Special Issue: The Pastor as Educator

Teaching as Religious Leadership
Jack L. Seymour

The Pastor as Educator

The Minister and the People of God
Mary Elizabeth Moore

Major Settings for Pastoral Teaching
Richard Murray

Revisionism of Pastoral Teaching
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Overview of James Smart's Contribution
Craig Dykstra

Preaching as a Part of Liturgy
Lawrence Hull Stookey
CONTENTS

Editorial: Ante-anticipatory Animadversions .................................................. 3

Teaching as Religious Leadership:
Rethinking the Pastoral Role
Jack L. Seymour .................................................................................................. 6

The Pastor as Educator
Leroy T. Howe ..................................................................................................... 18

The Minister and the People of God
Mary Elizabeth Moore .......................................................................................... 33

Major Settings for Pastoral Teaching
Richard Murray ..................................................................................................... 50

Pastoral Teaching: A Revisionist View
Allen J. Moore ..................................................................................................... 63

Book Review
James Smart's Contribution to the Pastor as Educator
Craig Dykstra ......................................................................................................... 77

Homiletical Resources from the Fourth Sunday of Advent
through the Baptism of the Lord
Laurence Hull Stookey .......................................................................................... 85
Persons waiting to board an aircraft are sometimes told by the airline employees that they will board by seat rows that are announced. Then the employee who is making the announcement will sometimes add: "We are ready now for pre-boarding. We would like those with small children or who are in wheelchairs to pre-board at this time."

What is the difference between boarding and pre-boarding? Apparently none, and yet the airlines people feel compelled to use this term rather than the obvious "early boarding." There is a curious psychology at work in this back formation of terms. It seems to go the other way sometimes: astronauts are debriefed, not briefed, and small countries are destabilized, not intervened in or overthrown.

These kinds of language changes are interesting because they seem to spring out of situations where we feel the old word will not do and a new one is required. In this issue, for example, the writers discuss "forming community." There was a time when we would have said "reforming," and my guess is most of the writers in this issue would not object to attempts to reform the church, or to prescriptions (I almost wrote "descriptions") of the church catholic, evangelical, and reformed.

Yet to talk about "forming community" seems to have more force, particularly in a context of discussion about education. To form community implies that we are creating it from the ground up, or in theological language, that community is being formed from beyond itself. Thus we get at the central thrust of the reality under discussion by dropping the prefix and going straight to the verb that means to shape or constitute. The metaphor seems to be one of building, but perhaps in an organic sense—a body growing and becoming stronger.

Forming community, and education as formation, seem to be
the preferred way of discussing the life of the church these days because it gets us out of dividing the church into areas: worship, evangelism, social action, and so on. The writers in this issue make it clear that education has a very close relation to liturgy, witness, action, administration, spiritual life (you have to be self-conscious not to say automatically "formation" here, too), and everything the church is and does. Most of us will find this line appealing because subdivision never seems to end, and the pastor who is told that worship is the central act of the church will soon be hearing from those asserting that so is moral action, spiritual life, and so on. In contrast to this amoeba-like process, most of those working on these issues in the church today assume that forming and acting go together, as do learning and acting. Thus the whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts.

The going term that catches up all these aspects of the community of faith is ministry. And again the holistic approach is used to say that ministry belongs to the laos and not to the priests alone. Although there are many reasons for saying that ministry belongs to the whole laos, to put it this way raises many questions: What does this have to do with professionalism? That is, are we implying one does not need special competence or knowledge to be a minister? Another question is: Why then have a special class called ordained ministry, if anyone in the laos can be a minister?

The ways of answering these questions inevitably bring up the concept of representative ministry, and you will find the writers discussing ministry in this form in the essays in this issue. Among the many advantages of using representative ministry, rather than more traditional language, is that it enables us to make distinctions and divisions of labor within the community of faith while at the same time affirming the wholeness of that community. As always, the answer raises further questions, and to discuss representative ministry means that we have to decide who gets to be the representative (or who must be the representative), which is a political question. But these further questions are understandable, since it is in the nature of a community created by the Word always to be arguing over what it should be arguing about— "pre-arguing," as it were.
EDITORIAL

To recall the anecdote with which we began, let us ask why we say "representing" and not "presenting." On the surface it seems the reason stems from an acknowledgment of the divine prerogative. God acts; we only react. The one who represents Christ is presenting once again—repeating—the original. Yet this argument may not hold up if we ask about the actual difference between presenting and representing. If to pre-board a plane means to enter it or walk into it, then does not representing Christ mean to present Christ? For if in the "representation" there is a diminution of the original reality, it cannot be that reality itself. This is a hermeneutical question, which is pre-eminently a field for preparing the way to ask questions.

Jack Seymour served as consulting editor for this thematic issue of QR on "the Pastor as Educator." To Him belongs the credit for the original idea and the substantive work. For his enthusiasm, cooperativeness, and excellent ideas the editor is grateful.

—Charles E. Cole
TEACHING AS RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP: 
RETHINKING THE PASTORAL ROLE

JACK L. SEYMOUR

Have we carried professionalism too far? Today when we speak of functions of ministry we tend to separate worship, education, and other tasks from each other. What is needed is a more holistic or religious view of ministry.

Throughout the history of the church an essential task of the pastoral office has been the teaching of Christian faith and life-style. The pastor, as representative of Christian tradition and a Christian community of faith, has been entrusted with the responsibility of teaching faith in such a way that persons can live vital Christian lives and a community of faith can be a vital presence in human society.

Although teaching has always been an important element of ministry, in particular epochs in the church's life when the church encountered other cultures or sought to clarify its understanding the teaching role has been more central. For example, this was the case in the period of the early church when the church expanded into the Greco-Roman culture and sought to express its message and faith in relation to the variety of philosophical and religious traditions, during the Protestant Reformation when it was essential that the fundamentals of faith be clarified, and in Puritan New England with the attempt to form a new pattern of human community in light of Christian tradition. Today, with the experience of changing and plural understandings of character and of the nature of human community, teaching has again emerged as a central task of

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TEACHING AS LEADERSHIP

The thesis of this article is that the problem of understanding the place of teaching in the pastoral role is essentially a problem of how ministry itself is understood in this day. It will not be sufficient merely to call pastors to add teaching to their other multiple functions, for the problem is deeper than the ordering of priorities by the clergy. The deeper problem is the contemporary understanding of ministry as a profession. This view segments ministry into loosely related functions and therefore isolates education from the present understanding of the total task. For the church to reclaim the historic teaching tasks of apology (representing the faith to each new cultural experience) and guidance (of leading persons and communities to see their lives in terms of the God of Jesus), the very nature of ministry itself must be re-examined and the unity of ministry restated.

Contemporary research on the nature of religion and the task of the religious leader offers some new ways of understanding ministry. The message of Christian faith is in tension with some present conceptions of human life, and church leaders must find ways to express that message that lead to conviction.

However, pastors in our time tend to rate education as a low priority, in spite of the historical role of teaching, the contemporary experience of pluralism, and contemporary research that suggests that the pastor is a crucial figure in vital church educational programs.1 Concretely, this fact is reflected in the experience of many directors of Christian education who claim that their role in the church is often limited by senior pastors and does not receive adequate staff support. The importance of teaching is also reflected in the call of United Methodist bishops to enhance the emphasis in theological schools on Christian education and to make the teaching of the Bible a major church priority.

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Contemporary research on the nature of religion and the task of the religious leader offers some new ways of understanding
both teaching and ministry. Above all else, it suggests that the pastor is a religious leader who stands at the intersection of the human and the sacred, seeking to understand with others the meaning of this encounter and how it transforms life into religious vocation. For teaching to find an appropriate place in this larger understanding of the pastoral role, the present professional understanding of ministry must be transformed.

FUNCTIONALISM AND MINISTRY

Within the last one hundred years the predominant model of ministry to emerge in American life has been that of the professional minister. This model is most clearly reflected in the conception of the pastor as pastoral director, one who orchestrates and balances the various functions of ministry (preaching, teaching, administration, social action, and pastoral counseling) within the church. Such a conception of ministry is functional: that is, it defines ministry by the diverse functions in which the clergy participates and by the skills necessary to fulfill adequately these functions. The result is that the various goal-task functions are separated from each other, and individual functions, or a balancing of them, takes precedence over the unity of ministry.

Professionalism in ministry was born in an era in American society when professionalism itself emerged as a primary mode of human organization. Professionalism grew out of a progressive desire at the beginning of the twentieth century to find a more adequate form in which to deliver human services. American society was experiencing rapid growth, immigration, and change. The cities seemed to be disintegrating, and forms of political organization based on friendship were unable to respond to social change and complexity. The progressive concern was to replace patronage with competence.

Progressive reformers sought adequate and specialized training for those who were to deliver human services, and they sought a rational and impartial process of education and evaluation by which human services would be organized. The professions of medicine, law, social work, teaching, and public administration, as well as ministry, all emerged. Each had its own specialized education and standards by which competence
was to be judged. Each represented a specialized function of human activity. A rational process was therefore developed in which persons trained in segmented functions practiced those functions in particular ways on clients in need of human services. In such a model the executive became a professional manager who saw that functions were co-ordinated and directed for the delivery of human services.

While this new form of social relationship unquestionably increased competence in the delivery of services, encouraged specialized research which improved both knowledge and practice, and provided a more rational process of decision-making which transcended political idiosyncrasy and patronage, it also had three negative effects. First, it created a hierarchy in American society by dividing those who were to deliver the services (the professionals) from those who were to receive them (the clients). The result has been an increasing lack of participation by clients in decisions about their own future. Professionals tend not to trust wishes of clients because the client is not the one with the skill. Second, professionalism has segmented areas of social concern from each other and has militated against interprofessional and interdisciplinary activity. The very same “condition,” for example, may be treated in radically different ways by a psychiatrist, a psychologist, a social worker, and a minister, when in fact only an overcoming of the specialties allows a holistic view. A “turf” has been given to each of the professions and they are to stay within their boundaries. Third, the political leader is turned into a manager, rather than one who inspires a holistic view of future possibilities for the community by mediating the tradition and hopes of the people. Co-ordination then replaces visionary leadership.

This cultural change profoundly affected the understanding of ministry. The same progressive spirit shaped training for the ministry. Not only was the ministry to carry a particular social function of facilitating the moral and religious life, but its elements were also differentiated. Pastoral counselors, directors of Christian education, church and community workers, and local parish clergy are but four examples of the differentiation. In each of the subspecialties of ministry, expertise was demanded not only in understanding the Christian heritage, but also in ancillary secular disciplines—pastoral counselors in psychol-
Pastors tend to judge themselves by professional rather than religious categories.

Both the positive and negative implications of professionalism have become true for ministry. Positively, professionalism in ministry has increased the focus on issues of competence and skill. Negatively, the three consequences of professionalism also have their correlates. First, the gap between the clergy and the laity has been widened. Rather than being mutual members of the community of faith, the roles of clergy and laity are separated when the clergy has specialized skills and a private language, and the laity is turned into a clientele. In turn, laity tends to see clergy as a "hired minister" and thereby forgets its participation in the priesthood of all believers. Second, the areas of ministry are separated from one another. For example, preaching and social action are seen as different functions. Furthermore, the role of ministry in the larger society becomes a specialized and restricted one. The church is "privatized" and is to deal with "religious matters" and personal issues while other specialized agencies of human society are to attend to the other issues of human services and human organization. Third, the pastor tends to be transformed into a manager and co-ordinator, rather than the leader who mediates the tradition and hopes of the community of faith into a vision for the present and future.

The result of these tendencies for teaching in the church are particularly significant. The first, and most obvious result, is that church education is seen as a specialized function of ministry with particular skills that differentiate it from other areas of ministry. Most pastors therefore conclude that they do not have the particular skills needed for education and "lean" toward the functions for which they clearly possess skills and are rewarded...
TEACHING AS LEADERSHIP

by both the congregation and church hierarchy. The clergy often feels like the amateur, rather than the professional, in education.

Second, education tends to be seen as a task of the laity rather than the clergy. Early professional training in Christian education was clearly directed toward the laity, and the Sunday school movement was a lay movement. The result of this is that, at best, clergy believes its task is to co-ordinate a lay church education program and, at worst, feels that since it is a task of the laity (the clients), it is not worthy of the clergy.*

The third and most subtle result is that clergy tend to see themselves as managers of a congregational program co-ordinating the functions of the congregation, rather than as leaders who teach so as to mediate the Christian tradition and hopes of the community into a vision of its present and future life and ministry. What this last result means is that the historic teaching responsibility of the clergy is replaced by the management of congregational life. It is therefore not surprising that clergy tends to leave education to the professional educators, who seem more professional, or to the laity. The implicit assumption is that the pastor is to spend time in other areas where he or she is an expert, not an amateur. Teaching then becomes an adjunct of pastoral ministry engaged in only by invitation or out of a special idiosyncratic interest of a particular pastor.

What is needed if teaching is to have a central place in ministry is a holistic image of ministry which transcends functionalism and unites ministry.

What is needed if teaching is to have a central place in ministry is a holistic image of ministry which transcends functionalism and unites ministry. In such a model, which continues to emphasize competence, teaching must mean more than educational skills. It must be seen as a way the pastor leads in individual and congregational growth in faith by mediating and representing in mutuality the tradition and its vision. Understood in this way, teaching is at the heart of pastoral activity and not an adjunct. It also becomes an activity of the whole people of God.
Contemporary research seeking to understand the human religious encounter with the sacred provides new resources for understanding both ministry and teaching in ministry. The primary conclusion of such research suggests that religion is the vehicle by which persons seek to understand the meaning of the sacred (the unconditional horizon) in their lives and to embody the meaning of that encounter in faithful responses of religious vocation in the context of the religious community and human life. The encounter with the sacred transforms a person’s understanding and loyalties (conversion) and calls him or her to live life in response to that experience (faithfulness). The response is embodied in persons who take the story, symbols, and life-style of a particular religious community as their own; for it is through this story that the depth experiences of life come to have meaning and value.

This understanding of religious life has powerful implications for ministry. Charles Winquist, for example, suggests that our understanding of ministry, “must avoid narrow definition. The call to ministry that encompasses the priesthood of all believers reaches beyond the vocational definitions of social work or psychological counseling, political or social movements, and intellectual or ideological currents.” Such an understanding must reflect the way ministry mediates through symbol, story, ritual leadership, and religious action the calling of persons into service of the depth dimension of reality, that is, living life in terms of the horizon of ultimacy, the encounter with the sacred. Functionalism in ministry emphasizes the tasks of everyday and the horizons of the conditional, those which can be controlled and manipulated. In contrast, religious leadership emphasizes mediation, understanding, and faithful responses to the religious dimension in life.

Urban T. Holmes further focuses this view of religious leadership, arguing that the pastor becomes the “mystagogue” of the community. Fundamentally, what this means is that the pastor is a guide in the community as persons seek to understand and respond to their sacred experiences which transform and redirect living. While skills are essential to pastoral leadership, these skills themselves are only given meaning through a unifying
The Christian tradition is a witness to the understanding that Christianity is a way of living informed by a critical appropriation of the faith traditions and the promised vision of God's kingdom. The context for the formation of faith is the gathered church, people who struggle together to understand God's Word, to support one another in the transformation of human living, and to engage in ministry in the world. The church, therefore, is the place where the story of the faith is told and disciplined guidance is given in such a way that people find the meaning of the encounter of the sacred and seek to walk worthy of God. In such an understanding, the clergy is seen as full members of the people of God, called out of that people to guide in the mutual pilgrimage of understanding life as religious vocation. The clergy, as is true of any member of the people of God, re-presents the tradition of Abraham and Jesus in the world. Its particular function is to lead and empower the faithful ministry of the gathered community, instead of dispensing services to clients. The metaphors for religious leaders are, more appropriately, guide and spiritual director, rather than professional.

Seen from this perspective, pastoral ministry is fundamentally a mediation process by which persons are guided in the disciplined engagement of the faith with life. The central issue of ministry then becomes that of religious self-identity—how the encounter with the sacred is mediated, interpreted, explored, understood, and engaged through human vessels. In this manner ministry takes on a unified perspective or stance through which the various activities are focused and interwoven.

Pastoral counseling therefore becomes more than the application of secular counseling techniques to ministerial practice; rather it becomes the care of souls—the active caring involvement in another's life to help the other clarify and shape the meaning of his or her life in relation to the Christian faith. Social action ministry becomes more than participating in social causes; rather it becomes the prophetic empowerment of the community of faith—the active directing of the struggle of the community of faith to interpret the implications of the encounter
with the sacred for the ordering of human life and engagement with God in that activity.

TEACHING AND THE NATURE OF MINISTRY

Teaching also becomes more than a functional segment of ministry, for it is fundamentally an interpretive process of bringing the tradition to bear on life. It is interwoven into the broader self-identity of the pastor. No longer can it be segmented into the school of the church where the heritage of the faith is told; rather it becomes a process in the whole of ministry by which religious experience is interpreted in relation to the story, symbols, and life-style of the Christian faith. The pastor not only teaches when she or he leads formal educational groups in study, but the pastor also teaches through each of the acts of ministry where experience is seen and understood in light of the Christian tradition, and the meaning of this encounter is assessed.

One of the most comprehensive ways of understanding education in any culture is that of meaning-making or interpretation. Education is the process by which cultural perspectives are shared, the meaning of experiences are interpreted in light of that cultural perspective and vision, and consequently, the perspectives of the culture are renewed and "re-meaned." For the Christian faith what this means is that teaching is an essential way that experiences of both human life and the encounter with the sacred are made meaningful in terms of the Christian cultural perspective and vision—of interpreting what it means to live under the horizon of the ultimate mediated through the faith of Abraham and Jesus.

Just as the care of souls and prophecy are not separate functions of ministry but are united in the task of mediation, so teaching is not separate, but part of the way that mediation and empowerment take place. Teaching is inexorably linked to this process. It is the interpretive element in all of ministry.

What does this understanding mean for teaching in the pastoral role? First, it means that the pastor must seek to understand himself or herself as a spiritual person. Since the task of all ministry is basically a sacramental task of representing the Holy One, the pastor cannot teach unless he or she is
struggling to interpret his or her own life in terms of the promise and vision of the tradition. The pastor is a fellow pilgrim with the whole body in seeking to understand what it means to be faithful. This search requires that the pastor continually study to understand what is reflected and embodied in the Christian tradition, what the meaning of his or her own encounter with the sacred is, and how the tradition opens his or her own experience to understanding and faithful action.

Second, the pastor re-presents to persons the symbolic reality that is beneath the traditions and institutions of Christian life. Not only does the pastor join others in the community of faith in the experience of the Christian life, but he or she uniquely points others to the meaning of that reality in their personal lives. At its root, this means that the pastor is a priest who bears in his or her own person the intentionality of the community—bringing to experience, awareness, and dialogue the mystery of transcendence and the traditions of the faith. The pastor guides others in their growth in faith—to experience, interpret, understand, and respond to the meaning of Christian story for their lives. Teaching is here the interactive process of linking the faith with the experiences of daily life. It does occur in formal teaching sessions, but it also occurs in other one-to-one and group interactions of care, administration, and service. The pastor is here being teacher and spiritual director, guide and theologian.

Third, the pastor is a guide for the ministry of the community of faith in the world. Just as the pastor struggles with his or her own faithfulness and is an agent of interpretation for other people, the pastor is also a guide for the church as it seeks to understand its faithfulness. A community of faith seeks to understand what kind of community it is in relation to God's ultimate project for human life, how people in the community are to relate to one another, how the community will embody the symbols of the faith to the world, and how it will become God's sacrament of transformation in the world. The pastor enables dialogue and interpretation to take place and teaches the tradition in every encounter where the community seeks to understand its own experience, style of life, and vocation. Teaching here occurs as the tradition of faith is brought to bear on the community's life and ministry. At its root this is what has been called the "doing of theology." Decisions are no longer
seen merely as issues of administration or community relations, but also as teaching (interpretive) occasions where faith and life are linked. Without such teaching the decisions cannot be empowered by faith.

Unquestionably the pastor teaches through formal educational settings in the life of the church, but the pastor also teaches as she or he participates in religious leadership for and through the community of faith. Teaching is more than a function. It is a stance and perspective intimately interwoven through all the activities of religious leadership. A functionalist understanding of ministry impoverishes not only the church’s educational ministry, but also ministry itself by segmenting its elements into disunity. The church and ministry will be served as the definition of ministry is broadened and brought to unity in a more comprehensive understanding. The people of God are in ministry together pointing to and re-presenting the Holy One in the world.

Although teaching the faith has been an important part of the pastoral role throughout the history of the church and the contemporary situation of pluralism and change is such that teaching is demanded, teaching will not become an important part of the pastoral understanding unless the limitations of professionalism can be overcome. Teaching is not a segmented function of ministry that is to be given over only to the professionals with educational skill. It occurs throughout all of pastoral activity where interpretation is called for and takes place. Merely to call for pastors to add teaching to their other functions will not be sufficient for the necessary re-imaging of the pastoral role in contemporary society. Religious leadership provides a direction for this re-imaging. The ministry of the community of faith as well as that of the pastor are enhanced when ministry is seen as the interpretation of and response to the encounter with the sacred, and the pastor is seen as a religious leader or guide in this process. In this way, the whole community of faith stands as witness to God’s transforming activity in life.

NOTES
TEACHING AS LEADERSHIP


10. See, for example, Lawrence A. Cremin, Public Education (New York: Basic Books, 1976), pp. 27 following.
What constitutes representative ministry other than the central act of proclaiming the gospel? If ministry implies that the people of God are to be stimulated into the actual living of faith and not merely "understanding" it, then education can become a way of unifying ministry itself.

