Doctrinal Standards in Early American Methodism  
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QUARTERLY REVIEW
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CONTENTS

Editorial: The Very Model of a Genius Theological
Charles E. Cole.................................................................3

At Full Liberty: Doctrinal Standards in Early
American Methodism
Richard P. Heitzenrater.................................................. 6

"Work" in a Christian Perspective
Robert T. Osborn............................................................28

What Is Theological Pluralism?
Jerry L. Walls.................................................................44

Rachel M. McCleary........................................................63

Homiletical Resources from the Hebrew Bible for the Season
after Pentecost
James C. Logan.............................................................71

Book Reviews
Recent Books on Galatians
Richard B. Hays...........................................................95

Pastoral Theology: A Review of Journals
David K. Switzer..........................................................103
EDITORIAL

The Very Model of a Genius Theological
(with apologies to Messrs. Gilbert and Sullivan)

I am the very model of a genius theological.
I know the Nicene fathers and all matters patriarchal,
From mendicants to anchorites and elect like Saint Ignatius,
Plus heretics that pestered us from Manichees to Arius.
I'm very well acquainted with Tertullian’s apologies.
I understand the demiurge and a lot of saintly prodigies.
I really get excited when you mention homoousion,
—ousion, ousion—ah!
For then I can be as inscrutable as any good Confucian!

If you aspire to greatness in this science magisterial,
Then forget the urge to speak in terms that are elementarial.
Obscurity has mattered since we learned to be Hegelian:
I’d rather not be clear—much rather’d be sesquipedalian.
My knowledge I will share with you to light you on your way.
You can be the more notorious if you only learn to say
In esoteric language as a sort of thaumaturgy
What’s familiar to the herd (I mean, of course, the clergy).

To start with the beginning—or, rather, protogenesis—
You need not know the Bible or Hebrew with its tenses;
What matters is prolixity and how thin you slice baloney.
For instance, don’t say “early tribes,” say “ampthicytomy.”
For blessing, berakah, for law, the real word, Torah,
For righteous, tzedakah, for quite the reverse, Gomorrah.
When all else fails, try nephilim, some think a kind of giant;
But what’s the diff? your listeners stiff are bound to be suppliant.

The erudite seem prone to Greek, historically speaking;
Hellenic terms are ‘specially good for adversary tweaking.
Kenosis may seem just the word, when being kerygmatic.
But to “empty self” in a dispute, better try apophatic.
Or Paraclete, Monophysite, aseity, didactic;
For God’s name, Tetragrammaton (another little tactic);
Dyothelite, eudaemonite—it all becomes diffuse.
With practice you can learn to be colossally abstruse.
The Latins added to our search for Deus absconditus
(That’s God to you), a being who appears from time to situs,
On terra firma, ad Inferno, or Deo volente, inside us.
(Imago Dei we are called, but caveat Diabolus!)
When quoting Christ, arise to say, “Ipsissima verba.”
The crowd will give to God (or you), glorissima.
And pari passu, in veritas, and ceteris paribus,
Latin hides the truth superbly, in riddles, like the rebus.
These ancient tongues may make you seem a bit too antiquary;
If so, reach for a little French from out your reliquary.
Déjà-vu, en vérité, de rigueur start crying.
For the unknown, l’inconnu sounds truly mystifying.
Je pense, je suis, Descartes’s neat phrase, all the while keep quoting.
Bon mots, you say, to some good soul whose precious words you’re noting.
And entre nous, and force majeure, or so-called soi disant.
Thus French makes you a nonpareil, and very au courant.
Theology has always been a ponderous German sport,
So Gott mit uns and Weltanschauung use as a first resort.
And when an answer you must give, call it “mein Antwort.”
Mix in some Angst, and Elend, too, or even Sein und Zeit.
Dasein is there for you to use, and with some work, Arbeit.
“Verstehen Sie?” be sure to ask, and seem the more polite.
Make sitz in leben daily speech, but for Easter Auferstehung,
And don’t forget some German names, like Pannenberg, or say, Jung.
The world’s religions unite us all; the ties, we say, are ligio.
But some Asian words are needed to enhance your real prestigio.
To play this game with honors calls for skills that are semantical,
So learn some technicalities, from Byzantic to the mantical.
A Sufi’s not a Sunni, and a yogi’s not a bear,
An atman’s not an amen, and a koan’s not a prayer.
From yin to yang, from wu to wei, in speculative cosmogony,
From Omphala to Nirvana, we’ll seek our true homogeny.
I haven’t warned you much at all re vulgar or vernacular. In English we can also shape some words a mite oracular; Modern’s now a has-been, postmodern’s where the rage is, And metaphors shine like light, according to some sages. Distanciate and deconstruct and demythologize— The coiners of such words as these will face the Grand Assize: But in the ‘stices we’re in the vises of their signals semiotic, Their prehensions and concretions that are somewhat un-erotic. These proclivities become incivilities in the ecumenic forum, But called to task you can allude to pons of asinorum, Or anamnesis can repeat as if you knew its meaning, Epiclesis, paraenesis—you may seem just ob-scening, But pay no mind; you’ll soon find the merely animalculous As dearly held as gospel truth, in circles ecumeniculous, Where the simply clear is rendered as the wholly recondite, And hearts will pound to hear a sound like “Dionysius the Areopagite.”

Sometimes the lexicon alone cannot discourse impede, So one must use more subtle arts to cope and to succeed. If some creative mind breaks forth with authoritative veracity, Smile and say, “True—if arguing ad verecundiam,” or some such opacity. Or if someone by dint of insight a real coherence finds, Quote, “Foolish consistency is but the hobgoblin of little minds.” In turn, when others recite with sententious might, then in a voice quite hard, Reply you wonder, though, what one must make of Lacan or other avant-garde?

You see, to be a model of a genius theological, Requires a mastery of the ana-logical and -gogical, An ability to think of names from Empedocles to Fichte, And Heils- and Form- and Überlieferungs-geschichte. A search for denseness, not real sense, avoiding mere mendacity, And shrouding all in a verbal pall with incredible audacity. Remember that our goal is not the truth to promulgate, But obstacles to throw in front, lest we communicate. —Charles E. Cole
The distinction between doctrines and the standards used to enforce them can be understood as a tension between the weight of tradition and the force of law.

American Methodism has never been characterized by a strong inclination toward careful doctrinal definition. That is not to say that Methodism has had no concern at all for matters of doctrine. From the beginning, the Methodist preachers referred to “our doctrines” with a sense of pride; they likewise expressed concern about the dissemination of erroneous doctrines in their midst. As American Methodism shifted from a movement to an institution (from a society to a church), it quite naturally developed structures and procedures to protect and perpetuate its traditional identity. Such a process included not only the establishment of legal and constitutional means by which to guard the “standards of doctrine,” but also the preservation of traditional doctrinal emphases to perpetuate the distinctive, if not well-defined, Methodist proclamation of the gospel which lay at the heart of the movement. The growing desire for order and discipline, in tension with a seeming ambivalence toward doctrinal formulation, provided the setting for a unique development in the constitutional history of Methodism in America that to this day has not received an interpretation that commands a consensus.

The General Conference in 1808 passed a set of rules for “regulating and perpetuating” the conference. Among the
provisions that became recognized as constitutionally binding upon Methodism was the stipulation that the General Conference have “full powers to make rules and regulations for our Church,” subject only to a list of six “restrictions” subsequently called the “Restrictive Rules.” The First Restrictive Rule, still in effect in the United Methodist Church today, states that

the General Conference shall not revoke, alter, or change our articles of religion, nor establish any new standards or rules of doctrine, contrary to our present existing and established standards of doctrine.¹

Questions of doctrinal standards in Methodism are determined in large part by the interpretation of this rule. The issue of interpretation is often focused on the meaning of the last phrase (“our present existing and established standards of doctrine”), giving rise to no small amount of debate among Methodist theologians during the past hundred years or so.

The interpretation that has prevailed over the last century has been incorporated into the official documents of the United Methodist Church. The Plan of Union, approved in 1966-67, noted that, although the last phrase of the First Restrictive Rule had never been formally defined, the “original reference” would include, “as a minimum,” Wesley’s “forty-four Sermons on Several Occasions and his Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament.”² That assumption provided the basis for subsequent interpretive statements passed by the General Conference in 1972. The “Historical Background” statement, still contained in Part II of the 1984 Book of Discipline, reiterates the claim that Wesley’s Sermons and Notes were “by plain historical inference” among the “present existing and established standards of doctrine” specified by the framers of the First Restrictive Rule in 1808.³ This view, however, like nearly every comment on the question during the last century, overlooks two key sources of evidence: the Discipline’s own historical stipulations for enforcing doctrinal standards (beginning in 1788) and the manuscript journal of the General Conference of 1808 that passed the first constitutional rules. Careful consideration of this evidence challenges the current view and calls for a reconsideration of the assumptions that have prevailed regarding doctrinal standards.

The question of doctrinal standards in early American Methodism has taken on added significance with the decision of the 1984
General Conference to establish a study committee on “Our Theological Task.” The committee’s charge is “to prepare a new statement [Book of Discipline, 169] that will reflect the needs of the church [and] define the scope of our Wesleyan tradition in the context of our contemporary world.” The First Restrictive Rule, of course, remains in force, and therefore a clear understanding of the intent of its framers (and thereby the meaning of its language regarding doctrinal standards) is crucial to the constitutionality of any updating of disciplinary statements concerning United Methodist doctrine. Of particular concern in this paper is the relationship between matters that bear the force of law and those that rely on the weight of tradition.

The matter of ascertaining the meaning of the phrase “our present existing and established standards of doctrine” in the 1808 document hinges upon two questions: What do the official documents of the Methodist Episcopal Church from 1785 to 1808 stipulate (legally establish by definition or implication) as the doctrinal standards of the denomination at that time? and What did the persons who drew up those documents intend by their language? Two related, but different, questions are, What are the distinctive doctrinal emphases of early Methodist preaching? and What documents best exhibited those distinctive doctrines? The developments during the period from 1785 to 1808 are of primary interest in answering these questions regarding law and tradition, but the ideas and actions of the generations of American Methodists before and after that period also help illuminate the issues.

The constitutional developments at the turn of the nineteenth century have never been fully outlined or adequately examined in the light of material now available. These events are crucial to a full understanding of the issues today, however, and deserve our careful attention. We will therefore look at the constitutional activities of early American Methodism step by step with an eye toward discerning the tension and interplay between the force of law and the weight of tradition, in an attempt to contribute to a better understanding of the scope of the Wesleyan tradition in relation to doctrinal standards in the United Methodist Church.

WESLEY AND THE CHRISTMAS CONFERENCE

The organizing conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church met in Baltimore in December, 1784, to consider the scheme of
DOCTRINAL STANDARDS

organization proposed by Wesley, as filtered through Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke. Its main concern was to establish a workable polity for American Methodists, separate from their former British connections yet still to some extent reliant upon Wesley, during his lifetime.

The question of doctrine remained largely in the shadows during those days of rewriting the Minutes of the British Methodist Conference (also known as the “Large Minutes”) into a form of discipline for the American Methodist connection. In fact, the official minutes of the Christmas Conference do not refer at all to any action concerning doctrine as such. One oblique reference appears in a letter from Wesley “To Dr. Coke, Mr. Asbury, and our brethren in North America” that is prefixed to those minutes. The letter spells out Wesley’s rationale for allowing the organization of a separate church in the American states in the light of the “uncommon train of providences” by which they had become independent. Wesley concludes by proclaiming that the American Methodists, being totally disentangled from the English state and church, “are now at full liberty, simply to follow the scriptures and the primitive church.”

Lest anyone think, however, that he was casting his American followers adrift in a sea of doctrinal tumult, Wesley sent to the new world, with Dr. Coke, a document that provided the liturgical and doctrinal framework for American Methodism. The Sunday Service for the Methodists in North America, received and adopted by the Christmas Conference, contained Wesley’s abridgement of the Book of Common Prayer and his distillation of the Thirty-Nine Articles. Wesley may very well have conceived of these materials, along with the “Large Minutes,” as providing the basic design for the organization of a Methodist church in America, much as John Fletcher and Joseph Benson had proposed to him in a nearly identical scheme for England in 1775. The Methodist preachers in America not only adopted Wesley’s revision of the Articles, but also apparently assumed that these materials from Wesley’s hand furnished the necessary doctrinal framework for an ecclesiastical organization, similar to the way the Thirty-Nine Articles provided doctrinal standards for the Church of England. The acceptance of these documents per se did not diminish the American Methodists’ regard at that time for Wesley’s continuing leadership in matters of government or for his other writings as a traditional
source of doctrine. In fact, their high regard for Wesley’s scheme seems to have convinced them that the specific documents he had drawn up and sent over were deliberately conceived for the purposes of establishing the new church, which now stood in a new and separate relationship to both the Church of England and British Methodism.

The preachers meeting in Baltimore clearly understood themselves to be establishing an independent organization that superseded any previous arrangements that had existed. The minutes of the Christmas Conference point out that “at this conference we formed ourselves into an Independent Church.” Also, the answer to Question 3 in their first Discipline, which they drew up in Baltimore, makes this point very clearly:

We will form ourselves into an Episcopal Church under the Direction of Superintendents, Elders, Deacons and Helpers, according to the Forms of Ordination annexed to our Liturgy, and the Form of Discipline set forth in these Minutes.” [italics mine]

The British “Large Minutes,” which formed the basis for these American “Minutes” as revised at the Christmas Conference, were thus superseded and no longer had any binding effect on the American Methodists after January, 1785.

There is no reason to suspect that the traditional distinctive doctrines preached by Methodists in America would have changed as a result of any action of the organizing conference. The preachers in the newly organized Methodist Episcopal Church would certainly be expected to preach the same message that had given life to their movement over the previous decade. No one would expect that Wesley’s Sermons and Notes would suddenly be discarded by the Americans; they had long been an important resource for solid Methodist doctrinal preaching.

After 1784, however, a new legal situation had been established in which the Sermons and Notes would appear to function quite differently than previously. During the decade prior to the Christmas Conference, the American Methodist conference had on several occasions pledged itself to the Wesleyan scheme in both doctrine and polity. It had followed the stipulations of the British Minutes to the letter, as was appropriate, given their status as part of British Methodism, under leaders appointed by Wesley. Their chapels were secured by the “model deed” contained in those
Minutes, which, among other things, (1) required that the preachers be appointed by Mr. Wesley, (2) “Provided always, that such persons preach no other Doctrine than is contained in Mr. Wesley's Notes upon the New Testament, and four Volumes of Sermons.” These guidelines for measuring the doctrinal soundness of Methodist preaching were certainly, by any definition, “doctrinal standards.” As such, they applied equally in America up through 1784 and were reinforced by specific actions of the conferences of Methodist preachers in America. But the Christmas Conference had established American Methodism as a separate organization with its own set of constitutive documents, similar in form but significantly different in content from the British counterparts. The differences in the legal situation and the tensions with the traditional understandings became evident in the development of American Methodism subsequent to 1784.

FROM THE CHRISTMAS CONFERENCE TO THE GENERAL CONFERENCE OF 1808

After 1784, the Methodist preachers in America no doubt remained committed to their traditional doctrines. But the question remains, what did the Methodist Episcopal Church understand their “established standards of doctrine” to be? The fate of the “model deed,” which stipulated those standards in Britain, helps answer that question. As noted previously, the Christmas Conference spent a large part of its time revising the “Large Minutes” into the new American form of discipline, published as the Minutes of 1785. A comparison of the two documents indicates that, although some sections were altered, many sections were either omitted totally or adopted without change, depending on their applicability to the American scene. The section which contained the “model deed” was omitted. The new Discipline therefore specified no doctrinal standards.

The conference had, however, received and adopted another document, The Sunday Service, that did contain a specifically designed formulation of doctrinal standards, the Articles of Religion (printed at the end, in the same manner that the Anglican Thirty-Nine Articles appeared at the end of the Book of Common Prayer). These “rectified” Articles, as we have said, had been drawn up specifically by Wesley for the American Methodists.
There seems to have been no need in the minds of the American preachers, given Wesley's intentional provision of these Articles, to specify any other standards of doctrine. This assumption is further supported by the fact that the "model deed," which the Methodist Episcopal Church did insert into its Discipline beginning in 1796, not only (1) designated a new source of authorization for the preachers (the American conferences instead of Wesley), but also (2) specifically deleted the proviso concerning the Sermons and Notes, thus consciously deleting their force as legally binding standards of doctrine.\(^5\)

A more direct clue to the Methodist Episcopal Church's understanding of its doctrinal standards can be found in the disciplinary provisions for maintaining and enforcing those standards. The Form of Discipline for 1788 introduces a section on the trial of "immoral ministers and preachers," in which Question 2 is "What shall be done in cases of improper tempers, words or actions, or a breach of the articles, and discipline of the church?"\(^6\) (This same edition of the Discipline, coincidentally, also has "some other useful pieces annexed,"\(^7\) one of which contains the Articles of Religion.) The first General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, meeting in 1792, divided that question (the second in the section on trials of ministers) into two questions that distinguish between matters of discipline and matters of doctrine. The new Question 3, dealing with doctrine, reads, "What shall be done with those Ministers or Preachers who hold and preach doctrines which are contrary to our Articles of Religion?" (emphasis mine).\(^8\) It is clear from this question that the only official measure or test of doctrinal orthodoxy within the Methodist Episcopal Church at that time was the Articles of Religion. In the same Discipline (1792) which contains this new question, the Articles were moved to a more prominent position at the front of the book §11. The sacramental services were added to the volume and the title was changed to The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America.

At no point in the early history of American Methodism were the Articles of Religion designated as standards that demanded positive subscription. Although not a creedal formula in that sense, they did function like the creeds of the primitive church in another way—they were used as standards by which to protect orthodoxy by determining heresy or erroneous doctrines, i.e.,
those doctrines that were "contrary to" the standards as found in the Articles. No American Methodist candidate for ministry was required to make any positive doctrinal subscription, either to the Articles, to Wesley's *Sermons* and *Notes*, or to any other documents. The Articles served the purpose, then, of providing minimal norms or standards by which to measure the orthodoxy (not necessarily the adequacy) of doctrines held and preached by the Methodists. The Wesleyan Articles of Religion provided a churchly doctrinal foundation for the new American Methodist ecclesiastical organization. They also presented an explicit doctrinal tie to the church universal and as such were a more appropriate standard of doctrine for such a church than the earlier British Methodist standards, Wesley's *Notes* and *Sermons*. In their original context, these British Wesleyan standards outlined what might be seen as a sectarian emphasis (for a movement rather than a church) under the larger umbrella of the Articles of Religion of the Church of England.

So far we have been looking at standards of doctrine as found in the Articles. That is not to say that good Methodist or Wesleyan doctrines were not to be found in other places. The *Discipline* itself, beginning with the first edition, contained two sections on doctrine (on perfection and against antinomianism) and explicitly recommended several other writings for specific purposes. Beginning with the edition of 1788 (the "useful pieces annexed"), the *Discipline* contained several doctrinal tracts in addition to the two doctrinal sections already mentioned. These were apparently not considered to be standards of doctrine in the same sense as the Articles since the provisions for the trial of a preacher on matters of doctrine were not altered in any way as to take these doctrinal writings into account. These treatises certainly contained sound Methodist (if not, strictly speaking, Wesleyan) doctrine, as did many other writings, but they were clearly never considered to be standards of doctrine. The same can be said of the *Sermons* and *Notes*. Whether or not the American Methodists understood all the ecclesial implications of their separate establishment, they apparently did accept Wesley's intention that their organization be grounded upon a doctrinal statement (the Articles of Religion) that had obvious ties to the larger church universal in both form and content (see note 7).
General Conference

The absence of a Superintendath the Conference shall elect a
President for same. Carried.

Moved by Stephen J. Beale, Seconded by Nathan Beall, that the General
Conference shall have full power to make such regulations for
our church under the following restrictions. Carried.

The General Conference shall not make, alter, or change our
articles of religion, or establish any new standards or rules of
discipline, contrary to our present existing established standards
of doctrine. Carried.

They shall not allow of more than one representation for every five
minutes of the annual Conference, nor allow of a Top number,
unless in for every seven. Carried.

Moved by Samuel, Seconded by Samuel Cogar, that a Committee
of 3 be appointed to modify certain exceptional circumstances in
the General Rules. Carried.

They shall not make or change the General Rules of the United
Brethren.

They shall not do away the privileges of our mission or preachers
stated by a Committee. Also an appeal must be made to the
privileges of our members of local before the society or by a
Committee of an appeal. Carried.

They shall not appropriate the produce of the 25th Conference
of the Western Annual to any purpose other than for the benefit
of the traveling and missionary expenses until 3000 out
preachers have been sustained. Carried.

Provided that the 25th Conference do make the appointment of
all the annual Conference, then a majority of the thirty of
the General Conference proceeding shall suffice to alter any
of the above resolutions. Carried.

James Jarman, James Beale, Phil. Barnes, John Barton, Robert M. Beal,
Morning, James Beal, John Beale, C. E. Beall, Samuel, Henry
and Richard Settles, voted in favor of above. John Beal.
Voted, that the Conference meet tomorrow morning at 8 o'clock.
Twenty-three years after the Christmas Conference, only a
dozen or so of the preachers from 1785 remained active in the
Methodist connection in America. At about the same time, the
passing of the earlier generations had led the British Methodist
Conference in 1806 to ask, “Can anything be done for the security
of our doctrines?” The answer in their Minutes was that Adam
Clarke, Joseph Benson, and Thomas Coke were to “draw up a
Digest or Form, expressive of the Methodist Doctrines.” Their
efforts resulted in two documents, both entitled Articles of
Religion. In America, a similar desire to protect and perpetuate
the established doctrines and discipline of the church was
apparently on the minds of Asbury and some of the other
preachers at the General Conference in Baltimore in 1808.

On the fourth day of the conference, a committee was
established to set rules for “regulating and perpetuating General
Conferences in the future.” This “committee of fourteen,”
formed by two members elected by each conference, included all
seven of the preachers in attendance (excepting Asbury) who had
been in active connection since 1785: Philip Bruce, Ezekiel Cooper,
Jesse Lee, John M’Claskey, William Phoebus, Nelson Reed, and
Thomas Ware. The subcommittee designated to write the proposal
was made up of three persons: Bruce, Cooper, and Joshua Soule, a
young preacher who would soon make his mark on Methodism.
Their report to the conference came from the hand of Soule, and
proposed the following as the first “restrictive rule”: “The General
Conference shall not revoke, alter, or change our Articles of
Religion, nor establish any new standards of doctrine, contrary to
our present existing and established standards of doctrine.”

