision and are “rooted and grounded” in love (3:17).

**Conclusion**

Ephesians uses the word *love* fourteen times to describe four situations of love. First is God’s love for the church. The church is grounded and rooted in love—indeed, it has been chosen in love. From its inception in the mind of God, the community of faith was chosen to be “holy and blameless before [God] in love” (1:4). God took the initiative and sought us “out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses [and] made us alive together with Christ” (2:4-5). Second is the love of Christ for the community. It is a love that “surpasses knowledge” (3:19) and manifests itself in Christ’s giving himself for us, “a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (5:2). It is this kind of love that the Ephesian community should have for one another. They are to speak the truth in love (4:15) and “live in love, as Christ loved us” (5:2). The growth of the church is not in numbers and in wealth but in “building itself up in love” (4:16).

This love for one another is also to be seen in the intimate unit of marriage—the third situation in which the word is used in the letter. Even
in this most intimate of relationships, it is not about ownership but about showing the love of Christ: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church . . .” (5:25). The love of Christ pervades every aspect of the believer’s relationships. Finally, the author uses the word to salute the believers’ love for Christ. Thus, in his final greeting, he writes, “Grace be with all who have an undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ” (6:24).

For the community of faith, the bond between us is Christ, our peace. We are because he is. And our love for one another is grounded and rooted in our being loved by Christ and by his dwelling in our hearts by faith. Truly, we love, because he first loved us.

R. Grace Imathiu is an elder in the Methodist Church in Kenya. Until recently, she was Senior Pastor of First United Methodist Church in Green Bay, Wisconsin.
While we might sometimes wish it were otherwise, conflict is an expectable aspect of congregational life. The clash of values, or strategies that characterize conflict, is not an option for us. It is, rather, a reliable feature of any group of persons who stay together long enough, and in such a way as to allow distinctly different passions and beliefs to emerge. The question we face, therefore, is not how to keep conflict from happening but how to help fashion a style of congregational life and leadership that can understand and deal with conflict in ways that promote the flourishing of the community and that are appropriate to the gospel's norms of love and justice. The question, in other words, is how the congregation can see and lean into its conflicts as expressions of and challenges to the very practical theological work that constitutes it as a distinct community of faith.

In this essay, I provide a general guide and framework for those who wish to pursue further their understanding of conflict management in congregations. To that end, I have divided the following discussion into four sections. In the first section, I consider some of the themes and resources in understanding the dynamics of congregational conflict. In the next section I address the social and cultural context of conflict. The third section briefly highlights distinctly theological resources. Finally, I discuss themes and resources in conflict management technique and congregational leadership in conflict more generally. There is a vast and growing literature in conflict management and mediation; in what follows, I limit the discussion largely to the literature specially addressing the congregational context.

Dynamics of Congregational Conflict

For several decades now, the consultants of the Alban Institute have been at the forefront of helping us understand the nature and dynamics of congregational conflict. For those beginning to explore this area, I would
CONGREGATIONAL CONFLICT

recommend the collection of essays edited by David Lott, *Conflict Management in Congregations* (Alban Institute, 2001). This collection brings together key writings from Speed Leas and other Alban consultants engaged in working with conflicted congregations. These highly practical essays provide an easy-to-read entry into the field and sort through many of the most common and troubling dynamics pastors face in the midst of conflict.

No single work has had more influence on our approach to congregational conflict in the past twenty years, however, than Edwin Friedman’s *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: Guilford, 1988). Extrapolating from the work of systems theory in general and Murray Bowen’s family systems theory in particular, Friedman encourages us to think about congregations as emotional systems: interrelated, anxiety-regulating processes. In this perspective, destructive conflict is less the product of problem individuals than the result of systemwide dysfunctions that rechannel, sustain, and amplify anxiety within the congregation. This often seems counter-intuitive to some people, since individuals or groups of individuals are often seen as the heart of the problem in conflicted congregations. “If only so-and-so would stop their difficult behavior, everything would be fine,” we sometimes hear. Yet, within systems theory, the supposed troublemaker is often merely an “identified patient,” the one whom the congregational system is offering up (or identifying as the patient) to keep the focus off the underlying, systemwide problem.

Indeed, in some cases, the problem person carries certain emotional functions on behalf of the larger congregation. The system, in other words, can locate in particular individuals emotions with which it is uncomfortable (anger, shame, disappointment) and “use” these persons to express those feelings on their behalf while not having to take responsibility for them. For instance, believing that expressing anger is unChristian, some congregational members unconsciously use an angry member of the church to express their own anger without having to become angry themselves. This unconscious process of group life is called “projective identification.” Edward Shapiro and A. Wesley Carr have explored this dynamic in congregational life in their book *Lost in Familiar Places: Creating New Connections between the Individual and Society* (New York: Yale University Press, 1991).

Another concept from systems theory that is particularly useful in conflict situations is that of “triangulation.” Triangulation is a process in
which distress between two persons is not dealt with directly but rather channeled through a third person or entity. For example, if someone is angry with the pastor, he or she might tell a third party about his or her anger (the church secretary, perhaps) rather than the pastor him- or herself. The third party then ends up carrying the anxiety with and for them, thus setting up a triangle of emotional distress among the pastor, the parishioner, and the third party. Emotional triangles frequently multiply, of course, as gossip brings in more and more people into the realm of distress. Such a process keeps the distress from being dealt with productively and keeps the anxiety alive and intensifying in the congregation.

While Friedman’s text remains the most influential application of family systems theory to congregational conflict, other useful works are available as well. Peter Steinke’s *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems* (Alban Institute, 1993) is a wonderfully written text that outlines clearly the basic principles of systems theory and their application to congregational life. Likewise, Charles Cosgrove and Dennis Hatfield’s *Church Conflict: The Hidden Systems Behind the Fights* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994) provides a broad application of family systems theory to congregational conflict.

While family systems theory is extremely helpful in clarifying the emotional landscape through which congregational conflict occurs, it does not exhaust the range of psychological perspectives that are helpful in such situations. Robert Randall’s *Pastor and Parish: The Psychological Core of Ecclesiastical Conflicts* (New York: Human Sciences Press, 1988) is a particularly important instance. Randall uses psychoanalytic self psychology to show how the needs and fears brought by the pastor and congregation affect the sense of vitality and cohesiveness each experiences and, subsequently, the kinds of experiences they attempt to generate with one another. Congregational conflict, for example, can be the result of pastor and congregation attempting to elicit from one another a particular kind of soothing or recognition central to their brokenness.

A version of psychoanalytic theory known as social systems theory has also been usefully employed in this regard. Within social systems theory, a psychodynamic focus on covert or unconscious dimensions of authority, boundaries, power, and leadership organizes the discussion. The text by Shapiro and Carr noted above derives largely from this orientation as does the book edited by Anton Obholzer and Vega Zagier Roberts, *The*
Unconscious at Work (London: Routledge, 1994). While not addressing the congregational context itself, this collection of essays is very useful in orienting newcomers to this important perspective and its implications for understanding organizational life.

As can be seen from the above discussion, the contemporary literature on the dynamics of congregational conflict is dominated by the application of various psychological ideas and theories to congregational life. Psychoanalytic theory and family systems theory, in particular, often set the terms in these discussions for helping pastors understand the complex and frequently confusing array of things that happen in the midst of conflict. The application of these theories has produced significant benefits to the church and has been of immense help to many pastors and congregations struggling with conflict. However, they have not been well integrated with the core practical theological task of the congregation. This has often left congregations believing that dealing with conflict is something they have to do in order to get back to their real task rather than seeing it as an expression of their mission in the world. A first corrective step in this direction is to help congregations see the social and cultural context of conflict: the ways in which the emotional dynamics noted above shape are shaped by the broader social and cultural world in which the congregation exists.

Social and Cultural Issues

Two social and cultural dimensions of congregational conflict are important to note. First, as Penny Edgell Becker has made clear in her study Congregations in Conflict: Cultural Models of Local Religious Life (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), the kinds of dynamics that tend to emerge in congregational conflict depend, in part, on the religio-moral culture of the congregation. In other words, if we focus only on the characteristic features of systems per se, we are likely to miss the particular “moral order” of the congregation in and through which conflict takes place. Becker’s study of five distinct moral orders (family congregations, community congregations, leader congregations, houses of worship, and mixed congregations) provides a compelling exploration of how “bundles of core tasks [and] ideas about who we are and how we do things here” (187) shape the nature and character of conflict likely to occur within each moral order. Though Becker’s sociological work is not written directly to those providing leadership in conflict situations, it does offer important
insights that need to be taken into account by such persons, helping us see how the moral and spiritual order that characterizes our life together as a congregation profoundly influences the form and content of what we are likely to disagree about and the ways in which we do so.

While Becker addresses the notion of institutional culture as it relates to conflict, a second dimension concerns the role of racial, ethnic, national, or gender cultures in shaping the dynamics of conflict. Conflict will be experienced and expressed quite differently given the cultural patterns and expectations that influence the participants’ lives. Given the increasing diversity within congregations (and the increasing recognition of the diversity that was already there), being sensitive to these differences and knowing how to respond to and learn from them are vitally important. How to respond to conflict, for example, in a way that respects (without being held hostage by) differences and responds appropriately to power inequalities is a significant challenge. David Augsburger’s *Conflict Mediation across Cultures: Pathways and Patterns* (Louisville: Westminster, 1992) is the core guide here, though *Conflict Management in Congregations*, referred to above, also has several helpful essays on this topic.

**Theological Resources**

The very use of the phrase *conflict management* to describe how the church deals with conflict points in the direction of the difficulties congregations often have in coping with conflict as an expression of their theological self-understanding. Sometimes even the rich vocabulary of the faith regarding conflict (reconciliation, forgiveness, confession, penance) gets coopted by the languages of secular conflict-management strategies. Regardless of how helpful we may find these theories and strategies regarding conflict management, they cannot be simply uncritically accepted outside of a thoughtful engagement with the languages and practices of the church. It is here, however, that the literature on congregational conflict tends to be somewhat less helpful. It often neither critically engages the theological self-understanding of the church nor helps the congregation do so as it works through its conflict.

The result, to borrow a phrase from Robert Schreiter, is that we are sometimes led to forget that reconciliation in Christian faith is less a strategy than a spirituality. Indeed, Schreiter’s text *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality and Strategies* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1998) is an effort
to help us think through what that means. As such, even though it addresses conflict more broadly than the congregational context, it provides a significant theological resource for pastors and laity reflecting on reconciliation as a practical theological task of the church. Likewise, Miroslav Volf’s *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996) could usefully be read in this same respect. David Augsburger’s book, noted above, also provides a helpful discussion of forgiveness and reconciliation in cultural context.

**Leadership in Congregational Conflict**

I will sketch three central features of leadership in the midst of conflict. First, leadership in congregational conflict requires what is sometimes called a “non-anxious” or “non-reactive” presence. Conflict amplifies so long as the chain of anxiety (or other intense feelings) remains intact. This has two elements. On the one hand, leadership in conflict needs to not act the anxiety out in destructive ways or pass the anxiety along to other members of the congregation. On the other hand, leadership must “contain” the anxiety, i.e., it must hold the anxiety in such a way as to learn from it what is happening within the congregation. This is, perhaps, simply to say that we need to learn how to listen and speak differently in the midst of conflict. A lively and useful guide here is Arthur Paul Boers’s *Never Call Them Jerks: Healthy Responses to Difficult Behavior* (Alban Institute, 1999). An important work for helping us understand our own strengths and weaknesses in dealing with conflict is Speed Leas’s *Discover Your Conflict Management Style* (Alban Institute, 1998).

Second, reestablishing appropriate role boundaries of individuals and committees within the congregation is also important. Destructive conflict is almost always perpetuated by the violation of role boundaries by various members of the congregation: either assuming too much authority or assuming too little authority (overstepping the boundaries of their roles or failing to enact their roles fully enough). This creates or intensifies distrust within the congregation and often undercuts whatever structures (pastor-parish relations committees, for example) may normally function to work through the conflict less destructively.

Third, conflict management is not solely the work of the pastor but rather the work of the whole congregation. Congregations, therefore, need to be prepared to deal with conflict as a part of regular Christian formation.
There is no sphere of our lives (marriage, friendships, work, spirituality) immune from conflict. Knowing how to live well in the already—not yet of God’s reconciliation, therefore, is a central element of Christian life in general, as well as of life in congregations. While there are a variety of congregational resources available in this regard, I have found the book edited by Carolyn Schrock-Shenk and Lawrence Ressler, *Making Peace with Conflict: Practical Skills for Conflict Transformation* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1999) particularly useful.

Practices of reconciliation within congregations are in various stages of development and/or disarray in North American Christianity. How much support pastors and congregational members facing conflict have from their religious traditions and judicatories varies considerably. The current literature on conflict management in congregations can serve us particularly well in understanding the emotional dynamics of conflict and in providing us with basic strategies for moving through it. We must, however, develop a stronger sense of dealing with congregational conflict as an expression of and a challenge to the practical theological work through which we reproduce our identity and reaffirm our call.

---

*K. Brynolf Lyon is Professor of Practical Theology and Pastoral Care at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis, Indiana.*
In *Living Grace*, Bishop Walter Klaiber and Dr. Manfred Marquardt make a major contribution to the growing corpus of quality resources for understanding and living doctrine and theology from a Wesleyan perspective. Using the officially approved doctrinal/theological statement of The United Methodist Church, “Doctrinal Standards and Our Theological Task,” as the basic framework, the authors present a compelling and coherent exposition of United Methodist theology.

The subtitle of the book, “An Outline of United Methodist Theology,” accurately portrays the content. The authors intend “to set forth as clearly as possible the biblical basis for United Methodist theology in order to place it in dialogue with the ecumenical heritage of the church” (13). Further, the book is “an effort to assist theologically reflective persons in and outside The United Methodist Church in formulating and constructing their own theological positions with reference to this ‘model outline’ of a theology of The United Methodist Church” (13).

The book is organized into four provocative and inviting sections: Responsible Proclamation, or Fundaments for a Theology of The United Methodist Church; Universal Salvation, or God’s Love for God’s World; Personal Faith, or The Personal Experience of Salvation; and Christian Existence in Its Wholeness, or The Reality of Love.

With careful attention to biblical foundations, historical context, intellectual discipline, and current realities, the authors present a comprehensive analysis and passionate proclamation of basic Christian beliefs and doctrines.

Three features of this volume make it remarkable and worthy of reading by United Methodists who seek to do theology from a Wesleyan perspective. One feature is its comprehensiveness. It succeeds in presenting United Methodist theology systematically and demonstrates how the components of our doctrinal framework fit together. A second laudable feature is the way in which the authors use the Quadrilateral
without calling attention to it. It is clear that primacy is given to Scripture; and the biblical scholarship is both thorough and accessible. But the proper role of reason and experience in theological inquiry and doctrinal exposition is observed throughout the volume.

Perhaps the most helpful feature of this book is the manner in which the authors place every doctrine and affirmation in the broader ecumenical and historical context. Not only is *Living Grace* an outline of United Methodist theology; it is also a concise history of major doctrines of the Christian faith. The authors demonstrate that United Methodist doctrine and theology are integrally related to the whole Christian community and share in the historical development of the Christian faith.

United Methodism confronts a critical need for theological reflection. Understanding foundational doctrines is necessary if the church is to engage in responsible theological inquiry and exploration. As the United Methodist doctrinal/theological statement in the *Book of Discipline* affirms, theological work inevitability requires that we give careful attention to doctrinal standards. Writing from their European context, Klaiber and Marquardt have provided a model for United Methodists in other contexts to engage our doctrines and perform the theological task as members of the broader ecumenical community.

Reviewed by Kenneth L. Carder. Carder is Bishop of the Mississippi Area of The United Methodist Church.

**Beyond the Ordinary: Spirituality for Church Leaders**, by Ben Campbell Johnson and Andrew Dreitcer (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001)

For recent decades, spiritual formation ministries among Protestant denominations have been expressed primarily beyond the parish and for individuals. Johnson and Dreitcer contribute a comprehensive agenda for pastors and congregational leaders to renew the church by attending to the pivotal tasks of spiritual formation in the context of our parish ministry. Their intentions for us spell nothing short of a fresh, communal visit to the “well” of God’s living presence in Christ.

Johnson and Dreitcer introduce each element of this agenda for congregational leaders with an eye to the cadre of “spiritual revolution-
aries” who accompany us through history, reminding us that attention to God’s guiding presence can set us at odds with a culture that has come to be comfortably ensconced within our congregations. In the midst of what they observe to be the “collapse of our (Western) culture” (7), the authors sound a clear call for church leaders to mind the care of our souls. A spirituality for today means frequent and deepening encounters with the Holy through sacrament, service, activism, and openness to the mystical presence of the Divine.

Chapter by chapter, Johnson and Dreitcer offer theological foundations and practical applications of each component they identify with “cutting-edge spirituality.” Those components provide a dynamic map that points to these core tasks:

- **A strong focus on spiritual formation with one another in the life of the parish.** Recognize, they say, the central role of God’s Spirit in the guidance of the church’s total life.

- **The unity of a spirituality of action and a spirituality of contemplation.** Do not be tempted, they urge us, to emphasize one at the expense of the other; for each belongs with the other in the flow of God’s power through our life and ministries.

- **A spirituality that is biblically based.** Expect, the authors exhort, to encounter the vital presence of the Holy as we read, pray, and embody the Word of God.

- **Discovery of each congregation’s underlying and prevailing myth.** The authors’ observations about the function of myth (the central story or tenets that govern a congregation’s identity and decisions) are a noteworthy contribution to this process.

- **Seeking God’s vision for our life together in ministry (in contrast to our custom of planning and management).** This work is characterized by a willingness to trust the Spirit’s guidance.

- **A practice of (spiritual) discernment that displaces our overly controlled and humanly managed decision making processes.** “What does God call us to do?” becomes a key question.

- **Leaders functioning as spiritual companions and guides for the church.** The authors urge more attention to the spiritual maturing of those who lead and minister with others.

- **Regular journeys to the “well,” where body and soul are refreshed and replenished by God’s grace and love.**
• Practicing a contemplative willingness to stop and listen for God. The book counsels us to deepen our capacity to rest in God as we move through the breathless activity of our world.

Johnson and Dreitcer have issued a helpful guide to faithful living as the body of Christ in this time. They commend this life, with all its risks, for spiritual formation, renewal, and revolution.

Reviewed by Diane Luton Blum. Blum is Pastor of Edgehill United Methodist Church in Nashville, Tennessee.

Strategies for Brief Pastoral Counseling, ed. by Howard W. Stone (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001)

Howard W. Stone has gone the second mile in the formulation of this rich and helpful text. His previous works, addressing brief and crisis counseling, were requisite reading for caregivers seeking to help persons to regain focus in life. In contrast to his previous works, Strategies for Brief Pastoral Counseling is more than a single tool for addressing crisis human transactions. It can be seen as a toolbox, or as a dynamic handbook, for creative and theoretically grounded pastoral action.

Professor Stone has assembled a rich and diverse cadre of pastors, pastoral theologians, pastoral counselors, marriage and family counselors, and organizational systems leaders who offer a synthesis of modern thought on brief pastoral counseling. The book is organized with precision and depth into three distinct sections: The Case for Brief Pastoral Counseling; Brief Pastoral Counseling Strategies; and Pastoral Counseling: Theory and Practice. The text is developed with such comprehensive care that both the novice ministerial candidate and the seasoned teacher of pastoral care and counseling will find insightful guidance and best principles for practice. Moreover, readers who possess varying levels of knowledge, skill, and experience will discover research and testimony that affirm the spiritual wisdom inherent in brief pastoral counseling as an economical and efficient pastoral counseling method.

As an instructional manual for functional, limited, counseling processes, Strategies for Brief Pastoral Counseling links classic historical developments in pastoral counseling to relevant, contemporary realities. The book recognizes and confirms time and context as the crucial variables in
facilitating meaningful and effective short-term (brief) pastoral counseling. It also succeeds in its mission to reconnect the theory of brief pastoral counseling with basic ministerial practices. Professor Stone and his writers have exceptionally fulfilled the premise of the text; namely, that brief pastoral counseling should be the normative mode of practice by most pastoral caregivers.

The essential value of this text lies in the clear outline and development strategies for brief pastoral counseling. The strategies can be characterized as a new way of thinking about the overarching needs of persons in congregational contexts. As the method of choice, brief counseling stresses the critical value of simple, focused, sessions; priority attending and listening; clarity about the core problem to be solved; and a clear framework for evaluating the problem. A practitioner of brief pastoral counseling is encouraged to journey with parishioners in recognizing the coping resources that compliment problem reduction, goal formulation, and action planning for change and growth.

Finally, this book should occupy a visible place on the pastor’s desk, because it is filled with relevant biblical points of reference, instructive case studies, and illustrative applied theoretical diagrams. Sound pastoral theology is balanced with straightforward principles of counseling and redemptive caring.

Reviewed by Vergel L. Lattimore. Lattimore is Professor of Pastoral Care at Methodist Theological School in Ohio in Delaware, Ohio.

Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness, by Clark H. Pinnock (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001)

Clark Pinnock offers this monograph as a full-scale explication and defense of the Open view of God. Pinnock and others publicly presented the view in a 1994 book titled The Openness of God. For those unfamiliar with the basic outlines of this theological alternative, Pinnock provides ample definition and characterization of it in Most Moved Mover.

Openness theology envisions God as a self-sufficient, though relational, trinitarian Being who voluntarily created the world out of nothing. God graciously relates to the world as one self-limited out of respect for the genuine freedom of creatures. This relational, pantemporal God does not
The Open view of God emphasizes love as God’s chief attribute and as the primary priority for theological construction. “The living God is . . . the God of the Bible,” writes Pinnock, “the one who is genuinely related to the world, whose nature is the power of love and whose relationship with the world is that of a most moved, not unmoved, Mover” (3).

The book’s introductory chapter may be the most interesting part of the book to those already familiar with the general themes of Openness theology. In it, Pinnock cites numerous objections to the Open view penned mostly by Evangelical theologians of a Calvinist bent. While Reformed criticisms have been harsh, not all Evangelicals object to the Open view of God. Pinnock lists those found mostly in Wesleyan, Arminian, and Pentecostal circles as appreciative hearers and sympathizers.

The remaining chapters follow the fourfold approach of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. Pinnock looks to Scripture as the primary source for theology and finds Open themes throughout the biblical witness. In Chapter 2, Pinnock turns to assess the authority of the Christian tradition, while in Chapter 3 (the most exciting chapter, in my view), he explains his preference for a dynamic, relational philosophy—a view he calls “biblical philosophy”—as opposed to substantive philosophy of classical thought. In this chapter, Pinnock shows how the Open view relates with process philosophy. The Open view shares with process thought the desire to overcome an emphasis upon the metaphysic of being and to emphasize, instead, a metaphysics of becoming. Pinnock believes process theologians are correct to conceive of God as affecting everything and being affected by everything. He agrees with the process notion that God is temporally everlasting rather than timelessly eternal. He also agrees that God should be understood as passible and omniscient in the sense of exhaustively knowing all that can be known.

Pinnock agrees with the process view that Genesis 1 does not itself teach creation out of absolutely nothing and might indicate a metaphysical dualism and thus an inherent limitation of God’s power. But he prefers to interpret the passage as being linked to another biblical theme: spiritual warfare. Pinnock suggests that the chaotic situation of Genesis 1 arises due to rebellious angels. For me, Pinnock’s alternative speculation seems to support what he ultimately wants to deny; namely, to say that God confronts rebellious angels at creation supports the process claim that God

exhaustively foreknow future actual events.
always confronts free nondivine others whom God cannot entirely control.

The way in which Open theists characterize God’s relationship with the world receives much of Pinnock’s attention as he distinguishes between process and Open theisms. The Open vision of the Trinity–world relation provides a way to portray God as essentially loving and creation as a gift, not a necessity. Pinnock acknowledges that one might wonder why the self-limited God envisioned by Open theists doesn’t withdraw or override creaturely freedom more often and thus prevent genuinely evil occurrences. He admits that his position is vulnerable but maintains, “[A]s an open theist, I cannot accept that God is metaphysically limited.” Instead, he says, “I am forced to say that God has made a commitment to the creation project that constrains His actions” (149).

The problem with this wholly voluntary covenant that God allegedly makes with the world is that it implies that God is more interested in keeping promises than in loving steadfastly. We can all think of times in which breaking promises must be done in the name of love. A theodicy based on voluntary divine promise-keeping arises out of the metaphysical hypothesis that considers the divine will to preside over God’s loving nature when the God–world relationship is considered. However, this metaphysics does not provide a basis upon which to claim that God essentially loves the world.

The last chapter of the book, “The Existential Fit,” addresses theology’s adequacy to the demands of life. Pinnock believes that the Openness model is more relevant to real-life situations than conventional theologies and that Open theism confirms deep human intuitions about choice and the future.

I heartily recommend Most Moved Mover. It is written in an accessible style and gets at the heart of many deep theological issues. I see the book as a major step forward in the Open-view adventure to provide Christians with an adequate, consistent, and biblically faithful theological alternative. Wesleyans not already familiar with this Evangelical phenomenon ought to join with many in their own tradition who embrace the Open view as congruent with Wesleyan theology. Openness theology provides windows for dialogue with both conservative evangelicals and the Christian progressive left.

Reviewed by Thomas Jay Oord. Oord is Professor of Theology and Philosophy at Northwest Nazarene University in Nampa, Idaho.
IN THIS ISSUE:

Issue Theme:
The Ongoing Significance of John Wesley for United Methodism

Wesleyan Faith: A Contemporary Reflection
Josiah U. Young III

Wesley’s Prescription for “Making Disciples of Jesus Christ”: Insights for the Twenty-first-Century Church
Randy L. Maddox

Myth, American Culture, and Sanctification
Mark Emery Reynolds

Recovering Human Nature through Christian Practice
Kenneth H. Carter, Jr.