At one time or another, most clergypersons will experience at least a mild "identity crisis" because they bear diverse responsibilities and have many different things to do, yet lack clear vision of their ministry as a whole. The ordained minister is called to preach, to nurture, to mobilize, to lead, to inspire, to supervise. A typical day might include repairing the sanctuary's heating equipment; offering the city council invocation between the women's circle coffee and a funeral; locating prices on new mimeographing equipment between visits to the hospital, the nursing home, and the library (which last has just sent a second overdue notice on the book the minister reviewed at the arts festival). It is little wonder that a pastor might ask herself or himself how all of this is "ministry" in any important sense of the term. Only by means of some theologically well-formed point of view on the whole of ministry is it possible to gain satisfactory answers to such a question, and relief from the pressures of fragmentation in a creation exquisitely amenable to holistic vision.

The purpose of this essay is to sketch such a point of view. Its thesis is that the traditional role of the pastor as educator contains within it a perspective comprehensive enough to

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understand the pastor’s total responsibilities in their unity. The “master image” infused throughout the exposition is of pastors centering their ministries with their congregations, in growth toward shared understanding and joyful experience of the Scriptures, church history, and the doctrines of the faith in their application to present life.

The idea that the pastor of the local congregation might function primarily in a role of educator alludes to important aspects of Judeo-Christian heritage and life. Judaism’s own understanding of ministerial leadership, for instance, seems to have undergone a process of change which began with an accentuation of priestly functions, and moved through the institution of the scribe to its post-Christian Era understanding of rabbi: teacher. And the Protestant tradition, in particular, from the outset stressed that ministry empowered by the Spirit requires for its fulfillment a disciplined life informed by a faith which at once is a gift and an appropriation through understanding. (In contemporary discussion, this stress is expressed in the call for new forms of praxis in the church, a “doing” [poesis] which is in-formed by, and in-forming of learning [theoria].) In early New England, the Puritan pastor was in addition to being an organizer and a “discipliner,” an interpreter of scriptural revelation. In the United Methodist tradition, an emphasis upon “learned ministry” is strictly entailed by Wesley’s stress upon “knowledge and vital piety,” even if practice all too rarely embodies the union. There is much in the tradition, then, to suggest that theologically informed interpretation represents not merely one among many functions performed by pastors, but also a unified perspective on every pastoral function.

TWO VIEWS OF THE MINISTERIAL OFFICE

By way of background, it may be helpful to consider two views of the ministerial office and its unity which inform most current understandings of the ordained ministry. The first views the pastor’s responsibilities largely in priestly terms: the clergy is the essential mediator between God and the chosen people. In an extreme form, the view is of the priest as a dispenser of the sacraments essential to salvation, a custodian of the means of
grace who provides access to the channels through which believers ratify their place before God. The priestly office is understood as part of a hierarchical scheme of relationships, downward from God, through Christ and the Spirit, to the clergy, and only finally to the laity. The early Protestant tradition caricatured the abuses of such a hierarchically oriented system of thought and praxis, but its own ecclesiology preserved the vital core of this outlook, in the way it construed the clergy as “shepherds of souls.” In the Reformation, also, a priestly ministry was emphasized which, through the image of the pastor as a shepherd tending the needs of a flock, maintained its own distinctive hierarchical structure of church life. As in the Middle Ages, most of the “flocks” continued to be organized relatively neatly as residential parishes, and the world itself seemed to be understood as little more than the aggregate of all the parishes, outside of which nothing of consequence existed, except the “principalities and powers.”

One contemporary understanding of the ministerial office which has been emerging in the past three decades is at once a return to a more apostolic orientation and also is a deliberate juxtaposition to these medieval and early Reformation views. A key to understanding this new perspective is the phrase “rebirth of the laity,” an expression which wends its way through all serious ecclesiological writing today, and which seeks to convey the church’s growing conviction that clergy are enablers of the laity’s mission to the world, in the name of God-in-Christ. One important implication of this new view is that “shepherding” analogies by themselves no longer may be capable of centering ecclesiological thinking, unless one were to maintain the bizarre notion that in at least one corner of sheepdom, there could be flocks of sheep which could be changed into guilds of shepherds!

Three factors in particular have contributed to what appears to be a virtual transformation of the ordained minister’s identity and role. The first is the rediscovery of the ministry of Jesus Christ as the essence of all ministry, with the correlate that all followers of Christ are called to be ministers in his name. From this vantage point, the ordained minister is one set apart (not aside), for the purpose of building up the followers of Christ for their own ministry (“equipping the saints”). She or he may
PASTOR AS EDUCATOR

strive effectively to represent that form of ministry (diakonia) to which all disciples of Christ are called, but in no sense does she or he perform that ministry merely on behalf of the whole people of God. Witnessing to God's love, revealed decisively in Jesus Christ, in Word, sacrament, order, and service, is a ministry for which all are responsible.

A second factor contributing to a new understanding of ministry is the breakdown of Christendom itself: the "world" no longer can be understood in the parochial terms of an indefinitely large and extended number of Christian parishes, hierarchically structured for protection from, and for combat with, the "non-Christian" environments standing over against Christ's flocks. Though the oikoumene remains God's world, it also includes peoples who have not understood, do not now understand, and in all likelihood never will understand themselves as Christians. To borrow a shepherding analogy, the call of Christ to continue his ministry is coming to be understood as a call to tend sheep which never may be gathered into the flocks most closely approximate to the Christian's own.

Finally, also contributing to a new understanding of ministry is the reappropriation of the gospel as good news for this world as well as for the next. Although one overarching meaning of each of the things of this world is the power of each to become a visible sign of invisible realities transcending the created order, each thing also has meaning within the created order, and its potential meaning there also is a cause for celebration. The fallenness of the world is occasion not so much for departing it as for transforming it. Hence, rather than merely issuing tickets for passage to the next world, ministry bears the presence and power which seeks to transform this present world. The pastor is one who helps others to sense the presence and the power which God, in the midst of all creatures, already is, and to translate that inward sense into outward expressions of a community of faith whose life together bears the future which God intends everywhere.

However many and perplexing are the difficulties which continue to accompany an ecclesiology which defines the cleric in hierarchical terms, such thinking at least could offer unmistakable clarity about the dynamic and form of the pastoral office. Not so with contemporary ecclesiological theories. One of
the most difficult problems accompanying today's understanding of ordained ministers as enablers of the ministry and mission of the whole people of God is that of how the clergy is to go about the all-inclusive work now understood to be the essence of ministerial leadership. A basic uncertainty is about the point of view from which the ministry of enablement most fruitfully can be envisioned and practiced. Is there a way to look at everything clergy must do as clergy which might help to focus all of the varying enterprises of ministry, seemingly scattered in many directions at once, into an integrated whole, informed by the overarching aim of "equipping the saints" for their own ministry? Striving to formulate a point of view on the whole of ministry is without doubt the most important single enterprise to be undertaken in preparing for ministry, and testing one's initial point of view is essential to perfecting the work of ministry at every subsequent stage. To this concept of "point of view" the next section turns, and proceeds by means of the "perspectivalism" of Seward Hiltner.

TOWARD A PERSPECTIVE FOR MINISTRY

Some years ago, Seward Hiltner offered the beginnings of an approach to ministry as a whole which, in spite of its merely preliminary and promissory character, has proved helpful to at least two generations of ordained ministers. Hiltner proposed that all thinking about ministerial functions or roles (for example, as preacher, liturgist, counselor, educator, evangelist, community organizer) be organized into three encompassing, interrelated, but also distinctive perspectives1 (Preface to Pastoral Theology: The Ministry and Theory of Shepherding Abingdon Press, 1958). The fundamental epistemological construct of this book continues to inform reflection on ecclesiastical ministry. For example, in a report, "Teaching as a Pastoral Ministry," produced by a task force comprising professors of Christian education in the United Methodist Church, Jack Seymour wrote, "Teaching must be understood as both a ministerial task and a ministerial perspective . . . a perspective taken toward all the tasks of ministry." In Hiltner's pastoral theology, each of his perspectives was understood to subsume certain of the traditional ministerial functions or roles under it, and to
constitute a way of looking at the totality of ministerial functioning. The second consideration is the crucial one for the purposes of this present essay: a perspective on ministry expresses a certain purposing or intending for the whole of ministry, an orientation which sets aims and goals for everything that one does.

Hiltner's three perspectives are well known: the perspective of "communicating" subsumes preaching, evangelism, and education; the perspective of "shepherding" subsumes crisis intervention, counseling, and nurture in general; and the perspective of "organization" subsumes the enterprises of stewardship and mission. The three perspectives together represent a comprehensive approach to ordained ministry inssofar as they call for a versatility in one's moving among the three perspectives, as situations in ministry may require. Such versatility is an important resource by which to avoid an unduly narrow scope for one's ministerial functioning. As every pastor knows, it is difficult to avoid restricting ministry to the functions with which one is most comfortable, but a single-minded preoccupation with one perspective which threatens to subordinate the other perspectives, and perhaps even the subsumable activities, to it, yields less than the holistic forms of ministry to which the community of faith is called. Reductionism is virtually inevitable, however, given the essential finitude of every minister, ordained or lay. (It must be noted in passing that Hiltner's perspectivalism concentrated exclusively, for all practical purposes, upon the ordained ministry; the notion of ministry of the laity, alas, seemed muted at best in Hiltner's early works.)

Hiltner's insistence on the integrity and wholeness of each perspective, however, and the necessity for sustaining responsibility to all three, in a multiple-perspective approach to ministry, provides one way in which reductionism can be corrected. The hermeneutical usefulness of Hiltner's approach can be illustrated with reference to the history of the pastorate itself, which reflects a shifting among these perspectives on the pastoral office as a whole. For instance, with regard to the ministry of healing in the church, it is interesting to note how apostolic Christianity ordered itself primarily in reference to the ministry of communicating, with healing and exorcism as especially significant sign-events. In the Middle Ages, the perspective has
become more that of shepherding; and with the shift, healing became almost an end in itself, more than a sign pointing beyond itself. Finally, Hiltner's organizing perspective seems especially characteristic of the present church; nowadays healing is done by “professionals” in the secular order, in the church-in-world.

Hiltner has attempted to build a concept of ministry upon that foundation of perspectivalism which is the dominant cultural orientation of the present era. This is the source of its originality and creativity. The following argument will be structured by Hiltner's perspectival approach to ministry, but it proposes to advance Hiltner's exposition in a way which both utilizes and alters the theory itself. The contention is, contra Hiltner, that education is not merely a single function or role within a larger congeries of ministerial responsibilities, but also contains a perspective on the whole of ministry. Alongside Hiltner's characterization of the (ordained) minister as communicator, shepherd, and organizer, this essay suggests placing the perspective of the minister (ordained and lay) as educator.

From the beginning, Protestantism has expressed especially vividly an understanding of the (ordained) minister as an educator, indeed, as a theologian: all of the Reformers understood the servanthood of the priest to be to the Word of God; priestly identity forms not merely in relationship to the church (for example, an employee of an institution), but also in reference to the Divine Word, in the light of which alone the church derives its own call-to-be. Of all modern Protestant theologians, Karl Barth has contributed most lastingly to the appropriation of the Word of God as centering the pastoral office. Barth's threefold doctrine of the Word of God (as Jesus Christ, as Scripture's witness to Jesus Christ, and as proclamation of that Scriptural witness to Jesus Christ; see Church Dogmatics, I/1 T. and T. Clark, 1969, pp. 51-135) calls throughout for a ministry expressing itself in acts of representing, in a way which enables both understanding and commitment: in short, for ministry as interpretation of the Word, interpretation which activates and sustains faith. Barth's own model of such interpretation, primarily as a proclaiming at someone, with the Holy Spirit completing the communication, needs considerable reworking, in the direction of a concept of divine communicat-
ing as speaking-with as well as speaking-to. What is central to the model, however, remains cogent: ministry or servanthood to the Word of God, exercised through study and clear exposition, aiming toward an understanding which both contributes to and is informed by transformed living. Proclamation as preaching, for instance, is one way, but only one way, to transmit, elicit, and enrich such understanding. Through whatever and however many ways, the indispensable aim remains that of stimulating others to their own faith-seeking-understanding (and discipleship). All ministry, in whatever office, can be informed by this single aim. And insofar as this is the case, educating can become a centering perspective on the whole of ministry, even as it also remains a long-cherished function alongside other functions of ministry.

**MINISTRY AS EDUCATION**

Given the desire to formulate a comprehensive perspective on ministry which centers upon the minister as educator, what must be taken account of? At the very least, four foci are required for developing a ministry from such a perspective. With the premise in mind that the minister as educator is most fundamentally an interpreter of the gospel and its contribution to human life, for such interpretation to be foundational of a community of faith the minister must be especially attentive to (1) the content she or he is to interpret, (2) methods of interpreting, (3) the recipients of interpretation, and (4) the settings for shared interpretation. Gaining some understanding of these components in a theologically informed ministry regulated by an educational perspective is a necessary condition for developing a comprehensive perspective on the whole of ministry governed by the educational aim.

These four foci can be expressed in other terminology. For instance: as content shared, methods of teaching and learning, the learner, and the learning environment. Since this latter phrasing likely will be more familiar in educational circles, the discussion to follow will be conducted by means of them, but in an order better suited to contemporary theological inquiry. By the very nature of the enterprise, interpretation is content-oriented, but contemporary theology recognizes also that the
content of the Christian message is not only a depositum cherished and transmitted intact from previous generations, but also is meaning for particular situations whose very description is shaped by the situation and methods by which it is interpreted. Accordingly, the following discussion begins with a consideration of the foci of setting and methods, moves to an account of contemporary approaches to understanding the faith-learner, and only then concludes with a précis of Christian content.

The Setting for Christian Learning Today

Five themes seem especially prominent in the contemporary situation within which Christian learning now must take place. The first is pluralism: of communities, values, and ideologies. In many respects the present situation approximates that of the second century, especially in its astonishing virtuosity of diverse world-views. The second-century church’s approach to an analogous situation was to attempt a distilling of Christian orthodoxy as absolute truth to be set over against the innumerable religious cults. Such an imperialistic approach to transmitting the gospel is not an option for the present missionary cause, if for no other reason than that modern consciousness is formed from the outset toward a sense of the validity rather than the falsehood of contrary points of view. Indeed, what any particular point of view even can mean will itself be shaped by the influences of other points of view also impinging upon consciousness. What this means for the ministry of interpretation is that if any learning is to take place all the relationships between conflicting points of view, or, in another jargon, between the many horizons of meaning, must continually be made explicit, but without serious prospect either of absolute differentiation or of hierarchical ordering. In contrast with neoconservative proposals to insulate believers from contamination by the varieties of outlook, the context of learning, within and without the church, must be made broader than any envisioned to date.

Along with pluralism, the contemporary setting for learning can be characterized by reference to the relativism of the diverse communities’ values and ideologies which are becoming increasingly pluriform. It is being taken increasingly for granted
that every inquirer's standpoint both has, and must have, a limitedness about it. Absolutizing of any single perspective is idolatry which desensitizes faith-seekers to truths which may be discovered in value-systems other than one's own. For the church's faith, the result is that the very style of interpretation and reflection will need to undergo change, from a characteristically declarative mode to one stressing sharing, confessing, and offering to one another out of a sense of mutual quest. Such a style of faith-pilgrimage is demanding, if for no other reason than that the validity of what is shared must be seen also in the bearer of what is shared.

Along with pluralism and relativism, there is also the secularization process, whereby human needs and their fulfillment have come to be addressed increasingly in nonreligious terms, with varying reductionistic hermeneutics developed to interpret what religious symbols, institutions, and life-styles can “really” mean to men and women whose very consciousness has become secularized. Interpretation of the Christian gospel is burdened increasingly by the issue of how the “beyond” is to be experienced by those whose horizons are limited increasingly to the “here and now.”

Fourth, within the churches themselves, also as a dimension of the setting for learning today, there is a distressing kind of alienation of believers from major advances in theological inquiry; the impact of Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment theological inquiry, grasped perceptively and eagerly in the world of unbelief, is felt within faith communities only on the far side of serious and sustained attempts to “work through” the resistances which have led to the alienation in the first place. Throughout the Christian church believers seem increasingly alienated from the historical approaches to the Scriptures, from methods exposing parochial accounts of church history written from narrow, denominational points of view, and, more broadly speaking, from attempts to transcend the ideologies of the conquerors of oppressed peoples, attempts pursued with considerable success by contemporary liberation theologians.

Fifth, and somewhat paradoxically in the light of the previous considerations, at every level of modern society there appears also a deepening hunger for what can only be called “wisdom,” about what ultimately matters. Perhaps the most striking
evidence of such hunger is the variety and intensity of current interest in "spirituality."

Methods of Teaching and Learning

It is both commonplace and necessary to reiterate that method and methodology are important considerations for teaching in any sense, and certainly for the perspective of the pastor as educator. Proper attention to method can greatly facilitate a theologically informed ministry as long as the minister-educator remains open to many methods of inquiry and refuses steadfastly the lure of some single approach to the exclusion of all others. For instance, the bias of the "learned" is to ensure that content is organized well and presented clearly; all too frequently, the assumption is that if these conditions are fulfilled, the learning somehow will take care of itself. This bias pervades theological hermeneutics as well; for instance, one has only to think of the otherwise strange notion that only the Holy Spirit makes possible, for the elect, the hearing of the Word in a particular witness to that Word. Engagement on the part of the learner is a necessary condition for any lasting learning to take place. And from engagement, inquiry comes. Though most learned people, happily, do "know" better, they do not always act on their knowledge. All lasting learning involves inquiry from the outset, in both the learner and the teacher. No one method can be best for all; some one method likely will be best for some.

Which method is to be chosen seems relative to at least two important factors: clarity about the overarching objective for any pastoral intervention, namely the eliciting and the advancement of understanding; and knowledge of the primary mode of receptivity on the part of other inquirers or learners. For example, it makes a substantial difference for learning to know that a learner assimilates data and insights primarily through visual, auditory, or tactile-kinesthetic processes. Persons who "hear" truths better than they "see" truths likely will understand the spoken word better than the written word. And vice versa. Young children by contrast, as Jean Piaget once expressed the matter, must invent in order to understand. These two factors entail that conclusion that for every act of ministry, there
be a clearly statable objective for the act, and a procedure which relates the act to the recipient's primary ways of responding to stimuli. This latter consideration leads to the third focus of a theologically informed perspective on the pastor as educator, the learner: the respondent, herself or himself.

The Learner

From the outset, the Christian tradition has articulated a theological perspective on the people of God as persons created in the divine image, corrupted by their sins and sinfulness, and redeemed by grace. In the sequence of transformations from creation, through the fall, to redemption, both intellect and will participate alike. Redemption itself has been understood best as a dynamic process involving both God and the sinner, transpiring over the course of a lifetime, and completed finally in the coming kingdom of God. Resources from contemporary research on human development enhance the intelligibility of the Christian tradition's understanding of human being-in-the-world primarily at the point of more fully depicting the process of human transformation. From a developmental perspective, human nature undergoes relatively predictable sequences of development which involve changes in the organism's patterns of adapting to external changes in the environment. Though to an external observer, the sequences themselves may seem to proceed in a somewhat orderly fashion, to the subject experiencing the sequences, change frequently is accompanied by trauma.

There are many studies available which can provide a much closer look at this process which, theologically construed, represents the varying ways within which divine grace is at work within every human being across the life-cycle. These studies make it easier to understand who the recipients are of a ministry led by a pastor from an educational perspective. To name just a few such studies: psychoanalytic thinking on separation-individuation in early childhood, Piaget's research on the structures of intelligence, Lawrence Kohlberg's studies on moral reasoning capacity, Robert Selman's work on interpersonal relations, and most recently, James Fowler's work on faith development. One of the most pressing hermeneutical
tasks of a theologically informed understanding of the pastoral office is to conceptualize the lines of interaction, and the mutual constructive criticism possible, between traditional theological perspectives and these recent developmental perspectives on the human situation.

The Constant of Christian Witness and Interpretation

A total perspective on ministry begins then with the understanding of the pastor as educator, and includes as well the setting and methods for learning, and the learner herself or himself. The final aspect of the discussion is content. While some might have chosen to begin here, it is appropriate to reverse the order because Christian ministry itself, from beginning to end, is indisputably person-centered. Accordingly, theological reflection on ministry must begin by bringing into view the people of God, who are both the recipients and the agents of ministry, in the settings within which they find themselves. Only then does it become possible helpfully to speak of the content of a theologically informed ministry whose governing perspective is educational.

But now, the fundamental question is: When ministry is seen from the perspective of the pastor as educator, what is itself the subject matter guiding her or his ministry? Some obvious answers are: knowledge of the Bible, doctrinal clarity, and norms for living. But these kinds of answers appear only when a theologically informed ministry, and more specifically, education itself, is thought of as a function of ministry. Neither answer to the question of subject matter really says enough. When education, and more comprehensively, the pastorate as seen from a theological orientation, come to represent a perspective upon the totality of ministry, the very content inquired about and taught in every other function of ministry must be reconceptualized in a more encompassing manner.

To deal properly with this issue requires at least four kinds of considerations. The first is the understanding of the Christian faith as a coherent set of beliefs, articulated explicitly either in a confession of faith or a theological system. But “the faith once received by the saints” is not merely an array of doctrine; it is also an ideal form of life, a normative pattern in the light of
which not only one's beliefs, but one's affections are shaped. Expressed in material as well as formal terms, a vital Christian faith is an enunciation of love incarnate, and a call to others similarly to make incarnate in their own lives that love with which God loves the world and which is endurably present in Christ, through the Holy Spirit, transforming all things and making them new.