The report of the “committee of fourteen” also contained, as its
first item, a controversial proposal to establish a delegated General
Conference. The defeat of that part of the report, over the question
of how the delegates would be selected (largely because Jesse Lee
opposed the committee’s proposal of seniority as a basis), seemed
to doom the whole report, which was then laid aside. As the
conference drew to a close, however, the question of designating a
time and place for the next conference allowed for the reintroduc-
tion of the question of delegation, and Soule’s motion that
delegates be selected by the annual conferences “either by
seniority or choice” broke the logjam and allowed for the rest of the report to be brought up and carried, item by item.

Along with the other rules for governing the conference, the First Restrictive Rule was then passed, including the important phrase in question, “nor establish any new standards or rules of doctrine, contrary to our present existing and established standards of doctrine.” The primary impact of that second part of the statement seems to be to allow for new standards or rules of doctrine so long as they are not contrary to the existing ones (“present existing and established”). The main intention, then, of the conference's adoption of the phrase seems not to have been to incorporate an additional body of material, such as Wesley's Sermons and Notes, to their “present and existing standards,” the Articles. The primary intent was rather to protect the present standards, the Articles, and to stipulate narrow restrictions under which new standards could be developed.

The intention of the conference in the face of the tension between the force of legal standards and the weight of traditional ideas is made more evident in the actions taken almost immediately after the passage of the Restrictive Rules on the morning of May 24. The first action of the afternoon session was an attempt to clarify any ambiguity caused by the phrasing of the first rule. Francis Ward moved

that it shall be considered as the sentiment of this Conference, that Mr. Wesley’s Notes on the New Testament, his four first Volumes of Sermons and Mr. Fletcher’s Checks, in their general tenor, contain the principal doctrines of Methodism, and a good explanation of our articles of religion; and that this sentiment be recorded on our Journal without being incorporated in the Discipline.

Three things are significant about this motion: first, it indicates a willingness among some preachers to specify particular writings that “contain” the core of traditional Methodist doctrine and expost the “standards” found in the Articles; second, that such sentiment was not inclined to rely solely upon Wesley’s Sermons and Notes but to include also John Fletcher’s Checks Against Antinomianism; and third, that this sentiment was somewhat hesitant, resulting in a desire for a “memorandum of understanding” only, that would be recorded in the journal of the proceedings but not explicitly stated in the Discipline. The most startling thing
DOCTRINAL STANDARDS

about this guarded and carefully worded motion is that it lost. The General Conference was not willing to go on record defining its standards of doctrine in terms of documents other than the Articles, not even Wesley's *Sermons* and *Notes.*

The rationale for the conference's negative vote on this motion is nowhere explicitly indicated. Nevertheless, in the light of the wording of the motion as well as the action taken, it seems obvious that the majority of the members present did not consider Wesley's writings to be "rules or standards of doctrine" in the same sense as the Articles of Religion. If the members of the conference had generally assumed such a correlation, the motion would not have been made in the first place, much less defeated. But what is confusing to the present observer is the conference's reticence to specify that the writings of Wesley and Fletcher "contain the principal doctrines of Methodism." This vote seems to be continuing evidence of a spirit of independence among the American Methodists that was more than simply anti-British sentiment, although that spirit can be seen flaring up at several points during the early years of the new denomination, including this period leading up to the hostilities of 1812. The tension between dependence upon and independence from Wesley had long been a mark of the Methodists in America, as illustrated clearly in the life and thought of Francis Asbury himself, who played a major leadership role in the conference of 1808. Asbury was apparently satisfied that the conference had sufficiently protected its Methodist heritage. Three days after passage of the Restrictive Rules, he reflected upon the actions of that conference in a letter to Thomas Rankin, noting in particular that "we have . . . perpetuated in words the good old Methodist doctrine and discipline." Although this phrasing echoes the minutes of 1781, when the colonial conference reiterated its allegiance to the British Wesleyan standards, this comment by the bishop can be seen as an indication on his part that the actions of the conference had, without a literal return to their pre-1785 legal condition, preserved the original Methodist spirit in the face of new challenges from both heresy and sloth. Although the Articles of Religion seem to bypass some distinctively Wesleyan ideas, it appears that the Methodists in America accepted Wesley's design for protecting doctrinal orthodoxy through a brief and basic symbol of catholic doctrine, purged of Calvinist and Roman errors.
The intent of the 1808 General Conference thus seems to be clear. The majority desired to restrict Methodism's "established standards of doctrine" to the Articles of Religion that Wesley had provided in 1784 and to avoid even implying, by association or otherwise, that there were other specific writings that were authoritative in the same manner. The motion itself is, of course, an expression of the weight of the Wesleyan tradition coming to the fore, howbeit in a form considered inappropriate by most of those present and voting at the conference. The defeat of the motion seems to be conclusive evidence that the General Conference did not understand its standards of doctrine to include Wesley's Sermons and Notes. The Methodist Episcopal Church was left with a constitutional statement in the wording of the First Restrictive Rule, which refers specifically only to the Articles of Religion, and reiterates and reinforces the crucial importance of the Articles by referring to them as "our present existing and established standards of doctrine."

In the light of those actions of the 1808 General Conference, it is by no means strange that for two successive generations no one ever seems to have raised the question as to what the "present existing and established standards of doctrine" were. The Articles of Religion were the only standards of doctrine that had been "established" by the Methodist Episcopal Church, that is, adopted between 1785 and 1808 with provisions for enforcement as a measure of Methodist doctrine in America. The fact that writers in the last half of the century began to raise the question, and in fact make inaccurate speculations about the intentions of the framers of the First Restrictive Rule, can be partially explained by the absence of any mention of this motion (or attempted "memorandum of understanding") from the published version of the manuscript journal of the conference. A note in the margin of the manuscript journal explains the omission: "N.B. It was voted that this motion be struck out of the Journal." The whole paragraph mentioning the defeated motion regarding the Notes, Sermons, and Checks is struck through with a huge "X" and consequently deleted from the printed version of the journal. That entry is the only instance of such an action in the whole manuscript volume, which covers the general conferences from 1800 to 1828. The conference did not want to specify its Wesleyan measures for orthodoxy beyond the Articles, but it also did not want the public to know that
it had been unwilling to go on record in that matter. The General Conference of 1808 manifested in its actions the continuing tension between dependence and independence, and, in its careful maneuvering, highlighted the distinction that is occasionally evident between the force of law and the weight of tradition.

THE GENERAL CONFERENCES OF 1816 AND 1828

The evidence outlined above would seem to be adequate to make the point that the doctrinal standards of early American Methodism were understood from a legal and constitutional point of view to be located solely in the Articles of Religion (though perhaps traditionally understood to be illustrated in other Wesleyan writings as well). However, further evidence to corroborate that view can be found in the actions of the General Conference during the two decades following the establishment of the Restrictive Rules of 1808. Two incidents in particular relate to this question, and both are coincidently connected with Joshua Soule.

In the first case, the General Conference of 1816 decided to appoint a “Committee of Safety,” which was assigned the task of inquiring “whether our doctrines have been maintained, discipline faithfully and impartially enforced, and the stations and circuits duly attended.” This committee consisted of Enoch George, Samuel Parker, and Soule (a most appropriate person to be in this group, providing continuity from the conference of 1808). The report of the Committee of Safety, apparently drawn up by the chairman, Soule, was approved two weeks later. It begins with the following statement:

After due examination, your committee are of opinion that, in some parts of the connexion, doctrines contrary to our established articles of faith, and of dangerous tendency, have made their appearance among us, especially the ancient doctrines of Arianism, Socinianism, and Pelagianism, under certain new and obscure modifications.

The term “established articles of faith” is not precisely the same as “articles of religion,” but the committee seems to have had those articles in mind, since the three erroneous doctrines listed are specifically contradictory to Articles II, I, and IX respectively of the Articles of Religion.
In the second incident, the General Conference of 1828 exhibited again the relationship that some persons within Methodism saw between the Articles as doctrinal standards and other doctrinal writings accepted and used by the preachers as containing good Methodist doctrine. The conference heard the appeal of Joshua Randall, a preacher from the New England Conference, who, according to the wording in the journal, "had been expelled from the Church, upon a charge of holding and disseminating doctrines contrary to our articles of religion." The charges were upheld by an overwhelming majority of 164 votes to 1. Encouraged by the tone of the conference, Lawrence M'Combs introduced a proposal that accused Bishop Soule (who was presiding at that session!) of preaching erroneous doctrine the previous year in a sermon at the South Carolina Conference. The motion claimed that in the sermon there was "in the opinion of some an apparent departure from several points of doctrine held by the Methodist Episcopal Church." The matter was referred to the Committee on the Episcopacy, on which M'Combs sat. The committee's report was brought to the floor the following day by its chairman, Stephen Roszel, the only member of the group who had been at the General Conference of 1808. The report, adopted by the conference, cleared the bishop of the charges. It concluded by saying, "There is nothing in the sermon, fairly construed, inconsistent with our articles of religion, as illustrated in the writings of Messrs. Wesley and Fletcher." The conference thus stated its understanding of the relationship between the legal standards of doctrine and the traditionally accepted doctrinal writings. This statement is particularly illuminating in four ways: one, it demonstrates the position of the Articles of Religion as the standards of doctrine; two, it shows that the doctrinal material found in certain other writings in the Methodist tradition did actually function at that time in a supplemental and illustrative role in relation to the doctrinal standards in the Articles of Religion, similar to the manner expressed by the defeated motion of 1808; three, it reveals that, among these other writings, the broad range of Wesley's works was considered useful in illuminating matters of doctrine, rather than just the *Sermons* and Notes; and four, it clearly indicates that materials other than the writings of Wesley, in this case (again) the writings of Fletcher, were also considered to be important in this illustrative role. While
the Articles of Religion functioned as juridical standards of
d Doctrine, these other doctrinal writings, traditionally accepted as
containing sound Methodist doctrine, were seen as exemplary
illustrations of the Methodist doctrinal heritage.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

The developments within early American Methodism indicate
very clearly that the "historical inferences" that are "apparent"
from the available evidence all tend to confirm the Articles of
Religion alone as the "present existing and established standards
of doctrine" that the "committee of fourteen" had in mind when it
drew up the First Restrictive Rule. The founders of the Methodist
Episcopal Church were not legally bound by any action previous to
the Christmas Conference and seem to have taken Wesley's words
to heart in considering themselves "at full liberty." At every point
where the Methodist Episcopal Church had an opportunity to
reiterate and reaffirm its allegiance to Wesley's Sermons and Notes
specifically as doctrinal standards after 1785, it either consciously
deleted the references, failed to mention them, or voted to the
contrary. At every point where doctrinal standards are referred to,
it is the Articles of Religion that are specified as the basic measure
of proper Methodist doctrine.

That American Methodism was firmly grounded in the broader
Wesleyan doctrinal heritage, however, can hardly be denied.
Wesley had not only provided the new church with its Articles of
Religion; even after 1806 his writings continued to provide the
traditional exposition of the principal doctrines of Methodism,
de spite the General Conference's reticence to make that relationship
explicit. The Sermons and Notes were quite likely alongside the Bible
in the saddlebags of many preachers in America, along with
Primitive Physick, the Doctrines and Discipline, and other basic
resources of the circuit rider. Just as likely, Fletcher's Checks could be
found in those same saddl ebags, and, shortly, even Watson's
Institutes and Apology would be considered appropriate baggage for a
Methodist preacher. The relationship between these traditional
doctrinal statements (accepted patterns of doctrinal exposition) and the
established doctrinal standards (minimal measures of doctrinal
orthodoxy) soon became confused as the constitutional distinctions
became blurred in the minds of later generations.
By the middle of the nineteenth century, commentators began to read mysterious inferences into that phrase, "present existing and established standards of doctrine," and shortly began to alter the Discipline to conform to their new readings. Bishop Osmond Baker, in his 1855 manual of church administration, was one of the first to claim that the Articles of Religion "do not embrace all that is included in 'our present existing and established standards of doctrine.'" His rationale was quite simple: "Many of the characteristic doctrines of our Church are not even referred to directly in those articles." He therefore suggested that "usage and general consent would probably designate Mr. Wesley’s Sermons, and his Notes on the New Testament, and Watson’s Theological Institutes" as "established standards of doctrine."

This line of reasoning, confusing traditionally accepted doctrinal statements with officially established doctrinal standards, was continued in southern Methodism by Bishop Holland N. McTyeire, who comments in his manual on the Discipline that "the phrase, 'doctrines which are contrary to our Articles of Religion,' is evidently elliptical." He goes on to mention those works which "usage and general consent" would include in the "established standards of doctrine," and adds to Bishop Baker's list the Wesleyan Methodist Catechisms and the Hymnbook.

In the 1880s, this broadened reading of the meaning of "established standards" was incorporated into the Discipline of the northern church in the section on the "Trial of a Preacher." The charge of disseminating "doctrines contrary to our Articles of Religion" was amended to add the phrase "or established standards of doctrine," thereby referring to a separate body of material. The Ecclesiastical Code Commission that proposed this change to the 1880 General Conference was chaired by James M. Buckley. Buckley's published explanations of doctrinal standards confuses the clear distinctions of legal establishment and traditional acceptance, resulting in continual references to "other established standards of doctrine" (my italics). Buckley, along with others who used this frame of reference, was forced into making distinctions between the way the Articles could be enforced and the manner in which these "other" standards functioned. He noted, for instance, that such a range of material provides for "substantial unity" while allowing "circumstantial variety" within Wesleyan Methodism.
DOCTRINAL STANDARDS

The incorrect assumptions (as well as the new wording) of these constitutional historians became explicitly implanted in the 1912 *Discipline* of the northern church, which referred to "doctrines which are contrary to our Articles of Religion, or our other existing and established standards of doctrine" (¶ 245; my italics). This wording was subsequently carried over into the *Discipline of The Methodist Church* after 1939. In the meantime, the First Restrictive Rule had remained unchanged, though by now its original context and intent were fully misunderstood.38

The terminology for the section on trials in the present *Book of Discipline* (1984) is less precise, though perhaps more accurate (if understood properly) in its simple reference to "the established standards of doctrine of the Church" (¶ 2621.g). The phrase should be understood historically and constitutionally as referring to the Confession of Faith (from the Evangelical United Brethren tradition) and the Articles of Religion (from the Methodist tradition). These are the standards of doctrine that have been established as juridical standards and carry the force of law within the church. Any attempt to enumerate other "standards of doctrine" confuses the distinction between the constitutional history of the church and the development of its doctrinal heritage. To say that our doctrinal standards are not "legal or juridical instruments" (1984 *Discipline*, p. 72) is to ignore our own provisions for enforcing those standards. To say that a particular list of other historic doctrinal statements should in some way be considered "established standards of doctrine" is to confuse the weight of tradition with the force of law.

The task of defining "the scope of our Wesleyan tradition in the context of our contemporary world" includes much more than defining or redefining legal standards of doctrine, although that is also involved. Minimal legal standards of orthodoxy have never been the measure of an adequate witness to the tradition, be it Christian or United Methodist. The heart of our task is to discover how seriously we take our distinctive doctrinal heritage and how creatively we appropriate the fullness of that heritage in the life and mission of the church today.

NOTES

volume has a number; others bear only dates. The 1984 Book of Discipline (§ 16) contains only slight revisions: "nor" has been changed to "or"; "articles of religion" has been capitalized; most commas have been omitted.

2. The terms doctrine and doctrinal standards are used in this paper with the specific connotation that their role is distinctly different from the task of theology or theological reflection. Doctrinal standards, established by and for the church, provide criteria for measuring the doctrinal adequacy of the witness of clergy and laity in the church, whereas theological reflection, based on norms such as Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience, necessarily is not subject to such standards and in fact is intentionally and appropriately critical in its task of examining such standards. See Schubert M. Ogden, "Doctrinal Standards in the United Methodist Church," Perkins Journal 28 (Fall 1974): 20-25.

3. Preface to Part II, The Plan of Union, as Adopted by the General Conferences (the "Blue Book," copyright 1967 by Donald A. Theuer for the Joint Commissions on Church Union of the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church), p. 22 (subsequently contained in the 1968 Book of Discipline, p. 35).

4. 1984 Book of Discipline, § 67, p. 49. This section of the Discipline, which is not a part of the constitution, was adopted in 1972 from the report of the Theological Study Commission on Doctrine and Doctrinal Standards. The line of interpretation contained in the statement reflects in large part the opinions of the last generation of Methodist constitutional historians, who were writing at the turn of the twentieth century. See note 37, following.


6. Benson's proposal to organize Methodism into a distinct denomination separate from the Church of England was passed on to Wesley by Fletcher with some alterations and additions. Two items are of particular note:

4. That a pamphlet be published containing the 39 articles of the Church of England rectified according to the purity of the gospel, together with some needful alterations in the liturgy and homilies . . . .

10. That the most spiritual part of the Common Prayer shall be extracted and published with the 39 rectified articles, and the minutes of the conferences (or the Methodist canons) which (together with such regulations as may be made at the time of this establishment) shall be, next to the Bible, the vade mecum ["constant companion" or "handbook"] of the Methodist preachers. (The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley [London: Epworth Press, 1960], 7:332-33).

Frank Baker comments that this proposal "was almost certainly present in Wesley's mind, and possibly before his eyes" in 1784 when he put together his scheme for American Methodism. John Wesley and the Church of England (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970), p. 212.

This assumption is clearly alluded to in an account of a private interview held during the Christmas Conference, at which Coke, Asbury, William West, and John Andrews (the latter two Protestant Episcopal priests in Baltimore County) discussed the possibility of merging the two emerging episcopal churches in America. Andrews's account of the conversation, in a letter to William Smith, notes that The Sunday Service of the Methodists makes plain that "the people called Methodists were hereafter to use the same Liturgy that we make use of, to adhere to the same Articles, and to keep up the same three orders of the Clergy" (interesting that he notes no basic difference between the Wesleyan version of these documents and their English counterparts). Andrews also points out that, "as to Articles of faith and forms of worship, they already agreed with us." Emora T. Brannan, "Episcopal Overtures to Coke and Asbury during the Christmas Conference, 1784, " Methodist History 14 (April 1976): 239.

In fact, the interview mentioned above failed to produce a working agreement in part because West and Andrews perceived that Coke and Asbury considered it "indispensably necessary that Mr. Wesley be the first link of the Chain upon which their Church is suspended." The "binding minute" makes it clear that the American preachers at the Christmas Conference were willing to acknowledge themselves as Wesley's "Sons in the Gospel, ready in matters belonging to church government, to obey his Commands," a very polite and precise acknowledgment of Wesley's relationship to them in matters of polity.
DOCTRINAL STANDARDS

This approbation of Wesley’s personal leadership disappeared from the Discipline after 1786, and Wesley’s name was omitted from the published minutes of the American annual conferences from 1786 to 1788.

9. James Everett (who was present at Baltimore in 1785), in his autobiographical reflections written to Asbury in 1788, makes a clear reference to “the Christmas conference, when Dr. Coke came from England, and the Methodist church separated from all connection or dependence on the church of England, or any other body or society of people” (italics mine). "An Account of the Most Remarkable Occurrences of the Life of Joseph Everett," Arminian Magazine (Philadelphia) 2 (1790): 607.


11. The references to “Minutes” in the 1785 Discipline clearly refer to that document itself, as can be seen in the answer to Question 3, cited above. Also in Question 69, “Questions for a New Helper,” where the prospective preacher is asked, “Have you read the Minutes of the Conference?” the reference is clearly to the American document, and not to the British Minutes, because in 1787, when the third edition of the disciplinary Minutes changed its title to A Form of Discipline, the question was changed to read, “Have you read the Form of Discipline?”

12. Minutes of Several Conversations between the Rev. Mr. John and Charles Wesley and Others (London: Paramore, 1780), p. 43. This edition of the “Large Minutes” was in effect at the time of the Christmas Conference; the “model deed” had been included in the three previous editions of the “Large Minutes”: 1763, 1770, 1772.

13. The first conference in 1773 agreed that the doctrine and discipline of the British Methodist Minutes should be “the sole rule of our conduct who labour, in the connection with Mr. Wesley, in America.” The conference in 1781 noted that the preachers were determined “to preach the old Methodist doctrine, and strictly enforce the discipline, as contained in the notes, sermons, and minutes, as published by Mr. Wesley.” At the conference of 1784, held the spring previous to the specially called Christmas Conference, the preachers agreed to accept among them only those European preachers who would, among other things, “preach the doctrine taught in the four volumes of Sermons, and Notes on the New Testament . . . [and] follow the directions of the London and American minutes.” Minutes of the Methodist Conferences (1795), pp. 5, 41, 72.

14. Question 64 in the “Large Minutes.” Part of the answer to Question 65 was retained (as Question 74 in the Discipline): “Let all our Chapels be built plain and decent; but not more expensively than is absolutely unavoidable: Otherwise the Necessity of raising Money will make rich men necessary to us. But if so, we must be dependent upon them, yea, and governed by them. And then farewell to the Methodist-Discipline, if not Doctrine too.” Minutes . . . Composing a Form of Discipline (1785), p. 32. A parallel comparison of the “Large Minutes” with the first American Discipline is published in Appendix VII of John M. Tigert’s Constitutional History of American Episcopal Methodism, 4th ed. (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1911), pp. 532-602.

15. The wording in the American deed follows very closely the wording of the British document before and after the omitted section, indicating that the doctrinal stipulation (“preach no other doctrine than is contained in . . .”) was consciously dropped from the American form.


17. This wording is on the title page of the Discipline; the “useful pieces” have separate title pages but are pagged continuously in the volume. In 1790, the Articles of Religion became section XXXV of the Form of Discipline; in 1791, section XXXVI.

18. The answer stipulates that the preacher of such “erroneous doctrines” shall conform the same process as is observed “in cases of gross immorality” which had just been spelled out.

19. This wording, not only used in 1808 in the Restrictive Rules but also still in effect today in the section on trials, implies a method of measure quite different from the early British rule that allowed preaching of “no other doctrine than is contained in Mr. Wesley’s Notes upon the New Testament and four volumes of Sermons,” which is strictly delimiting in its intention (my italics). The “contrary to” concept and language was adopted by the British Conference in 1832.
20. The explanatory notes of Asbury and Coke, included in the 1796 Discipline, for the section on trial of a minister for erroneous doctrines, point out that “the heretical doctrines are as dangerous, at least to the hearers, as the immoral life of a preacher.” The heresies mentioned specifically were “arian, socinian, and universalian.” The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America (Philadelphia: Tuckniss, 1798), p. 113.