Itinerancy Is Dead—But It Can Live Again
John G. McEllhenney

Outside the Theme
The Church’s Mission in Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century
F. Thomas Trotter

The Church in Review
Clergy Burnout
Carlyle Fielding Stewart III
Karen D. Scheib

A Word on the Word
Lectionary Study
R. Grace Imathiu

Issues In: Congregational Conflict
K. Brynolf Lyon

Book Reviews

Beyond the Ordinary: Spirituality for Church Leaders, by Ben Campbell Johnson and Andrew Dreitcer (Eerdmans, 2001) Reviewer: Diane Luton Blum

Strategies for Brief Pastoral Counseling, ed. by Howard W. Stone (Fortress, 2001) Reviewer: Vergel L. Lattimore

Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness, by Clark H. Pinnock (Baker, 2001) Reviewer: Thomas Jay Oord

NEXT ISSUE:
“MAKING DISCIPLES OF JESUS CHRIST”
The Ongoing Significance of John Wesley for United Methodism
QUARTERLY REVIEW
EDITORIAL BOARD

TED A. CAMPBELL
Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary,
Evanston, IL

MINERVA G. CARCAÑO
Metropolitan District, Portland, OR

DUANE A. EWERS
General Board of Higher Education and Ministry,
The United Methodist Church, Nashville, TN

PATRICIA FARRIS
First United Methodist Church, Santa Monica, CA

GRANT HAGIYA
Los Angeles District Office, Los Angeles, CA

JEROME KING DEL PINO, CHAIR
General Board of Higher Education and Ministry,
The United Methodist Church, Nashville, TN

MARY ANN MOMAN
General Board of Higher Education and Ministry,
The United Methodist Church, Nashville, TN

THOMAS W. OGLETREE
The Divinity School, Yale University,
New Haven, CT

HARRIETT JANE OLSON
The United Methodist Publishing House,
Nashville, TN

RUSSELL E. RICHEY
Candler School of Theology, Atlanta, GA

LINDA E. THOMAS
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago,
Chicago, IL

TRACI C. WEST
Theological School, Drew University,
Madison, NJ

DAVID K. YEMBA
Faculty of Theology, Africa University,
Mutare, Zimbabwe
Editorial
Living Faithfully, the United Methodist Way ............................... 5

ISSUE THEME:
The Ongoing Significance of John Wesley for United Methodism
Wesleyan Faith: A Contemporary Reflection ............................. 7
Josiah U. Young III
Wesley's Prescription for "Making Disciples of Jesus Christ":
Insights for the Twenty-First-Century Church ....................... 15
Randy L. Maddox
Myth, American Culture, and Sanctification ............................. 29
Mark Emery Reynolds
Recovering Human Nature through Christian Practice .................. 45
Kenneth H. Carter, Jr.
Itinerancy Is Dead—But It Can Live Again .............................. 59
John G. McElhenney

Outside the Theme
The Church's Mission in Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century ............................. 71
F. Thomas Trotter

The Church in Review
Clergy Burnout
Carlyle Fielding Stewart III .................................................. 78
Karen D. Schelb ............................................................... 78
A Word on The Word

Lectionary Study
  R. Grace Imathiu ........................................... 85

Issues In: Congregational Conflict
  K. Brynolf Lyon .................................................. 97

Book Reviews

Living Grace: An Outline of United Methodist Theology, by Walter Klaiber and
  Manfred Marquardt (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001)
  Reviewer: Kenneth L. Carder .................................. 104

Beyond the Ordinary: Spirituality for Church Leaders, by Ben Campbell
  Johnson and Andrew Dreitcer (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001)
  Reviewer: Diane Luton Blum .................................. 105

Strategies for Brief Pastoral Counseling, ed. by Howard W. Stone
  (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001)
  Reviewer: Vergel L. Lattimore ............................... 107

Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness, by Clark H. Pinnock
  (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001)
  Reviewer: Thomas Jay Oord .................................... 108
Living Faithfully, the United Methodist Way

HENDRIK R. PIETERSE

The year 2003 marks the three-hundredth anniversary of the birth of the founder of Methodism, John Wesley. This historic event provides Methodists with a felicitous opportunity to reflect on the continuing influence of their forebear in the faith. Not surprisingly, Methodist media abound with announcements of efforts and projects aimed at commemorating, celebrating, and interpreting Wesley’s life and ministry.

The scope of these efforts is impressive: an inaugural music festival at Oxford University, where Wesley was a student and fellow; a fourteen-day “immersion experience” in England for “Wesley pilgrims”; a historical convocation to celebrate Wesley’s “life and legacy”; a special edition of BBC television’s “Songs of Praise” devoted to celebrating Wesley’s birth; several scholarly conferences aimed at interpreting Wesley’s theological contribution; and many more. This is not to mention the many religious publications whose efforts to honor this remarkable eighteenth-century Anglican priest take the form of thoughtful conversation about the ongoing significance of his theological and spiritual legacy for the twenty-first century.

Quarterly Review joins these worthwhile efforts at remembering, celebrating, and reflecting. Thus, this spring issue examines and assesses the ongoing significance of John Wesley’s life and thought, particularly for those in the Methodist family who call themselves United Methodists.

The five theme essays all critically reflect upon key aspects of Wesley’s theological vision, thought, and practice and assess ways to articulate their continued intellectual cogency and unleash their power to inspire practices of personal and social holiness befitting disciples of Jesus Christ.

A central accomplishment of Wesley’s was to insist that faithful discipleship is holistic—a way of being that intentionally integrates head and heart, reason and piety, personal and social life and refuses to succumb to the
Enlightenment's dichotomous construal of individual and communal existence. In different ways, the essays in this volume all wrestle with the task of how to craft a form of holistic discipleship in the Wesleyan mode that will allow the church to be a beacon of hope and its people instruments of transforming grace amid the immense and often heart-rending challenges of the twenty-first century. For this task, says Randy Maddox in his essay, Wesley's "prescription" is unequivocal: Insist on a form of life characterized by the dynamic interplay of doctrine and discipline—formation in a distinctively Christian worldview and unremitting participation in specific practices that Wesley called "means of grace"—and propelled to maturity through the discipline of self-denial. Kenneth Carter, Jr., carefully examines the formative role of the means of grace in shaping human beings in the imago Dei—a journey of transformation Wesley and his followers call "sanctification"—to argue for a distinctively United Methodist way of life centered in four such practices: singing, testimony, searching the Scriptures, and generosity with the poor.

Mark Reynolds inquires how United Methodists can retrieve the doctrine of sanctification for our postmodern present. Using the category of myth, Reynolds analyzes the personal and social myths that shape American life and then construes sanctification as an alternative myth that issues in a thoroughly countercultural form of discipleship. For Josiah Young, such a countercultural existence is possible for United Methodists only if they are willing to use the resources of their Wesleyan faith—catholic spirit and Christian perfection—to be a force for progressive change in a "world house" rendered dysfunctional by the ongoing scourge of racism.

In his provocative essay, John McEllhenney argues that Wesley's vision of the itinerancy—men on the social margin ministering to persons on the social margin—has died in American Methodism. To recover their founder's vision, United Methodists must allow new Wesley-style itinerancies to be imagined that will minister to persons who feel themselves marginalized by mainstream United Methodism—persons such as the gay and lesbian Christians who exist on the fringes of America's homophobic culture.

May this tercentenary celebration of John Wesley's birth prompt a renewed quest for forms of discipleship that express the best of United Methodism's Wesleyan heritage.

---

Hendrik R. Pieterse is editor of Quarterly Review.
John Wesley declared the world his parish in a letter he wrote in 1739 to the Reverend James Hervey. Hervey had wanted Wesley to refrain from preaching to those "who [were] none of [his] charge," the Calvinist especially. Wesley wrote to Hervey:

If you ask on what principle ... I acted, it was this: a desire to be Christian; and a conviction that whatever I judge conducive thereto, that I am bound to do; wherever I judge I can best answer this end, thither it is my duty to go. On this principle I set out for America; on this I visited the Moravian Church; and on the same I am ready now (God being my helper) to go to Abyssinia or China, or whithersoever it shall please God by this conviction to call me.1

Wesley’s desire to be a Christian—his sense of the power of the religion—moved him to try to influence the world for the better. Whether Methodists today can follow Wesley’s intentions depends on their being a force for progressive change in the United States and the world. In those places where Methodism is such a force, Methodists appear as peculiar to their compatriots as Wesley did to Hervey.

My purpose in this essay is to suggest how Wesleyan faith can empower Methodists to become "peculiar"—to become forces for progressive change in the United States and the rest of the world. To this end, I will focus on the problem of racism.
WESLEYAN FAITH: A CONTEMPORARY REFLECTION

Wesley's "Catholic Spirit": Faith and the Problem of Racism

The world faces a host of problems today, one of which is racism. Its history is long. In Wesley's day, the problem centered around the enslavement of Africans, which Wesley passionately opposed. In his letter of 1791 to the celebrated abolitionist, William Wilberforce, Wesley states,

Dear Sir,

Unless the divine power has raised you up to be as Athanasius contra mundum, I do not see how you can go through your glorious enterprise in opposing that execrable villainy which is the scandal of religion, of England, and of human culture. Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you? Are all of them together stronger than God? O be not weary of well doing! Go on, in the name of God and in the power of his might, till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away before it.

Reading this morning a tract wrote by a poor African, I was particularly struck by that circumstance that a man who has a black skin, being wronged or outraged by a white man, can have no redress; it being a "law" in all our colonies that the oath of a black against a white goes for nothing. What villainy is this? That he who has guided you from youth up may continue to strengthen you in this and all things, is the prayer of, dear sir,

Your affectionate servant.²

Many hold that the United States has moved well beyond its ugly past, but in their book By the Color of Our Skin: The Illusion of Integration and the Reality of Race, Leonard Steinhornd Barbara Diggs-Brown point out that integration today is merely virtual and "enables whites to live in a world with blacks without having to do so in fact."² The media—television, for instance—proffers a certain disingenuousness and dishonesty, which prevents this nation from coming to grips with reality.

According to genetics professor Luigi Luca Cavalli-Sforza, whose pioneering work has exposed the view that racism is mired in prejudice rather than genetic differences, one such reality is that

while marriage between whites and Americans of Asiatic, Amerind, and Polynesian derivation (in the Hawaiian islands) is more common, marriage

QUARTERLY REVIEW
between [black] and white Americans has increased very little since the first steps toward equal rights were taken. As the geneticist Curt Stern pointed out many years ago, if skin pigmentation were irrelevant in selecting a marriage partner, the color gap between black and white would disappear with two to three generations. The fact is that the cultural and economic differences are still too strong, and awareness of skin color is too ingrained, for the situation to change with satisfactory speed.  

According to Cavalli-Sforza, the reason for this marginalization is that the black body, through no fault of its own, reinforces a certain spiritual vacuity in the nation. Socioeconomic contradictions (consider the gross inequities of the public school system) allegedly reflect the "fact" that whites are more intelligent than blacks. Allegedly, then, the fact that blacks lag behind whites academically is born of a certain necessity. As Cavalli-Sforza points out, however, such "necessity" masks the injustice that disables blacks, so that whites can feel superior. He attributes such feelings of superiority to unhappiness—the unhappiness of the social group that feels superior. Cavalli-Sforza goes on to argue convincingly that "unhappiness, whatever its source, generally stimulates the search for a scapegoat, who is always somebody weaker." (The use of weaker here signifies the reality of injustice; the fact that blacks are undermined by an unfair system. It does not signify that whites are inherently stronger than blacks.)

Steinhorn, Diggs-Brown, and Cavalli-Sforza suggest to me that racism is an ethical and thus a spiritual problem to be overcome through education and, in the case of the church, through a humane spirituality. Wesley is instructive: in his sermon "Catholic Spirit," he suggests that the true Christian is "filled with the energy of love." This energy raises certain questions: "Is thine heart right towards thy neighbor? Dost thou love, as thyself, all mankind without exception?" How utterly impossible to be a United Methodist with any integrity if the church fails to answer those "catholic" questions—at every turn and in every conceivable context—given the ugliness of our historic and present contradictions. Indeed, Wesley's sermon is helpful as it suggests the diversity that should reign in the church today. His appropriation of a biblical question—"Is your heart as true to mine as mine is to yours?" (2 Kings 10:15)—features prominently in the sermon.

On one level, Wesley's appropriation of this question is problematic. Given the context of 2 Kings 10:15, which serves as the basis for Wesley's
message, I can neither endorse the violence of Jehu nor the theology that upholds the extermination of the line of Ahab (2 Kings 10:10-11; 1 Kings 21:21). On another level, though, putting aside the problematic exegesis, I can appreciate Wesley's appropriation of Jehu's question to Jehonadab, "Is your heart as true to mine as mine is to yours?" Wesley is trying to assert that Christ transcends our spiritualities insofar as they are but opinions of a certain sort. Christ transcends them by virtue of the fact that he is the love incarnate that joins us together as justified and sanctified images of God. Christ thus belongs to all of us, and the inverse is also true. For God who sends Christ into the world is no respecter of persons. The very plurality of the category person suggests that there is an astonishing diversity in Christ: Christians justified by Christ and sanctified by the Spirit are quite different from one another—i.e., the "particular modes" of being in God "are almost as various as among the heathen [sic]." Wesley thought that these particular modes were externals that should not prevent the forging of internal solidarity among persons for Christ's sake. So "how," asks Wesley,

shall we choose among so much variety? No man can choose for, or prescribe to, another. But every one must follow the dictates of his own conscience, in simplicity and godly sincerity... Nor has any creature power to constrain another to walk by his own rule. God has given no right to any of the children of men, thus to lord it over the conscience of his brethren; but every man must judge for himself, as every man must give an account of himself to God. 7

Those committed to diversity recognize the power of Wesley's argument that "every one must follow the dictates of his own conscience, in simplicity and godly sincerity."

"The Dictates of Conscience" and the Legacy of Malcolm X

Wesley's "dictates of conscience" reminds me that I have been molded as much by Malcolm X as by the Methodist church. His untimely death deprived my community of a brilliant teacher on the threshold of realizing his potential as a force for worldwide good. Freed from the narrow chauvinism of the Nation of Islam, Minister Malcolm's critical eye focused on progressive alliances with all the world's people who radically opposed racial and economic injustice. He especially identified with Africa, the
Josiah U. Young III

bedrock of the cultural and global dimensions of his worldview. In promul­
gating a certain Pan-African consciousness, Malcolm tried to expose the
problem of Euro-American hegemony within the minds of black
Americans. To use Wesley, however heuristically, one might well say that
Malcolm held uncommon opinions “indeed quite peculiar to himself.” The
fact that I find many of his ideas compelling likely makes me as peculiar to
many Methodists as Minister Malcolm himself was. Still, many of his opin­
ions—his Pan-Africanism, for instance—are inextricable from my Methodist
identity. I, then, feel compelled to appropriate this little bit from “Catholic
Spirit”: “I do not mean, ‘Be of my opinion.’ You need not: I do not expect or
desire it. Neither do I mean, ‘I will be of your opinion.’ I cannot: it does not
depend on my choice: I can no more think, than I can see or hear, as I
will.” I would not expect most white Methodists—or a good number of the
black ones, for that matter—to uphold the legacy of Malcolm X, as I do. For
the sake of a catholic spirit, however, I do think that all Methodists should
appreciate that Malcolm’s legacy is still instructive. The depth of the
problem of racism in the United States makes it so; to name but a few
issues: the problem of racial profiling; the disproportionately high incarcer­
ation of black males; the inequities of public education; the discrepancies
in income; the unfair lending practices of banking institutions; the under­
mining of affirmative action; the ongoing marginalization of the black
underclass; the waxing frustration of the black middle class. Indeed, what
Malcolm X said to those whom he called “sincere white people” rings true
today: “In our mutual sincerity we might be able to show a road to the
salvation of America’s very soul. It can only be salvaged if human rights
and dignity, in full, are extended to black [people].” And to all people!

Going On to Perfection for the Sake of Our World House

Today, racism is a factor in global poverty, terrorism, genocide (as exempli­
fied recently in Rwanda)—I could go on. Indeed, Martin Luther King, Jr.,
thought racism was at the heart of the world’s dysfunction. I think it
continues to be the case. King writes that racism’s “vicious grasp knows no
geographical boundaries. In fact, racism and its perennial ally—economic
exploitation—provide the key to understanding the international complica­
tions of this generation.” Racism and other forms of social injustice frag­
ment what King called the “world house.” This metaphor signifies that all
people belong to one “household”—planet earth—and so ought to live in
peace with justice, for what divided house can remain standing? 11

King's "world house," which expresses his concern for the world's well-being, reminds me of John Wesley's declaration, "The world is my parish." Both suggest to me that we cannot begin to deal with global problems such as racism until we address the fact that Americans are by and large unconcerned with what Wesley called in his letter to Hervey "the glad tidings of salvation," namely, certain "catholic principles": the reformation of the wicked, confirmation of the virtuous, and instruction of the ignorant. 12 If Methodists were focused on those principles, they would stand out as beacons of conflict resolution. As it is, the church—especially in its scholarly life—still struggles with its own diversity. To me, this indicates that many Methodists have not come to grips with—or do not yet want to understand—the irritating particularity that Wesley would have them develop for Christ's sake and for the sake of the world. Still, our ancestor, John Wesley, calls us to actualize a catholic spirit that models Christian perfection to a world house that is our parish.

For Wesley, perfection did not mean that our opinions, our spiritualities, are themselves infallible. Nobody knows everything or does everything right. We are not always agreeable. Either: for the differences we embody are real and always threaten to endow our particularities with a little too much of an edge. I think it fair to say that such an edge is what Wesley meant by an infirmity—"that of calling [one's] brother, 'Thou fool,' or returning 'railing for railing.'" 13 Indeed, the process theologians remind us that bad vibes cling to us as they did to our predecessors, and only the decision to channel them into a force for good will allow us to pass along to posterity feelings that are more humane and hospitable than those of our ancestors. "Bad blood" can be purged from the heart and so need not be an impediment to perfection in our Wesleyan faith.

The vast differences of our convictions need not undermine a catholic spirit. And what, after all, is this spirit if not the conviction that the Holy Spirit has made it possible to overcome the sin that carries enmity to the grave? The commitment to perfection, the praxis that enables one to say to the other, "Give me your hand"—which is the devotion to Christian ethics—is indeed the outward form of this spirit. Wesley calls it "ceasing from sin," if it be interpreted in the lowest sense as regarding only the outward behaviour. 14 But far more significant than this basic cleanliness of intent and conduct is Wesley's sense that one who would be perfect is, by grace.
averse to the devil. According to Wesley, 1 John 3:8-9 makes the point: "Everyone who commits sin is a child of the devil; for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. Those who have been born of God do not sin, because God's seed abides in them; they cannot sin, because they have been born of God."

Wesley's claim is open to dispute. Wesley obviously believed that some of us can be quite sinless—he believed that strongly in the power of grace, his problematic sublation of Jew to Christian notwithstanding. Still, the sinlessness I find compelling concerns the big picture—the world house, in fact. What Martin Luther King wrote shortly before his assassination in 1968 is true: racism goes to the heart of our world's dysfunction. This is so because racism is at bottom a suicidal impulse within the human race—a death instinct, to make an allusion to Sigmund Freud. To that extent, the recent horror of Rwanda was not just peculiar to that part of the world but also reflects our American divisiveness. (The popular notion that the Rwandan holocaust was due to African culture, qua "tribalism," is false. In truth, the genocide stemmed from the colonial importation of racist values alien to Rwanda but indigenous to a context such as the United States.) If we would take steps to remedy our own enmity—to become "sinless" in this respect—we might help others bury the hatchet and live in peace with justice. If we would just see the urgency of it—the waste of human potential; the love affair with opulence; the lack of basic nutrition, education, and opportunity around the world—then we could stop ourselves from yielding to worldwide practices that destroy innocent babies and children in our own ghettos and in the world at large.

Perhaps Methodists, with their Wesleyan faith—catholic spirit and Christian perfection—can provide leadership. The peculiar people called Methodists would then be in the position to pose questions to the world—questions their founder has taught them:

Do you show your love by your works? While you have time, as you have the opportunity, do you in fact "do good to all [persons]," neighbors or strangers, friends or enemies, good or bad? Do you do them all the good you can; endeavoring to supply all their wants; assisting them both in body and soul, to the utmost of your power?
In the tradition of John Wesley, Methodists would be able to assert to the world that only affirmative responses enable one to say to another, "Your heart is true to mine as mine is to yours."

Josiah U. Young III is Professor of Systematic Theology at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, DC.

Endnotes
5. Ibid., 243.
7. Ibid., 383.
8. Ibid., 385.
10. Ibid., 202.
11. Martin Luther King, Jr., Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community? (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968).
15. Wesley writes: "Whosoever would bring down the Christian dispensation to the Jewish standard, whosoever gleans up the examples of weakness recorded in the law and the prophets and thence infers that they who have 'put on Christ' are endued with no greater strength" make a profound mistake. See "Christian Perfection," in Outler, 261.
Wesley's Prescription for "Making Disciples of Jesus Christ": Insights for the Twenty-First-Century Church

RANDY L. MADDOX

This is the religion we long to see established in the world, a religion of love and joy and peace, having its seat in the heart, in the inmost soul, but ever showing itself by its fruits, continually springing forth, not only in all innocence . . . but likewise in every kind of beneficence, in spreading virtue and happiness all around it.2

Is there a more appropriate longing for the church as Christians stand at the outset of a new millennium than this one voiced over a quarter of a millennium ago? Or does it strike us as hopelessly idealistic? John Wesley clearly did not consider it unrealistic when he articulated this as the driving vision of Methodism. If his current descendants do, it may be because we have lost touch with Wesley's wisdom about how to cultivate such Christ-like lives in the world.

The most focused presentation of Wesley's mature wisdom on this central mission of the church is a late sermon titled "Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity." The sermon opens with Wesley's charge that the reason Christian communities around the globe had done so little good in the world was that they were producing so few real Christians. He then identified three factors of typical church life that together account for this lamentable state: first, in too few churches did members attain any adequate understanding of Christian doctrine; second, many of those churches that provided members with doctrinal formation lacked corresponding provision of appropriate Christian discipline; and, third, of churches that provided both doctrine and discipline, there remained in most a broad absence of the specific Christian practice of self-denial.3
Most observers of church life would likely agree that Wesley's description remains broadly applicable today. What might be less clear is the point and perceptiveness of his diagnosis of this situation or his corresponding prescription for effectiveness in raising up authentic disciples of Jesus Christ. What makes doctrine so significant? What does Wesley mean by discipline? And why did he specifically highlight self-denial? Probing these questions may prove instructive for our consideration of how to fulfill the Christian mission in and for the world today.

The Vital Role of Doctrine in Christian Life

The first question we must ponder is why Wesley identified doctrine as foundational to the formation of real Christian life and character. To comprehend this we need to recall that he imbibed through his Anglican tradition the early church's appreciation of theology as a practical discipline. This appreciation recognizes that we humans are "meaning-seeking creatures." We are not content for life merely to happen; we struggle to make sense of why it happens. We do not typically act out of mere impulse; our crucial choices about how to act are guided by convictions about the ultimate nature and purposes of life. The pattern of these orienting convictions is our functional worldview. Thus, the early church understood the primal dimension of Christian theology to be the worldview that orients believers' lives in the world. As Paul put it, Christians perceive things rightly and act appropriately only when they have the "mind of Christ" (see Philippians 2). That this involves holistic dispositions, not merely intellectual convictions, is evident from Paul's parallel emphasis on Christians nurturing the "fruit of the Spirit" (see Galatians 5).

Paul's appeal for Christians to emulate the mind of Christ reflects the reality that this orienting worldview is not unilaterally infused by God at one's conversion. It must be cultivated as part of the intentional process of growing in Christ-likeness. This need defines the second dimension of theology as a practical discipline—the task of forming/reforming a Christian worldview in believers. Since the worldview in question is holistic, this task has proven to involve a variety of activities aimed at invoking and shaping beliefs, affections, and character dispositions. The case of the early church is particularly revealing in this regard. Their theological energies were dominated by the task of forming a Christian worldview in new believers; and they pursued this task with a clear sense that the cultures within
which they lived were bent on instilling quite different worldviews. In this context they prized most highly as "theologians" those—both lay and clergy—who crafted such practical-theological materials as hymns, liturgies, catechetical orations, and spiritual-discipline manuals. These materials established the rhythms and provided the deep narrative that served to instill Christ-likeness in believers' hearts and minds.

Wesley's self-understanding as a theologian reflects this early-church model. His literary efforts focused on providing his Methodist people with the same types of practical-theological materials. For example, recognizing the role of "life narratives" in forming and expressing one's worldview, Wesley particularly exhorted his Methodists to live in the story of Christ and the stories of exemplary Christians (a rich set of which he provided for their reading), so that their orienting narrative might be reshaped in keeping with the pattern of Christ. Likewise, sensing the formative impact of those favorite songs that embed themselves in our memories and being, he carefully edited a series of hymnbooks as resources for sustaining and shaping Christian faith.

In this practical-theological work it is clear that Wesley devoted careful attention to more than just questions of what type of materials had most effective impact. He readily engaged as well the normative dimension of theology as a practical discipline. As a case in point, his diagnosis of the inefficacy of Christianity focused particular attention on the importance of cultivating a proper understanding of Christian convictions about our human condition and God's gracious provisions for our need. His broad-ranging ministry convinced Wesley that a major reason why churches were nurturing so few real Christians was the prevalence of an inadequate notion of the "salvation" that Christianity proclaims. This salvation was too often restricted to the forgiveness of sins. On these terms, "making disciples" involves little more than encouraging unbelievers to exercise justifying faith.

Nothing was more central to Wesley's lifelong ministry than challenging this anemic conception of Christian salvation. For him, it focused too one-sidedly on the theme of Romans 1–3, where our most basic human problem is the guilt by which we "fall short of the glory of God" (3:23) and the crucial aspect of salvation is God's unmerited gift of justification. It failed to do justice to another central biblical theme that can be represented by Romans 7–8, where the deepest impact of sin is our spiritual
debilitation ("I can will what is right, but I cannot do it" [7:18b]) and the gracious gift of God is the empowering and healing presence of the Spirit. Wesley consistently tried to weave these themes together in his instruction on sin, grace, and salvation, as in the following quotes:

Two-fold Nature of Sin: Guilt and Disease

Our sins, considered in regard to ourselves, are chains of iron and fetters of brass. They are wounds wherewith the world, the flesh, and the devil, have gashed and mangled us all over. They are diseases that drink up our blood and spirits, that bring us down to the chambers of the grave. But considered with regard to God, they are debts, immense and numberless.