To speak of the Christian faith as a coherent set of beliefs and as an ideal form of life is to emphasize the relatively structured dimensions of the subject matter of ministry. But there is a dynamic dimension as well. Thus, third, the content of a ministry shaped from an educational perspective also must be said to be a process of personal and social transformation: this is to emphasize and to affirm that change and development, sometimes gradual and sometimes radical and immediate, also are divinely intended in God's saving work in the world. The fourth consideration also stresses the dynamic aspect of Christian content. A theologically informed perspective on ministry, adhered to by the pastor who understands herself or himself most fundamentally to be an educator, necessitates a way of reflecting upon experience and action which enables the people of God to continue searching for new ways of sense-making which are attuned both to changing social realities and to the abiding dimensions of God's presence in the world. There are many possible ways of specifying the dynamic of such reflection. John Calvin employed an analogy drawn from visual experience, comparing the role of Scripture in attaining knowledge of God and the self to the role of lenses which bring into focus realities existing independently of the believing inquirer, but which appear distorted and confused in the understanding of fallen sinners whose intellect has become diminished in capacity. (Institutes of the Christian Religion, [Westminster Press, 1960], I.6.1, pp. 70; I, 14, 1, pp. 160-61.) One might also pose an auditory parallel: a reflective approach to ministry is like the device which locks in the FM reception of a favored radio station. Still further, one can express the point in a tactile way: a reflective practice of ministry is like that sensitivity which birds display as they feel their way along the surface of the ground to the worms which lie buried beneath the surface. Given the varieties of sensory receptivity among the members of
the people of God, it becomes important to find ways both of reflecting upon, and of representing, those realities to which the faith points by means other than appeal to a single sensory modality only. In all these instances, the essence of the matter is the sensitizing to new realities which reflective inquiring and reflective ministry can discover and can help to create.
THE MINISTER AND THE PEOPLE OF GOD

MARY ELIZABETH MOORE

When we say the ordained minister is "representative," do we mean that the ordained can stick to preaching and leave teaching to the laity? Hardly, and yet this raises the question of how to re-form (reshape) truly representative ministry for the sake of both the world and the faith.

No title could be more ambiguous than this one, for the minister who leads the people is one of the people, and the people are themselves ministers to one another and to the world. Our hastiness in clearly separating the representative ministers from the laity may help us simplify our categories, but the separation obscures the profound meanings of minister and of the people of God. In the multiple meanings of these words lie powerful images which point toward new directions for teaching ministry. To discover these we must first break open the images and then re-form them.

On the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary celebration of our congregation, one of our former pastors rose to the pulpit to preach. We all expected him to say words of greeting. Instead he began by reading the New Testament text for the day. Then he looked at us and said, "I disciplined myself to read the text first rather than to say how glad I am to be here and how much this congregation means to our family. Though all of this is true, we are here for a larger purpose than our liking each other."1 This was a vivid reminder that being God's people is more than being a community of people that are compatible.

But what does it mean to be the people of God, and what does

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it mean to minister? Certainly we have many opportunities to address these questions during this era when many Protestant denominations and ecumenical bodies are examining the nature and shape of ministry. Unfortunately, these studies often begin or end with questions of distribution—distribution of power and benefits—rather than with questions of meaning. The result is to fan the flames of clericalism and anticlericalism. Inevitably these two "isms" feed each other, and both miss the point of ministry.

To rise above clericalism and anticlericalism is a thorny problem to say the least. Nowhere is the problem more vivid than in the teaching ministry of the church, where the distinctive roles of the representative ministers and the laity are particularly cloudy. This has been one function which clergy has often been happy to leave to laity, and yet, laity has looked to clergy as the bearer of special knowledge and understanding. Even when a lay professional or diaconal minister is involved with special responsibilities for educational ministry, the cloudiness remains. That person is often seen as an administrator or organizer of laity, while the pastors of the church are still seen as the resident theological experts. So you have on the one hand the idea that clergy has the answers, and on the other hand, the idea that laity has the responsibility. This sets up a competitiveness which undercuts the possibilities of partnership and takes its toll on lay and clergy alike.

PROBING AMBIGUOUS IMAGES

This problem is not simply a dilemma in the modern church. The images themselves are ambiguous. The word laos translates as "people of God," which refers to all God's people, who are redeemed and reconciled to God. The word laity, then, has at its root a reference to the whole—both lay and clergy. At the same time, we have side by side the ideas of the general ministry of all Christians and the representative ministry of set-apart leaders. In a real sense we are all ministers, and yet we recognize that certain ones are set apart to represent the whole and to re-present the work of Christ to the whole.

If these ideas are taken seriously, then we will recognize that ministry comes forth from the laos and is always related to the people. This does not mean that ministers are simply human
beings or that ministry is a simple human enterprise, for the people of God are themselves created, redeemed, and called out by God. This does mean that we need to recognize the laity of all the representative ministers and the ministry of all the laity. Such paradoxical thinking is quite different from setting the clergy over against the laity. And it is far more radical than a simple acknowledgment that the laity are important.

Even the Protestant Reformation with its doctrine of the priesthood of all believers led to ambiguous understandings of the laity. On the one hand, as Franklin Littell pointed out in the 1960s, the Reformation did not really unseat the idea that the clergy was the church:

The 16th century Reformers did not change this situation. On the contrary, Zwingli and Luther and others of the Protestant state-churches repeatedly made clear that the common folk were to stay in their stations and leave religious matters to those professionally trained to handle them. The “priesthood of all believers” became, therefore, the lay priesthood of Christian princes and town councillors advised by theologians and canon lawyers.²

On the other hand Yves Congar espoused the view that the Protestant Reformation had gone too far in focusing on the communion of the saints at the expense of failing to recognize the integral relation between the church as hierarchical institution and as invisible community of the faithful, and by ignoring the institutional aspects altogether.

Protestantism rejected the whole of the Church’s mediation: magisterium, priesthood, sacraments, the authority of tradition and the role of the teaching Church in the rule of faith, prelatical authority, the episcopal dignity, the pope’s primacy. Of the institution not one stone was left standing. Instead, there was offered the notion of the Church as holy assembly of the faithful. . . .³

The unfortunate consequence of this one-sided focus, from Congar’s point of view, was that the Roman Catholic Church responded by a one-sided focus of the opposite sort—a focus on the hierarchy. Congar does argue, however, that the Roman Catholic position was not as erroneous or heretical as the Protestant position because some recognition was always given to the other side.
This glance at interpretations of the Reformation is not just an idle journey into the historical theology of the 1960s. The 1960s, in fact, were years in which the laity was being rediscovered, and volumes of books and articles were written probing the theological meaning and the roles of the laity. Both Littell and Congar were interested in that rediscovery, and both were writing to the end that the church would revitalize its understanding of, and attention to, the laity. Though their historical interpretations were different, they both recognized in their analyses that the Protestant Reformation emphasis on the priesthood of all believers was not a magical solution to an old ecclesial problem.

All of this leads us to the heart of the problem—that is, the ambiguity of the distinction between the representative ministers and the people of God. No simple appeal to give attention to the laity can override this ambiguity. Neither does clarity emerge from our attempts to sharpen the distinctions between clergy and laity, or from our attempts to connect the two by sending worker priests into the world or by offering special titles or special roles in the leadership of the church to selected lay leaders. These attempts are indeed relevant, but they do not eliminate the ambiguity.

The problem, however, may itself be the solution. The very ambiguity that leads us to search out the differences between the clergy and the laity may be a blessing that enables us to see the priesthood of all the laity and the laity of all the clergy. Attempts to sharpen the distinctions may be doomed to narrow and partial answers. Rather than be satisfied with such partiality, we may need, instead, to learn to savor the questions, for the questions themselves reach toward a mystery that the answers try to avoid.

What does all of this ambiguity have to do with the teaching ministry of the church? It calls us first to a new vision of ministering to, for, and with the people of God. The representative minister of the church is called to minister to her or his own congregation or parish, for that community as a representative of it in the world, and with that community, enabling others to serve. The representative nature of ministry (ordained or diaconal in United Methodist polity) calls attention to the role of the set-apart minister in speaking for God to the
The ministry of all Christians does not mean that the representative ministers can simply distribute their tasks among the laity and have less to do.

This is a fallacy which has been very destructive to the teaching ministry. This is no more adequate than the laity’s expecting the ministers to do everything. If the representative ministers are to serve with the people, then the people need to support and empower the ministers, and the ministers need to support and empower the people. Rather than dividing the tasks among themselves, each takes on the additional task of being together in ministry.

This new vision is not so new; it has simply been hiding. Somehow we know already that the representative minister has an important function with the people, but we are confused in discerning what that function is. I recently listened as two pastors discussed their role in teaching ministry with each other.
One expressed his longing to share with the lay members in his church what he had learned about the Bible and to teach them to use the tools of biblical criticism in their own study. The other pastor responded quickly, saying that he was not eager to teach lay members what he knew. He was more interested in being taught by them and in enabling them to teach one another. Both of these pastors were affirming that the laity is important and that they, as pastors, have an important role in relation to the laity. The pastors, however, were caught up in a secondary issue. They were debating whether their role is to teach or be taught. This is an important question to be sure, but to pose the question in this way is to assume that one has to choose between ministering to and ministering with. If we recognize the importance of ministering to, for, and with, then the representative ministers are challenged to teach what they have learned, to teach on behalf of the church to the world, and to enable and empower the teaching ministry of the whole church.

EXPLODING THE IMAGES

What is being suggested is that we need to break open the images of minister and people of God so that a real explosion of meaning might take place. A simple rearrangement of responsibilities will not suffice. Here we will look particularly at the North American patterns of teaching ministry and the clergy-lay categories in theological discussions. The explosion might best begin with these.

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have witnessed landmark shifts in the North American Protestant churches, and these shifts have been particularly evident in the changing patterns of educational ministry. The question of who are the teachers has been particularly subject to change during this historical period. The result is that in the 1970s and 1980s we have considerable confusion about who the teachers really are.

The Sunday school began in the eighteenth century as a lay movement which was independent of churches. In the United States this pattern continued until the middle years of the nineteenth century, particularly the years between 1830 and 1860, when the Sunday schools were domesticated by the churches. During this time the Sunday schools became an
integral part of the local church or parish. Lay leadership continued, however, and though the pastors were encouraged to take increased leadership, they often took little role in this part of the church’s ministry.

Alongside this trend was the emergence of the professionalization of religious education in the early twentieth century. During this period professional organizations were born, systematic reflection was done on religious education, and extensive educational programs were developed to prepare persons for this specialization. This led to an explosion of new insights and models and a very dynamic era in the church’s education. A consequence, however, was that a specially trained group was set apart from the ordained clergy and the rest of the laity. Thus, three categories of teachers were introduced, and these still exist—the clergy, the laity, and the lay professional.

Where are we now? In the United Methodist Church we have all of these—lay teachers, ordained ministers whose role includes teaching, lay professionals in education, and diaconal ministers in education. This multiplicity of teachers has some real advantages. It is certainly not bad in itself, but it does have some problems. One problem is that the ordained ministers often do not see their own role in teaching and often leave the teaching ministry to lay professionals and lay teachers. A second problem is that the lay professionals and diaconal ministers often find themselves in an awkward bridge position between laity and clergy and often find themselves to be an out-group who need to gather together to find their voice. A third problem is that the role of the whole community in teaching often gets ignored by everyone. The consequence is that the educational ministry suffers.

An explosion of these North American patterns might break open new possibilities within them. After all, patterns are guides, not parameters. The patterns of the past need not, and should not, be the patterns of the future without thoughtful exploration of their adequacy for the new situation. The possibilities in the old patterns and images are a real challenge, however, and they can point us in some new directions. The North American patterns have helped us see the possibilities of creative leadership and responsibility that can be exercised by the laity, and this challenges us to find new ways to support and
empower the laity in their teaching. This also challenges us to see the teachers not only as those who meet with groups in classrooms but as all of the laity. These are the people who witness to their faith in their work, in their community service, and in all of their lives.

Another possibility that the explosion uncovers is that teaching by persons in many different roles can lead to more varied and comprehensive forms of teaching (for example, in homes, classes, services of worship, retreats, and so forth).

And finally, an explosion could stir a vision of the unity of these different people in the task of teaching. This would surely lead to more adequate education and a more adequate symbolizing of the unity of ministry. For example, what if the representative ministers met frequently with teachers, parents, children, and youth to teach and be taught by them (to keep abreast of what is going on in their lives, what their beliefs and commitments are, and what they are concerned about)? What if these ministers engaged in dialogue regularly with business or medical leaders in their parishes to share with them in their struggles with ethical issues? And what if these ministers engaged in theological study with congregational leaders as they contemplate long-range plans for the ministry of the church and other major decisions? These are only a few musings, but the list could go on. On the other hand, what if lay members of a congregation sought out the representative minister(s) to discuss issues of concern or to share theological insights? What if lay teachers of children and youth involved parents and pastors by inviting them to special events, by informing them about what is happening in the group, or by launching a teaching program that families could continue at home? And what if lay leaders of the congregation sought out the ordained and diaconal ministers to participate with them in a biblical or theological study on the nature of the church and its mission, or to engage in an empirical study of the nature of their community and its needs? Again, the list of possibilities is endless.

These possibilities give some sense of the visions that might come to light in the exploding of the North American patterns of teaching ministry. These visions give birth to new possibilities which the old patterns have missed and which we might make real.
Another set of images that might benefit from an explosion are the clergy-lay categories in theological discussions. When persons are uneasy with ambiguity they often attempt to clarify and distinguish categories. This may well be one source of the sharp differentiations often made between lay and clergy in terms of their roles or educational preparation. The whole wave of professionalism may be due in part to that search for clear distinguishing marks for the representative ministers.

In the 1960s when the laity received considerable theological attention, Yves Congar and Edward Schillebeeckx pointed to two distinctions between the laity and the clergy. One was the distinction in their relation to the hierarchy, and the other, in the locus of their work. In relation to the hierarchy Schillebeeckx noted that although the laity is part of the people it is not part of the hierarchy. Congar recognized a similar distinction but in the context of his concern for recognizing the laity as integral to the church. He said, “Lay people will always be a subordinate order in the church; but they are on the way to the recovery of a fuller consciousness of being organically active members thereof, by right and in fact.” Though Schillebeeckx and Congar both made this distinction, neither was willing to define the laity solely in terms of its place, or lack of place, in the hierarchy. Both recognized that, although the word lay popularly connotes nonclergy or nonleaders, the word is inadequate for understanding laity. Not only is it inadequate to view the laity in this way, but it is not consistent with biblical usage. Congar noted that the failure of New Testament writers to distinguish between lay and clergy does not necessarily mean that there was no hierarchy of leadership in those times. It does suggest that the laity was understood biblically as the people, rather than as the nonclergy. The use of laiks to refer to those who are not priest or Levite was introduced in the time of Clement of Rome, and it is not an adequate way of catching up the biblical concept of the people of God.

The other common distinction made between clergy and laity is in terms of the locus of work. The clergy is often associated with the sacred realm and the laity with secular affairs. Thus, those in the clergy have special roles in worship and the laity in the world. This does not make the work of the laity unimportant, for the role of the laity is to represent Christ to the world:
From the time that Heaven received [Jesus Christ] until the day when all will be restored anew (Acts 3:21), Christ’s kingly, priestly and prophetic mediation is at work in two ways: through the apostolic hierarchy, for the formation of a faithful people; through the whole body, in respect of the world. 7

All of this is very clear, but the clarity does have its limits. To say that laity has nothing to do with the sacred realm is inadequate, and the differentiation between sacred and worldly concerns is overly simple.

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How can we say that the laity has nothing to do with the formation of the people, or that the clergy has nothing to do with ministering in the world? This dilemma is at least partly recognized by Congar, and his way of dealing with it is to assert that clergy and laity are not differentiated by different missions, but by different roles in carrying out the church’s mission. Further, both Congar and Schillebeeckx recognized the essentially spiritual, or God-centered, nature of the work of the laity. 8

Though the nonabsolute nature of the images of clergy and laity was recognized in these writings of Congar and Schillebeeckx, the explosion of the images was yet to begin. Both the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches were on the edge of the explosion that has yet to have its full impact. The trend in Roman Catholicism had been for some time the trend toward centralization and clericalization. Even monastic movements had become almost entirely clerical. As Vatican II approached, efforts were made in Roman Catholicism to bridge the clergy-laity gap, but Norbert Brockman notes that this was done by trying to involve the priest in the world (for example, priest-worker movement) rather than involving the laity in the priesthood. 9

Vatican II introduced some radical re-thinking of images and models for ministry, some of which are only now being realized. The dominant image of the church in Vatican II was that of the
people of God. The people of God was recognized as the common priesthood, of which both the ministerial priesthood and the laity are a part. The roles within the people of God were seen as distinct, but the emphasis in *Lumen Gentium* was on the interrelationship among persons in different roles, the various gifts for ministry, and the common purpose.

Thus all orders of ministry are first understood within this context of the *diakonia* of all Christians. The task of all the people is to carry out Christian mission in the church and in the world; that is, to participate in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ.\(^\text{10}\)

In Protestantism some of the voices have called for even more radical shifts in understanding. Arnold Come argued for the recovery of the general usage of *diakonia* to refer to all Christians. He saw the need for a new reformation:

Simply a greater emphasis on the importance of the laity will not prepare the church for a new understanding of its mission of reconciliation. The very term “laity” inevitably implies the existence of a clergy, a superior clerical class of Christians. . . . The church is now ready for, and its God-given mission now demands, the complete abandonment of the clergy-laity distinction.\(^\text{11}\)

Come noted the relevance of this issue to the teaching ministry of the church, where contradictions and confusion abound. He was not arguing for abandoning leadership functions in the church, but rather for broadening our understanding of ordination and for recognizing more radically the ministry of all Christians.

A similar thrust was put forth by Letty Russell, when she spoke of partnership in ministry. She saw the full participation in ministry by both laity and clergy as essential to carrying on the mission of the church. She especially urged her readers to recognize “that vocation and ministry are not options for some Christians, but are basic to the existence of all Christians.”\(^\text{12}\)

What we need is another explosion of our images of clergy and laity. Though the clarified categories help emphasize the unique functions of laity and clergy, they tend to obscure the common ministry and the importance of partnership. Without a sense of common ministry, the representative ministers among us may find it very easy not to teach, for they will have no vision of their
role in preparing the whole body for ministry. Likewise, those in
the laity may find it easy not to teach, for they will have no
passion for their critical role in the ministry of the church and no
vision of themselves as participants in God’s future.

RE-FORMING THE IMAGES AND THE TEACHING MINISTRY

The trouble with explosions is that they leave things broken
apart and in the air. What we need to do now is to rediscover and
re-form the images so that they may inspire and guide us.

First, let us rediscover and re-form the image of the 
laos as the
people of God. “Once you were no people but now you are
God’s people; once you had not received mercy but now you
have received mercy” (I Pet. 2:10). We are those who are God’s
people, who are redeemed and reconciled to a new relationship
with God. We belong to God as children, and this special
relationship is indeed a gift. It is certainly not earned by our
strength or goodness (see, for example, Deut. 7:7-8 and 9:4-6). It
is a gift which brings with it comfort, renewal, and promise. But
it also brings responsibility, and God’s holy people do not
always sense that they have been blessed with the rewards of a
privileged people. We sometimes join with Tevia in
Fiddler on the
Roof asking why God doesn’t choose someone else just this once.

But being the people of God is not being a people of privilege in
the popular sense. Rather it is being the people called by God,
gifted with God’s Spirit and sent out to serve.

Such an image of who we are is already bigger than we can
comprehend, and yet we cannot let it rest without complicating
the picture further. In the early church the 
laos referred both to
the whole people and to the particular part of the people set
apart to representative ministry. This is the problem which, we
suggested above, might also be the solution. The co-existence of
these seemingly different understandings of 
laos opens the
possibility that one or the other understanding will be
emphasized. It also opens the possibility that we might
recognize in a far more radical way than is our custom that we
are all together in the people—clergy and laity alike. We are
together, and yet, we have different functions within that body.
Even our differences, however, cannot be absolutized. The ears
and the eyes have different functions in the human body, but for
The rediscovery and re-formation of the images of minister and the people of God do not make the roles of the representative ministers less important but more important. The New Testament usage of diakonia refers both to the ministry of the whole and to the ministry of particular individuals who were set apart for particular functions. As time passed in the church, the structures of ministry became increasingly ordered. The ordering was a result, at least in part, of the necessities of a growing church, but this ordering did not necessarily have to deny the priesthood of all believers. In fact, the idea of the people as a holy priesthood calls us still to remember the role of the whole in relating to God and in witnessing to God in the world. Likewise, the idea of the diakonia reminds us of the full community's calling to servanthood. A community which relates to God, witnesses to God in the world, and serves is a community which needs leadership. Thus, the two ideas of ministry—the ideas that we are all ministers and that certain ones are set apart as representative ministers—are both essential to our carrying on the work of God in the world.

The rediscovery and re-formation of the images of minister and the people of God do not make the roles of the representative ministers less important but more important. The rediscovery and re-formation of the images of minister and the people of God do not make the roles of the representative ministers less important but more important. The representative ministers are themselves part of the body, and they are at the same time set apart to lead this body. This awesome task calls us back into the idea of ministering to, for, and with. This idea becomes the foundation for a new vision of teaching ministry.

In this new vision we have already recognized that there are many teachers, and that neither the laity nor the clergy can abandon their teaching functions if the people of God are to be
faithful to God’s calling. Further, we must recognize that the education of the community is essential if that community is to be in ministry. The critical importance of lay education, especially of adult education, is a major theme in many of the writings which have stressed the importance of the ministry of the whole people. In this new vision we also recognize that the representative ministers have certain tasks by virtue of their being representative. These are the tasks of representing (re-presenting) God’s call to the people, the gifts of God in Christ, and God’s future. All of these tasks are done to, for, and with the people themselves.