21. Wesley’s Works, Notes, Christian Library, Primitive Physick, Fletcher’s tracts, Richard Baxter’s Gildus Salvianus, Kempis, and the Instructions for Children. These were all carried over from the British Minutes; the American Discipline omitted some, such as the reference to Wesley’s fourth volume of Sermons in Question 33 (Question 51 in the Discipline). The bishops’ notes in the 1798 Discipline say nothing after the two doctrinal sections, simply referring the reader to “Mr. Wesley’s excellent treatise” after the section “Of Christian Perfection,” and to “that great writer, Mr. Fletcher” after the section “Against Antinomianism.” A footnote in Bishop Roberts’s address to the conference at Baltimore in 1807, in a section headed “take heed unto the doctrine,” refers the reader to several guides to understanding the Bible, including works by Stackhouse, Doddridge, Bennett, Watson, Addison and Beattie, Jenny, Withington, Leland, and Ogden, but no mention is made of Wesley’s Notes.

22. In 1790 when the doctrinal treatises were introduced into the body of the Discipline (with section numbers), the title was altered to read, A Form of Discipline . . . (now comprehending the Principles and Doctrines) of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America. Two years later, the sacramental services were added and the title became The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America as we noted above. The doctrinal treatises were by and large “Wesleyan” tracts, though only half of them were by John Wesley: Scripture Doctrine of Predestination, Election, and Reprobation, by Henry Haggard, abridged by Wesley (inserted beginning in 1788); Serious Thoughts on the Infallible, Unconditional Perseverance of All That Have Once Experienced Faith in Christ (beginning in 1788); A Plain Account of Christian Perfection (beginning in 1789); An Extract on the Nature and Subjects of Christian Baptism, by Moses Hemmenway (beginning in 1790). The tracts were omitted from the 1798 Discipline (tenth edition) to make room for the bishops’ explanatory notes, but (with the exception of the treatise on baptism) were restored in the following (eleventh) edition of 1801.

23. These treatises were removed from the Discipline by action of the General Conference of 1812 to be published separately. The directions of the conference were only slowly and inaccurately heeded.

24. One document, by Coke, contained twenty-eight Articles; the other, probably by Clarke and Benson, contained thirty-eight Articles. See Articles of Religion Prepared by Order of the Conference of 1816, publication no. 2 of The Wesley Historical Society (London: Kelly, 1897).


27. Journal, 1:89.

28. MS journal, p. 68; this page also contains the Restrictive Rules (see illustration).

29. Journal, 1:120-29. The committee that had determined the necessity for such a committee of safety, based on the episcopal address, consisted of one member from each conference and included Philip Bruce and Nelson Reed, two members of the 1808 “committee of fourteen” that had drawn up the Restrictive Rules.


31. Journal, 1:155. The Committee of Safety ended its report with eight resolutions which were passed by the conference, including, “1. That the General Conference do earnestly recommend the superintendents to make the most careful inquiry to all the annual conferences, in order to ascertain whether any doctrines are embraced or preached contrary to our established articles of faith, and to use their influence to prevent the existence and circulation of all such doctrines” (Journal, 1:57). It might also be noted that the following day,
the conference adopted the report of the Committee on Ways and Means which included a proposal that the section of the Discipline on "The Method of Receiving Preachers" include the stipulation, "It shall be the duty of the bishops, or of a committee which they may appoint at each annual conference, to point out a course of reading and study proper to be pursued by candidates for the ministry . . . " (Journal, 1:260-61).

36. Discipline (1880), p. 213; see also Journal (1880, no vol. no.), p. 323.
38. At about the same time, the southern church received a report by the College of Bishops to the General Conference of 1914, stating that Wesley's Notes and Sermons "have never been adopted by organized Episcopal Methodism" and therefore "it is not clear that [they] are standards of doctrine." See the eighteenth edition of Bishop McIntyre's Manual of the Discipline (1924, edited by Bishop Collins Denney), pp. 147-48.
"WORK" IN A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

ROBERT T. OSBORN

Work is a gift of God and a joyful expression of humanity—only such a radical conception of work can point the way to the solutions to today's economic problems.

In that supply-sider's panegyric, Wealth and Poverty, George Gilder makes the rather harsh and unqualified assertion that "one of the hardest jobs is forcing or inducing others to work." My initial response, immediate and unreflected, was that these words are expressive of a rather inhumane vision of work and the worker, and a false one at that, since one need think only of the way in which a workaholic or the typical supply-sider (such as Gilder) takes to work. One could, on second thought, understand Gilder's point, namely, that given the conditions under which many are laboring today in America it can indeed be a hard job "forcing or inducing people to work." Nevertheless, there are, in my judgment, two fundamental flaws in Gilder's assertion. First, while apparently descriptive of the present situation of work in America, it actually goes beyond description to a rather dogmatic explanation. Gilder implies, uncritically and without warrant, that the reason some workers must be forced to work is to be found exclusively in the workers themselves, and that insofar as it recognizes and responds to this chronic human shortcoming, insofar as it "accords with the reality of the human situation" (p. 255), a true capitalism is the best economic system. The possibility that there might be problems in the structure of such a system

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It should be the easiest job to get people to work, and where this is not the case the cause is to be found primarily in the structure of the economic order rather than in a flaw in the character of a certain class of people.

Fundamental to the perspective of this paper is an understanding of the work of God which is prior to all human work. It follows that all human work is above all a sharing in God's work, that it is therefore communal, worldly, and responsible. Although contradicted in this world by sin, the divine mandate for work will, in the grace and power of God, prevail, and in this hope the church strives for a transformation of the conditions of work in our world.

God works first. The first thing to be said about human work is that it is not first; it is neither primary nor ultimate. Primary and ultimately necessary is rather the work of God, for God's work is
the very ground and possibility of the penultimate and secondarily important work of men and women. God's children are to work only six days; on the seventh day they are to rest and to remember the God who has worked and works still to make heaven and earth, to sustain it and all the creatures who dwell therein, including God's children and elected co-workers.

There are a number of important implications of this truth—that God works first and that God works for us:

1. Quite contrary to our rather sinful perception, the Bible teaches that by God's work the necessities of life are provided, so that our work might be free and unburdened by necessity and anxiety. Work then is a gift which God by God's work gives us; it is not a necessity placed upon us because God could not or chose not to do God's job and so burdened us with it instead. God has provided "every plant yielding seed," "every tree with seed in its fruit," so that "you shall have them for food" (Gen. 1:29). All that is necessary is so provided that God can say of the fruit of God's labor, "very good" (Gen. 1:31). Nothing is lacking; no necessity is left to be placed upon man and woman. In the second story of creation the point is clearly stated, that "out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden" (Gen. 2:9). God provides for life. Our work is not in the first instance to play God and provide for life. Rather, our work is given by God as the gracious occasion for the realization of the human life God has created for us.

2. Because God works faithfully and well to give us life, we are free to work without anxiety as to how we are to live and survive. "Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. . . . Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin." Jesus' point is not that we are not to toil, spin, or gather into barns, but that we are not to do so anxiously, as if there were no heavenly parent working for us, to give us life. "If God so clothes the grass of the field, . . . will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' " (Matt. 6:25-33 passim).

If we obey the voice of the Lord and are not anxious but trusting, "the Lord will open to you his good treasury the heavens, to give the rain of your land in its season and to bless all the work of your
hands; and you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow" (Deut 28:12). Job's productive labor and consequent prosperity came about because God had "blessed the work of his hands" (Job 1:10). As the Psalmist says, "Blessed is every one who fears the Lord! . . . You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands" (Ps. 128:1, 2). On the other hand, when "all the toil of man is for his mouth . . . his appetite is not satisfied" (Eccles. 6:7). If we labor in the attempt to be our own creators, to sustain our lives, rather than in gratitude for the work of God who alone can and does sustain us, then our work is indeed in vain. As Ecclesiastes says, "The toil of a fool wearies him" (10:15). To play God is tiring, if not tiresome.

All this is to say, strangely and paradoxically, that labor has more to do with our "well-being" than with our being. It has more to do with the meaning of our creation by God than it does with our creation as such.

3. Insofar as human work is secondary to God's work, it cannot be made into a fetish or an idol. As children of God, created in God's image, we are first and finally answerable to God, our creator. We are not answerable to the creation or to the demands of work that it might seem to place upon us. In biblical terms, making secondary matters primary is idolatry, and it is strictly prohibited. Idols are works of human hands which are worshiped and served as if human work and its products were the beginning and end of it all. The economic order and the sum of its products are not to be served but to serve. They are instruments of God's provision and the divinely ordained occasion for the realization of our human well-being. The economy was made for humanity and not humanity for the economy.

I would sum up this first and fundamental thesis with the proposition that while work is essential, more essential is worship. We can work humanly because in worship we acknowledge that primary gracious work of God without which we work in vain. Worship and work, but in proper order!

God gives work to God's children. While God's work is first (the work that alone is necessary and sufficient to provide for life), God nevertheless gives to the creatures of the sixth day their own work to do. And not only does God give them a work to do, but it is work like God's, indeed, a share in the divine work. In this aspect they
are created “in his image.” As children created in God’s image and as covenant partners in the work of fulfillment of the creation, they are to “fill the earth and subdue it” and “have dominion over . . . the birds of the air and over every living thing” (Gen. 1:28). At stake in this work is not their being as such, but their human being, not their creatureliness as such, but their being as creatures in the image of God.

Work, therefore, is the very occasion and promise of our human being, our spiritual being and truth as God’s children. Created as we are in God’s image, we find our humanity, our true meaning as God’s children, when we take our place as God’s partners in giving shape to this earth as context and source of life for all. Even though we seem to work of necessity, in order to stay alive, for food, clothing, and shelter, most of us know full well that we also need work for its own sake, as the occasion for the realization and expression of our humanity. It is this need that makes retirement or unemployment so threatening, even though there be adequate welfare and pensions; it is the loss or threatened loss of meaning, of the spiritual reality of our human being. Work is then not first of all a necessity put upon us by our need for material survival but by the privilege of being human, of being partners with God in the creative enterprise. Of one who is so free to work it can be said, as the chronicler said of Hezekiah, that “every work that he undertook in the service of the house of God . . . , he did with all his heart, and prospered” (II Chron. 31:21).

Correlatively, if work is in the first instance a gift from God, a God-given freedom and privilege, then it can only be understood as a joy and opportunity, as the occasion in which we find ourselves, our spiritual truth as human beings. It is misunderstood as an essentially onerous chore, as an obligation imposed heteronomously from without. As the gift of our Creator work is “theonomous,” a responsibility to God which at the same time is one of the deepest elements of our self-realization. In a word, work is the happy privilege of being human.

There are two obviously practical implications of the foregoing. Insofar as work, the very occasion and therefore necessity of our human being, is a gift of God, unemployment is unacceptable. Or, to state the matter positively, to provide employment for all is the first obligation of the economic order. Second, the economic order
will assume that work is the "natural" proclivity of God's children and will encourage that creative expression from every worker.

Insofar as work, the very occasion and therefore necessity of our human being, is a gift of God, unemployment is unacceptable.

Not only is it the function of the economic order to provide work, but also humane work, work that elicits the worker's personal and creative potential.

We have seen that God gives to the creatures of the sixth day a share in the work of creation. It is therefore God's work that determines the nature of the work of human beings, and, it would appear, there are three dimensions to that work and therefore also to human work: it is communal, worldly, responsible.

Work is communal. Since the final goal of God's creation is to give a good life to all human co-workers and covenant partners, and as the co-workers also work for and with each other, work is radically communal. We work for others because and as God first also works for them. We work with others, inasmuch as God also by grace lets them work with God as covenant partners. We cannot work for others as God does without working also with others. As they are God's co-workers so are they ours.

In brief development of this two-part thesis we may note that, according to Scripture, persons are the glory of God's creative work, the consummating and climaxing goal of creation, the work of the sixth and last day. As the Psalmist says, God has created man "little less than God, and dost crown him with glory and honor" (Ps. 8:5). If persons are the sixth-day creation of God, the end and goal of the creative process, then insofar as persons are called to be co-creators with God, the final goal of their creative work is in serving and helping build up other persons. And God created them "male and female," to be with each other, to help each other; only as man and woman together, as persons together, do they work with God and in fulfillment of God's purposes.

There are further striking testimonies in Scripture to this point that persons are what work is all about. I cite the jubilee year, the seventh year, when the land is to be at rest and what grows of
itself, "you shall not reap, and the grapes of your undressed vine you shall not gather. . . . The sabbath of the land shall provide food for you, for yourself and for your . . . slaves and for your hired servant and the sojourner who lives with you" (Lev. 25:5 ff).

Furthermore, it will be the year for the release of the debts of the burdened and poor. It is in the same spirit that Amos cries out in anger against those who "sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes" and who "trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and turn aside the way of the afflicted" (Amos 2:6-7). It is in fulfillment of this very purpose of our creation that the earliest Christians were "together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need" (Acts 2:44-45).

I make just two summary points: (1) Insofar as it claims a share in God's creative work, human work is with others and for others. Work cannot be understood as a matter of individuals struggling against each other in order to survive, as if God did not work sufficiently to provide. (2) Work is not for profit. Clearly, work for and with others cannot be individualistic work for private gain. Work is for persons and not for profit.

Work is worldly. Up to this point we have been focusing on the relationship in which work is done—in respect of God's work, in gratitude for the divine gift that work is, in community with God and with others. According to Genesis 1, God set the task in instructing humanity to "fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing." The same point is made in Genesis 2, where the Lord leaves it to man to "name" all the living creatures. I think it is faithful to the intent of Scripture to summarize this testimony by saying that God has given humans a share in God's personal and creative sustaining and ordering of the creation. When we humans fail in our creative and ordering work then, as Paul stated, the whole creation "groans in travail" as it waits the final redemption of humankind.

Within this understanding of work there are two dialectical dimensions. First, it implies on the one hand that the world is in need of the creative and humane ordering provided by human work, and on the other that God's covenant partners need the world, the material stuff of reality, as the opportunity and the
material for their creative expression and self-realization. A person needs the world in its need for persons. The spiritual and creative person and the material and created world need each other. The world is the raw material which the spiritual person works and brings to order. As such the world calls persons into their being in the image of God, since just as God created the world in God's own gracious freedom and according to God's own word and vision, so God's covenant partners bring the world into its final order and meaning through their free and creative vision. As God freely creates, so do persons. As the world is the expression of God's freedom, so it is similarly the occasion and opportunity of the freedom of God's children. As the world depends on and needs God's free work for its being, so it awaits the free and creative work of persons for its fulfillment.

The other dialectical relationship is correlative. It rests in the truth that God works to sustain persons and also works to sustain the world. Because persons are given to share in God's work, they work as God does to sustain and uphold the world. They also work, as does God, in and with the world to sustain all God's children. Once again it is a dialectic of mutual need and service, both persons and the world needing and serving the other for the sake of the life of both. And there can be no final conflict between the responsibility persons have to sustain and conserve the world and their responsibility to sustain each other by work in the world, because persons are sustained in their essence as human persons only when they are also sustained as God's co-workers, as those who thus share joyfully and happily in God's work of ordering and conserving the world and all its creatures.

Finally in this connection, I note that there is a proper order and relationship between these two dialectical relationships, between the work of creative ordering on the one hand and the work of mutual sustenance on the other, namely, that the sustaining aspect of work is for the sake of its creative and ordering aspect. We are sustained by the world and therefore sustain the world for the sake of our spiritual being as God's children, for the sake of sharing with God and with each other in the creative ordering of the world, and we do this for the sake of the creation and realization of the human community with and under God.

Just a few practical corollaries: (1) Work, to be truly human, must seek to invoke the personal freedom and creativity of the worker. It
must be work in which and for which the person of the worker is essential. It is work in which the worker is primary, work for the worker's sake. (2) Remembering that the worker needs not only to be free and creative, but that the creation is in need of that personal creativity, then work should be the occasion for the worker to leave a creative mark, as it were, on the material reality with and upon which he or she works. Simply stated, the work must count; there must be some sense in which the worker can meaningfully claim the work and its product to be his or hers. Workers are entitled, like Adam and Eve, to name that portion of creation with which they work. (3) While work must sustain persons and their creative spirits as God's children, work must also be constructive and not exploitive of the world and nature. Work and conservation are correlative and not contradictory.

Work is a responsibility. It is the responsibility born of the freedom God gives us to be partners with God in the fulfillment of God's creative purpose. It is the responsibility born of the gift of this freedom and not of necessity; it is the responsibility that we have because God works and we are free to work with God, and not the anxious responsibility of those who would work of necessity as if God were not working. In another, but not unrelated connection, Paul speaks to the point when he says to the Philippians, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12-13). Because of this freedom to work with God and in the confidence of God's work, we have a responsibility and obligation to work. This kind of obligation and responsibility, presupposing God's work and the freedom God gives, is not the anxious weaving and toiling that Jesus forbade, but the free, creative, and joyful responsibility and duty of those who find themselves and their freedom in the fulfillment of their responsibility. Not to work, or to work with anxiety, is to work faithlessly as if God were not working, as if God had not given us the freedom to work with God. Thus, just as Jesus warned against anxious, godless work, so Paul warns against and forbids a godless laziness and disobedience. "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is living in idleness. . . . If anyone will not work, let him not eat. . . . Now such persons we command and exhort in the
Lord Jesus Christ to do their work in quietness and to earn their own living" (I Thess. 3:6, 10, 12). Our responsibility for work is much like the responsibility of obedience one spouse owes the other as a result of the freedom of love that each receives from the other. The loving gift of freedom to work with God as covenant partners entails the responsibility of the obedient exercise of that freedom in our human work. Because we may work, because we are free to work, we must work, we have the responsibility to work.

With these observations we are calling attention to the fact that as workers we are not only in relationship with God who works and gives work to God’s children, with the companion worker with and for whom we work, and with the world upon which we work, but also with ourselves as the ones who work. To speak of the responsibility of work is to recognize that we owe ourselves to our work and work to ourselves. Workers owe themselves to their work, for it is in their work that they find themselves as cocreators with God and co-workers with the fellow worker. As workers we owe to our work our freedom, joy, and creative spontaneity, since work is the gift of God and as such is the very gift of our creation in God’s image, and it is our free responsibility, our true and free obligation and duty.

Sinful work. It should go without saying that the preceding description of work scarcely corresponds to the existential reality of the work most of us experience and are occupied with. Rather, it seeks to be a faithful representation of the design of our creator God, for whose final realization Jesus taught his disciples to pray, saying, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” Between God’s design and will and Jesus’ promise of its final realization stands the contradicting reality of sin. In this interim, work which is intended to be a free gift, a creative privilege, an event of community, an expression of free responsibility and obedience, finds itself contradicted at each of these points.

Persons now toil outside the garden, ignorant and denying of the tree of life, of the God who tends the garden for and with them. Work is no longer a gift of God, a blessing from God. Rather, it is under a curse. “Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. . . . In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread” (Gen. 3:17, 19). With God apparently no longer working with God’s children, the world which God had
made to sustain and provide for them now stands over against them, withholding its promises, forcing them, as it were, to struggle against it for their living. Work becomes labor, a burden and a task, a matter of survival and necessity, scarcely a gift and a freedom. The world which humanity should be free to subdue, whose creatures we are to name, in expression and realization of our creativity and humanity as God's co-creators and covenant partners, now threatens to make us slaves. It is no longer God who has the gift of life, but the world itself alleges to have the authority and power of life. The economic order becomes autonomous, endowed as it were with its own guiding hand, so that it must be served or controlled if one is to survive. From freedom to necessity, from humanizing creativity to the struggle for survival, the marketplace is now the measure; economics determine. The field is open for the struggle to control and to become, if possible, the wielder rather than the subject of this power. There can be no more careless toiling, like that of the lilies of the field or the birds of the air. Rather it is the toil of mere creatures weighted with the responsibility of the divine creator, the responsibility of life itself.

Finally, when God is forgotten and work to survive is all in all, it is then each to his own. There is no God uniting God's children in creative work; there is no divine purpose drawing them together in mutual work and service. There are only individuals struggling to co-opt the alleged authority and power of the economic order or a collective of individuals, often in the name of the state, struggling against such individuals and their cherished private property. Work is no longer work for persons; rather, individuals and their societies are for work. Not who I am or you are but what I produce is what matters. Anxious storing into barns is the sum and substance of the workaday world.

Let us pause for a moment to recognize that this alleged realism is also a fantasy—the fantasy of an autonomous economy, a world independent of its Creator alleging to be in and of itself the source of life, its own creator. The question we have to ask is which of these fantasies is an illusion and which is the vision of things to come, the very promise of God. Is life from God or is it not? The answer of the Bible is clear: Israel should know, says the Lord, "that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil" (Hos. 2:8). Israel's very existence and well-being are not the fruits of its own labor, but the "fruit of God's toil." In fact, Israel is God's
"WORK"

"vineyard" (Isa. 5:1-7). In the fantasy that Israel is so sustained by its own independent labor that it is to give to the fruits of that labor and to the idols of their own making the praise and devotion due God (see Hos. 2:8; 8:4), Israel resembles the axe that would "vaunt itself over him who hews with it" (Isa. 10:15). Although Israel may choose to pursue such fantasies, she does so in vain, for God "will hedge up her way with thorns" and "build a wall against her" (Hos. 2:6). Woe to those, declares Isaiah, who, in their alleged economic independence of God's gracious work, serve only their own interests and oppress and exploit others, "who decree iniquitous decrees, and . . . who keep writing oppression, to turn aside the needy from justice and to rob the poor of my people of their right" (10:1-2). There is no future for a people who turn from God to self, for they would then be like those who have forsaken living waters "and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (Jer. 2:13). No, the arrogant illusion that the world is mine, that its power can be subject to my individual and selfish whim, regardless of the needs of others, indeed, to the disadvantage and oppression of others, is over. The world is God's, and God will claim it. There is no future for the lie of the absolute economic individual. No religion can save such individuals. Nor is there a future for the economy of the absolute state: "I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will put an end to the pride of the arrogant, and lay low the haughtiness of the ruthless" (Isa. 13:11).

Actually, then, we have here two biblically attested visions. First, God's vision in which work is free, creative, trustful above all in God's work, and therefore communal, cooperative, and undertaken in free obedience. The other vision is that all-too-human vision of work as an obligation, as a demand put upon us by the world and drawing us into a godless struggle for survival, a competition among ourselves for the control of the alleged power of the world.

