FOCUS ON THE PASTOR AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION

W. Paul Jones, Consulting Editor

The Burned of God
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The Pastor as Spiritual Director
Roy W. Fairchild

Koinonia as Spirituality
Kathleen Kenney

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John H. Westerhoff

Other articles and reviews
Church and Family
Janet F. Fishburn

Homiletical Resources on John 6
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Review of Just War Books
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Review of Abingdon Dictionary of Living Religions
R. Blake Michael
QUARTERLY REVIEW
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EDITORIAL

Dear Reader

Why yet another offering on spiritual formation? The best way I can explain it is to report a conversation with a pastor in Kansas. He said he was glad to know we were working on this issue, because he thought the church had exhausted every other avenue for renewal. "We've had programs in evangelism, missional priorities, and management-by-objective. Every time we try something, it goes on for a while and then it runs down and we end up right back where we started. Somehow we need to begin dealing with something more basic."

Still, we had reservations about focusing on spiritual formation. One of our qualms was that spirituality as used in some quarters seems to imply that it is the ultimate answer to everything. We felt this implication to be a little pretentious, and that is why we have tried to focus on spiritual formation for the pastor—asking how pastors themselves can be helped by it and can practice it, if practice is the right word.

At first it may appear that the lead essay, by W. Paul Jones, narrows the focus too much, addressing as it does the situation of the "postliberal" clergy. But on reading it, it should be evident that this theological appraisal applies to many more than liberals. The other essays address questions that we find are sometimes overlooked in writing on spirituality. Roy Fairchild explores the role of the spiritual director, a role with which Roman Catholics are familiar but many Protestants are not. John Westerhoff asks how spirituality takes shape in education, an area where cognition, affection, and behavior are often considered major factors, but not spirituality. And Kathleen Kenney focuses on ecclesiology—the study of the church as a community of love and common commitment.
You should know that these writers represent Presbyterian, Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Methodist traditions. You would probably find it hard to discern that merely by reading the essays. We fish out of the same pool these days, and whereas the piscatologists used to consist mostly of Quakers, Catholics, and some unusual mainline mystics, today we can happily discuss spiritual formation no matter what our religious tradition.

We hope this focused edition can then be the beginning of reflection for many readers. As always, we would be glad to hear from our readers, because "this one's for you," to quote a nontheological source.

The Editor

Dear Editor,

Great issue on spiritual formation. Loved the article by Father Westerhoff. As he says, Wesley taught us to grow. We all need to exploit our true potential. Just wished you had done something on TM. Nothing has helped me more, unless it was aerobics. Five years ago I was a wreck—overweight, anxious, doing sloppy work. Then I started on a vegetarian diet, got into jogging, then TM. I mean, you have to get your head on straight before you can help other people, right? Keep up the good work.

Gratefully,
A Growing Pastor

Dear Grateful,

Yes, but Father Westerhoff also said we need to embrace suffering. You may have been better off when you were fat and sloppy. At least then you knew how badly you were doing. Growth in itself is not the answer. Formation means something entirely different.

With sympathy,
The Editor

Dear Editor,

You say you have me in mind. Good. I am glad you finally asked for my opinion.

In the first place, you made a colossal error by not beginning with the Word of God. If you had turned to your Bible, you would have learned
that Spirit is ruah, the breath that God blows into every creature to give it life. As Paul wrote, “God giveth to all life, and breath, and all things” (Acts 17:25 KJV). Therefore, true spirituality comes from God and not from human striving. I question some of the statements by your writers that imply we can achieve this spirituality through human effort.

Second, ought not this spirituality properly to be opposed to materiality? However you define spirituality, does it not connote an elevation of the believer’s life in God, a transportation to another realm? Indeed, “we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (II Cor. 5:1). Only materialists would suppose otherwise, and yet your writers never mention this fundamental opposition.

Finally, why do you need to belabor a point that ought to be obvious to every true believer in Jesus Christ? We have not only the examples of the Psalmist and of Jesus himself but again of Paul, who urged us to pray without ceasing: “In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Phil. 4:6). Perhaps you may think me odd for saying this, but one cannot be a Christian without constant prayer. Having a “focus” on spiritual formation is a little like saying a mother should tell her child to breathe.

Yours in Christ,
A Conservative

Dear Conservative,

To take your points in reverse order: (1) If prayer is so obvious, then why does Paul admonish the early Christians to pray? And mothers do in fact watch and listen to be sure their babies are breathing. (2) It is not true that the spiritual and the material are mutually exclusive. Christ comes to us in the bread and wine. He came in the flesh. He healed bone and blood. These are material realities. (3) Who says we did not begin with the Bible? Substantially we did. Your own letter does not begin with a text. Does that mean it is unbiblical?

Now let me ask you a question. Why is it that Christians very nearly come to blows when the topic of spirituality comes up? It’s as if two football players automatically attacked each other at the mere mention of blocking and tackling. Spirituality comprises the warp and woof of the Christian life. Yet we Christians disagree vehemently on what spirituality means. A human being who stands on the moon calls the lunar journey a spiritual experience. An artist refers to a piece of sculpture as spiritual. Erotic love has been called spiritual. Kneeling at the altar while the congregation sings “Just as I Am” is called spiritual. Which of these, if any, constitutes the true meaning of spiritual?
One reason that the term spirituality has been emptied of meaning is that it not only means too many things, its supposed powers keep getting raised to the nth degree. The result of this hyperinflation is that the term has become nearly bankrupt, just as the terms God and Jesus have become virtually meaningless because they have been invoked too often. Paul Jones quotes another writer as saying that the word God is "the ominous hollow noun." Paul and others are trying to retrieve the meaning of this and other precious terms.

Yours for lowering the volume,
The Editor

Dear Editor,

You must be kidding. "Spiritual formation" is the biggest put-on since church renewal. They say patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel. If so, spirituality performs the same function for lazy preachers. I believe we should pray, both as individuals and as the Christian community. And I also affirm wholeheartedly the realm of the spirit as that of God's reign. But when we consider the parish or the congregation, we have to take into account the work that must be done. People are dying in hospitals, the poor are hungry, and the lonely, particularly the old, feel a need for caring persons. Who is going to do all this work? And that is what it is, long hours and a lot of drudgery. There is no way around it.

One of the preachers in our conference was a spiritual type. He would quote St. John of the Cross, and he spent quite a bit of time at retreats and the like. But he did not make the rounds of pastoral calls, and he let it be known that he did not like church meetings. Once he asked his congregation to allow him to miss Christmas Sunday so he could spend the weekend skiing. I don't care what Dr. Jones says—give me a liberal pastor any day. Maybe they do it out of guilt, but at least they put in a day's work.

In friendly dissent,
A District Superintendent

Dear DS,

No doubt some who call themselves spiritualists are enjoying their vocation at the expense of others. But if I wanted to be mean I could ask you about all those workaholic pastors who seem to feel that God has personally asked them to shoulder the burdens of the world. Being a kind soul, I won't do that. But I would ask you to consider, not only what Paul Jones says, but also Roy Fairchild's essay. You are, after all, a pastor of...
pastors. And one thing that Roy mentions in his essay on spiritual direction is that directors involve themselves in personal encounters. Maybe you confronted the pastor about his outlandish request to be absent on Christmas Sunday, and if you did, you know that this was a certain kind of "work," too. (On the other hand, think how many Christmas services would be improved if the pastor did take the day off.)

Spiritual direction surely is not the whole answer to the problem you describe. Nevertheless, surely it would help if someone like a spiritual director could be consulted by pastors. How am I doing? Am I spending too much time away from the parish? Am I trying to avoid the hard work? Or am I trying to do it all? Such a director might even want to give their directees, if that is the word, a swift kick now and then. As a DS, you probably know what I mean.

Optimistically,
The Editor

Dear Editor,

After reluctantly reading this issue, I can accept the idea that moral action and so-called spirituality go together. Action requires vision, just as any serious kind of religiosity must include a moral component. But I am still bothered by a couple of things.

Isn't "spirituality" just a ploy for elitists to continue their domination of oppressed peoples? These power elites treat marginal groups in brutal and callous ways and then have their kind of preachers swear (on Bibles, I assume) that they are wonderful folks and are doing the right thing for Jesus and America. I am a little surprised you could be taken in by this tactic.

Furthermore, it is not enough simply to say that spirituality and moral action go together. The content of religious vision matters a great deal. For example, if you take a Norman Rockwell painting and project that as the ideal of the family, it implies certain things, not all of which are good. The marginal groups, and especially gays, are definitely not in the picture. So before signing on with your program of spiritual formation, I would like to know whether we're talking about the spirituality of Tomas de Torquemada or Teresa de Avila.

Skeptically,
A Radic-Lib

Dear Radic-Lib,

If what you mean is that our culture faces a crisis in the plight of the "underclass," I agree. And I think most of the writers in this issue would
also agree. But is it true that "spiritual formation" is an elitist notion? It seems to me the difficulty lies at the other end of the spectrum. The elitists of our time use their information and their technical knowledge to further the interests of selected groups who are already privileged. Being in control of information, they know how to convince the broad middle of society that what they are doing is really in the interest of all. I won't mention any names but I believe you can find them where people write Mobil ads, where the news is manufactured, and where those who have been in control of the government for several years pretend they are antigovernment. I don't think these people are the least bit interested in spirituality, and I doubt many people are fooled by their use of domesticated prophets.

These elitists seem more interested in power, material wealth, and prestige. Would you not want these things for other groups that are now out of power? Without knowing you or the groups you represent, I can predict that if you did gain power, you would behave pretty much the way the present elitists do. That is why these efforts at spiritual formation are needed. They are not escapist but express a deep-seated wish to get to the bottom of things, to understand why we humans are destructive, to find a vision of what humanity can really be like. Thus spiritual formation could be the most radical venture we could undertake. And yes, the content of the vision does matter, which is why I like what Kathleen Kenney wrote: "The life-style of a koinonia is a prophetic denunciation of the false idols of consumerism, racism, militarism, and sexism, and a prophetic annunciation of a new style of relationships inaugurated through Jesus Christ as Risen Lord."

Yours for more radical solutions,

The Editor

Dear Editor,

Please pardon my handwriting as I know it may look like chicken scratching. I am not a person who went to school very much. But I am a preacher. The Lord called me forty years ago and I began preaching the Word and have never regretted a day of it. What I want to know is this—don't we all want the same thing? I'm for the Bible and justice and the communion of the saints. So why then can't we pray together as Christians instead of disagreeing all the time? "The prayer of a righteous man availeth much." As long as your heart is in the right place, the Lord will hear your prayer. Please tell me what you think of this idea. P.S. I like your magazine but some of your writers are like preachers: they don't know when to stop.

In His name,

A Praying Preacher
Dear Praying Preacher,

Yes, no, and maybe. Yes, I think we could find a unity, especially in Christ, that could reconcile the warring factions of the church. But no, I don’t think we all want the same thing. Some people still pray for the death of their enemies. Others for reconciliation. In fact, by glossing over our differences we make it harder to reach common ground that is truly fundamental. That leads to the maybe. You say that if a person’s heart is in the right place, the Lord will hear the prayer. Aren’t our hearts usually in several places at once? “Purity of heart is to will one thing,” wrote James, seconded by Kierkegaard. But even if we heeded this counsel, our Asian friends would remind us that in the very willing we would be revealing a certain anxiety, a fear that cannot “let go” and trust God.

And because we are confused and do not know what we want, we are forced to reflect on who we are and what the divine reality is asking of us. At the risk of demanding once again that you wade through some sesquipedalian swamps, let me quote from John Westerhoff, whose essay in this edition contains this sentence: “While spirituality is grounded in an intuitive way of knowing, it is not alien to the intellect—indeed, it needs the intellectual way of knowing to save it from distortions.” In other words, we have to think along with our praying, just as we have to act and refrain from acting.

Yours in thoughtful meditation,

The Editor

EDITORIAL POSTSCRIPT

All of this letter-writing tempted me to forget something important our readers should know. (And when you write both sides of a correspondence, it requires real concentration.) The consulting editor for this edition is W. Paul Jones. Paul once wrote a delightful little book about his experience in a Trappist monastery in Colorado—The Province beyond the River (Paulist Press, 1981). I hope the brothers were not offended by the book, because Paul’s writing endeared them to me. Paul is like that. He can be frank with you and remain your friend. I thank him for his help on this special edition—for suggesting ideas and writers, for some hard evaluations, and for being reliable.

—Charles E. Cole
Spiritual discipline opens to the postliberal pastor the sources of nourishment and refreshment needed to deal with burnout and doubt.

As a youth, after months of sweaty anxiety, I blurted out my secret to my pastor, "I'm thinking about the ministry." His reply cut me—"Don't do it if there's any way out! Only then will you know." For the next twenty years, with tricks worthy of Houdini, I tried to escape. I know now that I cannot. And because of that fact, I, a liberal, no longer have the self-assured luxury of passing off spirituality as pious fluff. Infuriatingly faddish though it be, "spiritual formation" points to an unfamiliar terrain that can be as mysteriously deep as it must be intellectually demanding. Thomas Merton ended The Seven Story Mountain by understanding his call as being one of the "burned" ones—the branded, marked, called, claimed. And we who call ourselves "liberals" have been likewise burned theologically. The One who calls, presumably, is the Jesus of Schweitzer's final page of The Quest of the Historical Jesus—the "One unknown, without a name . . . [who] speaks to us the same word: 'follow thou me!'" (Macmillan, 1910, p. 403). For some of us this is coming to have the feel of Kafka's The Castle—to be called, but by whom, for what? Heavy questions, as if pursued by one T. S. Eliot called "Christ the Tiger."

I offer that the present interest in spirituality by others is raising secretly for some of the rest of us a "heartburn" with the weight of an ominous void. This movement seems to evoke knowing resonance more from the laity. We liberal clergy types tend rather to view the topic itself
with at least uneasiness, more likely threat or anger, even betrayal, followed by a grudgingly acknowledged ignorance. Laity want not only resources; they expect from us the expertise of a guru, or at least one who is a step ahead of them.

But few laypersons know the price we liberals have paid for our liberalism. We are the buffers between them and a crude literalism; we counter the intellectual bankruptcy of a moribund fundamentalism and insist on social justice against the emotional excesses of a freewheeling sectarian individualism. The one word marking these battle scars is *pietism*. Feminists prefer the term *dualism.* We have been force-fed revivalist rhetoric, the negative spiritual disciplines beginning and ending with "Thou shalt not," a daily breakfast of the predictable moralisms (and sweet endings) of The Upper Room or Guide Posts. Consequently we have worked with incredible diligence to exorcize this past with the discipline of intellect—I to Yale, one colleague to Chicago, another to Boston. We came from Appalachia, Mississippi, the Great Plains—from the Nazarenes, the Methodist Church, South, from Billy Graham. I understand deeply why a colleague recently walked out when

We liberals, male or female, do not come to hierarchical piety neutrally—we are scarred, defensive, and rightly cautious.

a student-led chapel began with "There Is a Fountain Filled with Blood." I understand personally a professor's sense of failure when students wish to start class with "devotions." We have been exorcizing our birthmarks with the strong intellectual demands of seminary thinking. But the concomitant anger of feminists results not only from the hierarchical, dualistic, patronizing formation of consciousness through traditional piety. Women are expected to develop superintellectual rigor against the liberal academy itself if they are to make out a case for the damage to women being done in insisting on left-brain exclusivity. Consequently, not only when conservatives talk of spirituality, but when any male member of the church uses such language, feminists are understandably suspicious that the motive at best is accommodation. We liberals, male or female, do not come to hierarchical piety neutrally—we are scarred, defensive, and rightly cautious.

Yet we dare not let the irony be lost on us. The avowed progenitor of our liberalism is Schleiermacher. In him is symbolized the shift from revelation as appropriated past history to the present as locus of divine knowing. And the name given to this liberal reconstruction is the
"theology of religious experience." This may be a clue. In 150 years we have moved imperceptibly from liberalism as spirituality ("God-consciousness") to liberalism as works. Even in the prayers of Walter Rauschenbusch, one is deeply impressed with how "vital piety" still grounds action. But it is as if current liberalism, in its conflict with conservative extremes, has been seduced into an untenable nonspiritual extreme.

So we return from whence we began. To be a liberal today in a reactionary time is to be deprived of all romanticism. One can remain a liberal, I suggest, only if one is called to stand there. It is difficult. To be a liberal pastor is to be called upon incessantly to give—counselor, advocate, reconciler, communicator, administrator, educator. And when the unceasing telephone finally evokes that deep angry response, "Now what?" it is then that I know the dilemma of liberal pastors, that we, the ones called upon to feed others, can no longer hide the fact that we are not being fed. We are the ones who go empty away because we are the walking victims of the liberal justification by works: the used ones, the aching ones, the burned-out ones.

This emptiness inside may be assuaged outside, temporarily, by job advancement, building programs, steeple politics, popularity. But even with midlife crisis aside, it is that call with which we began that is ultimately our undoing. On a plateau, plagued with flatness, we still cannot walk away, or hang it up. Oh, some do, and if you can, do it, quickly. But the rest of us, during the midnight moments—we are the haunted ones, gnawed at by a God who is absent, experiencing presence as void, at best. The atheist Samuel Beckett knows us—those with a God-shaped hole in the center of a soul we deny. "Oh, that I knew where I might find him" (Job 23:3). As John Updike says, "God," for us plagued ones, is "the ominous hollow noun." Male and female alike, we have been victims of God the demander, the hirer, the watcher, the moralist, even the trailblazer. But, my God, by contrast—how we yearn to be nurtured, held, fed, released from the liberal obsession with accomplishment, purged from the piety of upward mobility! Just to be, and to dance for no other reason than dancing!

But all of this is embarrassing. Spirit talk isn’t our language. Martin Marty recognized this in the title of his recent book, A Cry of Absence: Reflections for the Winter of the Heart (Harper & Row, 1983). We resonate best to talk of the "Siberias of the heart," knowing full well that we are not destined for a "summery spirituality" in which one is "smitten or slain in the Spirit" or possessed "in moments of joy" (pp. 5-8). Ours is the experience of the desert space left when the divine is distant, the sacred is remote, and the One others call "God" is silent.
So the liberal’s language is deliberately secular. “Burnout” is the way our corporate secular counterparts tell us to put it. That not only makes it acceptable, but “stress scores” can even become a status identification with the world. Burnout is a term permitting diagnosis without judgment, becoming a kind of inevitable occupational hazard. And stress management as the euphemistic solution avoids the theological in the psychological. I have before me a summation of the stress management answer. These are the key words: recognize, deal, manage, talk, avoid, plan, accept, relax, exercise, diet, get away, laugh. Each word is prefaced by two others: I must.

Our minds can discern the contradiction, if only through a glass darkly, between this so-called solution and the lesson from seminary days. Christian existence is life justified by grace. Thus faith is sheer gift, a trust in God’s graciousness. And what of the “I musts,” i.e., works? They should never be initiatives, only joyous responses. This is no antinomianism. In Barth’s words, the gospel becomes operative when the imperative “I must” becomes the invitational “you may.” This transition is the meaning of spirituality. While the syntax of stress management is “in order that,” somehow the syntax of grace is “because.”

Put this way, the dilemma of the liberal pastor becomes a parable of the situation almost universal to our culture as such. The liberal rightly rejects a “ghetto” spirituality, i.e., one that emerges from and focuses upon the church’s exclusive, parochial life. Our yearnings today may not be truly answered by a return to what we have so painfully rejected, but by a postliberal spirituality yet to be—for a manna feeding faithfulness in faithless places.

But obsession with action is only one pole of the dilemma. Karl Barth reminds us of the dangers of the other extreme. Religious experience, he claimed, is pagan, for such subjectivity means so beginning with the self that everything one claims to express “God” is simply projection of one’s self. Although there are good reasons to be suspicious of Barth’s claim, the liberal needs to acknowledge the dilemma. When one idealizes strong experience, one bows before idols, not the Divine. With voluminous new documentation that experience partakes of rationalism, sexism, classism, etc., we remember sheepishly Barth’s admonition that you cannot speak of God by speaking of man in a loud voice. The liberal craving really is for objectivity in the midst of the subjective morass of a culture of experience by the decibel. Yet “whoso means to rescue and preserve the subjective element shall lose it; but whoso gives it up for the sake of the objective, shall save it.” As liberals we continue to smart in the presence of those
who confuse intensity of emotion with the will of God. But in response, we have been pushed on the feeling-thinking scale to the far dry pole of thinking, to accompany our doing.

And thus we find that, in spite of ourselves, in our conflict with conservatives, we have not eliminated the dualism, but have become isolated on the contrary end. Against the dualism of soul and body, the liberal chooses body; of individual and corporate, the liberal chooses corporate; of being in or of the world, the liberal chooses “of.” In contrasting discipline and freedom, the liberal chooses freedom. Against the dualism of transcendence and immanence, the liberal chooses immanence. Perhaps in happier times, with a universe decked as if for homecoming, the liberal choice might seem adequate fare. But in our time, the composite liberal end of the spectrum no longer feels liberating but defrauding. What is the reaction to the stance that all is body, togetherness, worldliness, immanence, held together by action formed by calculating thinking? The attrition born of charismatics and Alinsky-ites in battle array. But what shall we do with our radical aloneness, with footnotes of mystery undaunted by secularity, with our rational “out-of-controlness,” with absence, with the dissipating vertigo of endless activity? The radicalness we seek is no longer between poles but in a strange new cry for both. When getting begins to feel like losing, when personal advancement levels off before the downslope, when today’s social justice is seen as inevitably tomorrow’s injustices—it is then that one becomes a prime candidate for burnout, dropout, transfer-out, or 1,001 of the latest self-help gimmicks for coping. Or, one is ripe to hear the prophetic voice that will no longer permit excuse: “Shall I at least set my lands in order? London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down” (T. S. Eliot, “The Wasteland”).

Barth’s critique of liberalism was that it recognized neither evil nor death. As First World citizens, neither have we. For those of us who specialize in making order and sense of the world, we may need to give up some intelligibility to regain the mysterious, recognizing the agony that transcendent distance respects, and resisting any domestication of the world that dulls the trembling depths and heights. Barth’s God entered to deal with the “bang” of cosmic threat. But perhaps the awakening of our liberal souls will emerge from the “whimper.” Call it burnout, if you will. I call it ache. While the Death-of-God theologians may not have known what to do with it, they framed well the issue: “It is really that we do not know, do not adore, do not possess, do not believe in God. . . . We are not talking about the absence of the experience of God, but about the experience of the absence of God.”9
The Grand Inquisitor is no villain but a liberal pastor at heart, sadly but caringly smoothing the way through life's absurdities, privately suffering on behalf of the flock.

caringly smoothing the way through life's absurdities, privately suffering on behalf of the flock. And the price? It is the price of having to know.