Two-fold Nature of Grace: Mercy and Power

By "the grace of God" is sometimes to be understood that free love, that unmerited mercy, by which I, a sinner, through the merits of Christ am now reconciled to God. But in this place it rather means that power of God the Holy Ghost which "worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure." As soon as ever the grace of God (in the former sense, his pardoning love) is manifested in our soul, the grace of God (in the latter sense, the power of his Spirit) takes place therein. And now we can perform through God, what to ourselves was impossible... a renewal of soul after His likeness.

Two-fold Nature of Salvation: Pardon and Healing

By salvation I mean, not barely (according to the vulgar notion) deliverance from hell, or going to heaven, but a present deliverance from sin, a restoration of the soul to its primitive health, its original purity; a recovery of the divine nature; the renewal of our souls after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness, in justice, mercy, and truth. This implies all holy and heavenly tempers, and by consequence all holiness of conversation.

The general point of these quotes should be clear, except perhaps for the last line quoted. It is puzzling in part because modern readers think of "tempers" almost exclusively as emotional outbursts. Wesley is using the term here in a sense common in the eighteenth century, where temper referred to an enduring character disposition (toward good or evil actions). The remnant of this earlier meaning comes through when we speak today of tempered metal, which has been strengthened and given a characteristic
shape. The line is also puzzling if we do not know that in the eighteenth century the word conversation referred to all one's outward actions, not just one's verbal discourse. Wesley is assuming here that our actions normally flow from our most characteristic inclinations or dispositions. As such, Christ-like action in the world must be grounded in the transformation of our existing unholy tempers into holy tempers.

Thus, the first prescription Wesley would offer his present descendants is to take seriously the task of cultivating in our communities a biblically grounded and theologically balanced sense of what it means to be a Christian, in order that we might be more effective in making real disciples—that is, believers who are not content merely with being forgiven but embrace responsively the lifelong journey toward full Christ-likeness!

The Contribution of Regular Participation in the Means of Grace

But how do we become different? Wesley would be the first to insist that careful doctrinal formation alone cannot effect this change. Transformation into Christ's likeness is made possible only by God's empowering and renewing grace at work in our lives. That is why Wesley moves from emphasis on doctrine in his diagnostic sermon to insisting that development of real Christians also requires discipline. The type of discipline Wesley had in mind is clear; he gave it official form as the three General Rules of his movement. All those who desire to seek salvation in its full biblical sense are exhorted to (1) do no harm, (2) do as much good as they can for others, and (3) regularly participate in "all the ordinances of God."

The third exhortation reflects Wesley's conviction that regular participation in the means of grace is essential for nurturing Christian life. He repeatedly denounced the folly of those who expect growth in faith and holiness without regular participation in the means through which God has chosen to convey grace. He often explained this connection with an early Christian proverb: "The soul and the body make a [human]; the Spirit and discipline make a Christian." This proverb points toward the dual benefit—Spirit and discipline—that Wesley believed we derive from regular participation in the means of grace.

The Spirit and Discipline Make a Christian

Wesley's early sermons are primarily reminders of the duty to live like Christ. In these sermons he reflects the model of spirituality he learned at his
mother’s knee and that was most broadly represented in the Anglicanism of his youth. This model identified the greatest obstacle to holy living as the “passional” dimension of human life—i.e., those emotional reactions, instincts, and the like that are not a product of our rational initiative and are not under fully conscious control. The normative corollary was that proper choice and action are possible only as we subject this passional dimension of life to rational control. This is admittedly not an easy task, but it was assumed that through exhortation and regular practice—empowered by grace—we could habituate an increased aptitude for maintaining righteousness.

As he sought to live out this inherited model of Christian spirituality, Wesley became increasingly convinced of its inadequacy. He learned by hard experience that rational persuasion alone cannot resist, much less overcome and heal, irregular appetites and passions. As a result his consuming question became not “What would God have me do?” but “How can I do what I know God would have me do?” In particular, “How can I truly love God and others?” In the events leading up to Aldersgate Wesley was repeatedly reminded of the biblical theme that God’s gracious acceptance precedes and provides the possibility of holiness on our part. Then, when he experienced a deep assurance of God’s pardoning love at Aldersgate, he found himself enabled to love God and neighbor as he had so unsuccessfully longed to do. This experience of having “the love of God shed abroad in one’s heart” became central to his mature model of Christian life.

Wesley’s articulation of this mature model was aided by his embrace of the empiricist swing in eighteenth-century British philosophy. For empiricism, truth is experienced receptively by the human intellect rather than being preexistent within it or being imposed by reason upon our experience. In terms of the dynamics of human willing, this philosophical conviction led to the parallel insistence that humans are moved to action only as we are experientially affected. To use an example, they held that rational persuasion of the rightness of loving others is not sufficient of itself to move us actually to do so; we are ultimately inclined and enabled to love others only as we experience being loved ourselves. Wesley’s crucial application of this truth became his insistence that it is only in response to our experience of God’s gracious love for us, shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, that our love for God and others is awakened and can grow.

In this insistence Wesley was giving concrete embodiment, as a model
of Christian life, to the abstract affirmation that grace is prevenient to holy living. Grace is identified not as some extrinsic “gift” but as the very presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The human will is not seen as a reservoir of inherent volitional power but as a capacity to be affected and to “reflect” what we experience. Thereby the freedom to live Christ-like lives is grounded not in our own capacities but in God’s empowering encounter with us. Yet our integrity or accountability is preserved because, while we do not have the capacity to self-generate love, we do have the capacity (what Wesley called “liberty”) to stifle responsive loving.

The foundational assumption of Wesley’s revised model of Christian life, then, was that this life is responsive in nature—not only at its beginning but also all along the journey. This comes through clearly in one of his most extended descriptions of the dynamics of the Christian life:

The life of God in the soul of a believer . . . immediately and necessarily implies the continual inspiration of God’s Holy Spirit: God’s breathing into the soul, and the soul’s breathing back what it first receives from God; a continual action of God upon the soul, the re-action of the soul upon God; an unceasing presence of God, the loving, pardoning God, manifested to the heart . . . [But] God does not continue to act upon the soul unless the soul re-acts upon God. . . . He first loves us, and manifests himself unto us . . . He will not continue to breathe into our soul unless our soul breathes toward him again; unless our love, and prayer, and thanksgiving return to him.\(^8\)

A second prescription that Wesley would offer us, then, is to encourage—and provide means for—experiencing this enlivening presence of the Spirit in our communities, in order that we might nurture believers who “reflect” God’s love in their engagement with the world.

The Spirit and Discipline Make a Christian

To be sure, this reflection is not inevitable. Note in the passage just quoted how directly Wesley moves from the affirmation that grace is responsive to the insistence that it is also responsible—if we do not re-act, God will cease to act. This integral connection was crucial to Wesley’s mature model of Christian life, and he defended it vigorously against the tendency of some of his evangelical colleagues to cast divine grace and human responsibility in a polar relationship. As he reminded his followers, even Saint Augustine
WESLEY’S PRESCRIPTION FOR “MAKING DISCIPLES OF JESUS CHRIST”

(who provided the seeds of the tendency toward this polarization in Western Christianity) insisted, “The God who made us without ourselves will not save us without ourselves.”

Wesley’s sermon “On Working Out Our Own Salvation,” based on Phil. 2:12-13, is his most extended effort to allay the fear of some strands of Western Christianity about emphasis on the “co-operant” nature of God’s gracious work in our lives. In this sermon he repeatedly underlines the primacy of God’s gracious initiative in the whole process of salvation: It is only because God is already at work in us, empowering and inclining us, that we can work out our salvation. But Wesley then rejects any suggestion that our working is an inevitable result of God’s grace: If we do not responsibly put God’s gracious empowerment to work, God will cease to work. The ultimate reason for this is that, for Wesley, God is more fundamentally like a loving parent than like a sovereign monarch—God will not finally impose our obedience.

This reference to obedience provides occasion to probe further what Wesley meant by the “discipline” he identified as crucial to forming real Christians. In our present setting, the word discipline most typically refers to the punishment one receives for lapses in obedience. The main exception is in the realms of athletics and music, where “discipline” is often used to refer to practices that one engages in regularly in order to develop the capacity, or “freedom,” for desired behaviors to flow forth naturally. Here the issue is not immediate reward and punishment but long-term impact. Failure to practice means increased difficulty (and less reliability) in attaining one’s desired goal. This sounds more like what Wesley intended when he argued that without “a thorough experience and practice” of the tenets of loving God, loving our neighbor as ourselves, and the like, all efforts toward a Christian life will be “utterly vain and ineffectual.”

As this suggests, Wesley had more in mind than individual acts of obedience when he encouraged his followers to cooperate with God’s grace. He was particularly concerned that they engage in formative practices that could help provide greater “freedom” and reliability for holy actions. Here we need to underline one aspect of Wesley’s mature insights into the dynamics of human willing. While he insisted that our affections are responsive, he did not consider them to be simply transitory. On the contrary, repeated engagement naturally focuses and strengthens them into enduring dispositions toward similar response in the future, i.e., into...
either holy or unholy tempers. Accordingly, Wesley made clear to his followers that God does not typically infuse such holy tempers as love, patience, and meekness instantaneously; regenerating grace awakens in believers only their “seeds.” For these seeds to strengthen and take shape, they need continuing gracious energizing by God; but they also need to be exercised and improved by regular engagement in the practices of the Christian life.

Thus, a third prescription that Wesley would offer his current heirs, if we hope to witness more disciples attaining significant maturity of Christ-likeness, is the importance of helping those in our communities appreciate the progressive “freeing” impact of formative spiritual disciplines.

The Spirit and Discipline Make a Christian

As a practical theologian, Wesley was not content with merely instructing his people in the doctrinal convictions of the empowering affect of the Spirit and the freeing effect of formative disciplines. He recognized the importance of providing concrete opportunities to experience the Spirit and to engage in formative practices—and that selection and design of these opportunities were central to his theological task.

The impact of Wesley’s mature convictions about Christian life at this practical-theological level is clear. His earliest writings, operating out of his inherited “habituated rational control” model of moral choice, emphasized Scripture reading, sermons, and prayer (all of which address us intellectually) as the means to insure Christian living. By contrast, lists of recommended means of grace after Aldersgate are both more extensive and more diverse and include items ranging from such universal Christian practices as fasting, prayer, Eucharist, and devotional readings to more distinctively Methodist practices like class meetings, love feasts, and special rules of holy living. The balance of items on these later lists reflects Wesley’s bifocal concern that his people not only experience the empowering presence of God but are also formed in the character of God. Their pattern was crafted to provide Wesley’s followers with both Spirit and discipline.

The degree of intentionality with which Wesley considered the effective balancing of the means of grace is particularly evident in his 1781 sermon “On Zeal.” While praising the broad eighteenth-century evangelical awakening for renewing religious zeal in Britain, this sermon offers Wesley’s perception that their zeal was not as beneficial as it ought to have
been because it was too often focused on peripheral matters rather than on those most central to Christian life. As a corrective, Wesley offered the following sketch of the relative value of the various aspects of Christian life:

In a Christian believer love sets upon the throne, namely love of God and [other humans], which fills the whole heart, and reigns without a rival. In a circle near the throne are all holy tempers: long-suffering, etc. . . . In an exterior circle are all the works of mercy, whether to the souls or bodies of [others]. By these we exercise all holy tempers; by these we continually improve them, so that these are real means of grace, although this is not commonly adverted to. Next to these are those that are usually termed works of piety: reading and hearing the word, public, family, private prayer; receiving the Lord’s Supper; fasting and abstinence. Lastly, that his followers may the more effectually provoke one another to love, holy tempers, and good works, our blessed Lord has united them together in one—the church.

Wesley then exhorted his readers to devote more zeal to engagement in the various works of piety than to advocating their particular branch of the church, more zeal yet to works of mercy, even more zeal to the holy tempers, and their greatest zeal of all to love of God and neighbor.

Wesley’s emphasis on the works of mercy in this passage deserves special attention. Note first his insistence that they are means of grace. He recognizes that they are more commonly viewed as duties, which we undertake because it is what God commands or because they help others. Without denying these dimensions, Wesley calls us to consider that we need to engage in works of mercy for our sake as well. They are another of the life-giving practices that God has graciously designed to empower us, to give us the mind of Christ, and to help shape our holy tempers!

Wesley not only places works of mercy among the means of grace; he also assigns them a more immediate relation to forming holy tempers than works of piety! This relative assignment does not mean that he would easily acquiesce to forced choices between engaging in works of mercy over works of piety. The empowering and formative impact of both are essential to nurturing holiness. However, it appears that he believed works of mercy make a unique contribution to well-rounded Christian formation and that he was particularly worried that his followers were neglecting their benefit. At least part of this unique contribution is that certain key virtues
The Pivotal Place of Self-Denial in Discipleship to Christ

The glow of such high hopes provides an appropriate backdrop for returning to Wesley's diagnostic sermon, where it is clear that he had learned by sad experience that the provision of a carefully balanced set of the means of grace did not guarantee the transformation of those in his societies. He charged that it was ultimately a lack of the specific practice of "self-denial" that hindered so many of his followers from becoming fully disciples of Christ.

To appreciate the pivotal role that Wesley assigns to practices of self-denial, we need once again to consider his insight into human willing. We noted earlier that he came to evaluate the conception of the will as an inherent capacity to initiate action to be naive and misleading. His mature alternative equated the will with the "affections," or our human capacity to be affected and to respond in kind. The obvious worry to raise about this alternative is determinism. Wesley's way of acknowledging the impact that life experiences, formative influences, and our environment have upon us, without rendering us totally determined by these, was to insist that along with our responsive affections (i.e., our will) God has graciously endowed humans with "liberty." By this he meant our modest but crucial capacity to inhibit specific responses of our will.

The inhibiting capacity of liberty is what makes humans morally and...
spiritually responsible for specific actions. It also makes us accountable for the dispositions or tempers that may underlie our actions (both by facilitating acting in certain ways and by constraining alternatives), since these tempers were formed by prior repeated instances of inhibiting or allowing responses.

It is crucial to note how Wesley distinguishes liberty from the freedom we need to live the Christian life. Liberty is simply our graciously gifted ability not to act on our impulses. It provides at most liberty from the total determinism of unholy tempers; it has no inherent power to initiate alternative holy acts. The freedom for these alternative responses comes through our affections as we experience God's further gracious gift of loving encounter. And yet here again liberty has a role to play—we can inhibit our response to these gracious encounters and stifle their character-transforming effect, or we can welcome them and allow them to form progressively the holy tempers that provide us with more consistent and enduring freedom for holy acts.

Wesley's conviction of the importance of self-denial relates to this role of liberty in relation to our dispositions. His sermon on self-denial stakes out perceptively our situation. When we begin to engage the spiritual life, we find that we are not starting on pristine terms. We are already prone to clannishness, greed, sloth, and other unholy tempers; and we recognize that these gain increasing ascendance over us as we allow them to be expressed. For Wesley, self-denial is basically exercising our gracious capacity of liberty to resist these unholy tempers.

Wesley is quite careful to make the point that neither self-denial nor the stronger language of "taking up the cross" should be taken to imply practices like tearing our flesh or wearing iron girdles or anything else that would impair our bodily health. They do not involve deprecating our true human nature but resisting the distorted inclinations that have come to characterize our lives through various influences. As Wesley focused it, we "deny our own will where it does not fall in with the will of God." We resist expressing our unholy tempers in order to prevent their further strengthening and, more importantly, to make room for reflecting instead the life-transforming love of God and neighbor that we encounter in the means of grace. Given Wesley's conviction that our own sense of well-being flows from this love of God and neighbor—true happiness is inseparably united to true holiness—self-denial can be seen as most truly a form of self-care.
RANDY L. MADDOX

Having defined self-denial, Wesley moves on to stress how integral self-denial is to effectual participation in the means of grace. Those who will not resist at all their unholy tempers in response to God's awakening overtures neglect the means of grace and squander their potential revitalizing power. Newborn Christians who do not continue to resist unholy tempers that remain in their lives often fade in their engagement of the means of grace, dramatically curtailing, and sometimes forfeiting, their renewing effect. And the many Christians who resist only selective unholy tempers tend to engage the means of grace in a haphazard manner, preventing the full transformation of their lives into Christ-likeness. A specific example Wesley highlights is how little we are likely to engage in works of mercy until we begin to curb intentionally the cravings we have nurtured for "luxuries" in clothing, food, and the like. It is this connection between self-denial and participation in the full range of the means of grace that leads Wesley to charge that if anyone is less than fully Christ's disciple, it is always owing to the lack of self-denial.

If self-denial is this crucial, how can we help it to become a more consistent characteristic of our own lives and those of our fellow disciples? Part of Wesley's response is to stress again the empowering effect of practicing self-denial. His pastoral advice is that young Christians ought not to despair when they recognize that they lack universal self-denial. Rather, they should begin practicing some type of self-denial. As they live in this practice they will find God's grace increasing their facility, and they will be able to broaden it to other areas.

While recognition of the progressive nature of the journey is helpful, Wesley would be the first to protest limiting one's advice to this admonition. It could encourage a very individualistic and isolated spirituality! By contrast, one of Wesley's most central pastoral convictions was that authentic spiritual formation cannot take place "without society, without living and conversing with [others]." This is what led Wesley to create corporate structures to provide his Methodist people with mutual support for their spiritual journey. The most basic structure was the class meeting, and one of its central values was the balance of encouragement and accountability it provided. It served as a concrete embodiment of God's gracious probing work that sensitizes us to remaining unholy tempers and God's corresponding gracious, assuring work that enables our responsive self-denial and the resulting increase of holiness in heart and life.
One final advice that we might take from Wesley, then, is that Christian communities that provide intentional corporate support for the progressive journey of becoming sensitive to and resisting our distorted dispositions will be more likely to nurture disciples who finish their course with joy and who contribute to the good and the joy of those around them.

This is the kind of religion we truly long to see established in the world!

WESLEY'S PRESCRIPTION FOR "MAKING DISCIPLES OF JESUS CHRIST"

Randy L. Maddox is Paul T. Walls Professor of Wesleyan Theology at Seattle Pacific University in Seattle, Washington.

Endnotes

1. This article is extracted from an essay prepared for the United Methodist Bishops' Taskforce on Theological Education. The complete essay, with full documentation, can be found online at http://www.pulpitandpew.duke.edu/maddox%20paper_9-23-02.pdf.


Myth, American Culture, and Sanctification

MARK EMERY REYNOLDS

According to John Wesley, Christian ministry was about revival. In concrete terms, this meant preaching to save souls and organizing societies to support the people called Methodists in the necessary pursuit of sanctification. Wesley understood sanctification as the continual therapeutic process of healing the distempered soul through the renewal of the image of God. The purpose of this process was the gradual empowerment of human beings to respond to God's grace so that they could increasingly fulfill the law of love given by Jesus in the greatest commandment. As the goal of this healing and empowering process, sanctification was understood as the divine restructuring of the depths of our consciousness, making love the primary and controlling temper that guides all of our thoughts, words, and actions. In this sense, sanctification, for Wesley, was a journey of intensification into holiness, with both a personal and a social dimension.

As Methodism in America gradually became a mainline denomination, it faced the pressures to accommodate to dominant cultural trends. As a result, many churches lost Wesley's vision for sanctification and acquiesced to distorted notions of individualism. In modernity the doctrine of sanctification, in large part, was translated into a narrow teaching on personal morality; and in postmodernity it became irrelevant at best and immoral at worst.

It is my contention that United Methodists will struggle to live lives faithful to God unless they creatively retrieve and live out a Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification in a way that is relevant to a postmodern and pluralistic context. Sanctification is central to a scriptural understanding of discipleship; it is also fundamental to a United Methodist self-understanding of faithfulness as the way we live out the implications of our baptism, from which we derive our true identity in Christ. Pursuing the life of sanctification opens us to personal and social transformation and gives us a public voice that runs counter to the dominant myths of culture.

So how do we creatively retrieve this essential teaching of the church? First, we must understand the context in which we live (in our case, contemporary American society). To this end, I employ the category of
Myth, American Culture, and Sanctification

myth as an analytical and interpretive tool. Myth shows how people construct a sense of personal and social identity. Then, I restate the doctrine of sanctification in such a way that it helps us to live faithfully to the sort of world that myth helps us to describe. I argue that sanctification can function today as nothing less than an alternative myth, giving rise to a countercultural understanding of world and practice of life.

What Is Myth?

Far from mere fantasy, myth is the process by which we make sense of the world. According to Rollo May, "Myths are narrative patterns that give significance to our existence. . . . Myths are like the beams in a house: not exposed to outside view, they are the structure which holds the house together so people can live in it." Myths are formed as an expression of the way we understand our inner selves in relationship to the outside world. Furthermore, they express, guide, and motivate personal and social beliefs, values, and morals through narrative and, therefore, drive toward continuity, even though they are open to reinterpretation in ever-new contexts. As such, they become powerful symbols woven into a story that speaks to us in the depths of our existence. According to May, personal and societal health depends on myths because they engage our whole person, function to relieve neurotic guilt and excessive anxiety, and assuage loneliness.

We can better understand myth when we consider it in relationship to memory. After experiencing a significant personal or communal event, we form it in memory like soft clay in the hands of a potter. As the memory is worked and reworked into a myth, it is related to past events and used to guide future action. Once we see how a person or a society forms and re-forms a significant event, adding color here and details there, we can understand how a person or society is oriented towards life. Myths are used to organize experience in a creative process of memory to bring coherence and meaning to existence.

Understanding how myths influence the deep structure of human existence is important when we consider the doctrine of sanctification, because sanctification, as Wesley understood it, involves being freed not only from the guilt and power of sin but also from its "root." From what we have seen thus far, the root of our thinking, acting, judging, and relating is largely grounded in our core belief systems construed as myth, which has conscious and unconscious, social and personal consequences.
The Formation of Personal Myths

Modern psychology has helped us to understand how we create, continually reinterpret, and live out personal myths. Our personal myths—which shape the way we interpret and narrate our identity, relationships, needs, and the general meaning of our lives—are largely the products of our families of origin. Depending on a child's perception of significant events in his or her life within the family system, he or she will make fundamental judgments about self-worth and the world around him or her and internalize them as objectively true beliefs. Furthermore, one's basic sense of self-worth, whether good or bad, will structure one's emotional foundation and color all of one's thoughts, feelings, and actions.

We also make judgments about people in general and whether or not we are going to trust others to meet our basic needs. If as children we are nurtured in healthy ways emotionally, physically, and spiritually, then we usually develop a basic sense of trust in our relationships with others; we will feel loved, and as people that are loved, we will trust that our needs will be met. Things can, of course, go terribly wrong somewhere along the way, either inside or outside the family, which can result in the loss of trust in people; but the early years of development remain crucial.

Those who feel basically bad and unworthy of love, for whatever reasons, fear that others will not meet their needs, and so they develop an orientation of distrust and turn inward. In isolation, they look for things that can be depended upon and can comfort and give a sense of nurture. If we distrust people and in isolation are convinced that we must find ways to comfort and nurture ourselves because no one else will, then it becomes very difficult to engage in genuine intimacy. Furthermore, this isolation and distrust can lead to the internalization of anger, resentment, rage, fear, self-pity, guilt, or depression—in Wesley's terms, bad tempers, dispositions, and affections.

Finally, we take this intrapsychic and spiritual material that is constructed out of these basic judgments about self and others and weave together a myth about ourselves, our place in the world, and the meaning of our lives. This basic myth is then continually worked and reworked, interpreted and reinterpreted, as new experiences are processed, assigned meaning, and woven into our personal story. As mentioned above, the myth usually operates below the level of immediate consciousness, determining
our basic posture toward the world and significantly influencing our thoughts, actions, and interpretations of new events. Of course, the culture in which we are raised will influence all those who play a significant role in our lives; and as this culture is communicated to us in innumerable ways, we will internalize many of its values and interpretations of existence.

There are several reasons why this analysis is important in trying to retrieve the doctrine of sanctification for our day. First, many Christians claim to have experienced the forgiveness, love, joy, and peace of God in a way that bestows on them a sense of sacred worth; yet, in quiet moments of honesty, they are plagued by a pervasive and diffuse sense of being guilty, sinful, and unworthy of love. This prevents the grace of God from really registering on their consciousness in a way that brings an enduring change to their self-image. Second, we cannot share what we do not have. If we do not continually experience and respond to the blessings of God, then we will find it increasingly difficult to be faithful witnesses to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Third, people who fear abandonment or lack the ability to trust and develop intimate relationships with others will find it very difficult to trust and completely surrender their lives to God and to trust God to meet their needs. They will miss the whole point of discipleship: intimacy with God through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Some people profess a close and nurturing relationship with God and live spiritually disciplined lives on the outside, but deep down struggle with feelings of being abandoned by God. Without an enduring sense of intimate connection to God, which requires deep trust, the life of discipleship becomes another form of enslaving legalism and an attempt to make ourselves worthy of salvation.

If sanctification is to address the root of sin, then it must surface and engage these personal myths. What stories control our lives? Are they the stories we tell ourselves about our parents and other significant people, or is our identity grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ? This is not to say that the gospel will always be in contradiction with the other myths that are shaped in our families or that the gospel necessarily negates all other stories. The real question is this: Do we try to fit the gospel story into our own personal stories, or do our personal stories find their meaning as they are considered as a part of God's larger story and action in the world? Do my personal values interpret, qualify, and limit the gospel, or does the gospel interpret, qualify, and limit my personal myth? These are difficult
questions, the answers to which are not always readily and directly accessible to our thinking. Furthermore, we cannot stop with these personal and interpersonal dimensions of sanctification, for to do this would run the risk of transforming a rich and holistic teaching of Wesley's into a narrow code of personal morality—a constant danger since the birth of our nation. Thus, we must press on to ask about cultural myths.