To opt for the first view in denial of the pretensions of the other would be naive and forgetful of the contradiction of sin. To opt for the second alone, as if it were more than an illusion, would be tantamount to a cynical and faithless abandonment of God and of our own humanity. A Christian will, it seems to me, opt for the first as that future for which Christ works in conflict with and in contradiction of the absurd pretensions of the latter.
Before concluding, however, we need to consider a few of the more fundamental expressions of the contradiction of sin:

1. We understand from the theological perspective that because God works first and fully, our work is characterized by a fundamental "carelessness"; it is free and confident. But when sin denies God, our work becomes burdened with the responsibility of which God alone is capable—the ultimate responsibility for the creation and sustaining of life. Such work is labor pure and simple, weighted with the anxiety of death and defeat in the struggle for survival. It is no longer persons and the world together under God, but the absolute individual and a collectivizing society struggling against each other and the world in the competition for life. In sum, not free and hopeful work, but anxious and burdensome labor.

2. We saw that according to the design of creation, work is a free gift to all. This is first, and in the exercise of that free gift and in dependence upon it the economic order arises, itself the expression and creation of that freedom. The economic order is a human achievement, in the service and expression of our free work. Under the conditions of sin the opposite is alleged. The economic order claims its independence, autonomy, and consequent authority over the worker. Work is no longer the original reality, the free gift of God; now it is secondary to the economic order and is a privilege which that order grants to the worker when it is in its (the economic order's) own interest. No longer is the economic order the servant of persons; rather persons now serve the economy. So, for instance, the World Bank will make a loan to a country with a good solid economy, that is, one that can sustain its own autonomous life, quite regardless of its service to the general needs of the people and its capacity to create work for all. In our country we recognize how the economy demands as a price of its recovery of health and vitality a significant rise in unemployment. Again, work is no longer a divine gift and therefore a right, but a gratuity the economy may or may not decide to offer. Not the worker but the economy is first. In biblical terms we have here a first-class case of idolatry—people serving the work of their own hands, the economic order created by their own labor.

3. Work under God and with God is, as we have seen, work with others and for others. Without God in the picture it would become instead the individual working and struggling in competition against others and others collectivized struggling...
against the pretentious individual, each seeking to deny or control for the other the means of production, the necessary conditions of free and creative work. It is private property against public property, individualistic capitalism against state capitalism, each finally in denial of creative and cooperative work.

As workers, our primary responsibility with regard to the material reality of the world is to shape it creatively and bring it to order.

4. We have contended that as workers our primary responsibility with regard to the material reality of the world with and upon which we work is to shape it creatively and bring it to order; the worker is, as it were, to make a mark and leave his or her name on that bit of the world that it is his or her privilege to work. The work of sustaining life, of working for house and food, is secondary, confident as it is that God is effectively at work to provide for all necessity, as God does for the birds of the air and the lilies of the field. Under the conditions of sin, where God is forgotten, this order of work is also forgotten. The world is now threatening, potentially life-denying, and the first order of work is to extract from the world a living, and only secondarily, if at all, is work the opportunity for the creative expression of the worker in the shaping and ordering of the world. Work is no longer a meaningful expression of the human spirit, but a meaningless toiling in the struggle for life.

5. The point was made that God calls all persons into free and obedient responsibility for their work, in the recognition that in working with God and with and for others they enter into the fullness of their own humanity and personhood. But sin distorts this picture radically. Under its aegis, work becomes the alien imposition of the world, the price of survival, and no longer the proper responsibility of the worker. It invites, on the one hand, the workers to become slaves to their work with the illusory threat that only by submitting to its demands can one win the struggle for survival and life. One must play God, one must work as his or her own creator. Or it can lead to the apparent opposite, to the despairing laziness and indolence of a latent but vain protest
against the imposition of so impossible and burdensome a demand. In either case, work becomes labor, a mere "job," no longer the expression of personal responsibility and freedom. Instead, the worker becomes no more than the expression of his or her work, a mere cog in the self-serving economic machine.

CONCLUSION: A HOPEFUL VISION

What is to be made of these two contradictory assessments of work, neither of which corresponds unequivocally with reality? This paper assumes that there is something wrong with our economy, and not with ours only, but with the world economy. It assumes that working conditions are not right—that unemployment, underemployment, underpayment and oppression are signs of disorder, of a serious problem. Michael Polanyi has suggested that the diagnosis of a problem, the understanding of what is wrong and why the pieces do not fit together, presupposes a "vision" of a solution which of course cannot exist within the reality, inasmuch as reality is the problem, but is a heretofore undiscovered reality—a new and more comprehensive reality which can comprehend, transform, and give new meaning to the problematic reality which occasioned the quest for discovery in the first place. Only in light of that comprehensive and promised solution can one begin to understand fully what is wrong with the present reality, let alone realize a solution. Planning and action presuppose hope. Thus, only the person who has a vision of what the economic reality can and should look like can begin to discern the root of the problem of the present reality and begin to take steps toward its solution. Christians are Christian precisely in that they have been given a God-ordained and God-authorized vision of that promised reality; they do not see it clearly, but at best through a glass darkly. Nevertheless, even now it begins to illuminate the present reality and inspire steps to the overcoming of its contradictions. That vision, as it pertains to work, I have attempted to formulate—a vision of the vision, as it were. What reality looks like when cast in the light of that vision we have elaborated under the rubric of sin. With a vision (always in need of revision in light of God's word) of our disorder and God's design Christians are prepared to make a contribution to the solution of our economic problems. We do so, however, with a special
confidence, for not only do we have vision, but we are persuaded that none other than God, in and through Jesus Christ, has taken the first and definitive step toward assuring that the envisioned reality, the kingdom of God, will indeed come. In Luther’s words we can say that were not his man, the right man, on our side, the man of God’s own choosing, all our striving would be losing. But because Christ worked and works, we too may work.

NOTES

3. Taking this departure I find myself in disagreement with Emil Brunner, for whom the first principle of fundamental premise is that “labour presupposes the will to live, the desire to acquire all that is necessary for life” (The Divine Imperative, tr. Olive Wyon [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1947], p. 364). Brunner makes this assumption because he approaches the question of work from a universal extrabiblical perspective of the “orders of creation,” which he does modify, of course, from the biblical point of view. The point at issue is the basic presupposition—the general experience of human need or the biblical revelation of God’s creating grace.
4. “God has created man as man, . . . He has ordained and equipped him for human existence, for its active affirmation and therefore for work” (Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, 4 vols. [Edinburgh: T.T. Clark, 1961] 3/4, p. 524).
5. Granting that sin tends to make of labor a curse, Nicholas Berdyaev states that “at the time labour suggests man’s creative calling; according to God’s conception of him [imago dei] man is called to labour and creatively transform by his spirit the elements of nature” (The Destiny of Man [New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960], p. 212).
6. Thus Berdyaev contrasts the Christian emphasis on “personality,” which is “impossible without love and sacrifice, without passing over into the other” (p. 57) with “so-called individualism, characteristic of bourgeois capitalist society” (p. 213). See also Brunner, p. 387.
7. “Man is to use but not to abuse the creature” (Brunner, p. 387).
8. Recognizing the new and redemptive perspective that Christianity brings to work and thus transforms the sinful perception, Berdyaev makes the claim that “it was Christianity that made contempt for work morally untenable” (p. 215).
9. See also Amos 5:21-24; Mic. 6:10-12.

43
WHAT IS THEOLOGICAL PLURALISM?

JERRY L. WALLS

To what extent should differences between orthodox theology and special-interest theologies be tolerated? This writer finds the definition of "doctrinal pluralism" in the Book of Discipline to be inadequate and poorly justified as a criterion for making such judgments.

The concept of theological pluralism has been controversial ever since it was officially accepted as part of a new doctrinal statement by the United Methodist Church in 1972.¹ And it is certain to remain a focus of discussion for some time to come since the 1984 General Conference has called for the development of a new doctrinal statement. The notion of pluralism will surely be a crucial concern as the new statement is drafted.

One reason for the controversy is the fact that there has never been a clear understanding of just what pluralism is.² The main purpose of this essay is to seek a clear understanding of the concept of doctrinal pluralism. The main focus of my analysis will be the definition of doctrinal pluralism which appears in the glossary of the United Methodist Book of Discipline. I will examine this definition in the light of Part II of the Discipline, which deals with doctrine and doctrinal statements. Here, then, is the glossary definition of doctrinal pluralism:

Expounded thoroughly in Wesley's famous sermon "Catholic Spirit," an attitude toward Christian truth that, recognizing the limitations of language, allows for more than one verbal statement

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Theological Pluralism

of truth, each statement pointing to the truth but not exhausting truth nor excluding all other expressions of truth. This principle maintains the continuity and identity of the Christian message but assumes that this may find legitimate expression in various theological "systems" or in special-interest theologies. Differences may be argued fruitfully in terms of evidence and cogency.¹

The initial reaction one is likely to have upon reading this definition is to wonder why pluralism is such a source of confusion. The definition seems straightforward and rather clear. And furthermore, if pluralism is an idea which comes straight from Wesley, we may wonder why conservatives have been so critical of it. For the definition purports to be merely a summary of Wesley's exposition of catholic spirit. I want to examine Wesley's sermon on catholic spirit, but before doing so, I want to emphasize that our definition embodies a number of claims.

Indeed, our definition embraces a number of important philosophical and theological issues. These involve the nature of language, the nature of truth, the identity of the Christian message, and its continuity in various verbal expressions of it. When this is recognized, it becomes evident that doctrinal pluralism is not so simple a matter as it might first appear.

Catholic Spirit and Pluralism

As we turn our attention to Wesley, let us make the general observation that in our definition pluralism is a matter of different verbal statements of the same truth, and it is warranted by the fact that language is limited as a means of expressing truth. Our purpose in examining Wesley's sermon is to find out whether his concept of catholic spirit is essentially the same as this understanding of pluralism.

In the first place, it is important to realize that an emphasis on love pervades Wesley's sermon. He begins by observing that according to Scripture, love is due all people, and especially those who love God. And at the end of his sermon, he again stresses the importance of love for all persons: "For love alone gives the title to this character: Catholic love is a Catholic Spirit."² Wesley's concern is that minor theological and ecclesiastical differences often prevent this kind of love. It is in the face of such differences that Wesley holds up the ideal of catholic spirit: "Though we cannot
think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion?" (493; page numbers refer to the edition of Wesley's Works cited in note 4).

It is important to emphasize that the kind of differences Wesley has in mind involve "smaller points" such as forms of government, forms of prayer, modes of administering the sacraments, etc. Major doctrines, on the other hand, are non-negotiable: "A man of truly catholic spirit has not now his religion to seek. He is as fixed as the sun in his judgment concerning the main branches of Christian doctrine" (502). For Wesley, this is a deeply spiritual matter. To have a heart right with God involves believing certain things about the nature of God and the nature of Christ. Wesley assumes that the person whose heart is right with God will hold firmly to the main branches of Christian doctrine, such as those pertaining to Christ's divinity (497).

Now what are particularly interesting for our purposes are the reasons Wesley gives for tolerance on smaller points of difference. In the first place, Wesley cites the limitations of human understanding: "It is an unavoidable consequence of the present weakness and shortness of human understanding, that several men will be of several minds in religion as well as in common life." And furthermore, "No man can be assured that all his opinions, taken together, are true. Nay, every thinking man is assured they are not" (494, 495).

A second reason, closely related to the first, is that everyone must follow his or her own conscience. "God has given no right to any of the children of men . . . to lord it over the conscience of his brethren; but every man must judge for himself, as every man must give an account of himself to God" (496). Taken together, these two arguments give good reason for Christians to be tolerant of one another concerning "smaller points" of difference, and make it clear that these should provide no barrier to love and cooperation.

Let us now come back to the question of whether the definition of doctrinal pluralism in the glossary of the Discipline is an accurate summary of Wesley's sermon on catholic spirit. In the light of our preceding discussion, I am afraid we must conclude that it is not. In the first place, different reasons are given to account for theological diversity. While our definition appeals to the limitations of language for expressing truth, Wesley's grounds, as we just saw, are the limitations of human understanding and the right
There is certainly a relation between the limitations of language and the limitations of human understanding, but the two are not the same.

A second and perhaps more important point of difference concerns the nature of theological diversity. In the definition from the Discipline, such diversity appears to be primarily verbal in nature. That is to say, statements which are verbally different may still point to, or express, the same truth; and if they express the same truth, in complementary fashion, all may be true. This principle applies to both the main branches of Christian doctrine as well as to "smaller points."

In Wesley's sermon, however, among the differences pertaining only to "smaller points" that may be tolerated are some that are not merely verbal, but substantial. In at least some of the examples he cites, contradictory positions are involved, and both cannot be right. For instance, some baptize infants, while others baptize only more mature believers. In Wesley's view, one of these positions is correct and the other is wrong.

It is clear, then, that our definition of doctrinal pluralism gives an account of doctrinal diversity very different from that given by Wesley in his sermon on catholic spirit. But even if our definition is not a faithful summary of Wesley's sermon, we still need to ask whether it presents a clear understanding of pluralism in its own right. We will do so by pursuing in greater depth the various issues involved in the definition, as noted above.

When we enter the territory of language and truth, we are entering an arena of great complexity and involved debate in recent philosophy. It would take us far afield even to begin to discuss these issues in detail. However, we must engage them to some extent in order to deal honestly with the issues raised by the
definition of pluralism we are considering. As our discussion has already indicated, considerations about the nature of language and its relation to truth are central to our definition.

How, then, is language related to truth? How is language related to reality? Let us begin to approach these matters by considering the following lines by Roger Trigg.

If language can be used as a means of communication (and the writing of this sentence assumes that this is so), certain presuppositions must be built into it. . . . What is of supreme importance is that there is some notion of truth as such in human language. This is the cement which binds language together. . . .

Because a main function of language is to talk about and communicate what is the case, the absence of any distinction between truth and falsity (i.e. between what is and is not so) will destroy language.  

The notion that there is a distinction between truth and falsity involves another assumption, namely, that there is a world of reality distinct from our language, which is the standard for distinguishing true and false statements.

1 This point accords with the conception that truth has two senses: (1) truth as actual states of affairs, reality; and (2) truth as true beliefs, judgments, propositions, etc.  

The first sense of truth is ontological. It has to do with what exists, what happened, what the facts are, etc. The second sense of truth is epistemological and linguistic. That is, it has to do with how we come to know and express the truth.

Notice that these two distinct senses of truth are employed in the Discipline definition of pluralism. This is especially apparent in the statement that pluralism “allows for more than one verbal statement of truth [i.e., truth in sense 2], each statement pointing to the truth [i.e., truth in sense 1] but not exhausting truth.”

Notice also that truth in sense 2 is dependent upon and controlled by truth in sense 1. That is, true judgments and propositions are not to be confused with reality. Rather, their function is to be a medium for conveying or revealing what is actual and real. As T. F. Torrance puts it: ‘For a true statement to serve the truth of being, it must fall short of it, be revisable in the light of it, and not be mistaken for it, since it does not possess its truth in itself but in the reality it serves. Thus, a dash of inadequacy is necessary for its precision.’  

So the
THEOLOGICAL PLURALISM

important thing is to realize there is a close connection between the
truth of true statements and the truth of reality, but that they are not
identical. It is in this sense that we must recognize a "dash of
inadequacy" in our most precise statements. We must be careful,
however, not to overstate the inadequacy of language for we run the
risk of denying the basis for its role as a medium for pointing to truth.
Language is perfectly adequate to point to the truth, to make true
statements about it, but it is inadequate as a substitute for the truth.

It is this emphasis upon the inadequacy of language that
undergirds our definition of pluralism. It is because statements
about the truth are not to be identified with the truth that more
than one verbal statement of the truth may be allowed. No one
statement of the truth can exclude all others because the reality to
which a statement points may not only permit, but even require,
other statements if it is to be fully (but not exhaustively) expressed.
Moreover, different statements may say essentially the same
thing.9

The validity of these points has been recognized by Christian
theologians for centuries. Indeed, the classic illustration of these
points is the Nicene Creed. For the heart of that creed, the
affirmation that Christ is homoousion (of one substance) with the
Father, is an expression of biblical truth in extrabiblical language.
John C. Murray offers this account:

All that Nicaea did was to reduce the multiplicity of the scriptural
affirmations to the unity of a single affirmation. . . . Therefore it
was nothing new. . . . The Nicene dogma was new, however, in
that it stated the sense of the Scriptures in a new mode of
understanding that was not formally scriptural. The Scriptures had
affirmed that Jesus Christ, the Son, is here with us as Lord of us.
Nicaea affirmed that the Lord Jesus Christ is the consubstantial Son.
The sense of both affirmations is the same, but the mode of
conception and statement is different.10

So the Nicene Creed is a major example of theologizing which
recognizes that the limitations of language not only allow, but
sometimes even require, more than one verbal statement of truth if
the truth in question is to be accurately expressed.

The homoousion formula was required because Arius had raised
the question of who Jesus Christ is, in ontological terms. That is,
the question was explicitly raised of who Jesus Christ is in himself
and in relation to the Father. Is he of the same substance as the Father, and therefore God, or is he a creature? It was the conviction of the Nicene Fathers that the language of Scripture discloses that the Son of God is a person who is properly described, in ontological terms, as homoousion with the Father. In affirming the homoousion formula, the Fathers repudiated the notion that the Son of God is a creature, who had a beginning. For the Son cannot be both a creature who had a beginning and an eternal person who is of one substance with the Father.

This illustrates the important point that different verbal expressions which purport to point to the same truth or reality must be consistent with each other if each is to be recognized as a true statement. Such statements must complement one another or illuminate different facets of the same truth. Thus, if one accepts the Nicene formula, one must believe that it is consistent with the statements of Scripture and that it contributes to a fuller understanding of who Jesus Christ is. But if different statements which purport to describe the same truth are simply contradictory, as in the case of the Nicene formula and the views of Arius, one of them must be rejected as false. Otherwise, language cannot communicate what is true concerning the reality in question.

When this occurs, as Trigg pointed out, one of the main functions of language is destroyed. Our definition of pluralism apparently recognizes this distinction between truth and falsity, for it cites cogency as one of the criteria for dealing with differences. Thus far, then, it appears that our definition of pluralism has solid philosophical grounding, for it is based upon a longstanding and widely accepted account of language and truth. Further this account of language is clearly cognitive. That is to say, it aims to describe the facts, or tell us what is the case. It is related to reality in such a way that it points to reality and truly expresses it.

This view of theological language is not unusual or esoteric. Indeed, it is the understanding of such language implicitly held by most believers. I emphasize it, however, because various noncognitive views of theological language have been influential in much contemporary theology and philosophy of religion. Again, this is a very complex field of inquiry which we cannot fully explore. But it is important to be aware that many theologians reject the apparent meaning of traditional theological claims. Although such statements as “God created the world” and “God
THEOLOGICAL PLURALISM

raised Christ from the dead” appear to be factual assertions informing us of the existence and activity of a Being who transcends the natural world, some theologians claim that they actually have a more mundane meaning.

Writers who hold such views typically resort to reductionism in their analysis of classical theological statements. That is, they reduce statements about God and alleged supernatural events to claims about humanity and human experience. Consider, for instance, Trigg’s account of how the doctrine of creation might be handled.

Once one has adopted a reductionist theology and has restricted one’s attention to the influence of religion on men’s lives, it becomes impossible to talk of a personal God or a Creator. A statement such as ‘God created the universe’ can no longer be treated as true (or false), if this is understood as saying something about the origins of the universe. It has to be translated into some statement about the attitudes of those who believe it. For example, D. Z. Phillips says: “To see the world as God’s creation is to see meaning in life . . . ” Statements which appear to be about God are in this way shown to be about believers (pp. 34-35).

A similar kind of reductionism can be applied to statements of belief in Christ’s Resurrection. Such statements would not be understood as referring to an actual event in the past in which God raised Christ from the dead. Rather, affirmations of the Resurrection might be interpreted, in Sherry’s words, “in terms of a new perspective upon life opened up for the Apostles and modern man.”

This kind of analysis of traditional theological language may strike some as contrived and distorted. Why is it necessary to resort to such measures? The answer, I think, is that these writers have rejected traditional views of God, the supernatural, and revelation, but still want to call themselves Christians. They do not believe classical creedal affirmations are true as traditionally understood but still want to insist that in some other sense Christianity remains true.

At bottom, then, these different views of theological language reflect fundamentally different understandings of theological truth and, accordingly, of the Christian faith. The depth of this difference must not be underestimated. As William J. Abraham put
it, "The abandoning of factual discourse about direct divine action is a momentous step to take. Indeed, so momentous that it will destroy the Christian tradition as it is generally known." Let us keep these points in mind as we go on to consider the remainder of our definition of theological pluralism.

IDENTITY AND CONTINUITY

As we recall, according to the definition, the principle of pluralism "maintains the continuity and identity of the Christian message." The issues of identity and continuity are no less difficult than the issues of language and truth which we have been considering. Indeed, they are further aspects of these problems. So we must continue to proceed with care.

Let us begin with a working definition of identity. Identity presupposes the existence of characteristics or criteria by which something or someone is known, recognized, or distinguished. These characteristics or criteria are what enable us to identify or "pick out" a person or thing from among other persons or things.

The concept of identity is crucial for the concept of continuity. Before we can know whether the Christian message has continued we must be able to identify it. To say that the Christian message has continued is to say that it is, in some sense, the same message today which the early church proclaimed. The idea of sameness is the basis for continuity. As Paul Holmer put it, "The core of theology for Protestants, not only Catholics, is a divine 'magisterium' which is the same from age to age." This much may seem fairly obvious. However, when we look more closely at the ideas of identity, continuity, and sameness, we must reckon with some notorious difficulties. For instance, the word *same* is inherently ambiguous, having both a strict as well as a loose sense. The question for us is, how strictly must the word be used in order to maintain the identity and continuity of the Christian message? What does it mean to say the Christian message is the same from age to age, from theological system to theological system, and from one special-interest theology to another?

One thing it *cannot* mean is that the Christian message is exactly identical in all these cases. Basil Mitchell makes this point nicely with a question: "When Augustine returned to the faith in which
Monica had nurtured him, must we deny that he remained in the same faith, if he went on to explore its implications in directions that Monica had never thought of?"¹⁴ This quote from Mitchell highlights one reason why Christian truth receives different expressions, namely, because different theologians have explored its implications in different directions. Certainly no single person is capable of drawing out all the riches implicit in the Christian faith. Different thinkers will quite appropriately unfold, emphasize, and apply various facets of the gospel in very diverse circumstances. Their own experience will often be a major factor giving shape to their particular insights and emphases. None of this should come as a surprise or strike us as objectionable.

And yet, we are still without an adequate account of the identity of the Christian message which enables us to say that different expressions of it are, indeed, in a real sense, the "same." If we have not identified the Christian message, how can we recognize genuine instances of continuity? What are the criteria for identifying the Christian message? What is essential to it?