Know what? Often it begins with the three-year loss of innocence called seminary. By graduation time, if not by the end of the first year, the fledgling pastor must seriously ponder the question, if others knew what I now know, would they still believe? One seems damned from that point on to a life of "bypassing." That is, the seminarian has three years to learn how to say one thing and be heard to say something quite different. I remember a New Yorker cartoon which pictured a clergyman standing fully clothed in a bathtub, while in the hall his wife speaks into the telephone, "I'm sorry, but the Reverend is unavailable; he just stepped into the tub." True, indeed, but false. A friend described his approach to funerals: "I say, 'Just as we trust God in life, so we trust God in death.' They think 'afterlife.' I don't—and we both win." Not really. Few seminarians endure first-year Bible without being overwhelmed by the humanness of Scripture. J/E/P/D, the synoptic problem, various "criticisms," etc.—until undercut is the Word of God which one once read daily to discern God's presence and will. Now Scripture functions illustratively for sermonic purposes, carefully edited. The dilemma becomes deeply theological. One listens restively as parishioners grieve with the words, "God called her home." We cringe, forever bereft of any God who kindly prepares a daily death list; or a God who is in heaven; or perhaps one who chooses anything. In fact, we hesitate to believe in a God who even "is," remembering Tillich's insistence that in the fight between theist and atheist over the "existence" of God, the atheist is right. 10

What would happen if one Sunday we let it "all hang loose"—announced that there was no physical resurrection, or virgin birth, or any miracles for that matter? that circumstances which biblical writers saw as
divine intervention were moments of insight about life? that Jesus will not return, on pink clouds or otherwise? that God does not reward the righteous with good things, nor is there even a God upstairs keeping track, nor is Scripture a future foretelling, nor can one “talk to Jesus”? The shroud of humanness cloaks it all. We know, yet we are a buffer that keeps the laity from the cruel reality of really knowing—like a pastor or counselor who hedges before the question, “Am I dying?”

Weber identified our world as a disenchanted worldview. My mother’s favorite response to my why-questions was, “If you can’t trust J. Edgar Hoover, who can you trust?” It is my favorite line, too, for opposite reasons. We have walked behind too many scenes, into too many dressing rooms, and propped up too many paper moons. We know how bishops are really chosen, and about the closed sessions where appointments are awarded, and what happens in dormrooms of seminarians. We have been tempted to be Totos pulling aside curtains hiding the Wonderful Wizards. Not even Gandhi and King, Jr., are left to us without muddy boots. The burden of the Grand Inquisitor—damned both to love and to know.

But when do 1,001 qualifications finally come to mean a functional denial of the original? Qualifiers upon dependent clauses within parentheses modifying brackets exegeted in footnotes, explained in the introduction as mythopoetic. The basic conservative question remains, “If you doubt any of it, where do you stop?” and the liberal dilemma, “If you can’t stop, where do you start?” This is the question called “spiritual,” with E. T., God, and Oz forming an uneasy whole. My spiritual pilgrimage began four years ago when I admitted, “I’m a functional atheist.” While articulate theologically, I did not function differently from humanistic atheists. What if a counselee said, “Paul, my wife and I haven’t been intimate for six months”? What then if I’m asked, “How long has it been since you have been intimate with God? Never?” My blue-collar friend would be blunt: “Don’t sell a product you don’t use.”

If Psalmists are to be trusted, the desert is where God seems most fond of operating. “Postliberalism” may be its current name. We know too much to turn back, and where we are, it is too intolerable to remain. The leap, said Kierkegaard, is not towards but out of. Yet spirituality cannot mean resources for shoring up the edge where we are. It means acknowledging the bankruptcy of this place, the one known in the eclipse of excitement. So, into the desert, where hope only blooms in prickled offerings, more scented than seen. But the way up is the way down, and the requisites for the journey are ache, and craving, and solitude, and
emptiness—the very opposite of what we have been prone to describe as
gospel. "The Lord is close to those whose courage is broken and he saves
those whose spirit is crushed" (Ps. 34:18, NEB).

From the beginning, Christianity has been for losers—either the
oppressed or those who have known the "sacrament of defeat." Are we
prepared for a theology of burnout? We are so made that we have no option
but to ask why for almost everything, especially at the pivotal moments of
life or death. Meaning is whatever is experienced as "answer." The name
for the intersection of question and silence is absurdity (which,
interestingly, literally means "absolute deafness"). Most of us exiled in our
culture today as postliberals can no longer claim "religious" experience—
hope, yes, undeniable experience, no. Nor is it likely. As a result, for a
Camus there remains only the absurd posture of rebellion. And listen to
Camus's two versions of rebellion: In response to The Plague (which is
"life, no more than that"), one may follow a Dr. Rieux, doing tenaciously
the pastoral task of healing, lifting hardly a glance toward the heavens
where God may or may not be watching; doing the task of one's pastoral
calling, expecting nothing but the knowledge of having done it
"nevertheless." With Tarrou, duty is insufficient. The call is to be a saint,
but without God. Nonadultery, for example, is insufficient; only nonlust
points to the authentic heart. Now comes the bind. Both versions incarnate
the Protestant work ethic. Duty for its own sake; or even more severe,
integrity through the purity of self-willing. And burnout is the judgment of
God upon those who tread either dead-end path as a road to justification.

In one sense being a pastor isn't too difficult—there are payoffs. But the
silent midnight hours, the quiet desperations of an undeniable
absurdity—of invocations at football games, being seen at the Rotary,
enduring semipagan weddings, stroking ruffled lay feelings in jealous
joustings for power. The quiet desperateness cries out, "Who feeds
me?," until one discovers that even on days off (if one dares to take them)
one experiences guilt over the very thought of doing nothing. Yet,
spirituality, said Merton, begins when a person can do nothing and feel
no guilt. But the desperate clutch of the work ethic keeps sending us back
to square zero.

We are those aware of the oppressed of the world, while enjoying the
suburban fruits of the oppression—and can relinquish neither. Perhaps
the prophets were right in identifying God's punishment as giving us
what we want. When Mother Teresa visited this country, an eager
reporter asked what she thought of such a prosperous nation. "I have
never seen," she replied, "such a starving people." She describes our
parishes. And we sense that she is describing the pastors of these
parishes. The name for the issue is spirituality.
The experience of God for postliberals is the shadow implied darkly by the experience we do know—eclipse, hiddenness, longing, aching, yearning.postliberals is the shadow implied darkly by the experience we do know—eclipse, hiddenness, longing, aching, yearning. The liberal is a congenital problem solver. But where the problematic permits no solution is where mystery knows its birth. There a postliberal spirituality may be born.

J. B. Metz’s description of Jesus, in *Poverty of Spirit* (Paulist Press, 1968), is suggestive: He is the one who “experienced the poverty of human existence more deeply and more excruciatingly than any other. . . . He had no consolation, no companion angels, no guiding star, no Father in heaven. All he had was his own lonely heart, bravely facing its ordeal even as far as the cross.” Spirituality is born of a world seen, with such honest eyes, as a world without God. The “sacrament of authentic humanness” is this same mind of Christ—the courage, Metz says, to gaze “into the darkness of nothingness and abandonment where God was no longer present” (p. 18). Such a christology of radical humanness can bring two awarenesses, which in intersecting become revelatory: (1) To know the impossibility of resolution within the contradictions of humanness. Don Saliers expresses the insight this way: “To follow the way of the cross is to be vulnerable to the experience of God’s absence and to the weakness and folly in our struggle to be faithful.” (2) To know, paradoxically, that in the depths of humanness is the center of divine
struggle. Saliers again: “The cry of dereliction from the cross is the most terrifying utterance from the depths of our humanity. But it comes ... from the very one we claim to be the incarnate word” (p. 2).

At least as a first step, we know that “the effort to understand the universe is one of the very few things that lifts human life a little above the level of farce, and gives it some of the grace of tragedy.” “What does it mean,” asks Julian Hartt, “to be rooted and grounded in finiteness and yet to have the sense and taste of the infinite (as Schleiermacher expressed it) ineradicably present?” That captures the liberal quandary as spiritual postliberal event: the paradoxical grace of thirst.

The title of Dorothy Day’s autobiography hints at our emerging theme—The Long Loneliness. God acts and only later do we receive the name, and perhaps even the awareness. Only years later did the people of Israel look back over the desert wanderings and call God love. Only when it was over did they discern that what had been experienced as survival was also a honeymoon. The divine-human love affair climaxed

What is at stake in postliberal spirituality is not experience, but discernment. What must be forged through intentional discipline is a sensibility, a habitual way of seeing.
everything. Therefore the issue really isn’t experience at all. Each of us has had inklings of grace, undeserved, unattended moments, gifts—in-carnate intersections which T. S. Eliot, in “The Dry Salvages,” calls “hints followed by guesses.” Likewise, each of us has had times of dereliction, aching, emptiness. Therefore the question is not whether one has experienced, but which type experience shall be formed through disciplined intentionality to be the aperture through which all else shall be viewed and thus experienced. There are the “moments,” and all else is a matter of “prayer, observance, discipline” (“The Dry Salvages”; my italics). The pianist plays countless, mind-numbing scales in order that Beethoven’s Piano Concerto No. 2 can be played as if by second nature. The runner rises at 5 A.M.; ten miles daily through even freezing rain in order that later the race can be run as a matter of habit. The woodcarver, the architect, the parent—even more the Christian. Gone must be the obsession with spontaneity, to be replaced by such words as intentionality, obedience, discipline. Spiritual formation is the honing of mind, eye, ear, and touch, to discern in, with, and under very ordinary things. The phenomenon of optical illusions makes the point well—one either sees it or one doesn’t—yet once seen . . . Living as a monk within a Trappist monastery has brought me to the discovery that spirituality emerges not in some unique breakthrough of special experience. God’s “existence” is the gradually enforced axiom which becomes one’s own very disposition as one’s life is formed and shaped by a community living out as rule the as if of the Christian faith. It is not incidental that the second book for United Methodists is called The Discipline. From Holy Club to societies, classes, and bands, faith meant being so ordered that one grows into the “form of holiness,” by rule, worship, prayer, Bible reading, and daily Eucharist. The moment the runner stops the discipline, running becomes a matter of reminiscence; so with the person of faith. Spirituality is an inward habitus, a disposition, a character, a habitual state emerging from a composite framework, a spiritual rule, a recollected and stable routine—establishing the mind of Christ through the body of Christ.

Walter Lowe is helpful in rejecting the prodigality of conservative Protestants to understand theology as “expressing the impress of some formative experience” called conversion. He finds more helpful the Anglo-Catholic understanding, where faith is grounded in objective “spiritual practice”—the daily office, rule, etc. It is significant, he says, that Bonhoeffer, known as the advocate of religionless Christianity (of living without God before God), is the very one who in Letters and Papers from Prison discloses as if axiomatic his need for objective spirituality, for being shaped daily with practices: using the sign of the cross,
recollections, intercessions, memorizing Psalms, day and night Bible reading. Bonhoeffer, experiencing under Nazi rule the eclipse of God, knew that religion as experience cannot provide the power of a "nevertheless." Religionless Christianity is nonexperiential life under promise born of daily rehearsal. And when the Nazis came for him, he embraced friends and left—a day like any other day. Faith as shaped disposition, rendered habitual, forged by reminders (sacraments), rehearsed as rule under promise.

Even for those who have known a conversion experience, the problem still becomes living "the day after." Marriage entails a covenant vow capable of lasting long after the ecstasy of falling in love. Inevitable aridity demands rule. Annie Dillard claims that all of Moses' life was lived for two experiences: one was seeing God for one second through the cleft in a rock; the other a tragic half-hour, viewing the Promised Land he would never enter. How to live between such few times: that is the fundamental issue. And spirituality is the name. Bernard of Clairvaux, in sketching out four stages of the spiritual life, insisted that spirit life for the sake of experience is unfaithful. Instead, one must live as if aridity is all that there is. This is pure love as pure faith. Kierkegaard explored the paradox: to decide to believe in the absurdity of the Incarnation is to do what one cannot do; there is no "reason" for so doing. Thus, the mere presence of faith is gift—in spite of oneself. This is "postliberal." We are caught in a world between paradigms. We are sensing, before others seem to acknowledge, that the roots of our culture are in dry rot. Yet we blink indecisively with the burden of having only hints about the unborn.

Yes, here we are, gambling a disciplined life for a vision radically uncertain, having only the cabin fever of the inveterate gambler, wagering "in spite of," only to discover that the mere acting as if one believes is itself gift from the hidden God.

The name is "spirituality." Kazantzakis knew the appearance of the veil before which we must practice our discipline: "We sing even though we know that no ear exists to hear us; we toil though there is no employer to pay us our wages when night falls." And what kind of doing is possible to "tame the dread mystery?" Nothing much, just cultivating a field, kissing another human, studying a stone, an animal, an idea.

And so we return to where we began—to ourselves as the "burned-out" ones. But is it any solution to develop a daily rule of our own to shape our sensitivities into a magnetized whole? Another requirement, an even more intense life by works? In one sense, yes; yet we have no option but to have a rule—either chosen by us for our consistent nurturing, or imposed unknowingly on us, whose "matins" are called "The Today Show." The hermit, Matthew Kelty, has spent a
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lifetime honing his eyes and ears for discernment and through him we are grasped by the paradox. Rather than being grim, works-weary, the honed eyes and the washed ears take on the lilt of gift. One day he sat on a hill, watching a tractor as it planted corn, on "as beautiful a morning as God had ever made," while overhead seven birds sang with abandoned joy, and two colts kicked and frolicked "up to their knees in wet grass." Who was playing best? "It does not matter, for all were playing, each in his own way," even "God in his heaven." It was glorious—heaven and earth in song.

I went to sing Prime. I thought the pitch high and the choir flat and I was mad. But that did not matter either. I was singing with the angels. That was real, singing with Christ in his glory, singing with everyone on the earth, with the Brother on the tractor, with the Brother dying in the infirmary, with every person on earth: the good and the bad, the virtuous and the dissolute, the sober and the drunken, the free and the imprisoned, the rich and the poor, people dying and leaving the world, people being born and just coming into it. I sing with them all in Christ.5

One of the burned ones now strangely on fire. Delirious vision. The possibility is open to us and it rests on discipline, a discipline that is necessary if one is to remain in suburban America, owning as if not owning, participating without being seduced, succeeding without seducing, attending without belonging, and never being other than a little kid at heart. This is to be fed to satisfaction. Without it, not one of us can endure for the long haul.

NOTES


7. This is the brilliant theme of Barth's Epistle to the Romans (London: Oxford University Press, 1933). The following quotation is from Barth's Dogmatics in Outline, trans. G. T. Thomson (New York: Harper, 1959), p. 16.

FOR FURTHER READING


Foster, Richard J. Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978. Perhaps the best single volume to introduce the Protestant to various disciplines of spirituality, including meditation, contemplation, fasting, etc. He speaks from a Quaker perspective. A study book is also available for work with groups.


Spiritual Formation Resource Packet. 11 monographs, Division of Ordained Ministry, United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry, P. O. Box 571, Nashville, Tenn. 37202. Monographs written by a number of writers as a resource for United Methodist pastors as to the meaning of spiritual formation, its historical options, contemporary theological options, ethic and feminist possibilities, etc. Its perspective is ecumenical.
THE PASTOR AS SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR

ROY W. FAIRCHILD

Can Protestant clergy learn from the Roman Catholic practice of submitting to a spiritual director? A noted writer on spirituality says yes and explains why.

A laywoman, long active in her local church and a leader in its wider judicatories, spoke up in a seminar of spiritual guidance. In a weary voice she said: "What I want in my life now is not meetings but meeting—meeting in the sense of being aware of spiritual presence in my life and in my praying. I want to discover the direction for the next phase of my life, but my pastor has not been of much help. Although I wanted a real conversation with him about my spiritual emptiness, he just handed me a booklet and said, 'Read this, I think it will help.'"

No one who has been in close touch with mainline Protestant churches during the last decade can miss the hunger for deepened spiritual life among laity and clergy alike. Yet, Protestantism has not shown much imagination in meeting that need in the average church, with the exceptions of the ambitious training program of the Upper Room Academy for Spiritual Formation and the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation. Looking for life in the Spirit, many church people have been drawn to evangelical, pentecostal, and charismatic renewal groups that promise spiritual gifts and a felt contact with the Holy Spirit. Some leave the church to find spiritual "highs" in Eastern meditation techniques and in psychoactive drugs, in place of the wordy hearsay of much Protestantism. Others, knowing that the Christian tradition has a wealth of resources in the area of spirituality and spiritual guidance, have intentionally set out to discover these riches through seminars.

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experiences in spiritual direction—Catholic-style—and in reading. It is not surprising that the books written by Morton Kelsey and Richard Foster are best sellers, describing as they do the tremendous variety of overlooked Christian meditation and prayer styles as an aid to our “encounter with God.”

Some pastors and laity, for personal, theological, and social reasons, resist a renewed emphasis on prayer and spiritual guidance, fearful that such attention will throw us back on an ascetic life, privatism and individualism, and a salvation by works that the Reformation was born to eradicate. They remember that Roman Catholic spiritual direction was associated historically with monasticism, auricular confession, and the whole apparatus that grew up around monetary penances and indulgences. They find their inspiration in Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

To be a Christian does not mean to be religious in a certain way, to cultivate some particular form of asceticism (as a sinner, penitent, or saint) but to be a man. It is not some particular act which makes a Christian what he is, but participation in the suffering of God in the life of the world.

Following Bonhoeffer and Barth, neo-orthodoxy has been highly suspicious of cultivating the “spiritual life.”

At the other extreme, one cannot help but notice the number of pastors who, having gravitated to a counseling ministry outside the church, now advertise themselves as “spiritual directors” as well as therapists, eager to attract a broader clientele of seekers. Somewhat sarcastically, William Willimon puts these words into their mouths:

Let me free-lance ministry, give me a degree and tell me I am special, encourage me to tack up a shingle, allow me to set up office hours, call me a professional, teach me some exotic spiritual gnosis that makes me holy, but do not hold me accountable to the church.

All of these signs of dis-ease about spiritual direction in the church prompt us to think again how Protestant pastors and people might foster the life of the Spirit in their mutual ministry.

The question this article poses is obviously so vast that it must be narrowed. Two concerns which many pastors share in this time of spiritual questing are: (1) What can be adapted from the much older Roman Catholic practice of spiritual direction without losing our Protestant understandings of biblical faith? (2) What shapes might spiritual guidance assume within the pastoral care of the local church? Answers to these questions in this limited space must obviously be superficial but, I hope, suggestive. Any thorough exploration of the Protestant and Catholic pastoral modes of spiritual guidance must rely
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upon the rich historical documentation provided in John T. McNeill, *A History of the Care of Souls* (Harper and Bros., 1951), and the recent impressive work of E. Brooks Holifield, *A History of Pastoral Care in America: Salvation to Self-Realization* (Abingdon, 1983), and other scholarly works. It is fortunate that our present ecumenical climate allows us to look with less defensive eyes at the ancient and modern practices of spiritual direction than was possible for the early Reformers. The very practices that Luther and Calvin inveighed against have shocked the consciences of most modern Catholics, and many of these excesses have been modified or discarded through the years.

What is “spiritual direction”? One modern Catholic, Sandra Schneiders, describes it as “a process carried out in the context of a one-to-one relationship in which a competent guide helps a fellow Christian to grow in the spiritual life by means of personal encounters that have the director’s spiritual growth as their explicit object.” This is a decidedly modern interpretation, as we shall see. Some of the features of Roman Catholic spiritual direction in the earlier days of the church’s history are enlightening. In the fourth century, dedicated people sought out the Christian hermits in the deserts of Palestine, Syria, and Egypt in order to learn to “live for God” more fully than the “establishment” Christianity inaugurated by Constantine enabled them to do. Later, desert monasticism became the main means of effective protest against a worldly church that had sold out to the culture. From those early beginnings to the Counter-Reformation in the sixteenth century, spiritual direction developed as a way of guiding Catholic Christians to grow spiritually as they faced the temptations of a hostile or religiously competitive world.

In broad strokes, we can identify some common characteristics of spiritual direction in this period from which Protestants can learn. (I can find exceptions historically to every statement that follows, but I believe they are exceptions.) First, it has focused primarily on the spiritual formation of the clergy and the “religious.” Spiritual direction was to foster a style of life exemplified in the monastic movements and in the discipline of the clergy. The form of life fostered was distinctly “religious” and contrasted sharply with the life-style of the secular or worldly laity. It assumed a “split-level” world. Spiritual direction led the religious to prayer and to the constant examination of the inner life and motives as well as external habits, diet, clothing, and ways of interacting with one another. Second, a sharp dualism of body and spirit was usually assumed. Neoplatonic and Hellenistic denigration of the body and sexuality pervaded Catholic spiritual direction throughout much of its history, in
contrast to a biblical spirituality. Woman was regarded as inferior because she represented sensual “matter.” Ways of “mortifying the flesh,” now regarded as masochistic, stressed a life-denying rather than a life-affirming image of the work of the Spirit. Denis the Areopagite, probably a sixth-century monk, underlined the theme of suspicion of the body, influencing much of the church to this day.

Third, spiritual direction, as the term implies, was usually given in an authoritarian, hierarchical relationship. While we have some records of spiritual direction being expressed as “spiritual friendship,” these are rather rare exceptions. A few of the outstanding spiritual guides were women who actually gave guidance to men. But, by and large, direction was given in a relationship of strict paternalistic control. The art of spiritual direction reached a peak in seventeenth-century French and Spanish Catholicism. Commands, prescriptions, and the muting of the directee’s autonomy were the order of the day. St. Francis de Sales stressed the authority of the director of souls in his Introduction to the Devout Life:

“The guide should always be an angel in your eyes: that is to say, when you have found him, do not look upon him as a mere man, nor trust him as such, nor in his human knowledge, but in God who will favor you and speak to you by means of this man.”

A fourth characteristic of Roman Catholic spiritual direction, historically considered, was its embodiment of a “ladder” concept of spiritual growth through stages of prayer. One Catholic dictionary of spirituality says that the theme of the ladder is a constant in the history of Catholic spirituality. The virtuous life moved through stages away from the material to the spiritual, thus reversing the direction of biblical spirituality and the Incarnation. Throughout the history of spiritual direction, enormous energy and imagination have been used to depict the stages of spiritual growth. Catholic mystics travel a well-worn, well-known path through the dark night of the senses and of the soul. Progress in prayer, for example, moves from discursive prayer to meditation, from meditation to contemplation and—for the advanced in the spiritual life—to the mystic marriage, and finally to union. One can understand how, in reaction to this “work” of salvation, the Reformers eschewed developmental language and maintained that “justification by faith,” the supreme act of grace in Christ alone, was sufficient to save people from their sins; anything other than the acceptance of this act and trust in Christ was considered irrelevant to salvation. One can also understand why Calvin and Luther did not relate sanctification to certain forms of prayer. To be sure, growth in grace was affirmed. Calvin, for example, states that
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“Christ is not outside us but dwells within us . . . and day by day he grows more and more into one body with us, until he becomes completely one with us.” Such sanctification is manifested in a life balanced by the knowledge of God, the experience of God, and the service of God and neighbor. In private and public worship, one is called to constant metanoia, conversion, when this balance is broken.