_Representing God’s call to the people._ The task of re-presenting God’s call to the people is to remind the people who they are and whose they are. It is to remind the people why they are gathered into a church community. This is what the former minister of our congregation did when he introduced his anniversary sermon to us. This is what he did, also, when he was pastor of our church and opened our council on ministries meeting with a reminder that we are not just there to do business but to carry on the work of God. Another pastor and lay professional in education reminded their congregation that they were part of God’s people when they taught confirmation classes and communicated with each young person and family individually about the meaning of confirmation. Still another pastor made a point of visiting all families before they joined the church and every church leader before he or she took on a leadership role for the coming year. This was her way of communicating the calling that is involved in church membership and leadership.

_Representing the gifts of God in Christ._ This is the task of sharing the resources of faith with the people and guiding them in their daily existence. The minister re-presents the work of Christ through offering sacraments, leading the liturgy, preaching, serving, and guiding. The shape of these is worked out differently in different church polities, but in these ways and more, the representative minister has a special role in communicating the gifts of God. All of these contribute to the Christian formation of the community and the individual members of it.

How do we go about sharing the resources of faith and guiding the people? The task is to address the ordinary events in
the lives of the faithful and point through these to ultimate meanings. The task of re-presenting God's gifts involves first of all being with the people and encouraging the laity to be with each other. This includes being with the people when they are facing illness or loss, when they are struggling with ethical issues in their work, when they are celebrating a birth, and so forth. One ministerial team makes a point of visiting every family unit in the congregation every year to bring Christmas greetings. One youth leader in a large city ghetto spends time with youth in the various gathering places in the neighborhood of the church. The ways of being with the people are many.

The task of re-presenting God's gifts also involves being a resource to the people. Urban Holmes has spoken of the priest in the community as "an agent for the illumination of the consciousness of the community he [or she] serves at all levels of meaning." The minister brings to light the significant meaning in the ordinary and offers resources that guide. These resources are many, but most fundamentally, the ordained minister has the role of assembling the community and pointing that community to its dependence on Jesus Christ as "the source of its mission and the foundation of its unity." The gifts of God are the resources to be shared. A pastor who has just moved into a church which was torn apart by conflict is devoting much of his time during his first few months to teaching. He is meeting, for example, with groups that represent the various factions of the congregation. He finds that this has provided opportunity for him to be with the people and to offer the resources of the faith to them.

The task of representing God's gifts is not complete without speaking the prophetic word for the community to the world and inspiring the laity to speak prophetically in their own worlds. This involves interpreting the world to the faith community and interpreting the faith of the community to the world. One director of educational ministries spent much of his time in ministering within the city's prisons. Part of the challenge he discovered was interpreting the penal system and prison life to the people in his congregation and enabling them to join in with their prophetic voices and with their work.

Re-presenting God's future. Finally, the representative ministers of the church have the task of re-presenting God's future with its
hope and with its challenge to be in ministry. This is the task of
communicating God’s promises and pointing persons toward
their mission. The representative minister points persons
toward a new relationship with God, toward a fellowship with
one another in which they share together in God’s gifts and in
concrete acts, and toward service in the world. Together
minister and community probe the promises of God’s kingdom
and judge the present situation in light of those promises.
Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the Latin American
base communities, where persons probe the realities of their
existence in light of God’s future. This probing gives birth to a
sense of mission and to action.

Our future in carrying on the work of Christ in the world
depends in large part on the adequacy of the teaching ministry
in representing God’s call to the people, the gifts of God in
Christ, and God’s future. The tasks require the special
leadership of those who are representative ministers of the
church, and they require the full commitment of the whole
people of God.

NOTES

1. The Rev. Corinah Rogers, in a sermon preached at Claremont United Methodist
Church, Claremont, California, October 3, 1982.


3. Yves Congar, Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of the Laity (Westminster,

Life” (unpublished manuscript presented at the School of Theology at Claremont,
November, 1982).

5. Congar, p. xi.

6. See particularly: Congar, pp. 3-5; Edward Schillebeeckx, “The Layman of the
Church,” The Layman of the Church and Other Essays ( Staten Island, N.Y.: Alba House,
1963), pp. 9-10. This view is shared widely and has been an argument used by many
persons who are concerned with the rebirth of the laity. See particularly Littell, p. 40;

7. Congar, p. 118; See also Schillebeeckx, pp. 11, 18-19, 22.

8. Congar, pp. 12-14, 24-27; Schillebeeckx, pp. 18-19, 22.

pp. 33-38.

10. Walter J. Abbott, “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church” (Lumen Gentium),

11. Arnold Come, Agents of Reconciliation (Philadelphia: Westminster Press,


13. Besides the Grimes and Littell sources already cited, see Littell, The Church
MINISTER AND PEOPLE OF GOD


15. World Council of Churches, One Baptism, One Eucharist, and a Mutually Recognized Ministry (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1975), p. 33. This role is put forth in the Faith and Order Paper as “the specific service of the ordained minister.” This specific service is understood in the context of the ministry of the whole people. Neither the general ministry of the community nor the special ministry of the ordained person can exist in isolation from one another.
MAJOR SETTINGS FOR PASTORAL TEACHING

RICHARD MURRAY

Pastors actually teach in almost everything they do, but the critical factor is whether the pastor nurtures and cares for persons rather than simply transferring knowledge.

Several years ago the Southwest Texas Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church conducted what it called “The Pastor as Chief Teacher Project” in cooperation with Perkins School of Theology. As a result of the work of ten pastors in that conference and of myself, a list of “Major Settings for Pastoral Teaching,” as well as a number of teaching models in each setting, was prepared and used in subdistrict workshops throughout that conference. I have since somewhat revised the list which points to many aspects of pastoral ministry in which teaching can be a significant element.

1. THE PASTOR’S OWN PERSONAL STUDY

Nothing is more persuasive in teaching than a model of a leader at serious study. Pastors thus educate when they share the excitement of their own learning. Telling a church member or an official body that you have just attended a stimulating set of lectures, or have just read a powerful new book, and then quoting several especially significant portions of the material not only informs but also motivates. It does little good to urge laypersons to study the Bible unless they see the pastor involved in such study, often with them.

Unfortunately, too many pastors spend their career hiding the

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discoveries of their seminary education and pretend that they never take time off to engage in continuing education. Fearful that parishioners will “misunderstand” leads many clergypersons to fail to share some of the great transforming experiences of their lives.

For me, one important aspect of this disclosure is that I find it exceedingly difficult to do systematic Bible study unless I have to do it! I keep telling myself that I should, but I do not unless I saddle myself with a deadline to prepare to lead such a study with a group of interested persons. When I have such a regular and demanding preparation I find myself working and sharing, and it is rewarding to me and to the others who participate.

Of course, dialogical, reflective analysis also requires that at times the pastor share problems, puzzles, and questions as well as affirmations.

2. PREACHING AND WORSHIP

Worship is addressed to God, of course, not to men and women. In Protestant churches this is hard to remember, and concern for personal understanding and emotional feelings can crowd out our genuine acts of worship to God. Nevertheless, while teaching must always be a secondary consideration in worship, it is also invariably present.

The pastor teaches by the hymns that are chosen and by the way in which they are used. If a new hymn is introduced unannounced, and after the congregation “whispers along” is not sung again for a year, the pastor is teaching that he or she really does not care that the congregation know the hymn, but only that it be exposed to its ideas on a single occasion. If, on the other hand, the hymn is used at least three times in a six-month period, and if attention is called to it several times, both its tune and verse will begin to be a part of the congregation’s understanding of faith. Teaching is enhanced in worship by repetition.

An old saying is that across the centuries Christians have learned more theology from regular repetition of the Gloria and the Doxology than in any other way. Certainly we have unconsciously learned from the regular use of these bits of liturgy, these ancient sets of words that Christians use when
they assemble to praise God and to affirm the Trinity as a way of thinking about God.

Pastors have many opportunities to train children, youth, and adults in knowing the meaning of worship and the frequent components of the worship service in their denomination. Pastors can lead Sunday school teachers in developing a plan in which early elementary children (first through fourth grades) memorize the Gloria, Doxology, and Lord's Prayer so they can take part in singing and saying them with enthusiasm. For a time we suffered under the illusion that young children should not memorize such things because they are incapable of understanding them. In recent times, many have come to understand that despite the insight of Jean Piaget and others in regard to children's intellectual capacity at certain ages, learning such rituals (never understood fully by anyone) can have many unexpected side values, among which is the very important feeling of "at homeness" in the Christian community at worship.

Reading the Scriptures in the service educates in many incalculable ways. When texts are read well, persons can reflect on their meaning and allow the stimulus of particular passages to start them on a whole train of thought. Many churches now provide pew Bibles and read all or some of the Scripture in unison or ask members to follow along silently in their Bibles while the Scripture is read. Such practices certainly enhance the opportunity for both learning the Scripture passages and being stimulated by them.

Involvement of laypersons in leadership in various elements of the liturgy is another major opportunity for education. I can recall from my youth the special impact various passages of Scripture had on me because I had been asked to prepare to lead the congregation in them. Scripture, responsive readings, and prayer are some of the best opportunities to teach through prepared leadership.

Many arguments have been advanced concerning the differences between preaching and teaching. The pastors in the Southwest Texas Conference were unwilling to separate out some sermons as "teaching" sermons. They insisted that both kerygma and "didache" should be present in every sermon and that the proclamation of the gospel was always intertwined by the teachings of the church. From carefully planned sermon
series on things like the Apostles’ Creed, to dialogue and encounter by way of thorough exegesis and exposition, the congregation may be taught as well as inspired and motivated.

The sermon also provides excellent opportunities to involve laypersons in its construction as well as its reception. Some pastors would find this burdensome, but others have had it quicken both their preaching and the lives of open laypersons. The quality of such pastoral education is potentially immense.

Several years ago a district superintendent about to return to the pastorate of a large church in Texas came by my office and said “Give me one idea that will help me re-enter.” I suggested the practice of a Presbyterian friend of mine of enlisting a team of six to eight laypersons to meet with him weekly to exegete the text for the sermon to be preached three weeks hence, and to suggest possible illustrations for the sermon now outlined by the pastor for two weeks away. The group, with advance preparation on the text, spent about half an hour each week on each task. Members of the group served a term of about three months and then part of them were replaced by others on a regular rotating basis. Eventually many of the key leaders of the church took part over a period of two or three years.

What a form of pastoral education! Involved with the pastor in one of the most significant tasks of the church, these laypersons had experiences with and insights into the Scriptures as never before.

Many will recall that the East Harlem Protestant Parish and Wallace Fisher in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, achieved similar lay involvement in the sermon by other means many years ago. The pulpit continues to reach more persons than any other avenue, and its potential for pastoral teaching is great.

It is also true that preaching opens the door to pastoral teaching in other settings. When the members of the congregation hear a preacher reflect on the truths of the gospel in dialogue with their real problems and needs, they often want to continue this dialogue in other times and places. When classes are offered by the pastor, his or her preaching determines to a large extent which persons will come and what numbers to expect. In personal counseling or in casual conversation the effects of the sermon and its teaching context are always present as well.
3. ADMINISTRATIVE GROUPS

Several of the pastors from the Southwest Texas Conference said that they thought the teaching they did in administrative groups was some of their most important. Whether it was a portion of fifteen to twenty minutes of a series of the regular meetings of the council on ministry or the work area on evangelism, or one or more entire meetings of an hour or more, these pastors said much could be accomplished.

The study might be the biblical basis of the work of the church or the particular task of that group, or it might concentrate on an outstanding book or even the official manuals of the church. I recall that shortly after he was appointed minister of evangelism in a congregation, one of my friends asked the work area on evangelism to meet with him during the Sunday school hour for a period of several weeks to explore the entire concept of evangelism, using a commentary on Ephesians as the basis of their reflections. Later, when the group began their plans for visitation it was undergirded by this form of pastoral education.

Taking advantage of groups already scheduled is often much to be preferred to trying to attract persons to newly formed groups. We are all aware that the demands on the most active members are often overwhelming.

4. REGULAR "DECISIVE TIMES"

The rituals and occasions of baptism, confirmation, marriage, and funerals afford many opportunities to teach. Often the motivation to learn is heightened at such times, and a wide variety of nonmanipulative methods can be used with individuals and groups. I say "nonmanipulative" because we are very aware how some clergy and some religious groups take advantage of the emotions which surface at occasions such as a funeral and use the situation to "thrust home the sword of truth" no matter how much blood is shed! Nevertheless, utilizing these important rituals in the lives of us all, the pastoral teacher may work with individuals, couples, or groups to enable them to maximize the significance and learning of such experiences.

From a carefully planned series of sessions with couples preparing for marriage or parents preparing for infant baptism,
to classes organized for larger groups, the pastor can lead toward better understanding and commitment. While such sessions usually have a counseling aspect, they also can contain an informal "curriculum" tailored to fit the schedule and needs of individual persons.

One of the most vital educational experiences of my ministry was a group of parents of children who were in the confirmation class. We used much the same curriculum as the youth so the parents could respond at home to questions or comments made by the children. Desiring "not to be dumb" these parents were highly motivated to know as much or more as their child in the class.

Some pastors organize groups to study the meaning of Christian marriage and funerals and thereby develop a congregational policy and suggestions for their conduct in that church. These policies are then interpreted to the congregation at large over a period of time through sermons, newsletters, etc., and sometimes culminate in a printed booklet for distribution to all members.

5. IRREGULAR “DECISIVE MOMENTS”

Both personal crisis and social crisis which arise suddenly and unexpectedly demand and lend themselves to various forms of study by individuals and groups. Such study will vary from helping persons “cope and survive” to moving into purposeful action.

When the young man and his wife came to the parsonage to tell us the next day he was to have his leg amputated because of a cancer discovered that morning, we began a long period of both counseling and study. As it became apparent that he would not live long, he wanted very much to study the fundamentals of the faith and the meaning of life. Week by week he worked through the chapters of several books as he read them and we met in the drugstore to discuss the questions they raised. Interestingly enough, on occasion others gathered round us with their coffee cups and joined in the “life-giving” discussion.

Many pastors use either a local or world crisis to occasion the suggestion of reading to individuals or organization of a study action group. In many such instances not a great deal can be
done beyond becoming better informed or more thoroughly exploring the complexities of the situation, but at other times persons or groups can quickly organize and make a decisive difference in the outcome.

6. PUSHING BOOKS

Many pastors are great book pushers. At any opportunity they urge persons to borrow or buy books, leaflets, or tracts. This is one of our greatest legacies from John Wesley and early Methodist preachers. But, like our forebears, we dare not urge others to read if we are not doing it ourselves. I found this out the hard way many years ago while serving on a conference staff. Often I would find a book with an interesting title, read a little of it, and then urge many others to read it out of my enthusiasm. Unfortunately, there were often parts of the book of which I was unaware and which I would not have recommended had I known!

Two conditions seem to enhance greatly the possibility that persons will read what is suggested: availability and "getting a taste."

Availability sometimes means lending your own copy rather than hoping someone will search it out in a distant library or wait several weeks for the book to arrive from a bookstore. Some books are lost and considerable effort must be made at times to secure their return. Certainly careful records of date, title, person, and address are essential if you are going to have a volume to lend to someone else.

Church libraries are in many places a total waste of time, energy, and money. Dust gathers on seldom-used old books donated by someone who did not want them. On the other hand, a church library that is visible to many persons regularly, whose books are carefully chosen, and that is cared for by highly dedicated volunteers can be a great educational tool.

"Getting a taste" is the simple process of leading a person into the text by looking through a book's major ideas with them, quoting from especially interesting or provocative portions, or even making copies of a few paragraphs to use in a class to stimulate participants either buying or borrowing the book itself.
MAJOR SETTINGS

Urging persons to get a book which you only mention by author and title is seldom followed up unless the pastor actually arranges to have the book there for sale. The United Methodist Publishing House has developed a program to provide many such books for sale in local churches in recent years.

Although reading in our society may seem to be on the decline, when motivated by need or curiosity many church members will respond to suggested reading. Since motivation is even more important for this form of education than some others, pastors need to train themselves to stimulate it at every opportunity.

Putting portions of the church library on wheels and actually taking a number of books to children, youth, or adults on Sunday morning is now done frequently. This effort is greatly enhanced when a knowledgeable librarian can give direction and guidance to books on certain subjects. Such librarians seldom appear except for the very active support of the pastor and time spent in encouraging persons to give memorials for the purchase of quality books.

7. CLASSES

Clergypersons prepare to preach and teach to keep alive. The mechanics of the ministry kill the soul over time. The substance of the gospel restores us to life. I did not say that the activity of preaching or teaching gives life. It is rather the preparation in which one is forced to engage and re-engage the substantial questions and assertions of the faith that renews one's spiritual life. Ministers must ponder regularly the intersections of life in the Scriptures and life in the world to keep life in themselves.

From regular, ongoing Bible studies to short courses in Bible, theology, ethics, etc., the pastor can usually teach as much as he or she wishes. Some pastors, of course, find this far more satisfying than others, but the rewards of depth experiences with an intensive group of people is highly stimulating to most when they get into it.

Elton Trueblood, in *The Incendiary Fellowship* (Harper & Row, 1978) urged pastors to fulfill their calling as equippers of the laity by establishing and leading local church seminars where members of the congregation could take advantage of a "mini-
theological” education with their pastors. This has, in fact, been done by many as they have stretched themselves to lead church members into areas where the pastor often feels inadequate.

A colleague of mine once told me in a flash of insight that he often continued his education by accepting invitations to teach on the edge of his expertise. While any of us can only find time for so much such stretching, it is a “sure-fire” method of “planned necessity.” Again, as preaching often opens a door to additional dialogue in a class, so teaching can open other doors of ministry as parishioner and pastor experience common quests together.

Sunday morning classes, Sunday evening and weeknight groups, ecumenical community lay academies, leadership training groups within and beyond the local church—all are waiting for the willing pastor’s leadership.

8. INTENTIONAL CONVERSATION

Many pastors who reflect on the teaching they do will decide that they may do as much or more in this fashion as in any other. Knowing that a person is struggling with a certain problem, the pastor will lead him or her to a helpful book and plan one or more conversations around it. Seeing the potential for leadership in a new member, the pastor will start a process of educating and preparing that person for a vital responsibility in the church.

This technique was highly developed by a young pastor of a rapidly growing suburban church who often invited me to lunch. When I arrived I always found one or two laypersons with him whom he was educating. After we had eaten, he would pull out a 3-by-5 card on which he had written a list of questions he wanted to ask me in the presence of his Sunday school superintendent-elect, or the new chairperson on education. Thus, in a quite informal setting, but in a highly intentional manner, he directed the conversation for the edification of these new leaders.

One should ask the question of hidden manipulation in such circumstances, and it seems to me that what is “going on” should always be openly acknowledged.
9. UNINTENTIONAL CONVERSATION

It has been said that a good pastor should be a master of "instant theology." Such a statement points of course to the fundamental reality that a great deal may happen fast and unexpectedly. The pastor is often called upon to think on his or her feet when confronted by an unexpected need or conversation. In such circumstances, we reach back into our memories and experiences, or a book we have not looked into for a long time, and we do the best we can at the moment. The teaching is "rough around the edges" but often very significant in the lives of those we are trying to help. Thus, even in the midst of a casual conversation it suddenly becomes appropriate to "teach" by referring to helpful data or experience.

10. THE LARGER COMMUNITY

A wide and sometimes bewildering array of settings outside the church offers both formal and informal opportunities to teach. Deciding how much of one's time to devote to these occasions and which are actually appropriate are difficult questions. From baccalaureate and commencement addresses to talks to service organizations and invocations at nearly anything, the pastor must decide what he or she will agree to do, and what the context will be if the invitation is accepted. Radio and TV programs broaden this setting immensely.

Pastors who take teaching seriously believe they teach both by the invitations they accept or reject, and by the content of what they do. They try not to allow themselves to be used by persons or organizations whose goals they do not share, and therefore, they spend time clarifying the contract or expectations of both before accepting invitations. The time is usually well worth the effort.

Some pastors prepare presentations in advance in case they are asked. In regard to TV and radio, pastors increasingly take the initiative to get on programs or organize their own, especially on local stations.

Motivation to educate and teach comes from appropriate rewards. The teaching pastor must locate such rewards if she or he is going to take the opportunities seriously. It seems to me
that such rewards focus in two aspects. First is the personal reward of the persistent search for truth which keeps both the personal and professional life of the minister from becoming mechanical and prosaic. Second is the reward of seeing over the years those who study with you utilizing and giving expression to the biblical and theological insights which they have discovered and which have become their own.

When we look at such pastoral teaching in settings like these, what is actually going on? How is such teaching by an active pastor/preacher any different from other teaching?

Reflecting on the educational/teaching aspects of my own pastoral ministry and that of those clergy I have known best, I find it helpful to describe these settings as:

1. Dialogical, reflective, analysis
2. of the data of the faith and the changing conditions of life
3. with candor and prayer
4. in the context of loving/serving/receiving relationships
5. carried out in many settings of pastoral ministry.

Each of the five phrases is essential to vital pastoral leadership. They are not only descriptive but also prescriptive for health in this aspect of representative ministry. Presupposed is a basic theological education, a general Christian call to ministry, and a commitment of gifts and graces to pastoral leadership. Such a combination is present, of course, in a broad array of personal characteristics which predispose some of us to find rewards in this aspect of ministry more than others.

This definition might be used to define Christian education in general and the educational ministry of every Christian if we wished to do so in another context.