The Formation of Cultural Myths and American Individualism

According to the authors of *Habits of the Heart*, in 1833 Massachusetts relinquished the last vestiges of religious establishment, after which religion was relegated to the private sphere of human existence, even though churches remained concerned about the whole of life and religious language continued to appear in political discourse. By the 1850s, with the rapid growth in Methodist and Baptist numbers, religion became increasingly privatized in the context of revivalism.

As time passed, religion increasingly focused on individual and voluntary associations. Denominational membership became fragmented and religion came to function as a conveyor of morals that would help maintain self-respecting and self-controlled individuals in a competitive world. With the increasing segmentation of society along public and private lines came a corresponding distinction between the sacred and secular spheres of existence. By the late nineteenth century, the private and public sectors of existence moved from being distinct to being increasingly discontinuous as they were organized in a way analogous to the bureaucratic organization of industrial corporations. As this happened, the public sphere came to be dominated by utilitarian individualism—the idea that everything external to the self is to be organized as a means to ensure the greater ends of the individual. Furthermore, the private sphere came to be dominated by expressive individualism—the notion that personal identity is to be found in various practices of creative self-expression.

This late modern period emphasizes three primary values: self-reliance, self-determination, and self-realization. The goal of human life is the liberation and fulfillment of the individual, and the self becomes increasingly detached from the larger society, including the church.

These shifts in culture reflect the birth of a new sense of selfhood modeled on the notion of exchange. The self, many Americans are convinced, is grounded in the ability to choose; for example, to choose one's
job so as to afford a choice of lifestyle. It is also thought that the self is free to choose its own values according to individual judgment in terms of what allows the most exciting challenges and personal satisfactions. The self becomes its own universal ground and the source of all religious meaning. Moral rules are rendered instrumental as utility replaces duty and self-expression dethrones authority. The authenticity of the self is grounded in self-approval. The goal of life is to break free from family, community, church, and inherited ideas to discover the meaning of life in order to become one's own person. This orientation shows a kind of forgetfulness in American culture. We forget our heritage and our ancestors, as well as our descendants; and we isolate ourselves from our contemporaries. Finally, this individualistic concept of self has proved to be compatible with religious pluralism. Diversity of religious belief and practice is allowable because religion has been rendered a matter of private choice—with the proviso that such beliefs and practices not violate the moral standards of the community.

Also reflected in these cultural shifts is a change in interpersonal relating: now relationships with others are often based on market exchange or therapeutic contractualism. On the first model, people either become resources to be organized for profit, prospective clients, or other means to personal gain. On the second model, people relate to others as a client relates to a therapist. Displacing more ancient notions of friendship, most interpersonal relationships today are based upon a "giving-getting" model that depends on a cost-benefit analysis in relation to one's own self-realization, wants, and satisfactions. These models of interpersonal relationship can support, at best, very weak commitments in a culture that overemphasizes free choice and encourages contractual intimacy, interpersonal relating based on calculation, and procedural cooperation in private and public life.4

All of these cultural shifts and their concomitant values are woven into corporate myths, such as the myth of the American dream, and are related to some of the same issues raised earlier when considering personal myths. However, we are now talking about national identity, value, and meaning. American myths answer questions about what it means to be an American and what values, attitudes, and beliefs are expected of Americans. Our national myths also reveal what visions direct our country. They address how we should relate to other countries in the global community and how we perceive our national needs, wants, and interests. Our myths also advocate a certain way of relating to the natural world. Myths lie deep within
our culture and find expression in representative characters and heroes, which are concrete living examples of these myths. Our cultural myths disclose what we as a nation find meaningful, valuable, beautiful, and true.

Although religion is very diverse in our contemporary context, a common assumption seems to be that religion is largely a private matter. Our corporate myths all seem to be grounded in American individualism. Furthermore, as religion has become privatized and personalized, the doctrine of sanctification (if mentioned at all) has often been reduced to personal morality. The problem with this reduction is twofold. First, when principles of discipleship are reduced to personal prohibitions and applied with the force of will power, the result is a new type of legalism that proves to be enslaving. Enslaving legalism can never issue in true discipleship, which promises freedom only through radical self-surrender. The second danger can be seen in the person who picks and chooses personal principles through calculation and a cost–benefit analysis in relation to personal satisfaction. This approach tends to erase the details that would allow for any recognizable form of Christian sanctification, and the doctrine becomes irrelevant.

A more daunting problem has to do with the emergence of postmodernity. Because the life of discipleship got so entwined with individualism and the modern conception of the self in America, when these ideas were called into question by postmodern thinkers the doctrine faced serious problems. World wars, mass genocide, and the fear of nuclear annihilation are just a few things that have traumatized Western civilization in the twentieth century. Such events have raised questions about the optimism of modernity and its hope in progress and have helped us to realize that we have much larger problems than cursing, smoking, and drinking. Once we became aware of these serious threats, not only to us as individuals but also to our entire species and the planet we inhabit, much of the concern for personal morality seemed petty.

If sanctification is reduced to personal morality and personal morality comes to be seen as petty, then sanctification as personal holiness becomes irrelevant. Furthermore, given all the serious global problems we face, those who continue to focus almost exclusively on personal issues are not just guilty of triviality; they come to be seen as insensitive, selfish, and sectarian people who are either blind or callous to the indescribable sufferings of the world. At best, they are seen to be complicit in the mass
suffering, inequality, and death perpetrated all around them. In postmodernity, the doctrine of sanctification, defined as personal morality, becomes not only irrelevant but also offensive—it borders on immorality itself.

Given these challenges, it should be obvious that, if we want to recover a viable doctrine of sanctification for our day, we will need to examine the myths of American culture in a way analogous to our personal myths. As we consider these myths and think about their relationships to one another and to people's personal myths, two problems clearly emerge that need to be addressed by the doctrine of sanctification: the disintegration of myth and American willfulness.

Throughout the development of modern America, but especially today with the postmodern attack on metanarratives, we have seen the disintegration of myths. In modernity, hegemony was given to rationalistic language and myth was linked with religion, fairytales, and magic and was disregarded as ornamental at best or deceptive at worst. In postmodernity, we get a recovered sense of the importance of narration and myth, but no one grand narrative is allowed to dominate. To better understand this phenomenon it will be helpful to look at three categories used by James Fowler in his discussion of faith and relationship: polytheism, henotheism, and monotheism.

Polytheism is characterized by a pattern of faith and identity that lacks a single center of value and power that is transcendent enough to focus and order a person's life. The polytheist is divided by many minor centers of value and power and has a fragmented sense of self. The henotheistic pattern of faith and identity suggests trust and loyalty to one god by investing deeply in one transcending center of value and power, which gives a focal unity to personality and outlook. However, the center is inappropriate or false; it is not something of ultimate concern, but an idol. The third pattern of faith and identity—radical monotheism—offers a transcendent center of value and power that is neither a conscious or unconscious extension of personal or group ego nor a finite cause or institution. "Rather, this type of monotheism implies loyalty to the principle of being and to the source and center of all value and power." It does not negate less-universal or less-transcendent centers of value and power, but relativizes and orders them.

This schema shows that the problem of the disintegration of myths in America is not the complete lack of myths; rather, in large part the problem is related to the fact that most Americans today, given the effects of global-
ization, are participants in multiple communities and exposed to many different myths from various religious, political, social, and cultural traditions. The disintegration of grand narratives makes it difficult to organize these various and often competing myths into one coherent story that can give us a unified sense of identity and can guide our actions. For the most part, especially during times of good fortune, Americans tend to be polymythic: they freely make choices from the cultural storehouse of myths, depending on which ones best suit their desires and goals at a given time; and they arrange these myths in a variety of functional combinations.

More recently, American public leaders have tried to reverse this trend toward fragmentation by appealing to the "war on terrorism." "United we stand" is the new American motto, and President Bush has tried to expand this phrase to include the world community. During times of national crisis we need myths that can create a sense of unity and patriotism. Thus, in times of trouble Americans tend to be henomythic insofar as we make our country the center of value and power, personally and socially.

Some of the consequences of the disintegration of myth are loneliness, nervousness, guilt, anxiety, and loss of meaning, direction, and purpose. The main way we deal with all this anxiety and loss leads us to our next problem: American willfulness.

In our flight from anxiety, Americans tend to grasp for control. As a whole, we are preoccupied with controlling our own destinies. As self-reliant and self-determining people, we try to master and control our circumstances, relationships, and feelings. We assume that our destinies rest squarely on our own shoulders: success or failure in life is our own doing. This assumption leads either to pride or to self-hatred, respectively. Part of this self-preoccupation drives us to focus on our uniqueness as individuals and to define ourselves in contrast, or even in opposition, to others, the world, and, for those who are religious, God. One consequence of our desire to master, control, or manipulate existence is our anxious desire to find our "true" selves, achieve self-realization, and carve out our own identity, free from all past and present influences. We want to be "self-made men" in all respects and then gloat about it. Our lives are typically characterized by constant striving and doing, and we are spoiled with instant gratification, which retards the cultivation of more mature values and attitudes such as care, generativity, and wisdom.

In all our striving, we forget, resist, ignore, or actively work against the wonder of life and the God that...
makes everything good possible. Looking out for number one and taking care of ourselves is the American way of life; no wonder that surrender has become a dirty word.

Sanctification as Countercultural Myth

In light of these personal and social challenges illuminated by the concept of myth, how can United Methodists retrieve an understanding of sanctification that will enable them to live faithfully in the postmodern context we described above? In addressing this question, I turn again to the category of myth, this time to construct a view of sanctification as a "countercultural" myth in the Wesleyan mode. However, it is important to supplement the largely sociological and psychological analysis thus far with a theological examination of the problem that sanctification seeks to undo.

According to Wesley, the fall of humanity has led to the corruption of the image of God. By sinning, we forfeit the image of God and take on the image of the devil by turning inward and making ourselves the center of the universe. In pride, we become a god unto ourselves and relate everything to ourselves, making our needs and wants of ultimate importance. Thus we subject everything external to our self-will, forcing it to serve as a means to our distorted sense of happiness.

At first, convinced that we are the creators of our own moral values and not accountable to the objective moral law of God, we may not realize that the freedom we gain through self-assertion is counterfeit. But eventually our own best creative efforts fail to fulfill our unquenchable desires and to assuage our guilt. So we inevitably fall into despair and begin to doubt that change is possible. With this deterministic outlook, we resign ourselves to our natural state of corruption and refuse to be responsible to the gracious empowerment of God, which intends to make us like Christ. In order to make sense out of these two conflicting self-images, we weave them into a coherent narrative, which gets buried in the deep structures of our consciousness and becomes, unwittingly, the script by which we live our daily lives. Here, sin gets deployed into a powerful personal myth that shapes the deep structures of our feeling, thinking, and acting.

Although this personal myth brings a sense of continuity to these conflicting images, these images still produce conflicting "temperatures" which manifest themselves in conflicting thoughts and actions. On the one hand, the idolatrous aspect of our personal myth leads to pride, lust, envy, greed,
gluttony, anger, and malice. On the other hand, the despairing aspect of our personal myth leads to sloth, guilt, shame, fear, and depression. As these conflicting tempers wage a war inside of us, we give increasing importance to our personal myth by continually shaping and reshaping it in an effort to force a unified sense of happy selfhood. But since this personal myth is fundamentally grounded in a lie, it never quite works; deep down inside we feel a pervasive and diffuse sense of bondage, anxiety, and unhappiness. We tweak our personal myths further to defend against these uncomfortable realities, and soon we are so self-deceived that we do not even realize how miserable we really are. In short, fallen humanity is characterized by a "distempered" soul, and the evil tempers that drive our sinful thoughts and actions spring from and are perpetuated by false personal myths.

Furthermore, since we are all constituted by an intricate and delicate web of relationships, both interpersonal and social, our distempered souls wreak havoc on our fellow human beings and the natural world. Also, the emergence in society at large of conflicts analogous to the personal dimension of life necessitates the production of false cultural myths to give coherent meaning to corporate life and to assuage mass anxiety, bondage, and unhappiness. In this sense, myth functions at the root of personal and social sin.

Sanctification, in contrast, is primarily the process of healing a distempered soul by rooting out false and deceptive myths. It is the therapeutic process of surrendering the enslaving myths that provoke us to pride and rebellion and contaminate our souls with spiritual sickness. Sanctification heals us from this spiritual sickness by restoring us to true knowledge of ourselves, God, and the world and to true virtue, freedom, and happiness. It is a continual process likened to spiritual respiration. After justification and regeneration, two opposing principles are still at work within us, rendering our best actions a mixture of good and evil intentions—hence, the need to rely upon God's grace moment by moment for the renewing of our souls in the likeness of God. Continually, God's grace empowers us to be more honest about who we are and to surrender our doubt, fear, and sinful words, works, and tempers. In so doing, we are empowered to surrender the false myths that deceive us into thinking we do not need God, giving rise to idolatry and despair. However, this requires nothing less than learning to trust God's view of us as invaluable children of God, God's unconditional love for us that grants forgiveness and renewed intimacy with God, and God's vision.
for our lives as holy and happy partakers of the divine life. In other words, God reveals a true, liberating, healing, and countercultural myth that leads us to holiness, happiness, and eternal blessedness—and it is this story that should control our lives. It is this powerful and life-transforming myth, given by God and embodied in and lived out by Jesus Christ and applied to our hearts in the power of the Holy Spirit, that enables us to live out the goal of sanctification: utter love of God and neighbor. Immersing ourselves unremittingly in this countercultural myth gives us a pattern of identity and faith that is radically monotheistic.

Our understanding of sanctification as countercultural myth must push beyond the individual and into the various relationships that constitute our interpersonal and corporate lives. This becomes clear when we connect sanctification with the biblical theme of discipleship. Jesus talks about the life of discipleship in terms of the reign of God’s righteousness, God’s power of life against death—the kingdom of God. As we look to God’s self-revelation in the life-act of Jesus, we see that the kingdom of God is good news—the proclamation of justice, mercy, and liberty for the children of God. The kingdom is about the love of God for sinners and the promise of the new creation. Jesus’ message is about a new exodus of enduring freedom, a message of joy, victory, and salvation. It is about God’s power for life against death as the power of the nihil, of nothingness.10

For Christians, this means that our lives have a definite determination: we are called to live a life of suffering love in radical obedience to God and in self-disposing service towards others. We are to embody the pattern of Jesus’ existence in self-emptying love.11 Participating in the self-giving love of God prompts us to respond with self-giving. We are to live as agents of healing and catalysts for abundant life in relationship to others and to the world.

The fact that the kingdom of God cannot be reduced to personal morality is clear in the Gospel of Luke, where Jesus proclaims the purpose of his coming in the synagogue at Nazareth (4:16b-21). In this passage, Jesus clearly connects his message of God’s kingdom with the Jewish year of Jubilee, which was about liberty and return, freedom and restoration, forgiveness and fresh starts.12 Clearly, the Jubilee implies the need for social and ecological reform. It reminds us that everything we enjoy in this life belongs to God, that our well-being is bound up in community, and that our future depends on whether or not we are good stewards of that which has been entrusted to us.
By connecting the year of Jubilee with his proclamation of the kingdom of God, Jesus not only brought the power of God and the justice of grace to individuals but also taught that these were signs of the messianic Kingdom that will culminate in the new creation. God's kingdom, interpreted in light of Jubilee, is the messianic year of liberty that begins the messianic time—time without end. A close reading of the Bible makes clear that the kingdom of God speaks to all the spheres of human existence: personal, interpersonal, social, and ecological.

Jesus' main claim is that the kingdom of God has been inaugurated. Christians have been entrusted with the promise that this divine reign has broken into the world in Jesus' life and ministry. As disciples of Jesus engaged in God's sanctifying work, we are to do our part in every aspect of our existence to make this world more like the kingdom of God. In this way, God, through transformation in sanctification, makes us signs of the messianic kingdom. As we embody our witness to God's reign through the renewal of the divine image in us, our lives point backwards to the in-breaking of the Kingdom and the messianic signs in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. As God makes us messianic signs by conforming our ways of being in the world to the Kingdom, our lives become living promises of the consummation of the new creation. As Wesley taught, God renews the earth through renewed human beings, as we participate in and act as "the channel of conveyance" between creator and the rest of creation, so that 'all blessings of God flow through him' to the other creatures." Wesley was therefore in good company when he claimed that there is no holiness without social holiness.

The good news is that willfulness is not the only way we can orient ourselves to life. The essence of the gospel and the main thrust of sanctification can be captured in a term used by Gerald May—willingness. Willingness focuses on self-surrender—letting go of our obsession with self-definition, self-reliance, and self-assertion and giving ourselves completely to God. This attitude is captured in the ancient spiritual discipline of submission. Willingness says yes to mystery and being alive in each moment in vibrant relationship to God. We gain a sense of wholeness and authenticity in life as we recognize that we are already a part of God's life and history and as we commit to continually turning our lives over to the power of God, willingly and continuously responding to God's grace by participating in the divine life. We are freed to notice the wonder in life.
and live in a posture of unceasing prayer, actively and passively.

Willingness is clearly taught by Jesus: we lose our life if we try to gain it but gain it if we are willing to lose it (Matt. 10:39). In addition, we are commanded to deny ourselves and take up our cross (Matt. 16:24). As taught, embodied, and modeled by Jesus, the Christian life is not self-focused; rather, it manifests itself in radical surrender and obedience to God, as well as in service to others. Insofar as American culture overemphasizes utilitarian and expressive individualism and interprets its core values through the lens of willfulness, its basic orientation toward life is antithetical to the orientation and values communicated by the New Testament narratives. Therefore, any biblical—and United Methodist—notion of sanctification must offer resources for critiquing the distortions of American individualism and willfulness. Furthermore, it must reclaim the values of self-surrender and willingness. It must also struggle with the appropriate relationship between passive and active expressions of love, given all the dangers of unhealthy forms of selflessness that feminist scholars have cautioned us about in recent years.

Conclusion

All interpretations of sanctification are contextual, unless one is merely repeating Wesley and ignoring the need to make his teachings relevant for today. The discoveries in psychology discussed in this article regarding the deep structures of human identity and how identity is organized around myths are part of our contemporary context and should be engaged when thinking about sanctification. This is particularly the case, as we have seen, when trying to discern the roots of human sin. This also means that the church needs to engage in practices consistent with her tradition—practices that can surface our personal myths and critically engage them with the good news of the gospel.

As by God’s grace they become free from these enslaving myths, Christians need to be taught the meaning and rhythms of the sanctified life—the new, countercultural myth they are invited to inhabit. Thus, it is very important that congregations be taught how Christian identity is grounded in Baptism and how growth as children of God is nurtured in the Eucharist. In addition, churches should be more intentional about teaching the spiritual disciplines as a way to genuine freedom, life, and joy in the Holy Spirit and in encouraging their practice; for example, within the context of Covenant Discipleship groups. We need to be reminded that
spiritual discipline is not primarily about doing but about being with—being with God in loving relationship so that God can transform us.

Furthermore, any enduring doctrine of sanctification must resist the tendency to reduce the church’s rich teaching about God’s sanctifying grace to personal morality. If our teaching is to be biblical and Wesleyan, it must expand the notion of sanctification to include interpersonal healing through the difficult process of reconciliation and of building up Christian friendships and working toward political and economic justice and ecological reform. Such an opening-up of the doctrine could benefit from a conversation with liberation theologians and eco-theologians and a more serious treatment of the biblical theme of stewardship. 17

Finally, the church must highlight and emphasize practices in her tradition that can surface cultural myths and judge them by the standard of Scripture. In this regard, our churches could benefit from a rich theology of worship that understands Sunday morning as a time when, as they honor and praise the one, true, living God revealed in Jesus Christ, worshipers can be weaned away from the cultural idols that dominate, distort, and consume their lives. 18 In addition, the church could also encourage ministry at the margins of society where the dominant cultural myths, constantly jostling for hegemony, are called into question and even shattered in the face of the poor.

All these practices emerge from a biblical and Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification and provide continual resources for developing and sustaining such a rich doctrine. These considerations are only a beginning as we try to reinterpret what sanctification might mean in the twenty-first century, but such considerations are important if the doctrine is to have any significant influence on the generations to come.

Mark Emery Reynolds is pursuing a Ph.D. degree in theology at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee.

Endnotes

2. Ibid., 66.
3. The following description of the development of American culture and its

4. Ibid., 127.


6. Ibid., 23.

7. I have coined the terms *polymythic*, *henomythic*, and *monomythic* for the purpose of relating Fowler's treatment of faith-identity patterns to the organization of cultural myths.

8. Bellah, xi.


13. Moltmann, 120.


17. For an in-depth treatment of the meaning of Christian stewardship from a United Methodist perspective, see the Winter 2002 issue of *Quarterly Review*.

Recovering Human Nature through Christian Practice

KENNETH H. CARTER, JR.

I serve a congregation that is typical of many healthy mainline churches in North America. We worship God. We sing—mostly hymns, sometimes a chorus. We offer care to those who are in the midst of crisis. We gather in small groups—sometimes to learn, at other times just to meet one another. We serve those in need in the larger world.

While we acknowledge our similarities to other mainline denominations, we also know that there are important respects in which we are not like them. For instance, unlike the Pentecostal megachurch nearby, we do not raise our hands in worship; and, contrary to the conservative Baptist congregation down the block, we ordain women to the ministry.

This raises an important question: Is there a Christian way of life that is distinctively United Methodist? Most United Methodists would answer yes. The more difficult question is this: What makes this way of life distinctive? In responding to this question, one is soon confronted with several more questions: What practices constitute the Methodist way of life? Does this way of life shape human nature in particular ways? Do specific practices form us as people in ways that we can explain theologically?

It is clear from these questions that any view of a distinctively United Methodist way of life must be grounded in theological anthropology. For theological anthropology allows us to articulate the key components of our way of life: the nature of human beings as created in the image of God, the nature and function of God's grace in the work of salvation, and the relationship between human nature and practice in the Christian life. In what follows, I suggest a theological anthropology rooted in Wesleyan theology and practice in order to outline a uniquely United Methodist way of life.

Human Nature and the Image of God

Any theological anthropology, including a United Methodist one, necessarily begins with this question: What is human nature in the light of God's grace? The United Methodist understanding of human nature is shaped by
RECOVERING HUMAN NATURE THROUGH CHRISTIAN PRACTICE

Wesley's writings about the *imago Dei*—the image of God—which is his primary way of describing the process of salvation in our lives. The image of God—the relationship between God and human beings—is a gift from God, enacted because of the character of God, his intention for humanity, his action to achieve his purpose. We are made for God, and we do not fulfill our humanity apart from the experience of divine presence.

And yet, while God draws us into communion, we resist God. We tend to ignore our vocation of communing with God and growing into God's image because our love turns into self-love. We turn from the worship of God to self-idolatry, to *homo incurvatus in se*. We exchange "the truth about God for a lie" (Rom. 1:25) and ignore reality, which is always oriented toward God. Thus the image of God is distorted.

So is created a fundamental paradox: we are drawn to God and yet we resist God. The divine image in us marks our capacity for God; yet the sin in us keeps God at a distance. This internal struggle is at the heart of a Wesleyan understanding of human nature.

For Wesley, freedom from this internal struggle, i.e., salvation, means nothing less than the restoration of the *imago Dei* in us—a process he calls "sanctification." Since the *imago Dei* is distorted but not destroyed, human beings are able to turn toward God through the prior operation of God's grace. For Wesley, this "prevenient" grace motivates us to participate in Christian practices even before explicit faith. This relationship between prevenient grace and practices as means of grace is evident in the following comment by Wesley on the Eucharist: "The Lord's Supper was ordained by God to be a means of preventing [prevenient], justifying or sanctifying grace . . . [Thus] no fitness is required at the time of communicating, but a sense of our state, of our utter sinfulness and helplessness."4

As we will see shortly, for Wesley, and for United Methodists, participating in Christian practices becomes a means of restoring the *imago Dei*—and constitutes our understanding of sanctification. Moreover, the sanctified life is a disciplined life, characterized by faithful engagement with a distinct set of Christian practices. Thomas Langford comments,

Wesley was aware that new birth into Christ can degenerate into sentimental emotionalism, ineffective religiosity, or irrelevant piety. The new person still lives in the flesh, and in the world, so the necessary corollary to liberation is discipline; the sanctified life is shaped by God's demands and human faithfulness.5

46 QUARTERLY REVIEW
The Formative Role of the Means of Grace

Thus, the sanctified life is shaped by experience and discipline, a dynamic Wesley called "practical divinity." Very early in the life of the Methodist movement, Wesley realized that the promise of sanctification depends vitally on faithful practice of the means of grace. In the minutes from the second Methodist annual conference in August 1745, he makes this clear:

Q. How then should we wait for the fulfilling of this promise [entire sanctification]? A. In universal obedience, in keeping all the commandments, in denying ourselves and taking up our cross daily. These are the general means which God hath ordained for our receiving his sanctifying grace. The particular [means] are prayer, searching the Scripture, communicating and fasting.6

To be sure, Wesley acknowledges the potential abuse of the "general means," the "forms" of religion: "[S]ome began to mistake the means for the end, to place religion rather in doing those outward works, than in a heart renewed after the image of God." Later, however, he insists that the opposite extreme has become reality. Many have come to despise or discount the ordinances, divorcing external behaviors from spiritual realities.7 Wesley alludes to yet another perspective on the means of grace: those who have enthusiastically received the gospel, who "are usually restless in their awakened state. Trying in every way to escape from their sins, they are always ready to grasp at any new thing, any additional proposal that promises them relief or happiness. They most likely try nearly all of the outward means of grace, only to find no comfort in them."8

My hunch is that most pastors have encountered persons like these in their congregations. There are those who are immersed in the activities and programs, the structure and organization of the church, with little interest in the spiritual life. There are others who sense that the Christian life must always be extraordinary and spontaneous; and then there are those who chase one religious fad after another, but with little depth of habit. This comes near to Langford's earlier judgment of Christian experience as "sentimental emotionalism, ineffectual religiosity, or irrelevant piety."