It is not adequate to our times simply to reach back into the old “spiritual classics” for guidance in the church. Indeed, perceptive Roman Catholics today would reject almost all of the assumptions of authoritarianism and dualism, and of clergy-laity distinctions in classical spiritual direction. Matthew Fox, Adrian van Kaam, Thomas Hart, Carolyn Gratton, Katherine Dyckman, Patrick Carroll, Francis Baur, and Sandra Schneiders are among those Catholic writers who have rejected or radically modified the medieval assumptions of spiritual direction.

To address our second question concerning a role for spiritual guidance in the pastoral care of the church, let me discuss what I have learned from the history of spiritual direction and the cure of souls. A central aim of all spiritual guidance might well be formulated as follows: “Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom. 12:2).

Here are some guidelines:

1. Progress in the life of the Spirit seems to be enhanced when Christians make themselves accountable to a spiritual guide in order to minimize self-deception about their motives and goals. That guide need not be a pastor. Indeed, the great majority of Catholic spiritual directors have not been pastors but monks. For Protestants, ordination does not confer a special spiritual status but recognizes and validates an ability to do a job as a leader of a community of faith designed for equipping the saints for the work of ministry (Eph. 4:12). Alastair Campbell has written, “We must learn to speak of the pastorhood of all believers and to explore the idea that each person has a call to lead in that special way characteristic of the Good Shepherd.” That may well include spiritual guidance, which is not a matter of learning a new “spiritual technology” but of being on a continuous spiritual journey, open to the Spirit, and possessing the capacity for listening love. It is the mutuality of ministry that Protestants affirm, and so the phrases “spiritual guide,” “spiritual friend,” and “spiritual companion” may well be more appropriate than “spiritual director.” The pastor’s role may include enabling the gifted laity to be exposed to ways of learning ways of prayer and discernment in various conference settings.
The crucial matter is that pastors and people together learn how to pray. Prayer to me is paying loving attention to all of God that we know with all of our selves that we know. Because we do not know how to pay such attention, Paul says, "We do not know how to pray worthily, but his Spirit within us is actually praying for us in those agonising longings which cannot find words. He who knows the heart's secrets understands the Spirit's intention as he prays according to God's will for those who love him" (Rom. 8:26-27, Phillips, The New Testament in Modern English, 1972 rev. ed.). Thus pastor and people understand the Holy Spirit as the ultimate spiritual director, whoever is the intermediary.

2. A second guideline is the recognition that personal spiritual guidance always takes place within the context of corporate worship, liturgy, and the koinonia of the church, and never stands as a ministry by itself. There is a sense in which everything that goes on in the church will have some bearing upon spiritual development, for better or for worse. When Richard Baxter in *The Reformed Pastor* (1656) affirmed that the minister was to be the "counselor for souls," he did not mean counseling as a one-to-one relationship as we think of it now. He believed that "pastoral" referred not merely to private conversation but also to public preaching, the administration of sacraments, guidance in prayer, and the visitation of families. In the worship of the church, we acknowledge our need for God's grace and adopt a more receptive, trusting stance that allows God's Spirit to get us "unstuck" from the world's values. What really matters in corporate pastoral care is the quality of the pastor's own spiritual journey as she or he leads the community. What else allows a pastor to teach and preach, counsel and celebrate with a growing sense of wonder, joy, and gratitude and a sense of solidarity with the least and lost of the world?

3. A third guideline calls for us to make some tentative distinctions between counseling, psychotherapy, and spiritual guidance. Most pastors will have read what I have had to say from the perspective of their training as pastoral counselors. In times of trouble more people go for help to the pastor than to any other professional. The enormous influence of psychology on pastoral counseling to the exclusion of spiritual concerns has been noted by many in recent years. In his book *Pastoral Care and Process Theology*, Gordon Jackson says, "The most critical problem in contemporary pastoral care and counseling is the missing element of God." He does not mean to urge the insertion of God-talk into pastoral conversations but a working theology of the activity of God in such interactions and in the world. Few pastors have such an operational theology. While secular psychotherapists are reporting a tremendous increase in the number of patients who are searching for...
answers to questions about the existential givens of existence—death, freedom, isolation, and meaninglessness—many if not most pastoral counselors continue to focus their attention on emotional and interpersonal dynamics to the exclusion of the divine life in the individual and society. To counter this one-sidedness I suggest that, for the time being, spiritual guidance be distinguished from counseling and psychotherapy.

Spiritual guidance differs from its companions in the helping styles in that it is not primarily problem-centered. Spiritual guides and those who work with them see each other less frequently than is usual in counseling. The real work of prayer (as defined earlier) is done by the person in his or her own life, and guidance comes in reflection, in the presence of the Holy Spirit and the guide, upon it. Spiritual guidance is for people who seek coherence and communion, a renewed meaning in their lives, and a deepened relationship with the Source of their being. To use Abraham Maslow’s terms, spiritual guidance is more oriented to “growth motivation” than to “deficiency motivation,” going beyond functional living to optimal Christian living. In contrast, psychotherapy is for people who are confused, emotionally distressed, and who do not understand the changes in their feeling and behavior. In counseling, these persons are concerned about choices. They are often in conflict about what actions to take in their lives. In general, psychological therapy fosters the development of the ego-management of one’s life and works through the obstacles, whereas spiritual guidance works with the unfolding of the person’s life as he or she seeks its transformation in the direction of God’s will and way of experiencing the world. (Space limitations do not permit more elaboration of these distinctions but perhaps the accompanying chart will help the reader.)

In pastoral conversations the spiritual guide will encourage the discussion of the experiences of God’s reality and absence. In mainline Protestant churches, spiritual guides will not avoid dealing with extraordinary religious experiences but will also not single out any special experiences as being essential to mature spirituality. Rather, believing the kingdom of God to be within us and among us, spiritual guidance will seek to help people to discern the spiritual in all experience, to attend to the directivity of God in the life-story of the person and in society. Spiritual guidance, Protestant-style, will not focus on the experience of God but on the God of all experience. Discernment of the spirits in reported experiences is a vital function of spiritual guidance. While keeping a bead on the “fruit of the Spirit” as described in Galatians, the guide will also find help in Roger Hazelton’s test questions:
CONTRASTS IN HELPING RELATIONSHIPS

With many therapists and counselors coming to value the need for transcendence and a sense of the "sacred," and the necessity of living by more than the ego, one can expect these contrasts to be increasingly blurred. The dotted lines of separation also convey this awareness. (Each requires of the helper: listening love, authenticity, willingness to enter the world of the other with empathy, respect for uniqueness.)

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<th>Psychotherapy</th>
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| **Experience of confusion about one's behavior, mental processes, moods, inability to cope and relate in work and love because of unconscious factors.** | **The need to make choices about life situations and relationships and to remove obstacles to goals adopted. Most issues available to awareness.** | **Yearning for coherence and communion.**  
Searching for God and personal meaning.  
A sense of shallowness or loss of soul and disillusionment.** |
| **Awareness and reduction of conflict, integration within, increased ability and willingness to function in love and work, increase in "sanity" and ego-control. Good functioning of total physical organism.** | **Recognition of needs and value, priorities through focus on feelings and increased self-awareness so that decisions can be realistic and lead to satisfaction of self-in-relationships.** | **Continuous conversion; letting go of resistance to discovery of deeper identity evoked by God. Ego is reduced: Now I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me (Gal. 2:20). Desiring and choosing differently, e.g. the Beatitudes.** |
| **To desire to heal, cure; to comprehend or solve mystery, and to help the person to intrapsychic peace and personal fulfillment. Looking to biochemical causation of the confused state, if biologically oriented.** | **To work collaboratively with the client so that "will" and ego-management is strengthened, leading to personal achievement, of goals chosen. Encourage self-direction, and self-assertion in action.** | **To be in dialogue together in the presence of mystery; willingness for God's intention to be realized through surrender of self-definition. Courageous service leading to universal fulfillment.** |
SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR

Do these claimed experiences of inspiration actually yield insight, encouragement and renewal for self and others? Are they creative or re-creative in their effects? Do they contribute to a more humane and liberating order of life?

4. A fourth guideline suggests that, being “people of the book,” Protestants might well make “story” the central paradigm of their spiritual guidance. Guidance, then, becomes the art of evoking life-story conversations. As Henri Nouwen has summarized:

The great vocation of the minister is to continuously make connections between the human story and the divine story... To be a living memory of Jesus Christ... means to reveal the connections between our small sufferings and the great story of God's suffering in Jesus Christ, between our little life and the great life of God with us. 17

We need to tell stories, our own and God’s, in history and see how they have an impact on each other. To facilitate this is, indeed, a spiritual art. 18 Here we return to our biblical, especially Hebraic, roots. Ask a rabbi a deep theological question and you will not likely get a string of doctrinal answers, a “ballet of bloodless concepts,” but you will be told a story. The parables of Jesus become for many a form of spiritual indirection, leaving the person to respond when the parable’s radical meaning sinks in.

Each of us has, or lives, or is a story. The plot line is not always clear. There are many subplots, detours, exoduses, and wildernesses in our journey. Too often we settle for living the stories and roles and expectations of others, the church included, and our own song remains unsung. The spiritual guide will enable his or her friend to reflect on the grace-filled fragments of the story, and to discern where God has been luring and leading. It is often in transitions—the in-between places of our lives that occur dramatically in times of loss, death, and separation—and in periods of boredom and meaninglessness that persons may find that God offers the greatest opportunity for transformation and resurrection. But we need one who will walk with us, helping us discern the working of God at these times of “little deaths.” These are painful but fruitful periods when egoism loses its hold on us and when our familiar self-image no longer dominates our behavior.

Our story must acknowledge the political and institutional power which has been at work in it, although without a guide we may be unconscious of these forces. We are communal beings more than we know. “Spirit” for the prophetic biblical voice must mean the power and freedom to transcend and thus to re-create, to reshape those very communities which have shaped our self-image and, indeed, our image.
of God. As we make contact with the myths we have lived by in our society, we discover that the primary work of the Holy Spirit is to subvert those myths and enable us to say with a whole heart, "Thy kingdom come."

As far as the Bible is concerned we are always on a journey and must recognize two constant pulls: forward in faith to the unknown and backward to the slavery of the familiar. We need spiritual guidance so that those transitional times may be ones of "creative dislocation." Praying the Psalms is one way of encountering those transitions creatively. There is no feeling or experience that cannot be found in that scriptural mirror. Walter Brueggemann says the life of faith consists in moving with God in terms of (a) being securely oriented, (b) being painfully disoriented, and (c) being surprisingly reoriented. The Psalms of lament are written for our periods of disorientation, when our story and future is not clear. He says, "The work of prayer is to bring these two realities together—the boldness of the Psalms and the extremity of our experience—to let them interact, play with each other, tease each other, and illuminate each other. . . . All this is to submit to the Holy One in order that we may be addressed by a Word which outdistances all our speech." When that happens, with the help of a companion, we have experienced spiritual guidance in pastoral care.

NOTES


19. Praying the Psalms (Winona, Minn.: St. Mary's Press, 1982).
KOINONIA AS SPIRITUALITY

KATHLEEN KENNEY

How can we overcome stagnation and privatism in spiritual formation? A former member of a religious order reflects on the failure of Christian community as well as its possibility.

My reflections on koinonia arise out of my experience, which includes twenty-four years in a Roman Catholic women’s religious community. It also includes my decision to leave that community and to commence a personal search for a different way to live in community at this time in history. Because of my own questions regarding life-style, approach to mission, prayer forms, relationship of inner life of community to society, etc., I found that I no longer fit within the structure of a traditional religious community. Thus, in order to be faithful, I needed to take a leave of absence from my religious congregation.

And so, with many other Christians who desire to be faithful to the gospel within the context of an intentional community, I am searching for a model of viable community for today. Already some contemporary attempts have been made to create such communities. They range from ecumenical communities of individuals, families, and households, such as Reba Place in Evanston, Illinois; to denominational celibate communities; to hermits like Shantivanahnam in Atchison, Kansas. These have been in existence long enough to demonstrate that there is and, I hope, always will be a pluriformity of models of community. In these reflections on koinonia as spirituality, I want to discuss some aspects of spirituality which I have come to view as being at the heart of intentional communities within the church, no matter what their structure.

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Anyone who has tried to form Christian community has been tempted to stagnate or to opt out.

"Please, no more questions!"—as if the changes in community life were mere experimentation in search of the final answer. The innate longing for stability, for stopping with "enough," seems to make people cry out, "Sit down and rest your weary members in the rocking chair of institution." The underlying assumption of this attitude is that there is a stage of growth at which point a community can heave a sigh of relief and exclaim, "We've made it!"

Even for those who know better, the temptation to opt out of the struggle in weary individualism, comfortable safety, or self-protection is great. While I speak out of a particular context, the traditional orders of the Catholic Church, I suspect that the same holds true for anyone who has worked consciously toward forming some sort of Christian community. There is a temptation to settle in and then to stagnate, or simply to opt out.

But for those who have come to know the God of history in the process of history, it really is not possible ever to "settle in," as if one had arrived at some sort of appropriate mode of response to that circle of relationships comprising persons, God, creation, and events. The spiral of relationships is dynamic. The God of our mothers and fathers is a God who creates and liberates. As hard to accept as it sometimes is, this God continues to create and to liberate as a God intimately involved with creature and creation. Jesus weeping over Jerusalem is a wonderful portrait of the pathos of this God. The goal of creation can be reached only with the response and involvement of the created ones.

Thus another basic assumption underlying these reflections is that life is a dynamic process. In order to counter a growing reluctance within faith communities to continue the process of adaptation and response to the changing socio-cultural-economic situation of the world, it is important to stress the dynamic process of koinonia. "Enough is enough," many say.
circumstances of people, culture, and society that make them who they are. As the response to the Word becomes enlivened by people in history, the Word, in turn, comes back to call forth the disciple to something new. The Word and the disciples and the community of disciples are in a dynamically dialogic relation to history.

Luke-Acts makes it clear that there is no formula for listening and responding to God in the course of history. When the early community of believers welcomed the Gentiles, its basic assumptions regarding its inner life and mission were questioned. And this has been the pattern ever since: When fidelity to God's servant Jesus meant expulsion from the synagogue, a community's assumptions were questioned. When a flat world turned out to be round, when Luther and his followers survived and thrived, when blacks, native Americans, and women finally laid claim to their identity as full-fledged human beings, when an atom bomb was actually dropped twice on civilian populations, a community's assumptions were questioned. When hundreds of thousands of persons are forced to become aliens in foreign lands, when the percentage of those dying from starvation grows, when one powerful nation pays a mercenary army to invade a sovereign nation, a community's assumptions ought to be questioned!

In this context, then, spirituality is understood as the dynamic process of living out the relationship of persons with God and with history. It is a style of life that weaves a path along the spiral of these three intertwined relationships. To refer to koinonia as spirituality is to place the lived experience of community within the context of a relationship with God, people, and history.

The basis of the Christian community was the experience, shared and personal, of Jesus as Risen Lord and the response to that good news. Koinonia is a response to that experience. The term koinonia used to describe the Christian community comes from two passages in Acts 2:42 and 4:32-34. The author of Acts used the term to point to a Greek ideal, a style of friendship that consisted of being of "one soul" or, in Christian terms, "of one heart and one soul." For the Christian, the oneness came from being one in Christ, having the same faith, being gifted with the same Spirit of love. This being of "one soul," or one in Christ, corresponded to a communal way of life that was expressed in dedication to the apostles' teaching, to holding all things in common, to bearing witness to the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and to the breaking of the bread and prayers. These are aspects which I view as being at the heart of viable contemporary communities. In the following reflections on koinonia as spirituality, I will focus on the community of goods, the
mission of proclaiming the good news, and the breaking of the bread and prayers as responses to the experience of the Risen Lord.

Both traditional religious communities and contemporary communities seem to incarnate some dimension of the sharing of goods, both in the sense of one's person and of actual material possessions. A commitment expresses itself in the sharing of goods. "But there will be no poor among you (for the Lord will bless you in the land which the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance to possess") (Deut. 15:4).

Today we see the massive exploitation of people, the immense and growing gap between rich and poor, the continuing rape of the earth and the poisoning of the atmosphere, and imminent threat of nuclear disaster. In this context, I offer a vision of a contemporary approach to holding all things in common and of distributing to each according to need that is expressed in a life-style whereby people not only share within their community, but also attempt to live in harmony with creation and all peoples. The sense of oneness goes far beyond the immediate group. Besides living the simple life in community, it means prophetically

Holding all things in common can lead to petty quibbling over nickels and dimes, but it can also be life-engendering and liberating.

denouncing the systems and structures that perpetuate poverty and the relationships of domination and subjugation among peoples, nations, and the earth. It involves the work of justice as well as the work of charity. A contemporary community that is a sign and sacrament of God's love in the world is invited to be faithful to the giftedness of the land. Accepting the land as heritage, they seek to live as a people under gift. The same Spirit that binds them together among themselves connects them with all of life. The sharing extends to all of life and, thus, the life-style of a koinonia is a prophetic denunciation of the false idols of consumerism, racism, militarism, and sexism, and a prophetic annunciation of a new style of relationships inaugurated through Jesus Christ as Risen Lord. The sharing, the communion, is an effect of a lived covenant.

In my experience, the holding of all things in common can have both negative and positive effects. For example, negatively, it can lead to a childish dependence, a petty quibbling over nickels and dimes, an authoritarian control over others by controlling the purse, and, oddly enough, a selfishness. But when lived in the context of the goodness of creation with a free choice made for the sake of the kingdom, the sharing
of goods can be very life-engendering and positive. For example, it can free some community members to carry out uncompensated ministries among the poor. I know of two women who share one full-time position in a wealthy suburban parish so that they both can work part-time among Native Americans in the Chicago inner city. A man in a Detroit community tells the story of how, after several years of living together, members of the community began feeling a need to build up personal savings accounts for their children's education or for their own health and retirement needs. After prayer and reflection, some members chose to do that and no longer keep their goods in common. At the same time, others felt called to respond to the questioning by living more radically. They moved a block away to an even poorer neighborhood and chose to cut their personal and community budgets. They did so freely, out of a deep sense of commitment to the gospel in the face of the present world situation where so few have so much.

A second aspect of koinonia as spirituality is mission. Mission is the proclaiming of the good news in word and deed. Some might define it as the outreach dimension of community; what the community does about gospel beyond its own boundaries. It is the Matthew 28 and the Luke 4 dimension of koinonia. Some groups originate out of a response to specific external needs, e.g., Mother Teresa's community in India was formed to care for the indigent dying. Other groups originate out of nurturing more internal needs, which is what some charismatic, healing communities have done. The mission ad extra is not a primary focus for them. However, I contend that a group which does not foster a sense of mission beyond itself is lacking an essential dimension to its spirituality.

Some years ago, a Latin American theologian surprised me by his emphasis on the need for the South American church to begin sending missionaries to other places. Until then, he said, they would not really be a church. Nor could they wait until all of the internal needs of the South American church were met. Some needs would be met only by reaching out beyond themselves. The good news they would proclaim would be out of their own situation of poverty and need. And the South American church has begun sending missionaries to Africa and India.

How mission is enfleshed depends on many factors, but the essential dimension of mission will be a motivating force and vision for a community. Jesus carried out his mission as one who entered fully into the human condition, identifying with the poor. As servant of the One who heard the cries of the poor throughout history and promised a new order, Jesus decided to stand with the poor as the place from which he preached and did the deeds of God. This is the place from which contemporary mission ought to be carried out. Where there is poverty,
oppression, anything that impedes humans from assuming their dignity as persons, there is a starting point for mission.

This approach to mission has an unavoidable tension that is bound to increase the more a person or community is faithful. It is the tension engendered by the growing confrontation with evil, personal and structural. The tension can take on a deep meaning when dealt with in a community whose members seek to be about the kingdom’s work. Together, members of the Christian community can remember and reaffirm that they are persons signed with the sign of the cross. In a very real sense, the missionary Christian community striving to be an authentic koinonia is doomed to suffer and know the pain of being put to death. It is not success that motivates nor measures mission. It is the sustaining experience, in light and in darkness, of a God who promises life, who promises to be faithful. The promise of faith is that, in the end, it is all God’s. Transformation, not simply change, is what the Christian community is about. And transformation is of the Spirit.

That brings me to a third aspect of koinonia as spirituality, the breaking of the bread. Just as the disciples needed to come together to tell their stories and to sing hymns, so does a contemporary community. The table fellowship of friends who “know,” who can nod their heads and hearts out of their own memories, is necessary to those who desire to be faithful. The warmth and consolation of wine and the delight and satisfaction of bread at the table of remembering sustains the members of koinonia. The Eucharist is at the heart of a missionary community. It is in the Eucharist that the community remembers who it is. In the anamnesis the polarities of life and death, of community and mission, are experienced as meaningful. They are not resolved. If anything, they are intensified. But the remembering as community helps each and all to place the pain, the questions, the tensions, the ambiguities in perspective and, together, to keep moving on.

Perhaps it is more important than ever for communities to come together frequently around the table. Listening to the Jesus story together and reflecting on how that story is being brought forward in and through them energizes and sustains hopes and vision. It can keep the community honest and sincere in its life and mission. Receiving the blessing and joining in the offering of Jesus helps the community to remember that it is through the cross that life comes. The originating experience becomes appropriated by the community through its own experience of suffering, death, and life.

In 1984 I experienced this appropriation very powerfully in a base community in Nicaragua, where I celebrated Eucharist with the community at Santa Maria de los Angeles. The ongoing struggles of these
people to create a new society in which all can live with dignity and freedom was brought into prayer and blessed with the bread and wine. The continued experience of oppression and death was placed within the story of Jesus who had to suffer and die in fidelity to the kingdom. The hope that was so tangible within that community was more than mere human hope. It was the hope that comes from knowing that your own struggles are but a part of that larger drama of God’s desire for all of creation to achieve its destiny of liberation in God.

Within the context of Eucharistic remembering, there can be a deepening of a common story. Shared joys and sorrows become part of the story of a group and, thus, some things and events take on a giftedness. In their presence, there is a power of grace that is evoked and shared. A community with which I lived for two years would break bread and share the cup about once a week. The simple ceramic cups are nothing special in themselves. Yet, every time I drink wine from one, it calls to mind the sacred moment of breaking bread with sisters who were so much a part of my life. The cup is, for me and for them, a sacrament.

Just as there exist tensions between personal ownership and community of goods, between meeting inner needs of a community and reaching out in mission, so, too, there is a tension between personal prayer and communal prayer. The fourth aspect of koinonia as spirituality that I want to address is the personal dimension of prayer. Unless members of a community are entering the inner journey, I don’t know how they can sustain themselves or be sustained as koinonia. In functional terms, this means taking time to be with God in solitude. It means being quiet enough to allow even the most active among us to be gifted with the prayer of mystics.

The context for prayer is history: personal, communal, societal, church, world. As persons who have a share in the process of creating history, of determining our destiny, we also know the deep dimension of sin and how sin can deter us from being faithful to the process that truly leads to the inbreaking of God’s kingdom of justice, peace, and love. In prayer, one is given to know both one’s giftedness and one’s sin, one’s richness and one’s poverty, and one is invited to change. Simultaneously, one is given to know both the giftedness and the sin in the world, the richness and the poverty, and one is invited to work for change. Discernment happens. That which is of God becomes more clear.