The answer which suggests itself most readily is that the essential things are set forth in the ecumenical creeds.¹⁵ This answer has a number of points in its favor. The first is the simple fact that the doctrines of the creeds have been time-tested points of agreement among all three branches of the Christian church: Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant. The Nicene Creed, especially, has been universally accepted.

But there is more to this point than the simple historical fact of the universal appeal of the creeds. We have to ask whether there is even any other plausible answer to the question of Christian identity. If the creeds do not truly state essential Christian doctrine, can we ever hope to know the identity of the Christian message? If the church catholic has been mistaken for centuries in its insistence upon the doctrines of the creeds, are we not driven to
the conclusion that the meaning of God's revelation, which the creeds attempt to state, is hopelessly beyond us? For the very idea of God's self-revelation assumes that the meaning of that revelation is accessible to us. It has been the confidence of Christians for centuries that the church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, correctly understood and stated the meaning of God's revelation in the creeds.

There is another reason for accepting the creeds as definitive statements of essential Christian doctrine, namely, because they clearly have an ontological reference. That is, they tell us the identity of the realities to which the Christian message points. They tell us who God is and identify the events through which God's self-revelation has been given.

The miraculous events cited in the creeds—the virginal conception, the Resurrection, and the Ascension—are vital to the Christian message because of their connection to the Incarnation. It was the Resurrection, above all, which disclosed that Christ is an eternal person who, therefore, could not be held by death. The virginal conception should also be viewed in the light of who Christ is, as revealed by the Resurrection. As Torrance puts it, "The Resurrection discloses that the Virgin Birth was the act and mode of the Creator's entry into his own creation as Man among men." Likewise, the Ascension discloses who Christ is, for it was the event in which he returned to the glory of his Father, which he laid aside in the Incarnation. In short, these events are essential because they disclose who Christ is: the eternal Son of God who became incarnate for our salvation.

This suggests that the key to knowing the identity of the Christian message is knowing the identity of the realities to which the message points. If we have an accurate (but not exhaustive) account of who God is and of how God's self-revelation was given, we have firm grounds for maintaining the continuity of the Christian message. If we know something about the identity of Christ (the main content, for example, of the Nicene Creed), we know something that will not change. As the Book of Hebrews puts it: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (13:8).

It is important to emphasize, however, that what is definitive is the truth which is expressed by the creeds, not the particular expressions used to convey the truth. That is to say, the Nicene
THEOLOGICAL PLURALISM

formula, for instance, may be restated in different language. Indeed, this may be necessary if the truth of the creed is to be effectively communicated to many contemporary believers. To say this is only to recognize a fundamental premise of the Nicene Fathers themselves, namely, that it is sometimes necessary to employ new expressions in order to maintain old truths.

Now it may be objected to this emphasis on the creeds that the Christian message is much more than a series of statements of fact, if it is that at all. The Christian message concerns life, here and now. It is an invitation to a new way of life.

Certainly it has not been my intention to deny that the Christian message concerns a way of life. Indeed, the view I have defended undergirds this claim, for the Christian life is very much tied to the identity of Christ and the events of his life. This point is supported by Anthony Thiselton’s observation that the creeds are part of the necessary background of the Christian life:

Christian believing involves taking up certain patterns of attitudes and behavior which can be said to be recognizably “Christian” precisely because they are patterns . . . . Because of God's saving acts in Christ, the status of “son,” or “one of the redeemed” (and so on) may now be offered and accepted, and the role of worshipper, obedient servant (and so on) “taken over” or appropriated. For all this to be meaningful, however, there must be a relatively stable background of repetition, habituation, or “expected” belief and conduct. 17

So the creeds and early confessions should not be seen as stifling authentic Christian faith and experience. Rather, they are essential for its preservation. As Thiselton puts it, the creeds mediate “to later generations the corporate knowledge and memory on which the authenticity of faith” depends (p. 66).

Thus, to maintain the identity and continuity of what it means to be a Christian, to live the Christian life, requires maintaining the identity and continuity of the events upon which the Christian community is founded.

IDENTITY, CONTINUITY, AND SPECIAL-INTEREST THEOLOGIES

Now that we have considered the meaning of identity and continuity, we can go on to evaluate the claim that the Christian
message "may find legitimate expression in various theological 'systems' or in special-interest theologies."

As a general statement, I think this claim must be accepted without quibble. The history of theology provides ample evidence that the Christian message has been powerfully expressed in a multitude of theological systems. We need not go beyond the names of Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Cranmer, and Wesley to be reminded of this point. The various traditions represented by these men differ in a number of respects. And yet, without downplaying the differences, we can properly emphasize that there is a definite core of agreement between these various theologies. The doctrines of the ecumenical creeds are basic to all. Thus it is possible to have substantial doctrinal unity in the midst of real theological diversity. 14

This much, I think, is fairly clear. But, of course, the claim we are considering goes beyond these relatively easy cases. The difficulty arises when we come to some of the more recent theological systems and special-interest theologies. It is not so simple to agree that all of them are expressions of the same Christian message.

As the Discipline notes, "The theological spectrum in The United Methodist Church ranges over all the current mainstream options and a variety of special-interest theologies as well" (p. 73). The concept of pluralism apparently lends legitimacy to the entire spectrum. Obviously, we cannot even enumerate all these theologies. However, we need to have some idea of what the Discipline means by "special-interest theologies." We can make some headway in this direction by examining the section entitled "Theological Frontiers and New Directions" in Part II of the Discipline.

In the first place, the Discipline singles out for mention theologies of liberation: "Notable among them are black theology, female liberation theology, political and ethnic theologies, third-world theology, and theologies of human rights" (p. 82). A paragraph later, other examples are cited: "The United Methodist Church also takes seriously other widely variant theological emphases of our time . . . . We witness recurring expressions of neofundamentalism, new pentecosialism, new forms of Christian naturalism and secularity" (p. 83). This gives us some idea of what "special-interest theologies" are and puts us in a better position to evaluate the claim that they, too, are legitimate expressions of the Christian message.
THEOLOGICAL PLURALISM

However, before we do so, let us take into account a few more lines from this section of our Discipline which bear on special-interest theologies: “All claims to Christian truth deserve an open and fair hearing for their sifting and assessment. The viability of all doctrinal opinion demands that the processes of theological development must be kept open-ended, both on principle and in fact” (p. 83). I have analyzed this passage in detail elsewhere, but I cite it here because it represents a very interesting rationale for the legitimacy of special-interest theologies. Without repeating my previous analysis, I wish to emphasize that we must comprehend what this passage is saying. The key phrase, I think, is “The viability of all doctrinal opinion demands that the processes of theological development must be kept open-ended.” This forces a number of questions. Are all doctrinal opinions “viable”? What about doctrinal opinions which contradict basic Christian beliefs? If the Christian message has an identity, does this not place some limitations on theological development? Let us keep these questions in mind as we turn our focus back to the special-interest theologies mentioned in the Discipline. What about the claim that all of these may be legitimate expressions of the Christian message?

Some of the examples cited pose no great problem. Theologies of liberation may certainly give legitimate expression to the message of the gospel. One may hold fast to the essential doctrines of Christianity while accenting and developing the idea that Christ brings liberation in all phases of life. A similar assessment holds with respect to neofundamentalism and new pentecostalism. Since both are committed to the basic doctrines of orthodox theology, while placing distinct emphases on different facets of the Christian message, there is good reason to hold that each of them maintains the identity and continuity of the Christian message.

However, when we come to the other examples cited, namely, Christian naturalism and secularity, a number of problems come immediately to the fore. For the sake of simplicity, I will limit my discussion to naturalism.

The most obvious question which must be faced is how the identity of the Christian message can be maintained in naturalism. If our discussion thus far has been on track at all, it is obvious that supernaturialism is essential to the identity of the Christian message. That is, the Christian message maintains the actual existence of a
supernatural Being and the factuality of certain supernatural events through which this Being has given us a self-revelation. None of this, presumably, would be allowed by naturalism, even if it were called "Christian naturalism." Indeed, the identity of the Christian message is such that it seems to be an outright contradiction in terms to speak of Christian naturalism.

But since Christian naturalism is mentioned as a theological opinion which must be regarded as at least viable, let us assume the Discipline must mean that it can give legitimate expression to the Christian message. For surely if a theological viewpoint is simply incapable of giving legitimate expression to the Christian message, it should not be regarded as even viable.

How, then, can naturalism be Christian? Is the identity of Christian truth actually such that a naturalistic system can express it?

In response to this question, let us recall our discussion above in which we dealt briefly with noncognitive analyses of theological language. As we saw, a number of theologians have argued that we may still affirm such things as creation and the Resurrection, without affirming the traditional understanding of them. The story of the Resurrection, let us say, may transform our attitude toward life, and in this sense redeem us, even if we do not actually believe Christ was raised from the dead. Thus, it may be argued, the Resurrection is not denied; it is merely given an interpretation different from that of classical theology.

The idea of interpretation is the key. Consider the following lines from the Discipline:

There is a core of doctrine which informs in greater or less degree our widely divergent interpretations. From our response in faith to the wondrous mystery of God's love in Jesus Christ as recorded in Scripture, all valid Christian doctrine is born. This is the touchstone by which all Christian teaching may be tested. (p. 73)

Notice the emphasis on "our response" in this passage. Apparently this is the basis for "our widely divergent interpretations," for there have been markedly diverse responses to "God's love in Jesus Christ as recorded in Scripture."

The question which arises from this passage, however, is this: how can our response to God's love in Christ be the touchstone for testing all Christian teaching? For some of these responses conflict
THEOLOGICAL PLURALISM

with others. In these cases, whose response is to test whose? Are all responses to be accepted as valid interpretations of doctrine? It is entirely unclear how such questions are to be answered.

In traditional theology, the situation is quite different. There the emphasis is on God's revelation, not our response. The test for Christian doctrine is whether it is true to that revelation. To recall our earlier discussion, the ontological truth of Christianity is the standard for judging verbal expressions of that truth, i.e., theology. The assumption here is that God's very self and purposes have been revealed by no one less than God, and in such a way that the recipients of that revelation accurately perceived it. Furthermore, Scripture is the product of that revelation, so that we have in it a true account of who God is and of God's manner of self-revelation. Therefore, Scripture has been recognized in classical theology as the touchstone for testing Christian teaching.21

What I want to emphasize is that in the quote above, with its accent on "our response" as the touchstone for testing Christian teaching, we have a shift away from traditional concepts of doctrinal criteria. But there is more: there also seems to be a shift in doctrinal content. For it is not clear whether the essential subject matter for Christian doctrine is God, or our response to God.

This brings us back to the question of the nature of theological language. Does it have an ontological reference, or is it only about human experience? When we talk about the Resurrection, for instance, are we talking about an event in which God actually raised Jesus from the dead? Or are we actually only talking about our response to Christ? That is, is it legitimate to interpret the Resurrection in terms of a "new perspective upon life," opened by the life of Christ, even if we do not believe Christ was raised in his body?

It is my judgment that the Discipline leaves the way open for such reductionistic interpretations of classical theological affirmations. If this conclusion seems overdrawn, let us recall that the central question in this phase of our discussion is how Christian naturalism can be considered a viable theological option. If naturalism is to be called "Christian," it must affirm Christian doctrine in some sense. Since traditional Christian doctrine is simply incompatible with naturalism, it can only be possible for naturalism to affirm some version of Christianity which interprets supernatural elements in a reductionistic way.

59
But what becomes of the identity of the Christian message if supernatural events are given a reductionistic interpretation? Is there enough continuity between the Nicene Creed and Christian naturalism that we can say the identity of the Christian message is maintained in the latter?

The only way it seems possible to maintain continuity here is to argue that the identity of the Christian message is other than has been believed in traditional theology. It has been believed, for instance, that the bodily Resurrection of Christ is essential, whereas it now appears that the really essential thing is the new perspective on life which Christ opened up. If this is admitted, it can be held that there is continuity between traditional theology and Christian naturalism, for traditional theology, while insisting on the Resurrection as a factual event, would agree that the Resurrection of Christ opened a new perspective on life. In traditional theology, having a new perspective on life is a consequence of believing in the Resurrection, but believing in the Resurrection cannot be reduced to having such a new perspective on life. Reductionist theology, on the other hand, wants to keep the consequence of believing in the Resurrection while rejecting the Resurrection itself.

But notice what has happened to the concept of continuity here. Modern interpretations have become decisive in defining continuity in place of traditional understandings. In other words, continuity is said to exist not because modern theologies agree with traditional theology in identifying essential Christian doctrines, but because traditional doctrines have been interpreted in ways compatible with modern viewpoints.

In short, we must redefine what it means to maintain the “continuity and identity of the Christian message” if we are to accept Christian naturalism as a legitimate expression of that message. And this in turn requires an understanding of pluralism different from that which is based on the notions of identity and continuity which we discussed in the preceding sections.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, let us note that the Discipline affirms at least three distinct understandings of theological pluralism: (1) that of Wesley in his sermon “Catholic Spirit”; (2) that different verbal statements
THEOLOGICAL PLURALISM

can express the same truth; and (3) that all doctrinal opinion is viable.

This third understanding of pluralism is far more sweeping in its claims than the first two. It permits not only different verbal expressions of Christian truth and different theological emphases, but even radical disagreement as to what is ontologically true at the very foundations of Christian doctrine. Thus it is not surprising that the Discipline draws no clear distinction between theological pluralism and doctrinal pluralism. In the final analysis, both are given full license. What this ultimately means is that the identity of the Christian message is left an open question.

At the outset of this essay, I raised the question of whether pluralism is as confused a notion as its critics have charged. In view of our preceding discussion, I think we are constrained to admit that the charge of confusion is fully justified. This means the United Methodist Church is characterized by enormous theological variety, but we have no clear rationale for it. It is not even clear what we mean by pluralism, let alone whether it is a sound idea. Stephen Sykes frames the issue this way:

A Christian Church which is aware of a wide variety of diverse theological positions and which deliberately decides not to adopt one of them, but rather to tolerate diversity, still has to offer a definite reason for doing so and to justify that reason in the face of objection. . . . Toleration of diversity itself needs to be justified theologically if it is to be able to claim any kind of integrity. 22

Thus, it is a pressing challenge for United Methodism not only to define pluralism more clearly, but also to justify it theologically.

NOTES

1. The terms theological pluralism and doctrinal pluralism are used interchangeably in this paper. While there is reason to argue that the two are not the same, the Book of Discipline uses both terms, with no apparent distinction in mind.

2. James V. Heidinger II, for instance, argues that pluralism has never received adequate definition and, as a result, “great confusion lingers about the real meaning of theological pluralism” (Good News [May-June 1982]: 37). See also Paul A. Mickey’s comments on the “confusion over the limits of pluralism” in Essentials of Wesleyan Theology: A Contemporary Affirmation (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), pp. 22-23.


4. John Wesley, Works (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979; rpt. of 1872 ed.), 5:53. Subsequent references to the sermon in this section are also to this volume and will be indicated by the page number in parentheses.

61
5. The notion, expressed in the definition, that theological diversity is ultimately a matter of different verbal expressions is recognized by Wesley in some of his other writings. He argues that, in many cases, theological controversies are at bottom primarily a matter of different parties using different words, language, and modes of expression. See, for example, his comments in his sermon, "The Lord Our Righteousness" (Works, 5:234-36).


7. Patrick Sherry, Religion, Truth and Language Games (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1977), p. 175. According to Sherry, there is a tradition for these two senses of truth, going back to Plato.


9. Perhaps it should be pointed out that philosophers often distinguish between sentences and statements. To cite Richard Swinburne: "Sentences are words strung together in conformity with the rules of grammar . . . However, a meaningful sentence is to be distinguished from what it expresses . . . Different sentences may make the same statement, and the same sentence on different occasions of its use may make different statements" (The Coherence of Theism [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977], pp. 13-12). If this distinction is recognized, it appears that the word statement in the Discipline definition of pluralism means "sentence."


12. Divine Revelation and the Limits of Historical Criticism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 91. Abraham's entire volume is a very important work bearing on these issues, especially chapter 4, "Divine Action and Mythology." To hold a factual understanding of the Christian tradition is not to assume that all theological language is of this type. As Abraham says, it would be "inertive and unimaginative" to think all discourse about divine action is "factual and explanatory" (p. 90). The language of poetry, symbol, etc., must obviously be taken into consideration in any full-blown account of theological language. It has not been my purpose to provide such a full-blown account, but only to highlight the basic contrast between those who accept traditional creedal affirmations as factual, and those who do not.


14. Perhaps it should be pointed out that philosophers often distinguish between sentences and statements. To cite Richard Swinburne: "Sentences are words strung together in conformity with the rules of grammar . . . However, a meaningful sentence is to be distinguished from what it expresses . . . Different sentences may make the same statement, and the same sentence on different occasions of its use may make different statements" (The Coherence of Theism [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977], pp. 13-12). If this distinction is recognized, it appears that the word statement in the Discipline definition of pluralism means "sentence."


17. "Knowledge, Myth, and Corporate Memory," in Believing in the Church, p. 65; emphasis as in original.

18. Thus it may be legitimate, as suggested in note 1, to distinguish between doctrinal pluralism and theological pluralism; for legitimate theological pluralism must rest on essential doctrinal unity (compare Deuelos, p. 19). This is not to suggest, however, that in all cases we can draw simple and clear-cut distinctions between doctrine and theology.

19. See my essay, "Examining the Case for Pluralism," Asbury Seminarian 38:4 (Fall 1983), especially pp. 24-29. I argue that this passage represents an incoherent position.

20. I do not mean to suggest that all liberation theology is rooted in classical orthodox theology. Much of it is not. But my point is that it can be, and when it is, there is no reason to doubt that it is a legitimate expression of Christian truth.


62
CHRISTIAN COLLECTIVE ACTS: A MATTER OF CONSCIENTIA

RACHEL M. McCLEARY

Our individual, personal choices have global significance—but can we appeal to that depreciated concept, conscience, for understanding this relation?

The food we eat, the cars we drive, the number of children we have are matters of personal choice. We believe it is our right, and not simply a privilege, to choose the life-style we want to live. But we cannot overlook, in planning our epicurean delights and driving our Cadillacs, that the freedom of personal choice we enjoy in large part, due to the efforts of others who grow coffee in Guatemala and pepper in Malaysia or who drill for oil in Nigeria. The products we purchase from companies such as Kellogg, Ralston Purina, and Exxon contain raw materials from around the world. But the flow of materials, both raw and manufactured, is not one-way from other countries to the United States. The products of American labor are also exported around the globe: rice to Korea, beef to Japan, wheat to Russia. A complex network of trade exists among the countries of the world, with materials being traded back and forth in a multidirectional flow. No matter where we live on this planet, our lives are interdependent and are becoming increasingly interdependent for survival.

José Míguez Bonino in his latest book, Toward a Christian Political Ethics, observes that societies cannot escape the modernization of their cultures. It is an inevitable consequence of developments in science and technology. The introduction of electricity, automobiles, and skyscrapers to developing nations weaves a complex...
The freedom of personal choice we enjoy is, in large part, due to the efforts of others who grow coffee in Guatemala and pepper in Malaysia or drill for oil in Nigeria.

foods we eat, the number of electric gadgets we use, take on a larger social significance. "The transistor radio made in Korea, which I buy at a low price, involves the low salary of the workers, the repressive regime in Korea, Japanese economic policies, American capital (which may even include investment funds of the churches), unemployment in my own country, and problems which will involve my children and grandchildren." In the rest of this essay I will focus on what the phrase "collective acts" means. We will see that acting collectively is different from joining a baseball team or becoming a school board member. Bonino's notion of collective acts has important implications for the task of formulating a Christian response to an increasingly technological world where the modernization of our societies is occurring at the expense of the quality of human life.

Bonino's claim is that all our acts become collective acts. He defines a collective act as one that cannot be performed "in an individualistic and isolated way but only collectively through structures of responsible participation." The first question to consider is, Does global interdependence make all our acts collective acts? When I eat an orange or dress myself in the morning, I perform these acts without the aid of others and also not in conjunction with others. When I buy a candy bar or close my eyes in prayer, I perform these acts in an "individualistic and isolated way." It is obvious, then, that not all the acts I perform are going to be collective acts. But let us look at what is involved in some of the personal choices we make. Assume I am hungry for a chocolate bar. To fulfill my craving, I walk to the store and purchase the candy bar. In order for me to be able to buy a candy
bar, the candy company must produce candy bars and my local grocery must stock them. Furthermore, the candy company imports cacao beans from South America and sugar from the Caribbean. My personal choice is dependent upon a complicated chain of supply and demand involving growers in South America and the Caribbean, processors of cacao beans and sugar cane, the candy company, the truckers who carry the candy bars to their destinations around the nation, my local grocery, and my desire (demand) for the candy bar. Nonetheless, when I decide to fulfill my craving for chocolate, I act alone and not in concert with others. It is precisely because each one of us has a mind of her or his own that a distinction between personal acts and collective acts can be made. We are independent, autonomous persons who can, and do, act without consulting others.

So far, Bonino’s claim has not held up in the face of our criticism. But there is another sense in which it is true that “all our acts become collective acts.” Roger Shinn has developed the notion of a “forced option” which, I think, leads us to understand the sense in which Bonino means that all our personal acts are social acts. Consider the following two imaginary situations, both of which involve forced options:

1. You are the president of a company that manufactures women’s apparel. Your company is having difficulty competing with other manufacturers and you find your company in serious financial trouble. You must decide between keeping your factories in the United States or moving the company to Hong Kong where labor is cheaper. Substantial initial expenses will be required for the move. But if you do not move, in all likelihood the company will go bankrupt. Your decision, whatever it may be, is a forced option. The circumstances are compelling you to make a decision. Notice that if you decide to do nothing you have de facto decided.

2. You are a citizen of a powerful, industrialized nation. There are three major sources of energy available to you: fossil fuels, solar energy, and nuclear energy. Fossil fuels, petroleum being one of them, are limited resources whose cost of extraction from the earth is rising all the time. Coal, another fossil fuel, is in abundance in three major countries, the Soviet Union, the United States, and China. But the burning of coal, like that of all fossil fuels, pollutes the environment. Coupled with the difficulty and expense of extracting the fossil fuels from the earth, the pervasive use of fossil
As a citizen in an industrialized nation, your decision alone does not alter the outcome of the energy problem. The solution does not reside with one person but with the many.

fuels is not a feasible long-term option. By contrast, the use of solar energy does not produce harmful effects. But harnessing solar energy is an expensive proposition, and conversion to this energy source is difficult if you live in a large urban area where buildings are heated and cooled by gas and electricity. The switch from a petroleum-consuming society to one powered by solar energy requires a conscious change of life-style which you and your fellow citizens may not be prepared to make. Finally, nuclear energy, once thought to be the panacea, has proven not only to be expensive because of the reactors' reliance on scarce uranium but also to involve risks relating to the disposal of radioactive wastes and the safety of nuclear power plants. As a citizen of your country, you are faced with immediate decisions regarding your society's energy consumption.