**Dialogical, reflective analysis.** Monological presentation of the truths of the gospel is not adequate in and of itself. In fact, even when packaged in a monological form, apparent mental dialogue, reflection, and analysis are essential for true education. The dialogue is with the fundamental questions of life, of course, questions that every form of religion addresses, with the historical data of the Christian faith, scriptural and traditional, and with the individual lives of members of the congregation in the complexity of their existence. We converse about, pull apart for examination, and question the assumptions which are present. The pastor does this within her or his own mind in the
study, on the street, and in the midst of a conversation. On occasion, such reflection and analysis are put into words to challenge and to comfort, or into feelings which lie behind our laughter or tears. Any of us can become a bore to those around us if such an examination of the data of life is not balanced by an understanding that others are not necessarily as "taken" by the subject as are we. Nevertheless, this mental exercise lies at the very heart of true education.

Of the data of the faith and the changing conditions of life. From the apostolic witness of Jesus Christ in Scripture and tradition to the everyday personal witness of faith of the members of the congregation, the pastor digs out facts, ideas, attitudes, values, and feelings. These are brought into dialogue with the world and personal events of the time to challenge, encourage, and comfort the congregation.

With candor and prayer. How refreshing truth is in the church! Church members so expect to be lied to for the sake of "love," enthusiasm, or fear, that when told by the minister "I simply don't know," or "I've been trying to reconcile those ideas for years," they are startled by the truth. Although the current orgy of full disclosure of all feelings and thoughts to everyone around is often very destructive, the basic premise of candor is essential to integrity in education.

Our perception of truth always needs the regular acknowledgment of our fallibility and rationalistic sin, so the pastor must bring everything into conscious dialogue with God, praying especially that he or she will be humble when reporting the conversation and able to discern who said what. It is tempting to use prayer as an educational weapon, especially when your point is weak!

In the context of loving/serving/receiving relationships. Most churches lavish love upon their pastors. Most pastors also pour out love to the members of their congregations. In both cases, whether they deserve it or not! This is the context of pastoral education. There is an intimacy about pastoral teaching known in few other educational settings. When the persons in your class are from those you have counseled in stress, visited in the hospital, baptized, and comforted as they buried their dead, teaching takes on quite a new meaning. When those same persons have both praised and criticized your preaching, invited
you on camping trips, and given you many gifts including the gift of their confidence over the years, all educational efforts are colored by that reality.

Such intimacy works both ways, since it enables your candor by a base of trust and love and restrains your honesty by a painful knowledge of the restraints under which people live. Thus the fundamental uniqueness of pastoral teaching is pastoral involvement in the lives of members of the congregation and the community. This involvement can never be purely personal involvement like that occurring between the lay members of the church. When the pastor becomes privy to the confidences of persons involved in a divorce, the pastor's involvement is always clothed in a theological mantle which includes biblical statements like those concerning divorce. The pastor is therefore forced to approach his or her counseling in light of some interpretation of Bible and theology and is also forced to clothe his or her teaching with the pastoral involvement just experienced.

Thus, pastoral teaching is different from that of a theological seminary professor, a church official such as a bishop or district superintendent, or anyone else not involved in the lives of a congregation to the degree that the pastor is at the moment. Memory of past involvement is important but is always muted by time and is therefore different. When you stand before a couple whose child has recently died and you look into their eyes, the prophetic and priestly aspects of ministry are overwhelmingly dominated by the pastoral.

Carried out in many settings of pastoral ministry. Although it would be foolish to claim that preaching or counseling is really only a form of education, it is also inaccurate to insist that some form of Christian education is not taking place when either is done well. The inevitable interpenetration of all the functions of ministry is the experience of all who have engaged in them.

Whenever we deliberately introduce data to influence thinking, feeling, or attitudes we are teaching. When the pastor realizes the situation is open for information, starts the process of "instant planning" to figure out how to proceed, he or she is engaged in pastoral ministry.

These five descriptive phrases are not what a pastor ought to do. They point to what pastors do, some far better than others, some quite consciously, others unaware.
Once we begin to see that the quality of the pastor is a characteristic of the entire community of faith, we can understand how "pastoral education" can embrace more than mere personal sensitivity and caring—it implies a concern for the community, justice, and the world as well.

One of the fundamental tasks facing the church is the recovery of teaching as a central part of pastoral ministry. For this to happen, something more than new administrative programs for the church will be required. Rather than perpetuating a triumphalist view of Christian education and laying upon pastors a sense of guilt for the failure of the church school, we need to mine our rich Christian heritage and develop models that will clarify the meaning of pastoral leadership and define the shared ministry of teaching that belongs to the whole community.

THE PASTORAL CONTEXT

What is proposed here is a revision of contemporary understanding of "pastoral." Pastoral teaching belongs to the whole of the community of faith. The model for "pastoring" is in the office of pastor, but the pastoral role is inherent in the very nature of the general ministry of all Christians. (I have used the word pastoring to distinguish between the office of pastor and the pastoral action and roles that are inherent in the meaning of the ministry that all Christians share.) What is assumed here is

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that the recovery of the pastoral mode of teaching is dependent on a renewed understanding of the pastoral office as well as a new recognition that all Christians are called to be pastors and teachers to one another. The context for teaching is the pastoral life of the whole church.

Pastoral refers, but is not limited, to the pastoral office ("the pastor of the church"). The classical image of the pastor as catechist and teacher is not unimportant, but the richness of its meaning can only be reclaimed for the contemporary church by attention to the larger definition of the pastoral role of all Christians ("being a teacher to one another"). Juan Luis Segundo reminds us that there is a distinction to be made between pastoral activity (the church carrying out its life of faith) and pastoral agents (ordained ministers or the "offices" of the church). All Christians are called to the pastoral activity of guiding one another and caring for the world. This is the ministry that serves to make God’s Word known in the everyday lives of people and in the affairs of the world. Pastoral teaching is the activity that brings persons into the saving grace of Jesus Christ and makes possible the fuller realization of the life that is possible as members of the community of faith. "Pastoring" is a ministry of humanizing that can liberate people from forms of oppression and free them to share in the ongoing ministry of Jesus Christ in the world.

The pastoral office is essential to the recovery of the pastoral responsibility of all Christians and to the revitalization of Christian teaching. The pastor is the representative, or the paradigm, of the pastoral action that belongs to the whole church. Too much time and energy has been spent on defending the lay and ordained forms of ministry on the basis of tradition. The fact of the matter is that these forms of ministry have passed back and forth in history with no one office or order ever becoming fully normative for the whole of the Christian church. Priest, pastor, prophet, and preacher have all had a time and place within Christian history, and they each have something to say to our situation today. Each at one time or place has been shared by ordained and unordained Christians. The truth is, the church has changed its mind from time to time regarding the various images and forms of ministry and has had to adjust its understanding of the orders of ministry to the practical needs of
church life and the urgent demands of the historical setting in which the church has found itself.

Today it seems fruitless to search for the ideal type or image for ministry, including the ordained ministry. Instead, it is more productive to understand ordination as that which represents the ministry that baptism and confirmation have bestowed upon all Christians and to seek paradigms or models by which the whole ministry of Christ might today be both recognized and realized.

This fluidity of ministerial form is illustrated in the way the New Testament church appropriated the ministry of Jesus Christ. Ministry was understood as living the ongoing life of Christ in the world. Such a ministry had both unity and particularity. As the church sought to describe its representative ministers—persons who could represent and symbolically act for the whole—the titles and names that had been used to describe Jesus' ministry were utilized. The titles that were given to Jesus, such as prophet, teacher, and servant, were applied to the "ministers" of the new church. These titles served as paradigms for ministry and were never intended to distort the whole of ministry or to become exclusive forms of ministry. They were symbols and images of a way of life and a form of service that would incorporate the fullness of ministry in which Christ was the chief representative.

The point here is that pastoral teaching is a paradigm that is essential to the recovery of the teaching ministries of the church. This argument is not a case for another administrative duty to be placed upon the office of the pastor in order to ensure the institutional maintenance of the church. The "pastoring" mode of education is not another program of the Christian education establishment that will ensure the survival of educational programs in the local church. The recovery of pastoral teaching is essentially a theological task in which the churches learn how to clarify, articulate, and act the faith that the gospel represents.

The enhancement of the pastoral office serves to ensure the pastoral life of the whole community of faith and is itself derived from the general activity of "pastoring" and the church's ministries of teaching, guiding, and caring. The pastor is representative of that which all church members should be about in one form or another.
The deep quandary within the ordained ministry today as to its essential purpose and role within the life of the church reflects the depth of confusion and misunderstanding that a congregation of Christians may have about their common life and purpose. As we have already indicated, the expectations that a congregation or church has for itself is related to the shape that ministerial leadership takes. The pastor's office and the historical image of pastoral teaching have become increasingly diffused and distorted by the twin impact of church secularity and the domestication of Christian education.

The pastor's role in contemporary times has been formed largely around the secular models of manager and therapist. In a society in which ministry is not understood by either those inside or outside the church and in which the status of the ordained minister and church pastor has declined along with the influence of organized religion, the more prestigious forms of professionalism have been incorporated into ministry. In a time of extreme social diversity, the church has in reality become the center of programmed tolerance rather than a community of faith with a common identity. The programmatic church requires a leader that can hold things together and ensure the continuation of its institutional life. In short, this means an effective manager. Also, as the nature of church life has become increasingly bureaucratized, there is the need for someone to manage the affairs of a complex organizational system that has to be financed and directed.

The therapist model of ministry has been an outgrowth of this same highly complex society in which persons can escape by turning inward upon themselves or by concentrating upon the personal relationships that can bring emotional reward and personal satisfaction. In reality, the therapeutic model is another form of management. The therapist serves as the manager of the personal. As society has become more complex, personalism has become a dominant ideology in which personal adjustment and human achievement have become central values for life. The leisure to be preoccupied with personal need is a by-product of the affluence of the Western world and the worth that individual success has in a competitive society.

These same social structures and values have had their impact upon the way the church has defined the role and tasks of the
pastor. The historical pastoral tasks of administrator (bringing order to the several parts of the body of Christ), shepherd (guiding and caring for the people), and teacher (edifying and nurturing the congregation) have become distorted by this quest for professional status, social acceptance, and personal realization.

The domestication of the church’s educational ministry has resulted in the subordination of the pastor’s teaching role and an uncertainty as to where the authority for teaching actually belongs. This development has been in process for some time and had its beginning in the nineteenth century with the rise of logical positivism and the attempt to rationalize the forms of ministry and to support a growing specialization within the work of the church. With the rise of the Sunday school movement in the nineteenth century, Christian education became primarily a lay movement separated from the church and the work of the pastor. By the 1920s, Christian education came to be understood as a specialized program that was denominationally inspired at the organizational level and which required trained and certified leaders. The professional Christian educator emerged as the authority on how and in what shapes the church’s educational work was to take place. The pastor either took a second place to the specialist in Christian education or came to believe teaching was primarily the work of the laity and was not a central concern of the pastoral office. The result was growing competition between the school of the church and the sanctuary of the church. It served to break down the unity of the pastoral office and to subordinate teaching to the other pastoral roles.

J. Stanley Glen has articulated the tragic consequences of education’s becoming a specialized and a separate domain in the church’s total ministry. The result is that teaching has become, for many pastors, an optional and a peripheral ministerial function. At the same time, the pastoral ethos has been discarded by Christian education. Glen writes:

What we have to recognize is that the subordination of the teaching ministry is not merely the subordination of a few men [sic] with special gifts but the subordination of a function which properly belongs to every minister and to the entire witness, worship, life, and work of the church.*
To probe again the rich imagery in the classical vision of the pastor can enrich the understanding that the church has of ordained ministry and provide a new focus and purpose for the teaching ministry. Such new understandings rooted within the traditions of faith may serve to deliver the church from the secularity that dominates its ministry today and help it to form new visions that will transcend a culture preoccupied with personal satisfaction and organizational success. In other words, the issue here is the values that are underneath all that we do today in Christian education and the more fundamental Christian values that should inform the educational task of the church. Not only should teaching be restored to the whole of ministry, but it should find new roots in the Christ-event that gave rise to ministry in the first place.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PASTORAL IMAGE

In recent times, there has been a timidity about using the classical images for ministry. The more professional and generic title of “minister” has replaced such names as preacher, priest, and pastor. The collapse of these traditional forms has come about with the secularity of the age, the desire for the ordained minister to be a professional among professionals, and the search for fashionable forms for ministry. Also, the impact of the social sciences on the current forms of ministry can be recognized from such titles as counselor, enabler, and director.

The pastoral image has in particular lost its meaning in contemporary church life. The tendency to literalize the image of “pastor” has led some to reject the root meaning as “shepherd.” With rural stereotypes, they assume that a congregation is like a flock of sheep that willingly goes wherever the shepherd directs. The urban mentality assumes that the life of the shepherd is not only unsophisticated but is an escape from the complex realities of modern life. Such literalization of any Christian symbol destroys the power that the symbol has and the deeper truth to which it points. Such stereotyping also grows out of little knowledge and understanding of the nature of the shepherd’s work today and the dedication and care which sheep require. A modern shepherd is still required to leave behind the comforts of life and go and live among the sheep for an extended time.
Regardless of inclement weather conditions and the hazards of the mountains, the shepherd remains absolutely faithful to the needs of the flock. The welfare of each and every sheep is the driving concern of the shepherd. In Southern California, where shepherding remains a significant art, shepherds are imported from Europe because so few Americans are willing to assume the sacrifices of an isolated life, and even fewer are trained and prepared for the variety of tasks required for caring for an ever-moving flock of sheep.

Another current criticism of the pastoral motif is that it is primarily a male model. The shepherding model does not reflect an experience with which the growing number of women who are becoming ordained ministers can identify. The shepherd in its most literal portrayal has always been depicted in male imagery. Even more serious is the fact that for most women the only pastors they have known have been men. Not only have men dominated the ordained ministry, but the styles of ministry were formed out of a strongly patriarchal society.

At the same time a more insightful look at the pastoral image will uncover some strong feminine qualities that our technological society has neglected and that ministry needs to recover. The pastoral image implies involvement in the lives of people and the willingness to take on both the burdens and joys of others. A loving concern and personal attention to others becomes central to the work of ministry. This concern involves a sensitivity to and awareness of the needs of each member of the congregation, the ability to see individuals and not just the flock as a whole. "Pastoring" calls for the gifts of a woman who can weep with those who suffer and can laugh with those who rejoice. Jesus, who is the model of pastor-shepherd, demonstrated the unity of the masculine and feminine nature of ministry in his ability to suffer with others and to take upon himself the needs of humankind. The cross is the ultimate symbol of the pastoral life in the service of the world.

The historical experience to which the pastoral symbol points is needed by the world today, and especially by the church that is called to serve without succumbing to worldly ways. Our secular experience was probably necessary in order to break the bonds of nineteenth-century pietism that had come to be excessive in both the church and its ministry. At the same time,
it looks as if we have come as far as we can in our attempt to use secular experience to define ministry. We are once again seeking to restore the sacred in our way of thinking and in our vision of the church's ministry. The pastoral symbol links the contemporary experience of ministry to the source of ministry and to the ordinary and everyday events of life to which ministry in its origin had its fundamental expression.

The image of pastor is rooted in the New Testament and the special meaning that the shepherd had for the early church. Jesus himself was the chief manifestation of the kind of life that was required of the shepherd. The shepherd had responsibility for the welfare of the flock and this responsibility called for training, unusual sensitivity to each movement of the sheep, and discipline to remain steadfast in spite of the adversities. The shepherd guarded the flock from the dangers that the journey might bring and sought to protect the sheep from the stranger who might come attempting to lead them astray. Finally, the New Testament witness speaks of the Shepherd who gives his life for the sake of the flock (John 10:1-4). It was this vision of sacrificial service on the behalf of others that caught the imagination of the early Christian community as it attempted to describe the kind of leadership it needed. As forms of ministry began to emerge in the early church, there were striking similarities between pastoral and diakonia. Both catch up the idea of the servant-guide and the concept that service is a life of love and justice. Furthermore, both carry the belief that these ministries are shared by all the members of the community of faith even though some may be called out for particular leadership roles.

Behind the shepherding imagery are several powerful insights that can inform our search today for a new ministry of teaching.

1. Feeding or nurturing a congregation can never be separated from the issues of justice and concern. A concern for the welfare of another person requires a concern for the social structures in which that person lives. Teaching involves more than the secular emphasis upon human needs and points beyond to the visions that are implicit in the promises of the coming kingdom of God.

2. The nurturing of another is a servant role. It is serving
REVISIONIST VIEW

sacrifically without regard to the cost and reward. The church needs to learn again to speak about the cost of discipleship and the disciplines that good teaching requires.

3. The care of a flock or a congregation is never possible in generalities but must find its expression in the particular. To know a congregation is to know the members and what they as individuals require for a life in Christ. The pastoral community is a people who are learning to live for one another and together for the world.

4. At the same time, there is no flock or congregation until the members come to have a common life together. They need one another, and the work of shepherding is to assist in forming the structures required for a community. Commonality does not mean that there are no differences and disagreements. What it does mean is the commonality of faith makes possible a unity that transcends the pull toward division. The shepherd is the reminder that the care for the congregations includes the care for those who are not wanted, who are often cast aside, and who are sometimes left behind. The recovery of the stray is that which finally liberates the whole from the preoccupation with its own survival.

At the same time, our understanding of the pastoral cannot be limited to the shepherding image. To do so would neglect some of the rich insights found in the historical story of ministry. "Pastoring" can be dramatically linked to Moses as he guided the tribes of Israel in their forty years of wandering in search of the promised land. This is a parable of our time: diverse people with different agenda and expectations struggling to find themselves in a vast wasteland. These were people divided and in conflict, who could only envision their salvation as a return to the comforts of the land from which they had come. Moses helped them to find their community, not in consensus or in practical programs that met immediate needs, but in the forming of a common covenant and identity and in the sharing of a common hope and vision. They believed that God had called them into a new land and a new way of life. It was God's promise to them and their promise to God that kept them together on their journey's way.

Moses was the guide who gathered together a diverse group into one people and nurtured a community of pilgrims. He was
the teacher who reminded them of their story, delivered them from their illusions about servitude, and helped them to know and understand the covenant. Although not a single adult lived to see the promised land, the community itself finally arrived. In spite of hunger, dark times upon the road, and incessant bickering, the Israelites reached the promised land. They finally survived the journey because they believed they were the people of the covenant. Moses constantly repeated the stories of who they were and the meaning that the covenant had for their lives. They were God’s chosen people whom God had promised to deliver to the promised land.

Moses as pastor-guide-teacher led his people not only from the hands of oppression but also from their own divisive self-interest and petty competition and helped them to take hold of a new vision of hope. Education in its central meaning has to do with this ability to transcend the limits of one’s situation and to envision the promises that are calling the people forth.

THE PASTORAL TEACHER

The word pastoral can be understood to mean “life help.” The pastor is one who assists others with life, or more strictly contributes the means by which life can be sustained with greater strength. To be a pastor is to give leadership on behalf of the community of faith and to enable the people to have the strength that only faith provides.

To be a teacher is to have a helping relationship with others. Teaching is a way of being with another. Historically, students learned by living with the teacher and by participating in an ongoing dialogue about life and the philosophy of life. They became disciples or followers of one who guided them in the intellectual journey for truth. The classical teacher was not necessarily an expert who had all the answers but was one who could engage in dialogue with the followers and whose strength was in knowing the way to learn. Teaching is the process by which the helper helps another in knowing and in understanding. The pastoral teacher is one who lives among the members of a congregation and helps them in knowing and understanding a way of faith that gives meaning and purpose to life.
Pastoral teaching is a ministry of the Word, or what Westerhoff has called "catechesis." He writes that catechesis is a pastoral ministry of the Word, the energy or activity of God which continuously converts and nurtures those whom God has chosen to witness to the Gospel of Salvation. The aim of catechesis is to make God's saving activity or liberating/reconciling Word known, living, conscious, and active in the personal and corporate lives of God's baptized people.6

Pastoral teaching is not a didactic event in which the pastor becomes the authority over those who know little and have much to learn. The experience is more like a journey to a new destination to which neither the pastor-guide nor the people have been before. They set forth for a destination that they have heard about but which they have never seen. In undertaking the journey they make a covenant to stay together, and they agree together to find the way.

There are two ways that the work of the guide can be understood. There is the tour bus guide who has not only been over the route many times but has all the answers about the sights along the way. What is more important, if the tour guide does not know the answer to a question from one of the passengers, he or she makes one up. For this guide it is important to be the only expert on the sights that he or she is describing.

The other kind of guide is the trail guide for a caravan of pioneers crossing the frontier for the first time. The guide does not know the trail and has never seen the destination. What is known are the signs along the trail and the stories of those who have crossed this way earlier. Each evening with the other leaders of the caravan, the signs are discussed, the stories are told and the route for the next day is planned. Catechesis is more like this. Catechesis, according to Westerhoff, is "a process, a course to be run (which is the original Latin meaning of curriculum)."7

A major difficulty for the church today and especially for the pastor who is the "lead" teacher for a local church is that we are so inundated even within Christian education with secular models that we have lost sight of the rich resources of our
Christian tradition. For many of us, our only experience and knowledge of teaching is tied to schooling and a formal classroom situation and to grades and degrees. The church has adopted to a large extent the industrial model of education utilized by the public school system since the mid-nineteenth century. In such a factory model of learning, students enter the system at the same time and place and move through a sequence of uniform steps until they achieve a standard of production so that they can be certified as "educated" persons. The major task for the church today is to find its own educational identity without becoming sectarian or unconcerned with the larger issues of the educational world. To recover the "pastoral" in church education is to recover also the sacred and the transcendent dimensions of knowing and understanding.

The shifts from the secular to the sacred context for Christian education can be subtle and, if care is not given, it could lead to the old dichotomy between church and world and to a new split in the nature of knowledge. To explore the parameters of the sacred is not to reject all secular forms or to become preoccupied with the symbols of the sacred, such as the Bible or church doctrine. Biblicism and dogmatism along with absolute religious truth (fundamentalism of theology) are not in themselves the sacred and might indeed blind us to the saving grace and transcendence possible through Christian education. What is suggested here is that church education should be grounded in the images that point to God's saving activity and to the promise of a coming new church.