Thus, opening oneself to the inner journey enables one to enter the outer journey with greater authenticity and truth and with eyes that know what they see. But it means one must allow all the dimensions of one’s interior to be singed and cleansed, comforted and nurtured, revealed and transformed. Being faithful to that inner journey in terms of
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A personal relationship with God that is made contextual in history is difficult. Dorothy Day called this the lonely journey. We need others to walk with us. We need the fidelity of one another, as well as grace, to enable us to be faithful. Those who accompany us can only walk along on the outside. But for that "oneness of heart and soul" to exist in the community of believers, I feel that each member needs to be in a personal, dialogical relationship with God who is revealed in the course of human events. The "oneness of soul" of the Christian community is the shared experience of God, of a loving God.
THE PASTOR AS SPIRITUAL EDUCATOR

JOHN H. WESTERHOFF

Education stems from human achievement, spirituality from divine action—right? Wrong, says an Episcopal priest, who believes the two coincide in ways that enable pastors more truly to fulfill their ministry.

Methodism at its best is properly understood as a movement in the history of the spiritual life, a school of spirituality, and an understanding of and method for guiding the spiritual growth of persons in community. John Wesley (1703-91; Feast Day, March 3), the Anglican priest upon whose spiritual pilgrimage Methodism is founded, made his most significant and lasting contributions to spiritual nurture. While his own piety was affective (a warming of the heart) and kataphatic (making use of the imagination), similar to Benedict of Nursia, Julian of Norwich, and Martin Luther King, Jr., like them he strove to avoid pietism’s heresy of an excessive concern for religious experience or right feelings. Like others before him he balanced his own spiritual tendencies with a strong commitment to both the intellectual and the moral life characteristic of the speculative (an illumination of the mind) and apophatic (self-emptying) dimensions of spirituality. Surely, no one in the history of Protestantism cared more about spiritual formation and education than he. Indeed, Wesley sought to describe the process and develop a method for spiritual growth. Further, he continually advocated the pastor’s role as spiritual guide and educator.

As an Anglican priest teaching in a United Methodist seminary, I mourn our historic division and claim John Wesley among those who have influenced my piety, but I also need to admit that, along with Methodist theologians such as Albert Outler, I am somewhat troubled by

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Methodism's replacement of Wesley's catholic, sacramental, communal, liturgical understanding of the spiritual life with a frontier, individualistic, evangelical piety.

John Wesley believed and taught an explicit doctrine of "holiness" or spiritual perfection as the goal and crown of Christian life. Those who have faith in Jesus Christ are going on to perfection, should expect to be made perfect in love in this life, and therefore should earnestly strive to do so—or at least that is what United Methodist pastors at their ordination explicitly acknowledge to believe, just as they implicitly promise to guide others in the art of holy living. Typically, clergy in the catholic tradition of which the Wesleyan tradition is a part have understood their ministry as aiding others toward sanctification. Justified we are; sanctified we are to become. "Justified" implies a new creation in Christ to be manifested in our common life. As justified we are both sinner and saint: sinner because what God has freely given has not been fully accepted; saint because the essential first step of salvation, God's justifying love, is already present. So it is that our lives are best understood as a journey toward wholeness and holiness or health, i.e., salvation. In our baptism we celebrate our awareness of this truth about ourselves and become incorporated into the body of Christ, the church, within which we live into our baptism, that is, become who we already are through daily conversion and nurture. To be ordained is to accept the responsibility to equip the church with persons who can aid others on their journey toward internal and external perfection, the Spirit's gift of holy living or the perfect love of God and neighbor.

The pastor is responsible for providing leadership in both spiritual formation and education.

While all members of the community of faith share in the responsibility to accompany and guide each other on our spiritual pilgrimage, the pastor plays a special role in this transforming-forming process. As William Temple wrote, "We need more than all else to teach the clergy to be teachers of prayer." At ordination the community of Christian faith bestows power on its clergy to engage in particular symbolic functions, one of the most fundamental being that of acting as an instrument for an ever-deepening awareness of our relationship to God who searches us out so as to love us into wholeness and holiness of life. Thus at every ordination, clergy accept the call of God and the community to be a spiritual example, guide, and teacher. As such, the pastor is responsible
for providing leadership in both spiritual formation and education. Formation or nurture is concerned with participation in the spiritual life experience within a community which, through informal means, shapes peoples' life-styles and patterns of living throughout the life cycle. Education is concerned with formal efforts to reflect on this experience as well as with the intentional acquisition of knowledge about the spiritual life and skills in the techniques of spirituality.

Nevertheless, we continue to educate and graduate theological students who are bright but not wise, who know how to make a living as professional ministers, but who do not always know how to live as a spiritual resource for others. Today we ordain clergy who probably are better educated, in terms of knowledge and skills, than ever before, but who may not be more holy or whole. Unless our identity is hid in God, we will never be able to fulfill our calling as spiritual guides, for a spiritual guide is one who prays, that is, one who meditates in solitude and silence on the love of God and the activity of God so that in a mysterious way she or he is enabled and empowered to nurture others in their relationship with God. Work and pray, of course, but if we do not pray, our work will be drudgery rather than vocation, meaningless rounds of activity rather than ministry.

Four characteristics are necessary for those who are called to the ministry of spiritual educators. They are brilliantly revealed in Graham Greene's novel *Dr. Fischer of Geneva: or, The Bomb Party*. A young man is talking to his wife about her malicious father and his hideous friends. She asks a strange question, "Have you a soul?" He replies, "I think I may have one;" then adds, "If souls exist you certainly have one." "Why?" she asks. To which he replies, "You've suffered." To have life and be a guide to others in their search for life we need to embrace suffering, our own and the world's.

A second character in Greene's novel is Monsieur Belmont, a busy lawyer who specializes in tax evasion. As for a soul, the husband comments, "He hasn't had the time to develop one. . . . A soul requires a private life. Belmont has no time." The second requirement of spiritual guidance is a commitment to a life marked by moments of solitude and silence.

Later, they discuss a soldier who attends her father's parties. He comments, "He might just possibly have a soul. There's something unhappy about him." "Is that always a sign?" her wife asks. "I think it is," he answers. Then there is Richard Drane, an aging movie idol. "No. Definitely not. No soul," he says. "He has copies of all his old films and he plays them over every night. . . . He's satisfied with himself. If you have a soul you can't be satisfied." And so the third necessary characteristic of a spiritual guide is a restlessness of the heart, a deep hunger and thirsting after God and perfection.
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Last, there is the wife’s father. “Does he have a soul?” she asks. “He has a soul all right,” her husband responds, “but I think it may be a damned one.” Damned because he does not live in a community that sees the image of God in him. And that brings us to our fourth characteristic for a spiritual guide. If we accept the mystery of our call and are on our own spiritual journey to perfection, living a life of prayer with a deep restlessness in our hearts, committed to solitude and silence, and embracing suffering, we still must live in a community that sees Christ in us.

The spiritual life, of course, is simply human life in its fullest, lived in an ever-deepening and loving relationship to God which results in an ever-deepening and loving relationship with ourselves, all humanity, and the natural world. According to such an understanding of the spiritual life, it has three characteristics: it is sacramental, communal, and liturgical.

To say that the spiritual life is sacramental is to assert the indissoluble unity of the sacred and the profane, piety and politics, the spiritual and the material, body and soul. Life that is overly materialistic ends up creating an inhumane social order; life that is overly spiritualistic ends up creating an escapist pietism. Sacramental life is relational. It encompasses a relationship of friendship with God; a relationship of co-creation with God, humanizing our social, political, economic world; and a relationship of reconciling community with all people, seeking justice and peace for all.

Spirituality is a quality of all life, not an exceptional experience or special kind of life.

The spiritual life is communal also. It understands human beings as communal beings and not as autonomous, privatized individuals. We must avoid an emphasis on “me and Jesus,” for one Christian is no Christian. We come to the church not because we have faith, but because we desire it and know that it can never be ours unless we live in a community of faith. Our spiritual life requires life in community. Similarly, our spiritual life necessitates life in a social world where issues of justice and peace become aspects of the spiritual life.

Third, the spiritual life is liturgical, that is, it takes its shape in activity. The word liturgy means “the activity of God’s people.” It has two dimensions: cultic life or shared rituals (repetitive symbolic actions expressive of the community’s sacred story) and daily work or our vocation in the world. Spirituality is a quality of all life, not an exceptional experience or special kind of life. The test of our prayer life is always in
The arts incarnate our experiences of mystery, wonder, and awe and thereby aid us in our encounter with the holy or sacred. Without the arts, we are cut off from most of the means by which we perceive life's ultimate meanings. Unless we encourage the imagination, curiosity, and creative expression through dance, drama, music, poetry, painting, sculpture, and film, the spiritual dimension of our lives will atrophy. Unless we help people to be conscious of, acknowledge, and express their feelings and moods as well as to recall and reflect upon their dreams and daydreams (visions), their spiritual growth will be impaired.
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Task three: to provide opportunities for an engagement with the spiritual experiences and wisdom of those in the past who in some way have exemplified the spiritual life. The list is long and we all have our favorites: Teresa of Avila, Julian of Norwich, Ignatius of Loyola, John of the Cross, to name but a few. We must discourage the temptation to think we have nothing to learn from the past or from those whose religious experience or tradition appears strange to us. Throughout the history of spirituality, various schools developed. Each focused on some particular dimension of the spiritual life and each appealed to different personalities. Each can provide us with insight and save us from the limitations of our own preferences.

Task four: to provide opportunities for a critical examination of the language and images used in our life of prayer and worship as well as for questioning our assumptions about God, prayer, and the spiritual life. As Jesus taught in the parable of the talents, the God we image or perceive is the God we experience. A healthy spirituality of engagement can become a sick spirituality of escape. Further, a significant aspect of spiritual nurture involves unlearning and emptying. At some point in our spiritual journey we need to articulate and embrace doubt. Spiritual openness and receptivity necessitate a questioning stance toward life. Unless we provide an intellectual environment that challenges our spiritual experience as well as its articulations and expressions, we will diminish the opportunities for persons to develop a mature spirituality.

While spirituality is grounded in an intuitive way of knowing, it is not alien to the intellect—indeed, it needs the intellectual way of knowing to save it from distortions.

While spirituality is grounded in an intuitive way of knowing, it is not alien to the intellect—indeed, it needs the intellectual way of knowing to save it from distortions. In order for our subjective experience to have meaning and moral influence on our lives, it needs to be objectively reflected upon and articulated. Spiritual nurture, therefore, requires us to encourage this critical rational activity.

Task five: to provide opportunities for the development of healthy bodies. Too many folk live as if they have bodies and souls. They think of having a body rather than being a body and thereby ignore, downgrade, or even despise all things temporal, from the human body to the body politic. True spirituality excludes a division of body and soul. Spiritual health will elude us as long as we envision the body as evil, sex as dirty,
and carnal knowledge as pornographic. We need to learn to experience the integration of our bodies and souls; we need to encourage an incarnate life-style infused with sensual and kinesthetic awareness. We need to take our physical needs and bodily existence seriously. Physical health and education cannot be separated from spiritual health and education. Physical education is a means for spiritual awareness. Salvation is not discovered by abandoning the world but by active participation with God in creation. We need to learn to play and to meet our body's need for exercise and health. We need to learn to listen to our bodies and respond.

Task six: to provide settings where the activity of prayer can be engaged in without distraction, where persons can address their deepest questions about their relationship with God and be guided into an ever-deepening awareness of God in their lives and God's will for their lives. The classical retreat where silence, communal liturgies, and spiritual direction can be given is essential. Retreat houses where a person can visit for three or more days abound, but persons often do not know about scheduling, what to expect, or how to make the best use of this resource. Further, spiritual guidance or direction needs to be as available to persons in the parish as is pastoral counseling. Every parish needs persons educated in spiritual direction to aid persons at special times in their spiritual pilgrimage.

Task seven: to provide resources for the life of prayer. The spiritual life is enhanced through a variety of exercises, techniques, or means aimed at helping us live in a fuller relationship with God. While these will come from various traditions and each of us will find different means of greater worth, it is important that all of us become aware of this diversity and be trained in their use. For example, the examination of consciousness, meditation and contemplation techniques, the Way of the Cross, discernment exercises, and various means for praying the spiritual are only a few of the aids which need to be taught to persons so that they can discover meaningful ways to enhance and enliven their relationship with God.

Task eight: to provide for daily morning and evening common prayer. The spiritual life is dependent upon taking time each day to sing praises and thanksgivings to God, to listen and reflect on God's Word, to center our attention on God and recognize God's presence in our lives, and to cooperate with God in God's concern for the needs of the whole world. It is difficult to learn to pray outside of a community. We need a community to pray with us and for us if our prayer life is to be vital. When our lives are caught up in time ordered by prayer, we experience a reality quite different from the pursuits and routines of our everyday experience.
SPIRITUAL EDUCATOR

When we live by a prayerful ordering of time, we feel at home in the universe, and we experience a liberating serenity even in the midst of turmoil and trial.

Task nine: to provide for meaningful weekly participation in the Eucharist. Insofar as the spiritual life aims at union with God through Jesus Christ, the Eucharist must be considered central, for it is within this communal action that union is achieved. The church throughout its history has carried on the work of spiritual formation principally at the Eucharist, through participation in the mystery of God's loving presence among us. Through our participation in this holy sacrament, God is made present and active in our lives. Thus we are enabled to live into our baptism. Within the mystery of this communal act, persons of all ages are led into an ever-deepening love relationship with God.

Task ten: to provide for the sacraments of anointing and reconciliation. Throughout our spiritual pilgrimage, we experience despair and guilt, brokenness and incompleteness. We hurt others and we suffer hurt. Insofar as the spiritual life is one of wholeness and health, of oneness with God, self, and neighbor, it is through the sacramental acts of the church—the body of Christ—that we come to know the healing power of God's love. Our lives are transformed and shaped through those grace-filled actions which enable us to be aware of and experience forgiveness and healing. Without this resource, our spiritual journey is hampered.

Task eleven: to provide role models for the spiritual life. Children and others learn by observing. Without mature role models, learning is hindered. This observation, of course, implies serious attention to adult learning throughout the life cycle. To be Christian is to have been baptized and to be striving in community to live into our baptism. The church is that community of persons who, having been baptized, continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in the prayers; who persevere in resisting evil and, whenever they fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord; who proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ; who seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving their neighbor as themselves; and who strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being. To keep this covenant it is important that adults take time regularly to review and evaluate their lives, and be helped to be more faithful. Such activity in the life of the church is essential to providing role models for the spiritual life.

Task twelve: to provide for small groups to aid us on our journey. In the beginning of the Methodist movement, persons gathered in small groups
(class meetings) to assist one another in their spiritual quest, to cultivate the spiritual life, and to aid one another in witnessing to daily life in the Spirit. In such groups, prayer, the meditation on Scripture, the sharing of personal experience, and the witnessing to faith can aid persons in their spiritual growth.

Task thirteen: to provide a community where persons can experience hospitality, reconciliation, and compassion as well as the opportunity to reflect on this experience and to address the implications of this experience for daily life and work in the political, social, economic world. Since spiritual and moral life are inextricably intertwined, the discipline of spiritual attentiveness to the needs of all people—especially the hurt, the oppressed, and sufferers of injustice—amidst the life-denying forces in our world needs to be nurtured so that we can live our prayers through responsible social action.

Task fourteen: to provide for occasions in which you can make your life a resource for others' learning, a time in which you can be vulnerable and offer yourself to others, believing that the presence of God will be disclosed in that relationship. Of course, to do this you will need to develop your own spiritual life, to pray daily, to go on retreat regularly, to have a spiritual guide, and to read the spiritual classics. To be a spiritual educator is to offer your own faith-experience, your loneliness and intimacy, your doubts and hopes, your failures and successes as a context in which others can struggle in their own quest for meaning; it is making your own painful struggles with faith available to others as a source of growth and understanding. It means allowing their questions to resound in the depth of your own soul. It means the life of compassion shared with others in a common quest.

SUGGESTED READINGS


Some Protestant churches talk as if the family is identified with the kingdom of God. Is it heretical to deny this, or are we blindly following nineteenth-century progenitors of civil religion?

Mother's Day, once a hallowed event on the civil calendar, has become something of an embarrassment when celebrated as a liturgical event in some churches. Mothers have traditionally been honored in some parts of the United States through sermon, song, and testimonial. For some church members, a pink or white carnation worn on the lapel signalled a mother living or dead. One pastor in a rural parish discontinued the practice of having mothers stand on Mother's Day when those standing began to include unmarried mothers. The United Methodist liturgical calendar now lists the Festival of the Christian Home in place of what was once called Mother's Day.

This is an example of the ethical dilemma created for pastors in a time when all the norms for acceptable family relationships seem to have disappeared. In addition to the ethical dilemma, the organization of Protestant churches has been predicated on certain expectations concerning a "normal" family, e.g., that it consists of two parents who are married to each other, who have children, and who maintain a fairly predictable pattern of family work and play in a normal "work" week. Recent changes in marriage and family living patterns, especially

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increased mobility of families, is affecting the church and the practice of ministry in ways related to belief, ethics, and organizational structure.

As marriage and family patterns have changed, there have also been changes in requirements for church membership and practices related to baptism and celebration of the Lord's Supper. In some churches pastors report little interest in the sacrament of communion, reflected in many churches in a drop in attendance at worship on “communion Sundays.” In others, children are now included in the celebration of the sacrament. Pastors express concern with the increase in requests to baptize the children of parents who are not church members. Beyond the changes in family patterns and in church rituals lie deeper theological issues. These issues concern the nature of the church, the nature of the family, and the relationship of the church to the family.

Before the impact of recent shifts in sexual mores and family structure began to raise pastoral issues, anthropologist W. Lloyd Warner concluded that the connection between beliefs and practices in the church and in the family were so closely intertwined that “should the present form of the family disappear, the Christian church would necessarily undergo revolutionary changes.” Warner, writing in 1961, had observed that the symbol system giving moral form to life relationships—especially to family relationships—was a sacred symbol system. In his study of the way Americans order and interpret their lives through rites, beliefs, and practices, he found that religion and family were dependent on each other for the creation of a symbol system that gives meaning to life and moral behavior.

Since the publication of Robert Bellah's seminal essay on civil religion in 1967, church historians have traced the effects of civil religion on the religion of the churches. Robert T. Handy has persuasively argued that since the early part of the nineteenth century, most American Protestant churches and church members have been energized by the vision of “a Christian America.” Broadly defined, “civil religion” stands for value consensus in society. Until recently the Protestant churches were (in effect) state churches in the United States in the sense that the churches and the culture had a worldview in common. That worldview, which can also be called Christian capitalism, provided the basis for middle-class values that were taught and reinforced by churches, public schools, and government law-enforcement and regulations. Changes in sexual norms, in family roles, and change in the church experienced since 1960 are all related to the gradual disintegration of the value consensus called “civil religion.”

The visions of the family and of the church that are now in seeming disarray were related to the rites, beliefs, and practices of civil religion.
Theologically speaking, there is no such thing as "a Christian family." Theologically speaking, there is no such thing as "a Christian family." There are Christians who live together in families and who, as Christians, are to love each other as the nearest neighbors. From a biblical perspective, if loyalty to family takes precedence over loyalty to the household of God as the center and source of life, then the family has become an idol. Jesus was unmistakably clear on the point that those "who do the will of God" are his brother and sister and mother (Mark 3:35).

It is the thesis of this paper that in American Protestant churches from 1830 to the present there has been great confusion about the nature of the church, the nature of the family, and the role of each in the life of a Christian. An influential presentation of the family as the earliest and most important source of God's grace and love to Christians is found in the "theology" of Horace Bushnell. Bushnell, a Connecticut pastor and concerned father, published a handbook for Christian parents called Christian Nurture in 1847. His assumptions about the role of parents in the Christian life of their children have influenced the way Christian education at home and at church have been defined ever since. Writing during the years in which the hope for a Christian America was born,
Bushnell was disturbed that evangelists seeking to convert youth placed so little emphasis on parents as a source of the Christian nurture of children. Bushnell thought that claims of instant new life at the moment of conversion encouraged an abrogation of parental responsibility to rear their children as Christians. An early theorist of the developmental nature of the Christian life, Bushnell concluded that "A child should grow up never knowing himself to be anything other than Christian." That is, if Christian parents nurtured their children adequately at home, a conversion to Christianity would not be necessary.

Because parents were the earliest and strongest influence on the character development of their children, Bushnell saw parents as the source of the "holy principle" in children by personal example and influence. Parents were also responsible for cultivating that spiritual seed which would eventually grow into Christian character like that of the parents, even if not immediately. The role of the church, in worship as well as education, was to support and complement the work of the Christian parent in the home. A good combination of godly, nurturing parents and a supportive experience for each age group in the church should lead youth quite naturally into church membership and a sanctified life. However, the ultimate objective of Christian nurture was not just church membership. It was good citizenship. The achievement of democratic ideals in "these last days" might lead to the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth if the majority of the citizenry were sanctified through propagation or conversion. Bushnell considered conversion a necessity only for persons who were not born into the Christian tradition to parents who were church members.

The warm and continuing reception of Bushnell's theology of Christian nurture in the home meant that he was in tune with his times. Christian Nurture was republished several times. With his explanation of how Christian parents propagate and rear Christian children he put the church in the service of the family, and through the family, to the nation. Christianity, from this point of view, was necessary to the nation because the family was the building block of society. Prior to the nineteenth century, families were seen as "little commonwealths" that mirrored the larger society. Bushnell articulated a new set of beliefs about the church and the family in which the family is a small church belonging to a nation that is a collection of Christian families.

For many Christians in the United States the family, and not the church, is still implicitly the place where God's love and forgiveness are located. All talk of the unconditional love of a mother as a model of Christian love makes of a mere woman a Christ-figure. To suppose that harmonious and peaceful personal relationships between family
The New Testament image of the church as the place where all persons are equal before God and in love for each other—where there is neither slave nor master, Jew nor Greek, male nor female—has in much American theology been subtly transferred into the vision of the ideal Christian and democratic family.

At the late Victorian peak of the power of civil religion, before World War I destroyed the hope for a Christian America, Walter Rauschenbusch, devoted husband, father, pastor, seminary professor, and passionate seeker of justice for oppressed workers of the lower class, wrote extensively about the importance and power of Christian parents and the Christian family. Relationships of love in Christian families were evidence that America was almost Christianized. Rauschenbusch, who viewed the church as the vessel of the Spirit to the nation, envisioned a time when the church would no longer be necessary if more families were Christian families.

Rauschenbusch had read Christian Nurture and agreed with Bushnell that if children experienced love and learned moral behavior patterns at home in early childhood they would likely be Christians for life. But Rauschenbusch added that just as a good wife calls out self-sacrificing love and moral behavior in her husband, so, too, do children evoke the natural love present in all adults that enables them to be good parents. As he wrote of the “sanctifying process” in the family, Rauschenbusch was describing how Christians come to know the love of God. Luther had talked of the Word and sacrament as the source of knowing God’s love when accompanied by the power of the Spirit that creates life anew for Christians. Rauschenbusch attributed the revelation and knowledge of God’s love to the self-sacrificing love of parents instead. It is parents who are the first revelation and means of grace to their children.