The two imaginary forced options presented above are quite different from each other in one crucial respect. As president of a company your decision to move your company to Hong Kong can have direct bearing on the outcome of the situation. By choosing to move to Hong Kong you are lowering the risk of losing the company. Likewise, your decision to do nothing has a bearing on the outcome. You are leaving the outcome to chance and risking the loss of the company. In contrast, as a citizen in an industrialized nation your decision alone does not alter the outcome of the energy problem. You may convert your home to solar energy, choose to walk or bicycle, and do other things as well. But the solution to the energy problem does not reside with one person but with the many. The global forced option situations we face—overpopulation, hunger, and energy shortages—will be resolved only when people act collectively.

We can now properly interpret Bonino's phrase "all our personal acts become collective acts." Our personal acts become collective acts when (1) they are causally related to the quality of life of others whose acts are causally related to the quality of our
CHRISTIAN COLLECTIVE ACTS

lives; and, (2) when this two-way relationship is permanent. A prime example of how personal acts become collective acts is the famine which struck the Sahel region of Africa in 1974. A large number of people died and seven million survivors remain dependent upon foreign assistance for their survival. The famine occurred in a semidesert environment inhabited by nomadic tribes and farmers. Prior to the French colonization of the area in the nineteenth century, the various tribes had agreements on migratory patterns. These agreements allowed each tribe to have sufficient grazing areas for their cattle without depleting the supply of grass from year to year. The tribes also had arrangements with the sedentary farmers who exchanged millet for cattle manure. The French, who colonized West Africa, ignored the already existing social arrangements among the indigenous population of the area. Instead, they made the nomadic tribes settle into prescribed areas with their cattle. The farmers were introduced to cash crops such as peanuts and cotton which were exported to Europe. The effects of the westernization of this semidesert region were overgrazing, overpopulation by people and livestock, and the transformation of the land into desert through inadequate farming techniques and livestock management. The balance of the ecosystem, once maintained by the indigenous arrangements, deteriorated under foreign influence. When the drought occurred (between 1968 and 1974), there were no grain reserves with which to feed people or livestock.

The disaster in the Sahel region of West Africa was the product of a process that occurred over many decades. However, the time factor does not obliterate the causal relationship between the cultural patterns of Westerners and the famine. Although some people shrug their shoulders and say that it cannot be proved that consumer habits in Western industrialized nations are directly responsible for such disasters, we can identify the following diachronic and synchronic casual chains linking Western food consumption to this tragedy in West Africa: (1) Geographic boundaries were set up, limiting the migratory routes of the nomads and their cattle. (2) The introduction of cash crops and boreholes produced an economic change, permanently linking the economies of the Sahel region with France's economy. (3) The unchecked drilling of boreholes lowered the water table, contributing to the conversion of savannah areas to desert. (4) All the
while new areas were opened up for settlement without making changes in farming techniques and livestock management.

Prior to the famine in 1973, the countries of the Sahel were heavily dependent upon foreign exchange. Since the drought, Europe and other industrialized countries have been inconvenienced by the disaster in the Sahel but they have found other countries to supply them with the cash crops they need. Unfortunately for the Sahelians the apocalypse is now. They are devastated by loss of life, home, and self-respect.

We would not have collective acts unless people acted in unison. However, we can act in unison in a consciously coordinated fashion or we can act in an unplanned, spontaneous way. The disaster in the Sahel was in large part due to uncoordinated, unplanned acts. The personal aims of the colonizers resulted in collective acts that harmed rather than helped the region. The collective acts of the colonizers were performed without taking into consideration the life-styles of the indigenous population and the ecosystem of the area.

It is useful to distinguish between collective marketplace acts and coordinated collective acts. A collective marketplace act is the cumulative result of many individual, personal desires. Coordinated collective acts, on the other hand, are consciously planned in the hopes of minimizing harmful effects. Because the colonizers acted in an "individualistic and isolated way," their acts are collective marketplace acts.

When two or more people act in unison because they have full knowledge of the other's role or intentions or plans, they act in conscientia. The Latin term conscientia, from which we get our term consciousness, means having in common with others an awareness of certain knowledge. This is evidenced by the sci- in the middle of the word. Con- means "with," and so the combination denotes a joint knowing. To act in a consciously coordinated way, as in the third scenario, requires that we consider the intentions, plans, and desires of others when we deliberate about acting. Normally we do not include others' plans in our deliberation unless the person is a spouse or family member or a close friend, or unless we want to impress people or get a favor from them. To act in a considerate way entails focusing on others and not only on oneself. It requires perceiving oneself as a member of a community with no greater or lesser significance than any other member.
The future of humanity can be determined by collective marketplace acts or we can rely on one leader or a governing elite to decide our future for us. An alternative to both of these is for each one of us to act in conscientia by including our neighbors near and distant in our deliberations.

At this point, the skeptic might argue that there is nothing to compel us to change the types of personal choices we make. We can continue to act on our personal aims as long as the marketplace supplies what we demand. And, even if we include the interests of others in our deliberations, there is nothing to stop us from giving more weight to our own needs, especially when we are deliberating over how to distribute a scarce resource. To act, therefore, in conscientia does not necessarily mean to act fairly, to give equal weight to everyone’s interests.

The skeptic has missed the point. To act in conscientia entails more than taking into account the interests of others. It also requires acting with a conscience, a term which is also derived from the Latin term conscientia. The skeptic is right in that there is nothing compelling any one of us to change personal aims as long as the marketplace supplies what each demands. Nor are we required to consider the interests of others as being of equal value to our own interests. But, when we act in conscientia we act with moral knowledge. We act with a conscience.

Acting with a conscience is a judgment I make when I apply a general rule of morality to a particular situation. Conscience itself is not the authority of morality; rather, it is a vehicle for coming to know the principles of morality. It is a mode of consciousness. I know what morality requires of me because I appeal to my conscience. I am attentive to its judgments. But in reaching a judgment of conscience I must also pay attention to the circumstances I find myself in. Since my action takes place within a particular situation I must have the clarity of insight to perceive that this case falls under the moral rule. Only by paying attention to both the general rule and the particular situation at hand can I ensure the rightness of my action.

According to Paul, Christian love is rooted in “knowledge and insight of every kind, which may teach you by experience what is most worth while” (Phil. 1:9-11). Christians, acting out of conscience, do more than what is morally required of them. They act with Christian love. Their awareness of moral law grows hand
in hand with their love. This process of growing awareness is what Bonino calls the process of "conscientization." It is a heightening of consciousness through Christian love. It is now clear why it is a Christian imperative to act in conscientia. Neither the scarcity nor abundance of food, shelter, and clothing will ever force people, like our skeptic, to consider the needs of humanity.

NOTES

HOMILETICAL RESOURCES:
EXEGESIS OF FOUR PROPERS
FOLLOWING PENTECOST

JAMES C. LOGAN

The following homiletical resources focus primarily upon the Hebrew Bible lessons as prescribed by the Common Lectionary. Some explanation is in order to clarify why these widely varying passages (one from Wisdom literature, two from the Pentateuch, and one from the Prophets) have been selected for these particular Sundays after Pentecost.

We are presently in a trial period in the use of the Common Lectionary. The structure of the Christian year according to the lectionary consists of three basic components: the two seasons of Advent-Epiphany (centering on Christmas), Lent-Pentecost (centering on Easter Day), and Ordinary Time (the Sundays falling between these liturgical axes). In the two christological seasons the readings have been selected on the basis of "thematic harmony" and "semi-continuous reading of the gospel." The Hebrew Bible readings have, therefore, the character of "preparation for" or "anticipation of" their fulfillment in the New Testament lessons. One generally discovers, therefore, an underlying unity in all three of the lessons for these seasons.

On the other hand, in the intervening Ordinary Time no unifying theme necessarily connects Epistle, Gospel, and Hebrew Bible lessons. The passages from the last have generally been selected, though, because they have some typological or harmonious relationship with the Gospel lesson.

To attempt to find unifying themes can result in cases of forcing texts to say something not inherent in the texts themselves. To avoid this error, I

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Lections in these homiletical resources follow those provided in Common Lectionary: The Lectionary Proposed by the Consultation on Common Texts (New York: Church Hymnal Corp., 1983).
have chosen to focus primarily on the Hebrew Bible lessons, which were
selected in the light of the Markan lesson.
For still a very different reason, I have made this choice of focus, and that
is to counter an almost inherent tendency of Christians to be Marcionites in
their selection of scriptural texts: somehow, because the New Testament
documents deal directly with the revelation in Jesus Christ, we feel that the
other Scriptures occupy a subordinate position in relationship to the New
Testament. We subscribe theoretically to a whole canon and yet practice a
two-level canon! Not many years ago among one of the questions phrased
for members being received into church membership in the former
Methodist Church was, “Do you receive and profess the Christian faith as
contained in the New Testament of our Lord Jesus Christ?” (Thanks to
theological scrutiny we have now corrected the question behind which
lurked the shadows of Marcion!) Further, the preacher critically examining
the primary texts employed for “Sunday-in, Sunday-out” proclamation will
likely echo James Smart’s lament for “the strange silence of the Bible in the
church” with a similar lament for “the strange silence” of the Hebrew Bible
in the pulpit. Yet, Wisdom literature, for example, is in the same canon as
Pauline Epistles. I do not claim that every word contained in Scripture is
necessarily on the same authoritative level as every other word (after all,
cultic laws and genealogical tables are not on the same level of import as the
announcement, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us”). But,
happily, a correct theological and hermeneutical grasp of the whole canon
shows that we do not have to choose one testament over the other.

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 1985
Job 42:1-6

Few persons in any congregation will know much more about the story
of Job—his struggles, sufferings, questions, and final vindication—than a
familiarity with the often repeated quote, “the patience of Job.” Fewer
still will know anything at all of the problematic history of literary
analysis, exegesis, and sequential reconstruction which the book has
endured at the hands of scholars. Yet for the preacher to get to the heart of
this particular text from Job, a knowledge of the overall structure of the
book is required; the isolated text by itself is not sufficient for an accurate
interpretation.  

Few books of the Hebrew Bible have been subjected to such minute
scrutiny as has this book. Prior to World War I, when source criticism and
documentary hypotheses fascinated biblical scholars, Job provided a
literal mine for radical analysis. Analysts virtually “picked it apart,”
almost verse by verse and piece by piece. In more recent times, however,
equipped with a considerably enriched knowledge of ancient Middle Eastern wisdom literature (particularly Babylonian), scholars have increasingly come to see the work as a basic unity with an overarching architectonic structure rather than the "bits and pieces" collage of the earlier period.

Norman Snaith, after careful exegesis of the book, offers the conclusion that the entirety of the book is basically the work of one author. The author has taken the basic story through many editions and additions, leaving the text as we now have it. Snaith's analysis reveals that there is a "first edition" which forms the basic story. This "edition" consists of:

- A shortened prologue (1:1-2:10)
- Job's apology (3, 29-31)
- Yahweh's speeches (38-39; 40:6-41:34)
- Job's apology (40:1-5) with Yahweh's further reply (40:6-41:34)
- Job's humble submission (42:1-6)
- Epilogue (42:7-17)

This outline suggests that the author was probably inspired by the story of the so-called Babylonian Job. In subsequent editions the author added the story of the three friends and the cycles of their speeches, the wisdom poem of chapter 28, and the speeches of Elihu (32-37). Although the insertion of additional material into the basic story creates some internal tensions regarding certain theological themes, the basic story is nevertheless enriched by the subsequent "editions."

Snaith claims that the underlying theme of the book is not the problem of suffering. Usually interpreters have claimed that the book is a work in theodicy (a philosophical or theological attempt to defend or justify the goodness of God in the face of the seeming senselessness of evil, generally suffering, in the world), but on closer examination it is clear that the book is no theodicy. In the speeches of Yahweh (chaps. 38-39; 40:6-41:34) no mention, much less defense, of human suffering is offered. It is more accurate to say that the problem of Job is the problem of the "absence of" or "silence of" God, or in Snaith's words, the author's "main problem is the problem of the transcendent God. Has this God anything at all to do with this world of men and their affairs? How can mortal man ever get into touch with this High God? How can the High God ever be imminently concerned with the affairs of man?"

Seen in this perspective, the message of Job embraces a wider segment of humankind—both those who suffer and those who watch while others suffer; those who experience meaninglessness and those who are afraid to risk experience because they may be confronted with meaninglessness; those who try to rationalize the distance of God but whose words serve
only to indicate the distance between themselves and other members of
the human family (Job's "friends"); even those who cannot utter a word
because fear of the absence has already paralyzed them into a deadly
silence. The experience of "God-forsakenness" lurks in the deep recesses
of human life. What better way is there to deal with this universal
experience than to bring it to light by telling a story? Propositional
statement is not the most adequate way to express this experience.
Homiletically, the Job text cries out for a narrative sermon.

The story begins with a description of Job, a wealthy, God-fearing
sheik. Satan challenges God with the claim that were Job to fall from his
happy circumstances, he would curse God. Accepting the challenge, God
consents to the testing of Job. Job loses his wealth, his animals, his
servants, and even his sons and daughters. His house collapses. Satan
even inflicts all kinds of physical suffering on Job. (If the author had
intended the story to perform the task of a traditional theodicy, there
would be no need to read further than the beginning of this story: God
tests Job to determine the integrity of his righteousness. That theodicy is
not the author's intent is borne out by the remainder of the story.)

Enter Job's three "friends." *Friends* must be put within quotation marks
because they are not really friends. They cannot enter into Job's experience.
They can approach it only from "the outside." Their pat answers indicate
this. Even seven days of sitting with Job will not suffice to make them
sensitive to the real plight in which Job finds himself. Their answers are the
cold, external, orthodox reasoning of the theological tradition.

First answer: Suffering is the consequence of sin (4:7-8, 8:20, 20:4-5).

Job rejects the pious theological language of his "friends." The answer
may seem a perfectly rational one. Righteousness equals prosperity;
unrighteousness equals deprivation. Job, however, knows better: "Why
do you, like God, pursue me? Why are you not satisfied with my flesh?"
(19:22).

Second answer: Suffering is pedagogical. It helps us to mature (5:17).

Eliphaz is the "friend" who expresses this answer the clearest.
Although this answer probably in Job's case has more merit, it still does
not really speak to Job's situation. Why should Job, a righteous man by
the law, need further education?

Neither of the two answers applies satisfactorily to Job's situation. He
would make his own defense before God. Job has even challenged God to
such a meeting. (See 13:15, 24.)

Elihu appears and really adds nothing of significance to what the earlier
visits of the "friends" have contributed. But storm clouds begin to form,
and the wind begins to blow stronger. Out of the whirlwind comes the voice of the One for whom Job had cried. (The wind is frequently the medium of God's meeting with human beings, as was the case at Pentecost [Acts 2:2].) But now Job finds that rather than interrogating God, he is the one interrogated. In fact, in such rapid order come the questions that Job has only the opportunity to stand and listen.

In the first question we find a summary of all that God has to say in what some have called the longest sermon in scriptural history!

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind:

"Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" (38:1-2).

Job's fundamental problem is his presumption in measuring the righteousness of God in terms of his own righteousness. Give Job his due credit: he has kept the law! But in those moments when God seems far away in the awful depths of divine silence, we, like Job, seek to justify ourselves by our law-keeping record. The truth of God, however, cannot be contained in propositional proofs and neat little syllogisms, nor within the limits of the human imagination. Taking refuge in our righteousness, however correct the assessment of our righteousness may be, always results in our trying to remake God in our own image.

In response to God's absence, we, like Job, often call upon God and demand that God justify the divine silence to us. Our human righteousness, however, cannot coerce God to cross the distance, to break the silence, to compensate for the absence. In the midst of the divine interrogation Job is brought to the moment of crisis, and his words form our text.

"I know that thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of thine can be thwarted. . . . Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. . . . I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees thee; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42:2, 3, 5-6)

A fundamental reversal has occurred in the narrative. The questioner has now become the questioned. To accept the reversal from being the questioner to being the questioned is to repent, to have a fundamental change of mind and will, to experience a radical change in perspective. More fundamental than sin against the law is the sinful condition of living over against God, always demanding that God conform to our
expectations. Job's fundamental repentance consists in turning from
dependence upon self-righteousness to faith in the unfathomable
righteousness of God. Therefore the real story of Job does not take place
in the courts of heaven where it begins in the prologue, nor in the dust
and ashes of the fields of Uz where Job contends with both his visitors and
with God. Ultimately the story takes place in the heart of Job. Once he had
known of God by the hearing of the ear, but now he sees God!

The dreaded distance between humankind and God had been bridged
the only way it could be—not with Job rising up in righteousness to God
but in God's coming into the plight of Job. Job does not receive an answer
which matches his question; he receives a presence which matches his
condition. The defensive hiding in legal righteousness does not supply a
human antidote to the silence of God. Nor can self-righteous protests
manipulate God to break the silence or to cross the gulf. Only a God of
grace can bridge the chasm between defensive human righteousness and
the righteousness of God. The presence of God is sheer grace.

Grace, however, always evokes a response. If grace means basically
"gift," then the gift must be received. Job's response to grace is to assume
the responsibility for his attempt to establish himself in his own
righteousness. To reverse this orientation of one's life is to repent. In
short, the story of Job is not so much a theodicy as a narrative sermon on
justification by grace through faith.

If only God would give us an answer! Any answer! But rather than
answering, God calls our very condition into question. This is exactly
what is accomplished in the other story of the silence of God, told in the
Gospels of the New Testament. This time not Job, but the suffering Son of
Man is tried on trumped-up charges, is led through experiences of the
lowest of degradation, and finally is taken to the cross. Through it all,
God seems to be distant and silent. No word of God breaks the silence
between the intermittent calls of derision. God does not raise a voice of
protest when the nails are driven into the hands and feet. Only a voice
calling from the cross is heard, "My God, my God, why hast thou
forsaken me?" Here is the supreme hour of God-forsakenness. Dumb
nature withdraws its lights, and there is "darkness over the whole land."

Yet in this hour of divine silence the unsurpassable miracle of divine
grace takes place. Behind the silence God is actualizing the divine plan for
all the Jobs of this world. In the darkest night of human history when God
says not a word, God accomplishes the work of redemption. When God
had seemed most remote and the divine silence had bordered on the
intolerable, paradoxically God was drawing near—nearer than ever to the
human condition.

When Christ took upon himself the God-forsakenness of this Job-like
world, the only real answer to Job's situation was finally given. Job's
defensive self-righteousness must die for the divine answer to be real for him. His own achievement reports have to be buried; his own pride has to face a Damascus Road surrender. Job’s condition of self-made righteousness, more serious than suffering without an answer, has to die the death of repentance. In the silence of that death the divine presence of grace is seen as the only real answer to the Jobs of this world. The God who takes away our guilt will in the end hear our anguished cries of suffering. But in the realm of grace, first things first.

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 6, 1985

Genesis 2:18-24

Our text from Genesis is taken from the second of the two accounts of the creation and describes the creation of woman. The last verse of the text is the focus of the lesson from Mark in which Jesus deals with the questions of marriage and divorce. Together, the two lessons offer illuminating perspectives on relationships between men and women, and between human beings and God.

In literary style the second account of creation (Gen. 2:4-25) stands in marked contrast to the first account (Gen. 1:1-2:3). As is well known, the first account comes from the priestly (P) tradition and is liturgically poetic, making use of the Hebrew literary devices of parallelism and repetition. The second account, from the Yahwist (J) tradition, is cast in the form of a simple narrative. The literary differences do not obscure the theological unity of the two accounts. In the P version the creation of man and woman occurs on the last day of creation, emphasizing that the creation of human life marks the completion of the created order. In the J version the creation of man and the creation of woman are separate acts (the first recorded in verse 7, and the second not until verse 18), but together they form the theological center of the story. Once the complementary pair are on the scene, the Yahwist brings to a conclusion the J account of creation. The theological congruity between the P and J versions is the truth that humankind is the consummate expression of God’s creation. Man and woman, Adam and Eve, will be the central figures in the drama of God and the created order because the human creatures stand in that special relationship with God which is “respondability” and hence responsibility. In Tillich’s words, “Man is man because he is able to receive a word from the dimension of the eternal.”

Gen. 2:4b opens the story by using the term Yahweh for God for the first time in the sequential order of Scripture. This is not without crucial theological importance. Yahweh is the God of the covenant. Most biblical interpreters concur that in Israel’s faith development, covenant preceded
Covenant faith, therefore, is the theological context for creation faith. Apart from the covenant there would be no theological answer to the question, Why did God create? God created precisely because in divine freedom and love the living God willed a living relationship with that which is other than God. In short, God willed covenant, and because God willed covenant, God willed creation. Karl Barth saw clearly the bond between creation and covenant when he wrote, “The covenant is the internal ground of creation... [and] creation... the external ground of the covenant.”

The placement of creation within the context of covenant is not without theological significance for the interpretation of our text. In our modern culture questions of purpose and meaning with regard to marriage are often curtailed or obliterated. Marriage is a relationship rooted in both the Creator’s command and the Creator’s covenant. As the covenant is a relationship between God and humankind of the most intimate and inclusive nature, so marriage is also a covenant relationship of the most intimate and inclusive nature between a man and a woman standing in responsible relationship with the God of the covenant—the One who has created this very possibility of two persons becoming one.

Our text opens with God taking counsel in the court of God’s own mind regarding an appropriate partner for the man whom God has created. We can glean two important theological insights at this point. First, in the act of naming the creatures the man occupies a position of superiority over them; they are subordinate to him. More precisely, they are under his supervision. Throughout Scripture, the human creature has custodial responsibility for the other creatures. But the responsibility is a derived one, not an autonomous one. God is still the Creator.

Second, the creatures under the supervision of the man and subordinate to him are thus not qualified candidates to be partners for the man. Only one who is of the same nature (ontological status) as the man can be the partner. Dominion does not properly apply to the human-to-human relationship. When we come to the relationship between human and human, between male and female, another kind of relationship is required. When humans attempt to extend the dominance appropriate to the other creatures over other human beings, they forget the derived or delegated nature of their responsibility. Thus the intentions of God in creation and covenant are violated.

God’s counsel continues. “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him” (2:18). A remarkable episode follows. God causes a deep sleep to fall upon the man (2:21a). This is the author’s way of preparing the reader or hearer for another act of divine creation. Human eyes cannot witness the creative activity of the Creator; in the final analysis, the creative activity of God is inscrutable. This, however, is
not the only theological significance of the “deep sleep.” The “deep sleep” indicates that the man does not play a part in the act of creation. The creation of woman as well as the creation of man is a divine action pure and simple.

