QUARTERLY REVIEW

SPECIAL ISSUE: THE UNITED METHODIST BICENTENARY

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EDITORIAL

It Never Got Much Better than This

Forty years ago there was a comic book that featured historical figures. When a crisis arose, the hero could work through a time-warp to summon those persons whose talents were noted for the particular circumstances. If you had to organize a defense against a wily foe, for example, you might call on General Robert E. Lee. If you had a communications problem you might try Marconi or Alexander Graham Bell. Sometimes you would call a conference of several persons, a sort of Supersummit, in which Napoleon, John Milton, and Socrates could consult together. The results were predictably successful, which probably did not teach us much about real history, but at least it made us feel a little superior to people who only read Daffy Duck and Action Comics.

The constant appeal of the past is that it was better, or if not better, at least it was inhabited by superior minds and heroic characters. Thus faced with only our own meager talents and wondering what to do in the midst of ambiguities and hard realities, we wish we had their wisdom and their courage. Rationally we know this impulse stems from rank romanticism, but in our hearts we yearn for the qualities with which we have imbued our predecessors.

As American Methodism begins to celebrate its bicentenary, we can anticipate two convictions that will be regularly expressed. One is that the Wesleys, Francis Asbury, and other heroes of the faith were on top of it all, and we need to "get back to them," whatever getting back means. The other is that we do not know our heritage, and that unless we recall our glorious past, we will lose our identity or worse. Far be it from me to try to counteract these two inevitable expressions of faith in our past. But I think these attempts to look back are highly selective and do not do justice to the persons whom we seek to honor.
At the root of our impulse to glorify the past lies our lack of confidence in ourselves. We are like youth who discover how limited reality is upon growing up. "There must be more to life than this," we may say. But reality is not like the beer commercial where "it doesn't get any better than this." The aged among us know it never was much better than this in the first place. And when we look back with honesty we must admit that we do not always like what we see.

Looking back, as many of us have learned from doing it so often, does not always leave us with happy thoughts. Perhaps that is how the legends of Lot's wife and of Orpheus and Eurydice originated. We may not like what we see, or to put it another way, we may be punished for seeing. When we recall our heritage as Methodists in the bicentenary of American Methodism, we need scouts who will help us see what is worthwhile and not be led astray by sentimental myth-makers.

Our image of the Wesleys, for example, tends very often to be frozen in time. The pictures we have of the Wesleys make them look awfully strange, not only because they look grim, but also because they happened to live at a time when clothes seemed to be for something other than enhancing the human figure. We are probably strong enough now to accept the fact that the Wesleys were not infallible. That is why John Tyson's essay on Charles Wesley seems appropriate in this issue. Charles, like John, and like many people of his day, used shorthand in his journal, and Professor Tyson's translation of a portion of it allows us to see a little more of Charles's personal life. And although the episode narrated in the journal relates an unpleasant experience, a certain humorous aspect of the situation is also apparent. Any pastor who has ever had to deal with clinging, maudlin types will sympathize with Charles and yet be able to smile at his predicament.

Smiling is not what the Wesleys were noted for, however, and their links with Puritanism were substantial. Talk about heroes who have been turned into villains: the classic case is the Puritan. And since part of the Puritan program concerned the use of money, many people labor under the mistaken impression that all Puritans were parsimonious. They were, "up
to a point,' as a character in a George Eliot novel might say. Beyond that point they were generous and perhaps even extravagant. John Wesley definitely did not advocate penny-pinching, if that is what persimmonous means. Gary Ball-Kilbourne discusses Wesley's understanding of stewardship in this issue, and although most of us remember the famous saying to “earn all you can, save all you can, give all you can,” we may not be aware of the implications of that philosophy. Mr. Ball-Kilbourne asks whether this philosophy can be integrated into the contemporary revolutionary understandings that the poor deserve justice. His answer may not be what we want to read, but it seems accurate. Looking back, we sometimes have to admit to seeing what we were not eager to see.

Supposing the bicentenary celebration to encompass not just the founders of the denomination but also the second and third generations who came between the founders and us, we also recommend some attention to nineteenth-century Methodist theologians. These were the days of denominational theologies, and it would probably be healthy for us to read Presbyterian, Lutheran, Congregational, Baptist, and other theologies of the time. These theologies are like the letters our ancestors leave us. We find their expressions quaint, their orthography amusing, and their ideas old-fashioned, and we see them as purely transitional—after all, we are the final product, and what could be more important? An objective observer might astound us with the thought that they had more to say and accomplished more than we. Thus Russell Richey's essay might stimulate us to reconsider these lost figures.

While we are looking back, we might also look around and find English, Germans, Koreans, and others who are also Methodists and also interested in their Methodist heritage. Robert Buttner reports on the discussion when these various descendants of the Wesleys gather around the same table. The result would not qualify as a family fight, but it hardly sounds like One Man's Family either. In fact, what could be more surprising, and more enheartening, than theological differences? Imagine. Right here in Methodism. Well, I never.

Other articles in this issue focus on what the church can do about nuclear war, what our stance should be toward ethnic
minorities in our midst, and the use of the Hebrew Bible in Easter preaching. The book reviews expand on these themes and all taken together strike a somber note about facing reality. Perhaps this point has been made enough, so we might well ask how the Methodists can possibly do any celebrating when the world is on the brink of radiation death, the faithful hesitate to be truly inclusive, and even the little children in Sunday school are caught up in these agonizing conditions?

If Zorba the Greek could dance after seeing his work collapse in ruins; if medieval believers could celebrate in the midst of the plague; and if the Israelis can still sing to the Lord after the Holocaust—then we should be able to celebrate when we suffer only from the contemplation of disaster, and not disaster itself. Therefore Methodists should have parades, festivals, parties, and whatever else it takes to mark appropriately our bicentenary.

Being Methodists, however, we know that this celebration has to be organized. What we have to do, though, is recognize there is madness in our method. By this madness I mean the ecstasy that always underlies orderliness, the innocence that lurks within adulthood, and the comedy that lies at the heart of sobriety. After Mr. Wesley's heartwarming experience, an entire lifetime was spent in pursuing discipline, both his own and that of his people. Methodists are really methodists. Perhaps the lower-case was the original, and the capitalization came later; but just as surely, Methodists contributed so much of their spirit and purpose and discipline to the culture that methodists became modernists. Not that all of modernism was a result of the Wesleyan movement; but Methodists were perhaps the leading proponents in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries of what we call modernism. And by modernism I mean an appeal to rational analytical methods, a belief in the benevolent efficacy of science when applied to government and institutional life. Thus Methodists in the nineteenth century were not only in the temperance movement, they were abolitionists. They were not only for clean personal habits but clean public and social life as well, and these broader concerns manifested themselves in civil service, public schools, health and sanitation measures, and the rise of the professions.
Hence the source of many of the dilemmas we face as a religious people. Modernism and religion do not always go well together. For one thing, modernism posits the necessity of elitists, or at least of specialists. Richard Poirier has caught this aspect of modernism nicely in his phrase, "the difficulties of modernism and the modernism of difficulty." Poirier was writing about literary modernism, but it seems to be true that modernists in other areas exploit difficulty—even sponsor it—as much as Ezra Pound or T. S. Eliot ever did. That is why anyone trying to solve a community problem, whether it be a flooding creek, unclean restaurants, or nuclear war, will be confronted with the rebuke, "leave it to the experts." Only the experts know about the technicalities of the matter, and ergo decisions must be left to Those Who Know. Well, if the present state of the culture is any gauge, modernism has been a failure on a colossal scale. And yet Methodists have been among those who most fervently supported modernism, and many of us still do.

Hence our faith in organization. We tacitly assume any human condition or problem can be ameliorated with an organized response. Did not a few Christians conquer the Roman Empire? Did not a small minority of evangelicals save England from revolution? (A mistake, some now think, since England has always suffered from not having had a revolution.) Have not a minority of reformers always led the way to progressive change? And so on. Given the ecstasy, all it needs is discipline and order, and everything falls before it.

If we do not genuflect at the altar of Decency and Order, what possibly can be done? As strange as it may seem to methodists, some people get things done without an overweening attention to organization. In fact, the reason they can do so much is they are consciously avoiding the escapism inherent in creating and maintaining organizations. We seem to have amplified the "method" part of Wesley's vision and reduced the "heart" part to formalities. Obviously, these are not matters for a General Conference to consider, and anyone disposed to ask how methodists can get beyond modernism would be well-advised to avoid General Conferences altogether.

What constitutes a movement beyond modernism? We do not
actually know, just as an explorer sailing through uncharted waters could not tell you exactly where she is going. But we can be confident that we are being carried beyond the programs of modernism, and if we really believe in Mr. Wesley, we had better get our boots on and be ready to ride.

—CHARLES E. COLE
Charles Wesley is well-known among Methodists and Christians of all denominations as a hymn-writer and the younger brother of John Wesley. But regrettably little is known about the man behind the hymns, Charles Wesley the Methodist pastor.

At present the best first-hand evidence available on Charles Wesley's pastoral life is his published Journal, but it is woefully incomplete. Large sections of Wesley's life have slipped through the gaps in his published Journal. The Journal entries are so terse and irregular that often one must read between the lines in order to locate his personal reflections as he went about the day-to-day work of the ministry. The recent recovery of a manuscript fragment of the Journal, written in shorthand, has filled in one of the major gaps in previously published editions. Even more significant, however, is the way in which this manuscript fragment illuminates a six-day span in the life of Charles Wesley. In the fragment we capture a glimpse of Charles Wesley the Methodist minister deeply immersed in Christian service, and the veil of silence and understatement has been pushed aside. We become privy to thoughts and details about his life which Wesley himself sought to keep from the public eye. The pastoral side of Charles Wesley is quite significant for us. It helps us see that the maker of the hymns was both pastor and husband, beset by the soul-straining responsibilities of both flock and family. Charles, quite unlike John Wesley, was happily married and was a devoted (even doting) father.

constantly found himself struggling to balance his public and private lives. Charles's published *Journal* begins with the entry for March 9, 1736, the day on which the Wesley brothers arrived in Georgia for their not-so-successful missionary endeavor. The early entries are comparatively full and extensive. But as Charles's *Journal* moves toward the pivotal year of 1738 and the herculean efforts of the ministry which followed, the entries become more terse and infrequent. In many ways, and most especially in comparison to the more polished published *Journal* of John Wesley, Charles's *Journal* seems to be little more than an annotated sermon log. It records Charles's hurried steps as he preached his way across the British Isles. Even a casual reading gives one the impression that Charles's ministry was both sustained and vigorous. And in a close examination of the texts he preached and the life situations in which he found himself, one finds the stuff his hymns were made of: almost constant pastoral service. A sort of impatience marks Charles's terse entries, as though there were many other tasks that demanded his time.

Much of Charles's published *Journal* was received and collected in serial form, as he mailed installments home in letters to his wife, "Sally" (Sarah), or his brother John. Huge sections of the *Journal* are missing and it is easily assumed that the material was lost in transit or mislaid prior to being bound into a collection for publication.

Thomas Jackson, the editor of the published *Journal*, recalled a gross mishandling of Charles's *Journal* just prior to its publication:

A little while before it was published, it [the *Journal*] was in great danger of being irrevocably lost. It was found among some loose straw on the floor of a public house in London, where the furniture of the owner was for a time deposited; several leaves in the volume being cut from the binding, and yet not removed.

Jackson conjectured that Charles Wesley may have destroyed portions of his own *Journal*. And there is some credence in this suggestion, since the emotional extravagances of the early years of the revival and the more pointed personal or polemical statements would certainly have been an embarrassment if they
were made public. Neither the faulty mails nor the possible expunging of problematic passages can completely account for the gaps and omissions in the published Journal of Charles Wesley. It is undoubtedly true that Charles was not so disciplined a journalist as was brother John, and certainly portions of Charles's journal were either lost or destroyed. But it has also become quite clear that Thomas Jackson, the editor of the published Journal, failed to use all the manuscript journal material that was available to him. Charles Wesley, because of his penchant for privacy and the unreliable state of the mails, occasionally wrote the most personal portions of his letters or journal in the shorthand developed by Dr. John Byrom. Byrom was a disenchanted medical man who made his living by teaching a shorthand system he developed. The flyleaf of the 1776 edition of Byrom’s Universal Shorthand lists Charles Wesley among the scholars who subscribed to the lessons and approved of Byrom's method of shorthand. To pry into these thoughts and reflections which Charles Wesley sought to shield from the public eye it becomes necessary to read Byrom's shorthand. A large fragment of Charles Wesley's shorthand journal material has only recently come to light. A quick comparison of the published Journal with the manuscript shorthand material indicates that none of the shorthand material was included in the Thomas Jackson edition of Charles Wesley's Journal. One might conclude from this important omission that Jackson could not read Byrom's shorthand and failed to consult with someone who could. This may, in fact be true; but another interpretation is possible. The shorthand material reveals Charles Wesley's most private thoughts. Jackson, faithful disciple of the Wesleys, may have sought to preserve the privacy which Charles Wesley himself valued so highly.

Before plunging into the text, let us note that the Journal entry for November 29, 1753, locates Charles Wesley at Bath, attending to the needs of the Methodist societies in that area. That same day he received news that his brother, John Wesley, was near death: "At two, as Mr. Hutchinson and I were setting out, we were met by a letter from Mr. Briggs, informing me, that I must make haste if I would see my brother alive."

Hutchinson was a person under Charles's pastoral care.
Charles calls him his "patient," and Hutchinson was in the throes of a mental or emotional disorder. Charles took Hutchinson with him on the forced march back to London, since he was afraid to leave the man alone in his disturbed state of mind. When Charles finally arrived at his brother's side, John Wesley had already composed his own epitaph:

Here lies the body of John Wesley, a brand not once only, plucked out of the fire. He died of a consumption in the fifty-first year of his age, leaving after his debts were paid, not ten pounds behind him; praying, God be merciful to me an unprofitable servant!

But John Wesley would live. The worst of his illness had already passed before Charles reached London. Soon John was even able to sit in the saddle for brief periods of time. The Methodist societies, however, pressed Charles to carry on John's load of the mission in London, and demanded a contingency plan in the event John did not survive.

On December 4, 1753, Charles's second day in London when John was still struggling with his "consumption," letters arrived from Charles's home in Bristol. Charles's wife "Sally" had been stricken with smallpox, and several of his children showed signs of contracting the disease as well.

The passage which follows traces Charles's return trip to Bristol. Once again he had to take John Hutchinson with him, and again Charles hoped to arrive at his destination prior to the death of a loved one. And again, Charles traveled carrying the heavy burden of ministry which he and his brother usually shared.

The passage casts light on several aspects of the early Methodist societies. The most prominent of them is the tangible caring of the Methodists. All along the way they do all that they can to speed Charles on to his home in Bristol. Especially noteworthy is the support of the Countess of Huntingdon, one of the patron saints of the Methodist cause. She nursed Charles's wife in his absence, even at the risk of the countess's own life. A second undercurrent is the debate over the medical-theological ethics involved in obtaining the new inoculation of smallpox. Here Charles begins:
I told the Society on Sunday night, that I neither could nor would stand in my brother's place, (if God took him to himself) for I had neither a body nor a mind, nor talents, nor grace for it.  

This morning I got the long-wished-for opportunity of talking fully to him of all which has passed since his marriage; and the result of our conference was perfect harmony.

Mrs. Dewal and Blackwell observed, what a fair opportunity my wife might have had for inoculating with her sister. I answered, that I left everyone to his own conscience; but, for my part, I looked upon it as taking the matter out of God's hands; and I should choose, if it depended on me, to trust her entirely to Him.

Before five I returned to the Foundery, and found two letters from Lady Huntingdon; the first informing me they apprehended my wife was taken ill of the small-pox, as soon as I left her; the second, that it was come out, and the confluent kind.

She had been frightened (after my departure) with one's abruptly telling her, my brother was dead, and sickened immediately. I immediately consulted Mr. L. [Lloyd], who advised me to fly where my heart directed. "But what can I do with Mr. Hutchinson?" "Take him with you by all means." I went and made him the offer, [End of Published Material] but took care to tell him before hand that as I should not leave my wife alone till she was out of danger, that therefore he could not be at my house. He flew out into a most outrageous passion, calling it turning him out of my house, as in vain I labored to set him right, Mrs. Phillips and Felts assisting me. My mind and body were quite spent with travel. I left him [John Hutchinson] at the height of his madness, met Mr. Lloyd who encouraged me to hasten to Bristol whether he would [ac]company me or no. I preached on "Let not your hearts be troubled—In my Father's house are many mansions," etc I met good old Mr. P———, and informed him of my journey. Strove once more to reason with the whirlwind but increased my own burden thereby without lessening his. Lay down to rest with faithful J., a man of a better spirit who knows to weep with them that weep.

Wed. Dec. 5. At Five I found John Hutchinson, after a restless night, as the troubled sea.
He had give a loose to his own thoughts and passions, and spent the night in thinking what bitter things would he say to me. All the devil could put into his heart to torment himself, or me, he uttered. Lady Huntingdon was the chief mark[?] of his malice, "that vile, wicked woman[" as he called her, that nasty baggage, that hypocritical goat, etc. etc. In vain I offered to receive him into my house if we found my wife out of danger or whenever she should be out of danger; that in the meanwhile he might lodge at Captain James' who had invited him or Mrs. Vigors or my own room in the horsefair or Mrs. Wilson's next door to me. He was proof[?] to all our entreaties.

Nec magis . . . tractabilis audit
Quam si dura villia aut . . . est marispatia cautes.10

I told him the chaise would be at the door by 6 [o'clock], when he must determine whether to go or stay. He suffered me to go without him, and I sent for John Jones to [ac]company me. Just as we were setting out John Hutchinson came. thrust out by Mrs. Felt. My flesh shrank at taking him in, a miserable comforter to me in my lowest distress; yet I durst not leave him in such a condition, a sure prey to Satan. The lightest[?] consequence of his stay in London, (where he is grows worse every day) is bodily death[?]. I therefore tried again to pacify him; but he was for quitting the chaise before we got through the city, and returning in a coach to his uncle's, there he said he would send for all his worldly friends[?], go to the fleece[?] and give a loose to his hearts desires. I thought of poor Ignatius chained to his ten leopards.11 I had all ten in one. At Hounslow we got a fresh chaise and I ever[?] persuaded him to go forward. At Salter[? a place] we rested a while and rode thence to Reading. There we had another desperate quarrel and he was again on the point of returning; yet was he over ruled (?) to drive on to Newbury, and instead of comforting me all the way [he] insulted my sorrow and spoke against my wife. I was so hindered and distracted by him that I could pray very little. As soon as I was released I took a walk by myself and poured out my heart in prayer, or my burden had been too heavy for me to bear. He was affrighted at my absence, and set upon the people of the inn to hunt after me. In under an hour I returned and he offered to go another stage to Marlborough. On the way he acknowledged his fault and promised amendment. But at Marlborough[?] he relapsed again and fell upon me for my weakness etc. I ordered a bed to myself in another
Charles Wesley's Journal

Chamber. He followed me in a transport of rage, laid hold on me and began dragging me back to his room. I did not follow readily; which made him roar as if possessed, and drew all the family to us. Had I put forth my strength he could not have prevailed but I was afraid to hurt him, and therefore let him drag me through a long gallery to his chamber. Then he locked me in. The servants without were frightened, fearing murder, and broke open the door. He [made me sit?] down and I allowed him an hour to cool, then he fell on his knees and begged my pardon for the violence he had offered me and for so exposing himself and me. I said all [that] I could to soothe him and then betook me to rest in [another room].


He had been sorely tempted in the night to cut his throat. When I came in he fell down again and asked my pardon, promising nevermore to grieve me. We set out at 7, but before we came to Bath his temper began to break out again, and before we reached Bristol, was as violent as ever. I resolved in myself nevermore to trust myself shut up with him; having passed 2 days as in hell, and came to Bristol by 4. I found my dearest friend on a restless bed of pain, loaded with the worst kind of the worst disease. Mrs. Vigor and Jones were ministering to her day and night. S. Burges, a most tender, skilful Christian woman, was her nurse. Dr. Middleton had been a father to her. Good Lady Huntingdon attends her constantly twice a day, having deferred her journey to her son on this account. She had expressed a longing desire to see me, just before I came, and rejoiced for the consolation. I saw her alive; but O how changed! The whole head faint, and the whole heart sick from the crown of the head to the soles of her feet there is no soundness. Yet, under her sorest burden, she blessed God, that she had not been inoculated; receiving the disease as immediately sent from Him. I found the door of prayer wide open, and entirely acquiesced in the divine will. I would not have it otherwise. God chuse for me and mine, in time and eternity! My poor unhappy friend [John Hutchinson] vilely awaited as a messenger of Satan to buffet me. Mrs. Vigor offered him a bed at her house, but he flew out into the street, I followed and laid hold of him. He would needs go and proceed for himself. I reasoned with
him but in vain. I told him there was but one bed in my house for me. He said I might lie out and leave it to him. I showed him the need of my never stirring from my wife till out of danger, and the great hurt he would do her if he could lodge in the house. His coughing would disturb and kill her. He answered what was my wife more than another, and I made such a do with her, that she had more care than his sister would have, who was far better than her in fortune, and a deal of such stuff; that it was the greatest cruelty in me thus to turn him out of my house desolate after I had brought him from all his friends, not to let him lodge there one night till he could look about him. He desired me to leave him, which I absolutely refused dreading the consequences. He said he would go to [Colter? a place or Cleaver: the sister mentioned before]. It was now dark. I went with him leading him, and by the way told him our friends' fears that his sister was infected by the smallpox. Once or twice he softened but immediately relapsed again into his strange madness. I comforted myself that it was my last trial with him, and having delivered him to his sister, dropped down. The strength of nature could carry me no further. Mrs. Galitin was there and ran to Lady Huntingdon for a cordial. I recovered myself in about an hour, and then Lady Huntingdon took me home in her coach. I rejoiced their hearts by "My brother lives," gave a short account of him, joined in fervent prayer, both for him and my wife; and the Lord greatly comforted us!