Yet, for Wesley, sanctification is a process by which men and women come to a deeper and more profound understanding and experience of grace—a journey that is "a long obedience in the same direction," to use...
Eugene Peterson's memorable phrase? All of us know people in our congregations who are solidly on this journey. We also know that they faithfully practice the means of grace.

Wesley defines the means of grace as prayer, individual and corporate; searching the Scriptures; and receiving the Lord's Supper. He rejects the idea that these means could be understood as "seeking salvation by works"; instead, they are "my waiting on God by the means he has ordained, and expecting that He will meet me there, because he has promised to do so."10

In prayer we commune with God; indeed, this is a primary dimension of what it means to be created in God's image. In the reading of Scripture we are encountered by the Word of God, which is both human and divine. In receiving the Lord's Supper we acknowledge the material creation (bread, wine) as blessed by God and as a sacrament, as an "outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace."

From what has been said thus far, it is clear that, for United Methodists, an inextricable link exists between human nature in the light of God's grace and the means of grace—the practices through which God's presence works in our lives. Wesley suggested, perhaps even required, a specific set of practices for the Methodist people. I agree with Wesley that congregations are shaped by Christian practices. And yet, pastors know from their own experience that congregations often have particular traditions that shape in unique and often conflicting ways how these practices are understood and implemented in the church.

We all know that we often do some things in the church as routine activities without understanding the historical basis for doing them. The fact is, though, that Christian practices like Holy Communion or a healing service or hymn singing are rooted in sustained reflection on Scripture and tradition. We can also do things in routine ways that are shaped more by the culture than by Christian tradition, by the patterns of a secular environment more than by the faith. For example, some Christians may be more influenced by an achievement-oriented and self-serving lifestyle than by practices such as hospitality, even though the external behaviors may appear to be very similar. Wesley would describe such people as having the outward form of religion without the appropriate inward disposition.

These divergent understandings and practice of Christian practices raise this question: Just what do we mean by "Christian practice"? I find Craig Dykstra and Dorothy Bass's definition helpful: Christian practices
are "things Christian people do together over time in response to and in the light of God's active presence for the life of the world." 

This definition is helpful for illuminating the peculiarly United Methodist way of life I am recommending. This way of life, the life of sanctification, consists of a dynamic interplay of certain practices done "together over time" and "God's active presence"—an interplay through which human nature itself is transformed "for the life of the world." In what follows, I single out four of these practices. To be sure, there are many more, but for me these four "means of grace" are at the heart of a Wesleyan vision of human nature and exemplary of a uniquely United Methodist way of life.

**Toward a United Methodist Way of Life**

**Singing**

In singing their faith, Methodists have been shaped by the hymns of Charles Wesley. Indeed, these hymns are in themselves a "little body of experimental and practical divinity," meditations on, for example, divine grace.

And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Savior's blood!
Died he for me? who caused his pain! For me? who him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be, that thou, my God, shouldst die for me.

There is in these words a deep and profound sense of human sin, and a corresponding awe and wonder about the gift of grace. This grace is evident in hymns testifying to the Incarnation ("Hark! The Herald Angels Sing"), which leads a passion ("O Love Divine, What Hast Thou Done?") that is rooted in forgiveness ("Tis finished! the Messiah dies"). And yet the life and death of Jesus are followed by the miracle of resurrection; and thus on Easter we sing, "Christ the Lord Is Risen Today!"

As human beings we share in the death and resurrection of Jesus. This is life in God's grace. And grace always leads us into service, as made explicit in the hymn "A Charge to Keep I Have." The liturgical year begins with anticipation of the coming of Jesus Christ and is completed in the desire, never fully realized in this human pilgrimage, of the coming Kingdom. Charles Wesley's Advent text carries within it a profound statement about the future of humanity: "Born thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a king, born to reign in us forever, now thy gracious kingdom bring."

Here a Christian practice leads us to the awareness of "God's active pres-
ence for the life of the world." In these hymns by Charles Wesley one senses a vision of human nature. And yet there is a problem in our tradition. Despite John Wesley's insistence that we should "learn these tunes before you learn any others; afterwards learn as many as you please," our singing is sometimes shaped by other streams of Christian tradition, from revivalist gospel to contemporary praise to social gospel—music that does not always possess the depth of doctrinal richness found in the writings of Charles Wesley.

Testimony
Another important practice for us has been testimony: speaking the truth about what God has done in our lives. Undoubtedly the most prominent example of testimony in our tradition was that of John Wesley himself, particularly his account of an experience at a meeting on Aldersgate Street in London on May 24, 1738, when he uttered those famous words: "I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ." Albert Outler surmises that "this is easily the most familiar passage in all Wesley's writings. In the Methodist tradition, it stands as the equivalent of Paul's experience on the Damascus road and Augustine's conversion in the Milanese garden."17

Wesley's Aldersgate testimony has elicited a variety of appraisals from his followers. While acknowledging that it has been a "sacred event for United Methodists," Roberta Bondi argues that the effects of an "Aldersgate spirituality" are "very destructive,"18 for two reasons: First, such a spirituality ignores the complexity of human life and describes an end point of the Christian life that cannot be experienced at its beginning. Second, "deep attitudes of the heart come a little at a time through a long process of practice, prayer, training, and especially God's grace."19

Pastors can confirm Bondi's comments from their own experience in the congregation. The person who has an instantaneous, life-transforming experience is an exception. The vast majority of people experience growth in grace over time through faithful, ongoing engagement in spiritual practices. And many pastors have had the experience of listening to parishioners who have become discouraged because they have not had an "Aldersgate-type" experience that brought assurance and inner peace. Life is more complex than that. Even John Wesley came to realize that a single experience is not enough. Albert Outler notes, "In the six months after 'Aldersgate' [Wesley] reports numerous instances of acute spiritual depression, equal in severity to anything preceding."20
David Lowes Watson argues that Aldersgate was a powerful affirmation of the works of piety in the Christian life but then insists, "If we interpret that moment of illumination and assurance 250 years ago as both the power and the form of our Christian discipleship," we commit a serious error. The experience might serve as the power of Christian discipleship, but that is only "half of the equation." The form of Christian discipleship, "which [Wesley] was always at pains to stress as concomitant with the power, was that which would either render grace effectual in a Christian's life, or would quench it."21

Bondi's and Watson's evaluations of Wesley's Aldersgate testimony are persuasive; yet there is a broader context to the experience. In journal entries prior to Aldersgate, Wesley notes that he had been reading the New Testament; he attended worship at Saint Paul's Cathedral in London, where the anthem was taken from Ps. 130 ("Out of the deep have I called unto Thee, O LORD"); he gave spiritual direction; he fasted and took the Lord's Supper as often as possible. Is it not better to interpret Wesley's Aldersgate experience within the framework of these additional practices? After all, as Dykstra has noted, "engagement in the church's practices puts us in a position where we may recognize and participate in God's grace in the world."22

The power of Wesley's testimony is that it conveys the grace of God, which comes to us as a gift. Its limitation is that it does not, at least in the form in which it is given in our tradition, adequately expose the surrounding practices that both make the experience possible and help to sustain it.

Generosity with the Poor
The poor were at the heart of John Wesley's ministry and theology. The Methodist movement began among the poor of eighteenth-century England. And yet, from the beginning, sustaining a relationship with and generosity toward to the poor was a struggle for the Methodists. Bishop Kenneth Carder reflects on John Wesley's sermon "Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity."

The Christian gospel has within it the seeds of ineffectiveness. Christian faith leads to diligence and frugality, which in turn often result in wealth and worldly success. Wealth and success then lead to the presumption of self-sufficiency and independence. In other words, affluence and success made the early Methodists less responsive to the gospel of grace.23
What practices could sustain relationships with the poor and generosity toward them? The rules of the United Societies included the expectation of "doing good, by being in every kind merciful after their power, as they have opportunity, doing good of every possible sort, and, as far as possible, to all men." These practices were best carried out within class meetings, gatherings of Christians for the purpose of mutual accountability. Indeed, the class meeting was a kind of laboratory for the relationship between doctrine and discipline.

Not only was generosity to the poor a part of the corporate and institutional life of the early Methodists, it was at the core of the church's proclamation. Carder notes, "Wesley's preaching elicited the most positive response among the poor and marginalized." Generosity to the poor was a part of Wesley's practice as evidenced in his proclamation, his missionary activity, and his ordering of the church's life. These practices were deeply rooted in his theology of grace and its congruence with a practice of generosity with the poor. Theodore Jennings suggests that the development of this practice was at the heart of the resolution of Wesley's vocational crisis and is the key, to a greater degree than the Aldersgate experience, to understanding Wesley's life.

A few years ago I participated in the beginning of an ongoing relationship between a North American congregation and the Evangelical Methodist Church of Bolivia. Our orientation was led by a missionary who had served in Bolivia, primarily in the area of healthcare. When the Bolivian government allowed the Methodist Church to begin mission work in the 1920s, it was exclusively in healthcare and education. The educational strategy was to educate the elite children and young people of Bolivia, with the hope that such a mission would benefit the lives of the larger society. Two schools, the Institutos Americanas (one in La Paz, the capital city; the other in Cochabamba) were established. Over a period of fifty years these schools had trained many of the country's leaders, including presidents and cabinet officials. Yet, most missionaries and Bolivian Methodists concluded that such a strategy had effected little change in the church and in the society. And so an alternative strategy was developed, in which the focus would be on the poor and on the local congregations of which they were a part. The result was the renewal of Methodism in Bolivia. For me, this seems almost to be a modern-day parable of Wesley's movement in eighteenth-century England.
One of Wesley's most-quoted statements comes in an essay written near the end of his life, entitled "Thoughts upon Methodism," in which he writes, "I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid, lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power." Let's take Wesley's warning to heart and ask: how are United Methodists in danger of becoming a "dead sect," exhibiting "faith without works" (James 2)? Again Wesley provides the clue: "I fear, wherever riches have increased, the essence of religion, the mind that was in Christ, has decreased in the same proportion."

Our early Methodist experience should teach us that the practice of generosity with the poor goes hand in hand with an understanding of human nature as "graced." Thus, the poor are able to hear a message of grace apart from works—as good news. However, the poor can teach us a deeper understanding of our doctrinal heritage. Kenneth Carder's assertion is both prophetic and liberating.

The poor, therefore, were not only the beneficiaries of Wesley's proclamation of grace, they were channels of that grace to Wesley. The poor and marginalized helped to shape the central theme of his preaching: God's prevenient, justifying and sanctifying grace which transforms individuals and societies.

Much of my ministry has been carried out in settings "where riches have increased." Wesley's preaching and teaching on this subject are rich in their treatment of the various New Testament traditions identified by Sondra Ely Wheeler: wealth can be a stumbling block ("Thoughts upon Methodism"); it can be a competing object of devotion (see Wesley's reflection on Jesus' insistence that "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" [Matt. 6:21]); and wealth can be a resource for human needs ("The Use of Money").

Searching the Scriptures
In his sermon "The Means of Grace," Wesley identifies searching the Scriptures as an ordinary channel of God's grace. Searching the Scriptures provided the means by which the early Methodists measured belief ("found the grace of God") and practice ("thoroughly furnished unto all good works"). For Wesley, searching the Scriptures includes meditating upon
them and listening to sermons and lectures, and he gave specific guidance about this essential Christian practice. It is in searching the Scriptures that we discover the movement of God's grace in our lives. For Wesley, God's grace starts us on a journey whose goal is the full restoration of the divine image in us. The journey begins with a recognition that we are sinners; leads on to repentance and then to faith, acceptance of God's gift of regeneration, and new birth, and finds its completion in the restoration of the image of God. This dynamic process of sanctification is a journey in holiness: inward holiness (the love of God) and outward holiness (the love of neighbor).

Searching the Scriptures is much more than mastery of content (information). It is the process of "hearing, reading and meditating" by which the Christian experiences reproof, correction, and training in righteousness (see 2 Tim. 3:16-17); thus, this practice leads to transformation. In my ten-year experience as a teacher or coteacher of Disciple Bible study, I have seen men and women transformed by a disciplined and sustained reading of Scripture. They come to see themselves in relationship to the God who makes a covenant with Israel; they confess their own temptation to break covenant with God and to ignore the voices of the prophets; they sense the call of Jesus to become disciples; they struggle with the fear and confusion associated with his death and participate in the disciples' amazement at the Resurrection; they reflect on the expansion of the gospel to those who are outsiders, and they struggle with the issues facing the earliest churches, from sexuality to materialism to power. Finally, they engage in an exercise in which spiritual gifts are identified, and they share the Lord's Supper together in a service based on John Wesley's covenant service. While Disciple is an ecumenical study (it is never identified as United Methodist, and the scholars represent a range of traditions, including Jewish and Roman Catholic), its method can be traced back to a practice of intentional study of Scripture that Wesley identified as a means of grace. Many of the participants in Disciple testify that the discipline of searching the Scriptures has deepened their experience of grace, while, for others, it has opened their lives to God's grace for the first time.

Recovering Human Nature through Christian Practices

My contention is that John Wesley contributed a profound understanding of human nature to the history of Christian theology, one that was truly "a third alternative to Pelagian optimism and Augustinian pessimism with
respect to the human flaw and the human potential." The human flaw, original sin, made practices necessary; for without them a disciplined life was impossible; the human potential, sanctification and the renewal of the imago Dei, gave to the practices a motivational power and an intellectual rationale. Thus, Wesley's theology was grounded in practice; indeed, his theology took shape in lectures to annual conferences, responses to the questions of preachers, establishment of rules for class meetings, sermons, hymns, and doctrinal responses to other communities. I have identified four practices that were integral to the early Methodist movement: singing, testimony, generosity to the poor, and searching the Scriptures. Other practices could be added to this list: observance of the Lord's Supper, private and corporate prayer, fasting, healing ministry, class meetings, and Christian conferencing.

The four practices have an intimate relationship with Wesley's understanding of human nature, and, in like manner, they address fundamental human needs: worship of God with our entire selves, being truthful people, seeing the equal status of all people as graced creatures before God, and grounding our experience in God's speech to us. These four practices, I have suggested, helped to shape a Wesleyan vision of human nature and, together, constitute a United Methodist way of life.

The question that arises for United Methodist pastors today can be stated as follows: Do these continue to be our practices, and, if so, do we do them well? That is a judgment I will leave to others. But I would insist that the loss of these practices, and others identified with our tradition, will lead to an impoverishment of a United Methodist way of life—of our worship, our witness, our service, and our study. And the recovery of these practices will connect us with the good news of God's grace. The moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre writes of the necessity of "a telos which transcends the limited goods of practices by constituting the good of a whole human life." Our human tendency to substitute "means of grace" for grace and form for power leads us to confuse institutions with practices. The challenge for us United Methodists is to find the proper balance between telos and practices. As we have seen, John Wesley has profound wisdom for how to accomplish this. The overriding telos of the Christian life, says Wesley, is the restoration of the imago Dei. However, this goal is possible only when we engage in basic Christian practices, among them singing the faith, giving testimony to God's grace, exercising generosity to
the poor, and searching the Scriptures. Our practices anticipate the ultimate practice of God, an action that will restore human nature and complete the unfinished work of grace.

Finish, then, thy new creation; pure and spotless let us be.
Let us see thy great salvation perfectly restored in thee;
changed from glory into glory, till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee, lost in wonder, love, and praise.38

Kenneth H. Carter, Jr., is pastor of Mount Tabor United Methodist Church in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

Endnotes
2. Ibid., 35.
10. Kinghorn, ed., 278. For a parallel reflection in the Reformed tradition, see Craig Dykstra, Growing in the Life of Faith (Louisville: Geneva, 1999), and especially his commentary on The Larger Catechism.
13. Wainwright, 201.
15. Ibid., 196.
17. Outler, John Wesley, 51.
19. Ibid., 25.
20. Outler, John Wesley, 51. Note John Wesley's journal entries between September 1738 and April 1739.
22. Dykstra, Growing in the Life of Faith, 41.
27. Quoted in Jennings, "Good News to the Poor in the Wesleyan Heritage," 153.
28. Ibid.
30. See Sermon XXIII in John Wesley's Forty-four Sermons.
33. See ibid.
34. See John Wesley, "The Way to the Kingdom," in John Wesley's Forty-four Sermons, 79ff.
36. See Wesley's sermon "On the Means of Grace" for a discussion of the Lord's Supper; on fasting, see his sermon on Matt. 6:16-18 (Sermon on the Mount), in John Wesley's Forty-four Sermons, as well as the General Rules in the Book of Discipline; on healing ministry, see "Healing Services and Prayers," The United Methodist Book of Worship (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992), 613ff; on class meetings, see Watson, Covenant Discipleship; and on the subject of Christian conferencing, see Kenneth L. Carder, Living Our Beliefs: The United Methodist Way (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1998), 90.
Itinerancy Is Dead—But It Can Live Again

JOHN G. McELLHENNEY

John Wesley's itinerancy died sometime in our Methodist past. The precise date cannot be fixed. But my best guess, judging from the state of rigor mortis, is that death occurred more than a hundred years ago. So let us bury it and call our United Methodist plan by its proper name: an appointment system for matching churches and clergy.

It is appropriate, however, before we entomb itinerancy, to pay tribute to it. Most simply put, Wesley's itinerant system used men of the social margin, who were unacceptable for ordination in the Church of England, to go out to persons living on the spiritual margin, men and women who were not being reached by the established church.

Wesley's itinerancy functioned as a supplement to, not a replacement for, the ministry of the Church of England. Methodist preachers did not supplant the parish priests; they did what eighteenth-century Anglican clergy were failing to do. But as the itinerants did those things, they needed the parish priests to carry out the responsibilities assigned to them.

Among the parish priests' tasks were these: they led the prayer-book services of morning and evening prayer; they celebrated the Lord's Supper and administered the sacrament of Baptism; they presided at weddings and funerals, offered pastoral care, and assisted the poor. As university-trained men, they guarded Christian tradition and interpreted it for their age.

Wesley, commenting on the Church of England, said, "I hold all the doctrines of the Church of England. I love her Liturgy. I approve her plan of discipline, and only wish it could be put in execution." Putting spiritual disciplines into practice was something that Anglican clergy did not do well in Wesley's day. Neither were they good at reaching persons who did not darken the doors of their churches.

Some people stayed away from church because of distance. The burgeoning Industrial Revolution was creating new ad hoc towns, yet it took an act of Parliament, not a bishop's decision, to create a new parish.
Hence, many people lived and worked where there was a long walk to
church.

Others felt uncomfortable in their neighborhood church. Class distinc-
tions relegated them, at best, to the status of stepchildren in the family of
God. The clothes they wore, the words they spoke, the lives they lived—all
set them apart from the ladies and gentlemen who danced at the manor
house and prayed in the best pews.

Those marginalized men and women were the persons Wesley trained
his itinerants to reach. And they were effective in doing so for a number of
reasons. They were utterly committed to Christ and unflinching in their
loyalty to Wesley. They were young and unmarried and as poor and
unschooled as many of the men and women they tried to reach. Finally,
and of considerable importance, the itinerants were socially unacceptable
to the parish clergy, which, of course, made them particularly acceptable in
the homes and hearts of people who were themselves socially inferior in
England's rigidly stratified society.

Methodist itinerants, men of low rank and uncertain breeding, minis-
tered among men and women who felt as if they too did not fit in anywhere.
Unlike their ancestors, who were rooted in the same parish and social class
for centuries, the men and women to whom Methodism appealed were
rootless. The traditions that measured every step taken by their ancestors
lacked authority for them.

People who had been long settled in work, home, and church were on
the move in eighteenth-century industrializing Britain. They were seekers
in every aspect of their lives: jobs, places to live, social status, belief in God.
For those unsettled women and men, Wesley's itinerants were prophets of
a God who had singled out for divine favor a people living on the Egyptian
margin, a God whose Messiah had sent out seventy itinerants and ordered
them to live on handouts.

Wesley's itinerancy was effective because it was a ministry of unsettled
persons for unsettled persons. The only difference between the preachers
and the people they contacted was this: The preachers were unsettled
seekers who had been found by God, whereas the people were unsettled
seekers who did not know what they were looking for.

Itinerancy in America

The same pattern held true in America. Methodist itinerants sprang into
their saddles and rode out in search of men and women who lived too far from the nearest church to participate in its worship services or who were alienated from their nearby church for social or theological reasons.

Growing numbers of Americans responded positively to Methodism for the same reason that it gained ground in Britain: there was something apostolic about the preachers. They were utterly committed to Christ and unflinching in their loyalty, first, to John Wesley, later, to Francis Asbury. In addition, they were young and unmarried and as poor and unschooled as many of their converts. Finally, they were unacceptable to the leaders of American society, both clergy and lay—which made Methodist itinerants particularly welcome in the homes and hearts of persons living on America's margins.

While the itinerants were similar on both sides of the Atlantic, the ecclesiastical situations in which they worked were vastly different. In Britain, as we have seen, Wesley and his preachers presupposed the liturgical, sacramental, pastoral, and intellectual ministries of the Church of England. But in the New World, with a few exceptions, there were no priests of the Church of England to provide the prayer-book worship and sacraments upon which Wesley's understanding of Methodism depended. Therefore the itinerants had to assume priestly tasks—first, on an ad hoc basis, which Asbury denounced, and later on a foundation constructed by Wesley.

In September of 1784, Wesley devised a constitution for American Methodism. He instituted an ordained ministry, supplied a prayer-book liturgy, and provided articles of religion. These were accepted by Wesley's preachers in America when they met later that year, during the Christmas season, in Baltimore. Almost as soon, however, as that conference adjourned, its members revealed that they were unskilled at doing the things expected of parish priests—with the result that the ecclesiastical context within which Wesley's itinerants ministered in Britain was missing in America.

Even though American Methodism now had ordained deacons and priests, they continued to function like lay preachers. They were good at doing what itinerants did: reaching the unreached and disciplining the undisciplined. But they threw out Wesley's prayer-book worship and ignored his advice to administer the Lord's Supper every Sunday. Later, when the itinerating deacons and elders settled down and moved into parsonages and remained in one place for a year or more, they began to do a somewhat better job of handling the traditional priestly duties.
In summary, itinerating Methodist preachers were remarkably successful at first, because people recognized something apostolic about them. Their faces glowed with their devotion to Christ. Their unmarried state and their willingness to live on handouts testified that they had committed sexual fulfillment and worldly ambition to God. Their movement from place to place revealed that they were men under orders. Their own position at the edge of American society corresponded to the marginal situation of, to use a crass modern phrase, their “target audience.” In short, Methodist itinerants embodied an austere Christianity that appealed to men and women who were living austere lives.4

Itinerancy began to change, however, when Methodist converts started living disciplined Methodist lives. Their hard work and penny-pinching made it possible for them to move away from the margins and edge toward the center of their communities. As they gained respectability, they became less and less comfortable with preachers who came across as hicks. Also, in the eyes of some male observers, the itinerants looked like something less than macho males. Respectable men in American society did not remain unmarried. How could you prove you were a man if you did not sire children? Also, respectable married men did not voluntarily accept poverty and gladly let their families survive on the handouts of others. How can you be a man if you do not support your family? So the Methodist preachers, not wishing to look like sexual misfits and social outcasts, began to marry and to lobby for better salaries and furnished parsonages.

Families who lived in furnished parsonages soon accumulated bits and pieces of their own—stuff that made them increasingly reluctant to change houses every year. So they favored longer appointments. At the same time, their congregants found it embarrassing to explain to their neighbors why Methodist preachers moved so often. After all, their social betters, the Episcopalians and Presbyterians, kept their ministers for long periods; even their social equals, the Baptists, did not have a new face in the pulpit annually. So the maximum time that Methodist clergy could remain in one episcopal appointment grew throughout the nineteenth century.

With Methodist preachers living for longer periods in one community, their defects became obvious. Socially, many exhibited “foot-in-mouth” disease. Intellectually, they were no match for clergy of denominations that supported higher education for their leaders. In addition, Methodist families began to send their sons—and later, their daughters—to college.
Increasingly, self-educated Methodist preachers faced pews occupied by worshipers with college degrees. So American Methodism gave in during the middle years of the nineteenth century to college-educated preachers and later to seminary-trained pastors. The result was that local church officials, enjoying the services of better-educated and socially graceful Methodist clergy, plumped for longer appointments.

**The Demise of the Itinerancy**

Not surprisingly, then, sometime around the close of the nineteenth century, itinerancy died. Methodist preachers ceased to itinerate in any sense that was true to Wesley’s plan. They were moderately well educated and reasonably effective parish priests. They were no longer men of society’s margins reaching out to men and women living in similar situations. Methodist pastors, who were appointed by bishops, were themselves the parish priests whose ministries Wesley’s itinerancy had been created to supplement.

Even though Wesley’s itinerancy has been dead for a century, instead of burying it, United Methodism continues to affirm it. The most recent *Book of Discipline* announces that “the itinerant system is the accepted method of The United Methodist Church by which ordained elders are appointed by the bishop to fields of labor.” What those words mean is that United Methodism has an appointment system, not an itinerant one.

In general, appointing pastors works better than calling them. Bishops and cabinets, if they know their ministers and congregations, can avoid some of the mistakes made when pulpit committees read résumés, check references, and listen to trial sermons. Also, when a mismatch occurs, the appointment system makes it possible to remove the pastor before irreparable damage is done.

Specifically, United Methodism has a modified appointment system—modified, because in recent years the bishop’s power of appointment has been limited by the requirement to consult with the minister and the church before fixing an appointment. More work needs to be done in this area. With so many clergy being second-career persons (some with spouses established in jobs and children in schools), the persons who bear the appointive power need to allow their decisions to mature over an extended period. One way to provide this time is to define appointment making as a year-round process. There is no reason, except history, for announcing appointments at annual conference. So why not make new
ITINERANCY IS DEAD—BUT IT CAN LIVE AGAIN

clergy—church matches whenever they are necessary?

And why not acknowledge that the parsonage system belongs to a concept of itinerancy that is dead? Certainly, there is nothing to suggest that United Methodism is growing more rapidly than other denominations because its parsonage system allows it to shuffle pastors more frequently. Therefore, church-owned parsonages could be eliminated gradually as the length of the average appointment is extended.