In the history of the church probably more attention has been paid to the rib in this divine operation than to any other part of the human anatomy! Too much has been made of Adam’s rib. After all, it is not the “rib” which constitutes the ontology (being) of woman. The status of being depends upon the creative activity of God. One must say this even in the face of the derivation of ishshah (“woman”) from ish (“man”). The linguistic derivation serves not so much to emphasize the dependence of the woman upon the man, but rather to underscore the essential and relational similarity of the two. Charles Cochrane put it this way: “The formation of the woman from the rib of the man signifies that she is ‘of’ the man and ‘for’ the man; not in the sense that she belongs to him, but rather that she belongs with him. As the text makes abundantly clear, she is brought before him as God’s gift, not as his possession.” The similarity of being is underscored by the man’s exclamation of joy in the goodness of what has occurred: “At last . . . bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” The similarity of being does not deny real differences. Sexually they are different—male and female. Yet they are intended for relationship, not property claims of one over the other. What is even more fundamental is that they are equally creations of God.

The foregoing drama is played out in a garden, and it is not accidental that the author provides such a setting. The garden exudes the goodness of creation and provides the context for a covenant of trust and well-being. The inextricable relationship between covenant and creation is graphically expressed here in the finale of the story of creation. The great Creator has formed them male and female, in the image of God, ish and ishshah, to be for and with each other in covenant relationship. As God is for and with humankind, so the man and the woman as reflections of the Creator are to be for and with each other.

After the “joyful meeting” comes the admonition of verse 24, which clearly states the goodness of sexual creation and covenant marriage. When in the history of the church it has been argued that marriage was given by God as a concession to human sinfulness and as a restraint upon human sexual drives, such an argument has plainly ignored the biblical account. The goodness of human sexuality is rooted in creation, and marriage is rooted in the command of the Creator God. It is the divine intention that the two who came from one shall in a new way be one again. “They shall be one flesh” (2:24). “Flesh” here means a unity of total being—not just humanness. This is strange arithmetic. One plus one equals one. But this is the divine math!
Insofar as the last verse of the Hebrew Bible lesson is the focal center of the Gospel lesson, the two lessons should be conjoined in the sermon. Probably the Christian church would not have emphasized the Genesis passage as it has if it not been the very arsenal which Jesus employed in exploding the cunning ploy of those who came to him in an attempt to trap him in a controversy. I will focus on Mark 10:2-12, which is the unit of the text dealing with the questions of marriage and divorce.

Few pastoral issues are more sensitive today than the issue of marriage and divorce. We should be careful to permit the text to say what it says, but we should at the same time be sensitive to the experiences of distress and pain of those of our parishioners affected by marriage break-up and family stress. The latter should not dictate the interpretation of the text, but unless the text is employed sensitively, misimpressions and additional hurt can be the result.

First, note the setting of the text, which follows immediately upon the second passion prediction pericope (9:30-50). On the way to Jerusalem Jesus, in typical Markan fashion, instructs his followers in the meaning of discipleship. Mark 8:27–10:52 forms one single block of material on discipleship. Jesus has urged peace among the disciples (9:50), and it is possible that verses 2-12 have been placed immediately after the teaching on peace among the disciples because few experiences provide the occasion for conflict as does the intimate relationship of marriage. In addition, it may also be that the teaching material between verses 2 and 31 has been arranged to deal with the three issues of most intimate concern in the practice of discipleship: marriage (vss. 2-12), children (vss. 13-16), and possessions (vss. 17-31).*

Mark 10:2-12 is cast in the form of a controversy story. Jesus is confronted with a direct question: “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” (vs. 2b). Although the question appears to be simple and innocent, behind it lies the controversy in Judaism over the interpretation of Deut. 24:1-4. According to F. C. Grant, “the school of Shamai was very strict in interpreting the ‘shameful thing’ (‘eruwaq dhabar) of Deut. 24:1 to mean infidelity, while that of Hillel was more lenient, and allowed divorce for even trivial offenses, e.g., ‘burning the bread.’”

Jesus, therefore, seems to be caught in an “either/or” dilemma. Whichever course of interpretation he takes will end in controversy. In effect however, Jesus transcends the intended controversy by re-examining its presuppositions. One presupposition accepted by all parties was that divorce was permissible. The protagonists disagreed only on the conditions. By distinguishing between the commandment of Moses and the commandment of God in creation, Jesus distances himself from all of his adversaries. Transcending one level of controversy, he places the fundamental issue on another level. “For your hardness of
heart be [Moses] wrote this commandment” (vs. 5). Jesus runs the risk of appearing to criticize the law of Moses! The issue, however, is more fundamental than law. The issue is God’s intent in creation. Quoting from both creation accounts (Gen. 1:27 and 2:24), he clearly indicates that marriage is not a human convenience, and therefore its real theological meaning cannot be contained in law. At best, the law is only provisional. The theological issue is not divorce but marriage. Marriage is grounded in the good intentions of God for creation. It cannot then be treated in a cavalier fashion. It is God’s intention that it be permanent.

No doubt today Jesus would call into radical question the modern cultural assumption that the foundation of marriage should be the emotion of love or physical attraction. In writing “A Wedding Sermon from a Prison Cell,” Dietrich Bonhoeffer was close to the intention of Jesus in this passage: “Marriage is more than your love for each other. There is a higher destiny and power, for it is God’s holy ordinance... It is not your love that sustains the marriage, but from now on, the marriage that sustains your love.”

Not only is the contrast between the law of Moses and the divine command of creation controversial to the ears of Jesus’ questioners; Jesus is also affirming the rights of women in marriage—rights the law of Moses and the general culture of his time did not permit. When Jesus forbids divorce and later (vss. 10-12) speaks of man committing adultery, he is in fact saying that women are not the property of males. In Jesus’ day adultery committed by males was always against another male, i.e., a violation of the other male’s marriage rights. Women were not considered the wronged party. This interpretation does not claim for Jesus the title of the “feminist theologian of the year.” Nevertheless, he takes a radical step in insisting upon equal rights in the marriage relationship. In this manner Jesus transcends the law of Moses and pushes the issue back to the radical implications of the command of God in creation.

If Jesus has a “high” view of marriage, does this mean that he institutes a still more rigorous legalism to safeguard marriage? On the basis of the Markan text the answer has to be no.

If the argument of Jesus shifts the ground of the question of marriage and divorce from law as a concession to human sin (and hence from a legalism), to creation as gift and grace, what are the consequences?
1. There can be no doubt that the message of the text declares that marriage belongs to the original intention of the Creator and hence is absolute and indissoluble. A new marriage constitutes adultery.

2. At the same time because marriage belongs to the original order of creation, it cannot be interpreted legalistically. In other words, Jesus is not enunciating a new law, a higher law, to supersede the law of Moses. His recourse to the doctrine of creation is the occasion for a call to repentance rather than the “laying-on” of a heavier burden of the law.

3. Human beings cannot take refuge in the fact that they keep the law of Moses. Such seeking of comfort in the law is really self-justification, and a feeble self-justification at that. After all, the law was given as a concession to human sin. The call to repentance is a call to all Christians to recognize how far all fall short of the Creator’s original intention. Conformity to the law is never enough and, therefore, no defense, because the law is not synonymous with the original intention of God.

4. The discrepancy between the conditional law and the original intention of creation, between the “law of concession” and the radical command of the Creator, serves to point to the deep cleavage in the present condition of creation, a cleavage illustrated by divorce but also with abundant evidences in other areas of human existence. This is to say quite simply that we are all involved in “original sin” (meaning the universality and pervasiveness of that which is contrary to creation) in one way or another.

5. The “additions” made to the Markan text (see Matt. 5:32 and 19:9) are representative of Jesus’ understanding of the tragic and precarious nature of human existence. Although these additions have the appearance of law, they provide no warrant for use as a cloak or cover-up of the real situation of human life. The nature of existence is that it is “split.” This split runs through the whole fabric of life. To attempt to cover this tragic condition with a “good conscience” because we have obeyed a conditional law is tantamount to an admission that there is no need for grace, for forgiveness, in short, for Jesus Christ himself.

6. A proper interpretation of the text requires that we see Jesus’ statement about divorce and remarriage not as a prescriptive law, but as a descriptive statement of the human condition against the backdrop of the goodness of God’s plan for humankind.

If law is not the basis of marriage, creation is! The conclusion follows that law is not the answer to problems of such serious and painful experiences as separation and divorce. Jesus is not lessening the standard for the life of discipleship. Indeed, the standard is the goodness of God’s creative command, “It is not good for man to be alone.”

7. In final analysis of the text we turn to its setting. Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem to face his passion. Only that which is done for us which we
could not do for ourselves can save us finally from the tragic nature of a
fallen world. Only the Word of grace, a cross and an empty tomb, a death
and a Resurrection will save us! The very setting and structure of the text
indicate that the message is grace, but not cheap grace, grace without
repentance, nor grace without discipleship (see the opening pages of
Bonhoeffer's *The Cost of Discipleship*). Nevertheless, the final Word of God
in Christ is grace, and without grace there is no possibility that "two" can
ever become "one," in any marriage.

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 13, 1985

Genesis 3:8-19

When the reader or hearer is confronted with this remarkable little
story of the first human couple, the temptation may be to look for its truth
in history, geography, or geology. Such is certainly not the intention of
the Yahwist. Scholars today generally date the story in its present form
(and generally Genesis 1-4) from the time of David or Solomon. The
Yahwist has collected the early traditions of Israel and put them in a
connected narrative form to be read and remembered as a confession of
the faith-experience of Israel. If we are to read and interpret these stories
(and particularly 3:8-19) correctly, we, too, should see them as the
confessional statement of Israel's faith-experience, and also as a narrative
illuminating our own faith. The Yahwist, therefore, is not interested in
the historical dating of a first man and woman; the Yahwist is interested
in the plight of humans in the ambiguities of history. The tragic plot of
humankind in history involves the intersection of two stories or, better,
an integrated narrative played out on two levels simultaneously. Our
pericope tells the story of God's purpose or intention for humankind. At
the same time, it is the story of our resistance to and unbelief in the story
of God. The God-story and the human-story intersect to provide the
necessary antithetical tension implicit in any good story.

Literary dictates are not the reason for this intersection. The story is not
fiction. The story is the existential story of the human race. The God-story
and the human-story intersect precisely because this is the character of
human existence in history lived in the presence of the living God. Israel
could tell the story and the Yahwist could repeat the story because it is
true! True for all of humankind. The truth cannot be verified by science,
historiography, nor archaeology. The truth is verified in our very
existence. Soren Kierkegaard was not the first to know that decisive truth
is always "subjective." The Hebrews knew this centuries before
Kierkegaard, and in fact he learned it from them. For this reason, the
story is "hinged" together with existential questions put by the serpent

83
and by God. It reflects the very character of our own life-stories. To live a life with God is to live a life which is constantly being called into question, into covenant, and into responsibility. One way, therefore, to exegete this text is to deal with the key questions in sequential order.

In order to understand the questions in our text we need to preface these with the question which occurs in 3:1b. The serpent said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?’” With this question deceit and temptation enter the Garden of Eden, a scene of harmony and peace.

This intrusion into the order of the goodness of creation appears at first to be innocent, almost to the point of naivete. On the surface it appears to be a question of inquiry: “Did God say . . . ?” Implicit in the question, however, is the deceit. It is not as though the serpent is inquiring, “Did you hear God correctly?” Nor is the question one of amazement, “Could God have said such a thing?” or “Could God have really meant what you heard?” Note particularly that the serpent does not repeat exactly or correctly the words of God stated in the earlier story. In Gen. 2:16-17 God said: “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.” Although the words of God and the question of the serpent have some parallel similarity, one ironic difference should not be overlooked. The ironic cunning of the serpent, in one sense mimicking the words of the Almighty, are couched in a question which cannot be easily answered with a simple yes or no. This is exactly the manner in which human beings, including ourselves, have experienced the power of temptation throughout history. Temptation comes to us most often cloaked in a question which on the surface does not lend itself to a yes or no answer. Temptation loves confusion and ambiguity because in the “fuzzy” zones our rejection of God and God’s purpose is not so obvious: Did Jesus really mean that we take him literally when he gave the summary of the law and the prophets? Wasn’t he “spiritualizing” the love of God and neighbor? We will go with him part of the way. Surely he didn’t expect us to take his words with radical seriousness! In effect these questions make Jesus and the demands of discipleship into matters of prudential ethics that we can handle without much personal cost and involvement. Temptation always lurks when we attempt to say things better than God has said them! This was the situation of the serpent and its question.

Because a rationalistic form of apologetics has frequently been foisted upon this simple story of temptation, some interpretive remarks are appropriate about the figure of the serpent. “Nowhere within this story or the Yahwist source as a whole is Satan identified as a snake. We have no textual grounds for reading this as a "Satan story." Second, the intention of the story is not to explain to us the origin of moral evil or sin;
created human freedom is the issue. In the story we are not provided the justification, any more than the woman was, to say "The serpent made me do it," or "Satan made me do it." What we should be concerned with is not the serpent, but the temptation in the words of the serpent: "a masterpiece of psychological shading" is the way von Rad puts it.15

The same applies to a rationalizing apologetics regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Nineteenth-century evolutionary thought led many to conclude that the act of disobedience was in itself of positive importance. Without the act one could not grow toward maturity or the development of conscience. The problem of moral growth from childhood to adulthood is an important modern issue, but that is hardly in the mind of the ancient storyteller. The theological intention of the story of the tree is to oppose two ways of existence: dependence upon God, and autonomy or self-will. We would prefer some theoretical and propositional treatment which would "let us off the hook" of concrete responsibility. But the Yahwist tells us a story so concrete that we cannot avoid its concreteness. It is the perpetual story of humankind—the story of you and me.

The episode with the serpent is the theological overture to the main story (3:8-19), whose dramatic structure is provided by the antithetical tension between "God's story" and the "human story." The critical turning points in this story are also questions. In this case the questions are God's questions, and in the light of these questions the tragic depth of the human situation is revealed.

God, walking in the garden in the cool of the day, calls out, "Where are you?" The response of the human couple is the universal human response before the Holy God: when God draws near, we run; when God calls to us, we evade. We are more comfortable with God the Answerer than with God the Questioner. Yet through the divine questioning the crisis of the human situation is brought to light. Note the progression in the human response: "I heard . . . I was afraid . . . I was naked . . . I hid . . . I ate . . . " (3:10, 13b). This progression reveals the stages of human alienation from God: fear, guilt, evasion, and admission. This is the ancient and modern story of human autonomy—the refusal to accept our created finitude.

The question, "Where are you?" calls humankind out of refuge in conscience before God the Questioner. The anxiety which breeds fear; the fear which makes us aware of shame; and the shame which leads us to hide from the questioning God—all tempt us to take refuge in individual conscience. In fact, it is conscience which tells us to fear. In Creation and Fall, Bonhoeffer wrote in commentary on this passage: "Conscience is not the voice of God to sinful man; it is man's defense against it." Out of disobedience arises conscience. The nemesis of autonomous conscience,
however, is the evercoming Word of God, which will not leave us to ourselves. No more than the first human couple can we hide in the garden—ancient or modern—nor seek refuge in autonomous conscience.

It is important to ponder the meaning of sin in this passage. The scriptural definitions of sin are various. In the New Testament the Greek word for sin means basically “missing the mark.” This is accurate, but sin means more than this. “The sinner is not merely an inaccurate marksman. Instead of aiming at the target, he deliberately chooses another target of his own.” Sin is not merely a transgression of a known law of God. It involves that deeper longing to be one’s own standard, to be the arbiter of right and wrong. This is the issue in our text. Transgression of the law is crime but deep within the act is the revolt against the law-giver. Sin is both crime or violation of law and treason or rebellion against the law-giver. Sin can never, then, be reduced merely to a matter of morality, and sin’s solution is never a new moralism. Sin is a theological term (with moral connotations and implications, to be sure), and, as a theological term (in contrast to a sociological definition), sin is first and always a revolt against God. The sociologist may call certain behavior antisocial or deviant; the lawyer may speak of law-breaking; the philosopher may write of immorality. The biblical kerygma, however, speaks of sin.

Sin is always that which harms, warps, distorts, and breaks our relationship with God. We are called by God's Word into an open situation where we can see ourselves for who we are, people without excuse, humans who cannot forever “cover-up.” In short, we are naked before God. Luther put it correctly when he said that we are all beggars before God. To try to avoid an open confrontation with God, i.e., to fear and to hide, is quite simply to turn more and more inward upon ourselves. The fearing and the hiding are worse than the eating, the disobeying, because in fear and hiding we take further refuge in ourselves. What refuge, however, it is! We by our own doing are thrown more and more upon ourselves.

The second question of God reveals the consequence of running and hiding from God. God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent beguiled me, and I ate” (3:13). With nothing but self in which to take refuge before the questioning God, humankind engages in the tactic of evasion and “passing the buck.” As a last resort the man and the woman attempt to escape from the framework of the story altogether. In effect this tactic amounts to denying the self, the very creation of the good Creator. This is the final tragic mark of sin. Sin ends in the attempt to hide oneself before the presence of God.

Such self-hiding might be the end of the story. God the Questioner, however, is a tenacious power. The questioning God will not let human beings escape from the scene. We may think of this pericope as a classic
narrative of the sinfulness of the human race. In one sense it is. As pointed out earlier, however, two stories intersect here: the human story of misery and the divine story of grace. When these two stories intersect, we are confronted with the irony of all ironies. It is, Bonhoeffer suggests, as if the great God says to humankind: "Just because you are a sinner, stand before me and do not flee." Francis Thompson's Hound of Heaven is in Eden! Wherever sin is, there also is divine grace. The creed puts it correctly. We do not confess belief in sin; rather, in the creed we confess our belief in the forgiveness of sin. The holy love of God in forgiveness is not indulgent, but always remedial, always working for a new creation. Yet grace without suffering, grace without responsibility, grace without conflict and struggle would not be grace but divine indifference. In Eden, as at Calvary, we meet the persistent holy God of Grace. Herein lies the gospel embedded in the Genesis story.

The story of the grace of divine persistence continues with the account of the consequences of revolt against God. The very fact that it is God who metes out the judgments upon the serpent, the woman, and the man indicates that God is still in control. The judgment against the serpent is theologically significant far beyond any mythological attempt to explain why the snake will crawl in the dust of the earth or why it will be the most feared and hated of all God's creatures. The judgment against the serpent reveals God's unalterable opposition to every form of temptation and sin. Because of the revolt against God a rupture has occurred which runs throughout the created order, radically disrupting its unity and harmony. The tragic result of revolt against God is division and over-againstness. The serpent is now situated over against humankind and humankind against the serpent. This is the first evidence of the rupture which is the consequence of disobedience.

Even here, however, there is the promise of divine grace. Strange promise that it is, promise nevertheless it is: "he [the seed of the woman] shall bruise your head [the seed of the serpent]." Precisely here lies the divine promise. Temptation and sin will not reign triumphantly. The persistent God will not rest until the breach in creation has been overcome and a new creation becomes reality. Early Christian commentators saw this promise from the perspective of the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The seed of the woman has been "bruised" even to the point of death. Yet, paradoxically, by suffering such a "bruise" of alienation and separation, the seed of the woman has mortally wounded the power of temptation (in whatever symbolic and figurative language we wish to express it).

"Pain in childbearing" is the judgment upon the woman. Further, the sexes, male and female, are now in tension with each other. Caution should be exercised at this point. Gen. 3:16b has nothing to do with
superiority of one sex over the other. In creation they, male and female, are in mutuality. Only in the condition of separation from God do we find the tension of dominance, one over the other. Creation in disorder is manifested in the tension now between male and female. The rupture in creation runs through human relationships as intimate as those between husband and wife.

Curiously but quite intentionally the curse against the man is first a curse upon the very dust from which the man had originally been created. The rupture in creation issues in a rupture between the good earth itself and humankind. The joyous scene of caretaking in Eden is replaced by the tragic scene of a cleavage between the ground and the man.

These judgments underscore the fact that sin is never simply an individual matter with consequences for the violator only. Sin is simultaneously deeply personal and inescapably corporate. The consequences of sin affect the whole created order. For this reason the Augustinian theological tradition, through Luther, Calvin, Wesley, and others, has tenaciously held that the root of sin is the universal and pervasive condition of alienation from God. Yet even in judgment of sin, God's story embraces the human story, telling us that the tragic fissures in creation cannot be overcome by human effort and strategy. Only God can bring a new creation to be.

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 20, 1985
Isaiah 53:7-12

Unlike the lections for most Sundays in Ordinary Time, the three lections for today do have a connecting thread. The New Testament lessons, Epistle and Gospel alike, follow the lectionary principle of "continuous reading." The lesson from Isaiah has been selected because of the reference in the Gospel lesson: "For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Appropriately the Epistle lesson focuses upon the "great high priest" who "in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning" (Heb. 4:15). The Isaiah passage consists of the final portion of the fourth of the so-called Servant Songs. The connecting thread is the message of the divine mission of redemption accomplished through God's solidarity with the human plight even to the point of suffering and death. In a derivative sense the lessons are also concerned with God's call to humankind to participate in the divine mission of redemption.

The historical setting of the text is Israel in Exile. The fall of Jerusalem had occurred in 587 B.C.E. at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar of the Babylonians. The Israelite nation was no more. Many of its peoples had
been scattered in captivity. The temple had been destroyed. No visible symbol existed around which the people's corporate identity could be galvanized. These historical circumstances are the setting for chapters 40-55. Most scholars have concluded that chapters 1-39 are pre-exilic and are from the hand of the prophet Isaiah of Jerusalem. The historical circumstances are so radically altered that most scholars claim different authorship for chapters 40-55; and since no prophet's name occurs within the context, the author has usually been designated as Second or Deutero-Isaiah.

We can, therefore, assume that the text before us in its present form comes from a time considerably after the fall of Jerusalem; more than likely the prophet addresses this message to the exiles during the time of Cyrus's rise to power. A baffled and despondent people are experiencing a crisis of faith and self-identity in the aftermath of the terrible events that Isaiah warned them would occur. Is there, now, a new word from the Lord?

The overarching message of Deutero-Isaiah is the salvation or deliverance of the people, as given in Isa. 52:1-2. This is the call of alert to the people. Then follows the announcement of God's salvific purpose in 52:7. But behind the message of salvation and implicit in that message is a call to and a theology of mission. The restored, or more exactly the renewed, Israel places the message of a "radical monotheism" within the context of the whole creation. Universality and the oneness of God form the core of the writer's theme of mission in 45:22-23b.