The love of fatherhood and motherhood is a creative act of God in us. Last year it was not; this year it is, and all things are changed. The dry dock of
our selfishness has been struck and the water of sacrificial love pours forth. . . . The springing up of this new force of love is essential for the very existence of human society. 5

But children are also a means of God’s grace to their parents because they inspire and evoke the miracle of parental love. Children were “the foundation of society, a chief motive power in the economic effort, the most influential teachers.” 6 The Christian family, as Rauschenbusch described it, exemplified democratic ideals of equality and the Christian ideals of love. This most Christian form of the family known to the history of “civilization” was differentiated from barbarian families because husband and wife were equals. Although their work was in different “spheres,” in their family contribution as parents they were equally necessary. Fathers were no longer tyrants demanding subservience in an authoritarian manner. They now lived and worked for the sake of their children so the children could be educated to advance in the world. In return for such self-sacrificing love as was demanded by the work world of fathers, such men, according to Rauschenbusch, ardently desired the love of their children. Rauschenbusch added a description of father-love to the already well-established belief in the sanctifying love of a mother. In portraying children as companions to their parents he rounded out his vision of the mutually self-sacrificing, mutually loving relationships of parents and children in the conflict-free and democratic Christian family.

Very little has changed in attitudes about the Christian family since Rauschenbusch wrote so eloquently of parents as a means of grace to their children. Books written by clergy and seminary professors to advise Christian parents about their role in the lives of their children continue to assume that the parent is the necessary means of God’s grace and primary sanctifying power in the life of a child. Even as the power of civil religion declines in the culture at large, the family idolatry related to it continues to shape the family ideals of Christians. Like those of Bushnell and Rauschenbusch, more recent manuals on Christian nurture at home continue to confuse the socializing power of human institutions and agencies with the sanctifying power of God’s love. Contemporary writers assure parents that if they rear their children properly, their children will grow up to be Christian, just like them. Such assurances are unknown to New Testament accounts of the Christian life. Such confidence about the ease of entrance into the Christian life makes the need of an Augustine or a Luther to embrace the Word of God in Scripture and sacrament for their very life appear absurd.

The following description of why families are important to God appears in the introduction of Family Ministry: An Educational Resource for
the Local Church. The book was written in 1975 as a resource for the coordination of family ministries in United Methodist churches. The stated objective of family ministry is "families assuming responsibility for the Christian nurture of their own members, for their participation in the life of the church, and for being the church in the world." The nature of the family is described as follows:

Families are important to God as a basic structure of human relationships providing community for individuality; given by God in creation for the welfare of all mankind; as a channel for God's unconditional love—affirming, sustaining, sacrificing, forgiving, redeeming; as an opportunity for the Kingdom of God to come on earth within families and in society.

In this case, the attributes of the church as the redeeming and forgiving community of believers have been superimposed on the family in a way that leads to the conclusion that the kingdom of God on earth might come in and through families. In this line of reasoning, where the family is seen as a channel for God's unconditional love, there is also a confusion of the eternal and unconditional love of God with the inevitably conditional and conditioned love of family members for one another. In addition, this description transfers the quality of love that belongs properly only to the fellowship of believers empowered by the Spirit to a description of what God intends for all persons in all families.

One outcome of the long-standing, firmly entrenched belief among American Protestants that parents are the necessary means of grace to their children is that church members may experience the sacraments primarily as bonding rites for families. Pastors find themselves faced with multiple dilemmas centering in the sacrament of baptism. Parents who otherwise have no contact with the church bring their children for baptism. Parents who belong to no church seek baptism for their infants in the church of their parents.

The Lord's Supper has also become an issue with reference to children in recent years. Several denominations have changed the administration of the sacrament to include children for reasons more psychological than theological. Although the supper has always been associated with nurturing and sustaining the faith, hope, and love of confessing Christians who have confirmed their baptismal vows, the primary reason given for the inclusion of children in the supper is to prevent them from feeling excluded from the church. This contradicts the practice of most of the Christian tradition of only including those in the supper who have made a conscious commitment to Christian faith and who come to the table seeking fuller fellowship with the Lord. The initiative for the inclusion of children in the supper seems to come from parents who do
not want family togetherness in church broken by the nonparticipation of children in the sacrament, and who find themselves unable to explain to children why they “can’t drink the juice.”

The denominational response to the anxiety of parents suggests that it is simpler to alter the central ritual of the Christian tradition than it is to ask why adult confessing Christians know so little about the sacraments.

Parents who look for a pastor to “do the kid” or who want the church to include the children in the sacred meal may look upon the sacraments as some mysterious form of God’s blessing for families. But, if this is so, the supper is reduced to some quaint remembrance meal that is substantially little different from family meals at home. When seen only as a symbol of family togetherness, it does seem reasonable to believe that it is wrong to exclude children.

The ambiguous influence of civil religion on the theology of the Christian tradition as it has been shaped by democratic values of freedom and equality seems to have reduced pastors, in some cases, to carrying out the role of civil servants. Some laity hold expectations of the services performed by pastors that can only be called “folk religion.” When nonchurch members, as well as “confirmed” Christians, seek out pastors as persons who can officiate only at times of family crisis—someone who can marry, baptize, or bury—this is a form of folk religion. Folk religion is the religion of the people as they seek God’s blessing to serve their own ends. It is also the religion of those who hope that their activity on behalf of the church will somehow protect them and their family from unhappiness, evil, or tragedy. Theirs is the simple hope of all parents everywhere of a good life for themselves and their children.

For most of the twenty centuries since the disciples of Jesus of Nazareth gradually became a social institution known as the Christian church, infant baptism has been widely practiced. Although some children may have been baptized as a part of “households” in the first century, the norm until the early fourth century was more likely that of baptizing adults for whom entrance into the church was a conscious choice that entailed a high level of commitment to a new way of life. Before Christianity became the official religion of the Constantinian Empire in the fourth century, baptism set Christians apart from non-Christians as persons who died to the old life and rose again into a new life that transcended prior value commitments and ethical norms. While baptism was considered necessary to salvation and eternal life, the sacrament was administered only after several years of instruction. In this way, those who were baptized were prepared to participate in the life-changing nature of reception of the sacrament.
Bushnell was correct that it is an advantage for a child to be born to parents who are Christian. But he equated the American way of life and good citizenship with being Christian.

However, wherever Christianity has been the officially sanctioned state church, as it was in the Constantinian Empire, infant baptism has been widely practiced. Although “believer’s baptism” is a common practice among contemporary Baptists, the Anabaptist rejection of the practice of infant baptism was a radical departure from tradition at the time of the Protestant Reformation. Like some evangelical and charismatic churches that rebaptize today, the Anabaptists claimed that infant baptism did not allow for the conscious response of the believer to God’s offer of a new life. They were probably correct in concluding that there is little warrant in the New Testament or in the early church tradition for the practice of infant baptism as normative.

A pastor in a church today is implicitly treated as an employee of the state whenever any parent requests the baptism of an infant as if the sacrament is a privilege of citizenship entailing no particular commitment or obligation of the parent. In some of the state churches of Europe, pastors are paid by the state to baptize, marry, and bury all citizens who request such services. These “sacraments” are a privilege of citizenship. In Denmark, where the Lutheran Church is the established church, few
Bushnell was correct that it is an advantage for a child to be born to parents who are Christian. But he equated the American way of life and good citizenship with being Christian. From that perspective, only persons not born into the church would have to be “converted.” In the period in which Bushnell wrote the second edition of *Christian Nurture*, persons who were candidates for “conversion” by his definition would have included anyone not born into American citizenship—immigrants, especially Catholic and Jewish immigrants. The requisite conversion was not the life reorientation of the early church but adaptation to American standards of individual initiative and moral self-control.

Bushnell was wrong in equating “conversion” with entrance into the Christian life necessary only for persons who were not “born into” the church. By confusing church membership with either being born into the church or being “converted” into the church he reduced baptism to the status of a civic ritual that connotes membership among the right people and gives the privileges of the good life.

The record of baptisms in Acts provides quite a different impression about the nature of baptism. The baptisms described are stories of the life-transforming power of God made real in the lives of those who are baptized. They are also stories of response of the new Christian to reception of “the gift of the Holy Spirit.” There was always an element of joy at the blessing conferred and signified in the ritual bath as the impurity of the old life was washed away.

A new community was created as persons once separated by the various barriers of social identity came together in the breaking of bread. The newly baptized Lydia—a Jewish proselyte turned Christian—received Paul in her home (Acts 16:11-16). The Philippian jailer, presumably a Gentile civil servant of the Roman Empire, washed the wounds of Paul and Silas and was baptized. “Then he brought them up into his house, and set food before them; and he rejoiced with all his household that he had believed in God” (Acts 16:34). The common element in each baptism recorded in Acts was the recognition of the presence of the Risen Lord as life’s central reality and value commitment. Those who were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus represented Jews and Gentiles, persons of different social rank, men and women, and, in a few cases, whole “households.”

For those who were baptized, the young churches addressed by the Pauline letters became the nurturing family of fellowship. Baptism represented the beginning of a new life sustained through the Spirit present with those who, in the words of Jesus, want to do the will of God. Here, any believer, whether part of a baptized household or not, found the unconditional love of God lived out, even though imperfectly. But
because the new life meant participation in the family where God's forgiving love is real, love of neighbor also became lived reality. The proper role of the church in the family life of Christians is to assist every individual to discern God's will concerning life-work and marital status. For those who choose marriage and become parents, the church is to encourage and strengthen faithfulness in the roles of spouse and/or parent in a time when those roles are not easy to maintain. By implication, the church ministers to a family of individuals who hold in common loyalty to Jesus Christ as Lord of life, not to families as such—or even to "singles" as such. The test of church membership is loyalty to Jesus Christ and the fruits of that loyalty, not family status or kinship loyalty.

With the loss of the civil religion consensus, pastors are now in a position to ask to what extent laity in the church confuse civil religion with Christian belief and practice. The recent defeat of an attempt to reintroduce prayer into the classroom in public schools seems to some observers to be evidence of the power of "humanism" and "secularism." That is correct. But it is also evidence that the Protestant churches are no longer the de facto state church. Laws that forbid the practices of Protestant ritual in state institutions free the church to be the church. This also frees pastors from the implicit obligation to be civil servants, baptizing, marrying, and burying citizens. The pastor is no longer the de facto vicar of the parish performing religious rituals for the state.

From this perspective the question can be posed as to why the movement to include infants and children in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper occurs as the real separation of the church from the state becomes obvious, as freedom of religion becomes a reality. The legally enforced separation of church and state since World War II coincides with the precipitous decline in mainline Protestant church membership. Just as Protestant rituals are no longer imposed on all public school children, church membership is no longer considered a sign of good citizenship. Why did it only occur to parents that children feel "left out" or "excluded" at the celebration of the Lord's Supper when the postwar church building boom was over and sanctuaries were no longer full of "young" parents with "young" children?

In the Protestant tradition the administration of the two sacraments—baptism and the Lord's Supper—are the responsibility of ordained clergy. In the American Protestant tradition, the administration of two more sacraments—marriage and burial—have been associated with the special authority of clergy. Although the state provides for a civil marriage ceremony, Americans have never quite become comfortable with the civil equivalent for funerals, the funeral home. Unlike the justice of the peace presiding at the marriage ceremony, the funeral director is
In the Christian tradition, the Lord's Supper is unique. It is not related to a family event as baptism, marriage, and burial are. All religions ritualize family crisis events, including American civil religion. Is the new concern for including children in the fellowship at the Lord's table born of the inability to distinguish civil sacraments from Christian sacraments?

Although the issue of including children in the sacraments could be dismissed as a theological confusion, it is more than that. It is also born of the genuine hope of parents that their children will not grow up only to grow out of the church. It is common knowledge among pastors that all too many teens leave home and the church of their childhood and return only to be married "in the church" and to ask the pastor to "do the kid." Pastors, as well as parents, want to end this migratory pattern. However, offering communion to baptized children would only seem to reinforce the confusion of genuine Christian faith commitments with American civil religion.

The argument is heard that children may experience the presence of the Lord at the table in an intuitive way more vital than their parents' experience of the sacrament. This could be true. But if it is, it suggests that thinking adults lack vital piety. For adults, as well as for children, the efficacy of the sacrament as the celebration of the presence of the Risen Lord depends on an intuitive grasp of the meaning of the sacrament for life. But children cannot be expected to comprehend what it means to believe that the Risen Lord is present even though they may experience the presence of the Holy in some inchoate way.

American theologians have disagreed over whether the Lord's Supper is a saving or a sanctifying sacrament. In the past, those who saw the sacrament as offering the possibility of an experience of salvation (conversion) wanted to include all adults in the supper, whether they were church members or not. Is it the hope of "converting" children that recommends open communion in our time? If that impulse is born of the civil religion tradition, then it is possible that the conversion desired is that of loyalty to family religious commitments.

On the other hand, theologians who have seen the supper as a sanctifying sacrament for persons who have confessed faith in Jesus as Lord have wanted to limit participation in the supper to believers. In recent times, "church member" has become the functional equivalent of "believer" and all adult church members have been welcomed to the table. From this point of view, the Lord's Supper is both a privilege and a necessity in the lives of those who seek to "grow up into the body of..."
When the church rather than the family is seen as a gathering where the unconditional love of God is known, then the church is in a position to offer ministry to Christians in families.

If early church interpretations of baptism and the practice of including all baptized believers in the Lord's Supper are considered to be normative, then Bushnell's formulation of children becoming Christian through nurture in the home is an aberration. There is no certainty that persons born into a Christian family will come to know and profess Jesus Christ. Formally, the supper becomes the distinguishing mark of those whose professed ultimate loyalty is to the family of God.

What is a pastor to do about the conflict between civil religion and sacramental Christianity? If the interpretation of the confusion of the sacraments of civil religion with the Protestant sacraments is correct, the pastor's dilemma may be especially intense in the Methodist tradition. The history of Methodism is interwoven with the history of the American democracy. Yet if the pastor is a civil servant who is expected to baptize, marry, and bury citizens who are not church members, this very role can be used as a principle of selection concerning pastoral responsibility.

A pastor who is seeking genuine faith commitments and vital piety among church members can explain and explore the difference between routine requests for civic rituals and the centrality of the experience of baptism and the Lord's Supper to Christian life and identity. This does not necessarily mean that a pastor will refuse to "do the kid" or bury a nonmember, but it might mean that. It does mean that the pastor has to know the difference between civic services and Christian worship services, civil sacraments and Christian sacraments, and to articulate that difference in preaching and teaching. The pastor would be required to explain the gravity of the responsibility accepted by parents and congregations when adults say yes to the baptism of an infant. An adequate discussion of the meaning of baptism gives parents an opportunity to explore their own reasons for requesting baptism for their child. This policy could require educating adults through exploration and self-examination concerning the meaning and experience of the Lord's Supper before requests to include children in communion are considered. In both cases, this is what it means for ordained clergy to take responsibility for the "right administration" of Word, order, and sacrament.
as Lord. However, when the church, rather than the family, is seen as the nurturing family of Christian fellowship, then it becomes possible to revise the requirements, meaning, and privileges of church membership. When the church, rather than the family, is seen as a gathering where the unconditional love of God is known in and through the common experience of believers, then the church is in a position to offer ministry to Christians in families.

In the church as the family of God, cultural definitions of family have only relative importance. When pastors see their role as that of proclaiming the good news of the gospel to all persons, regardless of present family status, then perhaps even unmarried mothers need not be an embarrassment as the church celebrates the importance of the Christian home.

NOTES
6. Walter Rauschenbusch, Christianizing the Social Order (New York: Macmillan, 1913), Part II.

FOR FURTHER READING


Westerhoff, John H., and William H. Willimon. Liturgy and Learning Through the Life Cycle (New York: Seabury, 1980). This book is for pastors "who are interested in the renewal of liturgy through religious education or catechesis and the renewal of individual and corporate life through worship." It includes helpful discussions of church membership rituals and practices, baptism and communion with reference to children and adults.
Good morning, Reverend; welcome to your study desk. I hope that you are as wide awake as yesterday's heavy schedule permits. This morning you lay aside other pressing business to prepare sermons for this next month. As you open this journal, you are considering whether to follow the lectionary readings. So, what are they? John 6. Accordingly, the first step is to take up that chapter and look at it; but the first view is not very encouraging. This is a text where it is easy to obey one of Krister Stendahl's commandments to preachers: "You shall not think that you already know the message." There are so many things in this chapter that one does not already know that one quails at the thought of expounding its mysteries to a skeptical audience. In a sense, this chapter asks the minister the same question that Jesus addressed to his mother: "What have you to do with me?" (John 2:4).

My purpose in what follows is to help you to deal more competently with this chapter, and I think that this is possible because there is a hidden bond between you and the author of the Gospel that enables you to meet as persons engaged in a common task. You share a common function: both John (the supposed author of this anonymous document) and you as a minister are leaders of worship in Christian congregations. As such you also share various purposes that should emerge as we study the text. First, however, I want to eliminate several purposes which often lead the minister on endless detours away from John's intention.

For example, it is easy for ministers, preparing to preach on John 6, to confuse their own objectives with those of a modern historian. They may...
try to reconstruct the sequence of events behind the text and tell their people what really happened during the Passover season in a given year (28 C.E.?) and at a specific place (mountain, lake, synagogue). Often ministers select this objective because they suppose that John was primarily concerned with telling the story as a modern historian would tell it. But such an assumption is wrong, quite wrong. This is not to deny the importance of what happened in Galilee several years before John was writing, but such a reconstruction is not the primary function of a sermon, whether John's or yours. To attempt this goal is to turn the chapter into a box of puzzles with a lost key.

Another detour is to suppose that the central function of a sermon on John 6 is to define the form and substance of Christian beliefs about Jesus, so that the sermon becomes an elementary lesson in Christian dogmatics. “What should my parishioners believe about the miraculous feeding? Or about eating the flesh of Jesus and drinking his blood?” Again, I do not mean to deny the importance of beliefs. Certainly, behind this text may be discerned the stamp of Christian faith, but the thrust of John’s message to his own congregation pointed in a different direction. We may grasp that direction more readily if we focus attention upon the linkage provided by a shared vocation. What was it that linked Jesus’ vocation to that of his successor prophets, including John? What is it that links the vocation of John to those who succeeded him as servants of the Word?

Fundamentally, of course, we need to recall what it is that makes Scripture sacred. Why do we have a lectionary? Why should we preach from it? We base our preaching on this Gospel, and on its various chapters, not because of its function in recounting an earlier history, nor because it serves to define the verbal content of the creeds, but because through the centuries the church has learned that this Scripture has the power to evoke a fresh dialogue between the living Christ and the people whom he has summoned to continue his mission. The Gospel of John probably began life as a series of oral sermons (one was chapter 6) by which the evangelist fulfilled his own personal vocation of relaying messages from the Risen Christ to communities of believers who were being persecuted because of their faith in him. Such is the vocation of modern ministers as well; by ordination they are charged to preach the Word of Christ in such a way as to initiate a similar conversation. Where that Word is preached, it creates a mysterious meeting between the Christ of the cross and a congregation that has been drawn together by power emanating from that cross. Modern ministers will establish rapport with John only to the degree that they establish rapport with John’s calling by the glorified and speaking Lord, whose speech fits a description
expressed by Aldous Huxley in *Brave New World* in a different context: "Words are like X-rays, if you use them properly—they'll go through anything. You read and you're pierced."

John's sermons, like those of his modern successors, were designed to speak to particular congregations in terms of their urgent needs. To establish rapport with him, we need to visualize the conditions faced by those congregations, including both the more objective factors of time and place and the more subjective factors stemming from the tasks assigned by Christ. Taking first the more objective data, I visualize John's audience as composed almost entirely of Jewish Christians living in Judea and Jerusalem during the decade immediately preceding the devastating war with Rome (66-70 CE). This was the time when the Christian movement encountered both enthusiasm and hostility greater than that of any later generation. Many Christians were martyred, and for every martyr we should visualize a mob of angry and jeering enemies. The situation is most clearly reflected in John 15:18-16:3; the prediction of Jesus in that passage clearly implies that the enemies of the Christians were drawn from the same groups that had executed Jesus. Both martyrs and their murderers claimed to be faithful to Israel and to Israel's God. (This judgment regarding date, place, and circumstance represents a minority opinion among scholars; for further support of this conclusion, I refer readers to Part I of my *John, the Martyr's Gospel*, Pilgrim Press, 1984.)

In the congregations where John's sermons would be delivered, the Scripture that was read in the service of worship every week was from the Hebrew Scriptures, what we sometimes call the Old Testament. To Jewish believers, anything said about Jesus would trigger memories about the deliverance of Israel from Egypt under the leadership of Moses. These memories would come alive with special force during the Passover season. Listeners would instinctively filter the stories about Jesus through recollections of the story of Moses, for they accepted Jesus as the prophet-king in whom God had fulfilled promises made to Moses (Deut. 18:15). Modern ministers who wish to discover how that filter operated when John 6 was read in a Judean congregation should recall from the stories of the Exodus the role of such images as these, each of which recurs in John 6: the mountain, the Passover, the wilderness, the manna, the bread from heaven, the fathers, the blood of the lamb, Moses, the twelve tribes, the murmuring of the people, the signs, the storm at sea, the works of God, and "the prophet who is to come into the world." If ears are sufficiently alert, echoes of the Exodus saga can be heard in every sentence of John 6. By preaching a sermon in which the key images evoked these resonances, John connected the vocation of his churches directly to the vocation of Israel, a vocation that Israel had both accepted and betrayed through all the
intervening generations. The difficulties modern preachers face in using John 6 stem in part from the fact that neither they nor their people hear these echoes. As a result, the chapter does not function to liberate its listeners in ways similar to the liberation of Israel from Egypt.

An even stronger exercise of imagination is needed when we visualize the tasks that conditioned the listening to John's sermons in the initial situation. When those tiny persecuted communes assembled for worship, three levels of spiritual activity came into play. At the highest level was the active presence of the glorified Christ—revealer of the Word and the acts of God, victor over the hostile world, giver of the Holy Spirit, companion of every believer and guide of every congregation in their warfare with the Evil One. His presence was invoked at the beginning of every assembly with "Come, Lord Jesus!" At its close his benediction was pronounced in such a way as to cover the members' needs until they met again. In the judging and forgiving presence of this living Lord, each congregation experienced what later theologians would call the omniscience, the omnipotence, and the omnipresence of God. In this chapter, his presence was presupposed in such declarations as this: "I am the bread of life."

At what we might call, without invidious implication, the lowest level of spiritual activity, we may discern the entire company of worshipers—including whole families as well as individuals estranged from their families by their faith. Members of this group (later to be called the laity) thought of themselves as having been born of the will of God, and not of the will of the flesh (1:13). They had been baptized by water and the Spirit (3:5). Although they had not seen the Risen Lord, they had come to believe in him (20:29). In him they had accepted the gift of eternal life and the rule of love. In terms of the key images of this chapter, they had shared the loaves and fish on the mountain; they had been presented to Jesus as gifts from his Father; they had eaten the flesh and drunk the blood of the crucified Lamb. When they came together, they came to worship him, to sing his praises, to pray in his name, and to await from him a fresh word of rebuke and assurance, of judgment and grace. The preacher was speaking for them all when he said, "From his fulness have we all received, grace upon grace" (1:16).