Fri. Dec. 7 All this day she grew worse and worse, yet still the most threatening symptoms were kept off. We met at 7 and joined in mighty prayer for my brother and her. At 10 we had powerful prayer. My very soul was drawn out and the souls of all present. At one we wrestled again and could not doubt but our Lord heard us!

Sat. Dec. 8 We expect the child to be taken every hour. I should be thankful if God spare him till his mother be out of danger. She draws nearer and nearer the crisis. God has satisfied me in "dreadful past the observation, darker every hour," yet after all this prayer ought I to doubt?"

Dec. 9 11th day [of his wife’s illness]. I ministered the sacrament at Kingswood and prayed with great feeling both for my brother and her. She is now brought very low indeed, being often ready to faint and die under her burden. For about an hour in the afternoon I watched her
while the glimmering lamp of life seemed every moment ready to go out. She got a little rest in the night. 

I preached on "let not your heart be troubled."

Mon. Dec. 10. The 12 day. All day the pox began to turn in her face which is now a good deal sunk, and her feet began to swell and burn and be sore. She is not so low as she was, yet at times her fainting fits return, and she still lies struggling as in the toils of death. Who knoweth what another day and night will bring forth?

Tues. Dec. 11. The 13th day. I was called up between 3 and 4. She lay fainting as before. In a moments pause the important die of life and death spun doubtfully ere it fell and turned up life! I prayed with her, and she revived. She has had a better night than we expected, and if she gets over another night we shall hope the worst is past.

6[o'clock]. She had a fit of coughing and feared being choked but recovered, drank and fell asleep, till 11. She waked now and then to drink and lay quiet and composed after it. Lady Huntingdon called and was... [here the ms. ends].

The entries of Charles Wesley's manuscript shorthand journal reveal a man involved in the pressure and pathos of personal difficulties and pastoral service. In him we meet a fellow pilgrim who sought the way of faith in the midst of the complexities of life. It was precisely this element that made Wesley an effective hymnologist. His hymns do not merely reflect the flowery phrasing of a bygone era, they mirror real life situations—situations from Charles's own life.

This inner connection between poet and pastor is easily seen in Charles's *Hymns for Families*, 1763. That hymnal was an anthology of Wesley's reflections over fourteen years of married life. The contents of the book cover the full scope of everyday existence. The titles of the hymns suggest the blend of life, faith and poetry: "For a Woman in Travail," "At the Baptism of a Child," "For a Child Cutting His Teeth," "For a Sick Child," "For Young Men," and "For Young Women," are but a few.

These hymns show Charles Wesley to be a person adept at seeing ordinary events penetrated by the presence of God. He saw and celebrated God's presence in mundane and difficult, as well as high and holy occasions. Henry Moore, one of the Wesleys' earliest biographers, esteemed *Hymns for Families* as
Charles's finest piece of work. Moore's estimation was based, at least in part, upon Wesley's ability to integrate daily life and Christian faith in his hymnological work:

We expect a man of real genius to be great where the subject is inspiring; but to be great in the privacies of common life, to be a true poet (While the man of God equally appears) in those littlenesses, so called, of daily occurrence, shows and elevation and spirituality of mind that has been rarely, if ever equalled.

Charles's *Hymns for Families* contained several hymns which emerged out of the difficulties mentioned in the shorthand fragment (December, 1753). One can trace his concern for "Sally" whom he often called his "dearest Friend," echoed in Charles's hymn entitled "An Oblation for A Sick Friend." In that instance he wrote: "Here us then, Thou Man of Grief./O make haste to our relief./After Thee for help we cry./Come before our sister die." In a similar way "Thanksgiving After a Recovery From the Small-pox" seemed to be born in the same situation. In that hymn Wesley voiced the prayer as his own, though he did not actually have the disease: "Peace, panting soul, the storm is o'er/My mortal foe appears no more./As brandishing his dart;/But lo, the Prince of Life is nigh./To chase my terrors with His eye./And still my fluttering heart."

The death of Charles's son "Jackie" was likewise reflected in the *Family Hymns*. The various hymns entitled "For a Sick Child" may mirror that incident in a general way, but "For a Child in the Small-pox" was certainly produced during or soon after that illness. In "For A Child in the Small-pox" Wesley sang the prayer of the child's father: "Father, by thy tender name/Thou for man vouchsaf'st to bear,/We Thy needful succor claim,/We implore Thy pitying care,/For our stricken child distress'd:/Wilt Thou not our load remove,/Calm the tumult in our breast,/Manifest Thy saving love?"

But the child did not live. The Wesley family then found themselves forced to deal with the anguish of infant death and unanswered prayer. Charles's hymn, "A Mother's Act of Resignation on the Death of a Child," reflected on this situation. This time speaking through the mother of the dead child Charles wrote: "Peace my heart, be calm, be still./Subject to my Father's will!/God in Jesus reconciled/Calls for HIS beloved child,/Who
on me Himself bestow'd/Claim the purchase of His blood." The poem concludes on a note of determined resolution in which the mother resigns the child into God's care: "Child of prayer, by grace Divine/Him I willingly resign."

Charles Wesley's hymns were, at least in part, vehicles of his own devotional life. They reflected the life of a Methodist pastor and the concerns of a doting father and husband, a person who struggled in life situations not far removed from our own. Wesley likewise sought to discern God's presence in everyday occurrences, in the good times and the bad. As seen in his Hymns For Families, Charles's hymns were both part of the pilgrimage and an affirmation of the victory of faith. They contemplate real-life situations, and struggle as we do, to find God at work in them. In this sense then, Charles's hymns were benedictions to the sort of life situations revealed in the shorthand journal. In writing the hymns he wrestled with life, came to terms with its varied aspects, and affirmed life—with all its complexities—in his songs of praise and faith.

NOTES

4. The writer located this fragment of Charles Wesley’s manuscript journal in the Methodist Archives, housed in the John Rylands Library, Manchester, England. It was found in Charles Wesley Folio IV. Thanks to the Rev. William Leary and the Methodist Archives Committee for permission to publish this material, and to D. W. Riley and his staff at Rylands for their help with the Charles Wesley manuscript material.
5. Vol. 2, pp. 95, 96.
7. In this transcription the material is of three types: the longhand material that borders the shorthand text on the manuscript fragment and that was published in the Jackson edition of Charles Wesley’s Journal has been set in Roman type and offset from the rest of the essay. Then the transcription of the shorthand material has been set in italics. Finally, snatches of longhand were contained within the shorthand, and these were published in the standard Journal but without the shorthand accompanying it; and these sections have also been set in Roman but follow the notation: "End of Published Material."
8. One of Charles’s letters to his wife, which carried the date December (though without reference to the year), seems to provide his report on the earlier portion of his journey. The context of the letter fits well the setting of the shorthand journal fragment. In the letter Charles reflects on the illness of John Wesley, mentions a “companion” and “patient” traveling with him, and names several of the people who figure prominently in the manuscript fragment. Charles’s letter, carried in the appendix to his published Journal, vol. 2, p. 192, was:
The Foundery, Dec. 1st.

My Dearest Sally,—God has conducted us hither through an easy, prosperous journey. My companion is better for it, not worse. But first, you expect news of my brother. He is at Lewisham, considerably better, yet still in imminent danger, being far gone, and very suddenly, in a consumption.

I cannot acquit my friends of unpardonable negligence, since not one of them sent me a word of his condition, but left me to hear it by chance. I haste to him to-morrow morning, when I have stationed my patient at Mrs. Booth's. To-night he lodges in the green room; I in S. Aspernal's.

Send this immediately to S. Jones, and bid her see to it, that [the Methodist Society at] Wick be not neglected on Monday night. I passed my word that I or John Jones should preach there. Frank Walker, or whoever supplies our place, must inform them, that we hasten to see my brother before he dies.

Our tenderest love to dear Bell, S. Vigor, T. Hamilton, John James c. If my brother recovers, his life will be given to our prayers. Pray always, and faint not.

Farewell.

9. A hurriedly written Charles Wesley letter, not dated but addressed to his wife "Sally," may have arisen out of this bout with smallpox. The letter (no. XXI) is appended to the published Charles Wesley Journal, Vol. 2, p. 191, and is carried here in its entirety:

My ever-dearest Sally—, Your illness would quite overwhelm me, were I not assured that it shall work together for your good, and enhance your happiness throughout eternity. How does this assurance change the nature of things!

Sorrow is joy, and pain is ease,
If Thou, my God, art here!

The slightest suffering (received from Him) is an inestimable blessing; another jewel added to our crown. Go on, then, my faithful partner, doing and suffering His blessed will, till out of great tribulation, we both enter His kingdom, and His joy, and His glory everlasting.

10. The first passage is taken from Virgil's Aeneid, IV, 439. The second from Aeneid, VI, 470-71. Filling in the omissions in the quotations the translation reads: "but by no tears is he moved, nor does he yielding hear any words," and "She is moved no more in countenance by his speech begun than if she stood in flint or Marpesian rock." The passage from Book IV relates to Aeneas's indifference to Dido's pleading. Destiny is calling him on to Italy. The passage from Book VI relates to Dido's indifference to the attempt of Aeneas to communicate with her in the Underworld. Marpesus was a mountain on the island of Paros, an island famous for marble.

11. Sometime between A.D. 98-117 Ignatius of Antioch was taken to Rome to face the wild beasts of the arena. On his way to Rome the bishop addressed letters to many of the churches he passed, hoping to encourage and edify them. The following passage from his Letter to Rome forms the background of Wesley's metaphor: "Even now as a prisoner, I am learning to forgo my own wishes. All the way from Syria to Rome I am fighting with wild beasts, by land and sea, night and day, chained as I am to ten leopards (I mean to a detachment of soldiers), who only get worse the better you treat them. But by their injustices I am becoming a better disciple, though not for that reason am I acquitted."

12. The repetition of the phrase "We set" indicates that Charles wrote it first in shorthand and then in longhand. The repetition was not accidental. His intention was to make this section somewhat intelligible even to the reader who could not follow the shorthand. Hence Wesley allowed even the general reader to know: "Thurs. Dec. 6 . . . We set out at 7 . . . And came to Bristol by 4. I found my dearest friend on a restless bed of pain," etc. This is an interesting example of the way Charles Wesley wrote the longhand and shorthand together; hiding his resolve never to travel with John Hutchinson from the general public, yet still giving the broad outlines of his journey.
13. Here the original text breaks off but the editor of the published journal has filled in the rest of the biblical citations.

14. Frank Baker, in his *Charles Wesley as Revealed by His Letters* (London: Epworth Press, 1948), p. 105, captured well the pathos of this situation: "Of his firstborn son, as is the way with fathers, Charles was immensely proud, though rather shy, defending himself against his wife’s hint about his lack of exuberance by answering playfully: ‘Why, I love him as well as you do. Only you make the most of a little love, by showing it, and I make the least of a great deal, by hiding it.’ Young Jackie only saw one birthday. The winter of 1753-1754 brought a double tragedy to the household. With John Wesley at death’s door, and busy composing his own epitaph, Charles accompanied him to London, only to hear that his own wife was ill with confluent small pox. For a month she lay ‘struggling in the toils of death,’ and henceforth her lovely features were so marred by the disease that the nineteen years difference between them was no longer noticeable. Little Jackie caught the infection and died. Once more they were a childless couple.”


European and American Methodists have some differences, it seems, over the role of theology in the life of the church.

As any dedicated dishwasher knows, Teflon is a resin put on pots and pans to make them completely indifferent to attack from almost any other known chemical, including whatever is on the bottom of a fried egg. Teflon belongs to a chemical family called organic polymers, which are substances made up of large molecules formed by the chemical combination of many smaller ones into chains. And when they get together to set up this strong, tough, heat-resistant resin, they form a family that is able to resist any chemical attacker.

The ecclesiastical equivalent of Teflon has been around quite a while. Churches for generations have generated a kind of tough, resistant, religious resin that has allowed them to slide off each other and to leave no trace of their encounter. But the odd thing about this is that it is also true within denominational families.

Take, for example, the United Methodist Church. Until recently there had never been an official theological disputation set up within the denomination that included an equal number of European and American United Methodists coming together for the express purpose of doing theology. We have been sliding past each other, theologically, for a good many years.

So when thirty-five pastors and theologians met together in a Methodist church in Zurich, Switzerland, in 1982, it was an event described by Bishop Franz Schaeffer of Switzerland as a sign: “We have a saying in some of our countries, ‘One bird does

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not mean spring,’ but it may mean that other birds follow. We need to find a common language across national boundaries to express our concern for the world. Here we have set a sign; we have seen one little bird. Perhaps a new way of speaking together may come out.”

Participants came from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, East and West Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and North America. All were United Methodists: some pastors, some teachers in theological schools, some bishops, and some board executives. A UN-style simultaneous translation made it possible for both German and English to be spoken throughout the discussions. Many of the European participants were members of the European Theological Study commission, a group made up of representatives from the European central conferences. This group has done theological work for their respective conferences for a number of years.

Four major papers were presented—along with responses to each paper—and discussed extensively. By far the most heated theme was the meaning of ordination, particularly as it relates to the proposal of ordaining persons into the diaconal ministry. Karl Steckel, a retired dean and acknowledged elder statesman of the European theological group, gave a passionate defense of a document on the ministry that the theological commission had submitted to the central conferences. Don Treese, Division of Ordained Ministry executive, then gave a report of the then-current status of the ministry study committee about the diaconal ministry.

At that time the study committee was proposing the ordination of diaconal ministers; this brought a storm of protest from the European delegates and many of the American participants. Word and sacrament are very serious theological “givens” by European theologians and to them ordination is seen to be a kind of guard and special preparation for their effective use. The study paper put it this way:

Ordination means 1) the certification on the part of the church that it perceives in the ordinand the gifts of the Spirit and recognizes a divine calling; 2) empowerment and authority publicly to preach the Word
The debate on the issue of diaconal ministries settled down to a nearly unanimous theological rejection of the ordination of the diaconal minister.

The debate on the issue of diaconal ministries settled down to a nearly unanimous theological rejection of the ordination of the diaconal minister. And yet there were many questions that came to mind. Questions that the group tried to address and, by implication, meant the group wondered whether or not anyone else in the church was asking them:

1. Which images and which traditions do you think will best serve to illustrate the current situation of the doctrine of the church?
2. What is the relationship between baptism and confirmation, admission into full membership of the church and the priesthood of all believers?
3. What is the Methodist understanding of the sacraments and their relationship to ordination?
4. What difference is there between administering the word and administering the sacraments and what does diaconate mean in this connection?
5. What is the meaning of and the relationship between ministry as understood by Methodists and membership of the annual conference (the covenant fellowship)?

The European theological contention is that there is still no clarity about the meaning of ordained ministry in the United Methodist Church. Because of this, the group endorsed a call for a theological study of the "meaning of ordination in the ministry in relation to the tradition and mission of United Methodism." This study, the group suggested, ought to take place through annual conferences so that serious theological study would precede any legislative proposals about the matter to General Conference.

of God, to administer the sacraments, to instruct and to care for the ordering of the congregations; 3) reception into the ministerial fellowship of preachers of the Gospel in our own and in the universal church, whereby this incorporation is linked to the preceding reception into the Annual Conference.
A second paper was given by Thomas Langford, professor at Duke, on "Grace as a Theological Norm in Wesleyan Theology." Langford carefully put forth what he called the center of Wesley's theology: "the grace of God, as the redeeming activity of divine love." His summary defines what he means:

The Bible and Christian experience witness to grace: justification is by grace; regeneration is the work of grace; grace preveniently takes initiative and may convey assurance of God's actual presence; grace leads to maturity in sanctification; undergirding the Church's mission, grace is conveyed through preaching and ethical service and through the means God has established for relationship. Christian life is rooted and fulfilled in loving grace.

But for Langford, grace is not just an important emphasis in Wesley's theology: it is the "ordering principle for [Wesley's] theological interpretation." And it was this that Manfred Marquardt, in his response, pounced on to formulate for today a Wesleyan emphasis of ordering life by grace: "Does it suffice—in order to keep the meaning of Wesley's teaching and preaching grace—to quote his writings or to repeat some central sentences from his sermons and to serve this new mixture of original Wesleyan ingredients as a Methodist cake?" He wryly commented that this would not be digestible nor profound nor Wesleyan.

Marquardt asks us to remember the basic elements of Wesley's understanding of grace: the initiative of God's redeeming love, its effective reality in the lives of people and the dialectical interdependence of God's unmerited activity with human response. In view of this, he tentatively suggests that we substitute (as does Langford) for the term "grace" the phrase "God's redeeming love" or "God's renewing love" and that this would be in line with Wesley's moving from legal to personal modes for interpreting the relation of God to persons.

Marquardt also tackled the difficult problem of regaining Wesley's teaching about prevenient grace. He thinks that we should do more theological work on this issue at three crucial points. One is to seek to understand how prevenient grace works within everyone. If, as Wesley asserts, "there is a measure of free will supernaturally restored to every man," how does this
work and how can it be identified as God's activity so that persons can recognize their responsibility and obligation to work for their eternal destiny?

A second issue is to seek to redefine for our time the difficult tension between the giving of this grace by God to all people and the obligation we have to react and to cooperate with that grace for our lives. The third issue is to try to reformulate what Wesley put too easily together: previenient grace and moral conscience. Marquardt contends that it is clear now that conscience can no longer simply be identified with the voice of God, since the conscience is so amenable to parents, cultures, and social groups. The recognition of the will of God must come for us through careful exegetical, historical, and systematic work on the revelation in Christ.

A young Czech pastor, Pavel Prochazka, gave a comprehensive paper searching for the meaning of tradition in John Wesley's practice—a rich field, given Wesley's love of many aspects of church tradition that he made available to the Methodist societies. Prochazka concluded that the meaning of tradition in the theological concept of John Wesley can be condensed into a slogan: "Orthodoxy yes, but orthopraxis too!"

A final paper by Helmut Nausner, an Austrian pastor, raised a theological issue rarely brought to the attention of a less theologically inclined American United Methodism. He wondered about the theological meaning of the Book of Discipline. Also in his paper he spoke of the theological resources in the Book of Discipline, which, for him, included the Book of Worship.

Starting out with the somewhat startling statement (from an American point of view) that "to be concerned about the Book of Discipline, is to be concerned about the gospel, its shaping of life—as a church and as individuals—and about our missional responsibility," he raised the knotty issue of the theological meaning of church law. Europeans come to this problem from the standpoint that the church law and civil law support each other in countries without the separation of church and state. From this point of view, the "laws" in the Book of Discipline often take on much more important meaning than they do for Americans who, more often than not, see the book as a kind of administrative manual that gets changed every four years.
We do have a "theology" of the Discipline, but it rarely gets articulated and, therefore, goes more as an assumption, unexamined.

We do have a "theology" of the Discipline, but it rarely gets articulated and, therefore, goes more as an assumption, unexamined. This is too bad because the church's experience over the centuries indicates that there is a link between obedience to church rules or disciplines or law and obedience to
God. The monastic movement is the prime example of this, but so also are the many sect groups, including the early Methodist societies, where rather rigid and specific rules were set forth for the daily living of the Christian life. But our Book of Discipline does not, in fact, function that way for us.

There may be a couple of places in the Discipline where it comes close. Certainly, if we include the Book of Worship as part of the Discipline, there is some semblance of semi-official liturgies that function, if not as rule, at least as guide. The "quadrilateral" statement is probably the closest to what Nausner is talking about and there is evidence that it is becoming something that shapes our lives and thoughts (though hardly in the same daily way that the early Methodist rules guided people in their daily lives). And perhaps the "Social Principles" act as theological principles that can guide our obedience to God in social questions. But for a church that spends so much money and time on what goes into the Discipline (for the entire General Conference legislative work is geared specifically for that purpose alone) every four years, we ought to be able to reap a more theologically bountiful harvest.