Pastoral teaching is not a function that is separated from all the other activities of a faith community. It is integral to all the ministry that calls a faith community together and sends it into its mission to the world. The old separation between the pastor as liturgist, preacher, administrator, and teacher was just too simple and served only to allow pastor and congregation to choose what they most enjoyed or what they delighted in doing. There is no division possible in the central ministries of the church. The very nature of pastoral is the gathering of the parts into a unified and working whole. No one part of ministry is finally effective without all the parts that are active in the manifestation of the ongoing life and ministry of Christ.

The classical example of the pastoral teacher is provided us by
that beautiful little seventeenth-century tract, *The Reformed Pastor*, by the Puritan pastor Richard Baxter. The book is of lasting value for pastors, especially the insights of Baxter regarding pastoral teaching. John Wesley found the book so useful he strongly recommended it to his traveling preachers. The word *reformed* used by Baxter to describe the pastor did not mean Calvinism but a renewed understanding of ministry.

Baxter might be called a “folk pastor” in that he lived and taught among the people. To be a minister was to serve all the people in all their experiences. Although a true Puritan and prone to legalism, Baxter’s admonitions on pastoral teaching have some of the ring of Segundo’s liberation theology and emphasis upon pastoral motivations. Baxter called himself the “people’s teacher.” By this he meant that teaching had to be practical in the Puritan sense. Teaching had to be related to the everyday life and the daily experiences of impoverished people struggling for a bare existence in a class-oriented, oppressive English society. Baxter himself was imprisoned at least twice for his nonconformist views. Although, like the later Methodists, he was Arminian and Roman in his doctrine of grace and salvation, he was political and social in his interpretation of the kingdom of God. Teaching was not for him abstract, nor was it done for the purpose of doctrinal conformity. To teach theology was to articulate the faith and the way of the Christian into the real-life issues of his people.

For Baxter, the pastoral and the catechetical (verbal teaching) could never be separated. His sermons were prepared for teaching and through his preaching he taught what he called “basic Christianity.” His weekly pastor’s forums were the occasion for human discourse about faith, especially biblical faith, and the art of prayer. Along with other Puritan pastors, literacy was a major concern, and he distributed Christian literature as he went about his pastoral tasks. He visited each family on a regular schedule and gave attention to each individual. Pastoral care took the form of personal and family catechizing. On his visits he taught the essentials for salvation and how the Christian life could be lived with devotion and steadfastness. Baxter also took his visitations as the opportunity to exegete Scripture, instruct on how to spend the sabbath,
guide persons in how death could be faced, and remind each person of the disciplines of church membership.

Baxter is an example of the pastoral tradition of the church. He understood teaching as essential to the ministry of the church and the life of every Christian. From a careful study of this example of the heritage of the pastor can come some new possibilities for Christian education in our time. A revisionist view would attempt to recover teaching as a pastoral activity. This recovery would be made with the full recognition that pastoral work is larger than any one person and must be the concern and the task of the whole community of faith. This is not to underestimate the place that the pastoral office has as a paradigm for the shared ministry that all Christians have for the edification of both the church and the world. What the church needs at this time in its history are pastors who can envision teaching as one of the central tasks of ministry and can lead the church in the recovery of pastoral teaching.

NOTES

2. A similar view can be found in the works of John H. Westerhoff III. See, for example, his writings in Westerhoff and O. C. Edwards, Jr., A Faithful Church Issues in the History of Catechesis (Wilton, Conn.: Morehouse-Barbour Co., 1981), pp. 1-9, 293 ff.
8. There are several editions of Richard Baxter’s work, which was first published in 1656. Here I have used the 1862 edition, which was edited by William Brown (Carlisle, Pa.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974).
BOOK REVIEWS

JAMES SMART'S CONTRIBUTION TO
THE PASTOR AS EDUCATOR
Craig Dykstra


He had a Ph.D. in Semitics, wrote nineteen books, and was professor of Biblical interpretation at Union Theological Seminary in New York and editor-in-chief of the Christian Faith and Life curriculum of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. But James D. Smart always understood himself primarily as a pastor. The pastorate was where he started. He returned to it when he finished his curriculum work. He went back to it again after retiring from Union Seminary. And all the while he was gone from it, he thought of himself, according to one of his colleagues, as a pastor on leave from his parish.

Early in his ministry, as he tells it in The Rebirth of Ministry, he had little sense of the minister as educator. He thought of teaching as something that was done primarily by Sunday school teachers and professional Christian educators; his was only an auxiliary role. Besides, as he says, "in seminary the educational aspect of ministry was totally ignored" (89). But after a number of years of working in this way in two congregations, he began to sense that, though the congregation was growing and his work going well, something was amiss: "I became conscious of what can only be described as a sense of spiritual suffocation, an awareness of something seriously wrong. As the distress continued I was forced to probe to the bottom of it" (91). What he discovered was that he had been spending virtually all of his

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time with adults and almost none with children and youth. "It became clear that I had been expending most of my energies at the point where they were least likely to produce results and only a tiny fraction of my time at the point where the lives of my people were most open to be molded and refashioned by the Christian gospel" (91). So, in this and in his next pastorate, he deliberately reconstructed his ministry to focus more on the younger members of the community. As he did so, he found himself much more intimately involved in educational situations. This led to an alleviation of the sense of spiritual suffocation and a new sense of balance in his ministry, "with education taking its place alongside preaching and pastoral responsibilities and closely interwoven with them. It was not just one more responsibility added; it was a restructuring of the entire ministry with extremely important implications both for the character of preaching and the character of pastoral work" (92). From that point on it seemed incomprehensible to him to be a pastor without being at the same time a teacher. He now seemed shocked (partly at himself and partly with the many other ministers who do not regard teaching as an essential part of their ministry) when he exclaimed, "Jesus was a teacher. Paul was a teacher. But these ministers are not teachers!" (88).

Smart's contribution to understanding the pastor as educator began during a watershed period in the modern history of North American Christian education. In order to be appreciated, it needs to be seen in its historical context. This context has at least two dimensions, one sociological and the other theological.

One of the reasons why so little was taught in seminaries about the educational dimensions of ministry when Smart was a student, and why pastors felt so little responsibility for teaching, is that education had become institutionally isolated from the minister's purview. The Sunday school had grown up as essentially a separate lay movement. Lay people were the organizers, supporters, teachers, and administrators of Sunday schools. Most Sunday schools had separate budgets from the congregation as a whole and set their own independent policies. Teacher training and support was done through regional and national Sunday school unions and conferences rather than by pastors. What had become the primary educational institution of the church had developed independently from the ordained ministry. Ministers, felt separated from and often antagonistic toward it. And education had become something other than the minister's business.

The religious education movement of the first three decades of the twentieth century was a strong reaction against the Sunday school in its current form. But the movement did little to bring the minister back into the educational role. The religious education movement was
JAMES SMART'S CONTRIBUTION
determined that education in the churches be professionalized. Teaching standards and methods, organizational procedures, and everything else about the church's school were to be improved. But this was not primarily to be done by pastors. It was to be done by well-trained, professional religious educators. Religious education would be truly educational. And this meant that its leaders would be schooled in educational philosophy, learning theory, psychology, curriculum, methods, evaluation, and administration. They were not to be theologians and ministers; they were to be educators. Pastors were something different.

He was not the only one to say it, but in this context Smart's call for ministers to be educators was something that needed to be said afresh and with power. It meant that ministers needed to become involved in contexts from which they had been alienated and in activities for which their skills had atrophied. It is a call which still needs to be heard, since the minister's isolation from the educational ministry of the church has still not been overcome.

In addition to the sociological context, there was a theological side to all this as well. The Sunday school had long been associated with a conservative, revivalistic theology which, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was quite hostile to the emerging liberalism and to historical and critical work in biblical interpretation. The religious education movement was a reaction against this as well. Theologically, the religious education movement was liberal and humanistic. It had a strong faith in human goodness and progress, in "the democracy of God and the brotherhood of man," in the power of rationality and science to alleviate human suffering and evil. The Bible was a source book for the highest in human ideals, and only one source among others. People were understood to learn primarily through experience and experimentation, and education was a bold, creative journey into the reconstruction of society and humanity.

Smart was a major figure in turning religious education away from this kind of thinking. He began his curriculum work and his writing during the period when liberalism was dying, and, along with Elmer G. Homrighausen, H. Shelton Smith, and a few others exposed educators to the new theologies of Karl Barth and Emil Brunner in Europe and Reinhold Niebuhr in America. Neither the uncritical fundamentalism of the Sunday school nor the unreconstructed liberalism of the religious education movement would do as far as Smart was concerned. As he saw it, education had to be brought back more centrally into the life of the church and into ministry, and it had to become more theologically responsible.

For six years, beginning in 1944, Smart worked out what this meant
in practical terms in his responsibilities as editor of the Christian Faith and Life curriculum. This was a rather bold, new curriculum which determined to provide for the church a rich theological education that introduced its people to the best current thinking in biblical interpretation, church history, and theology in ways that they could understand and appropriate. The philosophy behind this curriculum, and Smart's whole understanding of the educational ministry, was published later in a very influential book entitled The Teaching Ministry of the Church.

For Smart, a proper understanding of the pastor as educator depended upon a proper understanding of the teaching function of the church. And this, in turn, required an understanding of what the church is. In Smart's mind, this had everything to do with revelation.

The revelation of God creates the Church. Apart from revelation, it has no real existence. . . . The revelation itself demands a human channel of communication. God's revelation of himself is not a communication merely of information about himself or of abstract truths which can be conveyed in words alone or trusted wholly to the pages of a book. It is God himself who is revealed—not just something about God but a truth that is at the same time a life, a personal life, and if it is to be communicated to the world, it must be through persons in whom the life as well as the truth can be embodied (24-25).

The church, for Smart, is created by revelation and is a response to revelation which makes further revelation possible. The church is the church as it responds to revelation. And for Smart, this takes three forms: as worship, as ministry of the Word, and as obedience to the Word in the entire conduct of its life in the world. Teaching along with preaching constituted the second of these, the ministry of the Word.

The ministry of the Word, in Smart's way of thinking, is being witness to God's revelation through telling of "the riches of mercy and understanding and love that we receive from God in the gospel" (RM:29). This is very much tied up with the Bible since, for Smart, all this is known only through biblical revelation. It is through Scripture that God's revelation comes. But this does not mean that the ministry of the Word is concerned with the Bible alone. Rather, the ministry is witnessing to a living God who is known through the Scriptures and whose purposes are continually being carried forward through the church in its whole history. The task of the ministry of the Word is to make all this alive in the present.

This is done through teaching and preaching. For Smart, these two go inextricably together; but they are not the same. They are to be distinguished, but not separated. Smart disagreed with C. H. Dodd, who argued that preaching was the proclamation of the kerygma while
teaching had to do largely with moral instruction. For Smart, "the content of preaching and teaching is the same. But preaching essentially is the proclamation of this Word of God to man in his unbelief" (TM:19), while teaching has its essential concern in "the growth in grace of the believer" (TM:20). Teaching "follows the Word that is preached into the lives of the hearers . . . . take(s) seriously the problems that the believer begins at once to meet in his response to the gospel and in his personal growth in the knowledge of God" (TM:22). Smart warned that the minister who fails to be deeply involved in the teaching ministry is like a farmer who scatters seed on the land and refuses to do anything more until the harvest. In fact, if he withholds himself from the more open and vulnerable situation of the teacher, he is likely to lack that intimate knowledge of what is happening in his people's lives which alone makes it possible for him to be an effective harvester. The ministry of the Word is a ministry to people, not in the mass but as individuals, to be exercised with loving care. The work of sowing is only partly done in sermons. It needs also to be done in smaller groups and from house to house. But in these situations it takes the form of teaching (TM:22).

Smart always understood the ministry of the Word to be a ministry of the whole church, and he never intended that pastors should take it over. Indeed, for him, the purpose of Christian education was to make all Christians "disciples wholly committed to his gospel, with an understanding of it, and with a personal faith that will enable them to bear convincing witness to it in word and action in the midst of an unbelieving world" (TM:107). The whole church is to be a witness to the Word. But the fact that the whole church has a teaching responsibility hardly means that the pastor does not. The ministry of the Word is not to be split in two, so that lay people are responsible for one dimension of it and the pastor the other. Indeed, if the whole church is to be equipped to be ministers of the Word, the pastor by virtue of his or her training will need to be the principal person responsible for equipping the church for that ministry through teaching.

Smart understood the ministry of the Word primarily as a work of interpretation; and this was no less true for teaching than for preaching. Teaching and preaching are hermeneutical activities. The focus of this hermeneutical activity, for Smart, is first and above all the Bible. Through the Bible, interpreted in the church, God is revealed. And God's revelation, in turn, reveals everything else: who we are, what our situation and condition is, where we are going. Smart made this all rather clear in The Teaching Ministry of the Church; but he brought
One of Smart's deepest convictions is stated succinctly as the title of a chapter of that book: "No Scripture, No Revelation!" If the church has its life only through revelation, then "no Scripture" also means no church and no continuation of God's work in the world. But Smart was deeply worried that, in fact, the Scriptures were becoming lost to the church. This he saw to be a result of a profound failure of the teaching and preaching ministry of the church.

In *The Strange Silence*, Smart made the claim that the Scriptures are fading in a serious way from the consciousness of ordinary church people and even its ordained ministers. He claimed that we do not know them in breadth and depth, and that far too many have nothing, more than the most superficial acquaintance with them. Smart lists a number of reasons: topical sermons that do not include careful scriptural exposition, fewer groups of youth and adults doing Bible study, little private reading of the Bible in families or as individuals. But the reasons we are losing the Bible run deeper than this. The problem, according to Smart, is that the word of interpretation has become terribly complicated. The world of the Bible and the contemporary world have moved so far apart so rapidly that people immediately experience a huge gap of language and concepts when they do read it. Biblical scholarship over the last two hundred years has revealed the Bible to be a very different sort of book than we once thought, and ministers who have been introduced to this scholarship are themselves often overwhelmed by the complex variety of factors that must be taken into consideration for the proper interpretation of Scripture. This task is made even more difficult when, even now, critical tools and the results of historical research are kept out of the hands and minds of the people. A gulf between clergy and laity in their understanding of what the Bible is is thereby allowed to continue. The problems then become "how to get from the original meaning of a text in its ancient situation to the meaning of the same text in a late twentieth-century world, [and] . . . how to deal honestly and adequately with the critical problems generated by the Biblical text when [ministers] confront the rudimentary educational milieu of a local congregation" (SS:29). With these fundamental tasks, Smart admits, seminary training has not been much help.

Until these problems are solved, the church is in profound danger in Smart's view. Their solution will depend upon two groups of people. First, biblical scholars and seminary teachers are called by Smart to push their writing and teaching beyond linguistic, textual, literary, and historical questions and deal with the two questions of the
James Smart's Contribution

contemporary meaning of the texts as Scripture and of how that meaning can be communicated in the church. This work, he says, is a task for biblical scholars and systematic and practical theologians together; it cannot be divided neatly by disciplinary boundaries. Second, pastors must continue to learn the Scriptures and develop their interpretive skills, and then pass these on to the people through constant teaching and preaching. This is partly a matter of discipline and partly a matter of courage. Smart suggests that the reluctance of pastors to teach the Bible may have something to do with feeling simultaneously overawed with the complexity of the task of biblical interpretation and a bit timid in their vulnerability in the teaching role. But Smart counsels that "all they need is the honesty to face their own and their members' questions one by one as they arise. By their training they have resources available to them that no one else possesses. They need only to be a few steps ahead of their people to be useful to them as their guide. What is required is not a minister who has all the answers but rather one who is willing to embark with his people upon a journey into the Scriptures..." (SS:169-70). If the pastor does not fulfill this role, who will? This, for Smart, is the most essential task of the pastor as educator.

James Smart, in his writing and teaching, has made two fundamental contributions to our understanding of pastor as educator. First, he has put the teaching task of the minister in a strong theological perspective. The teaching ministry is at the heart of the church, and Smart shows why. From this perspective, teaching cannot be ignored by the pastor or carried out in only an auxiliary or superficial manner. Second, Smart has called our attention to the profound need of an appropriate and adequate hermeneutic for the use of the Bible in the church and has shown how important the pastor's role as a biblical interpreter in the congregation is.

Smart does not provide pastors with all they need in order to understand and carry out their educational ministry. Beyond calling pastors to their task as biblical interpreters, Smart does not offer a great deal of help on how to do it. Educational process was never of much concern to him. The image he seemed always to have in mind was of the pastor as biblical scholar who brought the results of his or her study to the people for them to hear and discuss. The idea that interpretation might be done by a group of people making discoveries together—with the people sometimes one step ahead of the pastor—never seemed to occur to him. His interpretive process always seemed to move more from original meaning to contemporary meaning than dialectically between the two. He wrote of the way in which our "interpretive context" affects our reading of the text (SS:51-63), but for him the
educational context seemed to be limited largely to some kind of classroom. He did not consider carefully the ways in which meanings might be deepened and changed if learning takes place in the context of action in the church and in the world.

Smart's voice, then, is one to be heard among others. Nonetheless, while listening to other voices, it is crucial to see the vital significance of what Smart was pointing to. A pastor working intimately with groups of people as a teacher bringing to bear the skills of modern biblical interpretation in the study of the Scriptures in order to discern what God has to say to us in our present situation has great power to precipitate "a journey into an unknown future, an unfolding of new possibilities of human existence and Christian discipleship" (SS:170).
The form and content of the exegetical section in these homiletical resources differs somewhat from previous issues; we deal here with the broader perspective of the sermon in its liturgical setting, such that our study of the lectionary passages may be called "liturgical exegesis." This approach takes the interpretation of the biblical text with as great a seriousness as standard exegetical method but to that adds an explication of the liturgical context and the way in which the history and theology of the occasion interact with the texts for that day. If a formula is helpful, it may be said that textual exegesis plus contextual explication equals liturgical exegesis.

Liturgical exegesis presupposes a carefully constructed lectionary in which the lections are selected to complement each other and to have an integral relationship to the liturgical celebration. Thus certain meanings, validly drawn from a lection, may not be the focus of the sermon because those meanings are independent of the themes of the other lections for the day and are unrelated to the liturgical context generally. Perhaps an example will clarify this.

On an occasion other than Christmas, it is defensible to preach on the ethical imperative of the gospel from Titus 2:11-15: we are to renounce all evil and be "a people . . . zealous for good deeds." But this pericope was not assigned to Christmas for the purpose of ethical exhortation. Rather, for this occasion the key terms in the passage are "the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all" and "the appearing . . . of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us." It is this which coincides with the liturgical motif of the day and complements the other readings as they also relate to that motif. Certainly the parenetic and the christological emphases in Titus are not mutually exclusive; ethical imperative rests on the grace God has revealed and the freedom God has accomplished.
in Christ. Still, the primary focus for Christmas Day is the Incarnation as such; specific ethical implications are better suited to an occasion when other elements in the rest of the liturgy do not compete for attention with this theme.

What liturgical exegesis does, then, is to help us narrow the field of sermon subjects. Particularly from the fourth Sunday in Advent (Advent IV) through the Epiphany-Baptism of the Lord, the lections are too rich to be treated fully in five sermons. Whether the preacher is examining these texts for use at this season or for independent use at other times, sorting must be done. Liturgical exegesis simplifies the sorting process so that the subject for each sermon not only is manageable but also is coherent with the rest of the service for that day.

In discussing Advent IV, I will set out in some detail the various options in the lections and attempt to show how liturgical exegesis enables us to select from the possibilities. Because of space limits on the other occasions less attention can be given to this sorting process. In the resources after Advent IV, I shall set forth rather early the basic liturgical theme and then look at the homiletical possibilities related to it. Thus some of the rich themes inherent in the lections will be passed over; preachers in verse-by-verse study of the texts are encouraged to seek out these neglected themes with a view to their possible use on other occasions.

The lectionary framers made certain decisions about the nature of specific liturgical occasions and on that basis selected the readings. Hence liturgical exegesis begins by exploring basic assumptions in lectionary design. For instance, the framers first selected the Gospel for the day and then added the other readings in relation to it. Therefore liturgical exegesis sees the Gospel pericope as the controlling lection and logically we consider this first in our study rather than looking at the lections in the order in which they are to be read in the public service. (During the period of the year we are considering, and at certain other times, all three lections are interrelated. Users of the lectionary do need to be warned, however, that at other times—particularly the Sundays after Epiphany and after Pentecost—the Old Testament and Gospel lections are related, but the Epistles run on an independent track.)

Our discussion for each occasion falls under three headings:
A. Exploration of assumptions about the character of the liturgical occasion.
B. Examination of the Gospel for the day, then of the other readings, focussing on the way they are related to each other and to the character of the occasion.
C. Discussion of the common thread(s) binding the whole liturgical
HOMILETICAL RESOURCES

...event, and suggestions of specific possibilities not only for the sermon but also for the propers for the day (those items such as hymns and prayers which vary from occasion to occasion).

Although this procedure may appear to suggest that the calendar rather than the Bible is the basis for proclamation, this is not the case. The year does not determine the Gospel but is derived from it and eases that sorting process that always has to occur when moving from text to sermon.

For United Methodists, it is particularly crucial to begin liturgical exegesis by looking at assumptions concerning the year. American Methodists long ignored the liturgical calendar except for Christmas and Easter. In recovering the cycle, we inherited certain defective traditions (e.g., that Epiphany is a season with a unified emphasis), or misunderstood what we received (e.g., that Advent has to do with the nativity and surrounding events). Unless we are clear about the presuppositions of the lectionary, we bring to the exegetical process inaccurate interpretations and thus confuse matters utterly.