Between these two levels we should visualize a cluster of leaders who had received from the Risen Lord quite specialized vocations, with assignments to preach, to prophesy, to teach, to judge—along with whatever gifts of the Spirit those tasks required. John pictured these leaders as fishermen, casting their nets for a new catch of fish under the supervision of the Lord (21:1-8). They were also shepherds, willing to die in the care and feeding of his flock (21:15-19). In such churches as the one at Corinth there was a bewildering profusion of these gifts—not only
Jesus leaders laity

The members of the laity were bound by the Spirit, in their baptism, to respect the spiritual gifts of both their leader and their Lord. Their mutual relationships correspond to the relationships among Jesus, the disciples, and the crowd as presented in chapter 6 of John. Jesus used the crowds to teach the disciples, and the disciples to teach the crowds. The disciples were responsible for listening to and speaking to both Jesus and the crowds.

This discussion may help us understand the structure of chapter 6. There are several different scenes, and action shifts from one to another; but Jesus stands at the center of every scene, and his words carry great weight. The disciples are prominent at the beginning and at the end, failing the test which Jesus gives them at the beginning and receiving different "marks" in the test he gives at the end. The crowds are pictured as coming to Jesus, receiving food from his hands, following him across the sea, and being trained to recognize the different kinds of bread and to distinguish true from false signs. There is a fourth group, "the Jews" who murmur against Jesus and dispute among themselves. Actually, however, their ominous role is primarily pedagogical: Jesus uses them in making clear to the disciples what eating his flesh means.

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When this chapter was delivered as a sermon in John's churches, the various listeners would be inclined to identify themselves with different participants in the stories. All listeners would, of course, sense that they were being addressed by Jesus, since all worship focused on his guidance. In each congregation, the leaders would identify themselves most strongly with the disciples, since they considered themselves heirs to the same tasks. Members in general (although no member is ever "general") would picture themselves not so much in the role of the disciples as in the role of the crowd that followed Jesus (6:2). They were the ones who prayed with a single voice, "'Lord, give us this bread always'" (vs. 34). Both leaders and followers would understand "the Jews" to refer to the adversaries of the Christian cause as a whole, with whose hostility both groups had to cope. As we read the chapter, it is very important to note both the different audiences of Jesus and their later successors in the audiences of John.

Now a word about the organization of John's sermon. Modern readers are inclined to divide historical narrative according to changes in location. In this case, the scene shifts from the mountain to the sea, and then perhaps to the beach at Capernaum, and finally to the synagogue in that town. But the points of transition are often vague (e.g., when did Jesus leave the mountain to feed the crowds? When did he move from the beach to the synagogue?). John was much more interested in the symbolic overtones of these scenes than in telling how and when the actors moved from one place to another. To follow his line of thought, it is much better to divide the chapter according to shifts in the successive conversations.

The conversation between Jesus and his disciples takes place on the mountain (vs. 3), during the feeding of the crowd (vss. 5, 9, 12), in the boat on the sea (vss. 16–21), and in the Capernaum synagogue (vss. 60–71). As we have suggested, that conversation would have maximum pertinence for the leaders in John's churches.

The report of Jesus' conversation with the crowd does not begin on the mountain; they do not speak in that episode. It begins in Capernaum in response to their bewilderment over how Jesus had got across the sea. Their conversation is wholly absorbed in the problem of the meanings hidden within the gift of food and the sign; Jesus uses the miraculous feeding as an opportunity to teach them lessons to which they had been blind. This single continuous conversation (vss. 22–41) would have maximum pertinence for the laity in John's churches.

In verse 41, the conversation shifts to "the Jews," the rulers of the synagogue, who are perceived as speaking with a single voice in challenging the claims made for Jesus. It is clear, however, that John was
On the stage are three groups of actors, although only the first two are
given speaking roles: Jesus, the disciples, the crowd. Jesus is engaged in
two activities: teaching the disciples and feeding the crowd, though he
uses the feeding as an instrument for teaching those disciples. Their work
is assumed to be that of providing food for the crowd of followers. He
expects them to have the resources (in money or food) for meeting the
needs of the crowd, but he is disappointed. The story implies that they
should serve as shepherds or deacons (compare 10:1-18; 21:15-19), and
implies, as well, that they are not yet equipped for that work.
The timing of this conversation is important: "The Passover . . . was at hand." To members in John's churches, this had been the most important date in the calendar, the birthday of Israel, when all of them were summoned to remember the liberation from slavery in Egypt (Deut. 16:1-3). The scriptural accounts of that liberation provided the screen through which they filtered the stories of the new Moses. To them, Jesus was not only the promised prophet like Moses, working the signs of deliverance, but also the Passover lamb, for his death would take place on the very day when that lamb was slaughtered (19:31). As we have already stressed, John expected his readers to notice the links between the two stories, one in the Book of the Law and the other in this book entitled "In the beginning was the Word." In both books a crowd gathers, composed of males only (Deut. 16:16; John 6:10). In both stories, God provides bread from heaven for a people on the move. The hungry people in the wilderness murmured against Moses (Exod. 16:1-8), just as the Jews murmured against Jesus (6:41, 43). In both cases, Israel was ready to stone the God-sent emancipator (Exod. 17:4; John 10:31). In both cases, God's sign provoked ominous misunderstandings (Exod. 16:15; Deut. 8:3, 16; John 6:15, 26); a common mistake was to suppose that the manna/bread had been provided by a human leader rather than by God (Exod. 16:6, 15; John 6:32-33). Both stories emphasize the fact that men had been given all they could eat (Exod. 16:8, 18; Deut. 8:9-10; 11:15; John 6:11-12). It may even be that John's mention of the twelve baskets of fragments (6:13) was intended to recall God's extra provision of manna on Friday in order to cover the Sabbath needs of the twelve tribes of Israel (Exod. 16:22-25). It is certain that in both stories God uses the situation as a test of faith (Deut. 8:2, 16; John 6:6). These similarities, which are far too numerous to be accidental, provide important clues to the interpretation of John's sermon.

The siting of the story will bear imaginative scrutiny. For those in the crowd, the site is Galilee and "the other side of the sea." This marks them as "come-outers," willing to leave the familiar turf, ready to follow Jesus even to a great distance. They have been impressed by signs of divine power (6:2) not unlike those of Moses. This locale corresponds to the wilderness where Moses had provided manna for "your fathers." The statement in verse 15 implies that the feeding did not take place on the mountain itself. That the place is grassy may be an echo of God's promise to Moses in Deut. 11:15. So, we have a series of verbal associations, in which bread = manna, the new Moses = Moses, the crowd = Israel, wilderness = wilderness, Passover = Passover.

For the disciples, another site is more symbolic of their relation to Jesus. It is on a mountain that Jesus "sat down with his disciples." Traditionally
the mountain is the place of divine revelation, where prophets are given visions of the invisible realm of God's purposes and where God calls, meets with, and commissions the leaders of his people. So, to the other equations we may add another: mountain = Sinai. For Jesus to sit down is to say that he initiates a period of teaching (compare Matt. 5:1 ff.). In this connection, however, we may notice a curious thing. No formal instruction seems to follow. They are simply there. However, it is quite possible that to John the story of what followed was designed to be a revelation from God, an object-lesson concerning their own tasks and how they could accomplish them. In this context, the lifting-up of Jesus' eyes may indicate his looking to God, while his "seeing" of the crowd coming to him may suggest a heavenly vision of what is to follow. So, too, the mountain is the proper place to set a test for the disciples, those intern-prophets of the future church (compare Mark 9:2–8). It is to the mountain that Jesus retires in silent protest against the error of the crowd (vs. 15), so that this place symbolizes a degree of nearness to the disciples and a degree of distance from the crowd (echoing their distance from Sinai in Exodus 19–20).

In his sermonic parable, John wanted to correct misunderstandings on the part of the Spirit-gifted leaders in his churches. The chapter as a whole illustrates several such errors (vss. 16–21, 60–64, 70–71). One of these emerges immediately in the story of the supper. Here Jesus takes the initiative by asking Philip, "How are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" That question discloses several assumptions. It assumes, for example, that the disciples are obliged to care for the physical needs of Jesus' followers, i.e., to work as deacons (Acts 6:1–6). From the presence of the crowd we assume an amazing success for Jesus' mission; his work of healing had elicited a contagious enthusiasm among great numbers. It is the conjunction of this popular enthusiasm and the disciples' responsibility that explains this trial of their ability to care for so many people. Moreover, the story makes it clear that Jesus had virtually planned this event as a test of their ability to cope with such an emergency. This test takes the form of a question that echoes Moses' words in the wilderness: "Where am I to get meat to give to all this people?" (Num. 11:13). In telling how the disciples failed this test, John makes several points clear.

For one thing, it is the disciples and not Jesus who face the crisis, since Jesus already "knew what he would do." The question that showed Philip's deficiency showed the Master's reliability; Jesus could handle every situation which they might face in the future as apostle-deacons. For another thing, the story stresses the accuracy of the disciples' answers. They were right in saying that there were too few dollars in the
treasury to buy food for so many, and that the lunch in a boy's basket was ridiculously insufficient. In fact, the disproportion between resources and needs made Jesus' expectation seem altogether foolish. Yet their realism marked their failure as deacons. His action said in effect, "You have no faith." In such an emergency, faith would know that wherever the Lord is present, wherever he gives thanks, wherever he asks for God's help, there his followers will receive as much as they need. This seems to be the lesson that Jesus drove home by asking his disciples to gather up the fragments; in obeying his command each one found that the crumbs exceeded their earlier estimate of resources (compare Exodus 16).

The thrust of John's sermon would have been quite apparent to the deacons in John's churches. They would compare this kind of leadership with the leadership of Moses during the long saga of Israel's journey from captivity to the Promised Land. They would also sense the parallel between Christ's ability to feed his followers and his ability to guide apostles in their "fishing," i.e., in making converts (21:3-8). Where he is in command and where they follow his instructions, apparent failure becomes manifest success and apparent scarcity becomes manifest abundance. As Amos Wilder has written, the story of a miracle is sometimes the best way to call attention to a reality which in itself may be nonmiraculous (The Language of the Gospel, Harper & Row, 1964, p. 130).

If that was the thrust of John's sermon to the pace-setters in his churches, he also had a message for the pace-keepers. It is true that in this segment of the sermon Jesus says nothing directly to them; that conversation does not start until later (vss. 25 ff.). Yet even before that lesson begins, the crowd of followers has merited a degree of both praise and blame. They were to be praised for recognizing that Jesus is "the prophet who is to come into the world." Later Christians have sometimes faulted this tribute as being too modest, for Jesus is much more than a prophet. However, John's readers would immediately catch the larger significance of this tribute. He is no ordinary prophet (if there is such), because this tribute refers to God's promise to Moses; Jesus is the greater Moses in whom Israel's hope would be fulfilled (Deut. 18:15; Acts 3:22). In thinking this, the crowd members deserved praise. Yet, at the same time, they were guilty of great confusion. Their gratitude and their enthusiasm induced them to want to make Jesus king. They were grossly mistaken about the nature of Jesus' kingship. It was a matter that could be understood only after Jesus' death, which would make clear the ways in which this king would exercise royal power (18:33-37). So, the crowd was guilty of great folly, an error that Jesus signalled by withdrawing to the mysterious mountain of revelation. He alone knew the secret of God's power. In this way, John registered the double pressures within the
hearts of Jesus' followers: they wanted to glorify Jesus for his gifts to them, but they confused his glory with the power wielded by earth's kings. Such confusion would be corrected when they recognized that only after the ignominy of the cross would the Holy Spirit be granted, a gift that would be in itself a demonstration of divine power (7:39). Modern ministers may well ask how their own congregations are open to similar confusions and insights.

PUZZLES FOR PREACHERS

1. As a dramatist, John has Philip and Andrew appear on the stage three times (1:40-49; 6:5-8; 12:20-22). Did he connect these three appearances in such a way as to give these two leaders a distinctive role in the story of Jesus? If so, can you flesh out their story into a full-length drama?

2. How many similarities do you find between your congregation and the crowd that Jesus fed—their reasons for coming to Jesus, their awareness of his signs, their desires to praise him, their sense of excitement over a possible messiah, their diverse ideas of what they need by way of food?

3. Assume that John told the story in verses 1–15 as the text around which he built the rest of his sermon (vss. 16–71). Then compare his interpretation of this text with other sermons on this same text that you have heard or that you have preached.

SUNDAY, AUGUST 4, 1985

John 6:24-35

JESUS AND THE CROWD (1)

The editors of the lectionary omitted verses 16–21. To some extent that omission violates the structure of John's sermon, which, as we have seen, was organized to meet the needs of a double audience; the leaders in his churches and the followers. As the first episode dealt with the need of those in that first group to find resources for their assignments, the episode of the storm at sea illustrated their difficulties in coping with formidable odds. Their efforts to make headway against contrary winds had been foiled until Jesus joined them; then they arrived at their destination with mysterious suddenness. We should not forget John's continuing interest in the training of these disciples, even though a sermon on that text must await another occasion.
With verse 22 the focus of interest shifts to Jesus' conversations with the crowd. We note that their devotion to Jesus had been so great as to lead them to search for him across the lake. John says nothing about the logistical problem of transporting five thousand men so far. Anyone who has had experience in arranging a church picnic for a hundred people twenty miles distant in the country will appreciate the dimensions of that problem. "How many small boats will be needed? How much time will it take? Where will we meet? Who will issue the necessary instructions to the pilots?" But John says nothing about such matters; he was not interested in creating that kind of verisimilitude. Just as he thinks of the crowd as speaking with a single voice, he pictures it moving as a single unit across the sea. It is on the relation of those in the crowd to Jesus that he focuses attention. He finds in their action a mixture of faith and confusion. Even though they do not know where Jesus himself had gone, they follow his disciples to Capernaum, hoping to find Jesus with them. Their hunch is correct, and they do find him, though they are baffled to explain how he got there without a boat. "When did you come here?" That question provokes a long conversation between these two parties alone (as if neither disciples nor "the Jews" were present).

The reader has some sympathy with that question, for there was a mystery about Jesus' movements. He seemed to be able to come and go at will, choosing when and where to be present. To that mystery later theologians would give the word omnipresence, a feature which they attributed to the transcendence over space and time that characterized the Risen Lord. This may be the implication of John's story. However, Jesus gives no direct answer to the question from persons in the crowd. Rather he begins to talk about the bread which they had eaten. Presumably, they could not understand his movement across the lake because they were confused about "the signs" and were unable to distinguish between two kinds of bread. They had already consumed one kind of bread, but they had been deceived by it; there is another kind, and the discussion reaches a natural climax when the crowd begins to pray, "Lord, give us this bread always" (vs. 34). It would seem that this prayer discloses the purpose that Jesus had had in mind when he fed them the abundant supper in the wilderness.

In other words, the story of that supper is the text and this conversation is the sermonic interpretation of that text. Moreover, in interpreting this supper, Jesus also reinterprets the scriptural story of Moses feeding Israel in the wilderness. The memories of these two events crisscross, and each story becomes a screen that filters out unexpected meanings in the other. In both stories, the crowd that had been fed had failed to understand the
sign as "a work of God." In John, the action of Jesus in feeding his followers points to his wider work and to himself as "the true bread from heaven."

But we should also view this sermon as one addressed by John to his Christian audience. He, too, used the Galilean sign as a key to understanding the Exodus sign, and vice versa. He, too, used Jesus' distinction between the two kinds of bread as an authoritative clarification of the confusions that had bewildered the Galilean pilgrims. But John also had an additional set of memories to superimpose on the two earlier stories; these were the Christian memories of many suppers within the church, when there had been mysterious encounters with the invisible but present Lord, when he had blessed the bread and transformed apparent scarcity into manifest abundance. If we are to judge from the experience of the church in Corinth, those memories included times when those who sat at table were anything but peaceful and happy. Private greed had provoked jealousies, and those who had received spiritual gifts exploited them for their own prestige and power (I Cor. 10—11). It seemed to be true that the greater the enthusiasm among Christians and the more dangerous their enemies in the world, the greater was the confusion as to which signs were truly performed by Christ. Which works are indeed the works of God? Which bread endures to eternal life? Ever since the time of Jesus and John, sermons on this pericope have dealt with such questions as these.

John organizes his sermon by raising three questions, the first of which we have already stated. Jesus' answer to this first question justifies several further comments. He makes it clear that it is a mark not of faith but of dangerous error to view the miracle as the magical production of enough loaves to fill five thousand stomachs. To place such an emphasis upon "the food which perishes" perverts the truth. In emphasizing another kind of food, Jesus corroborates Moses' emphasis on the manna as demonstrating the necessity to live not by the day's bread but by the word spoken by God (Deut. 8:1-3). In its misunderstanding of the loaves, the Galilean crowd had imitated Israel's misunderstanding of the manna. In both cases, the crowd was more impressed with the bread than with the source of the bread, forgetting the giver in its excitement over the gift. The Galilean supper should be understood not as a marvelous happening in the past but as an anticipation in the present of the eternal life which "the Son of man will give to you" (my italics). Most signs pass away, but this sign endures. Such endurance is the proper proof that something is the work of God.

This leads to the crowd's second question: "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" There is merit in this question, and John felt it
was a natural question for his congregations to be asking. Christ’s followers naturally desire to emulate God’s work. But there is a danger in this question. Presumption may be hidden in the craving to do what God alone can do. Piety may hide a self-centered narcissism: “how can we wield power similar to that of Jesus?” To this query Jesus gives a quiet rebuke, as if to say, “Faith does not rest on what you do, but on what God has done for you.” God has sent Jesus; in consequence, the work of God is to trust this messenger. (The tenses of the verbs fit the time frame when John is writing: is to trust, has sent). In this interchange, the language of faith has subtly shifted. The image of the multiplication of loaves has become the image of God’s work in sending Jesus; accordingly, the image of eating bread has become the image of believing in Jesus as a life-giver sent by God. Life has replaced food as the key to understanding.

This discussion leads into the third question: By what signs can Jesus verify his claim to be God’s messenger? This is the issue that arose wherever Christians made this claim to their Jewish neighbors. Moreover, the questioners add a requirement of their own, a requirement which those neighbors would themselves make. Jesus could verify his role as God’s messenger only by working signs comparable to those of Moses in leading Israel out of the wilderness into the Promised Land. So, the question discloses a halfway grasp of the truth: Moses and Jesus were both sent to liberate God’s people; there is a hidden linkage between the Galilean loaves and the Exodus manna. But the question also masks an error: the tendency to measure prophets by judging which can work a greater wonder. The error gave the preacher an opportunity to provide a better test: Who is the ultimate giver of the bread? Does the bread satisfy hunger for a few hours or forever? Who gives Israel eternal life? The test is not bread but life; in being that life, and the giver of life, Jesus is the bread. To come to him is to banish hunger and thirst forever. This is the test which every meal within the church should satisfy.

PUZZLES FOR PREACHERS

1. Compare John 6:34 with the petition in the Lord’s Prayer (Matt. 6:11). In what way does the story of the feeding of the five thousand illustrate both petitions?

2. Psalm 107 seems to be saturated with Israel’s memories of experiences in the wilderness during the long trek to Canaan. Would this be a good reading to use on this Sunday? At what points do motifs from the Psalm reappear in the Gospel?

3. Have there been times in the past year when your congregation has become unusually aware of the presence of Jesus? If so, do those
situations correspond in any degree to the situation in John's churches that are reflected in John 6? Do the questions raised by your people parallel in any way the questions posed by John's crowd?

SUNDAY, AUGUST 11, 1985

John 6:37-40

JESUS AND THE CROWD (2)

At this point I wish to amend the decision of the lectionary committee, which makes verse 35 the conclusion of one unit and verse 37 the beginning of another. Such a division violates John's literary design. He distinguished sharply between Jesus' discussion with the crowd and his altercation with the Jews (vss. 41-59). The committee had to make this division because both conversations are too long for the typical lection. Since we, however, are trying to follow John's sermon to his congregations, we need to preserve his organization. Accordingly, we will deal here only with the conclusion of the conversation with the crowd.

In this conclusion, John is still using as a text the story about the wilderness supper (vss. 1-15). Moreover, in these verses we find an extended response to the crowd's petition for "this bread." The shortest response is given in the simple declaration, "I am the bread of life." In his own person and presence, Jesus is the answer to their need, as well as the answer to the three earlier questions. But John is not content with the brief declaration, "I am the bread of life." He expands and clarifies its meaning in the form of three parallel sentences that function as a summary of Jesus' entire mission and that could be easily memorized and used on many different occasions (vss. 38-40). We can study those sentences best by arranging them in nine parallel lines.

(1) I have come down from heaven,
(2) not to do my own will,
(3) but the will of him who sent me;
(4) and this is the will of him who sent me,
(5) that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me,
(6) but raise it up at the last day.
(7) For this is the will of my Father,
(8) that every one who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life;
(9) and I will raise him up at the last day.

These lines reflect the art of repetition; in lines 3, 4, and 7, the thought is firmly anchored in God's will. The parallel structure serves to define the
meaning of "heaven" in line 1; lines 4 and 7 view heaven not so much as a geographical place as the source of God's action, God's sending, and Jesus' coming. Heaven is the realm of eternal life (not the same as post mortem survival). The lines also serve to define the basic meaning of the double metaphor of Father/Son; God's fatherhood is defined by the action of sending Jesus, and Jesus' sonship is defined by his obeying the will of the Father.

These lines also serve to place the time frame of the ancient preacher within brackets. Retrospectively, he is looking back on the whole story of Jesus and not simply the episode in Galilee (notice the tenses in lines 1, 3, 4, 5). Prospectively, he is looking forward to the consummation of all things in the last day (lines 6, 9). Yet the focus of concern falls on the present call to decision, to see and to believe (line 8). The correspondence of lines 5 and 8 shows that by believing, each person becomes a gift from God to Jesus, a gift that God will not withdraw, a gift that conveys eternal life in the present (the last day will verify this gift). This gift is a work of God more potent than any food that perishes; this gift represents the fulfillment of God's will in sending Jesus. Line 5 is the bottom-line guarantee offered to believers: Jesus will lose none of those whom God has given him. These meanings are reinforced by two couplets, each a condensed epitome of Jesus' promise as the life-giving bread: "He who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst" (vs. 35). The implication should be clear: to eat me = to believe in me = to come to me. Three metaphors describe the same action; the invitation to this action is issued to all. The metaphor of coming links this couplet to the next: "All that the Father gives me will come to me; and him who comes to me I will not cast out" (vs. 37). This couplet replaces the image of eating with the image of coming, which is no less vital to the sermon. In fact, the whole sermon begins not with the marvelous feeding but with the action of coming: Jesus saw the crowd "coming to him" (vs. 5). That coming of the crowd is a symbolic reaction to Jesus' coming from the Father; God was present both in the coming of Jesus and in the coming of the crowd, God's gift to Jesus of the new Israel.