Any time people get together from across national boundaries, even those within the same church, many nontheological issues come to the front. This was true at Zurich. Let me note three that were particularly striking.

1. It is quite noticeable that there is a high level of involvement and interest by European Methodists in the area of theology. They are much more serious, on the whole, about Wesleyan theology than we are in America. Their theological commission was raised for the purpose of helping the annual conferences deal with some of the issues that are debated administratively. This commission has issued papers on such subjects as confirmation, sanctification, piety, charisma and renewal of the church, holiness as Christian freedom, and ministry. It is not too strong to say that the European Methodist church is oriented more around theology; the American church more around pragmatic programs.

2. It is always stimulating to see theological language act as a universal church language that cuts across national and cultural lines. In this respect, theology is a little like music. To talk about
grace, about God's love, about tradition, about the priesthood of all believers, about growing in love, etc., is to talk about what we are all about in our living in whatever culture or nation.

3. But the other side of number two is to recognize that there is no such thing as a pure theological language where everyone puts the same meaning into every word. In any theological discussion we are all conditioned by our cultural setting. Our theological language, and the convictions that language expresses, are shaped, in part, by our political, social, economic, sexual, and ecclesiastical settings from which we come. This was experienced at Zurich as we gradually began to recognize the vastly different settings of the United Methodist churches in Europe and America. In Europe, United Methodism is a missionary church, a minority church. And it is a free church set in the middle of a dominant culture with a long tradition of state churches where ecclesiastical law can actually be enforced by civil law (or, as in the case of Eastern European churches, can be severely limited by governmental decree). In America, United Methodism is a large middle-class denomination given not so much to a missionary stance as to a holding operation of a majority establishment, yet, at the same time, one that is firmly entrenched in the American separation of church and state.

Talking theologically in a setting of two different traditions, within the same denomination, means taking into account these disparate cultures and how these forces have influenced our theological language which expresses our religious convictions. John Wesley hovered over the Zurich conference. His words were quoted and his spirit motivated many theological expressions. In addition, now and then there was the expressed desire to translate Wesley's experience for us in such un-ploughed areas as, for example, Wesley's use of prevenient grace to counteract the rigid predestination preached during his day. This led one participant to wonder whether or not some comparable prevenient grace can today help to counteract the rigid psychological and political predestination that we live with.

Marquardt, the West German theological teacher, summed up a lot of this interesting disputation in some carefully chosen words:
The work of grace is the active work of the Holy Spirit to which the human spirit is called to respond, making love the dominating motive of life. This is genuine Methodist theology in our time as it was in Wesley’s and in earlier centuries, because it arose from serious study of Scripture and tradition and it was proved by experience and critical thought. It is in this spirit that I invite you to engage in theological reflection and discussion: ‘to understand our faith in God’s love, known in Jesus Christ, more and more profoundly and to give this love more and more effective witness in word, work, mission and life’ (1980 Book of Discipline, p. 85).
ECCLESIAL SENSIBILITIES IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN METHODISM

RUSSELL E. RICHEY

How can a church committed to ecumenism also retain its clear identity?

"Do Methodists Have a Doctrine of the Church?" So Albert C. Outler queried in the title of the lead essay in a volume dedicated to precisely that question.1 L. Harold DeWolf affirmed less ambiguously: "There has never been an official Methodist doctrine of the church excepting the brief and very general statements in the Articles of Religion and the General Rules. . . . To this day such a Methodist doctrine remains unformulated."2

When Methodist theologians have worried over our ecclesiological poverty, they have sometimes drawn comfort from our "apostolic" deprivation. We have denied ourselves a proper doctrine of the church in our concern for the world and other Christians (our evangelical catholicity).3 Our mission to convert and our catholic spirit provided us with ecclesial sensibilities—the capacity to sense the appropriate corporate Christian or churchly direction—that more than compensated for our lack of explicit ecclesial guidelines. Indeed, we have been modest enough to discern our initial ecclesial sensibilities as consonant with and perhaps productive of twentieth-century ecumenism.4

However, when the case for Methodist catholicity is stated, we appeal generally to Wesley's sermons, to his conception of the Methodist mission, to the peculiar relation of Methodist societies to the Church of England that he endeavored to sustain.

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Early American Methodism, particularly post-1784, has not seemed as promising an ecumenical precedent. It was, appearances suggest, wanting both an adequate doctrine of the church and the ecclesial, particularly catholic, sensibilities in Wesley's own thought. The appearances are numerous. The absence of theological capacity, not to mention leadership, among early leaders; curious relations with Wesley; the unpersuasive effort to appear faithful to the Church of England; pressures to produce church government and sacraments by revolution; an evangelical-pragmatic turn of mind; and persecution as Tories during the Revolution. All of these factors conspired to press American Methodists to decision not reflection, to polity not doctrine. As Asbury confesses of the Christmas Conference, "We were in great haste, and did much business in a little time." The result was a polity without ecclesial warrant. When effort was made to provide warrant, that also created dissension. And having adopted an episcopal polity, the young church had to contend almost immediately with internal criticism of it, carping from the Wesleys and attacks from Episcopalians. Other denominations, too, found Methodist polity good sport. In this period of intense denominational competition, much of Methodist transaction with other religious bodies revolved around Methodist polity. Others attacked; Methodists defended. Defended, explained, gloried in. The Methodist view of the church became a divisive issue. American Methodists, it would seem, fell into a denominationalism that betrayed the ecumenical proclivities of its father in the faith.

The purpose of this essay is to suggest that American Methodism retained far more of Wesley's catholicity than appearances would suggest.

The purpose of this essay is to suggest that American Methodism retained far more of Wesley's catholicity than appearances would suggest. The thesis, conveyed by the title and hinted at above in relation to Wesley, is that while American
Methodists (and I will confine myself for sake of convenience to the Methodist Episcopal Church, or MEC) lacked an adequate and explicit doctrine of the church, they purposed accomplishments in God's world that implied a very rich sense of church. What they lacked on a formal theological level, they often possessed on an operational or organizational level. In program American Methodists sustained Wesley's catholic ecclesial sensibility to projecting a Protestant unity of affection (catholicity) and purpose (missions), providentially grounded, oriented toward the kingdom, expressed in a shared but denominationally differentiated faith and in a Christian nation.

These ecclesial sensibilities were not well integrated with the polity. They are not particularly striking in The Disciplines, Minutes, or Journals, for instance. Nor were they developed elsewhere into an explicitly coherent self-understanding. Hence Methodism can be criticized, rightly, for its want of an adequate doctrine of the church. However, it seems to me instructive to explore some of the intellectual and symbolic commitments out of which a more adequate ecclesiology might have been constructed. In a longer essay, I would endeavor to show that these commitments suffused Methodist writings, appearing quite incidentally in journal, letter, sermon or treatise.

But the case for their mutual operation, even though not formally worked into doctrine, can be best made by discovering them together. And though one at first might suspect not, full expressions of Methodism's intimations of the church are even to be found in controversial works where its defenders were forced to think seriously about its purposes. The debates with the Episcopalians were especially pitched, brought ecclesial issues to the fore, and endured well into the nineteenth century. To exhibit Methodism's ecclesial richness in the compass of this short paper I will restrict myself to work by two eminent spokesmen who sum up the controversy, Nathan Bangs's An Original Church of Christ, which appeared initially in 1837, and Abel Stevens's An Essay on Church Polity, which was published ten years later. These were influential and enduring statements by men who shaped the church. Bangs and Stevens are best known today for the multivolume histories of Methodism by which they defined the church's historical self-understanding.
They exercised a comparable role in their own day as media lords. Banks edited *The New York Christian Advocate*, Stevens, *Zion's Herald* aimed at the Methodist people. They also furthered scholarship, nurtured the ministry, and sought the cultured elite through *The Methodist Quarterly Review* and *The National Magazine*. Bangs was editor, Stevens corresponding editor of the former; Stevens editor of the latter. These were men whose ecclesial views commanded respect and who merit our attention.

In the two works under review the keen historical scholarship of Bangs and Stevens is very much evident. *An Original Church of Christ* and *An Essay on Church Polity* are histories of ecclesiology undertaken to legitimate Methodist polity. What makes them important for our purpose is the combination of that historical sense and an acute self-consciousness about ecclesial issues for the church. They sought ecclesial self-understanding in the face of rather pointed external attacks upon and lingering divisive strains within Methodist polity. Both responded formally to Episcopal charges that Methodist orders and hence sacraments and indeed the entire system were spurious and therefore desecrative. They endeavored to do so without troubling the waters that had produced recent schisms (the Methodist Protestant Church for Bangs and the Wesleyan Methodist Connection for Stevens; Stevens was less concerned about the split between North and South). Stevens was especially intent upon explaining the Methodist system to local critics who found it un-American. He also intended "to comprehend the outline of the course of study on church polity, required of candidates for membership in our conferences" (p. 4).

Bangs and Stevens provided quite competent expositions of Methodist polity and ably evidenced its fidelity to Scripture and tradition. It would be legitimate, I suppose, to take the polity expositions as the ecclesial statements of these authors. To do so would miss the catholic environment of Methodist polity. The most lively sense of the church in these two works inheres less in the formal historical and theological defenses of Methodism than in the exhortations to the Methodist faithful, in passing remarks, in the sermonic portions of the text. They are in the order of commonplaces, assumptions, given—I want to call them sensibilities—that are placed alongside of, but not
adequately integrated with the polity expositions. Yet Bangs and Stevens clearly envelop Methodism in the wider church in several ways. A statement by Bangs is worth reproducing at some length, for it touches on five of the six themes which in my judgment ought to be seen for their ecclesial significance:

It is the wish of the present writer, that while we rally around our own standards, maintain our own peculiarities, and "contend earnestly for the faith once delivered unto the saints," as we understand it, we should needlessly give offence to none, but conform our love toward all men. It is possible, I think, to cleave to our own institutions, and yet exercise a catholic spirit toward all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. It is possible, indeed, to rise to that height in Christian experience, to be so absorbed in the spirit of divine love, and so ardently drawn forth in quest of immortal souls, as to lose sight of sectarian differences and partialities, and to be wholly taken up in the more paramount interests of the Redeemer's kingdom (p. 381).

In this passage I would call your attention to (1) the spirit of catholicity and call for charity, a partaking in the unity of divine love; (2) unity founded in confidence and oriented towards the kingdom; (3) a sense of a shared evangelical faith which transcended sectarian differences; (4) perception of Methodist labors as part of the broader missionary quest for immortal souls; and (5) the acceptance, even celebration, of denominationalism as compatible with, conducive to, common Christian purpose. Missing here but present elsewhere is the conferral of ecclesial significance on a Christian America.

It is theological sleight of hand, I guess, to subsume under ecclesiology themes that belong elsewhere in theological cyclopedia. Yet to fail to recognize these themes for their ecclesial significance would be a more grievous sin. It would imprison our historical perceptions in a sectarianism that our ancestors sought to escape. For while formal doctrines of the church had become part of the weaponry of sectarian warfare, many of the warriors felt impelled to moderate and modify their ecclesiological defenses and attacks by recognizing a broader (though limited) Christian unity in which all evangelical denominations were joined. To demean those efforts by dismissing their expositions as the branch theory of the church is unfair—not inaccurate but not adequate. Not inaccurate for they
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Bangs and Stevens, at any rate, took seriously Methodism’s ecclesial unity with other evangelical Protestants. Both expressed unease about entering a potentially divisive controversy; both desired to carry it on without giving offence; both recoiled at Episcopal uncharitableness. Of apologetics predicated upon the doctrine of apostolic succession, Stevens complained, “It unchurches most of the Protestant world” (p. 76). Aligning themselves with Wesley and a distinguished strain of catholic Christians, Bangs and Stevens sought to be avid Methodists imbued with a catholic spirit. They recognized that spirit inside and outside Methodism confident that the catholic spirit informed institutional life:

Now that efforts are making to spread the gospel of our common salvation to the ends of the earth, by the united instrumentality of all denominations of evangelical Christians, why should the breach be widened between any of them, by the utterance of those things which tend naturally to alienate affection? . . . It is much more important, in my estimation, to exemplify the purity of true religion in our doctrine, spirit, and conduct, than it is to contend for mere forms and ceremonies (Bangs, p. 23).

The unity enjoyed by evangelical Protestants required their cooperation and a civility in controversy but it was not just of their agency. Unity rested on providence. Methodist confidence in providence was awesome; it suffused all their writings, including these two. The accent on the millenium here,
however, is more muted. Still, appeal was made to both providence and the millennium in legitimating Methodist polity. A chapter by Stevens entitled “Methodism a Special System” simply overflows with trust in the divine provision for Methodist particularities. However, what gave the particularities their warrant was Methodist realization that the transformation of the world was a joint enterprise. The providence that guided the Methodists oriented other denominations in the same direction and on the same end. So Stevens in the chapter mentioned projected a world mission for Methodism under “the universal idea of the church” in the morning of the latter day, preparing for the final battle and under a special providence (pp. 204-6). It is possible to miss the unitive providential/millennial note amid the strains of Methodist triumphalism. That would be a mistake.

Similarly, in the ferocity of the theological battles between Methodists and their adversaries, particularly the Calvinists, it is easy to lose sight of their belief that catholic unity and common guidance by providence required and produced theological accord. Bangs corrected such misimpressions:

Indeed, the grand principle of Methodism from the beginning was, to lay fast hold of the cardinal doctrines of Christianity, with a determination never to unloose the hold, and then to adopt all those means to diffuse them among mankind, which the developments of time and circumstances should dictate to be necessary and expedient (p. 367).

Those doctrines—a Reformation credo plus holiness—were succinctly stated (Bangs, pp. 364-65) and Methodists enjoined to adhere to them. In conserving a common evangelical faith, Methodists would preserve a “sacred deposit committed to our care by our fathers” (Bangs, p. 364).

The institutionalization of this providentially given, catholic, and theological unity was in a threefold manner dictated by the socio-political realities of a land of immigrant peoples launched on an experiment in religious and civil liberty and yet claiming the prerogatives of the covenant. Ecclesial significance was accorded the country itself, missions, and denominationalism (the voluntary system).
Methodist participation in a Christian America—in reforming the nation and spreading Scriptural holiness over the land—is not a dominant motif in these two works. Overarching the national mission, as we will note below, was the imperative of the world. Nevertheless, it is present, as for instance in Stevens; affirmation of a providential linkage of Methodism and America:

Its adaptation in this respect to our own country is worthy of remark. While the great moral revolution of Methodism was going on across the Atlantic, the greatest political revolution of modern times was in process on our own continent; and when we contemplate the new adaptations of religious action which were evolved by the former, can we resist the conviction that there was a providential relation between the two events?—that they were not only coincident in time, but also in purpose? While Wesley and his co-laborers were reviving Christianity there, Washington and his compatriots were reviving liberty here. It was the American Revolution that led to the development of the resources of this vast country, and rendered it the assembling-place of all kindreds, tongues, and people; and Methodism commenced its operation sufficiently early to be in mature vigor by the time that the great movement of the civilized world toward the west began. It seems to have been divinely adapted to this emergency of our country. If we may judge from the result, it was raised up by Providence more in reference to the new than to the old world (Stevens, p. 144).

Sidney Mead's formulation, "The Nation with the Soul of a Church," captures rather nicely the American transference of features of Christendom, church establishment, and churchly ecclesiology to the nation itself. Bangs and Stevens did not here develop a full-fledged theology of the nation, as might have their Presbyterian counterparts under a similar charge. However, the elements of such a theology are present, as the above passage should suggest.

Much more pronounced was the Methodist recognition of an ecumenical missionary endeavor and pride in being its Protestant originator. Both the unitive and universal dimensions of Methodist missionary activity were obvious to Bangs, who taught Methodist revivals had effected a reformation that "has spread less or more among all denominations" as "the radiations of Methodism" (p. 301). He affirmed:
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We believe, indeed, that God has made the Methodists, unworthy as they may be, instruments of reviving and spreading pure Christianity among mankind. We believe that the evangelical labors of Wesley, his coadjutors and followers, "have provoked very many" "to love and good works," and that thereby gospel light, love, and holiness have been extensively diffused among the different orders of Christians. . . . With all those who are engaged in the solemn work of converting the world to Jesus Christ, we wish most heartily to co-operate, that we may unitedly carry on the warfare against the "world, the flesh, and the devil" (p. 381).

Adding that Methodism is a missionary church, Stevens concurred:

Methodism is marked with a special character and a special purpose. Wesley said that its purpose was to "spread holiness over the land;" but it is greater; it is to "spread holiness over the world." It was raised up not merely to resuscitate the English Church, but to affect all Protestant Christendom, either by its direct influence or by its example. It is a missionary church in its plans, a revival church in its spirit; and such it promises to be until the world is redeemed, if we but preserve its peculiarities (Stevens, p. 199).

In its essence, as a missionary, evangelical order Methodism was both most distinctive and most united with other Protestants. 12

It was in that possibility of Christian unity despite denominational individuality that the ecumenical genius of the nineteenth-century denominational or voluntary system lay. 13 Bangs said it best: "While, therefore, the members of the Methodist Episcopal Church are exhorted to exercise a catholic spirit toward all Christian denominations, there is no inconsistency in urging them to a liberal support of their own institutions" (p. 383). Unity in denominationalism, unity despite division, was feasible only when the preceding five understandings reigned. For then the denomination was a voluntary, religious association, a compact of those who proposed together for the evangelization of society (Christian America) and the world (missions) in a catholic and charitable accord with others who shared the essentials of the evangelical faith and sought providential guidance.

It was a precarious vision, one even then being distorted by
sectional divisions, slavery, the rising tide of confessionalism, the rapid entry of new peoples who could not share in that Protestant vision. But for all its limitations, it was a noble attempt to see beyond disunity and to envision separate denominational ventures as part of a larger Christian purpose. Achieving unity of affection (catholicity) and purpose (missions), conceiving it in providential and theological terms, institutionalizing it denominationally and in the fabric of a Christian America, nineteenth-century American Methodists (and other Protestants) were ecumenical though divided.¹⁴

One might draw quite opposite implications from this exploration. Recognizing the genius of a Methodist ecumenism that posits unity amid division and catholicity despite resolute maintenance of denominational structures, some would conclude that the nineteenth-century saga should content us with verbal ecumenism and structural denominationalism. Another and opposite reading would hold that a continuous legacy of Methodist ecumenism places a burden on its twentieth-century heirs to take unity with utmost seriousness and to do so as Methodists. Various other constructions are possible. My own conclusion differs from these and other views. Related to this difference is the program of this essay—to examine the expression of Christian unity at a given time—without worrying over its departure from theological ground (Wesley) or its bearing on twentieth-century unity (ecumenism). My judgment is that the appropriate (as well as actual) forms of Christian institutionalization differ; and that in consequence the appropriate (as well as actual) relation of unity and diversity also varies. Few would dispute the factual statement. When raised to an interpretive principle my judgment calls into question the teleology implicit in much history of Christian unity which measures previous unity by its approximation of the twentieth-century ecumenical movement and discerns the movement of past efforts toward fruition therein. That presentistic or Whiggish conception of history takes seriously the previous ventures in Christian unity but primarily as evolutionary stages whose fulfillment lies in their yielding to more recent and adequate unitive strategies. That mode of history is probably
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inevitable. Yet we should, I believe, strive to take each moment of history seriously in its own right. And that means respecting nineteenth-century American Methodist sensibilities for what they were and what they aspired to. To be sure the Christian unity envisioned was limited to Protestants (and overly confident of even their cooperative spirit), focused excessively on a nation whose capacities for transcendence were quite limited, and construed racism as a sectional rather than pervasive trait. But for all that its evangelical catholicity was a significant venture in Christian and world unity.

The lessons that we can draw from my construction are less programmatic than those of the other two readings. I do not expect a mandate for unity or denominationalism from historical enquiry. Rather I would wish for reflection about the variety of Christian unity in our heritage; commitment to search for today's form; and appreciation for the imperfect, conditioned, partial character of our goal. Ecclesial sensibilities we might still require.

NOTES

8. I am using the second or 1840 revised edition of Bangs (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane) and the 1852 edition of Stevens (New York-Lane: and Scott). Hereafter I will refer to author and page in parenthesis in the text.
9. I am accenting the unitive value of aspects of American religion that have sometimes been seen as divisive. See Walter G. Mueller's ambivalence on such themes in "Methodism and Ecumenism in the United States," in Minus, pp. 156-74. Compare

10. See the title essay in *The Nation with the Soul of a Church*, by Sidney E. Mead (New York: Harper & Row, 1975) and the considerable literature on civil religion.


Can the concept of steward be broadened to include a reformist or revolutionary view of society?

John Wesley's famous dictum, "Earn all you can; Save all you can; Give all you can," comes to mind immediately when one begins to consider his understanding of stewardship. Yet the theme of the Christian as steward can be found widely throughout Wesley's writings. For John Wesley, stewardship is the appropriate life-style for the Christian, not only in the economic sphere of life, but in all other spheres as well, from personal time-management to politics. In fact, stewardship is the form that life takes for the Christian who is proceeding on the path towards Christian perfection, which Wesley also called entire sanctification. Those persons today who wish to seek within the thought of John Wesley to discover resources for theological ethics would do well to explore what he had to say about the Christian as steward.