In dealing with the lectionary, it is also necessary to have a bird’s eye view rather than simply a Sunday-by-Sunday understanding. This overview allows for continuity in preaching. Those who do not see the broader design of the lectionary sometimes complain that its use does not lend itself to preaching in series; therefore preacher and congregation may not have the sense of continuity and forward movement that a series can bring. First it must be said that the treatment of biblical material in sequence is itself part of the answer to this objection. Second, when we plan sermons well in advance instead of week by week, we may find that indeed a pattern emerges that can be identified as a series without doing exegetical violence to the readings.

That was the case in my preparation of these materials. In writing this section I did not set out to look for a possible sermon series. In retrospect, however, I realize that without great difficulty the five occasions considered below have a continuity such that thinking of them in series is not far-fetched. Under the overall heading of “Christ’s Coming” or “Christ’s Appearing,” the following can be identified:

I. Its Promise
II. Its Manner and Mystery
III. Its Paradox
IV. Its Victory over Adversity
V. Its Meaning for Who We Are

What is crucial about preaching in series is that the continuity arises out of sound exegesis rather than (as often has been the case) the continuity being imposed upon the texts or derived by an unsystematic
continuity being imposed upon the texts or derived by an unsystematic selection of texts put together in a way which makes them say what the preacher wants them to say rather than what the texts want to say. Liturgical exegesis is at least some safeguard against both dangers.

Especially for those who hold Quarterly Review in one hand and Seasons of the Gospel in the other, a word needs to be said about the texts considered here for each occasion. Particularly in those years when December 25 falls on a Sunday, this lectionary system is marvelously flexible or impossibly confusing, depending upon your point of view. On Christmas Day we may use No. 5 of the propers, or No. 6 if No. 5 was used on Christmas Eve. On January 1, we may use No. 6 if that was not used on December 25; or we may use No. 7. Or, we are advised that we may anticipate the Epiphany by moving its propers (No. 8) ahead by five days. If we don’t do that, we may use No. 8 on January 8. Or, we may use Nos. 8 and 9 together on January 8; or we may use No. 9 alone on the second Sunday in January.

Here the following options have been taken:

- December 25 — No. 6
- January 1 — No. 7
- January 8 — No. 8 (Gospel only) plus No. 9 (all three lections)

Pastors may make necessary adjustments, depending upon local circumstances, particularly where there are not services both on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Lections

Isaiah 7:10-17 Romans 1:1-7 Matthew 1:18-25

A. Advent celebrates our anticipation of the coming of the Lord—historically prior to Bethlehem, by remembrance; eschatologically at the end of time, by hope. These two aspects are linked by the faithfulness of God’s promises to the believing community.

Thus the Old Testament lections for the season focus on the messianic promises found by the church in the traditions of David and the prophets; the New Testament lections, particularly at the beginning of the season, center on the promises to the church concerning the ultimate triumph of Jesus Christ. As the season
progresses, anticipation of the eschatological coming of the Lord diminishes (though it never totally disappears), giving way to New Testament narratives in which the birth of Jesus is anticipated. By Advent IV, then, we are reading Gospel selections from the first chapters of Matthew (Year A) and Luke (Years B and C). These selections speak to us of preparation, however—not of the nativity itself, which is reserved for December 24.

Advent is rich in imagery about darkness and light, sleep and watchfulness, judgment and reign; and messianic titles abound. Throughout all of this, the faithful are to ready themselves for the appearing of their Lord, whether in the humility of a stable or the splendor of his glorious Parousia.

In many quarters there is a tendency to think of the Sunday prior to December 25 as “Christmas Sunday.” This kind of confusion should be resisted even in years when some pastoral accommodation may be necessitated by the fact that Advent IV falls on December 23 or 24; this year, however, it is impossible to think of Advent IV as Christmas Sunday, hence the full liturgical character of the day can be preserved with relative ease.

B. Matthew 1:18-25 is rich in exegetical material and homiletical possibilities. First, this is the locus classicus for the doctrine of the virginal conception of Jesus. Coming from a different angle, the text can be used to set forth the central role of God’s Spirit in the incarnation (verses 18, 20), though “Spirit” here is to be understood in terms of the very essence of God’s being rather than in the sense of a fully articulated doctrine of the Third Person of the Trinity. Or attention can be paid to the meaning of the name used in this text, since the linkage of names to personality and mission is so central in Hebraic thought. Jesus is a form of Joshua, which means “the Lord is salvation”; and Emmanuel means “God with us.” Thus God’s saving activity is one of incarnational immanence. Or again, the pericope could support a sermon on the importance of angelic visitations in interpreting and furthering the drama of salvation. Because of the citation of Isaiah 7:14, the sermon could explore the meaning of prophecy in the Christian understanding of our Old Testament heritage.

All of these themes and others can be derived from standard exegetical procedure. Were the preacher not engaged in liturgical exegesis, the choice from among the options could be made solely on the basis of pastoral discretion (or even personal preference). But liturgical exegesis requires that the decision not be made so independently. We must consider the relationships the other readings have to this controlling lesson and how all of these are bound up with the character of Advent IV.
The relationship between the prophetic passage and the Gospel is clear, no matter how problematical it may be from our perspective. Isaiah 7:10-17 has been chosen because Matthew, with editorial liberty, cites the Septuagint's translation of Isaiah 7:14. Again, liturgical exegesis aside, a number of important themes could be drawn from this Old Testament lection other than the birth of a child, for example, the nature and importance of signs in Scripture, or the certainty and sternness of God's judgment. But within the liturgical framework, it is a woman's conception of a child to be named Emmanuel that is crucial.

In the epistle there is also a concern with prophecy: the gospel that was promised beforehand in the prophets has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Paul goes on to make a christological statement—quite likely an earlier one, known to the Romans, which he is quoting by way of establishing a common base of faith between himself and a church to whom he is known only by reputation. Paul concludes by stressing the universal import of Christ's coming: “to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations.” Were the preacher using this text for a Sunday evening service in the middle of June, any number of preaching themes could be derived from it: the meaning of apostleship, the messianic significance of the resurrection, the power of a common statement of faith to bind together Christians not personally known to each other, the role of obedience in faith, our mission to all nations, and so on. The sorting out of a single preaching theme would have to be done, probably on the basis of parochial circumstances and interests. But on the morning of Advent IV it is the liturgy itself that enables the sorting to be done.

C. Given this wealth of possible subjects for preaching, what common thread can be found that binds together the lections and ties them to the rest of the liturgy as well? Even here there may be more than one possible answer. But we shall explore this unifying theme: The fulfillment of God’s promise is both continuous and discontinuous with the expectation of God’s people; God is ever faithful—but in ways we may not always recognize.

Matthew is much concerned about continuity between hope and fulfillment. This is the purpose of the genealogical data that opens his Gospel. Matthew is not merely “tracing roots”; he is demonstrating that the coming of Christ is continuous with all that God has been doing since the time of Abraham.

It is this same concern with continuity that enables us to deal with Isaiah 7:14 with integrity. No longer do we believe that prophets were glorified soothsayers who gazed into some kind of spiritual crystal ball. And we know (even if Matthew did not) that the Septuagint was not accurate in rendering the Hebrew alma as “virgin” rather than “young
woman.” But neither of these points is central from the perspective of liturgical exegesis. What matters is that the God whose sign was given to Ahaz in the birth of a child has in the latter days given us the fullest possible sign of salvation through the birth of the child Jesus. It is God’s consistency as a sign-giver that is at stake.

Similarly, Paul’s reference to that which God “promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures” is at heart a concern for continuity, not a developed doctrine about mechanical foreknowledge on the part of Old Testament authors. Continuity is also an implicit issue in the Apostle’s quotation of a pre-Pauline christological formula. Paul wants the Roman Christians to know that he is not writing in order to upset their theological apple cart, but rather to confirm and elaborate upon that which they already know.

Concern for continuity also helps explain Matthew’s interest in the name Jesus. As we shall see when studying Matthew 2, the evangelist demonstrates that Jesus is the New Moses; but here he is also the New Joshua. So also with the emphasis on Jesus as the Son of David (Matt. 1:1; Rom. 1:3), which has to do with the continuity of God’s activity in bringing to pass the ancient promise.

But why all of this concern with continuity? Because the fulfillment of the promise is at the same time so startlingly discontinuous. Far from arguing for the status quo, the biblical writers are arguing against a sense of chaos created by the new thing God has done. Joseph could not imagine the promises of David coming to pass through the unexpected pregnancy of Mary. That is hardly the way a king should come into David’s line. And so Joseph must be convinced by an angel in a dream that this is a divine discontinuity rather than a human disgrace—a divine discontinuity that is somehow continuous and consistent with all God has done before. So also in the early christological formula used by Paul, that Messiah is the son of David according to the flesh is surprising, perhaps, but not perplexing, for so it was prophesied. But that he is the Son of God by his Resurrection from the dead is scandalous: His death was that of a common criminal, as Paul frequently notes; and his Resurrection is an unfathomable mystery.

On the final Sunday of the season of expectation, it is fitting to sound the note that God’s coming into our midst is at once expected and surprising, anticipated and shocking. Therefore too great a familiarity with divine ways is inappropriate for Christians. We cut ourselves off from divine revelation if in advance we decide too certainly how that revelation will come to us. God is faithful; but the strange thing about divine fidelity is the newness God ever introduces when fulfilling promises. This is a necessary word to the contemporary church, in which assurance of God’s love is often taken to mean certainty about
God's ways. Not only can we have the former without the latter, but perhaps it must be thus if we are to live by "the obedience of faith for the sake of his name" (Rom. 1:5).

One aspect of the unexpectedness of God's activity is its universality. This is explicit in Romans 1; for in verse 5 "the nations" can be translated "the Gentiles"—of which the Roman Christians certainly were a prime instance. The same theme of God's activity apart from Israel is at least implicit in the Isaiah passage; for God is using Assyria as an instrument of divine judgment, and ultimately of grace. Matthew's Gospel (as writing) has a clear concern for the universality of the gospel (as good news), for he is writing to a mixed community of Jewish and Gentile Christians. What reaches its climax in Matthew 28:18-20 is already present in the opening chapters. It is more evident in the second chapter than in the first, however, and preaching upon it may be deferred until the Epiphany, when it is a prominent concern of the liturgical festival itself.

But if the universal emphasis does not shape today's sermon, it may well be reflected in the prayers for the day, so that the hope of the church is seen not as an internal matter only but as a force that propels us outward for the sake of the world. Often in liturgical exegesis we discover emphases that are properly incorporated into portions of the liturgy other than the sermon. Thus the intersections for the day may include this prayer, which is part of the oldest collection of Advent prayers we possess (from the Gelasian Sacramentary, c. A.D. 750):

Look favorably upon our prayers, O God, and show your Church that mercy of yours which we proclaim, manifesting to your people the wonderful sacrament of your only-begotten Son, so that what you have promised in the Gospel of your Word may be fulfilled in all the nations of the world, and that all of your adopted people may possess that which the witness of your truth has conveyed.

Other liturgical resources from Advent can enhance the continuity-discontinuity theme of the sermon. Continuity is particularly apparent in the traditional "O antiphons," whether in their hymnic form or their spoken form. Walter Russell Bowie's "Lord Christ, When First Thou Camest" is an excellent prayer of confession that may be sung by the congregation, or by the choir with the congregation following the text silently and then joining in the singing of the amen. The incorporation into the liturgy of such resources provides a thematic unity that is drawn from the biblical lections for the day, whether directly or indirectly. This kind of unity prevents the liturgy from being destroyed by that "variety show" approach which afflicts so much Protestant worship, particularly during Advent and Christmas.
A. What is said here about the liturgical nature of the day applies both to the services on Christmas Eve and on Christmas Day. While the popularity of midnight Mass in the Roman Catholic tradition somewhat obscures the fact at Christmas, we Christians cling to our Jewish liturgical heritage by calculating the liturgical day from sunset to sunset, rather than from midnight to midnight.

Christmas is popularly understood to be the observance of the birth of Jesus; but the festival is ruined unless we go beyond a superficial interpretation of this event. For the birth of Jesus is important only in light of what the church believes him to be: the incarnate, suffering, rising messiah of God. The evangel of the gospel is not adequately announced so long as Christmas is primarily a romantic observance, replete with cooing doves and soft lullabies. The beginning of the gospel story announces exactly what the conclusion of the gospel story proclaims. John Donne understood this well when, on Christmas Day of 1626, he began his sermon in Saint Paul’s Cathedral, London, with these words:

The whole life of Christ was a continual passion; others die martyrs, but Christ was born a martyr. He found a Golgotha (where he was crucified) even in Bethlehem, where he was born. For to his tenderness then, the straws were almost as sharp as the thorns after, and the manger as uneasy at first as his cross at last. His birth and his death were but one continual act, and his Christmas Day and his Good Friday are but the evening and the morning of one and the same day.  

What Donne understood before the age of biblical criticism and liturgical renewal is today even more evident. It is now clear that the nativity accounts of Matthew and Luke are relatively late-comers to the literature assembled by the evangelists. The Passion and Resurrection narrative form the first stratum, followed by the stories of Jesus’ ministry of teaching and healing. Only later did the birth of Jesus come to be of interest, and then only to two of the Gospel writers. Mark is silent on the matter, and John’s prologue is a theological exposition of the Incarnation rather than a birth narrative.

Interestingly, this developmental process was replicated in the history of liturgical observance. From the beginning Christians celebrated the Passion, death, and Resurrection of their Lord—annually in the Christianized Passover observance and weekly in
the Lord's Day. Before the second quarter of the third century there is
no evidence that the birth of Jesus was remembered liturgically.
All of this is not to say that Christmas is unimportant; but it is to
suggest that, contrary to what is popularly practiced in our culture, this
season is secondary to Easter. Unless the cross was an atoning act and
the Resurrection a reality (without stopping here to define that term
precisely), then we simply celebrate the birth of a good man who was
betrayed by his friends and executed unjustly. Apart from the paschal
mystery, the birth of Jesus is nothing more for the church than is the
birth of Abraham Lincoln for American citizens.

Hence we must reject the notion that Christmas is a supremely
evangelical occasion for people who, in a scientific age, can appreciate
the birth of a baby but cannot make sense of an atonement or
resurrection. We will not reach such people by reducing Christmas to a
birthday party for Jesus. The true evangelical note of Christmas is that
the one who is born is the one who hangs on a cross and comes forth
from a tomb. There can be no neat separation of these matters, either in
doctrine or liturgical observance. As we shall see, the nativity accounts
of the Gospels themselves make this clear.

The Christmas observance, then, is a "mystery" in the theological
sense of that term—revelation open to the scrutiny of reason, to be
sure, but never totally accessible to reason or logic, let alone derived
from them. The Christmas liturgy is the song of angels, not the
conclusion of a syllogism. I once heard a Roman Catholic priest say,
"When I enter the pulpit at the midnight Mass for Christmas,
something inside of me says 'Don't preach; sing!' " He did not mean
that he was tempted to break into a song instead of a sermon, but rather
that preaching on this day is itself a kind of music that transcends
ordinary discourse.

Because of the character of Christmas and of the sacraments
themselves (related as they are to the incarnational principle of divine
self-disclosure through the matter of creation), the celebration of the
Eucharist is not merely appropriate to this day but virtually inseparable
from the Christmas liturgy. This fact will necessarily be taken into
account in any liturgical exegesis for this occasion.

B. Before going directly to an examination of the Gospel for
Christmas Eve, something must be said about the unusual opportunity
afforded the preacher in this year, when we read Luke's nativity
account on December 24, John's prologue on December 25, and
Matthew's second chapter on both January 1 and 8. This arrangement
gives the preacher the opportunity to present the full Gospel tradition
of the Incarnation without indulging in "harmonizing."
Harmonizing is all about us at Christmas. Virtually every crèche embodies this faulty hermeneutic: Shepherds and magi appear on the same scene with no apparent awareness that the former are unknown to Matthew and the latter to Luke. Usually the stable is surmounted by a star, ignoring the fact that the star appears only in Matthew—who knows nothing of a stable but tells of the magi entering “the house.” For the first evangelist apparently considered Mary and Joseph to be lifelong residents of Bethlehem until, with protest (or mystification, at least) they retreated to Nazareth after the exile in Egypt at the direction of an angel.

Thus otherwise intelligent Christians have little inkling that Matthew, Luke, and John each has a particular perspective on the nature and meaning of the coming of Messiah; indeed, pious believers may even consider that such separate viewpoints are necessarily contradictory and must be denied. In dealing with the three perspectives in turn, preachers can help congregations see that the differences between the accounts is troublesome only if we are looking for irrefutable factual detail; if instead we read and hear the Gospels for what they were intended to be—testimonies of faith, which set forth the rich meaning of God’s presence among us—these differences are both complementary and edifying. Their very existence points to fullness of grace that cannot be explored adequately from a single perspective.

In preparing to preach in this way, the preacher will be greatly helped by Raymond Brown’s comments on the backwards development of christology and on the infancy narratives as history and theology in his magisterial work, The Birth of the Messiah.

Now on to a particular consideration of the Gospel lection for Christmas Eve, Luke 2:1-20. Nothing hinders our understanding of this marvelous account so much as its extreme familiarity. In a very brief space Luke sets before us the way in which God comes into our midst and the consequences of that coming. The crucial points are these:

- God comes to us in the midst of human history; we are not delivered from history, but through it by transcendent power. The names of both the emperor and the governor are noted, and a specific census is cited.
- God comes in ways that appear to be quite ordinary, even humiliating: A poor, pregnant woman and her husband, member of a has-been royal line, arrive in a village unheralded and able to find accommodations only in a stable. (The poverty of Mary may be inferred from the content of the Magnificat. The fact that in 2:24 she offers birds, the gift of a poor woman according to Leviticus 12:8, may point in the same direction, though it is not certain to what extent the law in Leviticus was observed in New Testament times.)
The significance of the event cannot be known except by divine disclosure: Angels reveal a mystery that is not apparent to human wisdom. In addition to the report of the angelic word in verses 10-14, this fact is emphasized in the following verses by the phrases "which the Lord has made known to us," "the saying which had been told them concerning this child," and "praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them."

This disclosure is made to persons unlikely to be favored by human standards. Shepherds were regarded with condescension and suspicion by the more settled people of their time. The even more dramatic contrast between the shepherd and Caesar Augustus and Quirinius, governor of Syria, is obvious.

The revelation involves both a declaration—the proclamation of the herald angel—and a sign. Like most biblical signs, this one is such that those closed to God’s way will attach no import to it; it is just the birth of another baby. But to persons who are open, the sign confirms the promise and engenders faith.

Thus those who receive the sign act upon its dependability. They go to Bethlehem in order to experience for themselves the truth proclaimed to them.

As a result of this confirmation of the revelation, those who have heard and seen tell others (verse 17).

All of this is a great mystery, such that it evokes from Mary the remembering and pondering of these divine acts (verse 19); from the shepherds, praise and thanksgiving (verse 20); and from those who hear their story, great astonishment (verse 18).

At the center of the divine disclosure are the identifications crucial to the event. First, the angel identifies the place of the nativity; the Davidic reference points back to 1:27, 32, and 69 and 2:4. Second is the triple identification of the cosmic situation by the angelic chorus: God is glorified in heaven; on earth peace is to reside because divine favor has come upon God’s people. There is a kind of explosive quality in the revelation; each identification is more expansive than the last.

The other lections for the night enhance the Gospel motifs. Isaiah speaks of the great light that has shined on the people in darkness, even as Luke declares that "the glory of the Lord shone around them." In the writing of the prophet, the child who is born to the throne of David is given great authority forever and, as in Luke, is identified by significant titles: "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

Titus speaks both of God’s historical appearance "for the salvation of all" and of the anticipated eschatological appearing ("the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ"). Here also titles are crucial, for
names are bound up with an identity they reveal. The richness of the Incarnation is attested by the multiple character of names given in the three lections for this night. The sermon may well "sing" forth this richness of grace revealed from the "house of bread" (the literal meaning of "Bethlehem"). For from this fatness we are fed.

C. All the Scripture assigned for this night leads us to the center of this liturgical occasion: the nature of God's revelation to us and the manner of its coming. The force of this should not be blunted by overattention to the human circumstances surrounding the birth of Jesus. The proclamation of God's grace is unduly domesticated when we indulge either in sentimentality (descriptions of the sweet baby smiling at his mother) or in historical invention (speculation about a heartless innkeeper who turned the holy family away and thereby missed the opportunity of the ages). At the same time it must be said that the focus of the day is kerygmatic rather than doctrinal. This is not the occasion on which to present an apologetic for the two natures christology. The task of the preacher, like that of the herald angel, is to announce good news such that those who hear the promise will go to behold the humble sign. The response of the congregation should be to leave the church singing to others the song of the angelic chorus.

Much can be made in the sermon of the nativity as our clue to the way in which God comes into our midst daily. Based upon the major exegetical points above, we can say that God comes to us in the midst of our hectic lives, often in humble, hidden ways.

The opportunities to see and serve Christ are hidden precisely because they are so common, like the everyday event of a baby being born. To recognize God's presence we need the help of revelation, which may come even to those most unlikely to be held in high regard by us. For Christians this revelation is centered in word and sign, particularly sermon and sacrament, which seem to others to be ordinary speech and at best a vestigial meal. Our perception of God's grace causes us to act in grateful obedience, to testify to divine goodness in word and deed. For thus we respond to the supreme mystery of God in our midst.

Particular attention may be given to the Eucharist as a sign which, like the Incarnation, is a humble condescension of the Most High through the material of creation. Many see it as having no importance. (Why do these Christians make such a fuss over a little bread and wine?) But to those who have accepted the revelation, it is a source of great thanksgiving (eucharistia) and a means by which we are enabled to recognize more readily the other incognito manifestations of God in our world.