Finally, we should notice a surprising twist in the second line of that couplet—Jesus will not cast out anyone who comes to him. Why should the pledge of reliability take this form of not casting out? The answer is made clear in the situation facing John's readers. According to the stories in chapters 6 and 9, Jews who came to Jesus were being cast out of their synagogues (the Greek word eklektos is the same in 9:34-35 and 6:37). John assures such refugees of a different treatment from Jesus; this hospitality was desperately needed by believers who had lost family,
friends and synagogue home because they had “come to” Jesus. The lesson to John’s churches: they, too, must replace such ejection with the cordial warmth of a new home.

PUZZLES FOR PREACHERS

1. Quite without thinking of your professional duties, jot down in your personal diary some of the ways in which Jesus has become for you the bread of life. Then study the metaphors which you have used most naturally. How do they compare with the range of John’s metaphors?
2. Can John 6 be used legitimately in connection with a campaign to raise money to feed starving people here and abroad? If so, what rationale would support such use?
3. How might this same text be interpreted differently in sermons designed for use at a Eucharist, at Easter, at a funeral, at a service of ordination?

SUNDAY, AUGUST 18, 1985

John 6:41-59

JESUS AND HIS ADVERSARIES

We have explained above why we have cut the scriptural pie into slices different from those adopted by the lectionary committee. Here we want to deal with the conversation between Jesus and “the Jews” as a whole. This conversation was initiated by the reference to his enemies “murmuring” at him. The choice of this verb is an echo of the Exodus stories of the people murmuring at Moses (in the Greek translation of Exodus 16-17, the verb is the same, gogdatz)

Both of these stories imply that the rebellion of Israel was directed as much against God as against God’s messenger. In both cases, the rebellion was provoked by the harsh and seemingly unacceptable conditions that God had attached to the gift of bread or manna. In John, those conditions were attached to the understanding and acceptance of the declaration “I am the bread of life.” (This declaration is referred to six times, in vss. 35, 41, 48, 50, 51, 58.) In interpreting this incident we must be careful how we use the term “the Jews”; we should not use it as a blanket curse covering all members of the race or religion. In the Pentateuch, Moses speaks of the rebellion as involving “Israel” and “the people” without meaning every individual Israelite; likewise, John in his reference to “the Jews.” He knew that Jesus, his disciples, and the crowd were all Jews in both a racial and
religious sense of the term. In this debate in chapter 6, John was using the term to apply to leaders of the synagogue who were hostile to those members who accepted Jesus as "the bread of life."

In our pericope it is this declaration that incites their antipathy. On the face of it, one may wonder what there was about this assertion that aroused such murderous anger. Before the end of the conversation, the reason becomes clear. The location of the debate is well chosen, for these enemies exerted their authority over the synagogues, and it was from the synagogues that believers in Jesus were being expelled.

Although the argument appears to proceed between Jesus and these antagonists, we should remember that John was writing not for these outsiders but for insiders. He is interested in the lessons that the debate contained for the same worshiping congregations that he was addressing elsewhere. They were engaged in similar debates with the rulers of the synagogues and needed to know how to respond to similar attacks, and how to present the gospel persuasively to these enemies.

The debate focuses on two questions (vss. 42, 52), which the adversaries raise with a single voice. Their first query was prompted by the assertion that this bread had come down from heaven. They understood heaven differently, for they assumed that a heavenly origin excluded human parentage. How could anyone whose parents they knew personally have come down from heaven? Jesus' thought moved on an entirely different level. For him, to speak of heaven was to speak of God's initiative, God's sending, God's teaching, God's drawing believers to himself. It was to speak of all the invisible means of support. It was to speak of life, eternal life, its source and its home. Heaven was the source of the manna by which "your fathers" (vs. 49) and "our fathers" (vs. 31) were sustained during the long pilgrimage through the wilderness (to John, both the crowd and its enemies had the same fathers). So, in answering the question about heaven, Jesus (and John) drew on the store of ideas that had been used earlier in the sermon (compare vss. 41/35; 44/38; 44/40; 45/37; 47/33; 49/31; 50/33; 51/31). We see, then, that the concept of heaven was a basic source of misunderstanding between believers and unbelievers. That problem has remained with the church ever since. Unbelievers try to fit the work of Jesus into their preconceived views of the universe; believers allow his redemptive work, his provision of bread, to engender new views of heaven and its relation to earth.

In many ways, Jesus' answers to his hecklers simply repeated his earlier teachings to the crowd, yet at one point they marked a significant advance. At the conclusion of his rebuttal to the first objection, Jesus defined bread in a new and most unexpected way: "The bread . . . is my flesh" (vs. 51). To eat the bread = to eat his flesh. It is this amazing
shift in thought that provokes the second question from the hecklers: "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (vs. 52). The ensuing debate forms the climax not only of the debate but of the entire chapter as well. To John and his audience, this question/answer was no trivial matter; it was the source of intense persecution.

This makes it vital to understand exactly how Jesus' flesh is given "for the life of the world." First, we must grasp the sense in which the term "world" is used. In most contexts, John used this term to refer not to the physical universe, nor to humanity in general and as a whole, but to Israel as God's people, and more specifically to those leaders of Israel who were in unconscious rebellion against God—in fact, to those very antagonists to whom Jesus was then speaking. This world is composed of those who "hate you" and who "hate me . . . [and] my Father also" (15:18-23). (I have given extensive evidence for this interpretation in my book, John, the Martyr's Gospel, chap. 3.) This group of enemies is the world which God loves, to which he has sent the Son with the gift of eternal life (compare Rom 5:6-8). Accordingly, this debate itself represents a point where that love meets this resistance. It is the sharpness of the collision that reveals the vast significance of the moment.

How, then, did Jesus give his flesh for the life of this world? Surely, the answer points to Jesus' death, to the atoning sacrifice of the Passover lamb. But it is hard to recapture the offensiveness of this idea. How can a crucified criminal wield power as the messianic king? How can a sinner become the measure of God's righteousness? How can a man's death become "the life of the world"? It was not simply Jesus' words that uttered this claim; it was the events of his trial and execution that made the claim so inescapable and at the same time so unacceptable. If Golgotha was the place where Jesus' flesh was given for the life of the world, then the cross provides its own austere definition of the life-giving bread. To eat this bread is to believe in the Lamb who by dying takes away the sin of the world of his enemies. To believe in him is to leave the community ruled by "the Jews" and to come to Jesus, trusting that he will not cast them away. So, it was the events themselves and not simply the words of Jesus (or of Christians) that provoked the question from the Jews. And those same events add a final equation to the others suggested by this sermon: to eat the bread = to come to Jesus = to see and believe in Jesus = to be a gift from God to Jesus = to have eternal life = to be raised at the last day = to eat the flesh given for the life of the world.

As if those ideas were not offensive enough, Jesus makes them even more offensive by adding an absolutely binding set of conditions. He introduces this declaration with the words "truly, truly" to indicate that the following pronouncement is a prophetic revelation, issued on the
authority of God: “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (vs. 53). “The Jews” must not only come to believe in this Passover lamb as God’s messenger, revealer, and redeemer; they must also eat his flesh and drink his blood. Here again is an echo from Scripture: “They shall eat the flesh. . . . It is the Lord’s Passover” (Exod. 12:8-11). What can Jesus mean if he does not mean that in order to receive his life, believers must participate in his giving of his flesh for the life of the world; that they must share in the dying of the Son of man; that they must accept such dying as a permanent calling? In its essence, this requirement is no more rigorous than many other commands of Jesus (10:1-18; 12:23-26; 13:12-16; 15:10-27). Our surprise at the rigor is due to the fact that all of these demands of Jesus have over the years been defused by being spiritualized to the point where no one is offended by them. But the original thrust should be clear: to eat this lamb’s flesh is to join in his vicarious sacrifice. This climax to the sermon makes dying the mode by which Jesus becomes life-giving bread.

At first sight, this demand may seem to smack of the martyr complex, a perverted psychic revelling in suffering for its own sake. But further words from Jesus destroy this possibility; they trace the suffering to the particular tasks assigned by God:

“As the living Father sent me, and I [by being sent] live because of the Father, so he who eats me [i.e., is sent by me] will live because of me” (vs. 57).

The primary thing in eating this bread (i.e., Jesus) is to accept a vocation as Christ’s messenger to his enemies. It is this mission that entails the risk of martyrdom. To turn away from that mission because of the risk is to reject this bread. But what if a person accepts the mission, knowing the risk? Another saying of Jesus gives the answer: “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood, makes me his dwelling place, and in him I make my dwelling place” (vs. 56, my own free translation). Thus, the teaching in the synagogue brings to a conclusion the sermon which Jesus began on the mountain (vs. 3) and which he illustrated by feeding the crowd: to eat this bread = to join Jesus in his mission to his enemies, a mission that leads to martyrdom.

PUZZLES FOR PREACHERS

1. Many observers of the church today assert that the vagueness of its message and the blandness of its work stem from the fact that it has no clear conception of its real enemies. Would this vagueness be dissipated if we could locate the modern equivalent of “the Jews” in John 6?
2. John used the term "flesh" (σῶμα) so seldom that it is difficult to recapture its precise meanings for him. Does his use in 6:51-64 throw light on the use in 1:12-14 and 17:1-2?

3. Christian readers read this story through glasses provided by their experience of the Eucharist, in which bread and wine symbolize the body and blood. But for John and his readers those glasses were provided by stories of the Passover. Perhaps you should ask a neighboring rabbi about the primary meanings of that festival in the first century.

SUNDAY, AUGUST 25, 1985

John 6:60-71

JESUS AND THE DISCIPLES

Lack of space forces us to be very brief in comments on this lection. Here the disciples return to the stage, and their sudden appearance indicates that they have been present in John's mind from the beginning. The whole chapter has a special message for the charismatic leaders in his churches. His lack of interest in "the Jews" is obvious in that he says nothing about their response to Jesus. By contrast, what he tells about the response of the disciples gives the clue as to what it meant to eat Jesus' flesh. That demand is so hard that it induces a murmuring against its rigor. (The same Greek word is used for the resistance evoked among the Jews both in the Exodus and in the Galilean synagogue.) In fact, so offensive is the condition that Jesus attaches to the gift of life that many disciples recant their faith in him and desert his mission (vss. 64, 66). Here as elsewhere in the New Testament, the word for offence refers to the stone of stumbling that induces believers to betray Jesus (I Pet. 2:4-8).

In this way, John brings the sermon on bread to a climactic definition of the issue facing the leaders in his churches. Are they willing to eat Jesus' flesh, i.e., to accept persecution from the same adversaries? They could react either like Peter or like Judas. These two disciples illustrated the truth that "no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father" (vs. 65). Such a gift was granted to Peter but not to Judas. In pondering these two role models, readers could detect in Judas's stumbling the power of the devil (vs. 70) and in Peter's initial stumbling but final martyrdom (21:15-19) they would understand how this shepherd had become qualified to feed Jesus' flock. In Peter's dying, he would eat the bread of life and become able to feed others. To eat the bread = to receive the gift of eternal life = to eat Jesus' flesh = to die in love for the persecutors = to feed others with the bread of life.
1. This chapter posed three tests for the disciples (on the mountain, in the boat, in the synagogue). In which test did they encounter the greatest difficulty? From which test did they have the most to learn?

2. It is impossible to equate the action of eating the bread of life with the action of dying with Christ unless one changes one’s ideas of what death is and what life is. How must one redefine those two terms before this chapter makes sense?

3. Jesus refers in his teaching to “the last day” (vss. 39-40). How does the story of Jesus help us to relate present experience to this final judgment? How does it illustrate the axiom that there is nothing like the day of judgment for concentrating the mind?

Preachers who have followed this study from the beginning will now glimpse some of the reasons why it is so difficult to preach from texts in John 6. Not only must preachers take the whole chapter as a thought-unit and interpret each part in the light of the whole; not only must they grasp the complex involutions in John’s thought and the constant superimposition of one image on another (e.g., eating/coming/believing/dwelling/dying). They must also make it clear why in the original instance the demands of Jesus on his disciples were so offensive that they caused many of them to reject this “bread of life.” If the original situation was so life-threatening, should a present-day sermon on that situation be any easier to prepare or to deliver? The difficulties inhere in the events themselves, or rather in Jesus himself as the personal revelation of God, and not in preachers’ expertise as historians, their profundity as theologians, or skills as orators. So great are these difficulties that cautious preachers may well avoid this chapter entirely. Such avoidance, however, becomes itself a way of murmuring against the harshness of the demand, a sure sign of being offended. When that fact is recognized, preachers may well accept again the inner turmoil of preparing sermons on this chapter, directing them toward audiences composed of the successors of the leaders and laity in John’s churches. Should that be the decision, I urge preachers to obey another of Krister Stendahl’s commandments: “You shall not read from the cook-book—serve the food.”

Here let me address each reader personally. Should you decide to serve the food, you may find that your homiletical resources are greater and more accessible than you suppose. They are more accessible because they derive from your own experience as one who has succeeded to John’s vocation.
The vocational link may be described by way of the images John used in chapter 6. For example, you may recall times when you were expected to provide food for particular parishioners and when you were dismayed to find yourself helpless to meet that expectation; yet you later learned that these persons had been fed by your ministry in ways wholly unknown to you. If so, you are not so far from Philip and Andrew as you may have thought (vss. 1-15). Or your ministry may have aroused opposing winds of hurricane proportions that stalled your boat en route to your professional goal; that inner crisis may have made you aware of a mysteriously calming presence at the epicenter of the storm, and you may have found yourself much closer to the goal than you had thought (see vss. 1-21). Or perhaps you have been confronted with intimations of your own mortality in a way to release nameless but uncontrollable fears; yet the stories of Gethsemane and Golgotha, you know not how, have conveyed an assurance that your death is not the calamity you had supposed, since Christ gave his flesh for your life as well as for the life of the world. Such experiences provide homiletical resources greater than a shelf of commentaries. They enable you (without telling unseemly stories, e.g., of your own operation) to translate the biblical images of John into a vocabulary fully contemporary and fully intelligible.

A second resource immediately accessible to you is the fund of memories alive in the congregation to which you have been called to preach. When its members share in the sacrament, they recall many sufferings and joys that somehow or other have been encapsulated in the act of eating the flesh and drinking the blood. Their memories stretch back not only over the years but over the centuries since the first Passover. The stories of wandering in the wilderness can evoke the same despair one feels after reading the morning newspaper. As Christians share the dialogue with Jesus about the different kinds of bread, they can recognize the vast difference between the food that perishes and the food that satisfies deeper hungers. Their formal doctrines of Christ may be deficient, but that does not cancel out the fact that they have "come" to him and are carrying on a more or less desultory conversation with him. To be sure, their faith in him, like yours, is an amalgam of confidence and confusion; but that very mixture establishes rapport, however limited, with leaders and laity in John's churches. Those leaders and laity in your congregation form two angles of the eternal triangle of which we have written—He forms the third. That triangle encloses all the deepest hungers, together with an ample supply of food. "Don't read the cook-book—serve the food."
BOOK REVIEWS

Just War Ethics and Disarmament

THEODORE R. WEBER


The Roman Catholic bishops' letter on nuclear weapons and deterrence strategy is a sophisticated document, by comparison with most other church social statements, in its very competent use of traditional thought on war and peace, principles of moral reasoning, and pertinent empirical information. Other church groups could improve the quality, relevance, and authority of their own communications by following the bishops' example. These three fine books will help them. Two of the books are studies of the traditional just war ethic. The third is a proposal to recover disarmament as a viable policy in place of nuclear deterrence. All three are worthy of careful reading.

Michael Walzer's Just and Unjust Wars is the most noticed book on the ethics of war since Paul Ramsey's War and the Christian Conscience (Duke University Press, 1961), which it presupposes. It is a philosopher's inquiry into ways of moral reasoning about the dilemmas of war, and it rests on the double assumption that war has a moral reality and that the just war ethic is relevant to the questions it poses.

Walzer, professor of government at Harvard University, divides the problems of justification into the traditional categories of resort to war and conduct of war. By contrast with many just war approaches, however, he does not attempt to formulate or refine principles and apply them to cases. Rather, he begins with the legal conventions that have

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been developed to control war and its conduct, and inquires, through the
examination of historical examples, whether they are sufficiently
comprehensive and flexible to cover the issues of justice and conflicts of
value that arise in a war setting.

What justifies resort to war? According to established consensus and
legal codes, war as such is not a crime because states have the right and
duty to protect their territorial integrity and legal sovereignty, but the
right of war is limited to those purposes in a purely defensive mode. All
other uses of force, “Preventive wars, commercial wars, wars of
expansion and conquest, religious crusades, revolutionary wars, military
interventions . . . are barred and barred absolutely” (72). What is not
pure defense is aggression, and aggression is a crime. Walzer calls this
construct the “legalist paradigm.”

This paradigm is a useful and necessary starting point, but it is not fully
satisfactory. The state making first use of force is not necessarily the
aggressor. The excluded uses of force are not self-evidently unjustified.
Walzer examines several revisions of the paradigm which reflect
unrepresented dimensions of the moral reality of war. Among them are
preventive war, which never is justifiable, and pre-emptive war and
intervention (including humanitarian intervention), both of which
violate the literal paradigm but may be justifiable with reference to the
protection and enhancement of rights.

Moral reflection on the conduct of war begins, in Walzer’s approach,
with the war conventions, that set of rules which directs what legally may
or (more commonly) may not be done in actual fighting, and which rests
primarily on the distinction between those who fight and those who do
not as legitimate targets. Walzer takes the tour through decisional
contexts such as guerrilla war, terrorism, siege, blockade, and reprisal to
show the meaning of the rules, their application, and possible exceptions.
His emphasis, however, is on the maintenance of the rules and their
reinforcement and extension as protectors of rights. Both sides in the
conflict are bound by the rules of conduct, regardless of judgments
concerning the justice of their resort to war.

How are the conflicts between justice and convention, between
winning and fighting well, to be resolved? Walzer rejects three methods
of resolving moral dilemmas: (1) a straightforward utilitarian calculation
which pushes limitations aside to pursue justifying goals; (2) absolute
enforcement of the war conventions; and (3) a sliding scale of respect for
conventions, based mainly on the relative justice of causes. His own
position is that the rules are authoritative and should be observed as a
matter of course, but that they may be overridden in cases of “supreme
emergency.” The criteria for such an emergency are the relative weight of
what might be lost and the closeness of the threat, both of them necessarily extreme. Within this framework he accepts the justification for initiating (but not continuing) the World War II strategic bombing of German cities, rejects justification for the atomic bombing of Japan, and endorses (while recognizing its fundamental immorality) the ultimate reliance of nuclear deterrence on countercity threats.

Not surprisingly, Walzer's "supreme emergency" principle is a prime target for critics. My own comments here are limited to two: First, the actual use of that principle is a movement beyond moral choice to a contextual commitment to ultimate values. Moral reflection no longer suffices; what is required is theological analysis. Walzer the philosopher must become a theologian to deal adequately with the just war tradition and its application to the moral dilemmas of war. And when he reflects on "supreme emergency" theologically, he must ask whether overriding the conventions and moral rules in the instances he cites is not an act of idolatry.

Second, his reluctant endorsement of countercity deterrence by means of this principle reflects some curious shifts in his argumentation. For one thing, it is an apparent concession to "realism," based on his observation that politicians will, in any event, cast aside moral restrictions when there is an overwhelming threat to sovereignty and territorial integrity. I had expected him to offer them moral guidance as to what they should do, not to base his own moral conclusions on what they as politicians are likely to do. Also, the recognition—actual or implied—of the ultimacy of sovereignty and territorial integrity provides a context for moral decision different from his earlier claim that, in the nuclear age, war avoidance is the overriding goal of all foreign policies. War avoidance as the primary context for moral decision-making will lead to nuclear policies quite different from those based on the protection of sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Other aspects of Walzer's book deserve more attention than I can give them here: his case for the relevance of just war thinking; his defense of the objectivity of moral language; his contention that human rights, transmitted to international relations through the device of social contracts, are the basis of the war-limiting conventions. Regrettably, Walzer also does not give them the attention they deserve. The lack of extensive development is surprising, especially with regard to the role of human rights in just war ethics. But we cannot expect all things in a single volume, and what we have in this one is a penetrating analysis of moral-political thinking that will remain for some time one of the landmark efforts of its kind.

James T. Johnson, chairman of the Department of Religion at Rutgers University, has written a two-volume work on the origins and
development of the just war tradition, with particular attention to its function as a restrainer of war. The first volume, published in 1975, is Ideology, Reason, and the Limitation of War (Princeton University Press). The volume reviewed here is Just War Tradition and the Restraint of War.

The book has several interrelated purposes. One is methodological. Johnson devotes the first part of the book to a critical analysis of ways of studying the just war tradition. This treatment would be of interest to anyone seeking a thorough knowledge of the subject, but its primary audience surely would be scholars in the fields of history and ethics. A second purpose, obviously, is the presentation of the results of Johnson's historical research. The third and perhaps fundamental purpose is the inquiry into whether and how this tradition can provide effective moral restraints on instrumental violence under the conditions of modern war.

But the historical investigation is given the most space, and it is basic to the other two purposes. Johnson challenges the widely held notion that the just war tradition developed primarily out of Christian theology, and shows that it derived from four principal sources which came together in the High Middle Ages: the canonists of the church, the theologians, the civil lawyers, and the knightly code of chivalry. The combination was essential to its effectiveness in restraining war, for it represented a consensus (and therefore an accommodation) of churchly and political, religious and secular, interests.

In the seventeenth century, this consensus was divided into two parts—one primarily religious, expressing itself through the reformulation of moral principles, and the other secular, expressing itself through the development of international law. Because the latter was related more directly to political and military matters, it became the principal bearer of the just war tradition and the vehicle for its development through radical and far-reaching changes in the nature and conduct of war. Influential figures in this development include the jurist Vattel, Napoleon, and military theorists Clausewitz and Jomini.

In the twentieth century, the just war theory has been recovered as a religious and moral tradition by theologians such as Reinhold Niebuhr, John Courtney Murray, and Paul Ramsey. Central to the effectiveness of their recovery efforts is their recognition that the contemporary relevance of the tradition depends on an integration of theological and political insights.

Johnson himself, as a historically oriented Christian ethicist, stands primarily in the company of the theological ethicists rather than in that of the historians. He has a practical interest in the tradition as a means of imposing moral restraints on war, and he recognizes rightly that historically the tradition has had that purpose and has served it.
Historical research yields the sociological conclusion that the moral restraints are socially effective to the degree that they manifest the kind of comprehensive consensus present in the Middle Ages. When underlying conditions change, the consensus tends to break up, and with it goes much of the authority of the moral tradition.

Moreover, the restrictions that have the most durability, such as the protection of noncombatants from direct and intentional attack, are the ones that reflect deeply held values in the community which supports the tradition. Particular moral limitations which do not have that kind of value correspondence bind action only weakly and tend to fade from the code. This connectedness of values to community warns us that the moral restrictions are not likely to have real authority outside the community in which the values are held.