According to Wesley, "no character more exactly agrees with the present state of man, than that of a steward."1 In defining a steward, Wesley wrote:

[He] is not at liberty to use what is lodged in his hands as he pleases, but as his Master pleases. He has no right to dispose of anything which is in his hands, but according to the will of his Lord. For he is not Proprietor of any of these things, but barely entrusted on this express condition,—that he shall dispose of all as his Master orders. Now, this is exactly the case of every man, with relation to God. We are not at liberty to use what he has lodged in our hands as we please, but as He

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pleases who alone is possessor of heaven and earth, and the Lord of every creature. We have no right to dispose of anything we have, but according to his will, seeing we are not proprietors of any of these things.  

Humans are, therefore, stewards of their souls, their bodies, their material goods, and their intangible talents—all of which belong ultimately to God. At some future time, God will hold humans accountable for their stewardship. This notion of stewardship has at least one far-reaching ethical implication. As Wesley noted, "there are no works of supererogation; that we can never do more than our duty; seeing all that we have is not our own, but God's; all we can do is due to him."  

Wesley developed this theme of the Christian as steward to its greatest extent with regard to the use of money. Money in and of itself, is not evil; but the use of money can be. On the other hand, used by a good steward, it is an excellent gift of God, answering the noblest ends. In the hands of his children, it is food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, raiment for the naked: It gives to the traveler and the stranger where to lay his head. By it we may supply the place of an husband to the widow, and of a father to the fatherless. We may be a defence for the oppressed, a means of health to the sick, of ease to them that are in pain; it may be the eyes to the blind, as feet to the lame; yea, a lifter up from the gates of death.  

Only when the accumulation of money for one's own purposes becomes an end in itself does the use of money become sinful. Along these lines, Wesley gave his famous dictum for the use of money. In keeping with the sentence of labor imposed upon Adam, Wesley considered it proper for persons to be diligent in working to support themselves, insofar as they are able. Money can be gained improperly, however, in Wesley's view. People ought not to gain money at the expense of their lives, their health, or their souls, nor by doing anything that might harm their neighbor. Once earned, money is not to be wasted. The meaning of "save all you can" is that it is very poor stewardship to spend money on luxuries and superfluities, such as fine clothes or jewelry, or to spend money on harmful things, such as gin. This would be using money for one's own purposes,
or worse, for the devil’s purposes. Rather, money is only good when it is used for God’s purposes, and so Christians are to give all they can.

People can give all to God by doing four things with money: (1) Providing for the necessities of life for themselves; (2) providing for the necessities of life for their households; (3) doing good to those within the household of faith; and (4) as much as possible, doing good to all. Wesley did not demand the complete sacrifice of personal necessities on the part of Christians. He told them specifically to look after their own basic needs first. However, by basic needs, Wesley meant “food to eat, and raiment to put on.” He considered persons to be rich if they had money left over after food and clothes.6

Wesley described good stewardship in the use of money in these terms:

You may consider yourself as one in whose hands the Proprietor of heaven and earth, and all things therein, has lodged a part of his goods, to be disposed of according to his direction. And his direction is, that you should look upon yourself as one of a certain number of indigent persons, who are to be provided for out of that portion of his goods wherewith you are entrusted. You have two advantages over the rest: The one, that ‘it is more blessed to give than to receive;’ the other, that you are to serve yourself first, and others afterwards.7

This remarkable image of the Christian as “one of a certain number of indigent persons, who are to be provided for out of that portion,” suggests the essential solidarity the Christian experiences with the rest of humankind.

This remarkable image of the Christian as “one of a certain number of indigent persons, who are to be provided for out of that portion,” suggests the essential solidarity the Christian experiences with the rest of humankind. Christians share the common human condition of requiring certain basic necessities of life. They properly seek to satisfy those necessities, never
forgetting that they are charged as well with satisfying those necessities for others to the limits of their entrusted wealth.

But while Christians were "to make friends with the mammon of unrighteousness," they had to be careful not to become overly friendly. Although Wesley counseled Christians not to divest themselves of all their material possessions, he did tell them not to seek to increase their possessions for their own benefit. Wesley recognized the very seductive danger present in the temptation to gain and save and to stop there, neglecting to give all one can. That, however, is simply not the way of the good steward. Observing Methodists who had followed his advice and thereby prospered, Wesley warned them that

allowing that diligence and frugality must produce riches, is there no means to hinder riches from destroying the religion of those who possess them? . . . Do you gain all you can; and save all you can? Then you must, in the nature of things, grow rich. Then if you have any desire to escape the damnation of hell, give all you can; otherwise I can have no more hope of your salvation than of that of Judas Iscariot.8

Good stewards help the poor with their own relative wealth. God wills this use for the material goods God entrusts to persons. A Wesleyan notion of stewardship, however, does not seek to justify the private ownership of property through engagement in humanitarian relief. Those persons whom God has blessed with enough to feed and clothe themselves with some funds left over, are so blessed for the sole purpose of being channels or agents through whom God feeds and clothes many others. Once persons use their money in the four ways Wesley outlined as appropriate to the rule of "give all you can," they should not have a single cent left over. "'Freely ye have received; freely give;' so as to lay up no treasure but in heaven. Be ye 'ready to distribute' to every one, according to his necessity.'"9

Wesley meant this full stewardship of money quite literally, with all of its radical implications. On one occasion, he illustrated the extent of this proper use of money with his experience in the Holy Club at Oxford. One of the members (probably Wesley himself) found twenty-eight pounds sufficient to provide for his basic necessities for a year. Therefore, he gave away the balance of his annual income, no
matter whether he received thirty, sixty, or one hundred twenty pounds in a year. Elsewhere, Wesley discussed his own stewardship in handling the financial affairs of the Methodist movement, denying that any wealth was accruing to him. By his own standards, if he were to die with more than ten pounds in his estate, once one took due account of his debts and book bills, then he would rightfully accept the epithet of "thief." Such stewardship, carried out responsibly by members of a Methodist society, would not result in a benevolent system of the private ownership of property, but rather in something more radical. Although Wesley did maintain a legal right to property as "civil liberty" in his political treatises, nothing in his writings lends support to anything like free-enterprise capitalism. Instead, Wesley's ideal in the stewardship of money—though an ideal he never was able to put fully into practice—was along the lines of the Christian socialism of Acts 4:32. Since money is not the only thing God places into human care, the notion of stewardship extends to all the other areas of life. Wesley's sermon, "The More Excellent Way," best demonstrates this claim. Here Wesley described the life of a good steward to be the way of life chosen by those seeking after entire sanctification—that is, Christian perfection.

Christians taking "the more excellent way" aim at that full holiness of life in which all is done to the glory of God. All business is to be transacted in the spirit of sacrifice. Persons should partake moderately of food and always with thanksgiving. Conversation should be about serious, preferably spiritual, matters. Common folk should not waste their time and words discussing political issues over which (in eighteenth-century England) they had no control.

Wesley even classified which amusements were appropriate or inappropriate to the "more excellent way." Dancing and attending theatrical performances do not build up the person and are frowned upon. The best diversions are gardening, visiting "sensible" neighbors or the sick or poor, reading "useful" books of history, poetry, or philosophy, and, best of all, praying. Wesley summed up the attitude implicit in this "more excellent way" of stewardship in another sermon:

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Improve the present moment. Buy up every opportunity of growing in grace, or of doing good. Let not the thought of receiving more grace to-morrow, make you negligent of to-day. You have one talent now: If you expect five more, so much the rather improve that you have. . . . God is pouring his benefits upon you. Now approve yourself a faithful steward of the present grace of God. Whatever may be to-morrow, give all diligence today, to "add to your faith, courage, temperance, patience, brotherly-kindness," and the fear of God, till you attain that peace and perfect love. 14

Although Wesley's treatment of the theme of stewardship displays him as something of "an obsessive-compulsive neurotic, driven to improve each shining hour" 15 it also shows evidence of the solid framework of an ethical system firmly grounded in a theological foundation. Building upon the cornerstone of entire sanctification, Wesley erected a coherent structure: Christians strive towards Christian perfection in love by using all things God has granted to them to their best ability and their most complete comprehension of God's will. Christians therefore are charged to take all that God has given them and to share it with those in need.

Many have accused Wesley of overemphasizing the individual in his theological ethics. Some grounds for this accusation are found in the great weight Wesley placed on the salvation of the souls of individuals. However, within the context of Wesley's notion of stewardship, a strong social thrust presents itself.

Though danger exists in any attempt to apply the thought of a historically limited figure to the problems of another era, a Wesleyan ethics of stewardship should prove quite relevant in offering a way of life to Christians in the 1980s. With impending shortages of natural resources, including food, threatened ecological disasters, the tightening squeeze of inflation, the dismantling of social welfare programs in favor of armament expenditures, and the seductive lure of an inequitable economic system, Christians need alternative models by which to live.

Further outlines for one such model are suggested as Wesley applied this dominant ethical theme of stewardship to the examination of the causes and remedies of poverty. Wesley well
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understood, better than many people understand today, how persons can be impoverished and hungry through no fault of their own. Even if Christians attempt to follow Wesley’s three rules for the use of money, societal conditions can cause widespread poverty. Poverty, then, does not imply a moral flaw in a person’s character. Rather, it is a spiritual danger, threatening temptations and the despair that can weaken faith. With great poignancy, Wesley preached in one instance concerning the depression that accompanies poverty: “O want of bread! want of bread! Who can tell what this means, unless he hath felt it himself? I am astonished it occasions no more than heaviness even in them that believe.”

Wesley intended the humanitarian relief efforts set up through the Methodist societies to soften the tragedies of poverty. In addition, he also wrote a tract entitled, “Thoughts on the Present Scarcity of Provisions.” If written today, this tract would be classified as a public policy paper. As Wesley observed the conditions of England in 1773, people were starving because unemployment was widespread. Employers were unwilling to hire more people because they were unable to sell their products. Products were not selling because people were spending such earnings as they had to buy food at high prices. Food prices were so high because food itself was scarce because of poor stewardship.

Resources were being misused. “To sum up the whole: Thousands of people throughout the land are perishing for want of food. This is owing to various causes; but above all, to distilling, taxes, and luxury.” Grain that could have been eaten was instead distilled into alcohol. (Wesley exclaimed that it would have been less harmful had the grain been thrown into the sea instead.) Carriage horses, which were a luxury exported to France at high profit, fed on pastureland that might have supported beef cattle or mutton-producing sheep. Their oats could have been consumed by humans. Small family farms had been bought up by gentlemen-farmers who could have cared less about selling produce to the common folk. The gentry sat down to bountiful tables filled with luxurious delicacies while the poor starved. Greedy landlords raised rents on land while,
Taking a biblical concept of stewardship that was consistent with the whole of his theology, Wesley applied the concept in a concrete manner to a crucial social problem of his day. Indeed, rather than commenting how odd it was for Wesley to write this strange little tract expressing his ideas on the hunger problem facing his time, we can see just how naturally this tract fits as an integral part of his theology! Wesley saw hungry people around him. The fact that hunger existed was an indictment against the stewardship of the English people. They had fallen away from God. And although Wesley, limited by the range of the social theory of his day, was unable to perceive how social structures themselves could be unjust, he could see how a people who wished to be good stewards in eradicating hunger and poverty could create more favorable economic conditions through legislative means. Though he did not offer in his legislative proposals any provisions for direct governmental relief to the poor, he did suggest ways in which poor stewardship could be diminished through tax disincentives or outright prohibitions. The good works of mercy that evidence the fruits of repentance in general, the government increased already high taxes in order to finance the national debt.

To deal with this situation, Wesley went beyond suggestions of humanitarian relief to recommend legislative remedies, many of which were rather harsh, if not impractical. He put forth such policy proposals as prohibiting the distillation of grain into beverage alcohol, taxing the export of horses, taxing carriages, setting ceilings on the rent of farmland, discharging half of the national debt, and abolishing “useless” government-paid pensions once those presently enjoying them died. Wesley despaired of the implementation of any of these proposals. First England needed to regain its fear of God.
within the process of sanctification extend even to seeking legislative means for society as a whole to feed the hungry as God has willed.

Although most discussions of Wesley's political thought focus on how Wesley was thoroughly a monarchist and a Tory, his ethics of stewardship is vitally present in this area as well. Wesley's commentators are quick to mention that he held firmly to a doctrine of the divine right of kings. In his political theology, the primary task of preachers was to preach Christ. Their only excursions into politics should be to defend the king and the king's government against slander on those rare occasions when defense was required. Otherwise, private individuals ought not to judge those holding public office.19

Side-by-side with this doctrine of the divine right of kings, however, Wesley held strongly to a notion of the divine right of all persons to enjoy liberty, which he defined as having two facets: civil liberty (a person's enjoyment of all his or her legal property)20 and religious liberty (worshipping God as a person's conscience dictates). For Wesley, the sole source of authority and power, life and death was God. On this ground, Wesley opposed any agitation for democracy. Democracy's flaw, according to Wesley, was that it claimed authority and power ought to rise from the people.21

Yet for Wesley, even the king's divinely ordained power had a limit. The king does not wield power on his own accord, nor for his own purpose. He is God's steward where political power is concerned. The king's power exists to preserve liberty. Indeed, liberty finds its fullest realization under the king's laws. To this end, the king's power may extend over matters of life and death in accordance with God's will, but it is not to abridge civil and religious liberty. Wesley was quite adamant on this point as he wrote about religious liberty:

Every man living as man, has a right to [religious liberty], as he is a rational creature. The Creator gave him this right when he endowed him with understanding. And every man must judge for himself; because every man must give an account of himself to God. Consequently, this is an indefeasible right; it is inseparable from humanity. And God did never give authority to any man, or number of men, to deprive any child of man thereof, under any colour or pretence whatever.22
Wesley opposed the American Revolution and democratic agitations in England in part because he believed liberty was being enjoyed to its greatest extent under the reign of George III. The thrust of Wesley's political thought was therefore conservative. This conservatism had several implications. When Wesley spoke of government as being a "trust" from God, he was supporting the crown against any notion of rule by the people. He was very much afraid of the anarchical and tyrannical tendencies he believed democracies to hold. Furthermore, no writing of Wesley's sustains a notion of "just revolution." 

However, political theologians of today might still be drawn to explore the ramifications of the stewardship of power of which Wesley wrote. For so long, theologians have, like Wesley, expounded on matters of politics and government for the sake of preserving the status quo. Romans 13 in particular has been understood as referring to the divine ordination of whatever government happens to exist—just or unjust—for the unchallengeable task of maintaining law and order.

But other lines than the one Wesley drew might be extrapolated as well from his root of the stewardship of power, which understands that governments are judged as just or unjust according to how their laws promote liberty.

But other lines than the one Wesley drew might be extrapolated as well from his root of the stewardship of power, which understands that governments are judged as just or unjust according to how their laws promote liberty. For example, one might expand the Wesleyan concept of liberty to set up modern standards of human rights, or to establish a measure for the justice of particular governments. However, theologians who go very far along these lines would have to acknowledge that though they locate themselves within the Wesleyan theological tradition, they are travelling beyond the political theology of Wesley himself. Furthermore, a Wesleyan-inspired ethics would insist that not only will God hold governments
accountable for their stewardship of power, but God will also hold individual citizens accountable for their stewardship in their liberty!

Wesley believed the human being to be accountable to the Creator in every corner of human life. In financial matters, personal habits, public policy, and political affairs, God has given the human being resources for the working of good in the world and for the edification of the individual and society. If one fails to use those resources responsibly, one acts unfaithfully.

As with the thought of any great figure, idiosyncrasies appear within the details of Wesley’s counsels. Nonetheless, his theological framework remains consistent and sound. Contemporary Christians, whether Methodist in heritage or otherwise, who today seek a distinctively Christian way of living in the midst of a bewildering world where poverty, hunger, scarcity, oppression, and war abound, could do far worse than to recover Wesley’s theme of the Christian as steward. Our Creator has granted us precious resources in wealth, health, time, power, and all our other earthly attributes. Wesley calls us to acknowledge that we owe God absolute accountability in their use. Living in fundamental solidarity with the rest of humanity, we dare not waste nor abuse God’s gifts. The steward rightly uses those goods for the benefit of the world.

NOTES


2. Works, p. 137.


10. Works, 7:36.


18. Works, p. 57.
20. No logical contradiction exists between Wesley's holding a commitment both to civil liberty and to an ideal of Christian socialism as mentioned previously. Christian citizens would be at liberty to dispose of their legal property according to the dictates of stewardship. A Wesleyan Christian “socialism,” then, is a matter for the free conscience to choose, and is not to be imposed upon even an unregenerate populace, as contrasted with Marxist thought. However, the implication is that a sanctified people would freely and naturally choose a Christian socialism of sharing all goods in common.
23. At best, the American Revolution served as providential retribution for the sins of England and America. See: “A Seasonable Address to the More Serious Part of the Inhabitants of Great Britain,” Works, 11:119-20; Sermon 130: “National Sins and Miseries,” Works, 7:400-408; Sermon 131: “Some Account of the Late Work of God in North-America,” Works, 7:409-19. Also, although Wesley was a Tory whose heart was with the deposed James II, there is at least one passage in which he approved of the Glorious Revolution of 1689, writing that “English liberty commenced at the Revolution.” “A Calm Address to the Inhabitants of England,” Works, 11:137.
Two things explain the vitality of the Old Testament lections for this Eastertide. One is the sensitivity of the religious community in which they took shape—and have continued to be reshaped—to the changing circumstances of its environment. The other is the resolve of this same community, at each stage in its history, to order its life in accordance with the Word of the living God.

In the case of each Old Testament lection, I am talking about three levels or stages of meaning—its meaning for the Israelite community, its meaning for the Christian community from Jesus until now, its meaning for us—in the development of tradition. Since the text took definitive, if not final, shape at the first of these levels, I shall begin my discussion of the lection’s ancient Israelite context with a textual analysis of the passage under discussion. This may tempt the unwary reader into too easily assuming that my comments will become progressively significant and relevant for the homiletician as we move from level one through level two to level three. This could be a dangerous as well as a terribly erroneous assumption. It just might be the case that, in distancing ourselves from the ancient Israelite and early Christian communities, we have also put distance between ourselves and the Lord.
Today's Old Testament lection, like the entire tradition of Yahweh's deliverance at the sea (13:17–15:21) to which the bulk of this lection belongs, is a composite of JE and P materials. But whereas the deliverance-at-the-sea tradition as a whole is about evenly divided between JE and P until we get to the songs of Moses and Miriam in chapter 15, only two verses (14:22-23) of P material appear in this particular lection. Yet these verses hold special significance. They illustrate the freedom exercised by Israel's cult leaders in adapting the narratives of Israel's escape from Egypt to their own purpose. Convinced that the Exodus marked the mightiest of all of God's mighty acts, they shaped their account of this event in such fashion as to win others to this conviction. This they did, among other things, by heightening the miraculous element—e.g., by having the waters stand up as walls—in the narrative of Israel's crossing of the sea. Whereas the J account (14:21) traces the parting of the waters to a coincidence of exceptional magnitude, which, despite its incredible timeliness, lends itself to a natural explanation, the P version excludes any such possibility. God alone can be the subject of such an occurrence.

Except for the song of Miriam in 15:20-21, today's lection consists principally of excerpts from the story of the conflict between Yahweh and Pharaoh and its outcome in the Exodus. The length of the story of Israel's emancipation precludes the reading of the narrative in its entirety as a Scripture lesson. Yet the exegete must be keenly aware of the before and after. For just as Easter cannot be fully understood apart from Calvary or Pentecost, full appreciation of the Exodus demands that we pay some attention alike to the crisis that triggered it and the faith that it both awakened and nourished.

The preface (13:17-14:9) to our lection begins by taking note of Israel's avoidance of the direct route to Canaan, anachronisti-
cally called “way of the land of the Philistines” (vs. 17). No doubt, a key factor in this decision was the presence of Egyptian garrisons on the frontier between Egypt and Canaan. But the biblical narrative takes no account of such prudential considerations. Israel’s choice of route comes in response to a divine directive (vss. 17-21).

Exod. 14:10-14. All the human parties to the exodus—the agent of Yahweh’s imminent deliverance, Moses, those destined to become its beneficiaries, the Israelites, and its appointed victims, Pharaoh and the Egyptians—betray the same resistance, at least initially, to the divine plan for springing Israel’s release from bondage. And their resistance has a common explanation. Who can trust a God who ignores the obscurity of Miriam’s and Aaron’s brother of halting speech? Not Moses. Who can trust a God who ignores the helplessness of a ragtag band of fleeing slaves? Not Israel. Or who can trust a God who flouts the strength of the most powerful ruler on earth? Certainly not Pharaoh and the Egyptians. And why not? Because human beings trust the capacity of human beings. If, like Moses, they themselves do not have eloquence, they resign the reins of leadership into the hands of one who does. If, like Pharaoh, they boast great power, they look to that power to win them more power. Or if, like the Israelites, they boast little power, they point to their weakness in defense of their search for an asylum in the wilderness. In short, no matter what their station in life, human beings tend to trust only what they can control.