The first consequence, then, of burying itinerancy is the possibility of looking honestly at the appointment system and its parsonage appendage. With the blinkers of itinerancy removed, it should be possible to fashion an approach to matching churches and clergy that is appropriate to today's world. And when that begins to happen, United Methodism may have the grace to allow a new itinerancy to be born.

A new itinerancy will echo the essence of Wesley's, in that it will be led by a person who can articulate with extraordinary clarity the biblical way of salvation for the twenty-first century. This leader will welcome God-called men and women from the margins of American life and send them out to persons living on the margins. These messengers will not meet United Methodism's current ordination requirements, but their Wesley-like leader will hold them accountable to the biblical way of salvation and to clear standards for measuring their evangelistic effectiveness.

Using that description, it is possible to imagine a number of new itinerant ministries. But to illustrate let me suggest a model that, as a grain of sand irritates an oyster to produce a pearl, may force United Methodism to allow something to happen that will be as innovative in twenty-first-century America as Wesley's itinerancy was in eighteenth-century Britain. My irritating grain of sand begins with this question: Who are the people living on the margins of American society today?

Contemporary America's Marginalized People

Many answers can be given to that question: the millions of persons who cannot swim comfortably in the English-language current of American life, the millions whose skin color causes them to be subjected to formal and informal profiling. New itinerant ministries may develop in response to the needs of those persons and many others living on the margins of the American way of life.

But for my illustration of an itinerancy that may irritate today's United
Methodist hierarchy as Wesley’s irritated the Anglican hierarchy of his day, let us consider the growing number of Americans who are not living in nuclear families. Wade Clark Roof, in his book *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion*, writes, “In 1970, 40 percent of Americans lived in nuclear families with children present under the age of 18. By 1990 that percentage had fallen to 26.3, almost a fourth of which are stepfamilies, sometimes called ‘blended families.’” These findings mean that nearly three-fourths of all Americans are either living alone or living together in some arrangement that, traditionally, is viewed as being at the edge of social acceptance. Those who are not living by themselves are part of households that consist “mainly of gay and heterosexual cohabitators where no recognized marital or blood ties are involved.” Roof calls these households “nonfamily households.”

What Roof says next is of particular importance for the new itinerancy that I am proposing. He notes, “The family types currently growing—singles, divorced and separated, and the so-called nonfamily households—show lower levels of involvement in, and support of, organized religion, though by no means less personal faith” than do traditional family types. Yet in the eyes of many persons living in those new households—persons who often are not without faith—conventional religious congregations look like bastions of traditional familism and heterosexual culture. What kind of messenger of God’s love is likely to be welcomed by men and women who feel that churches are fortresses of family values and hotbeds of homophobia? Not the regular clergy of a denomination that declares homosexuality to be “incompatible with Christian teaching”; that insists that “self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be ordained as ministers”; that denies its clergy the right to “celebrate homosexual unions.” Who, then, are the possible carriers of the good news of God’s love to persons living on the edges of America’s family-values society? Perhaps the openly gay men and lesbian women whom The United Methodist Church refuses to ordain.

Homosexuals are no more acceptable for ordination in United Methodism today than Wesley’s lay preachers were acceptable for Anglican ordination in the eighteenth century. Even Wesley himself, loyal Anglican priest that he was, shuddered initially at the idea of an unordained person daring to preach. When he learned that a layman, Thomas Maxfield, was preaching in London, Wesley dug spurs into his horse and raced home.
prepared to denounce Maxfield. Susanna Wesley listened to her son and then told him that Maxfield was as surely called by God to preach as he was. "Hear Maxfield," she counseled. Wesley heeded his mother's advice, heard Maxfield preach, and decided that God was speaking through him. The result was that Wesley, convinced that God could use lay preachers, decided to ignore his church's prohibition of lay preaching.

Today's United Methodism needs someone like Wesley—someone who is loyal to the denomination; who loves its history, doctrine, and polity; who is personally devout; who stands apart from society's commercial values; and who is a born organizer. This new Wesley must be willing to take a great risk in order to reach persons living at the margins of America's often homophobic society—the risk of being the instigator of an itinerancy using openly gay and lesbian Christians whom The United Methodist Church refuses to ordain.

Needless to say, there would be a significant difference between Wesley's itinerants and the new ones. His itinerants were excluded from their church's ordained ministry, but their style of life was not declared to be "incompatible with Christian teaching." Therefore, if United Methodism is to allow a new itinerancy of gay men and lesbian women to develop under the leadership of one of its ordained ministers, it must draw a lesson from its own history. Many nineteenth-century Methodists refused to condemn slavery because the Bible accepted it. Also, many nineteenth- and twentieth-century Methodists refused to accept the ordination of women because the Bible condemned it. Those positions are now seen to have been wrongheaded and morally indefensible in the light of the Bible's overall message.

It seems unlikely that The United Methodist Church will soon reach a similar conclusion about its stance on homosexuality. Indeed, the percentage of General Conference delegates voting to retain the prohibition has been growing, from about 60 percent in 1996 to approximately 66 percent in 2000. That change resulted from a well-funded campaign that included warning General Conference delegates that the church would be split if they changed its anti-gay position.

So if a new itinerancy is to be allowed to exist at the fringes of United Methodism, a considerable number of United Methodists must entertain the possibility that they are as mistaken about the Bible as were their pro-slavery and anti-ordination-of-women ancestors. Even if they are not ready
to abandon their stance on homosexuality, they need, at least, to look again at the biblical Jesus, beginning with his genealogy in Matt. 1:1-16. That family tree gives flesh to something Jesus proposed time and again during his ministry, a new way of seeing people—not as rich or poor, pure or impure, insiders or outsiders, but as beloved children of God. Another way of making this point is to say that God used a mixed bag of men and women to provide ancestors for Jesus, such persons as Judah, Tamar, Rahab, Boaz, Ruth, David, Bathsheba, Solomon, and Ahaz.

Although the family tree of Jesus sheltered a considerable number of society's dominators—those who determine who's in and who's out—Jesus himself was an outsider. He grew up in Nazareth, a place proverbial for its inability to supply good things (see John 1:46). His father was probably a carpenter, and therefore his family was from a marginalized peasant class. From a distance, he observed men who had become wealthy at the expense of the farmers and fishermen he knew intimately. No wonder, then, that Jesus became a social prophet who denounced the oppression of the poor by the rich; who welcomed all and sundry; whose family "was open-ended in that it included the poor, the children, the tax collectors, and the general riffraff of society were invited to belong."12

Those biblical materials may be no more persuasive today than was the argument in the nineteenth century that God opposed slavery even though the Bible accepted it. What is needed, therefore, is for United Methodism's leaders to allow something to happen that will be similar to the way the Church of England permitted John Wesley to retain his ordination, even though he was establishing an itinerant ministry that was contrary to the church's polity. His church disapproved of what he was doing, but its bishops refrained from exercising their power to defrock him. He, in turn, maintained his loyalty to his church's doctrinal heritage and tutored his itinerants in it. Then he used them to reach men and women who were not being reached by the church that, grudgingly, allowed his irregular ministry to proceed.

The word allow is particularly important in what I am proposing. There is no way that a new itinerancy of gay men and lesbian women could be inaugurated by General Conference legislation. Indeed, even if miraculously, such an itinerancy were to be legislated, it would not be like Wesley's. It would simply be one more committee-defined and conference-refined program. The whole point of what Wesley did was that it operated
ITINERANCY IS DEAD—BUT IT CAN LIVE AGAIN

at the fringes of the established church. It was deplored but allowed by the hierarchy—allowed because no one could doubt the genuineness of Wesley's Christian faith; deplored because he was taking it upon himself to use persons who could not be ordained by his church to reach out to men and women who felt unwelcome in his church.

The proof of Wesley's new pudding, of course, was its success: God used it. Likewise, the test of a new itinerancy—one using God-called gay men and lesbian women—will be the same as Wesley's: does God seem to be at work in it? Are the words of the new itinerants rhyming with the spoken and unspoken yearnings of men and women living on the margins of America's family-values society? And are their words rhyming with the Word of God made flesh in Jesus the Christ?

Conclusion

A number of new itinerancies can be imagined, each reflecting the Wesleyan model. That model, as we have seen, centers on an ordained minister of the established church—Anglican in Wesley's day, United Methodist in ours. This leader's loyalty to the church's history, doctrine, and polity is unswerving, but it is accompanied by two charismatic qualities: an ability to articulate the biblical way of salvation with extraordinary clarity for the present age and a readiness to allow new occasions to call forth extraordinary ways of reaching men and women who find the established church unappealing or outright repellent.

This model could serve, of course, as the template for deploying persons from a variety of America's margins as missioners to persons who feel themselves marginalized by mainstream United Methodism. Therefore, the example used in this article—using God-called gay men and lesbian women to reach persons who find themselves living at the edge of a homophobic culture—has been chosen as the grain of sand that may irritate the oyster of United Methodism into producing a pearl. Other new itinerancies may effectively reach persons living on other margins. But because they are likely to be less controversial, they are likely to be less attention-getting than was Wesley's original itinerancy. So I chose the most dramatic example I could imagine, in the hope of provoking United Methodism to allow a new itinerancy to be born and in the hope too that when a new Wesley (more likely a woman than a man) appears and begins to deploy new itinerants, United Methodism will graciously, even if grudgingly, hold onto the new
movement and not let it become a separate church.

A contemporary student of the Anglican tradition, Frederick Quinn, chaplain at Washington National Cathedral, laments the Church of England's handling of Wesley and his people called Methodists.

With any sign of flexibility or accommodation, the Church of England could have both kept this extraordinary figure and his followers as part of its fold and been enriched by their contribution, but no such offer was ever tendered.13

May similar words not be intoned a century from now about United Methodism's failure to keep a new extraordinary figure and her followers as part of its fold.

John G. McEllhenney, a retired clergy member of the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference, teaches United Methodist history, doctrine, and polity online for Drew University and in the classroom for Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Endnotes

1. Ten years ago, a book's title said that itinerancy was in crisis, not dead; see Donald E. Messer, ed., Send Me? Itinerancy in Crisis (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991).
3. Ibid., 80-81.
4. The material in this paragraph and the three succeeding ones summarizes the research presented by Christine Leigh Heyrman in Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., 236.
10. Richard P. Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists (Nashville:...
Abingdon, 1995), 115.
The Church’s Mission in Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century

F. THOMAS TROTTER

The Willson Lecture printed below was presented on Friday, October 18, 2002, in Nashville, Tennessee, during a banquet honoring directors and staff of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry of The United Methodist Church.

I am very pleased to have been invited to give the 2002 Willson Lecture at the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry. This lectureship was funded by one of the many faithful United Methodist laypersons who believed in the importance of higher education and the church. Over the years, the lectures have been aimed precisely at the Willson vision. I am honored to be included.

I have a vision for the church in higher education. My vision has two elements: to articulate the historic Methodist tradition of learning and to sustain and maintain the family of institutions that belong to that tradition.

The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry is central to this vision. Without considerable attention to reflection and maintenance, I fear that The United Methodist Church will continue to drift into distraction and neglect of this mission for higher education.

Like all agencies, the board from time to time has to rethink and restate its mission. The cultural environment in the new century is much different than it was at midcentury. Over time, organizations founded for missional purposes may slide into purely maintenance roles. The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry is not immune to this fate.

There are understandable reasons for this. Simply maintaining the
programs assigned by the General Conference requires energy often beyond the board's resources. In all organizations, there is a gravity principle at work: The way we do things tends to become more central than the reasons for doing things. A bureaucracy is an organization that has become opaque to its purpose. What you see in bureaucracy is apparatus. What you don't always see is aspiration.

Unity of purpose and vision struggle for attention. The demands of our assignments frequently overwhelm our best intentions to focus on our larger mission. Søren Kierkegaard, a popular figure when I was younger, told the story of a gaggle of geese in a farmyard. They spent their time talking about themselves, the wonders of geese, their wings, and their powers of navigation. One thing they did not do, said Kierkegaard, is fly.

My years as general secretary of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry were devoted to trying to find reasons for unity of purpose, not only in the board but also in the entire range of institutions in the church. A great enterprise in those years was the development of the vision for a university in Africa. The task was judged by many to be too far out of the box. Were not other boards responsible for missionary areas? Did not the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry have enough on its plate with domestic colleges and professional ministry? And wouldn't the project take resources away from already agreed-on initiatives?

This board and the General Conference rose to the occasion, and a new and dramatic reality for faithfulness was created. We made Africa University a reason for expressing unity of purpose. We saw to it that each unit of the board had a significant part in the formation of the university. The Division of Higher Education took the lead but was supported by the other divisions. The Division of Diaconal Ministry focused on education and agriculture; Chaplains and Related Ministry concentrated on business administration; and Ordained Ministry led the planning of the theological faculty. When the General Conference voted to support the vision, new life surged into the board and into the entire church.

There is a connection here: a vision was realized through the unity of the board. The vision itself unified the board and its work. The important issue for all of us in general agency work, whether staff or board directors, is the creation of vision and the unity of purpose to drive mission. What new initiatives can again focus attention on what drives us in mission and faithfulness? I recommend two suggestions for consideration.
First, we need to model a style of life at the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry aimed at active reflection on the purposes of learning, institutions of learning, and the role of faith in learning. By this I mean simply that it no longer is sufficient for us to be managers and politicians. We have to show the church a new and dynamic way of being the church in mission in the areas assigned to us.

What does it mean for the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry to take seriously its Disciplinary injunction to serve as "advocate for the intellectual life of the Church"? What are the reasons for maintaining connections with more than 120 schools, colleges, and universities in times like these? United Methodists have always insisted on a learned ministry. What are the connections between learning and ordination? What is the board doing to clarify the call to ministry by women and men in a world that desperately needs servants of Christ?

This is a conversation that is not taking place anywhere else in the denomination. The church expects those of us involved in higher education to be busy with this conversation. I know there are some discrete matters that flow from our separate assignments. But there needs to be a general passion for the overarching purposes of the board.

I leave it to the officers of the board to articulate this. But I do know that it is a necessary and urgent discussion. We need to model the possibility of a passionate and coherent vision in the church in a time of increasing atomism and self-serving inattention. In a society that is growing coarse and indifferent to human need and aspiration, we can become a model of meaningful discourse for the whole church. If the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry can do this, new energy and trust will emerge.

Second, let me make a practical suggestion for such a discussion. We all know it is hard to describe convincingly the reasons for church-relatedness with our schools and colleges. What would you say were the reasons for the many fine colleges in our group to maintain their church connections? In simple times, we could say that parietal rules for student care were sufficient. A college reputedly noted in its catalog that it was "located seven miles from any known form of sin."

For years now, the reasons have been fading and the connections have been eroding. Ken Yamada, associate general secretary of the Division of Higher Education, has called this the "rusted pipeline." The relationships are now usually defined by the personal commitment of presidents, not by
articulated denominational programs of analysis and support.

Church colleges, once clear in their mission, have over the past half century become relatively isomorphic with the large public institutions. There is no unifying principle. Clark Kerr described the modern university as a collection of schools connected by a central heating system. While there are dedicated Christian teachers in the schools, the vast majority of faculty are products of a professional culture that defines itself on disinterested research and identification with guilds of scholars rather than with the church, its traditions, and its faithfulness.

The church schools, seeking survival, have tended to be smaller versions of the mega-university. So the schools of the church, like the mega-university, are focused on producing graduates who are more oriented toward jobs than social responsibility, toward personal autonomy than service, and toward indifference to religious traditions as defining human accountability.

The overriding question for the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry and the university world is this: What ought to be the purpose and goal of higher education in the twenty-first century?

My proposal is this: Instead of being passive about the shapes of higher education, the board ought to enter discussion with the colleges on new purposes. Instead of teaching economism (the theory that ultimately all human enterprise is determined by economics), the pursuit of wealth, and the exploitation of human resources, we should find new goals for learning institutions.

Our society is being impoverished by the tendency to suppose that technical expertise is more important than moral leadership. Our colleges generally define their disciplines vertically and not horizontally. That is, as more and more specialization is considered normative, there is less and less emphasis on making students historically, culturally, politically, and socially aware of the world. We are being "dumbed down" by our culture.

John B. Cobb, Jr., delivered the Thompson Lectures in Thailand in June 2002, on the theme of religion in education. He describes four types of schools: trade schools, research institutions, liberal arts colleges, and professional schools. Most universities and many colleges try to maintain all four of these models in various arrangements. No wonder the center cannot hold! Industrial models of organization have overwhelmed humane, purposeful communities of learners.

But Cobb envisions a fifth model. The focus of this institution would
be problem solving in the areas of the world’s deepest needs. Job training, useful in our technical society, can be done by trade schools. The professional schools of law and medicine can be built on a short liberal arts program. Research can be best done in a technological-industrial setting. The liberal arts colleges generally look to the past, our Western cultural history; this humanistic tradition of learning argues that its students become whole persons and then can function in a variety of careers.

Cobb suggests that the humanistic tradition can become richer by adding an intentional focus on problem solving to the liberal arts program. This would require major changes and would reshape the school into an institution centered on a new paradigm—service to humankind. This is his fifth model.

Cobb calls for an emphasis on problem solving. He asserts that it is time for colleges to move away from defending traditional academic disciplines. He wants schools to abandon the “passionate inquiry and advocacy in which they all begin and move toward methodologically self-conscious objective study of phenomena.” The Wesleyan notion that the world is our parish should be translated into “the world is our laboratory.” Some of our schools might commit to a vocation of solving a critical world issue rather than perpetuating a weary model of self-fulfillment and careerism. In this quest they would raise up generations of graduates with moral courage, social and political competence, and a new sense of religious commitment.

I suggest that our own United Methodist family of schools might become such a community of institutions with this mission. There are four major areas (not easily amenable to the current definitions of university organization) that might be seen as models: ethnic studies, gender studies, peace studies, and environmental studies.

The family of United Methodist schools might rediscover the genius of their origins in rethinking with the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry what might be done. Schools need to be reoriented toward the need for advanced study and research that lie beyond job creation, career tracks, and technical competence. There are profound and unexamined threats that society now faces—threats that could be addressed by rethinking institutional goals and reasons for being.

We are in the midst of a deepening global crisis. Any hope of intelligent response to the crisis requires that it be unpacked, explored seriously, and new directions be identified. I do not need to outline in great detail what the global crisis is. I leave that to your responsible study. Some insti-
Institutions, or a family of institutions, need to be focused on this task, which will include creating a new kind of curriculum and a new kind of informed, thoughtful, and socially active graduate.

This is a major undertaking; but it is the kind of reform of learning that Methodists understand. This is the expression of the genius of our movement, which has always intended that institutional existence be measured by the highest moral visions. The colleges of the frontier were founded to provide the nation and church with moral purpose: "Be afraid to die until you have won some victory for humankind" (Antioch College). We Methodist people founded the first college for women. We founded schools for freed slaves. We founded seminaries to insure a learned ministry. Out of a new initiative should come a generation of women and men who model a larger human and religious commitment to God's world and to the faith we hold by daring to solve social issues in a holistic and nonfragmented way.

This is no time for timidity about faith or institutions. The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry can be the catalyst in such a new vision. The church can think again! The church must think again! We need to enlist our community of schools, colleges, and universities in exploring with us the new shapes of twenty-first-century education. This will be education for addressing critical issues of world survival.

Some of you will remember that the church came perilously close to giving up on higher education as mission in the 1972 General Conference. A resolution adopted by the Conference suggested it was time to abandon the mission of higher education and turn it over to the public universities. It seems incredible that such weariness and distraction defined the leadership in that period.

But the board elected in 1972 determined to take a hard look at the presupposition and created an independent commission to study the role, place, and history of the higher education and seminary mission of the church. The National Commission on United Methodist Higher Education presented its work to the board and the 1976 General Conference in five volumes. That report is still a valuable mine of information about our work.4

The findings of that commission were adopted by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, and the erosion of our mission was reversed. The Ministerial Education Fund, the Black College Fund, the HANA (Hispanic, Asian, and Native American) scholarship program, the revitalization of the University Senate, and the MINDS (Multipurpose
Interactive Database System) program—all gained impetus from that study.

It may be time for this board to establish another commission to do research and collaborate with the staff and directors in a new study that will aim the board and its institutions to a dramatic program for the twenty-first century.

In early Methodism, what commended us to cultured despisers was the measure of our love for one another and of our care for the world. What commends United Methodists today? In the next period, with imagination and faithfulness, we might see the cultured despisers defining Methodists as the people who love the world enough to change it for the better through its historic care for higher education and learning.

We have a great treasure in the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry. We have in our care schools, colleges, universities, and seminaries whose assets exceed that of the denomination itself. Now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, when we expected to meet Buck Rogers, we meet instead ourselves and our daunting assignment to imagine what we can do for the church and the world in the new century.

F. Thomas Trotter was General Secretary of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry from 1973-1987. He is retired and lives in Indian Wells, California.

Endnotes

3. John B. Cobb, Jr., “Envisioning a Fifth Model.” These lectures can be found online at http://www.religion-online.org. I am indebted to him for his typology and critique, as my discussion below reflects.
Burnout is a real problem for many clergy. Often characterized by fatigue, listlessness, high anxiety, and sometimes depression, it adversely affects performance in ministry. Having served The United Methodist Church for twenty-five years (twenty of which have been in the role of senior pastor), I offer some insights on the causes and remedies of clergy burnout in the denomination.

One of the first problems of clergy burnout has to do with the working paradigm of ministry clergy have adopted as a model for service. Ministry models set expectations for ministry and provide a general set of assumptions about the why, the what, and the how of ministry. One troubling paradigm is the "Messiah" model, which expects clergy to be all things to all people. The mutual expectations of ministers and congregations are very high. On this model, the clergy person views him- or herself as a

continued on page 79
messiah who is always available to heal all wounds, cure all woes, and satisfy all the needs of God's people. No clergy person can ever fulfill all of the congregation's "messianic" expectations; thus, to place oneself in the position of messiah is a sure formula for failure and burnout. Clergy must have healthy and realistic expectations of what they are called to achieve in ministry and what they can do within the churches and the time periods they are called to serve.

The second problem leading to clergy burnout is that ministers often live in a fish bowl, with their attitudes and actions always on display. People are constantly analyzing whether pastors are "walking the talk." Few, if any, professions place individuals under such constant evaluation. Even during recreational time clergy are under scrutiny by church members. Hairstyle, dress, shoes—all can become topics of discussion among congregants, and can create enormous pressure and anxiety. Clergy can get the feeling that they are constantly being watched, which can create paranoia and even defensiveness—and this can make both clergy and parishioners uncomfortable and unhappy. Living with these daily pressures can create feelings of vulnerability and frustration. Avoiding the tyrannies of always having to be perfect can help clergy to relax in ministry and escape some of the "stresses" of burnout.

Third, no other profession demands competency in such a variety of roles as the ordained ministry. Ministers are expected to be administrators, spiritual advisors, caregivers, healers, preachers, teachers, conflict negotiators, arbiters, lawyers, biblical scholars, church and denominational historians, visionaries, fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, confidants, psychologists, sociologists, economists, fundraisers, prophets, priests, advocates for social justice, defenders of the poor and oppressed, evangelists, spiritual warriors, truth tellers, armor bearers, and leaders of workshops, worship services, Bible studies, and church retreats. Given all these expectations—not to mention the expectation that clergy be God's representatives—is it any wonder that some people expect clergy to be God and are disappointed when they're not? What other profession requires and demands so many different things of one person in order to be successful?

Moreover, clergy have to be forthright, frugal, long-suffering and not long-winded. They must visit the sick; bury the dead; marry the young; preach a fresh, new, and creative sermon each week; and serve as a punching
CLERGY BURNOUT

bag for irate parishioners, absorbing the blows and never crying ouch or foul. Clergy must be patient, forgiving, caring, and sharing and must know how to raise and save money at the same time and feed and take care of their families, often on a shoestring wage. Through it all, the clergy person is expected to grin and bear it, to be courteous and polite, and to never speak ill of anybody. In addition to fulfilling these various roles in the church, clergy often have the pressures of fulfilling their roles as wives, husbands, mothers, and fathers. The excessive demands for competency in so many areas can be overwhelming, thus contributing to exhaustion and burnout.

Fourth, in The United Methodist Church the problem of clergy burnout can be precipitated by service on conference boards and committees. Clergy not only must meet the expectations of their local churches but must also fulfill denominational demands. This puts some clergy over the edge. How much can one person really do? Fulfilling the demands and responsibilities of the parish are tough enough without having to carve out time for serving on an annual conference board. If I choose not to serve, will I be viewed as less than a team player? What will my bishop, district superintendent, and colleagues think of me? How will this decision affect my next appointment? How can one devote the energy needed for building the local church when one is expected to devote extensive time to denominational service? Feeling caught in the crossfire of local church work and conference service can lead to burnout.

Other causes of burnout have to do with clergy not taking enough time to rest, relax, and have fun. Some clergy forgo vacation and work sixteen- to eighteen-hour days, with virtually no time off. Let me set the record straight: ministers never really have a day off insofar as they are mentally and emotionally disengaged completely from the concerns of church life and work. Whether it is concern for a dying parishioner or stress over the church staying within its budget, clergy always have something ministry-related on their minds—and they often take these concerns with them on their vacation and days off. I have rarely had a vacation that was not interrupted by an emergency such as the death of a parishioner—and this notwithstanding the fact that the congregation has a large number of qualified clergy associates.

Thus, clergy find it very difficult to mentally disengage from the demands of the ministerial office, and this can create mental fatigue and burnout. Everyone needs time off and a break from the hustle and bustle...
of work. For the sake of their sanity and well-being, clergy must find ways to distance themselves emotionally and psychologically from their work.

One of the strengths of United Methodism is the annual time allotted for rest, vacation, and spiritual renewal. Unfortunately, many clergy do not avail themselves of the available time, and this also contributes to burnout.

What, then, can be done to counter or prevent burnout in ministry? I have five suggestions for my fellow clergy. First, have realistic and healthy expectations of what you can accomplish. Be a servant, not a messiah. You cannot be all things to all people. Narrow the scope of what you can do and help the church to understand the reasons for doing this. This will make for healthier relationships between pulpit and pew.