Johnson acknowledges the influence of Walzer's book, but he faults Walzer on this point concerning the relationship of moral consensus to the authority of just war thinking. In Johnson's view, Walzer believes the consensus to be much broader and deeper than it actually is. Because he finds it not to be so comprehensive, Johnson does what Walzer declines to do, namely, to seek a crosscultural, natural law basis for a more broadly authoritative just war ethic in the process of extending the tradition. He is encouraged in this regard by the theological recovery of the tradition in this century, for he believes that the theological transcendence of particular national interests will facilitate a broader and less parochial view of where and how restraints ought to be placed.

Although I applaud the theological developments to which Johnson points, I am not as confident as he that theology and religion as such necessarily advance the cause of moral limitations on war. The rise of political fundamentalism in both Iran and the United States reminds us how divisive and retribalizing religious commitments can be. It may be that on an international level, only a more secular approach to moral foundations (memories of Hugo Grotius!) will avoid such intense and bitter rivalries. Certainly Johnson's own approach to natural law points in that direction.

But Johnson and Walzer certainly are correct to note the need for and continuing relevance of the just war ethic. The reports of its demise are quite premature, as these two excellent volumes demonstrate. If we do not use just war criteria in our war-related thinking, we withdraw to absolutist pacifism, or drop into the abyss of letting violence be limited only by counterviolence and the availability of resources for destruction. Restraint of war is on Alan Geyer's agenda in *The Idea of Disarmament!* only in the sense that he wants to constrain and reverse policies leading—he believes—to the next war. The executive director of the
Churches' Center for Theology and Public Policy in Washington, D.C., he has written a feisty political tract of generally high quality which challenges bad thinking about both nuclear deterrence and disarmament and is dedicated to discrediting the former and restoring the credibility of the latter.

The message of Geyer's book, simply put, is: Multilateral disarmament has been set aside as unrealistic (unthinkable!) and has been replaced by strategies of reciprocal nuclear deterrence. Now, however, the deter­rence strategies themselves are revealed to be unrealistic, false, and tending toward catastrophe. It is morally, politically, and humanly necessary to explode the myths underwriting deterrence and to restore disarmament to the status of rational and realistic (thinkable!) strategy.

Partly to inform us but mainly to dramatize urgency, Geyer has invented a threefold periodization of the history of nuclear weapons policy. The First Nuclear Age (1945-60) was the time of United States monopoly, of proliferation, and of disarmament propaganda. The second (1960-74) was marked by serious negotiations, treaties, and some degree of relaxation of tensions. The Third Nuclear Age (1974-) is a time of intense competition, rapidly expanding technology, and crisis politics. It is marked by the fear that the arms race is out of control and that the nuclear holocaust may be unavoidable.

Where does one begin to bring the situation under control? In Geyer's view one begins with intellectual penetration of the assumptions that support present policies. The principal assumption is that there have been fundamental political conflicts at the heart of international politics since World War II, and that nuclear arms competition and policies are expressions of those conflicts. Nuclear weapons developments cannot be brought under control without first resolving the underlying conflicts. According to Geyer, this is the argument of the "realists," who seem to be the principal villains of this piece.

Geyer does not dispute the existence of the political conflicts. His contention is that "realist" defense and deterrence policies do not correspond to political reality, and therefore are not explained by them. These policies presuppose an elaborate mythic structure which reduces the multiplicity of international society to bipolarity, misrepresents the motivations of both sides, exaggerates or underrates military capabilities, misallocates resources, and provides a characteristically fraudulent rationale for policies which tend toward the murder of humankind. Bringing sanity to foreign policy planning, and especially to its military aspect, begins with the destruction of the myths and the return to reality.

To come that far in the argument is to recognize that control and reversal of the arms race are not contingent on prior resolution of the
supposedly underlying political problems. The arms race has a life of its
own, supported by myths rather than by reality. The causal relationship
between policy and technological innovation begins with the latter, not
the former. New technologies require new policies. Therefore it is
possible as well as necessary to disengage efforts to control the arms race
from efforts to resolve basic political conflicts. That possibility is at the
heart of the restoration of credibility to disarmament.

When Geyer lays out the policy alternatives for disarmament, he offers
a seven-point selection ranging from nuclear superiority to nuclear
abolitionism. His own recommendation is for a combination of “modest
de-escalation” with “minimal deterrence,” moving toward general and
complete disarmament. Specifically, he supports completion of SALT II,
the nuclear freeze, adoption of a comprehensive test-ban treaty,
discontinuance of the production of new strategic weapons (including
MX and the cruise missile), and broad reduction in United States military
forces and overseas commitments.

Geyer’s retention of some deterrent element means that he is not
calling for simple unilateral disarmament, but he does insist that the
strategic foundation of policy be disarmament and not nuclear
deterrence. Moreover, there must be unilateral initiatives even though
the strategy is not simply unilateral. Educational initiatives must be
launched within the United States to destroy the distorting myths,
rehabilitate disarmament as a serious policy alternative, and engage the
political process in movement toward fundamental changes. Also, the
United States should take unilateral steps toward disarmament of
sufficient seriousness to invite matching steps by the Soviet Union, but
not so drastic as to create a position of irretrievable weakness.

I find much to agree with in Geyer’s analyses and recommendations,
but I call attention to the following problems:

(1) Geyer’s treatment of myth is not demythologizing; it is debunking.
The critical study of myths, by, for example, Niebuhr and Rudolf
Bultmann, assumes that there is truth in myths. Geyer equates them with
lies. There is much that is false in the myths of U.S. foreign policy, but
there is truth as well. When the elements of truth (however modest)
surface, they may damage Geyer’s case for disarmament.

(2) Attempts to reverse the arms race do not have to wait on resolution
of the basic conflicts of international politics, but the political conflicts are
more intertwined with and productive of strategic arms competition than
Geyer allows. His own disinclination to repudiate nuclear weapons
unilaterally indicates his awareness that the political context provides
some reasons for keeping them. In fact, Geyer acknowledges the reality
of these basic political problems, but he does not make a significant effort
to relate them to his disarmament proposals. Perhaps the much-scorned realists are closer to the truth on this point than he is.

(3) In calling on the United States to make unilateral initiatives, Geyer insists he is not letting the Soviet Union off the hook. The aggressions against Afghanistan, Poland, etc., are mentioned. However, bad myths, in his view, are at the heart of the nuclear threat, and the myths which he attacks are American myths. He should not be surprised if someone interprets him to mean that the United States is the main threat to the peace and survival of the world.

(4) Geyer's critique of nuclear deterrence is not based primarily on just war thinking. It is pragmatic and teleological. However, occasionally there are just war kinds of arguments in the book, and when they appear they are used mainly to undermine the justification for nuclear weapons. This suggests tension if not contradiction between the two approaches. If Geyer were to extend his line of just war argument, would that not result in a principled repudiation of deterrence that would lead him to unilateralism and undercut his' pragmatic efforts?

The concluding chapter makes a theological statement which Geyer insists is not disconnected from the preceding chapters, because (a) the nuclear threat is theological in nature, and (b) the empirical analysis is necessary groundwork for constructive theology. His statement is centered in the Incarnation of God in Christ and therefore in the pain, suffering, and hopes of the world. To comment with any adequacy would require more space than I have here. Briefly, it is a good and suggestive beginning, but not a sustained and penetrating work of analysis and construction. Geyer is distracted by his penchant for polemizing from getting on with his substantive work. I look for more from him in this area in the future.

In a work as bold and comprehensive as this one it would be possible to find other points to complain about, such as, for example, his polemical one-sidedness and occasional unfairness. But Geyer's book may be as strong and innovative a case for disarmament as one is likely to find today, and his criticisms of U.S. deterrence policy are more often right than wrong. Moreover, Geyer is an encyclopedia of information on U.S. foreign policy—especially its military aspects. One can learn a lot from this book.
It is a cliché of the late twentieth century to say that our world has shrunk, has grown smaller, has become one global village. A cliché, perhaps, but nonetheless true. Communications, transportation, and migration have brought once-distant cultures into the same neighborhood. And perhaps in no area of human endeavor is that proximity more obvious and more potentially irritating than in the religious sphere.

Formerly Europe was Christian; West Asia, Muslim; South Asia, Hindu; and East Asia, Buddhist. Now New York synagogues are converted into Hindu temples; Boulder's mountains are home to Tibetan Buddhists; and tiny Plainfield, Indiana, is headquarters for America's Muslim students. And this proximity is not without its problems.

As a professor of world religion, I must constantly be on guard lest I misrepresent one or another of the world’s religious traditions. Odds are that one of its adherents will be among the 15 percent of my students who come from other cultures to study in the West. Similar problems must be plaguing my colleagues in the parish, for twice recently I have been called upon to cool the frictions of interreligious misunderstandings. In one case, the members of a ministerial association invited me to referee their dialogue with adherents of a Hindu-inspired religious commune in their county. In the second instance, a pastor called upon me to counsel with and perform a wedding ceremony for one of his parishioners and her chosen—a bona fide Zoroastrian.

Such examples are perhaps trivial, but they clearly illustrate the situation in which contemporary persons concerned with religion find themselves. Neither for the pastor nor for the professor is knowledge of

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the Christian tradition alone adequate. Cognizance must now be taken of those many who "shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob" (Matt. 8:11 KJV).

In such a confusing and rapidly unfolding situation the professor, the pastor, and the concerned layperson need all the help they can get for understanding other religious traditions. Accurate, accessible, and affordable reference material on others' religions is becoming as necessary to the well-equipped library as have been biblical commentaries and theological lexicons. While specialists in world religion theological lexicons. While specialists in world religion anxiously await Ninian Smart's promised updating of Hastings' Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics and Mircea Eliade's forthcoming new Encyclopedia of Religion, the nonspecialists' needs are already served by several available one-volume dictionaries of world religion. These include S. G. F. Brandon's Dictionary of Comparative Religion (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970, 704 pp.) [DCR], and E. Geoffrey Parrinder's Dictionary of Non-Christian Religions (Westminster Press, 1971, 320 pp.) [DNXR].

Recently, a third comprehensive, one-volume dictionary has appeared. The most up-to-date and, in many other ways, the best of the trio, this is the Abingdon Dictionary of Living Religions, edited by Keith Crim and his associates, Roger A. Bullard and Larry D. Shinn. Consisting of more than eight hundred pages, it contains thousands of entries and sports sixteen pages of color plates and maps as well as hundreds of black-and-white illustrations. The work should be of great help not only to specialists in the study of world religion but also to all religion scholars, to pastors, and to laypersons who must confront the reality of a shrinking world. As great as are the inherent strengths of the Abingdon Dictionary, however, the work can hardly be considered in isolation from its chief competitors—Brandon's DCR and Parrinder's DNXR.

In many ways, the titles tell all. Crim's Abingdon Dictionary limits itself to living religious traditions with no explicit attention to the great religions of past eras. Of course, topics directly relevant to the evolution of major living traditions (for example, the Carvakas and the Essenes) are not omitted; but emphasis is clearly on extant religious traditions and their immediate contexts. Both Brandon's DCR and Parrinder's DNXR, on the other hand, do attempt to deal more fully with major extinct religious traditions—particularly those of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Hellenistic world. While such arcane knowledge is inherently interesting and indeed indispensable to the scholar, it is also more adequately covered in biblical reference materials and in the sort of books learned religionists are likely already to have acquired. Therefore, Crim's decision to limit his work to living traditions seems the wiser use of energy, time, and space.
On the other hand, inclusion in the *Abingdon Dictionary* of items on Christianity can be brought to query. Like Brandon's *DCR* but unlike Parrinder's *DNXR*, it includes entries on the history of Christian tradition. It is somewhat helpful to have Christian materials available in the same volume as others. Further, there is considerable value in seeing Christianity treated in the same style and with the same brevity as other traditions. Such treatment may keep the reader aware of the limitations any such dictionary places on fully understanding something as complex as a living religious tradition. One must, nonetheless, question whether time, energy, and space might have been better utilized in a fuller treatment of non-Christian traditions. The audience for whom Crim's work seems intended can well be assumed to be equipped already with an *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* or similar reference work whose superiority on specific all-Christian topics is patent. Despite that fact, however, it must be admitted that Crim's decision to include Christian materials does make the *Abingdon Dictionary* conveniently comprehensive and commendably balanced. And, since the work may be expected to find much use in non-Christian parts of the world where English is the primary medium of scholarship, the inclusion of Christian entries is ultimately justifiable.

Perhaps the greatest strength of the *Abingdon Dictionary of Living Religions* is the breadth of expertise, breadth of experience, and breadth of perspective of its contributors. Parrinder's *DNXR* is the product of his own hand. The result of that fact is a volume which reflects both the strengths and weaknesses of a single unified perspective. Brandon's *DCR* relies upon a couple of dozen contributors drawn primarily from upper-echelon British university faculties and reflecting almost exclusively Western perspectives—Christian or secular (with one rabbi thrown in for good measure). The *Abingdon Dictionary*, on the other hand, relies upon more than 150 contributors drawn from among established scholars, young experts, Westerners, non-Westerners, Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, sociologists, psychologists, theologians, et al. Such a format, of course, opens the door for inconsistency, duplication, and confusion; but Crim and his colleagues have, by and large, avoided those dangers. What one finally gets is a work of elegance and accuracy which can be used by the nonspecialist for general knowledge, by the scholar for specific knowledge, and by any sensitive seeker for insight into how religious persons perceive their own traditions.

Furthermore, the user will be treated to a variety of perspectives and interpretations of religious phenomena. For example, essentially comparative-religion perspectives are represented in the *Abingdon Dictionary*, but they never enjoy the near exclusivity which they have in
Parrinder’s work. Likewise, classical Orientalists have their say in the Abingdon Dictionary, but they never seem to predominate as they may in Brandon’s. Most important may be the inclusion of “internalist” perspectives provided by the members of the various religious traditions themselves. The articles by practicing members of religious traditions and the sensitivity to their presence which pervades the other contributions help make the volume useful for seeing beyond the various “-isms” of the world and for beginning to understand the faithfulness of other human beings. The Abingdon Dictionary may not go as far in this direction as some would hope, but it is a significant advance toward opening up communication among faithful persons of whatever traditional identification.

One of the means by which the Abingdon Dictionary facilitates this interreligious understanding is by the simple devices of brevity and clarity. The fact that the editor and his two associates, while fully qualified scholars themselves, are also dedicated teachers rather than primarily research scholars means that they understand the necessity of the clear communication of any useful knowledge. They have also been quite successful in selecting contributors who measure up to their demands for clarity and brevity. In that light, it is noteworthy that the contributors are drawn not only from the ranks of research faculty, but also from institutions across the country of all sizes and educational missions. At the very least, this choice of contributors ensures that the majority of the articles were not ghostwritten by graduate students but instead were written by scholars who daily confront the task of explaining the complexity of religious phenomena to nonspecialists. Hence, the Abingdon Dictionary of Living Religions, replete as it is with expert knowledge and critical opinions, is also remarkably readable and commendably usable by a broad audience.

That usability is enhanced by the organizational plan of the Abingdon Dictionary. Each major religious tradition receives a substantial article outlining the historical development, major ideas, and internal piety of the tradition. Prodigious effort is made to have these summary articles presuppose no knowledge of that tradition per se but at the same time to incorporate reference to numerous subtopics which are then treated separately under their own entries throughout the Abingdon Dictionary. Neither of the competitors takes a similarly thorough approach. For example, under “Hinduism,” Parrinder (DNXR) gives one paragraph; Brandon (DCR), three pages. The Abingdon Dictionary, on the other hand, provides more than twelve pages on Hinduism itself and, under other articles beginning with the words Hindu or Hinduism, provides another thirteen pages on Hindu ethics, priests, pilgrimages, regional variations, etc. Hence, the nonspecialist has at his or her fingertips twenty-five pages
on Hinduism plus cross-references to approximately fifty other major articles on the topic and to hundreds of minor articles. Parrinder's volume (DNXR) simply does not lend itself to that sort of detailed exploration of a topic. Brandon's volume (DCR) does function similarly but without the breadth, detail, and comprehensiveness of the Abingdon Dictionary.

Also praiseworthy are the number and quality of articles on quite contemporary phenomena. For example, Satya Sai Baba, the Unification Church, and the office of Ayatollah all receive adequate and accurate treatment. While such entries may eventually become antiquated, at present they make the Abingdon Dictionary relevant and usable in those areas of life where interreligious interaction is most prevalent. It is precisely this type of entry which is most likely to be consulted by the layperson or the pastor, and it is also in these contemporary matters that the classically trained specialist is most apt to need quick assistance. Neither Brandon's DCR nor Parrinder's DNXR is of much use in such contemporary matters, but the Abingdon Dictionary is commendably comprehensive and up-to-date.

At the same time, such articles of contemporary relevance do not crowd out other, more enduring topics. As mentioned earlier, major topics of likely longstanding interest are longer, more detailed, and more fully documented than are the more discrete and specialized topics. Overall, the balance in time and detail seems appropriate for most uses. Cross-references from major to minor articles and vice versa are extensive within the articles themselves. A handy prefatory classification of key entries (xv) helps in providing cross-reference information. Fuller cross-references at the end of major articles would facilitate location of the Abingdon Dictionary's hidden treasures, but this lack can hardly be considered a serious omission.

A more telling criticism of the volume's cross-references is the inconsistency with which non-English terms are treated as entry titles. Occasionally relatively obscure non-English terms serve as entry titles, e.g. "Alayavijhana." Sometimes two equally applicable non-English terms exist and only one is used, e.g., there is a "Lingayat" entry but no cross-reference under "Vindati." More commonly, the non-English terms have cross references to an entry under a more familiar title, e.g., "Varṇa" to "Caste." And occasionally a topic is treated only under an English title when a non-English term also commonly crops up in the literature, e.g., "Filial Piety" is not referenced at "Hsiao." Of course, making a judgment on where a topic can most profitably be entered is no easy matter; and it is not surprising that the reader's judgment would occasionally be different from that of the editor. But it is precisely because of that potential for disagreement that the editor should have gone out of
his way to provide too many rather than too few cross-references. At a minimum, a comprehensive dictionary should include some sort of general index providing reference from non-English terms to the technical English equivalents under which they are treated in the volume. Brandon’s DCR, with its forty pages of indices, is more helpful in that regard, though Parrinder’s DNXR also suffers from lack of indexing.

Unlike the other two works, the Abingdon Dictionary contains a section of color plates ranging from Buddhist mandalas to Zuni dolls. These plates plus numerous black-and-white illustrations (a feature shared with DNXR) enhance the utility and increase the readability of the work. As the editors acknowledge in the preface, entire volumes would be required to do justice to religious art and architecture, but the inclusion of these materials is a step in the right direction and helps the reader to begin, at least, to visualize, for example, the richness of Hindu religious imagination or the dignity of Muslims at prayer. Unfortunately, the color plates are clustered together (at page 398). In itself this arrangement is justifiable, and the articles carefully refer the reader to the appropriate plate; but the reverse is not true. Thus, for example, if one becomes enticed by the beautiful Muslim calligraphy of Plate II, one searches in vain under any of the caption categories for a discussion of this art. Perseverance and creativity will reveal the discussion under “Art and Architecture, Islamic”; but, again, it is properly the editor’s and not the reader’s task to make such connections.

Another nice feature of the Abingdon Dictionary is its inclusion of color maps, which may be quite helpful in enabling those schooled only in Western traditions to locate the major cities of Eastern religious development and vice versa. It could have been more helpful to have the maps at the end of the volume or with their edges in contrasting color for easier location. Also, one may quibble with inclusion of a map showing the Pale of Settlement while omitting any indication of the Great Wall. Nonetheless, the maps remain a useful and pleasant feature shared neither by DCR nor by DNXR.

In a work as comprehensive as this, there is the inevitable problem of transliteration and pronunciation systems. For the latter, Crim has chosen a relatively standard system for indicating English (really American) phonetic equivalents. The nonspecialist will appreciate the ease with which this system helps in the approximation of correct pronunciation for a complex and bewildering array of alien terms. Unfortunately, scholars who have even a nodding acquaintance with international phonetic systems will find the system cumbersome. Likewise, those millions throughout the world whose mother tongue is not spoken English but who pursue much of their scholarly endeavor
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through the written English medium will find the system frustrating. Once again this trade-off means that nonspecialist scholars, pastors, laypersons, and others will probably find the system to their liking.

On the other hand, a question can be raised about Crim's decision to retain the Wade-Giles system for transliteration of Chinese words. While that system has enjoyed widespread and long-term acceptance among scholars and while it is at least equally precise for rendering Chinese pronunciation into European tongues, it is currently being replaced by the simpler and, for the nonspecialist English speaker, easier Pinyin system. Probably at present, a parallel use of both systems would have been most helpful, especially within that lamentably absent index. At the least, a chart showing equivalences for important terms could have been included. Of course, there is no way in which to solve such perpetual dilemmas to everyone's satisfaction, but when devices as simple as cross-references or providing a dual-entry index could have enhanced the reader's use of the volume, those devices should have been employed.

Finally, one point mentioned earlier deserves elaboration. Crim has chosen contributors from widely varied backgrounds, including members of the several major religious traditions themselves. Both in articles by those adherents and in the other articles, every effort is made to be accurate, objective, and fair in discussing the religious claims of a tradition. Such may seem to be a minimal requirement for a good dictionary of world religions, and indeed all three dictionaries discussed above succeed reasonably well in fulfilling that goal. There is a real temptation, however, for the modern scholar of religion to attempt to explain religious phenomena solely in terms of one or another Western theoretical framework. Hence the heart-felt piety of religious persons can sometimes be sociologized or psychologized into just so much sublimated emotion or just so many functional requisites. The Dictionary is not ignorant of these externalist explanatory schemes, and it employs them profitably when appropriate. Its variety of contributors, however, ensures that it never becomes entrapped by any single methodological perspective. In this important dimension it is clearly superior to Parrinder's one-man production (DNXR) and also slightly superior to Brandon's, nonetheless acceptable, work (DCR).

There are, however, many in the study of religion who may feel that the time is right for a dictionary of world religion (in the singular) which would not divide religious phenomena into "-isms" but instead would explore the common elements of human religiousness under whatever vocabulary, symbol system, polity, etc., they occur. Such a dictionary would not stop at fairly and accurately describing the various religious phenomena of the world. Instead it would go on to ask what that religious
phenomenon means in the life of faith of particular human beings. It would not simply report that Kali is a goddess "widely worshipped in Bengal" (398); rather, it would attempt to ferret out the reason why millions of devotees have found that worship to be meaningful in the ultimate circumstances of their lives. Such a dictionary would be ever attuned to the meaning of religious phenomena for faithful persons rather than contenting itself with the facts of religious behavior in a complex world. Such a dictionary would strive to be a valuable book that is for, rather than about, homo religious.

Crim's Abingdon Dictionary is not yet that ideal work, but it does represent the best effort to date in providing an understanding of all human religiousness objectively and fairly within the confines of a one-volume reference work. Those looking for a handy reference work on the religions of the world should make this work their first choice.
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