Moses may not have been a good enough Neo-Orthodox theologian to convert Israel to this realistic view of human nature before the exodus. But he nevertheless set the stage for Israel’s acknowledgment of it afterwards. He wrought this achievement by providing a theologically correct interpretation of Israel’s deliverance in advance of its occurrence. “The Lord will fight for you,” he announces, “and you have only to be still.” In other words, Israel will learn, if only in retrospect, that the power in control of this world is not a this-worldly power.

Exod. 14:21-25. As noted earlier, literary critics normally credit vss. 21, 24-25 to J, while vss. 22-23 get assigned to P. The two accounts differ significantly—so sharply, in fact, that the
explanation of the crossing of the sea in the former is sometimes viewed as early and natural and that in the latter as late and supernatural. The waters are parted, according to J, by a powerful east wind that enables the Israelites to cross over to the other side, unharmed, on dry land, but the waters return in time to halt the advance of the pursuing Egyptians. The wheels of their chariots get clogged in the onrushing waters and they perish in the bottom of the sea. The waters are parted, according to the P account, on command from Yahweh, but only long enough to permit the fleeing Israelites to cross over on dry lands. At the break of morning, as the Egyptians are making their way through the parted waters, no sooner does Moses heed the divine command to stretch his hand over the sea than the Egyptians are buried alive, so that “not so much as one of them” survives the catastrophe. At another point in the sea tradition, it is not the hand but the rod of Moses that is stretched over the waters (14:16). Some scholars trace this explanation to the E source.

The interpretation of Exodus 1-15 as a “historical drama” (Anderson) or “cultic legend” (Pedersen) or “hymnic confession” (Noth) has yielded a way of reconciling the historian’s quest with that of the theologian. The assignment of this material to such a literary genre does not rule out the possibility that the biblical record of the crossing of the sea is rooted in Israel’s actual passage through a body of water. It leaves room for Anderson’s contention that “the narrative is based upon real historical experiences.” But these experiences were nevertheless remembered and celebrated and written down and transmitted in a cultic setting. They come to us, therefore, “in the confessional language of worship, not in the language of scientific prose. The purpose of the story is to communicate the meaning” of the exodus as it was taking shape and being expanded in the life of the worshiping community.

Exod. 15:20-21. Miriam’s song is but one of two included in the fifteenth chapter of Exodus. The other (vss. 1-18) is known as the song of Moses. Interpreters normally date that of Miriam close to the time of the exodus of which it sings, while that of Moses—because it presupposes knowledge of Israel’s conquest of Canaan and the building of the Jerusalem temple (vss.
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14-17)—is commonly assigned to the period of Solomon's reign. Yet Pedersen's comment—"The hymn of triumph [and he
draws no distinction between that of Moses and Miriam] is
indeed on the same plane as the rest of the [Exodus account] of
the crossing of the sea"—fully justifies doubt about our ability
to date the song of Miriam. The heart of the song—"the Lord ... 
has triumphed gloriously"—is not a simple statement of
historical fact, but an affirmation of faith. This is not to deny the
penmanship of this song by an eyewitness to the exodus. It is
merely to assert that the testimony of this witness defies public
verification. It attests to a reality that eludes capture by camera
or telescope or microscope as surely as by the naked eye. Apart
from the eyes of faith, such testimony would have been as
impossible for the first generation of Israelites as for the
Israelites of our generation. No matter what the time of its
utterance, it is as much a statement about what is as it is a
statement about what was. In short, it is a confession of faith in
which the singers of this song testify not only to their belief in
God's sovereign control over history, but also, at least by
implication, to the claim of God on the life of the singers
themselves.

THE MEANING OF THE EXODUS

In Israelite history. The exodus gave the Israelites their favorite
solution to their identity problem. They could have solved this
problem by calling the role of their ancestors. And sometimes
they did. They remembered Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with
pleasure and frequency. Or they could have solved it by calling
attention to the place of their settlement. And they did that
rather frequently, too. They remembered Palestine as a land of
"milk and honey" and, to this day, their descendants call it their
"homeland." More often than not, however, they sought and
found the answer to the question of their identity in the
deliverance at the sea. Just as "The Ole Mill Stream" became a
landmark for the hero of the song by that name because it was
there that he met his beloved, the exodus became a landmark for
Israel because it was to that event that Israel traced its experience
of Yahweh as Lord and Savior. From that time forward, at least
in its better moments, Israel knew who it was because it knew whose it was.

The ritual for Israel's celebration of the Passover, the festival in which it both discovered and renewed its identity, attests to the central place of the Exodus in its self-understanding (Deut. 6:20-25; 26:5-10; compare Josh. 24:2-13). The Exodus informs and underlies the prophets' criticism of Israelite life and society; they either appeal to the Exodus as a divine model for the conduct of life or as a standard for passing censure on Israel (Isa. 10:26; Jer. 2:6; Hos. 11:1; Mic. 6:4). No less frequently, the Psalmists spotlight the Exodus in their recital of Yahweh's saving deeds (78:12-53 and other places). Then, in wake of the Babylonian deportation of Israel, when historical circumstances dealt a brutal challenge to Israel's self-understanding as the people of God, Isaiah of the exile rekindled Israel's hope of deliverance from Babylon by recalling Yahweh's deliverance of Israel from Egypt. In short, the biblical writers found in the Exodus both the clue to Israel's origin and the key to Israel's destiny.

In Christian history. In the New Testament, as in the hands of later Christian interpreters, the Exodus becomes a model and guarantee of God's deliverance of Christ's followers from whatever holds them in thrall. Just as Isaiah of the exile proclaimed a second Exodus which, although patterned after Israel's deliverance from Egypt, would nevertheless dwarf that first Exodus in both scope and significance, he heralded the appearance of the agent of God through whom this deliverance would be accomplished (61:1 following).

In our history. Let us take note of these three parallels between the biblical record of Israel's Exodus from Egypt and Jesus' Resurrection from the dead: (1) tradition bears unanimous witness to the interpretation of this event as a mighty act of God; (2) tradition betrays little effort to purge itself of conflicting details in its account of this occurrence; (3) tradition attests to the fact that this event holds decisive meaning for human existence.

Recalling these parallels, the preacher needs no additional reminder that the proper subject of Resurrection, as of the Exodus, is none other than the sovereign Lord of the universe.
(Acts 10:34-48); that the goal of this divine act is the transformation of Christ's followers, by deed as well as word, into proclaimers of the heedless love of God (Col. 3:1-11); or that, when this-worldly systems take vengeance on God's mockery of their claim to unlimited power, we are confronted, as were our Lord's first disciples, with the challenge: "Do not be afraid; go . . . to Galilee, and there [you] will see me" (Matt. 28:10; this verse simply draws out the implied meaning of vss. 1-9 for the evangelist's audience). In other words, the homilist may quite properly interpret the New Testament readings for this Sunday as answers, respectively, to the following questions: Who raised whom? What is the meaning of this action for Christ's followers? How shall we respond to those who have bent the systems of this world to their control? Employing the aforementioned readings, let us briefly note the direction we might take in search of answers to these questions.

Who raised whom? Both the pronouns in this question are important, even though the author of Acts 10:34-38 leaves no room for doubt regarding the identity of either party. He clearly identifies the one raised as the Nazarene who was "anointed . . . with the Holy Spirit and with power" and the one whom, even though "he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed," . . . they [namely], the Romans, with the help of certain Jewish authorities] put . . . to death by hanging him on a tree" (vss. 38-39). But they who crucified Jesus failed to reckon with the fact that the power behind him dwarfed that on which they had drawn.

The opponents of Jesus, like the Egyptian enslavers of the Israelites, held the reins of power. They defined the terms of social success. They set the standards for economic activity. They drew the boundaries of the ecclesiastical community. And they dispensed power as if they were the final arbiters of power. When the question of credentials arose, whether in the realm of ethics, economics, politics, or religion, they were the authorities to whom people turned for certification. And from their verdict, the masses believed, there was no appeal to a higher court.

But Jesus' disciples, in retrospect, nevertheless carried their
appeal to a higher court. And that court overturned the decision of the this-worldly powers that had mocked and crucified Jesus of Nazareth. " 'God raised him . . . and made him manifest.' "

While some of our Lord’s followers were doubtless overcome with surprise by the news of this decision, it was hardly a verdict without precedent. After all, had not Israel’s prophets looked forward to a time when God would raise up a deliverer who would side with the oppressed against their oppressors? And did they not repeatedly, in support of this proclamation of future deliverance, hark back to the Exodus as a model and sanction of this deliverance?

Who raised whom? The God of all creation, the very same God who in the Exodus had delivered the powerless from the power of the powerful and set Israel free from its life sentence in slavery, in Jesus Christ demonstrated the helplessness of this-worldly power to secure the door of the tomb against the Lord of love; or more simply, to use Paul’s words, God in Christ revealed “the law of the Spirit of life” and set humanity “free from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:2).

What is the meaning of this action for Christ’s followers? Colossians answers this question for us with a clear and emphatic imperative: “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things . . . where Christ is. . . . Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are in earth” (Col. 3:1-3). In the next eight verses (and in later verses, too; see especially vss. 12-17) there follows a parenetical section in which the author suggests two marks for identifying the people who eschew earthly things to set their minds on the things that are above: (1) they will, in addition to leading an impeccable personal life, studiously avoid cultivation of the attitudes and habits that set neighbor against neighbor; (2) they will subordinate their religious, cultural, and other differences in order that they might both experience and commend “love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony” (vs. 14), for “Christ is all, and in all” (vs. 11). In short, they will enlist their services in support of the campaign of God, the God who came in the Exodus and dwelled among us in Jesus, to break down the middle wall or partition between Israelites and non-Israelites, between Christians and non-
Christians, until all we who once were "strangers and sojourners" become "fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Eph. 2:19). The heart of the gospel, whether as proclaimed by the prophets of the Old Testament or the apostles in the New Testament, is never the demand for unquestioning belief in God, but a call for manifestation of God's unconditioned love for human beings.

As if to underscore this demand, the biblical writers are at pains to deny the beneficiaries of God's redemptive work—whether wrought in the Exodus or Christ—any right to press their claim on God's love. The Passover celebration of the Exodus voices this denial in terms of a quite positive affirmation: "And when . . . your son asks you, "What does this mean?" you shall say to him, "By strength of hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, from the house of bondage" " (Exod. 13:14).

As reflected in these accounts, the birth of Israel's claim to a special relationship with the Lord roots in the experience of the exodus. While the details of this event vary greatly, its key interpreters agree on the central distinction marking this claim. They look beyond Moses and themselves for the explanation of their deliverance at the sea. They do not become the people of God because they choose Yahweh to be the God of Israel. They become the people of God because the Lord chooses Israel to be the people of Yahweh.

The evangelist's proclamation is clear and emphatic. His message is that the death of Jesus has not canceled a single element of Jesus' ministry or teaching; that the God of Jesus is still alive and in control of the world, and that in this world—still subject to the God of Jesus, despite all appearances to the contrary—love shall have the last word. Therefore, repeating Jesus' words to his first disciples, the evangelist says to us latter-day disciples: "Do not be afraid."

The systems of this world can kill love's spokespersons, but its God is still Lord. Therefore, even though we live in a world where Pharaohs can enslave and Romans crucify and nuclear bombs cremate, fear is groundless, for the God of Exodus and Easter is our God.
A long history stands behind the Old Testament lection for today. Its roots in both world history and Israelite history are deep and numerous. While our purposes hardly require us either to identify or trace all these connections, a summary look at the background of the flood narrative is a prerequisite for distinguishing the purpose of its final redactor from that of his sources.

World literature includes many versions of the destruction of humankind. In the Egyptian version a goddess acts as the agent of the supreme deity without benefit of flood, while the Canaanites apparently knew of a wholesale destruction by fire and brimstone (many scholars trace the story of Sodom and Gomorrah to such a myth). But if a flood be not the only means of effecting universal catastrophe, it is nevertheless the most common (accounts of such a deluge have been found in the traditions of Pacific Islanders, the peoples of India, North and South America, Mesopotamia, Israel, and elsewhere) and the most copied.

The Israelite version of the flood is marked by numerous duplications, many of which also involve obvious discrepancies. These include: the account of the earth’s corruption (Gen. 6:5; 6:11 following); the announcement of the earth’s destruction (6:7; 7:11-14); Noah’s entry of the ark (7:7; 7:13); and many others. After carefully analyzing and closely comparing these and other such repetitions, duplications, and discrepancies in the details of the narrative—and, simultaneously, taking stock of their stylistic peculiarities and theological assumptions—critical scholars have reached a consensus that the flood story is a composite of J and P materials. And they assign their production to the periods, respectively, of the late United Monarchy or shortly thereafter and the early postexilic period. At the same time, they credit a redactor of the P school with so effectively
joining and editing the narrative that the unwary casual reader can pursue its contents without ever questioning its singularity of authorship or witness.

The hero of the Babylonian deluge, classically told in the Gilgamesh Epic (compounded of traditions transmitted from the third and second millennia B.C.), has the name of Utnapishtim. When the gods decree the death of Gilgamesh's friend Enkidu, Gilgamesh undertakes a pilgrimage into the presence of Utnapishtim, who relates to him the story of how he and his shipmates escaped the flood.

The god Ea warns Utnapishtim through a reed wall of the gods' decision to destroy humankind by flood, and he instructs him, step by step, as to what he must do in order to escape the deluge. Utnapishtim follows Ea's orders to the last detail: he directs the construction of a large ship to the god's specifications; he brings aboard beasts of the field, his family and other kin, a boatman and various craftsmen, together with provisions for his motley crew; he battens down the hatch before the waters drench the earth; when the boat comes to rest on a high mountain, Mount Nisir, he sends forth, in succession, a dove, a swallow, and a raven; when the raven fails to return, he and his party take leave of the boat to launch a new beginning for humankind on earth; and, finally, as soon as he is safely back on solid ground, he offers a sacrifice whose "sweet savor" causes the gods to swarm around him like flies, and they bless both him and his wife with the gifts of immortality and deification.

While the differences between this and the biblical version of the flood are numerous and important, their similarities are much too striking and precise to claim independence of the Babylonian epic for the Genesis account. The evidence is conclusive that the Israelites "took a piece of ancient tradition and retold it in order to make it a vehicle of their own distinctive religious beliefs." And, by the same token, "it is impossible to attach any historical value either to the Mesopotamian or to the biblical story."

The story of the flood illustrates the ability of the Israelites to confess their faith through the reformulation of their ancestral tradition. Just as their Babylonian ancestors had turned Utnapishtim's passage through the waters of the flood into a
symbol of their hope for victory over mortality, the Israelites turned Noah's escape into a symbol of their faith in God's preservation of the natural order despite human sin. As if to employ this example as a precedent for the creative appropriation of religious traditions, the early Christians interpreted the flood as a prefiguration of Christian baptism, the rite of passage into the new life to which we are given access through the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ (I Pet. 3:20 following).

Gen. 8:6-12. The testing of the waters by the birds is reminiscent of the Gilgamesh Epic. So also is the flight of the raven (vs. 7), mention of which, since it clearly marks an interruption of the narrative, probably stems from the attempt to reconcile the Israelite with the Babylonian story.

The dove's flights come about as close to humanizing the flood story as the narrators ever allow the hint of human emotion to affect them. The spacing of the three flights seven days apart tempts the reader to think of what the passengers aboard this ship were thinking. Just as they build suspense by setting them a week apart, they feed the hope of those aboard the craft by making each flight more successful than the previous one.

Gen. 8:13-16. The days mentioned in vss. 13 and 14 both fall on Wednesday which, in the P document, is "the day of liberation." Further evidence of the assimilation by P of the flood story to Israel's salvation history appears in the fact that the new era dated to Noah and that inaugurated in the exodus both begin on the first day of the year. The conclusion to Noah's journey ends (vs. 16), as it had begun (6:12-22), with a divine directive: " 'Go forth from the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you.' " The P redactor stamps his theological purpose on the transition from the era of the flood to that of its successor by a quite simple device. Just as he brings down the curtain on the old order with a divine word to Noah and his family, he raises the curtain on the new order with a divine word to Noah and his family.

Gen. 9:8-16. Despite von Rad's declaration that "the Flood hangs like an iron curtain between this world age and that of the first splendor of creation," the sequel to the story of the deluge portrays the Lord as renewing the creator's original demands for
procreation of the species and the exercise of dominion over the animal world. So, while life cannot proceed as if humanity’s relationship to God had never been fractured, human life will nevertheless continue and, in certain key respects, it will mark an extension of life as it was experienced in the antediluvian era.

P dates the divers eras in salvation history to God’s entry into covenants, respectively, with Noah (9:8-16), Abraham (17) and Israel (see especially Exod. 24:7 following and 31:16-17). The covenant with Noah, when compared with the other two, is remarkable for its conditions, its extension and its sign. It is offered without condition; God issues the unilateral promise never again to destroy the earth by flood (Gen. 9:11). It is extended to the entire human family—unlike the Abrahamic covenant, which is extended only to his descendants, or the Sinai covenant, which is extended only to the people of Israel; and, beyond that, it embraces the descendants of every living creature that came out of the ark (vs. 10). And its sign is not a delimiting rite (as in the case of circumcision for the Abrahamic covenant or the Sabbath for the Sinai covenant); its sign is, rather, a natural phenomenon—the rainbow—to which all people, without distinction or exception, have access.

The inclusive implications of this covenant were not lost on later Judaism. It enabled its teachers to “build a fence around the law” (as it described the formulation of God’s requirements for the Jews) without excluding all non-Jews from the possibility of salvation.

THE MEANING OF THE FLOOD STORY

The dynamic character of the growth of this tradition en route to its fixation in the Bible anticipated the course of its subsequent development. At the hands of both its Jewish and Christian interpreters, its implications have been enlarged and its meaning extended. In tracing this development, we shall focus primary attention on the Noah covenant, but not to the total disregard of other aspects of the story.

In Israelite history, The Israelites never flinched at attributing to God the creator of humankind sole responsibility for the decision and deed that resulted in the near destruction of
humankind. If all-powerful, God should have been able to prevent it. In all probability, the biblical writers were not strangers to this line of argument. Yet they let stand, side by side, narratives simultaneously reflecting the radical freedom of humankind and asserting the indisputable sovereignty of God. They were as ready to credit God with the punishment of humanity for moving outside the boundaries set by God for the conduct of human life as they were to acknowledge God's establishment of those boundaries in the first place. As they saw it, even though people could forget the dignity in which they had been created—in "the image of God" and, therefore, with the ability to discern and resist the temptation of rebellion—God did not forget and, upon remembering, acted accordingly; in short, God respected human dignity even when human beings exercised their freedom to deny it.

In Christian history. The author of Matthew portrays Jesus as heralding the eschaton on the analogy of the flood. As in the days of Noah, he says, people will be so preoccupied with life's routines that they will march, heedless to God's purpose and their own jeopardy, headlong to their own destruction (24:36-39). Elsewhere in the new Testament the analogy gets stretched still further. In I Peter the water of the flood becomes a type of the water of baptism, the rite symbolizing Christian entry into fellowship with the crucified and risen Christ (3:18-21). Just as the former carried Noah safely above the destruction that befell his neighbors, they who bathe themselves in the latter will partake of the fruits of Christ's victory over evil. From here it was only a short step to the interpretation of Noah's ark as a type of the church, and Christians were not long in taking it. They described the church as an ark that sails above the earth's destructive waters, hauling aboard all those who would escape the wrath to come. At the same time, they warned that delay of the eschatological judgment could only be construed as evidence of God's patience and mercy, as just the delay of the flood in Noah's time was.

In our history. Gerhard Nebel declared that "the past in its pastness is not what concerns me, but the past as something present. . . . I am delving into Adam in order to unriddle . . . myself." What Nebel says of himself with respect to Adam
could also be said of the Genesis narrators with respect to Noah. Assuming that our interest in Noah is similarly motivated, let us now look at the "something present" in his story that help us to unravel ourselves.  

God sets boundaries for human existence. The creation stories (Gen. 1:1-2:4 and 2:4b-25) take note of both human beings' similarity to and distinction from all God's other creatures. Like them, we are created from "the dust of the earth." Unlike them, we are created in "the image of God." This means that, whereas they have no alternative to being or remaining mere creatures of earth, we do. By exercising the unique faculties belonging to us as creatures bearing in us the divine image, we can, if we choose, become the children of God. But only if we choose! God does not compel us to control our animal instincts. God permits us, if we choose, to indulge the lust of the beast—for food, sex, possessions, praise, power, etc.—within us. God permits us to afflict ourselves with the consequences that, as day the night, follow close on the heels—or not so close on the heels, but nevertheless follow!—of our self-indulgence. In short, these consequences define the boundaries—boundaries we ignore at grave risk to ourselves and our world—within which God has established human existence. 