Second, recognize your gifts and areas of specialty. Concentrate on your gifts and surround yourself with people, including laity, who have gifts in areas of need that are not your strengths.

Third, learn how to say no without feeling guilty about it. You cannot be all things to all people or be everywhere at the same time. Make service to the congregation a priority; then choose conference responsibilities in light of this priority. It is better to decline an opportunity than to accept it and then not be able to give it your best.

Fourth, take time for yourself and your family. Do fun things. Surround yourself with people who love you and want to have a good time. Develop friendships with people who see you as human being and not simply as a clergy person. Spend time with people who share your interests. Avoid people who are uptight, stiff, and never like to have fun or see you have fun. Some people have just enough religion to make them miserable! Take time for yourself without apologizing for it. After all, you already give most of your time and energy to others.

Finally, and most important, take time for prayer and spiritual rejuvenation. A burned-out caregiver does more harm than good. Take your burdens and concerns to God and develop a healthy prayer life. As clergy, we are called upon to help others heal, but we are often in need of healing ourselves. Be honest when you are hurting and recognize your own need for personal healing.
exploring contextual factors in the life of The United Methodist Church today that increase the potential of burnout. After exploring personal and interpersonal factors as they intersect with contextual factors, I suggest strategies for prevention and response.

Borrowing an analogy from medicine, burnout is more like a syndrome than a disease. While a disease (e.g., strep throat) has a known cause (streptococcus bacteria) and an accepted course of treatment (antibiotics), a syndrome has multiple contributing factors and no single course of treatment. Each case must be assessed individually. However, a physician often has some diagnostic framework that helps identify links between the various symptoms and possible causes. A theologically informed family systems perspective provides a diagnostic framework that can help us understand the complex interaction of personal, interpersonal, and contextual factors that lead to burnout.

Differentiation, a central tenet of family systems theory, provides a way to describe these personal and interpersonal factors contributing to burnout. Self-differentiation does not refer to an autonomous or isolated self but rather to a dynamic relationship between connectedness to others and a separate self. Self-differentiation includes the ability to distinguish between thought and feeling, to have a sense of one’s own guiding principles or values, and to tolerate and manage anxiety. The opposite of differentiation is fusion. One of the indicators of a higher level of differentiation in a person or system is clearly defined but flexible internal, interpersonal, and structural boundaries.

Interpersonal relationships reflect our levels of fusion or differentiation. Persons with higher levels of fusion have trouble distinguishing their own self and needs and responsibilities from those of others. Poor self-care is often a result of not being able to identify one’s own needs. Reactive distancing, or cutting off relationships, also marks fused relationships. Persons with lower levels of differentiation tend to personalize issues, fall into either/or thinking, and assign blame to self or others. Learning how to stay connected to others and maintain a less-anxious presence in the midst of conflict make a significant difference in our ability to manage interpersonal relationships and avoid burnout.

Contextual and institutional factors also contribute to burnout. Just as individuals have various levels of differentiation and patterns of func-
tioning, so do congregations and denominations. Such systems are interlocking; high anxiety in one system can impact the other, related systems. Since our personal level of differentiation is affected by the systems in which we participate, we are likely to act differently in different systems. For example, conflicts in the congregation can impact the pastor's family. A congregation with a higher level of differentiation may help a pastor establish clearer boundaries and think more critically about situations, while a pastor and congregation both tending toward fusion can increase this proclivity in each other.

High levels of anxiety, poorly defined boundaries, and lack of a clear vision in the denomination as a whole are contextual factors that can increase the likelihood of clergy burnout. The high degree of anxiety currently present in The United Methodist Church is attributable to the number of changes the denomination is experiencing, such as a transition to new processes for ordination. Underlying our confusion about these processes are differing views of ministry. Another cause of denominational anxiety are the financial challenges that have led to significant changes in organizational structures. Increasing pressures on the itinerancy and appointive system can create a sense of competition between clergy. Such larger denominational anxiety increases the stress that many congregations already feel from local factors such as declining membership and financial constraints.

The variety of conflicts in our denomination on issues ranging from homosexuality to understandings of evangelism, mission, and biblical authority not only reflect but actually create anxiety. Conflicting views of our identity as a denomination often underlie these conflicts; yet we rarely enter into significant dialogue with one another about what it means to be church. Rather than identify conflicting views of mission in the church, we tend to argue about the structures for funding and organizing mission.

What strategies can help us reduce or even prevent clergy burnout? From a family systems perspective, the most important individual strategy is increasing one's level of self-differentiation. Critical self-reflection can increase one's ability to distinguish between thought and feeling, manage anxiety, and develop good interpersonal boundaries. Such reflection may occur in a number of contexts, including seminary, peer groups, or therapy. Increasing one's level of differentiation needs to be considered part of the formational process for ministry. Candidates for ministry should be...
CLERGY BURNOUT

Karen D. Scheib is Assistant Professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling at Candler School of Theology, Emory University, in Atlanta, Georgia.

How might we creatively use the mentoring processes during candidacy and the probationary period to foster such self-growth? One of the difficulties with these programs is the unevenness of their development across annual conferences. Also problematic is the perception by candidates and probationers that the mentoring process is evaluative rather than formative. If mentors are seen as "gatekeepers" of the ordination process, whether or not this is their official role, candidates are less likely to reveal personal struggles.

There are also strategies for addressing contextual and institutional factors. Part of Wesley's genius was a clear guiding vision of a dynamic interplay between personal and social holiness. It seems we have lost this dynamic interaction, and we tend to fall to one side or the other of what was for Wesley a unified vision. The lack of clear identity in the denomination only adds to pastoral and congregational confusion. While a systems perspective can help us diagnose the problem, treatment requires that we also address these foundational theological issues.

Karen D. Scheib is Assistant Professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling at Candler School of Theology, Emory University, in Atlanta, Georgia.

Endnotes

1. The Austin Theological Seminary study (2002) reports clergy burnout rates of about 20 percent in their sample of seminary graduates, somewhat lower than the 40 percent reported by Klass and Klass among pastors in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (1999). For further discussion of this research, see Michael Jinkins, "Great Expectations, Sobering Realities," Congregations (May/June 2002).

2. The theoretical perspective reflected here is that of Bowen Family Systems theory. For more on this theory, see E. Friedman, Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue (New York: Guilford Press, 1985); and R. Richardson, Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership, and Congregational Life (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996).
There are preachers of the Scriptures who often insist on putting the text—any text—into its historical context, leaving it there, and preaching by drawing parallels between “us” and “them.” However, developments in New Testament scholarship challenge us to read not only “behind the text”—the world that formed and is addressed by the text—but also “within the text,” letting the text speak for itself as a complete and final work within the world it creates.

In addition, scholarship is more and more aware that there is no such thing as a value-free interpretation. Every reader brings to the text a specific “lens,” formed in a particular social location. The lens each of us brings determines much of what we see in the text, what we ignore, and what we do not see. Perhaps this fact underlines the need to read Scripture in community, so that we can “lend” one another our lenses and so learn insights we might have missed on our own. The Bible is truly the community’s book. Indeed, the writer of Ephesians insists that only as community with all the saints can readers comprehend the love of Christ in its breadth and length, its height and depth (Eph. 3:18-19).

Recent scholarship has also suggested that we learn to read “in front of the text”—that is, that we include in the exegesis of any passage a reading of the reader. Not only should the world behind the text be questioned and investigated but the reader and her or his world should also be interrogated and investigated. Thus, as we read the text in the context of its first-century world, the text returns the favor and reads us in turn, exposing us for who we truly are, with our hopes, disappointments, biases, and prejudices. Indeed, the Word does save us. It functions both as a window into the mysteries of God’s heart and as a mirror where we see our reflection and repent.

Finally, scholars speak of the “ethics of interpretation,” which means basically that we ask tough questions like the following of our interpretations and sermons. Who is hurt and who benefits from our interpretation?
LECTIONARY STUDY

How are we hurt and how do we benefit from our interpretation? In studying the lections from Ephesians below, preachers might find it helpful to read behind the text, within the text, and in front of the text, and to interrogate the "ethics" of their interpretations.

Introductory Questions

Who wrote the letter?
Scholars disagree on the authorship of Ephesians. According to some, the author is clearly Paul; after all, the letter says so! Twice in the letter, the author identifies himself as the apostle Paul (1:1; 3:1) and refers to himself as a "prisoner" for Christ (3:1; 4:1). However, in the late eighteenth century, scholars began challenging Pauline authorship on the grounds of language and style and of the impersonal character of the letter. There are those who, without necessarily arguing for either Pauline or pseudo-Pauline authorship, suggest that the author either was from the Jewish tradition or was familiar with that tradition.

To whom was the letter written?
This question immediately raises textual considerations. The earliest manuscripts do not contain the words "in Ephesus" (1:1) in the prescript; this phrase was inserted at a later date. The text itself provides no clear clue as to why it was written. The author addresses no particular problem or crisis. The letter does not seem aimed at opposing Gnostic teachings or advocating for the admission of Gentiles into the church or serving as an apologetic for the Christian faith. Therefore, it is most likely a circular letter to all churches, and Ephesus was one of the churches on the mailing list. So, the Letter to the Ephesians was written for the purpose of instructing and edifying Christians over a range of congregations. As such, it is as an essential, fundamental Christian text for all Christians in all places at all times.

Why was the letter written?
Since it does not address a specific problem or a crisis in a particular church, it is impossible to ascertain why the epistle was written. There was no major sociopolitical crisis at the time of the writing (80-90 C.E.) that might help us with this question. And so one must look at the contents of the text to determine the themes.

Who is reading the letter?
Each of us is located in relation to the rest of the world by circumstances
and factors we cannot change: social, personal, and familial alignments such as race, gender, and ethnicity, and nationality and economic and educational status. Together, these factors locate each of us in relation to access to power and freedom from oppression. Some scholars insist that before reading and interpreting a text, each of us should take a self-inventory. Taking time to "read oneself" helps us to understand the preunderstandings we bring to the text and how they shape what we see and receive from it. With such self-critical knowledge, the conversation between us and the text can be an honest space for the Word of God to be heard.

To whom is the letter being read?

One of the challenges of reading and hearing Ephesians has to do with the fact that it was written to Christians living in a world very different from ours. Ours is a world of airplanes, penicillin, and email, but also of the Holocaust, racism, and oppression. Thus, Ephesians is being read to somewhat jaded Christians for whom the division of Jew and Gentile is not nearly as real as that of Black and White, Christian and Muslim, gay and straight. The church Ephesians speaks about is truly an expression of God’s reign of reconciliation and justice. And the God of Jesus Christ of whom the letter speaks is extravagant and generous in both blessing and forgiveness. For some in the twenty-first century, this is still a vision of the church for the future, while, for others, it is simply not a true image of the church. After all, there is good evidence that the church has brought about and justified exclusion, persecution, suffering, and even death. Many people hearing the text in today’s world might be both hopeful and pessimistic about the divine nature and the significance of the church as an agent of reconciliation in today’s world.

Who is hurt and who benefits from our reading of the letter?

We often come to the biblical text expecting it to say what we think it will say or should say. Thus the Bible is often used to justify what we already believe. The ethics of interpretation demands that we look at the consequences of our interpretations, not just for our community but also for the entire world. For example, the hostility between Jew and Gentile features prominently in Ephesians. This alerts us to be attentive to how we use terms that refer to our Jewish neighbors today.
Growing up on the slopes of Mt. Kenya in East Africa, I always had a strong sense of identity. I was who I was because I knew beyond doubt that I belonged to my tribe and my church. These two communities were similar in their composition and in their love of stories, songs, and rituals as vehicles of instruction. Whether it was in Sunday school, in worship, or sitting by the fire late in the evening, stories that celebrated our identity were told and retold. These communal events of story telling helped me realize instinctively that my identity was closely interwoven with the identity of the communities to which I belonged. My identity was not a private matter but rather a public celebration of belonging and being accountable to a community. I learned to refrain from doing certain things because "our tribe doesn’t do that." Other things I felt obligated to do because "that is what we do as Christians." I grew up with the African adage, "I am because we are, and we are because I am."

Reading Ephesians as an African Christian, I could easily summarize the theology of this letter with a new adage, "The church is because Christ is." For the writer of Ephesians, Christ and the identity of the church are closely interwoven (1:3-14); indeed, the church’s identity is found only in and through Christ. This identity is not a private and individualistic matter; on the contrary, it is public and communal. The writer therefore not only addresses the readers using the second-person plural pronoun but also employs the language of community. For instance, he quotes a hymn (likely known to his audience) and employs the liturgy of worship, especially around the sacrament of baptism. For the writer, the vision of the church is clearly one of a community gathered around Christ and in Christ: the church is because Christ is.

For the writer, the centrality of Christ in the identity of the church cannot be overstated; the title Christ appears eight times in vv. 1-14. Christ is the agent and means God uses to create the community to whom the letter is addressed. Because of Christ, the community has been adopted as God’s children (v. 5), redeemed and forgiven. They are who they are and have what they have because of Christ. It is in and through Christ, and Christ alone, that they have come into being, are shaped, and do the things they do. So the writer talks of the blessing they have received from God “in Christ”
(v. 3). They have been chosen by God "in Christ" (v. 4) as God's children (v. 5). God's glorious grace is freely bestowed on them "in the Beloved" (v. 6) and they have come to know the mystery of God's will "in Christ" (v. 9). They have obtained an inheritance "in Christ" (v. 11) and they in turn have set their hope "on Christ" (v. 12). Furthermore, it is "in him" that they have redemption (v. 7) and "through his blood" that they have found forgiveness. Clearly, for the writer, the church's identity is wrapped up so closely in the identity of Christ that it cannot and would not exist without him.

For Ephesians, Christ is clearly and often identified with the person of Jesus. Christ is therefore not a negotiable title: Jesus is the Christ. God has done something decisive in his life, death, and ministry. Jesus’ death on the cross—his "blood"—has secured the forgiveness of sins. However, for the writer, "Christ" is a figure who is not bound by the temporal earthly existence of Jesus. Christ has primordial origins that go back before creation, before God "dug" the foundation of the world. God’s saving work in Christ was set in motion before the beginning of time. God’s intention for creation is manifested in Jesus, and, consequently, in the church—an intention bent on bringing together into one new humanity and creation Jew and Gentile, heaven and earth.

July 20, 2003—Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

Eph. 2:11-22; 2 Sam. 7:1-14a; Ps. 89:20-37; Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

"So then, remember . . ." (v. 11). Twice the author invites his audience to remember. And twice what they are called to remember is a dark and painful past (v. 12-13). Peace in communities of persons who were previously divided is often fragile; and memory can be treacherous for maintaining the peace. This is true also today, where groups of people live side by side with a past often marked by colonialism, imperialism, holocaust, genocide, violence, and hatred. Remembering the past hurts; and some even speak of avenging the past. The writer is surely courting an emotive history when he reminds his readers of their painful past in which ethnic slurs (such as the pejorative “c-word” [circumcision]) abounded across communities to belittle and humiliate. Some people might argue that when it comes to some past atrocities, it is best to forget. "If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it!" “Let sleeping dogs lie!”

Yet the writer of Ephesians asks a community of faith comprised of both Jews and Gentiles to remember when they lived apart and separated—
divided into “us” and “them” based on the physical marking of circumcision (v. 11). Circumcision separated the “covenant people”—God’s family—from outsiders. Jews were circumcised; Gentiles were not. Thus, one either belonged to God’s people or one did not. Needless to say, circumcision is a gendered marking; thus, only men carried the symbol of belonging to God’s family on their bodies. Because of the pain involved for adults, few Gentiles would lightly convert to Judaism.

The writer not only reminds the Ephesian community that in Christ their ethnic separation has been overcome but also invites them to remember their former lives without Christ. Having already shown that their identity is to be found only in Christ (they are because Christ is), it is clear that life without Christ is no life at all. The writer maps out life without Christ: It is a life of alienation and hopelessness, of being a stranger and without God. It is marked by disenfranchisement and abandonment. To be excluded from God’s “commonwealth” (v. 12) renders one without the rights afforded to “citizens” (19); hence, one is without voice and outside the concern, even the sight, of the community. To be without God, says the Ephesian writer, is to be “uncivilized” and lacking that which makes us human. Some in the church community might therefore feel justified in ignoring such “outsiders.”

The landscape of disenfranchisement, alienation, powerlessness, hopelessness, and inhumanity that the writer paints is the reality for many in our world today. Of the world’s 6 billion people, 2 billion live without the basic rights of having daily bread, clean water, and medicine. Eight hundred million, most of them children, go to sleep hungry every night. These persons are truly excluded from the commonwealth of being human. The sheer numbers and the problems are overwhelming, driving many of us who have so much into inertia or guilt. What has more breadth, length, height, and depth than these divisions in our world?

For the writer of Ephesians, Christ is able to break down the wall of division between groups of people (v. 14), putting to death through the cross their mutual hostility. Christ has brought a way of forming community that was radically different from the interpretation of the Mosaic law. Although God had given the good law, in the hands of some interpreters, the law had been misused into becoming a deadly and fixed symbol of exclusiveness—an iron curtain of division. With Christ’s abolishing the law, Christ himself defines the meaning of being human. This “new humanity” (v. 15) is a trans-
formed community—the body of Christ—where those who were previously divided are reconciled. Reconciliation has to do with transformation and sanctification, with new ways of being, acting, and relating to others. The church as the expression of the new humanity is where Christ’s rule of peace, reconciliation, justice, and authentic joy reigns. The church has been given a ministry of reconciliation and thus stands prophetically against a world short on shalom—the peace that is God’s salvation. Christ our peace was able to do that which no one imagined possible: he brought down the dividing wall and left in its place not amnesia but peace enough to be able to remember without bitterness.

Remembering helps us stay focused amidst the mundane. By inviting his readers to remember the past, the author, using a set of contrasts, brings into focus what his readers might be tempted to take for granted. What they lacked before, they now have. In the past, they were “aliens… and strangers” (v. 12), but now they are no longer so (v. 19). Before, they were excluded from God’s commonwealth (v. 12), but now they are “citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God” (v. 19). What no one could do, God has accomplished through Christ Jesus. He is God’s “but now.” The cross is the bridge that closes the abyss between the past and the present.

July 27, 2003—Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Eph. 3:14-21; 2 Sam. 11:1-15; Ps. 14; John 6:1-21

“For this reason,” writes the author, “I bow my knees before the Father” (v. 14). Something—a reason, a rationale—prompts him to respond to God on bended knee. He does not give advice or preach or quote a hymn; rather, concern for his audience prompts him to pray for them.

The writer is anxious that, on hearing of his suffering on their behalf, his audience would “lose heart” (v. 13). Losing heart is the greatest challenge facing the church. It means giving up, surrendering, on the part of those who have been involved in the struggle for justice for a long time. When we struggle on for any length of time without seeing a ray of hope or change, even the most persistent and optimistic among us can and do become weary—we can lose heart. The same language of “losing heart” also appears in the Lukan parable of the persistent widow and the unjust ruler (Luke 18:1-8). According to Luke, the parable is to illustrate the “need to pray always and not to lose heart” (v. 1). In both passages—the powerless widow facing unjust legal power and the excluded Gentiles, whose advocates are
harassed and imprisoned—the situation seems desperate beyond hope. Under such circumstances, even the most persistent can lose heart.

For Ephesians, like for Luke, the key to such situations is prayer. Prayer is the medicine that heals discouragement. In Luke’s parable, Jesus teaches about prayer by pointing to a life lived with an inner source of strength. Day after day, the widow claims justice from one who seems ill-equipped to provide it. It is this inner source of strength that the writer of Ephesians prays and intercedes for on behalf of his audience. His prayer is that God “may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through [God’s] Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love” (vv. 16-17).

Surprisingly, the writer does not pray for a miracle, either for himself or for his situation. His intercession is not for a change of heart on the part of those who exclude his audience because they are Gentiles or for power to destroy or hurt his enemies. On the contrary, the author prays for strength in “your inner being with power” (v. 16). This “inner being” is the very core of who they are—their very identity. The strengthening brings clarity of vision and understanding and purpose. so that, while everything around them falls apart or looks an impossible feat, they are clear and strong about their purpose. Being strengthened in their inner being means they do not need outside affirmation. They know who they are.

Empowered in their inner being, the Ephesian church will also know whose they are: they belong to Christ. The author prays for the nurturing of their identity through Christ who “dwell[s] in your hearts through faith” (3:17). Indeed, their hearts are now the dwelling place and the seat of Christ. The hearers of this letter, excluded as they might be from the society, are not powerless. However, their power is not political or religious. It is the power of identity—knowing who they are and whose they are. Believers share in the life of Christ, who lives in them in the daily routine of lives committed to justice and accomplishing in them far more than they can imagine (v. 20). Their lives are changed not by outside intervention but by the witness of the Christian community. It is not what is going on outside the church that speaks the last word but the reality of Christ within them. The author’s prayer changes not their circumstances but their attitude. The daily struggle of their lives continues, but now with renewed clarity of purpose, because they know that Christ has already won the battle of breaking down the walls of separation, hatred, and fear.
Nevertheless, there can be no boasting or arrogance on the part of believers. After all, Christ's presence in their hearts roots and grounds them in love (v. 17). Thus, the prayer asks for power to know the love of Christ—a love like the Ephesian Christians have never known. This love is without boundaries because its "breadth and length and height and depth" surpass all knowledge (v. 18). Perhaps the author is testifying to his own experience of this love, through which "the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel" (3:6). To be rooted and grounded in such a love is to be filled with the fullness of God. It is to live in a community of faith without boundaries—a community of "them" and "us."

August 3, 2003—Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Eph. 4:1-16; 2 Sam. 11:26-12:13a; Ps. 51:1-12; John 6:24-35

For the second time, the writer identifies himself as a "prisoner in the Lord" (v. 1; see also 3:1). For him, his divine calling is to advocate for the inclusion of the Gentiles in God's commonwealth (3:5-7); and, to some degree, he sees his imprisonment as an outward indication of this inner commitment. He expects his audience to be likewise totally committed to their calling. So it is not surprising that, sandwiched between this self-description as prisoner for Christ in 3:1 and 4:1, we find the writer's prayer for his audience's growth in inner strength (3:16-21). In the same way that he has remained single-mindedly committed to his calling, even to the point of imprisonment, he now implores, begs, and beseeches his audience to live a life "worthy of the calling to which [they] have been called" (v. 1).

The author reminds his audience of the character and challenge of their calling. Their calling from God in Christ demands a life of holiness, lived without blame in love (1:4). Fundamental to this calling is the unity of their life together as a community. It is this unity and harmony that make them different from other institutions, fellowships, and groups. Their life together in unity and harmony is the outward witness of their inner life, grounded and rooted in Christ. Therefore, the challenge of the holy life they are called to live concerns more than personal salvation; it concerns the difficult task of working for the community's salvation—the salvation of relationships. In their life together, it is their Christ-like ways of relating to one another "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with another in love, [and] making every effort to maintain the unity of the
Spirit” (vv. 2-3) that give witness to their identity as a holy people.

For the writer, maintaining unity is the heart of the matter. No human community is without the struggles of personal relationships; so it should not surprise us that the Ephesian audience had similar struggles. It is possible that the occasional word or action caused anger and resentment. No wonder, then, that later in the letter, the writer urges hearers to forgive one another (v. 32). He concedes the reality of anger but urges them to not “let the sun go down” on their anger (v. 26). Indeed, it is clear from the laundry list of things they are to “put away” in their new life in Christ that the audience of this letter is struggling with the issues to be found in many communities: bitterness, wrath, wrangling, slander, malice, evil talk (v. 31). Given the nature of being in community in such circumstances, it would be easy to consider their calling to live a holy life together as impossible.

However, in Christ and with Christ all things can and do come together in unity and harmony.

Christ is central in the life of the community of faith. The writer urges his audience to make every effort to “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (v. 3). The “peace” the writer is urging his audience to maintain is not just “an absence of war” or simply “being nice.” He is urging for the very presence of Christ in their relationship, for it is Christ who is our peace (2:14). Christ is the one who breaks down the walls that keep us apart and becomes the glue that joins two previously alienated groups into one (2:13). This message of peace is the only one there is, and the writer directs it to both those who were once “insiders” of God’s household and those who were once “outsiders” (2:17).

To live in a bond of peace with one another is to live bound to one another in Christ, not by virtue of our personality traits or the gifts we may have. For the author, believers have no way of leaving one another or “escaping” the community. We cannot be severed from one another because to do so would sever that which holds us together—Christ. One cannot leave and begin another community because there is “one body and one Spirit ... the one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all” (vv. 4-6).

To be the kind of community the writer of Ephesians is talking about does not mean living as a homogeneous “blob” where everybody is the same. Differences in ability do exist. Different persons are equipped to carry out different tasks. For the author, the emphasis is on the “grace” of
these abilities, that is, on viewing them as gifts given for the benefit of the church. They are not given to benefit the individual to whom they are given; rather, they are given to strengthen the body of Christ. This point is all the more important when we note that the letter includes leadership functions in the church among the gifts: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers. Like all the other gifts, the leadership functions are given for the sake of equipping and building the Body, not for gaining status or celebrity.

The writer places particular emphasis on the leadership of the community in its teaching and pastoral ministry, possibly because the Ephesians were exposed to a multiplicity of doctrines and to "trickery" and crafty scheming (v. 14). In such times, the gifts of interpreting and teaching correct doctrine are crucial. These ministries build up the body of Christ into maturity through unity and knowledge of the Son of God. Again the emphasis is on the community; the gifts equip everyone, not just some. And so the author urges his hearers to "grow up" in their identity as those who are grounded and rooted in Christ (v. 15). They must no longer be like children, influenced and enthralled by every new wave of thought, or like an empty gourd bopping in the ocean, "tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind" (v. 14). Instead, they are to recognize that they all have the same vision and are "rooted and grounded" in love (3:17).