In this liturgy, of course, the familiar carols are the dominant propers. Their very language, with its present-tense verbs repeating
insistently that “Christ is born today,” brings to our attention the fact that this is no mere historical commemoration. The liturgy is anamnestic: Through our worship we enter into the event we celebrate. Certain carols particularly commend themselves. “O Little Town of Bethlehem” asserts the hidden character of the Lord’s coming to us, particularly in the third stanza: “How silently. . . .” So also does “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing” in its second stanza: “. . . veiled in flesh the Godhead see.”

Throughout the sermon and the whole liturgy care should be taken to commemorate the full saving work of Jesus Christ, not his birth alone. Our carols generally do this adequately, as do contemporary eucharistic prayers. Indeed, this extract from one of these prayers sets a pattern for the way in which we may make the connections between the beginning of the story of the Lord and all that follows thereafter:

As Mary and Joseph went
from Galilee to Bethlehem
and there found no room,
so Jesus went
from Galilee to Jerusalem
and was despised and rejected.
As in the poverty of a stable
Jesus was born,
so from suffering and death
you raised him to bring us life.4

**SUNDAY, CHRISTMAS DAY 1983**

*Lections*

Isaiah 63:7-9  John 1:1-18  Galatians 4:4-7

A. For commentary on the nature of the liturgical celebration, refer to A in the preceding section.

B. The Gospel for the day is the magnificent theological poem that opens the Fourth Gospel. Sometimes preachers shy away from this passage, despite its richness, because they fear the congregation will not understand the Logos theology behind it, or simply because verses 1-3 can sound like double-talk. In these fears there is sound homiletical instinct; exhaustive (and exhausting) treatments of the Logos philosophy and christology are basic as background for the preacher; but the Christmas sermon cannot be a learned treatise in exaltation of Hebrew wisdom literature and Greek thought. Nor will a congregation be edified by a discussion of how the Word can be “with God” and at the same time “be God.”
On the other side, however, are two overriding considerations for the prologue as a preaching text. First, this passage “sings,” as we have said a Christmas sermon also should. Second, its song is, at its center (verse 14), the Christmas gospel in a sentence. The affirmation that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth, affirms the Incarnation while avoiding the triviality that sometimes afflicts Christmas preaching.

We are here once again in the midst of the continuity-discontinuity tension explored on Advent IV. The coming of God in the flesh is something radically new; having never happened before (or since), it is the unique manifestation of divine grace and truth. Yet it is congruent with all God has ever done: The Incarnation is the temporal, creative self-expression of an eternally creative, self-expressive God.

There is in this prologue, as in the very metaphor of word, a necessary tension between divine disclosure and divine hiddenness. Compare verses 14b and 18a: “We have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father” and “No one has ever seen God.” Christ is the true revelation of God, but not all of God there is. That is why “word” is such an apt analogy. By our words we reveal who we are and at the same time conceal who we are. When engaged in conversation with a stranger, I am sometimes asked, “What is your occupation?” In certain instances, fearing that full disclosure that I am a Christian minister will cut off the dialogue, I say, “I am a teacher.” It is not a lie. I have revealed truth about myself, but also concealed what the other person may not yet be ready to bear. So also with God in the incarnate coming. The manager reveals divine humility while concealing divine majesty, discloses God’s self-sacrificing immanence while placing in the shadows God’s self-sufficient transcendence. Only this paradox can explain the other paradox in the text: “He came to his own home, and his own people received him not.”

The effective Christmas sermon will not degenerate (as many I have heard did) into an excoriation of people for not, in the preacher’s view, having received Christ properly. The thrust of the text is positive, and so will the sermon be. What is to be proclaimed is that in our receiving of the Word and its power to make us the children of God, we are in the midst of a necessary apparent contradiction. It is apparent rather than real, for even God’s discontinuity is continuity. It is necessary because the God who can be proclaimed without apparent contradiction is an idol of our own devising, which cannot save us.

The same dynamic is present in the epistle: God sent the Son to be born of human flesh under the law, so that we might be freed from the law and the limitations of human flesh, receiving adoption as sons. (In
our commendable desire to avoid sexually exclusive language, we may be tempted to change this latter phrase in a way that destroys it. To change it to “sons and daughters” misses Paul’s point. In the culture of that time only males could inherit. But in Christ all can inherit, for both males and females are counted as “sons” with respect to this privilege.

In the Galatians text we have again the paradox of the Incarnation: only by taking on the bondage of the Law could God set humanity free from slavery to the law. One might think the cure for sin to be much simpler—that God could simply stay in heaven and revoke the law by edict. But the gospel does not follow human logic; that is the whole point of this day.

Isaiah makes explicit the paradox of salvation also. The great God of Israel takes on the affliction of the people; God is brought low in order to lift them up. This is the source of the prophet’s thanksgiving and confidence.

The same sense of mystery and awe pervades all of the lectionary selections for this day and thus makes them admirably suited for each other and for the Christmas liturgy.

C. The entire service may center on the paradox of divine self-giving, which produces thanksgiving within us when we experience our adoption as children of God. Thus the connection between the events in Bethlehem twenty centuries ago and our own existence is clear. Christmas is not merely a human-interest story about Jesus but an act of divine emptying “for us . . . and for our salvation,” as the Nicene Creed puts it.

Nor can salvation be treated in narrow terms. What is at stake is the redemption of the whole created order, not separate transactions between God and individuals. Although we are free to reject the fruits of redemption, the Word is bound to redeem all that the Word has created. Therein is the magnificence of Christmas.

One hymn virtually demands to have a central place in this liturgy. “O Come, All Ye Faithful” does its full liturgical work only on this occasion; for only today do we sing with full integrity a greeting to the Word appearing in flesh. Despite the awkwardness of fitting the words to the tune, United Methodists will do well to restore a stanza that others use in this hymn, a stanza that employs the language of the Nicene Creed to refer to “God of God, Light of Light,” and “Very God, begotten,” not made or created. Thus altered, the hymn may be placed after the sermon, in lieu of a creed and as a bridge to the Eucharist. This order on this occasion reminds us in a powerful way of the Word’s becoming flesh in our very midst.
A. In many congregations, the first Sunday of the new calendar year has been the occasion for a covenant renewal service, and the timing has been determined entirely by the secular schedule. Congregations with this custom might begin to associate a renewal rite with the baptismal covenant and transfer this act of renewal to the Sunday that commemorates the Lord's baptism; in 1984 that is January 8.

Given the fact that 1984 is the bicentennial year for American Methodism, many United Methodist congregations will undoubtedly want to note this in the liturgy for the first Sunday of the calendar year. Wherever possible, this is best done in an afternoon or evening service in cooperation with denominations other than United Methodist—AME, AME Zion, CME, Wesleyan Methodists, and so on. This helps preserve the integrity of the morning service, but also helps counter a denominational chauvinism that blinds us to a pan-Methodist reality.

Where it is considered necessary on January 1, 1984, to sound notes about the new calendar year, covenant renewal, the bicentennial, or some combination thereof, this should be done with great liturgical care and is probably more appropriately incorporated into the prayers for the day than into the sermon. Our discussion here presumes simply that this is the Sunday after Christmas; it is neither as important as the Sunday that precedes or the one that follows. But it has its own set of lections and a distinct integrity we do well to respect.

B. Today's Gospel provides two perplexities. First, at least some editions of *Seasons of the Gospel* prescribe Matthew 2:13-15, 15-23; and one is led to wonder why it simply doesn't read 13-23. A bit of higher criticism reveals this to be a scribal error for "Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23." But while verses 16-18 may present some difficulties in content (hence, we assume, their deletion), the preacher who is intrigued by the providential possibilities in the error of a scribe or typesetter may want to consider restoring the omitted verses. And I shall presently argue for their inclusion on exegetical grounds.

The second perplexity is that Matthew 2:13 following is read this week, but Matthew 2:1-12 is not used until next week. Thus we find ourselves walking backwards. The easy answer is to skip the lections for this week and transfer the Epiphany to January 1. But easy solutions are not necessarily good solutions from an exegetical point of view. (The general critical principle, "When confronted with variant
texts, choose the more difficult reading” may have a wider application than was originally intended.)

At first reading, the passage looks like a bit of inept proof-texting. Matthew cites Hosea 11:1 in verse 15; Jeremiah 31:15 in verse 18; and Isaiah 11:1 (apparently) in verse 23. Was Matthew anything more than a quoter of chapter and verse?

To begin: The use of the Hosea passage seems forced, since it is obvious that the prophet was referring back to the Exodus, not forward to some messianic event. Confusion reigns in Matthew’s citation of Jeremiah. That prophet believed that Rachel was buried near Bethel, north of Jerusalem; so loud were her cries for her deported descendants that they could be heard in Ramah, five miles away. But according to another tradition, Rachel was buried near Bethlehem, south of Jerusalem, not in proximity to Ramah. Matthew seems to mix the two traditions by quoting Jeremiah but connecting Rachel with Bethlehem. The complexities of the third citation cannot even be explored here. It is not clear what Matthew is quoting; the best guess is Isaiah 11:1 in which the branch (netser) grows out of Jesse, perhaps garbled with several other passages in which the Nazarite vow is mentioned. Whatever reference Matthew has in mind is clumsily associated with the town of Nazareth.

To make any sense of this, we once again point out Matthew’s concern for continuity. The central thrust of this passage is that God triumphs over those who would frustrate divine purpose. In this, God acts consistently with respect to the Old Testament record. Matthew first of all intends to evoke the image of Exodus with his citation from Hosea. Jesus is the New Moses. Even the names of his parents make this point: Joseph was the Old Testament worthy whose going down into Egypt set the stage for the Exodus; Miriam (= Mary) was the sister of Moses who composed the song of triumph after the Exodus, and presumably the unnamed sister of Exodus 2:4-8 who guarded Moses’ basket in the bulrushes and arranged for her own mother to nurse the child for Pharaoh’s daughter. The slaughter of the innocents in one instance by Pharaoh and in another by Herod makes the Jesus-New Moses equation inescapable, and its popularity is evident in early Christian liturgy, particularly in the Christianized Passover.

But the Exodus was only one of two critical points in the history of Israel. The other was the Exile; and it is to this that the Rachel citation refers. Rachel cried for her children because they were slain or taken into captivity far from her burial place. Not only are Exodus and Exile bound together in their trauma, but they represent God's triumph over two different kinds of adversity. In Egypt, the Hebrews were oppressed by an outside force through no fault of their own. They
Homiletical Resources

became the victims of circumstance when a dynasty arose whose Pharaoh "did not know Joseph" (Exodus 1:8). But those who centuries later were taken captive were not innocent bystanders. They were, according to the judgment of the prophets, punished for their own transgressions. They had deliberately and frequently broken the covenant with God.

The theological point is this: God was able to bring about good in both kinds of circumstances by setting free those who are bound by oppressors, and by bringing to repentance those who have strayed from the covenant. Nothing from outside or within is able permanently to thwart God’s design. That is the force of Matthew 2:13-23 and is the reason why verses 16-18 ought not to be omitted, the judgment of the lectorary designers to the contrary notwithstanding. For the double emphasis is a foreshadowing of the cross, which Matthew always has in view in the nativity account. Jesus is put to death in part because of the powers over him—Pilate and the Roman establishment, the chief priests and the elders, both Gentiles and Jews; but in part he goes to the cross because of defection within—Judas betrays, Peter denies, the others all flee. Yet out of all God brings salvation, faithful to the promise. The divine fidelity is also the meaning of the “Nazareth” citation. Whether this is seen as fulfillment of a promise to bring forth a successor to David or as the fulfillment of a vow of purity, such as that of Samson, the point is the same.

Subsidiary to the theme of divine dependability but closely related is the motif of human resistance and even depravity. Herod tries to dupe the magi by saying he wants to worship the child, when in reality he intends to slay him. When the magi go home a different way, the king takes excessive measures to protect his throne. Ironically, he slaughters every male child except the right one—and that one seeks no earthly empire (Matt. 27:11). This, too, can be important for preaching. Misdirected human power tactics against God’s dominion are a fact of life; our people are unprepared to live in the real world if we remove from the Gospel accounts the realism with which the writers would confront us. The slaughter of the innocents is not a pretty sight, but neither was the slaughter at My Lai or the terrorist bombings in the name of religion in Northern Ireland or Lebanon. The one who comes to Bethlehem faces opposition; hence he must judge before he can save.

The epistle is less directly related to the Gospel than we may wish; it, too, suffers from a questionable deletion of verses. But the richness, even of what is included, is vast and can support Matthew’s point without being forced. The phrase “according to the purpose of his will” (Eph. 1:5) is one example. Others are “the hope to which he has
called you” (1:18) and “the immeasurable greatness of his power” (1:19). Finally, 1:20-23 is pertinent in light of Matthew’s foreshadowing of the cross. It is likely that the preacher may weave these texts into the proclamation of the Matthew text without making them dominant features of the sermon.

*Seasons of the Gospel* provides a choice for the Old Testament lection, and while Protestants need to be exposed to the Apocrypha (Ecclesiasticus 24, in this instance), the Isaiah passage suggested for the day refers more readily to Matthew’s concerns. God has acted to save and will continue to do so. Not only has the Lord done certain things (61:10); but the Lord will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth (61:11) and will vindicate us and give us a new name and a new status (62:1-3). Hope for the future is called forth by a remembrance of the past. Matthew points to what will happen in the story of Jesus by recalling the Exodus and the Exile. As we remember the whole Gospel story, we find confidence for our own future, knowing that God cannot be stymied either by the external forces of oppressors or by our own rebellion and idolatry.

C. The liturgy today lacks the great expectancy of Advent IV and the intense joy of Christmas Eve and Day. Nor does it have the richness of next week’s Epiphany—Baptism theme. That is as it should be. Interludes are important in human life, and the attempt to sustain a “liturgical high” across a period of four Sundays is unrealistic. Nevertheless the theme of God’s faithfulness in the face of human perversity can unite the various elements in the liturgy.

Carols and anthems are still appropriate, but by this point some variety will be needed. Although our Christmas music hardly abounds with references to the slaughter of the innocents and the flight into Egypt, we are fortunate to have the sixteenth-century Coventry Carol, “Lullay, Thou Little Tiny Child.” Taken from a mystery play that depicted the massacre and escape, this carol may be considered as an anthem for the day. Two possible hymns for congregational use are found in the *Supplement to the Book of Hymns*: “Born in the Night,” with its haunting petitions, and “Who Is He in Yonder Stall?” The latter, beloved in the Evangelical United Brethren tradition, begins with the nativity, moves through the Passion, death, and Resurrection, and concludes with Christ’s reign. Of similar design and theme is the Japanese hymn “Behold the Man” from the recently published volume, *Hymns from the Four Winds.* Also to be considered is “Oh, Mary, Don’t You Weep, Don’t You Mourn” from *Songs of Zion.* Although here Mary is being addressed at the foot of the cross with the assurance that Pharaoh’s army was drowned, this lovely spiritual can be sung today in relation to Matthew’s use of the Exodus theme.
HOMILETICAL RESOURCES

On this day in particular, the prayers will appropriately include intercessions for those who impede God's righteousness, especially for the Pharaohs and the Herods of this present age, that they may repent. The prayers also will include words of confession and repentance from us; for we have fallen into the exile of our own idolatries.

If the old year-new year theme needs to be sounded in the service, a point of contact between this theme and the lections for the day can be incorporated into the prayer of thanksgiving: We remember with gratitude God's faithfulness in the past, and from this we find hope for the present and future.

THE EPIPHANY AND BAPTISM OF THE LORD

Lections


To combine these two liturgical events is not as odd or forced as it may appear. Indeed, in the Eastern Orthodox churches, the baptism of the Lord is the primary focus of the Epiphany liturgy. The Epiphany has been associated largely with the arrival of the magi. But in both East and West the day is above all an identification festival. The events at the baptism and the heavenly voice make manifest who Jesus is; the magi, by their own identity and by the gifts they bring, declare Christ's mission and ministry.

The principal function of the liturgy today is to proclaim this identity and to invite Christ's people to renew their covenant commitment as they remember the revelatory events commemorated. This day forms the closing bracket of a liturgical complex that began on the Sunday prior to Advent. Today is not the beginning of a new liturgical season, as so often we have been taught; for now we count Sundays after the Epiphany rather than in Epiphanytide. Next week we begin to read in course through the early chapters of I Corinthians for the seven Sundays up to Transfiguration. The fact that we are reading in course rather than skipping about to find epistles related thematically to the Gospel lection indicates that these Sundays are not thematically related across all three readings. The import for January 8 is this: We may properly use this as the conclusion of the Advent-Christmas cycle and make the renewal of the baptismal covenant an enacted response to all that has occurred liturgically since November 20. As previously indicated, we had on January 1 a lessening of liturgical intensity. Now
for one day that intensity is somewhat heightened, prior to a prolonged pre-Lenten relaxation.

B. For Matthew a central concern of the magi narrative is that Christ has come for the Gentiles as well as the Jews, but in a way that involves interdependency. To a point the Gentiles are guided by a phenomenon of nature (the star); but beyond that they must rely upon revelation (the Hebrew Scriptures) for guidance. Salvation is for all, but it is from the Jews; Matthew, writing for a mixed community, wants immediately to set at rest any claims to exclusivism by the Jews and any fear of exclusion or pride of autonomy by the Gentiles. Christ is the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets, a fact repeatedly emphasized in Matthew's Gospel. This is one identifying mark of Messiah.

How much more about the nature of Jesus Christ should be derived from Matthew 2:1-12 is a matter of opinion. As early as Irenaeus, the gifts of the magi were given symbolic significance: gold = royalty; frankincense = divinity; myrrh = suffering and death. To what extent Matthew had such identifications in mind is unclear. Certainly gold and incense were popularly associated with royalty and deity in his time; and myrrh is specifically mentioned by Mark and John in connection with Jesus' suffering and burial. Therefore the identification certainly has a status above that of mere conjecture or superstitious invention and has been implanted securely in popular piety through its appearance in carols about the magi (e.g., "We Three Kings of Orient Are"). Another custom of popular piety clearly is beyond exegetical basis, yet consonant with Matthew's general viewpoint. Once the number of magi was set at three (Matthew specifies only the kinds of gifts, not the number of the donors), one came to be depicted as young, one middle-aged, and one elderly; one was black, one white, and the third either white or yellow. Fanciful as this may be, it identifies Jesus as Matthew did—the one who comes to people in every condition of life.

After the infancy narrative, there is silence of decades in the story of Jesus. When the account is taken up again, however, once more there is a concern for identification. It is the Lord—not just anyone—for whom John is preparing the way in the wilderness. The one who comes after John will come with the Spirit and fire. If such language is a bit obscure, the veil is lifted at the baptism. The heavens open, the Spirit comes, and a voice declares that this Jesus is God's beloved Son. What was made known to the magi through a star and the Hebrew Scriptures is now declared in a more direct and a more public manner.

The baptism of Jesus is the inauguration of an era that is new and yet consistent with that which it fulfills. At this event are the same things cited in Genesis 1:1-3—water, the Spirit, and God's voice. If Matthew is
more subtle than Paul in affirming Christ's new creation, he is no less insistent. Messiah is identified as the one who has a redemptive mission to the whole creation and all of its people.

This Matthean perspective is amplified in the other readings we have chosen for the day. In Acts, Peter declares that God shows no partiality but accepts persons from every nation; for Jesus "went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed" (10:38). Such a confession from the mouth of that bigot, Peter, carries double weight! Peter's conversion to inclusiveness can be understood only as divine grace, for it follows on the vision of the unclean things that Peter is invited to eat. God initiates the revelatory dream; Peter responds. Here is the other side of the interdependence about which we spoke earlier: the Gentile magi receive instruction from the Hebrew Scriptures; the chief of the Jewish apostles of Jesus receives enlightenment from an encounter with a Gentile. Christ "is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility" (Eph. 2:14).

The characterization of the messianic servant in Isaiah 42 further identifies the mission of Jesus. He will establish justice in the earth. He is a covenant to the people, a light to the nations—i.e., the Gentiles. He delivers the prisoners and brings forth new things. These motifs clearly relate to the New Testament readings.

C. The entire liturgy is bound together by the relationship between Jesus Christ's own identity and the identity he grants to us by grace through faith. We are incorporated into the covenant of his new creation and called to carry his righteousness and justice to all peoples. We share his ministry of doing good, releasing the prisoners, delivering the needy and the poor, and establishing peace in the earth.

In this connection and on this occasion emphasis upon our baptismal covenant is important; for it is in baptism that we receive our identity and are bound to him whose baptism we remember. If at all possible, baptisms should occur in today's liturgy in order that the rite of renewal can be made in a fully baptismal context. When there are no baptisms, the renewal rite can be used alone, employing the form in the recent baptismal formularies of our denomination.

Baptism and baptismal renewal are most appropriately placed after today's sermon. Thus the preaching, without being overly didactic, gives the necessary interpretation for what is to follow. The paucity of baptismal hymns in the United Methodist Book of Hymns is alleviated by the inclusion of seven baptismal texts in the Supplement to the Book of Hymns; see the topical index under "sacraments." The prayers for the day may well include petitions for missionaries and for all who give themselves to the cause of social justice.

The service as a whole should seek not only to recall the coming of
the magi and the baptism of Jesus but also to give to those who worship a sense of being incorporated into him whose identity is proclaimed and whose mission is made manifest in the reality of daily living.

NOTES

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2. Antiphons to be spoken are found on pages 50-51 of Seasons of the Gospel. Hymn 354 in the United Methodist Book of Hymns provides a sung version of antiphons 7, 3, 6, and 5. Those wishing to sing all seven antiphons can find the missing ones by looking at hymnals from other denominations.
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