God respects human dignity. The flood stands as a reminder of God's respect for the boundaries of human existence. When we creatures fashioned in the divine image trade our human potential for animal indulgence, God does not trade the power of a sovereign for the love of a parent. God exercises parental sovereignty, purging what cannot be redeemed and salvaging what can be redeemed. 

To read the flood story thusly is, of course, to interpret it as a parable on the difference between the divine attitude toward and treatment of faithfulness and unfaithfulness. By implication, it is also to construe it as a thinly veiled summons to eschew the path of indulgence for that of obedience. Read otherwise, most especially as a literal historical event, it becomes simply another instance, only vastly multiplied in sweep and effect, of the kind of blind, brutal tragedy we meet in a tornado or an
earthquake. Certainly it is much easier to find God's respect for human dignity in the flood when it is read as a parable of human life than when it is read as a fact of human history.

*God, though not mindful of the human condition, commits deity unconditionally to humankind.* When God, after the flood, renews the relationship between deity and humanity, it is on the basis of a new covenant. Unilaterally and unequivocally, as if the flood has freed humankind from its self-seeking inclination, God promises never again to cut off human flesh or destroy the earth by flood.

But the redactor who appended the flood tradition to that of the creation is under no such illusion. He knows full well that human nature after the flood remains pretty much of a piece with what it was before the flood. As evidence of humanity's unchanged condition, he relates a story in which Noah, the hero of the flood, becomes the mirror of the revolt against God (Gen. 9:18-27). Thus God, in the new era as in the old, must press the divine claim for human allegiance in a heart and in a world corrupted by self-will and rebellion. This new order, even though it is "now a corrupted order . . . is still God's" order. In a word, we postdiluvians live in a world in which sin as well as grace abounds.

Here we meet the God of Christ in Genesis. For just as God showed "his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8), God also showed his love for us in that while Noah remained vulnerable to sin God promised never again to destroy us by flood. By the same token, just as Christ's Resurrection particularized God's power to turn Israel after the flesh into the Israel of God (see I Pet. 1:3-9; compare Acts 2:14a, 22-32), the covenant with Noah generalized God's determination never to write of the human experiment as a lost cause.

*God reminds us anew of the danger and power of human rebellion.* In the Noah story the rainbow becomes a sign of God's unconditioned promise never again to destroy humankind by flood. "When . . . the bow is seen in the clouds," says the Lord, "I will remember my covenant" (Gen. 9:14 following). But those among whom this usage originated may well have recalled the fact that to their ancestors it did not become a sign in the sky,
signifying the appeasement of the gods, until after it had served its purpose as a divine weapon for “inflicting punishment.” In either case, they would have had ample ground for construing it as a summons to self-examination. For if in the latter case it signals the divine anger, in the former it indicates that humanity has put the divine mercy under great strain. The bow does not appear in the clouds until, first, the clouds, as before the flood, are brought over the earth. In the interim between the appearance, respectively, of the clouds and the rainbow, who among us, recalling the flood, could fail to wonder if perhaps, next time as once before, the clouds will be followed not by the rainbow but by the flood?

In any case, it is worth recalling the fact that God’s promise to Noah says nothing about removal of the boundaries of human existence. They are still there. Neither does it say that humanity will not again trespass those boundaries as in Noah’s time. Nor does it say that God will not permit humanity to do to itself—namely, cut off all flesh and destroy the earth—what the Lord would never do to it. In short, while the promise to Noah offers encouragement to those who say, “In God We Trust,” it brings no assurance to those whose faith was expressed in the book title, In Man We Trust.

The pessimism of the Genesis text is matched by the witness of our time. The promised clouds have already mushroomed to produce holocausts as devastating as the terror envisioned in the flood narrative. And the arms that produced those clouds over Hiroshima and Nagasaki are dwarfed by comparison with the nuclear weapons of today. As never before, therefore, blowing in the wind of these gathering clouds, people are hearing God’s summons for a new generation of Noahs. And some of them are beginning to heed that call. For while they are prepared to take God’s promise to Noah at face value, they are skeptical about their neighbors who have wrested from God’s exclusive control the power to destroy the earth. And they are asking themselves the question with which the story of Noah and the flood confronts us all: “What are today’s counterparts to Noah’s ark to whose construction God is calling us amidst the gathering clouds, lest they once again begin to mushroom?”
Instead of exploring this Sunday's Old Testament lection in terms of its various historical contexts, the focus throughout, following a preliminary literary analysis of the passage, will be on its central theological affirmations. For although its key concerns, as addressed in the text, reflect the particularities and biases of the author and his ethnic community, they nevertheless evoke ideas and images that enable us to transcend these limitations. Some would call this task an exercise in demythologization. "Reparticularization" might be a more accurate term for it, and for at least two reasons. On the one hand, it suggests the need for historicizing the meaning of the text in terms of our own experiences and, maybe even, our particularities and biases. By the same token, it discourages assumption of the possibility—or, worse, the responsibility—of deriving from it some truth of omnipresent and universal application.

TWO SALVATION ORACLES

Isa. 43:1-7. These verses consist of two oracles (1-4; 5-7) of salvation, the most common form of prophetic speech employed by Isaiah of the Exile. This speech pattern consists, typically, of these three elements: words of assurance, declaratory statements of validation, and a happy forecast of things to come. Although these elements often follow each other in this order and sometimes are neatly separable, quite often they overlap to the point that they all but defy isolation. However, in the instances at hand, even though the elements do overlap, they are nevertheless obvious, as we shall presently see, after we have taken note of the reason for Second Isaiah's predilection for the oracle of salvation.

The oracle of salvation had its origin in Israel's liturgy. It came into being as the response of a cult figure, usually a priest or
prophet, to the prayer of a lamenting member of the Israelite congregation. It took the form of an assurance that the Lord, having heard the complainant’s grievance or prayer, would henceforth remove the obstacle from that person’s path and thus pave the way for the renewal of a harmonious relationship with God. Psalter scholars, following Joachim Begrich, have explained the sudden transition in certain psalms from cries of lament to exclamations of joy by tracing it to unrecorded oracles of assurance uttered on behalf of the deity by an attending cult figure.

If Second Isaiah marked Israel's answer to the need for such a messenger, the Exile itself may be construed as the occasion that elicited it. By the time this prophet arrived on the scene, the ill-founded pride flayed by the Isaiah of Uzziah’s time had yielded place to rampant despair. Members of the Jewish community, now exiles in the land of a real international power, could scarcely believe themselves to have been capable of the self-delusion to which they had fallen victim as they recalled their expansive dreams for the land and people of Judah. Face to face with the garrisons and temples of Babylon, they must have marveled at the gullibility that had allowed them to attach such great expectations to the temple and armies of Judah.

If Second Isaiah, under these circumstances, had only reiterated the doomsaying of First Isaiah, he would surely have driven Israel into a despair beyond despondency. But the situation and people of Judah, he recognized, called for a different tune. Since the problem of Jewry was no longer inordinate pride but a shrinking self-esteem, what it most needed was a shot of simultaneously optimistic and realistic encouragement. And he responded accordingly.

The realistic basis of his optimism was provided by Cyrus of Persia. With the armies of this enlightened and dominant ruler in control, our prophet could claim powerful support for the Lord’s plan to effect the release of the Jews from captivity and their return to Palestine. But he joined this hope, lest it again degenerate into indefensible chauvinism, with a transformed interpretation of the mission and destiny of Israel. He turned Israel into the servant of God’s saving plan for all mankind. He thereby revived and revitalized Israel’s covenant with Yahweh.
He revived it by interpreting the victorious campaign of Cyrus as an aspect of God’s plan for Israel’s release and restoration. At the same time, he revitalized it by subordinating its political to its religious goals and redrawing its boundaries along the lines of God’s sovereignty.

The question remains an open one as to whether Isaiah 40-55 marks an instance in which the medium became the message. But there can be little doubt that the messenger’s sense of style matched his concern for substance. The salvation oracle was exactly the right vehicle for rekindling the hope and igniting the spirit of fallen Israel.

The impact of the salvation oracles is heightened by their strategic and, no doubt, dramatic placement. The opening words of the first oracle (vss. 1-4), “But now,” following as they do an extended recital of Israel’s devastating recent reverses—all construed as bewildering (to Israel) acts of divine judgment—broadly hint at a decisive upturn in Israel’s fortune. What follows immediately and powerfully reinforces this reassuring introduction. Not only does the speaker get identified as the Lord of creation (hence Israel, the power of its Babylonian overlord notwithstanding, has an ally more powerful than its enemy; “created” and “formed” are the verbs used in synonymous parallelism to describe the divine activity), but Israel is twice addressed in the intimate vocative (“O Jacob”; “O Israel”) under the name of its eponymous ancestor.

There follows an emphatic imperative, “Fear not,” to introduce the Lord’s validating actions of a most intimate sort (“I have redeemed you”; “I have called you”) in Israel’s behalf. Use of a form of the verb gd'al (“to redeem”) to describe the Lord’s action is especially suggestive and important. This verb had its origin in family law. It defined the primary responsibilities—to reclaim the land or freedom lost because of debt; to marry the widow; to avenge the murder, etc., of the primary person, namely the next of kin, in the life of an ancient Israelite. No doubt, the prophet’s use of the term here is to be construed metaphorically, but the context permits no other conclusion than that he was fully conscious of its deeply personal history and nuances.

In case there be those in need of still additional validation of
God’s will and power to save Israel, they can easily find it. The prophet strips fire and water—the mythological instruments of cosmic disruption and so the classical symbols of human helplessness and the folly of human pride—of their power to do Israel in or, for that matter, even to do it harm. In the day of testing, they will prove powerless to frustrate Yahweh’s redemptive plan for Israel.

Then, as if the special character of the Yahweh-Israel relationship had not been adequately expressed in the identification of Yahweh as Israel’s creator, redeemer, and savior, the prophet forecasts the Lord’s gift of Egypt, Ethiopia, and Seba as a “ransom” for Israel. Although some scholars read this prediction as a substitution of these three African countries for Judah as the object of imperial tyranny, a less literal interpretation of it would seem preferable. It is best read as a metaphorical assertion of Yahweh’s readiness to do whatever may be necessary to effect Israel’s redemption. After reaffirming Israel’s special relationship with Yahweh in even more endearing terms than those used erstwhile, vs. 4 and the first oracle of salvation conclude with a reiteration of the assertion—and in the idiom—of the previous verse concerning the exchange of African nations for Israel.

The second oracle of salvation (vss. 5-7) repeats the elements and the assurance of the first. The prophet personalizes his encouragement of the Israelites by the use of familial language to describe their relationship to God; the Lord addresses them as “my sons” and “my daughters.” Then, without a perceptible break between the elements of validation and forecast, he blends the former with the latter in a sweeping vision—from east and west and north and south—of the ingathering of the exiles from all over the world.

THE TRIAL SPEECH

Isa. 43:8-13. This form of prophetic speech is used repeatedly in Second Isaiah, sometimes to take note of the Lord’s quarrel with Israel (40:12-31 and other places) and sometimes to explore the Lord’s dispute with the peoples and their gods (41:1-5, 21-19 and other places). In this instance, while there are hints of
Yahweh's conflict with Israel, the non-Israelites and their gods are the principal defendants in this lawsuit.

The question at issue in this pericope is that of theological supremacy. In earlier times Israel might have been content to settle the matter in battle. But the fall of Jerusalem in 587 changed all that. When this historical event turned the evidence against Yahweh in favor of the gods of the nations, captive Judahites shifted the site of the struggle. They substituted the courtroom for the battlefield as the arena for pressing the debate. What a victory in this setting required was validation of the claim to revelation. And this could be obtained only through proof of the ability to draw a straight line between the prediction of things to come and subsequent historical occurrences. “Who,” Second Isaiah asks, “can show us the former things?” That is to ask, in other words, “Who has demonstrated the capacity to foretell future events before they happened?”

Before convening the court to adjudicate this question, he assembles all the nations, together with the people of Israel, before the Lord. No one heeds the divine summons to bear testimony in support of the gods of the nations. But Yahweh claims the people of Israel as witnesses to the fact that Yahweh, besides whom there is no other savior on earth or in history, is alone God. The testimony of these “witnesses” is given, according to our prophet, that “they,” i.e., “the nations” (following Fr. McKenzie and the Jerusalem Bible [JB] against the RSV and the NEB in accepting a conjectural emendation for the “you” of the Hebrew text) “may know and believe me and understand that I am . . . the Lord, and . . . I [alone] am God (43:10-13 fragments).

The putting of the $64 question in the JB: “Which of them . . . ever foretold this in the past?” makes both the issue and the answer clearer. The “this” mentioned here apparently refers to what is happening with respect to Cyrus. If so, the testimony authenticating Yahweh’s claim to be the God of revelation and, by definition, the sole God of the universe would be the proclamation of Second Israel himself.

By exercise of this same logic our prophet, who reflects a keen knowledge of Israel’s prophetic heritage (e.g., 42:24-25), could hail Israel’s destruction, since the prophets had foretold it, as an
act of Yahweh. Thus he was able to contend for Yahweh, the Lord of Israel, as the Lord over Israel. Indeed, if we read with the JB against RSV and translate the verbs of vs. 12 in the past tense, the actions of this verse may be construed either as the pre-exilic prophets’ oracles of doom or our present prophet’s oracles of salvation. In either case, they would satisfy the court’s sole requirement—exact correspondence between foretelling and happening—for a verdict in favor of Yahweh and against the gods of the assembled nations and peoples.

THE THEOLOGICAL AFFIRMATIONS OF ISAIAH 43:1-13

The gospel proclaimed by Second Isaiah in this passage was a timely one. It was thus because the prophet, while he never took one eye off the traditions of his ancestors, kept the other riveted on the history and conditions of his contemporaries. He explored others’ message of what in the world God had done in order that he might become a messenger of what in the world God was doing.

If the gospel in our sermon on this passage would be equally timely, our focus in its preparation must be equally inclusive. We must, in addition to taking careful note of the key elements in our prophet’s proclamation, look at the ways in which they have been—or should be—modified in light of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. Today’s New Testament lections will be of help in this exercise, but we should not overlook other passages in Second Isaiah as a possible source of meaningful commentary on these ideas.

Israel is the beloved people of the Lord. The pre-exilic prophets sounded the alarm before the fire. Before the Babylonians razed the city of Jerusalem, they proclaimed the imminent fall of Judah. But they did not ground this forecast in the superior might of Israel’s enemies. They based it, instead, on their analysis of the history and character of the people of Israel. Israel would fall, they thundered, because Israel had abandoned the Lord.

Once the captives arrived on foreign soil, they began to take seriously the words of these prophets whom they had once dismissed as peddlers of cheap doom. And, as they reviewed
their life and history in Judah in light of their proclamation, they were forced to concede that it was a true word the prophets had spoken. They had abandoned God. What is more, they were prepared to admit it and, if necessary, to make atonement for their misdeeds and, by so doing, bring their Exile to an early end and hasten the day of their return to their homeland. But their repentance and industry did not pay off. As the days faded into weeks, the weeks into months and the months into years and deliverance seemed no nearer than when their Exile first began, they began to think the unthinkable thought. Was God, at long last, returning the compliment? As Israel had once abandoned God, had God finally abandoned Israel?

Second Isaiah answers this budding doubt with the emphatic reminder that Yahweh was not only present at Israel's birth, but that he was there as its creator and redeemer. And he says of the God in whose name he speaks, not only that Israel is called by the Lord's name, but that the Lord is called by Israel's name. "I am," declares the prophet's God, "the Holy One of Israel." In other words, all Israel's rebellions and transgressions acknowledged but notwithstanding, the Lord's love for Israel remains intact and undiminished and very personal. "O Israel," says Yahweh, "you are Mine, and I am your God."

The Lord of Israel is the God of creation. Just as Yahweh is sovereign over Israel's history, Yahweh is sovereign over the history of all peoples (vss. 4-6, 9-13). In making this point at this juncture the prophet is simply drawing out the implications of his designation elsewhere (e.g., 42:5-6) of the Lord as creator of heaven and earth. No doubt, as in the case of the exiled priests who gave us the P story of creation (Gen. 2:1-4a), Second Isaiah is reflecting the influence of the Babylonian stories of creation. But our prophet has no interest in creation as theological abstraction. His motivation and concern are primarily pastoral. What interests him is not the inmost being of deity, but the availability—and the significance of the availability—of God for human life. If he could console despondent Israel without raising such theoretical issues, he might well forego them. But he cannot reduce his people's anxiety, on either his terms or theirs, without raising questions about the scope of Yahweh's sovereignty. Since Israel's destiny has become inseparably
intertwined with that of other lands and peoples, it would hardly be reassuring to Israel to learn that the purpose and role of Yahweh were confined to Israel.

But Second Isaiah’s comfort for Israel is not flawed with a vision of a god who is too small. The God who speaks such intimately comforting words to Israel—“you are mine” (43:1); “I am your Savior” (43:3); “you are my witnesses . . . and my servant whom I have chosen” (43:10)—is none other than the “God . . . who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread forth the earth and what comes from it” (42:5). And this God is the same Lord as the God who “gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might” (40:29). “Faint” and without “might”—what an apt description of Israel!

Second Isaiah’s invocation of God’s work in creation is of a piece with his subordination of the Lord’s choice of Cyrus to the divine election of Israel (42:10-17; 45:1-7). His purpose in this recital of God’s mighty acts, alike in creation of the universe and of Israel, has but one purpose. And that purpose is to whet Israel’s anticipation of and confidence in the mighty act of God, shortly to take place, that will result in the creation of a new Israel out of a new Exodus. Or to put it more briefly, his purpose is, quite simply, to renew the faith of his exiled compatriots in God’s mission—and Israel’s.

Today’s reading from Isaiah affirms God’s sovereignty over the Exile of Israel; that from the Book of Acts, God’s sovereignty over the crucifixion of Jesus. Both accounts call in question popular theology’s tendency to construe historical success and failure as a mirror of divine grace and judgment.

This reminder raises some hard questions for us. What are some of the exiles and crucifixions of recent history that we may have too quickly converted into acts of divine judgment? Or what are some of the individual or social successes, bought at the expense of inconvenience or injustice or pain to our neighbors, that we have too quickly claimed as acts of divine grace? In short, how have we contributed to the movement to turn the Lord of the new Israel into something less than the God of creation? The serious consideration of such questions as these will enable us to discover just how relevant Second Isaiah’s words are for us.
The God of creation is the Lord of history. The second affirmation moves us to call in question the notion that divine love can or should be construed preferentially. It compels us to ask if one people has not arrogated unto itself exclusive claim to a relationship that is equally open to all people. By the same token, it raises questions about the theological adequacy of any understanding of mission and destiny that leaves the peoples and the races and the nations of the earth estranged and isolated one from the others. The issue here is not whether a particular group may perform a special role in the divine economy. It is, rather, whether that role can properly be designated a vocation from God if it be conceived and prosecuted without reference to God's will for all of God's other creatures.

"Yahweh, the God of Israel; Israel, the people of Yahweh!" This formula describes the bilateral view of the covenant to which the masses of Israel had long subscribed. And the appeal of this notion was powerful and understandable. It not only spotlighted God's special interest in Israel, but it suggested that Israel enjoyed an intimately personal relationship with God to which no other people had or could have access. If this belief fared ill at the hands of the great pre-exilic prophets, the Babylonian defeat of Judah put it under even greater strain. In increasing numbers, the Jewish exiles accepted history's negative verdict on the discredited theology of primitive henotheism. Social circumstance conspired with prophetic teaching to move Israel in the direction of cosmopolitan monotheism.

This monotheism was reflected in Isaiah's affirmation that the God of Israel is the Lord of current history (41:4). Furthermore, Isaiah praises Yahweh for the still more wonderful things to come. And he does all this without losing the tie to the past—the redemption from Babylon will exactly duplicate the redemption from Egypt. In short, the prophet insists that the God of creation is the Lord of history, past, present, and future.

Israel is the agent of the Lord of history. Second Isaiah deserves special credit for turning Israelite theology back on a global course (Gen. 12:1-3). But he does not effect this achievement at the expense of belief in Israel's election. The Lord's restoration of Israel to its homeland will be followed by resumption of its
HOMILETICAL RESOURCES

role as God’s agent. But there will be no return to normality. The old enmity between Israel and the nations will be replaced by a relationship of mutual understanding and appreciation. The nations will view Israel’s restoration with wonder and admiration (49:7-13). And Israel’s pride in its own privileged status will give way to a concern for the performance of its mission to the nations (42:5-9, 14-16 and other places). The language of the prophet’s description of Israel’s new mission is reminiscent of his description of God’s role in creation. His acute awareness of the Lord’s role as creator compels him to define Israel’s mission in universal terms. In 42:7-16 Israel’s mission and God’s—to minister to the “blind”—are defined in identical terms. Here God and Israel become interchangeably the subject of action designed to alleviate life’s burdens. Israel adopts the target of God’s reconciling work as the beneficiary of its own redemptive action.