Conclusion

Ephesians uses the word love fourteen times to describe four situations of love. First is God's love for the church. The church is grounded and rooted in love—indeed, it has been chosen in love. From its inception in the mind of God, the community of faith was chosen to be "holy and blameless before [God] in love" (1:4). God took the initiative and sought us "out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses [and] made us alive together with Christ" (2:4-5). Second is the love of Christ for the community. It is a love that "surpasses knowledge" (3:19) and manifests itself in Christ's giving himself for us, "a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (5:2). It is this kind of love that the Ephesian community should have for one another. They are to speak the truth in love (4:15) and "live in love, as Christ loved us" (5:2). The growth of the church is not in numbers and in wealth but in "building itself up in love" (4:16).

This love for one another is also to be seen in the intimate unit of marriage—the third situation in which the word is used in the letter. Even
in this most intimate of relationships, it is not about ownership but about showing the love of Christ: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church . . ." (5:25). The love of Christ pervades every aspect of the believer's relationships. Finally, the author uses the word to salute the believers' love for Christ. Thus, in his final greeting, he writes, "Grace be with all who have an undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ" (6:24).

For the community of faith, the bond between us is Christ, our peace. We are because he is. And our love for one another is grounded and rooted in our being loved by Christ and by his dwelling in our hearts by faith. Truly, we love, because he first loved us.

R. Grace Imathiu is an elder in the Methodist Church in Kenya. Until recently, she was Senior Pastor of First United Methodist Church in Green Bay, Wisconsin.
While we might sometimes wish it were otherwise, conflict is an expectable aspect of congregational life. The clash of values, or strategies that characterize conflict, is not an option for us. It is, rather, a reliable feature of any group of persons who stay together long enough, and in such a way as to allow distinctly different passions and beliefs to emerge. The question we face, therefore, is not how to keep conflict from happening but how to help fashion a style of congregational life and leadership that can understand and deal with conflict in ways that promote the flourishing of the community and that are appropriate to the gospel's norms of love and justice. The question, in other words, is how the congregation can see and lean into its conflicts as expressions of and challenges to the very practical theological work that constitutes it as a distinct community of faith.

In this essay, I provide a general guide and framework for those who wish to pursue further their understanding of conflict management in congregations. To that end, I have divided the following discussion into four sections. In the first section, I consider some of the themes and resources in understanding the dynamics of congregational conflict. In the next section I address the social and cultural context of conflict. The third section briefly highlights distinctly theological resources. Finally, I discuss themes and resources in conflict management technique and congregational leadership in conflict more generally. There is a vast and growing literature in conflict management and mediation; in what follows, I limit the discussion largely to the literature specially addressing the congregational context.

Dynamics of Congregational Conflict
For several decades now, the consultants of the Alban Institute have been at the forefront of helping us understand the nature and dynamics of congregational conflict. For those beginning to explore this area, I would
recommend the collection of essays edited by David Lott, Conflict Management in Congregations (Alban Institute, 2001). This collection brings together key writings from Speed Leas and other Alban consultants engaged in working with conflicted congregations. These highly practical essays provide an easy-to-read entry into the field and sort through many of the most common and troubling dynamics pastors face in the midst of conflict.

No single work has had more influence on our approach to congregational conflict in the past twenty years, however, than Edwin Friedman's Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue (New York: Guilford, 1988). Extrapolating from the work of systems theory in general and Murray Bowen's family systems theory in particular, Friedman encourages us to think about congregations as emotional systems: interrelated, anxiety-regulating processes. In this perspective, destructive conflict is less the product of problem individuals than the result of systemwide dysfunctions that rechannel, sustain, and amplify anxiety within the congregation. This often seems counter-intuitive to some people, since individuals or groups of individuals are often seen as the heart of the problem in conflicted congregations. "If only so-and-so would stop their difficult behavior, everything would be fine," we sometimes hear. Yet, within systems theory, the supposed troublemaker is often merely an "identified patient," the one whom the congregational system is offering up (or identifying as the patient) to keep the focus off the underlying, systemwide problem.

Indeed, in some cases, the problem person carries certain emotional functions on behalf of the larger congregation. The system, in other words, can locate in particular individuals emotions with which it is uncomfortable (anger, shame, disappointment) and "use" these persons to express those feelings on their behalf while not having to take responsibility for them. For instance, believing that expressing anger is unChristian, some congregational members unconsciously use an angry member of the church to express their own anger without having to become angry themselves. This unconscious process of group life is called "projective identification." Edward Shapiro and A. Wesley Carr have explored this dynamic in congregational life in their book Lost in Familiar Places: Creating New Connections between the Individual and Society (New York: Yale University Press, 1991).

Another concept from systems theory that is particularly useful in conflict situations is that of "triangulation." Triangulation is a process in
which distress between two persons is not dealt with directly but rather channeled through a third person or entity. For example, if someone is angry with the pastor, he or she might tell a third party about his or her anger (the church secretary, perhaps) rather than the pastor him- or herself. The third party then ends up carrying the anxiety with and for them, thus setting up a triangle of emotional distress among the pastor, the parishioner, and the third party. Emotional triangles frequently multiply, of course, as gossip brings in more and more people into the realm of distress. Such a process keeps the distress from being dealt with productively and keeps the anxiety alive and intensifying in the congregation.

While Friedman's text remains the most influential application of family systems theory to congregational conflict, other useful works are available as well. Peter Steinke's *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems* (Alban Institute, 1993) is a wonderfully written text that outlines clearly the basic principles of systems theory and their application to congregational life. Likewise, Charles Cosgrove and Dennis Hatfield's *Church Conflict: The Hidden Systems Behind the Fights* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994) provides a broad application of family systems theory to congregational conflict.

While family systems theory is extremely helpful in clarifying the emotional landscape through which congregational conflict occurs, it does not exhaust the range of psychological perspectives that are helpful in such situations. Robert Randall's *Pastor and Parish: The Psychological Core of Ecclesiastical Conflicts* (New York: Human Sciences Press, 1988) is a particularly important instance. Randall uses psychoanalytic self psychology to show how the needs and fears brought by the pastor and congregation affect the sense of vitality and cohesiveness each experiences and, subsequently, the kinds of experiences they attempt to generate with one another. Congregational conflict, for example, can be the result of pastor and congregation attempting to elicit from one another a particular kind of soothing or recognition central to their brokenness.

A version of psychoanalytic theory known as social systems theory has also been usefully employed in this regard. Within social systems theory, a psychodynamic focus on covert or unconscious dimensions of authority, boundaries, power, and leadership organizes the discussion. The text by Shapiro and Carr noted above derives largely from this orientation as does the book edited by Anton Obholzer and Vega Zagier Roberts, *The...*
Unconscious at Work (London: Routledge, 1994). While not addressing the congregational context itself, this collection of essays is very useful in orienting newcomers to this important perspective and its implications for understanding organizational life.

As can be seen from the above discussion, the contemporary literature on the dynamics of congregational conflict is dominated by the application of various psychological ideas and theories to congregational life. Psychoanalytic theory and family systems theory, in particular, often set the terms in these discussions for helping pastors understand the complex and frequently confusing array of things that happen in the midst of conflict. The application of these theories has produced significant benefits to the church and has been of immense help to many pastors and congregations struggling with conflict. However, they have not been well integrated with the core practical theological task of the congregation. This has often left congregations believing that dealing with conflict is something they have to do in order to get back to their real task rather than seeing it as an expression of their mission in the world. A first corrective step in this direction is to help congregations see the social and cultural context of conflict: the ways in which the emotional dynamics noted above shape are shaped by the broader social and cultural world in which the congregation exists.

Social and Cultural Issues

Two social and cultural dimensions of congregational conflict are important to note. First, as Penny Edgell Becker has made clear in her study Congregations in Conflict: Cultural Models of Local Religious Life (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), the kinds of dynamics that tend to emerge in congregational conflict depend, in part, on the religio-moral culture of the congregation. In other words, if we focus only on the characteristic features of systems per se, we are likely to miss the particular “moral order” of the congregation in and through which conflict takes place. Becker’s study of five distinct moral orders (family congregations, community congregations, leader congregations, houses of worship, and mixed congregations) provides a compelling exploration of how “bundles of core tasks [and] ideas about who we are and how we do things here” (187) shape the nature and character of conflict likely to occur within each moral order. Though Becker’s sociological work is not written directly to those providing leadership in conflict situations, it does offer important
insights that need to be taken into account by such persons, helping us see how the moral and spiritual order that characterizes our life together as a congregation profoundly influences the form and content of what we are likely to disagree about and the ways in which we do so.

While Becker addresses the notion of institutional culture as it relates to conflict, a second dimension concerns the role of racial, ethnic, national, or gender cultures in shaping the dynamics of conflict. Conflict will be experienced and expressed quite differently given the cultural patterns and expectations that influence the participants' lives. Given the increasing diversity within congregations (and the increasing recognition of the diversity that was already there), being sensitive to these differences and knowing how to respond to and learn from them are vitally important. How to respond to conflict, for example, in a way that respects (without being held hostage by) differences and responds appropriately to power inequalities is a significant challenge. David Augsburger's *Conflict Mediation across Cultures: Pathways and Patterns* (Louisville: Westminster, 1992) is the core guide here, though *Conflict Management in Congregations*, referred to above, also has several helpful essays on this topic.

**Theological Resources**

The very use of the phrase *conflict management* to describe how the church deals with conflict points in the direction of the difficulties congregations often have in coping with conflict as an expression of their theological self-understanding. Sometimes even the rich vocabulary of the faith regarding conflict (reconciliation, forgiveness, confession, penance) gets coopted by the languages of secular conflict-management strategies. Regardless of how helpful we may find these theories and strategies regarding conflict management, they cannot be simply uncritically accepted outside of a thoughtful engagement with the languages and practices of the church. It is here, however, that the literature on congregational conflict tends to be somewhat less helpful. It often neither critically engages the theological self-understanding of the church nor helps the congregation do so as it works through its conflict.

The result, to borrow a phrase from Robert Schreiter, is that we are sometimes led to forget that reconciliation in Christian faith is less a strategy than a spirituality. Indeed, Schreiter's text *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality and Strategies* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1998) is an effort
CONGREGATIONAL CONFLICT

to help us think through what that means. As such, even though it addresses conflict more broadly than the congregational context, it provides a significant theological resource for pastors and laity reflecting on reconciliation as a practical theological task of the church. Likewise, Miroslav Volf's *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996) could usefully be read in this same respect. David Augsburger's book, noted above, also provides a helpful discussion of forgiveness and reconciliation in cultural context.

**Leadership in Congregational Conflict**

I will sketch three central features of leadership in the midst of conflict. First, leadership in congregational conflict requires what is sometimes called a "non-anxious" or "non-reactive" presence. Conflict amplifies so long as the chain of anxiety (or other intense feelings) remains intact. This has two elements. On the one hand, leadership in conflict needs to not act the anxiety out in destructive ways or pass the anxiety along to other members of the congregation. On the other hand, leadership must "contain" the anxiety, i.e., it must hold the anxiety in such a way as to learn from it what is happening within the congregation. This is, perhaps, simply to say that we need to learn how to listen and speak differently in the midst of conflict. A lively and useful guide here is Arthur Paul Boers's *Never Call Them Jerks: Healthy Responses to Difficult Behavior* (Alban Institute, 1999). An important work for helping us understand our own strengths and weaknesses in dealing with conflict is Speed Leas's *Discover Your Conflict Management Style* (Alban Institute, 1998).

Second, reestablishing appropriate role boundaries of individuals and committees within the congregation is also important. Destructive conflict is almost always perpetuated by the violation of role boundaries by various members of the congregation: either assuming too much authority or assuming too little authority (overstepping the boundaries of their roles or failing to enact their roles fully enough). This creates or intensifies distrust within the congregation and often undercuts whatever structures (pastor-parish relations committees, for example) may normally function to work through the conflict less destructively.

Third, conflict management is not solely the work of the pastor but rather the work of the whole congregation. Congregations, therefore, need to be prepared to deal with conflict as a part of regular Christian formation.
There is no sphere of our lives (marriage, friendships, work, spirituality) immune from conflict. Knowing how to live well in the already-not yet of God’s reconciliation, therefore, is a central element of Christian life in general, as well as of life in congregations. While there are a variety of congregational resources available in this regard, I have found the book edited by Carolyn Schrock-Shenk and Lawrence Ressler, Making Peace with Conflict: Practical Skills for Conflict Transformation (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1999) particularly useful.

Practices of reconciliation within congregations are in various stages of development and/or disarray in North American Christianity. How much support pastors and congregational members facing conflict have from their religious traditions and judicatories varies considerably. The current literature on conflict management in congregations can serve us particularly well in understanding the emotional dynamics of conflict and in providing us with basic strategies for moving through it. We must, however, develop a stronger sense of dealing with congregational conflict as an expression of and a challenge to the practical theological work through which we reproduce our identity and reaffirm our call.

K. Brynolf Lyon is Professor of Practical Theology and Pastoral Care at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis, Indiana.

In Living Grace, Bishop Walter Klaiber and Dr. Manfred Marquardt make a major contribution to the growing corpus of quality resources for understanding and living doctrine and theology from a Wesleyan perspective. Using the officially approved doctrinal/theological statement of The United Methodist Church, "Doctrinal Standards and Our Theological Task," as the basic framework, the authors present a compelling and coherent exposition of United Methodist theology.

The subtitle of the book, "An Outline of United Methodist Theology," accurately portrays the content. The authors intend "to set forth as clearly as possible the biblical basis for United Methodist theology in order to place it in dialogue with the ecumenical heritage of the church" (13). Further, the book is "an effort to assist theologically reflective persons in and outside The United Methodist Church in formulating and constructing their own theological positions with reference to this 'model outline' of a theology of The United Methodist Church" (13).

The book is organized into four provocative and inviting sections: Responsible Proclamation, or Fundamentals for a Theology of The United Methodist Church; Universal Salvation, or God's Love for God's World; Personal Faith, or The Personal Experience of Salvation; and Christian Existence in Its Wholeness, or The Reality of Love.

With careful attention to biblical foundations, historical context, intellectual discipline, and current realities, the authors present a comprehensive analysis and passionate proclamation of basic Christian beliefs and doctrines.

Three features of this volume make it remarkable and worthy of reading by United Methodists who seek to do theology from a Wesleyan perspective. One feature is its comprehensiveness. It succeeds in presenting United Methodist theology systematically and demonstrates how the components of our doctrinal framework fit together. A second laudable feature is the way in which the authors use the Quadrilateral...
without calling attention to it. It is clear that primacy is given to Scripture; and the biblical scholarship is both thorough and accessible. But the proper role of reason and experience in theological inquiry and doctrinal exposition is observed throughout the volume.

Perhaps the most helpful feature of this book is the manner in which the authors place every doctrine and affirmation in the broader ecumenical and historical context. Not only is Living Grace an outline of United Methodist theology; it is also a concise history of major doctrines of the Christian faith. The authors demonstrate that United Methodist doctrine and theology are integrally related to the whole Christian community and share in the historical development of the Christian faith.

United Methodism confronts a critical need for theological reflection. Understanding foundational doctrines is necessary if the church is to engage in responsible theological inquiry and exploration. As the United Methodist doctrinal/theological statement in the Book of Discipline affirms, theological work inevitably requires that we give careful attention to doctrinal standards. Writing from their European context, Klaiber and Marquardt have provided a model for United Methodists in other contexts to engage our doctrines and perform the theological task as members of the broader ecumenical community.

Reviewed by Kenneth L. Carder. Carder is Bishop of the Mississippi Area of The United Methodist Church.

**Beyond the Ordinary: Spirituality for Church Leaders**, by Ben Campbell Johnson and Andrew Dreitcer (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001)

For recent decades, spiritual formation ministries among Protestant denominations have been expressed primarily beyond the parish and for individuals. Johnson and Dreitcer contribute a comprehensive agenda for pastors and congregational leaders to renew the church by attending to the pivotal tasks of spiritual formation in the context of our parish ministry. Their intentions for us spell nothing short of a fresh, communal visit to the "well" of God's living presence in Christ.

Johnson and Dreitcer introduce each element of this agenda for congregational leaders with an eye to the cadre of "spiritual revolution-
aries" who accompany us through history, reminding us that attention to God's guiding presence can set us at odds with a culture that has come to be comfortably ensconced within our congregations. In the midst of what they observe to be the "collapse of our (Western) culture" (7), the authors sound a clear call for church leaders to mind the care of our souls. A spirituality for today means frequent and deepening encounters with the Holy through sacrament, service, activism, and openness to the mystical presence of the Divine.

Chapter by chapter, Johnson and Drietcer offer theological foundations and practical applications of each component they identify with "cutting-edge spirituality." Those components provide a dynamic map that points to these core tasks:

• **A strong focus on spiritual formation with one another in the life of the parish.** Recognize, they say, the central role of God's Spirit in the guidance of the church's total life.

• **The unity of a spirituality of action and a spirituality of contemplation.** Do not be tempted, they urge us, to emphasize one at the expense of the other; for each belongs with the other in the flow of God's power through our life and ministries.

• **A spirituality that is biblically based.** Expect, the authors exhort, to encounter the vital presence of the Holy as we read, pray, and embody the Word of God.

• **Discovery of each congregation's underlying and prevailing myth.** The authors' observations about the function of myth (the central story or tenets that govern a congregation's identity and decisions) are a noteworthy contribution to this process.

• **Seeking God's vision for our life together in ministry (in contrast to our custom of planning and management).** This work is characterized by a willingness to trust the Spirit's guidance.

• **A practice of (spiritual) discernment that displaces our overly controlled and humanly managed decision making processes.** "What does God call us to do?" becomes a key question.

• **Leaders functioning as spiritual companions and guides for the church.** The authors urge more attention to the spiritual maturing of those who lead and minister with others.

• **Regular journeys to the "well," where body and soul are refreshed and replenished by God's grace and love.**
Howard W. Stone has gone the second mile in the formulation of this rich and helpful text. His previous works, addressing brief and crisis counseling, were requisite reading for caregivers seeking to help persons to regain focus in life. In contrast to his previous works, Strategies for Brief Pastoral Counseling is more than a single tool for addressing crisis human transactions. It can be seen as a toolbox, or as a dynamic handbook, for creative and theoretically grounded pastoral action.

Professor Stone has assembled a rich and diverse cadre of pastors, pastoral theologians, pastoral counselors, marriage and family counselors, and organizational systems leaders who offer a synthesis of modern thought on brief pastoral counseling. The book is organized with precision and depth into three distinct sections: The Case for Brief Pastoral Counseling; Brief Pastoral Counseling Strategies; and Pastoral Counseling: Theory and Practice. The text is developed with such comprehensive care that both the novice ministerial candidate and the seasoned teacher of pastoral care and counseling will find insightful guidance and best principles for practice. Moreover, readers who possess varying levels of knowledge, skill, and experience will discover research and testimony that affirm the spiritual wisdom inherent in brief pastoral counseling as an economical and efficient pastoral counseling method.

As an instructional manual for functional, limited, counseling processes, Strategies for Brief Pastoral Counseling links classic historical developments in pastoral counseling to relevant, contemporary realities. The book recognizes and confirms time and context as the crucial variables in

Reviewed by Diane Luton Blum. Blum is Pastor of Edgehill United Methodist Church in Nashville, Tennessee.
facilitating meaningful and effective short-term (brief) pastoral counseling. It also succeeds in its mission to reconnect the theory of brief pastoral counseling with basic ministerial practices. Professor Stone and his writers have exceptionally fulfilled the premise of the text; namely, that brief pastoral counseling should be the normative mode of practice by most pastoral caregivers.

The essential value of this text lies in the clear outline and development strategies for brief pastoral counseling. The strategies can be characterized as a new way of thinking about the overarching needs of persons in congregational contexts. As the method of choice, brief counseling stresses the critical value of simple, focused, sessions; priority attending and listening; clarity about the core problem to be solved; and a clear framework for evaluating the problem. A practitioner of brief pastoral counseling is encouraged to journey with parishioners in recognizing the coping resources that compliment problem reduction, goal formulation, and action planning for change and growth.

Finally, this book should occupy a visible place on the pastor's desk, because it is filled with relevant biblical points of reference, instructive case studies, and illustrative applied theoretical diagrams. Sound pastoral theology is balanced with straightforward principles of counseling and redemptive caring.

Reviewed by Vergel L. Lattimore. Lattimore is Professor of Pastoral Care at Methodist Theological School in Ohio in Delaware, Ohio.

**Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness**, by Clark H. Pinnock (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001)

Clark Pinnock offers this monograph as a full-scale explication and defense of the Open view of God. Pinnock and others publicly presented the view in a 1994 book titled *The Openness of God*. For those unfamiliar with the basic outlines of this theological alternative, Pinnock provides ample definition and characterization of it in *Most Moved Mover*.

Openness theology envisions God as a self-sufficient, though relational, trinitarian Being who voluntarily created the world out of nothing. God graciously relates to the world as one self-limited out of respect for the genuine freedom of creatures. This relational, pantemporal God does not
exhaustively foreknow future actual events. Above all, the Open view of God emphasizes love as God’s chief attribute and as the primary priority for theological construction. “The living God is ... the God of the Bible,” writes Pinnock, “the one who is genuinely related to the world, whose nature is the power of love and whose relationship with the world is that of a most moved, not unmoved, Mover” (3).

The book’s introductory chapter may be the most interesting part of the book to those already familiar with the general themes of Openness theology. In it, Pinnock cites numerous objections to the Open view penned mostly by Evangelical theologians of a Calvinist bent. While Reformed criticisms have been harsh, not all Evangelicals object to the Open view of God. Pinnock lists those found mostly in Wesleyan, Arminian, and Pentecostal circles as appreciative hearers and sympathizers.

The remaining chapters follow the fourfold approach of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. Pinnock looks to Scripture as the primary source for theology and finds Open themes throughout the biblical witness. In Chapter 2, Pinnock turns to assess the authority of the Christian tradition, while in Chapter 3 (the most exciting chapter, in my view), he explains his preference for a dynamic, relational philosophy—a view he calls “biblical philosophy”—as opposed to substantive philosophy of classical thought. In this chapter, Pinnock shows how the Open view relates with process philosophy. The Open view shares with process thought the desire to overcome an emphasis upon the metaphysic of being and to emphasize, instead, a metaphysics of becoming. Pinnock believes process theologians are correct to conceive of God as affecting everything and being affected by everything. He agrees with the process notion that God is temporally everlasting rather than timelessly eternal. He also agrees that God should be understood as passible and omniscient in the sense of exhaustively knowing all that can be known.

Pinnock agrees with the process view that Genesis 1 does not itself teach creation out of absolutely nothing and might indicate a metaphysical dualism and thus an inherent limitation of God’s power. But he prefers to interpret the passage as being linked to another biblical theme: spiritual warfare. Pinnock suggests that the chaotic situation of Genesis 1 arises due to rebellious angels. For me, Pinnock’s alternative speculation seems to support what he ultimately wants to deny; namely, to say that God confronts rebellious angels at creation supports the process claim that God
always confronts free nondivine others whom God cannot entirely control.

The way in which Open theists characterize God's relationship with the world receives much of Pinnock's attention as he distinguishes between process and Open theism. The Open vision of the Trinity-world relation provides a way to portray God as essentially loving and creation as a gift, not a necessity. Pinnock acknowledges that one might wonder why the self-limited God envisioned by Open theists doesn't withdraw or override creaturely freedom more often and thus prevent genuinely evil occurrences. He admits that his position is vulnerable but maintains, "[A]s an open theist, I cannot accept that God is metaphysically limited." Instead, he says, "I am forced to say that God has made a commitment to the creation project that constrains His actions" (149).

The problem with this wholly voluntary covenant that God allegedly makes with the world is that it implies that God is more interested in keeping promises than in loving steadfastly. We can all think of times in which breaking promises must be done in the name of love. A theodicy based on voluntary divine promise-keeping arises out of the metaphysical hypothesis that considers the divine will to preside over God's loving nature when the God-world relationship is considered. However, this metaphysics does not provide a basis upon which to claim that God essentially loves the world.

The last chapter of the book, "The Existential Fit," addresses theology's adequacy to the demands of life. Pinnock believes that the Openness model is more relevant to real-life situations than conventional theologies and that Open theism confirms deep human intuitions about choice and the future.

I heartily recommend Most Moved Mover. It is written in an accessible style and gets at the heart of many deep theological issues. I see the book as a major step forward in the Open-view adventure to provide Christians with an adequate, consistent, and biblically faithful theological alternative. Wesleyans not already familiar with this Evangelical phenomenon ought to join with many in their own tradition who embrace the Open view as congruent with Wesleyan theology. Openness theology provides windows for dialogue with both conservative evangelicals and the Christian progressive left.

Reviewed by Thomas Jay Oord. Oord is Professor of Theology and Philosophy at Northwest Nazarene University in Nampa, Idaho.
IN THIS ISSUE:

**Issue Theme:**
The Ongoing Significance of John Wesley for United Methodism

- Wesleyan Faith: A Contemporary Reflection
  Josiah U. Young III
- Wesley's Prescription for “Making Disciples of Jesus Christ”: Insights for the Twenty-first-Century Church
  Randy L. Maddox
- Myth, American Culture, and Sanctification
  Mark Emery Reynolds
- Recovering Human Nature through Christian Practice
  Kenneth H. Carter, Jr.
- Itinerancy Is Dead—But It Can Live Again
  John G. McElhenny

**Outside the Theme**
The Church’s Mission in Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century
  F. Thomas Trotter

**The Church in Review**
- Clergy Burnout
  Carlyle Fielding Stewart III
  Karen D. Scheib

**A Word on the Word**
- Lectionary Study
  R. Grace Imathiu

**Issues In:** Congregational Conflict
  K. Brynolf Lyon

**Book Reviews**
*Beyond the Ordinary: Spirituality for Church Leaders*, by Ben Campbell Johnson and Andrew Dreitcer (Eerdmans, 2001) Reviewer: Diane Luton Blum
*Strategies for Brief Pastoral Counseling*, ed. by Howard W. Stone (Fortress, 2001) Reviewer: Vergel L. Lattimore

NEXT ISSUE:
“MAKING DISCIPLES OF JESUS CHRIST”