At the time and in the place—the period of the Exile in Babylon—where, for many Israelites, the world has come to an end, Second Isaiah rediscovers the world as the field and focus of Israel’s mission. As a consequence, his version of Israel’s role as God’s agent features this highly significant, if not altogether new, development: the call for commitment to the service of God becomes at the same time a call for commitment to the service of humankind.22

Just as in our Old Testament reading for today Second Isaiah looks forward to God’s promised redemption of Israel through an agent whose work will be strikingly unconventional and inclusive, in Acts 2:14a, 36-47, Luke looks back on the life and ministry of Jesus as its fulfillment. In the Gospel lesson (Luke 24:13-35) this same evangelist asserts the presence of God the redeemer among those of us whose blind eyes have been opened by the risen Christ. The epistle lesson (I Peter 1:17-23) for the day counsels us to conduct ourselves with “fear” during the time of our “exile” (the interim between the Incarnation and the parousia). The author does not at this point recall our prophet’s paradoxical statements concerning “the blind”: even though he says God will lead them (Isa. 42:16), he calls on Israel to open its eyes. Putting these two Scriptures together, we get
the clear implication that exemplary Christian living can and should have the effect of extending the Incarnation.

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Lections
John 14:1-14 1 Peter 2:1-10

The Acts reading (17:1-15) for this Sunday recalls the subject and outcome of Paul's preaching in Thessalonica and Beroea. In it Paul pinpoints the theme of his proclamation in this proposition: "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ" (vs. 3). For three weeks, according to Luke's report, the apostle argues the case for this thesis from the Scriptures. Since this discussion takes place in the synagogue, the writings in question could only be those of the Old Testament.

We are given no clue in the immediate context as to the content of Paul's proclamation. But we may assume that its key elements pretty much duplicate the kerygma as it finds expression elsewhere in the earliest Christian preaching. For although scholars are agreed that this preaching as summarized in Acts (2:14-39; 3:13-26; 4:10-12; 5:30-32; 10:36-43; 13:17-41) owes much to Luke's editorship, few are disposed to challenge the accuracy of his articulation of its credo. This credo affirms faith in Jesus Christ as the climactic act of God in a redemptive history that stretches all the way from the time of the patriarchs to the occurrence of the parousia. Its chief articles of faith simply call attention to the focal points of this linear history: (1) Yahweh, the God of Israel, called and commissioned the ancestors of this community, the patriarchs, to act as the bearers of the divine promise; (2) Yahweh liberated the patriarchs' descendants from Egyptian oppression; (3) Yahweh led the Israelites through the wilderness into Palestine, their homeland; (4) Yahweh raised up for them in Palestine a king, whose mission it was to establish a dynasty that would enable God's people to live in equity,
justice, and *shalom*; (5) Yahweh, through the ministry, crucifixion, Resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, now issues the call to repentance and extends the offer of forgiveness; (6) Yahweh has ordained Jesus Christ to be the judge of the living and the dead.

Two facts about this formulation of the *kerygma* are particularly noteworthy: (a) Jesus Christ becomes the key to the interpretation of the Old Testament; (b) the Old Testament becomes the key to the interpretation of Jesus Christ. But as striking as these similarities are, they do not take us as close to the heart of the connection between the testaments as does a comparative analysis of the *kerygma* in each. In fact, Christians have sometimes turned the two former conclusions into a rationale for viewing the Old Testament and Judaism as stepping-stones to Christianity with which, now that Jesus Christ has wholly superseded and displaced them, we may safely dispense. However, on close inspection, the *kerygma* of the Old Testament invites favorable comparison with that of the New Testament in at least these three crucial particulars: (1) its setting in the culture; (2) the fate of its proclaimers (just as the apostles were attacked for their proclamation of the Christian *kerygma*, the prophets were attacked for their proclamation of the Israelite *kerygma*); and, most significantly of all, (3) its articles of faith.

**THE SETTING OF DEUTERONOMY 6:20-25**

The manner of its introduction offers a clue to determination of the setting of our passage. "When your son asks you . . . "What is the meaning of the [law] which the Lord . . . has commanded you?" then you shall say,' " the lection begins (vs. 20). There follows a brief recital of the mighty acts of God that both explains the origin of the peculiar relationship between Yahweh and Israel and delineates the ground for its continuation. And, in the biblical account of the celebration of the feast of the Passover (Exodus 13) a similar recital is given.

In the other two occurrences (Deut. 26:5-10; Josh. 24:2-13) of Israel’s classical credo, the inquiry concerning meaning is missing, but the recital follows the same historical pattern. The
absence of the leading question in these instances may stem from the fact that these versions of the credo originated for use in the celebration of a hypothetical older festival, the so-called festival of covenant renewal, for a less homogeneous audience. Among those subscribing to Israel's observance of such a festival, it is commonly argued that its celebration provided the occasion for the assimilation of new groups and tribes into the covenantal community. They are still unclear whether the faith thus affirmed was confessed by or for the new converts. But they are agreed that it very accurately and quite adequately expresses the key elements in authentic Israelite faith.

Once the membership of these new converts in the community of Israel had been formally acknowledged, one can easily imagine the liturgist for such a service uttering these words, addressed by a New Testament writer (I Peter 2:10) to another Israel: "Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy." Indeed, one would be as hard put to it to find a better one-sentence summary of Israel's classical creeds as one would be to improve on John 3:16 as a one-verse summary of the Christian creed.

THE ARTICLES OF ISRAELITE FAITH

C. H. Dodd advanced the thesis that in early Christian missionary activity instruction in human duty could be separated from the proclamation of the gospel. Today's Old Testament lection offers telling witness against the notion that any such division is characteristic of the Old Testament. In it kerygma and didache, gospel and law, theological affirmation and moral instruction, preaching and teaching are joined. And, in this instance, the question of priority, should it be pressed, would probably have to be settled in favor of instruction. But the question should not be pressed, for if the gospel is offered as an explanation of the law, the law is presented as a derivative of the gospel. In short, instruction is not so much an addendum to Israel's articles of faith as it is an article of faith itself, as the
following analysis of the articles of faith found in Deuteronomy 6:20-25 will make abundantly clear.

1. The initiative of Yahweh: the foundation of the covenant. The answer to the son's question concerning the meaning of Israel's "testimonies and . . . statutes and . . . ordinances" grounds its significance in Yahweh's deliverance of the people of Israel from Egyptian slavery, that he might bring them into the land of promise (vss. 21-23). What we get here is not a straightforward historical account. Instead of a narrative in which happenings are traced to the impact of some human beings on other human beings, from beginning to end the subject of the action is the Lord. We are not presented with a report plus a theological interpretation. The theological interpretation is given in the report itself. It is calculated not only to convey, but also to elicit, the faith that construes this deliverance as an act of God.

The Deuteronomic narrative goes on to detail the establishment of a covenant in which Yahweh becomes Israel's Lord and Israel Yahweh's people, but it never fails to root this covenantal relationship in the initiative of God. In another place it simply explodes the suggestion that Israel might possibly rationalize its covenantal status with the reminder: "It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord . . . chose you; but it is because the Lord loves you . . . that the Lord has . . . redeemed you from the house of bondage" (Deut. 7:7-8).

In effect, the Deuteronomic word concerning the Yahweh-Israel covenant—as a reminder to the people of Israel—could very well be put thusly: "You are not the people of the covenant because you chose Yahweh to be your God; you are the people of the covenant because Yahweh chose you to be object and vehicle of divine grace." In the Gospel lesson for the day (John 14:1-14), John not only replaces the Egyptian deliverance with Jesus as the focal point of divine revelation, but he goes on to draw the implications of this equation for the conduct of daily life. If one really believes Jesus' works truly reveal God, in John's view, that person will go forth to do the works of God seen in Jesus. The Deuteronomist is less explicit about the precise connection between recognition of the divine initiative as the foundation of
the covenant and its ethical consequences, but he does not overlook the fact that there is a connection.

2. The disparity of the covenanting partners. Despite Israelite tradition's portrayal of the Yahweh-Israel relationship in terms of the suzerainty (between equals) covenant, many Israelites construed it in terms of a parity (between equals) covenant. As if to prevent or counter just such a distortion, the author of our passage takes pains to indicate the unbridgeable gulf between the Lord and the people of the covenant. Who are the people of this covenant? Helpless slaves of one of the earth's most powerful rulers, the Pharaoh of Egypt, against whose forces revolt would be futile, if not unthinkable. Yet this same Pharaoh proves helpless before the "signs and wonders, great and grievous," of the Lord of the covenant.

Exodus 24:3-8 recalls one of the rituals for the ratification of Israel's covenant with Yahweh. In this ritual-of-blood ceremony, the blood of the sacrifice is sprinkled over both the altar, symbolizing Yahweh, and the people. This rite enshrines the belief that two parties, originally separate, can become one through common participation in the vital essence of a third (such as in this case, the blood of the sacrificial animal) something. By the performance of this ritual Israel dramatizes its union with Yahweh.

Even though the redactor of our Scripture, whether familiar with this primitive ceremony for sealing a covenant or not, almost surely believed that Yahweh had become partners with Israel in a covenant, he just as surely rejected out of hand the notion that it was a partnership of equals. Whereas the Lord's future does not at all hinge on Israel's fate, Israel's future is wholly conditional upon the Lord's pleasure. It will be "righteousness" (Deut. 6:25) for the people only "if" the people take care to do as the Lord has commanded. What we get in this stipulation is simply a variant of the covenantal requirement of a vow to fulfill all the demands of the "book of the covenant" (Exod. 24:7).

Israel's pledge of adherence to all such requirements attests to an awareness of the conditional character of covenantal status. By the same token, it marks an acknowledgment of Israel's relationship with Yahweh to be that of subject to ruler. In fact, it
would hardly be an exaggeration to describe the aforementioned ritual of the covenant as a coronation ceremony in which Israel enthrones Yahweh as king. In any event, when we get around to assigning the blame for Israel’s misconstruction of the covenant, we should spare the shapers of the earliest covenantal and creedal traditions.

3. The commitment of Israel. In the aforementioned ritual of blood, the celebrant pauses after sprinkling of the blood on the altar to read the contents of the “book of the covenant.” After thus reviewing the requirements of the covenant (this “book of the covenant” refers, in all likelihood, to one of Israel’s codes of law to which obedience is pledged), he waits to sprinkle the blood over the congregation until its members give the response: “All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient” (Exod. 24:7). We cannot be sure, of course, that the “statutes” of Deuteronomy 6:24 ever belonged to this “book of the covenant.” But there can be no doubt that they were received by Israel as an expression of the divine will and a condition for Israel’s continuation as Yahweh’s covenental partner.

Lest we misconstrue this emphasis on law (the testimonies and the statutes and the ordinances of Deut. 6:20) as legalism, let us note the downplay in ancient Israel of our tendency to interpret law as a restraint on freedom. The ancient Israelites interpreted the law, instead, as the condition for the exercise and enjoyment of freedom. This is not to suggest that they found it any easier than we might to keep their pledge of obedience to the law. It is simply to point out the fact that they could think of no other way of continuing to be the covenantal people of Yahweh.

4. The price of faithless disobedience: the dissolution of the covenant. Yahweh’s deliverance of the people of Israel from Egypt has the immediate goal of securing for them the land (i.e., Palestine) sworn to their fathers (Deut. 6:21-23). Even though this promise has become the basis of exclusivist claims to Palestine by various peoples, including Christians as well as Jews, this version of Israel’s creed is as short on promise as it is long on demand. It only promises to bring Israel into the land and to give it to her. It says nothing of Israel’s exercise of dominion over it in perpetuity. But it hinges Israel’s very preservation and
enjoyment of righteousness on the twin conditions that it both "fear [i.e., stand in awe of and show reverence for] the Lord" and "do all . . . he has commanded." Quite obviously, the author of the creed looks beyond Israel's occupation of the land to its achievement of a still higher goal. Just as obviously, this higher goal is a relationship with Yahweh in which Israel will answer the grace and mercy of the Lord with reverence and obedience.

This latter goal so far transcends that of the occupation of land that the occupation of land might best be viewed as the condition for achievement of the people of God's true destiny. Yet the people of God, in order to realize this destiny, must offer unto the Lord the daily sacrifices of awe and obedience. The "if" attached to Israel's realization of its God-given destiny is a big if. It clearly implies that, should it not meet these conditions, it would thereby jeopardize its claim to God's other gifts.

In this eventuality, what would happen to the land? Now that the heir has failed the purpose for the divine bequest, will it be permitted to hold title to it? Can the Lord remain faithful and not press the search for a more responsible tenant—for one who will treat divine grace and mercy as a sanction for and a mirror of reverence and obedience?

First Peter 2:1-10 answers this inquiry for us in noncultic terms, despite the writer's designation of the people of God as a "royal priesthood." The daily sacrifice for which he calls is nothing less than the daily offering up of ourselves to our neighbors in the service of God. By implication, he is telling us that, just as the dissolution of the covenant is the price of faithless disobedience, the reward of faithful obedience is the preservation of our covenant with the Lord and the extension of its membership to our neighbors.

NOTES

Lections in these homiletical resources are taken from Seasons of the Gospel: Resources for the Christian Year (Abingdon, 1979).

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I have treated the capitalization of "exodus" in the following way: When I am referring to Israel's crossing of whatever body of water it crossed in the flight from Egypt, I use the lower case. When referring to the book or the event plus theological interpretation, I prefer the upper case.


5. Pedersen, p. 728.


9. John L. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing, 1955), p. 11, who bypasses the question of historicity because it would be "divisive." Most critical scholars would surely agree with Father McKenzie that the question of historicity is not so much "divisive" as it is decisive for understanding the flood story and, consequently, disavow serious interest in the search for the ark of either Utnapishtim or Noah.


15. Of the many provocative interpretations of this story known to me, I find none more suggestive or profound than that of Thielicke, but one with the "something present" interest in mind should also consult von Rad, *Genesis*, pp. 109-35; Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), pp. 73-91; Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: Schocken Books, 1979), pp. 37-42.


17. Maly, p. 16.


1982), p. 981, for a Christian hymn that gives forceful expression to this understanding of
the vocation of God’s people.
23. See Gerhard von Rad’s discussion of “The Short Historical Creed” in “The
Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch,” The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays,
Traditions, pp. 60-61, 142, 206, 253; A. Weiser, The Psalms, translated by Herbert Hartwell
THE MOST PRESSING ISSUE
BEFORE THE CHURCH

JAMES K. MATHEWS

Are we moving from Hiroshima to Euroshima to Terrashima?

In October, 1982, my wife and I spent a day in Hiroshima, Japan. We were met by a lovely woman with the marvelous name of Koko Kondo, daughter of the Rev. Kiyashi Tanimoto, famous in Hersey's book on Hiroshima. She was an eight-month-old baby whose life was miraculously saved that awful day. Now somewhat stunted in stature and unable to bear children, she and her whole family devote their lives to remembering the destructive entrance to the atomic era at 8:15 A.M. on August 6, 1945. This era was introduced with the explosive force of one bomb equal to 20,000 tons of TNT. Now we speak of single bombs in megatons (one million tons of TNT). But combined the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. have a nuclear arsenal fifty times greater than that. No wonder a Japanese professor at the 1981 WCC Amsterdam hearing on nuclear weapons suggested this possible sequence: Hiroshima! Euroshima! Terrashima!

United Methodists share with other Christians the understanding that the church is a community of believers under the Lordship of Jesus Christ; a redemptive fellowship in which the Word of God is preached and the sacraments duly administered. Moreover, under the discipline of the Holy Spirit the church exists for the maintenance of worship, the edification of believers, and the redemption of the world. In a word, the church of Jesus Christ exists in and for the world.

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This theological summary, stated in the United Methodist Discipline, is cited here to make it clear that the church is more than a gathering of people of good will confronting the social and political issues of our time. It is with such an understanding that it is possible to consider what may be regarded as the most pressing issue before the church today.

It is frequently suggested that the current issues are particularly clear; namely, peace, social and economic justice, and plain humanity. All three are comprehensive and each in some sense overlaps or may even include the others. By the third issue we mean what was expressed so well in the World Council of Churches' Uppsala Assembly in 1968: that "we belong to a humanity which cries out passionately and articulately for a fuller human life."

What then is the most pressing issue? Perhaps most people would respond: "the nuclear threat," because nowadays the very continued existence of humanity itself is at stake. Speaking at Hiroshima during his visit to Japan, Pope John Paul II said: "From now on it is only through a conscious choice and through a deliberate policy that humanity can survive."

In spite of humanity's perilous position and these somber warnings, many would still question that the nuclear threat is indeed the dominant contemporary problem. Justice, they insist, must be given precedence. This point of view was put forward repeatedly and incisively at the Sixth Assembly of the World Council of Churches at Vancouver in the summer of 1983, especially from Third World spokespersons. For example, Allan Boesak, theologian from South Africa, as he addressed the assembly on the nuclear peril, declared that obsession with peace was a North Atlantic concern which would ignore deprivation and injustice in the Third World. The former should therefore not be used so as to escape concern for the latter. This viewpoint was reinforced by the far larger attendance in Vancouver of Third World people at group meetings concerned with injustice than at peace meetings. The resultant dual concern is reflected in the various reports and findings of the assembly.

This emphasis upon justice among the world's poorer nations is understandable, for they suffer sorely from both racial and
economic exploitation. The World Bank has estimated that 800 million people are destitute—20 percent of the world's population. No fewer than another 20 percent are abysmally poor. Even these, of course, are not evenly distributed but largely concentrated in Third World countries. In them there is much urban squalor but in rural parts of some countries in Asia and Africa as many as 70 percent of the people suffer from the ravages of poverty. These countries need everything: health, education, housing, food, employment—everything! The northern countries are obsessed with security, and in the race to attain it the world's resources are misused and unequally distributed. The nuclear issue is a justice issue.

The fact is that both justice and peace must be addressed. Matters of race, hunger, exploitation, poverty, international economics, ecology, and technology are intermingled constantly with the peace issue. The same people who are committed to solving the nuclear dilemma are likely to be engaged in justice problems.

The biblical vision is one of peace and justice for all. Peace and justice are represented as embracing; they belong together (Ps. 85:10; Isa. 32:17). That strange messianic figure, Melchizedek, is the king of justice and of peace. It is a false dichotomy to try to separate the two, or to see them as inimical to each other.

What then shall we do as churches: As already suggested, the churches' first task may well be to encourage the nuclear powers to keep talking; and, more than that, to come to agreement progressively in even modest terms leading to fuller and finally complete nuclear disarmament. Widespread peace movements in various parts of the world intend to keep the pressure on both parties. In the process we Americans ought not to assume a too lofty and self-righteous a position. The U.S. record in the U.N. Special Sessions on Disarmament in both 1978 and 1982 would not encourage this; nor would the repeated excesses in rhetoric on the part of our leaders during the past two decades. On the one hand, we need not be beguiled into attributing excessive virtue to the U.S.S.R. On the other hand, there is no call to portray them solely in beastly and demonic terms. We need to understand them better. It may well be that they understand us better than we do them. The fact is that we are very much alike!
Is it entirely beyond imagination that we could find some modes of cooperation between East and West, so that together we might find effective ways of addressing North-South issues? It is popular to point out that in World Council of Churches' meetings one-sided actions are taken, condemning the U.S. for its shortcomings and looking the other way about shortcomings of the U.S.S.R. This is only partly true. In some measure this is one of the prices we pay for being a free society. Actually WCC meetings offer good forums for candid discussion. Nevertheless, the Afghanistan resolution at Vancouver was weak. It only narrowly escaped re-commitment (306-278) and on the final vote of approval there were 142 abstentions. Meanwhile, WCC gatherings are occasions for bilateral meetings of U.S.-U.S.S.R. delegates in which considerable effective work has been done.

Such a role on the part of the churches implies fuller preparation for this demanding task. The WCC after the Amsterdam hearing and again at the Vancouver Assembly declared:

We believe that the time has come when the churches must unequivocally declare that the production and deployment as well as the use of nuclear weapons are a crime against humanity and that such activities must be condemned on ethical and theological grounds.

Obviously the churches as a whole are not yet ready to subscribe to this declaration. Fuller study of the issues is an urgent necessity. Fortunately an impressive array of study materials is at hand. (The Sept. 14-21 and Sept. 28, 1983, issues of The Christian Century give a considerable bibliography.) "The Pastoral Letter on War and Peace" of the U.S. Roman Catholic bishops offers another important resource. Others would include the WCC Report on the Amsterdam hearing, Before It's Too Late, and United Methodist Alan Geyer's The Idea of Disarmament.

This study clearly involves further theological reflection. The nuclear issue raises nearly every facet of theology: creation, incarnation, redemption, eschatology. But reflection must lead to the practical: making concrete proposals for action for peace is too important to leave solely to the military and political experts.
Most Pressing Issue

The dialogue with those in science, technology, and politics must continue. This is a point upon which Geyer insists, for we are to be peacemakers and not merely peace tinkers. As always, however, our prophetic indignation must be tempered with Christian humility.

These steps will require a far greater commitment of the churches' resources to the ministry and mission of peacemaking. Very often the churches are so preoccupied with their individual peace efforts that they neglect their corporate potential. Fortunately the Roman Catholic bishops' pastoral letter invites cooperation from all other Christians as well as from the Jewish and Islamic communities. We need to be aggressive in meeting this challenge. Likewise much fuller support for the peacemaking initiatives of ecumenical bodies should be forthcoming.

We United Methodists have a proud tradition in the peacemaking field, especially since World War I. In all candor, however, we have been slipping of late and are in the rear guard. We have led initiatives in helping to establish the churches' Center for Theology and Public Policy, as an example, but more is yet required of us.

Since the nuclear issue is of first importance, addressing it effectively is a vital dimension global mission. Why not a more intentional, intensive and comprehensive involvement in the whole issue of nuclear disarmament? In our pride over two centuries of Wesleyan accomplishment we need to reflect very much more on what is demanded of us as United Methodists.

Finally, the churches have a task of keeping alive hope no matter how dismal the prospects may seem. For we are a community of hope committed to a risen Lord.

One more word: It is said of the ancient Greeks that they loved freedom, but they came to love security more. They loved freedom and security but they came to love comfort more. Finally there came a time when people expected more from society than they were prepared to give to society. Then it happened that they lost their comfort, their security, and their liberty. It is worth thinking about if we are to bequeath to children and grandchildren a meaningful future.
Once again the church is faced with the question:
What shall we do with the blacks?

The creation of the Wesleyan wing within the Church of England meant that the faith moved from those associated with the established church to a new group which was being marginalized under industrialization. This took place first within the existing church, and then as a separate church. In the main, it represented the movement of the faith across class and vocational barriers.

Although the founder, John Wesley, and his brother Charles, the poet of Methodism, could hardly be classified as lower class, the Methodist movement which they started was rooted in a passionate and enthusiastic concern for the poorer classes. Wesley preached a gospel of salvation to the miners and day laborers, to those who worked in factories at Bristol and inhabited the gloomy and dingy slums of London and other large cities of England.

The poor and the dispossessed, the unchurched and the uneducated, listened gladly to the call to repentance under the threat of damnation. The Methodist preachers told of a Christ whom Wesley had discovered at Aldersgate, a Christ who gives an inner assurance of love, and causes the heart to feel strangely warmed. This simple message was good news to the hard-working, common people who populated the perimeter of colonial America, and they responded with enthusiastic emotionalism to the Methodist evangelical vision of Christianity.
Group after group was brought into the church because of a loving acceptance which could prevail over the rejections found elsewhere.

Among the poor and disinherited who listened and responded to the gospel message of the Methodist preachers were the black slaves who had been brought to America in chains. They joined the Methodist "classes" and "societies" and attended the preaching events and camp meetings. "For the slave," as Harry V. Richardson points out, "becoming a Christian represented a complex of aims and hopes in which his soul's salvation was only one." (Dark Salvation, Anchor Press, 1976, p. 47.) In any case, the black diaspora from the African homeland responded. There was immediate and rapid growth among the black Methodists. In some cases, the number of black people equalled or exceeded the white people. Thomas Rankin, a white Methodist preacher in Virginia, reports the response to his preaching in 1776:

At four in the afternoon I preached again... I had gone through about two-thirds of my discourse, and was bringing the words home to the present now, when such power descended that hundreds fell to the ground, and the house seemed to shake with the presence of God. The chapel was full of white and black, and many were without that could not get in. Look wherever we would, we saw nothing but streaming eyes and faces bathed in tears; and heard nothing but groans and strong cries after God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Sunday 7. I preached at W's chapel, about twenty miles from Mr. J's. I intended to preach near the house, under the shade of some large trees, but the rain made it impracticable. The house was greatly crowded, and four or five hundred stood at the windows, and listened with unabated attention. I preached from Ezekiel's vision of dry bones: "And there was a great shaking." I was obliged to stop again and again, and beg the people to compose themselves. But they could not; some on their knees, and some on their faces, were crying mightily to God all the time I was preaching. Hundreds of Negroes were among them, with tears streaming down their faces. (Nathan Bangs, A History of The Methodist Episcopal Church, New York, vol. 1, pp. 111-12, 1838.)

Black people joined the Methodist movement from the very start and found their spiritual home in the Methodist Episcopal Church. When Robert Strawbridge organized the first Methodist society in the back country of Maryland on Sam's Creek in
Frederick County, a black slave named Anne, who was the slave of the Sweitzer family, immediately responded. Unlike the two black slaves of Nathaniel Gilbert, Wesley’s first black converts in England, we do know the name of that first black American Christian. And at John Street in New York City, Beatty, the black servant of the Heck household, was a charter member of that society. Although some blacks found the contumelious racism of the white church intolerable and went out from among those who oppressed and insulted them, they gathered themselves into a black Methodist church. It surprised no one. The implications were that there was nothing wrong with the message; there was something wrong with the messengers and those who sat in the choicest seats.

But a sizeable number of blacks, the largest number in any mainline Protestant church, have remained a part of this body throughout its social metamorphosis and its changing structure and its checkered history. They will be present as bishops, official delegates, national and regional staff, and card-carrying members of the United Methodist Church as we celebrate two hundred years of Methodism on this continent. These black Methodists will participate in the discussions and deliberations. Most of them will be aware that present throughout the unfolding drama of Methodism, beginning at Sam’s Creek and continuing at the bicentennial General Conference of the United Methodist Church, is a perennially present and all-too-familiar question: What shall we do with the blacks?

Although millions of black Methodists have lived, suffered, struggled, fought, sung, cried, preached, pleaded, walked out, passed resolutions, hoped, made demands, organized caucuses, written books, dreamed and died, the question is still before the church: What shall we do with the blacks?

That question has received several clumsy, compromising, tentative and uncertain answers. The question black Methodists may have to answer for themselves along with other ethnic minorities is whether in the grand community of United Methodism they are a saving remnant or a sedimental (and perhaps sentimental) residue. The answers that are given to both questions will probably have profound effects on what Methodism will become in the next two centuries.
Some would argue that the question has already been answered decisively; for them, the abolition of the racially segregated Central Jurisdiction solved the problem of racism in The Methodist Church. They would maintain that the UMC is an inclusive church and all who have taken the vows of membership are simply “United Methodists.” They would insist that black and other Methodists of color accept the realities of the eighties: we are an “integrated church”—and with vehemence they would ask, “What is all this fuss about an Ethnic Minority Local Church priority?”

Well, the fact is that at this moment, at the voluntary level there is not a trend toward inclusive fellowship. United Methodists are, by and large, homogeneous with people of the same color in churches made up of people of the same color—no matter what the racial and ethnic makeup of the neighborhood and the complexion of the church. There is no significant indication that there is any movement to change this pattern.

If inclusiveness is to make sense and work, it must happen at the local church level, where the church really lives out its life of faith, witness, and service, where relations are more personal and voluntary. But another fact is that Methodism is a connectional church and participates in the larger reality of the household of faith where judgment begins. But beyond either of these facts is the commanding gospel reality that the church exists as people because of its awareness of God’s grace and the redeeming work of Jesus Christ. In a sense, every time we gather at the Lord’s table, or any other table, or park bench, bank desk, or conference table, we are preparing for and rehearsing to be comfortable guests at the eschatological feast, the celestial banquet where those from every nation and kindred and tongues shall sit at the Welcome Table.

Blacks and other colored minorities must insist that the UMC explore how diversity and interdependence can be used as positive sources in working for a more just management of our household. An integrated powerlessness which requires people to deny cultural and ethnic differences and to deny their identity and simply to affirm the validity of white values and Western styles and North American Protestant tradition—this is neither a plausible solution to the recurring problem of racism nor a
desirable answer to the question of what to do with people of color. At root this resolution is a pejorative statement concerning God's creation. It suggests, at least by implication, that God made a mistake in making people who are black, brown, red, and yellow. Black Methodists and other minorities dare not accept or participate in this definition of inclusiveness under the guise of integration.

This responsibility cannot be borne by black Methodist people alone. Nor can partnerships with the other powerless minorities produce what is needed to keep the church from transforming the revolutionary ethic of Jesus into an inoffensive and prudential morality which succumbs to death rather than life. The justification for its continued existence, its respectability and its movement into a third century in this country and its ability to be the church depends on United Methodism's willingness to become a truly inclusive fellowship, no matter what the rest may do. A truly inclusive fellowship includes open itineracy, and churches where all kinds of people gather—neighborhood churches, multi-ethnic churches, ethnic churches, rural, small-town, and city churches without any thought of where the worshippers came from or who they are except that they gather in His name.

As the bicentennial General Conference gathers, it will decide who the United Methodists are and what the priorities ought to be for the church for the next four years. Will we compromise again, or will we recover who we are and let a nagging perennial issue now help us to lead the way on this continent? The cross is still the way home.
BOOK REVIEWS

WOMEN AND RELIGION

Clarissa W. Atkinson


In their introduction to Women and Religion in America, the editors quote Frances Willard: "The time will come when these gates of Gospel Grace shall stand open night and day, while women's heavenly ministries shall find their central home within God's house." If the number of publications of the 1980s concerning women and religion can be taken as a sign of Gospel Grace, then Willard's triumphalism was justified. Fortunately, the new publications are not merely numerous: many are of high quality, and they make available a rich variety of resources with which to examine the history and present situation of women in the pulpit, in the pews, and in the wider society.

Most of the new publications center on women and Christianity, although some significant new material and new interpretations have appeared concerning the experience of women in Judaism, and even more on the faith and spirituality of women outside the Judeo-Christian tradition. Much of the new work, including the volumes reviewed here, deals specifically with religion in the United States. (Women in New Worlds has a few articles on the English background of the Wesleyan tradition, but its focus is on the New World, as promised by the title.) Materials for the study of religion in the United States are,

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of course, more accessible to American scholars and editors than those of the Old World (or the Third World). As this good work continues, we may look forward to comparative, crosscultural studies which will shed a brighter light on the ambiguous relationship of women and religion. In the meantime, books such as these are enormously helpful, not only to students and seminarians, but to all kinds of people for whom rediscovery of the past is a necessary instrument in the reconstruction of a complex present.

Women and Religion in America is the first in a proposed series of three volumes of a documentary history. The general editors, Rosemary Radford Ruether and Rosemary Skinner Keller, have divided the book into seven sections, each with a special editor and a special theme. The editors have written introductory essays and made selections of documents to illustrate a particular aspect of the religious work and experience of nineteenth-century American women. The titles of the various sections fairly represent the wide range of topics covered: "Women and Revivalism," "Women in Utopian Movements," "The Leadership of Nuns in Immigrant Catholicism," "The Jewish Woman's Encounter with American Culture," "The Struggle for the Right to Preach," "Lay Women in the Protestant Tradition," and "Women in Social Reform Movements." Wisely (I believe), separate sections are devoted to the Jewish and Roman Catholic traditions, which have often been neglected as peripheral to "mainstream" American Protestantism. Because the experience of black women cuts across almost all of the chosen categories, the editors have not assigned to them a separate section: for example, the mystical visions of Sojourner Truth are included under "Women and Revivalism," and the anti-lynching campaign of Ida B. Wells-Barnett under "Women in Social Reform Movements." The system works well for individuals, but it tends to obscure the distinct collective experience of black women in church and society.

The outstanding contribution of this work to the study of American religious history is the collection of documents here available. No historian's interpretation, no matter how lively or learned, captures the flavor and significance of the experience of historical persons as richly or accurately as their own words. It is difficult to single out one illustration, but I especially appreciated some of the less familiar material—for example, extracts from the correspondence of Rebecca Gratz of Philadelphia, a Jewish woman whose letters to her family commented upon religious bigotry: "What a pity that the best and holiest gift of God to his most favoured creatures should be perverted into a subject of strife—and that to seek to know and love the most
High should not be the aim of all—without a jealous or persecuting feeling towards each other.” To read the prayers, petitions, and reflections of these women is to begin to appreciate their struggle and their many-sided achievements. Some of the documents will be known to those who are acquainted with nineteenth-century history; others recapture lost voices and ideas and personalities.

Both sides of the perennial debate about the function of religion in women’s lives find support here. We discover once again that religion is both a shaping force in women’s experience and an important arena for the expression of their powers. “Religion” confines women to the home and sends them out into the world. “Religion” helped to create and shape the domestic ideal of “true womanhood,” but it also sponsored and legitimated the activities of female prophets, preachers, and missionaries. Ruether and Keller do not attempt to determine whether “religion” has been predominantly a force for liberation or for oppression; obviously it was (and is) both—it is much too broad a cause to be limited to a single effect. What their book does offer is an opportunity to study some of the evidence necessary to interpret the many roles of women in the religious culture of nineteenth-century America, and the several ways in which faith and ecclesiastical institutions shaped their lives and their experience.

The interest and centrality of the documents of this volume should not obscure the contributions of the general and special editors. Mary Ewens, O.P., editor of “The Leadership of Nuns in Immigrant Catholicism,” chose relevant documents with care and imagination and wrote an informative and enlightening essay on the role and image of Catholic sisters in the New World. Their hospital and missionary work, their conflicts and friendships with bishops and priests, are presented on the one hand as a chapter in the story of the Catholic Church in Protestant America; on the other, as a chapter in the older story of the struggle for female autonomy within Christianity.

Each of the general editors was responsible for one section of the book as well as its overall design. Writing on Utopian communities, Ruether suggests the extraordinary breadth of the communitarian movements in the nineteenth century and also conveys a sense of the depth of its meaning in individual lives. Her essay makes the point that a substantial impetus was given to American Utopianism by widespread concern about the distance between the public and the private sphere (in our terms, between the “personal” and the “political”)—a distance that troubled sensitive consciences in the nineteenth century as it does in the twentieth. Mormons, Shakers, and many other groups struggled with the structure and role of the family.
in society. We may deplore or wonder at their methods, but we can easily appreciate their desire to bring relationships between men and women, adults and children, into closer harmony with what they perceived to be the heavenly kingdom. And Keller's essay on “Lay Women in the Protestant Tradition,” based on the rich resources of the documents she has gathered, makes it plain that ordination and professional employment are not the only or the major issues for women in the churches. The religious work of women and female leadership have never been defined by office, nor has such work ever ceased, even when it was most deeply frustrated by the male establishment, at home, at church, and in society.

With Louise L. Queen and Hiliah F. Thomas, Rosemary Skinner Keller is also an editor of Women in New Worlds. The papers gathered here, like those in an earlier volume in this series (published in 1981), were presented at the “Women in New Worlds” conference in Cincinnati, Ohio, in February, 1980. The conference itself was an extraordinary event. Sponsored by the General Commission on Archives and History of the United Methodist Church, it brought together people from many sectors of society, including the churches and the academy. It was one of the rare occasions when people were less concerned to display their knowledge than to listen and learn, to fill some of the glaring gaps in traditional “church history.” The quality of the papers was high, and the quality of the discussions was equally high. Speakers and audiences were genuinely eager to share what they had discovered and to find out more about a history they claimed as their own.

The papers are grouped into two sections called “Prescriptions” and “Practice”—an arrangement which helps to work around one of the recurring puzzles in women’s history. Attitudes toward women expressed by preachers, theologians, and other authorities may be extremely significant in women’s lives, but they do not begin to tell the whole story: how seriously shall we take them? We cannot ignore Tertullian’s remark that “Woman is the devil’s gateway,” but it tells us more about Tertullian than about the nature and experience of third-century women. To what extent, if any, can the contributions of Susanna Wesley or Mary McLeod Bethune be understood through what was said about women by men of their time and place? The editors chose four very fine papers to illustrate “Prescriptions: Attitudes and Ideology Underlying Women’s Role in the Church”; the rest of the volume is devoted to “practice.”

“Practice: The Life Experience of Women in the Wesleyan Tradition”
BOOK REVIEWS

is subdivided into four sections: "Clergy Wives," "National Missions and Social Reform," "Foreign Missions and Cultural Imperialism," and "Professions in the Church: Individual and Corporate Responsibility." These divisions allow certain themes to be developed through various historical periods: for example, the eighteenth-century career of Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon, and the twentieth-century work of Methodist women in the Civil Rights movement can both be appreciated in terms of mission and social reform. Because the entire "Women in New Worlds" conference was focused specifically on the Wesleyan tradition, the volume avoids some of the customary pitfalls (and the random nature) of typical collections of papers from scholarly meetings. Consistency of theme as well as focus links papers from very different historical contexts: Anne Barstow's "An Ambiguous Legacy: Anglican Clergy Wives after the Reformation," set in sixteenth-century England, sheds light on the very different world described by Rosa Peffly Motes in "The Pacific Northwest: Changing Role of the Pastor's Wife since 1840." Studies of individuals include women as widely separated as Susanna Wesley and Georgia Harkness, but each is presented in relation to a common tradition.

Thematic consistency also strengthens the connections between "Prescriptions" and "Practice." One of the most interesting papers in the first group is Joanna Bowen Gillespie's "'The Sun in Their Domestic System': The Mother in Early Nineteenth-Century Sunday School Lore." Based on analysis of the maternal ideology of the influential Sunday school materials of the nineteenth century, Gillespie argues that whatever was believed about the authority and responsibility of the father, the mother was presented here as "the spiritual authority—the model of progressive, intelligent citizenship and of leadership in her world. . . . In fact, this woman saw herself at the very center of her sphere and indeed of society itself, through the home's influence on the family." Such materials, too rarely explored, help make sense of the nineteenth-century habit of attributing moral superiority to women—on the face of it, a strange phenomenon in a patriarchal society. This habit, of course, was not confined to Methodist circles, but Sunday school stores provide some basis for understanding the widespread notion that "weak" women, through their homes and families, had a responsibility to reform and purify the "world." Gillespie quotes Lydia Huntley Sigourney's Letters to Mothers: "No power other than mother power ever built a great nation; no instrument will throw deep roots into a country unless it reach children through the mother and men through the women. The mother of a family is a moral power, ripening thought at the same time that she
opens hearts to love, and souls to character." Here the editorial focus on one religious tradition provides a lens through which to view an enigmatic aspect of the society, politics, and culture of nineteenth-century America.

In *Women Ministers: How Women Are Redefining Traditional Roles*, Judith L. Weidman has brought together a group of essays on the work of contemporary women ministers and their influence on the churches and on styles of ministry. How do female clergy differ from their male colleagues, and how do such differences reshape the contemporary practice of ministry? Weidman herself is a United Methodist minister, and the authors include eleven women (and one man) from mainline Protestant denominations. The articles cover a range of topics including preaching, counseling, parish management, liturgy, and the experience of a clergy couple. All are written out of direct experience; these are not theoretical discourses on "women and ministry" but accounts of what has happened to some individual people in their education, their work, and their lives. The great strength of the book is its direct dependence on experience, although that dependence may also be responsible for the uneven quality of the papers. Some authors make a personal story broadly significant; others lapse into anecdote. Different readers will appreciate different writers and topics; for me, the most effective was Leontine T. C. Kelly's "Preaching in the Black Tradition," which is extremely well-written and helps to clarify significant aspects of a specific tradition.

This volume will be particularly helpful to women who are thinking about becoming ministers. Here they can learn from twelve active participants something about what it is really like "out there." The book will not discourage seminarians—these writers are optimistic people, generally content with their work and their lives. They mention problems and difficulties, but real discouragement does not emerge. None seems seriously to question her vocation or her ability to deal (ultimately) with sexism in church and society. I assume this reflects genuine cheerfulness as well as professional optimism, but I wonder a little about the "Wonder Woman" burden it may place on readers, and on the authors themselves. Is it really true that hard work, good will, and prayer can put everything right?

The book should be useful also to church people who are seeking a new minister, or to those who are working with a woman minister, perhaps for the first time. In her introduction, Weidman points out that it is change that inspires both hopes and fears about women in ministry, that the "threat to established patterns and symbols makes the issue
larger than the as yet modest number of clergywomen involved." The numbers (at least the numbers of women employed in ministry) are still modest, but women are graduating from seminaries in ever-larger numbers, and no one—not church leaders, nor seminary administrators, nor the women themselves—are perfectly confident about the implications of this change for the shape of our religious life. Change is intimidating, and this volume may help to ease some difficult transitions.

In very different ways, each of these books contributes to the common task of rediscovering and reinterpreting the past in the light of present questions. The documents and essays gathered here bring much information, and some very intelligent reflection, to our necessary efforts to make order and meaning out of rapid social change. Whether or not "women's heavenly ministries" ever "find their central home within God's house," such books help to keep ajar "the gates of Gospel Grace."
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