The renewed Israel has been chosen not for special privilege but for special responsibility. In quite simple terms, one could say that the true message of the prophet is "saved for mission." God is a God of universal grace who desires salvation for all the nations. The chosen ones are instruments of that universal mission (49:6).

Although the message of salvation was unquestionably a comfort to the exiled peoples, the call to universal mission must surely have stirred questions in their minds. What kind of election or chosenness was this? Clearly God was not calling for a new triumphalism. God's chosen ones are not called to reign over but to be "a light to the nations." The call is not for position but for service.

Within the context of this theology of mission are placed the Servant Songs. The Servant Songs have usually been identified as 42:1-4; 49:1-6; and 50:4-9, with the final and longer one appearing between 52:13 and 53:12. After careful literary comparison of the songs and the remaining body of the writing, scholars see little reason to agree with earlier conclusions that the songs were of different authorship. The Servant Songs may have come from the prophet's later years and may have been inserted into an already existing text. No compelling internal literary evidence, however, provides an obstacle to the claim of unitary
authorship of the whole. A reading of all four of the songs will be profitable for the interpretation of our text, though we concentrate here upon 53:7-12. At other times in Israel's history individual persons had been called "servants of God." Two themes in this theology of mission stand out with striking newness. First, a people and not just an individual have been called, and, second, the fulfillment of this call entails the role of a suffering servant.

The history of biblical interpretation has seen much debate about the identity of the servant. Some interpreters have attempted to identify the servant as a historical figure such as Moses or perhaps the prophet himself. Some interpreters have even claimed a relationship between the servant and Cyrus. Others have identified the servant as a future historical figure, perhaps from the line of David, who would restore the kingship, a messiah. Yet if Davidic expectations are the intention of the Servant Songs, a severe tension results. The suffering servant hardly fits this kingly role. More fruitful, however, is the suggestion that the servant refers to a corporate, redemptive remnant. To be sure, the servant is spoken of as an individual, but we have other biblical evidence of the use of the concept of an "ideal figure" or "corporate personality." This interchange of the one and the many has occurred before; Jacob, the one, is also Israel, the many. Perhaps, then, in the prophet's mind is the idea of corporate personality, a special group of God's faithful. In any event the identity is not nearly as crucial as the message.

If we are to understand the radical picture of the servant which our text presents, we need to hear the question posed in the opening of this chapter: "Who has believed what we have heard?" (53:1). So utterly contrary to human standards of expectation is the servant that "many were astonished at him—his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the sons of men" (52:14). It seems scandalous by the measure of human reason that God should act in history in such a manner. That the salvation of God should be revealed to the nations through one who is the lowest of the lowly staggers the imagination and causes human reason to stumble. Surely one chosen by God for such a high mission should bear better credentials! Oppressed? Afflicted? Killed? Buried with the wicked? Doesn't divine justice, to say nothing about plain common sense, demand quite the contrary of this?

The issue is not one of divine justice, and particularly not justice as we humans define it. God sets the stage according to a grand design which contradicts human expectation and almost defies human description.

What is at stake here is the salvation of the nations, not some abstract idea of justice. What is crucial is not human respectability but the divine initiative that goes so far as to identify with the fundamental condition of the human race.
Human reason, ancient and modern, is scandalized by the picture of the suffering servant. Ezekiel had depicted the exiles as a forlorn flock of sheep (Ezekiel 34). Now we are asked to believe that one "like a lamb that is led to the slaughter" will be God's answer to the Exile and the instrument of God's mission for the nations. What staggers the mind even more is the open admission, "Yet it was the will of the Lord to bruise him; he has put him to grief" (53:10a). How much more complicated can the plot get? Human reason can understand how at times persons may willingly assume suffering and be heroic. Heroism is a human virtue, though more talked about than actualized, but heroism is not the issue here. God willed the sufferings, grief, oppression, and even death of the servant who "opened not his mouth," who had "done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth."

This account of "the will of God" may appear to conflict with God's professed will to save. How can such a thing be accomplished when the hearts of the nations are so hardened? How can the defenses of a sinful human race be penetrated? How can sin be revealed for what it is—rebellion against God and inhumanity in the treatment of our sisters and brothers? How can human injustice be turned to justice? How can the shield of human pride be punctured and the human heart laid bare? These are radical questions, and only a radical answer will suffice.

God's radical answer is a deeply personal one. God calls a people. God calls a servant so attuned to God's saving will as to lay aside all earthly claims for acclaim and heroism. God calls a servant who will vicariously enter into the human situation and, so to speak, from the inside work God's will for salvation. The text shows us that so dire is the situation that only a sinless substitute for the human race will suffice to set things right: "he makes himself an offering for sin" (53:10b). The human race has victimized itself, and its sin has insulated itself from God. Only a sin-bearer can liberate those who are so locked into themselves that they cannot escape. Only a vicarious "intercession" (53:12c) can save us. The efficacy of the intercession is righteousness, i.e., right relationship (53:11b). 20

These words were addressed to a historical people living in a specific historical time. Can they speak to us centuries later? Can they speak to the modern popular religion which sees salvation as a possession to be enjoyed rather than a responsibility to be lived for the sake of the world? Can they register with conviction in a time when "born again" language frequently seems to indicate the terminal point rather than the beginning point of a new life? Can they pierce the citadels of our modern churches who have made themselves the object of mission rather than the instrument of mission? Can they offer the answer to a church which has lost its sense of identity because it has lost its sense of mission? And
"when the chips are down," can we in our puffed-up, autonomous pride receive something done for us which we could not do for ourselves? These are not rhetorical questions. They are indicators of our age, of our churches, and of ourselves.

We should not hasten to give too quick an answer to these questions. This passage from Deutero-Isaiah should be interpreted, first, in its own historical setting. We need to hear the foreignness of the words of the text before we can gain familiarity with them. We should, therefore, avoid the temptation to "christologize" the Servant Song too quickly, and above all, we should avoid any predictive interpretation of the Servant Song. That would be foreign to the prophetic tradition itself.

Yet, we seek an answer to the questions. Is there a word for our condition? As Christians we read and interpret Isa. 53:7-12 in double focus or perspective. First, we read from Isaiah to the New Testament. Doing so, we become aware of the tremendously formative influence which Deutero-Isaiah had on the early church. No parts of the Hebrew Scriptures were drawn upon more than Deutero-Isaiah. In the stories of the baptism of Jesus (Matt. 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22) use is made of Isaiah 42:1. In fact there is striking parallel between the manner in which God presents the servant and the manner in which God presents the Son. Various quotations from Deutero-Isaiah, and particularly the Servant Songs, are found on the lips of Jesus. The story of the Ethiopian’s meeting with Philip states that the inquirer was reading some of the very words of our text (53:7-8; see Acts 8:32-33).

In New Testament circles much time and effort have been expended debating whether the early church interpreted Jesus in the light of the Servant Songs, or whether Jesus actually appropriated the suffering servant identification for himself and his ministry. It is an interesting debate. While there is no conclusive argument why Jesus should not have drawn upon his own tradition and Scriptures, one should also state that Jesus was not in the business of "proof-texting" his ministry. The inescapable fact is that whatever self-understanding he possessed, the very life he lived was one of self-giving servanthood. In his very being he was the One who came "not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

We also read Isaiah 53:7-12 in another perspective. We read from Christ to the Isaiah passage. Great care should be exercised in this regard lest we read "into the text" rather than read "toward the text" as our perspective is directed by the person and ministry of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ the Servant defines for us the nature of his being and authority.

It is not exclusively the suffering servant imagery and content which had appeal for both Jesus and the early church. Jesus announced the new age of God in which justice, righteousness, and mercy would be the
eschatological reality. The birds of the air would find nesting in the trees and people would come from the far corners of the earth. It is true that the major portion of Jesus' historical ministry was among his own people. Nevertheless, what was unavoidably implicit in his proclamation was the universality of the good news of God's new eschatological age. Following the Crucifixion and Resurrection, the culmination of Jesus' servanthood, the earliest church took the implicit universality and made it explicit. The Acts of the Apostles is the account of the universal mission of the church. Servanthood, universality of grace, and the eschatological reality of the new age are so embodied in Jesus Christ that though he was despised, spat upon, humiliated and crucified, the church could do no other than to confess him as its servant Lord.

The Christian church is the continuation of that servant-ministry of Jesus Christ. It is precisely here that those sons of Zebedee, James and John, issue a warning to the church today. In a real but embarrassing way they show us who we are. They came to Jesus, one asking to be the Secretary of State and the other wanted to be the Secretary of Defense in the new administration. Their ears had not caught the sounds, accents, and nuances of their Scriptures. They had not even heard Jesus correctly. His was the way of servanthood, suffering, and death. These disciples still had not heard that which by worldly standards is foolishness, the foolishness of self-giving mission and of servanthood.

The church is called into being by the One whom God sent "not to be served but to serve." By the standards of the world this is an insignificant story that underscores what the world considers to be weakness, but what in God's eyes is the strength of servanthood. Not by accident are the symbols of a despised cross, a bowl of water, and a towel central for Christians. They define who Christ is, and they define who we in Christ are called to be.

NOTES

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3. In preaching there is no purpose served in presenting even the briefest outline of this history of analysis. It is important, however, for the preacher to know something of this history in order to provide a basic structure of the story. This structure can be seen only by familiarity with some of the history of analysis of Job. The Jewish scholar Robert Gordis offers the most readable account of results of this scholarly pursuit. See The Book of God and Man: A Study of Job (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1965).

5. In rendering Job’s response in this manner I have reconstructed the text somewhat. Verses 3a and 4 are really interpolations into the text of material found elsewhere in Job. Vs. 3a is almost identical with 38:2. Vs. 4a should be compared for its similarity with 21:2 and 33:31. Vs. 4b is identical with 38:3b. The continuity of Job’s confession is really broken by these insertions. The intention, however, is that these verses should provide some corollary commentary on the main contours of the confession.


8. This is certainly not a continuation of the man’s speaking in vs. 23. One can only conclude that the J writer had added material here that is a commentary on what has gone before. Some scholars argue, however, that the origin cannot be in the J source, because such a gifted writer as J would not have interrupted the narrative in such an abrupt manner. They claim that vs. 24 is a later addition made to the J material.


14. By “rationalistic” I mean a type of interpretation which seeks to render a cohesiveness to a text by means of incorporating categorical interpretations not in the text as such. Such “rationalistic” interpretations can be “naturalistic,” as with the incorporation of evolutionary conceptualization. There is also a “psychologistic” form of interpretation which imposes upon the text a psychology not held by the biblical writers.


17. Bernhard Durham, in Israels Propheten (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1875), was one of the first to isolate these Servant Songs.


19. George A. F. Knight in Deutero-Isaiah (Nashville: Abingdon, 1965), p. 237, argues that this passage teaches a doctrine of vicarious sacrifice, but the sacrifice is not substitutionary. This position does not deal sufficiently with 42:1-“and he shall bear their iniquities.”

20. Note, however, that in the RSV the translation is “to be accounted righteous.” This enters a juridical note into what is otherwise personal and interpersonal. This translation is out of line with Deutero-Isaiah’s conception of salvation. The nations will be saved, not just reckoned to be saved. See James Smart, Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), p. 213.
The recent proliferation of studies on Galatians has begun to fill a vacuum in the literature of New Testament research: despite the work's centrality for New Testament history and Protestant dogmatics, there has been a surprising shortage of English-language critical commentaries on Galatians in this century. Symptomatic of the situation is the fact that Frank Stagg's brief treatment of Galatians in the Knox Preaching Guides series (1980) lists in its bibliography only three full-scale commentaries, all of which reflect pre-World War I scholarship: J. B. Lightfoot (1865), W. M. Ramsay (1899), and E. D. Burton (1921; Burton had started work on his commentary in 1896). Although there have of course been numerous popular commentaries in the interim, Burton's classic volume in the International Critical Commentary series did not find a worthy successor until 1979, with the publication of a Galatians commentary in the Hermeneia series by Hans Dieter Betz (Fortress, 1979). In 1982, we gained another significant commentary on the Galatian letter: a contribution to the New International Greek Testament Commentary (NIGTC) series by the distinguished British evangelical scholar F. F. Bruce. Let us consider in turn the characteristics of each of these works.

Betz's commentary, Galatians—the first in the Hermeneia series to be written in English rather than translated from German—is a massive work of erudition, thorough, vigorous, and finally idiosyncratic. In spite of (or partly because of) its idiosyncrasies, this work has already become a landmark of modern biblical scholarship, a standard by which all Galatians commentaries will be measured for a generation to come. The distinctive strength of Betz's commentary lies in his insistence on reading the letter as a unified piece of argumentation. He contends that Galatians belongs to a clearly defined literary genre of antiquity, the "apologetic
letter"; consequently, the structure of Paul's argument must be understood in terms of the conventions of Greco-Roman rhetoric. This approach allows Betz to generate an elaborate outline of the letter's formal structure (16–23), which serves as the "map" for his exposition.

Not only with regard to structure but also with regard to matters of style and diction, Betz sees the pervasive influence of ancient rhetoric; repeatedly, he elucidates Paul's turns of phrase with parallels and precedents from a wide range of ancient texts. This method produces numerous original and stimulating insights. For example, the disjointed and baffling section in 4:12–20 is explained as "an argument from friendship," employing "a string of topos [conventional motifs] belonging to the theme of friendship" (221). Or, to take another example, Betz resolves the old exegetical problem of whether the words in 2:15–21 are part of Paul's speech to Cephas of Antioch by suggesting that these verses function in Paul's argument as the propositio, that portion of apologetic speech which sums up the content of the speaker's preceding narration of events (narratio) and provides a transition to the central argumentative section of the speech (probatio).

Although Betz's method yields useful results with regard to determining the function of large units within the argument, his approach is less helpful when it comes to accounting for the progression of thought within the large structural units. His treatment of 3:1–4:11, which breaks the discussion into a series of discrete "arguments," is especially susceptible to this criticism. Still, the reader of this commentary can scarcely escape the challenge to read Galatians afresh with an eye towards the flow and structure of the discussion.

Betz's formal analysis leads him also to clearly articulated conclusions about the purpose of the letter. If Galatians is an "apologetic letter," i.e., a letter in the rhetorical style of a courtroom defense speech, who is being defended? On behalf of whom is the apology offered? Betz answers that this letter should be understood as an apology not only on behalf of Paul himself but also in defense of the Spirit, whose adequacy to shape and guide a moral life was at issue in the Galatian crisis. Betz hypothesizes that the Galatians were susceptible to the blandishments of a law-gospel because they were having a "problem with the flesh."

The Galatians had been given the "Spirit" and "freedom," but they were left to that Spirit and freedom. There was no law to tell them what was right and wrong. There were no more rituals to correct transgressions. Under these circumstances their daily life came to be a dance on a tightrope! Left with only "Spirit" and "freedom," how could they face the world of hostility, in particular the evil world whose destructive forces were working within, in the human "flesh"? (9).
This reconstruction of the situation allows Betz to present a cohesive reading of the letter, including the paraenetic material in chaps. 5 and 6 in which Paul insists that the Spirit does offer sufficient means to overcome “the flesh.” Clearly this approach is a decided improvement over the view that Paul’s ethical exhortations in Galatians 5 and 6 are purely conventional and unrelated to the situation or that they are addressed against a second group of opponents with libertine tendencies.

Throughout the commentary, Betz’s footnotes offer access to a wealth of ancient parallels and modern secondary literature. Although this material will first of all be of interest to scholars, all foreign-language quotations are translated, so that the interested general reader is never left in the dark. This feature of the Hermeneia format makes the book usable for a wider audience.

In spite of the explanatory power of Betz’s rhetorical analysis, the commentary is susceptible to criticism on a number of points, some of them of a fundamental character. First of all, major questions can be raised about the way in which Betz has employed his rhetorical model. The entire analysis depends on the supposition that there was a clearly defined “apologetic letter” genre to which Galatians conforms. But was there? The evidence is scanty, as Betz himself acknowledges (15). Consequently, the parallels that he cites throughout the commentary are drawn, as Wayne Meeks has pointed out, not from “apologetic letters” but from ancient handbooks on rhetoric.1 In any case the structure that Betz discerns in the letter does not fully correspond to the prescribed structure of the apologetic speech: Betz describes 5:1–6:10 as the “exhortatio,” an anomalous designation since no such unit exists in the apologetic speech.2 It appears that Betz has pushed his formal analysis beyond the evidence. Positively speaking, Betz is working on an important cutting edge of New Testament studies, with his emphasis on studying the literary genre and rhetorical structure of the New Testament writing; negatively speaking, he has been too eager to force Galatians into a particular mold without sufficiently acknowledging that genres are in any case fluid, supple entities. Betz would have served his readers better if he had applied his magisterial learning to the task of tracing the way in which Paul eclectically adopts and transforms a variety of literary genres and conventions.

Secondly, we must ask whether Betz’s commentary sufficiently reckons with the strongly Jewish style and content of Paul’s argumentation. Betz’s scholarly endeavors have been devoted to the task of locating New Testament texts within the intellectual milieu of Greco-Roman Hellenism. However valuable this enterprise may be, the reader of this commentary is left with little lively sense of Paul the Jew, the “Hebrew born of Hebrews” (Phil. 3:5), whose thought-world is formed by the symbols of Jewish Scripture and tradition. Betz has remained remarkably
uninfluenced by the work of major scholars such as W. D. Davies and Nils Dahl, who have demonstrated Paul's extensive grounding in Jewish apocalyptic traditions and rabbinic exegetical methods. Instead, Betz seems to lapse here and there into an old-fashioned caricature of Judaism as a cardboard religion of legalism against which Paul is waging a polemical campaign.

Finally, many readers will want to question the theological angle of vision from which Betz explicates Paul. It is no accident that Betz places a Latin quotation from Luther's own commentary on Galatians as a superscription to the entire commentary. Translated, this superscription provides a revealing insight into Betz's hermeneutical perspective:

Indeed, we are not treating of political freedom, but with a different kind of freedom, which the devil especially hates and attacks. It is that freedom for which Christ has set us free, neither from any human servitude nor from the power of tyrants, but from the eternal wrath of God. Where? In the conscience.

Betz's interpretation of Galatians stands within the mainstream of Lutheran piety as mediated through Rudolf Bultmann. Faith is understood as a phenomenon within individual subjectivity, and justification is portrayed as something that occurs "in the conscience." Consequently, Betz sees no direct connection between theology and ethics in Galatians. "Paul does not provide the Galatians with a specifically Christian ethic," Betz writes. "The Christian is addressed as an educated and responsible person. He is expected to do no more than what would be expected of any other educated person in the Hellenistic culture of the time" (292).

Nowhere does Betz grapple with the very different and increasingly influential interpretation of Paul championed by critics such as Krister Stendahl, Markus Barth, and E. P. Sanders, who have maintained, with good exegetical reason, that Luther's reading of Paul wrought a creative hermeneutical distortion: Paul, unlike Luther, was not concerned to assuage the "terrified conscience." Instead, his concern was to give pastoral guidance for the relation between Jews and Gentiles in Christ. This reading of Paul opens up a very different perspective on the question of theology and ethics: Paul's exhortations reflect an urgent concern for the loving integrity of the community in Christ, a concern which is obscured by Betz's preoccupation with the individual's justification and freedom.

With due allowance made for these criticisms, however, the fact remains that Betz has written a commentary that is indispensable for any serious student of Paul's Letter to the Galatians. Betz is a fair target for criticism precisely because his approach to the text is such a commendably clear and daring one.

98
F. F. Bruce, unlike Betz, has no intention of proposing innovative paradigms for interpretation; instead, he offers us sober and judicious assessments of the familiar issues in *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Eerdmans, 1982). Whereas Betz invests little energy in the traditional questions of critical introduction (date, occasion, addressees, etc.), Bruce writes fifty-six information-laden pages on these matters, including, for example, fifteen pages on the North Galatia–South Galatia question. (Bruce opts for the latter, which allows him to correlate the letter’s historical data with Acts and to date it very early, before the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15.) Whether or not one agrees with Bruce’s conclusions, his summaries of the problems are clear and informative; this introductory material may in fact be the most valuable part of the book.

The NIGTC series, according to the foreword by the series editors, intends, among other things, to “cater to the needs of students who want something less technical than a full-scale critical commentary,” to “interact with modern scholarship,” and to “provide a theological understanding of the text, based on historical-critical-linguistic exegesis.” In Bruce’s commentary, however, the first two of these intentions work at cross-purposes: Bruce so diligently interacts with scholarly articles and monographs that the student who wants “something less than a full-scale critical commentary” will surely suffer bewilderment. The reader who wants to use the commentary as a bibliographical resource will find much helpful information here; the reader who goes looking for the promised “theological understanding of the text” will often find Bruce’s interpretation buried under a clutter of technical data. (By contrast, the Hermeneia format is a model of clarity: Betz keeps his interpretive comments in his text and his debates with the scholarly guild in his footnotes.)

The potential buyer of Bruce’s commentary should also be advised that it is explicitly intended as a commentary on the Greek text of Galatians: Greek phrases and sentences are often left untranslated. Those who are able to use Greek will find Bruce’s observations on text, vocabulary, and syntax informative and reliable. Those who cannot use Greek will not find this an easy book to work with.

Bruce makes a much more consistent effort than Betz to place Paul’s thought in the context of Jewish Scripture and tradition. Citations from rabbinic literature and other Jewish texts frequently are brought into play. Likewise, Bruce is much more inclined than Betz to explicate texts in Galatians with extensive cross-references to other New Testament texts, including non-Pauline texts. In general, Bruce’s interpretive method seeks to minimize points of tension—whether theological or historical—within the New Testament; thus, Acts is treated as a reliable historical source, and even the most troublesome Pauline passages are given calm,
reasoned explanations. (See, for example, Bruce's sympathetic treatment of Cephas's behavior [133-34] and of Paul's odd exegetical move in 3:16 [172].)

Bruce has no sharply defined theological agenda, but it would not be unfair to characterize his overall theological reading of the text as basically similar to that of Betz, with whom he shares the traditional Protestant concern for the individual's relation to God and the traditional Protestant blind spot for Paul's gospel as a word which creates and shapes community.

In summary, Bruce's commentary serves the purpose of providing notes on syntax and background information which could serve as data to aid the reader in his or her own work of interpretation. But the reader who comes to Bruce expecting him to generate fresh theological insights will likely be disappointed: he neither breaks new ground nor frames any questions which help us to see the text in a new light. Still, Bruce's work provides us with a thorough and balanced Galatians commentary from an evangelical perspective, far superior to the 1953 volume in the New International Commentary on the New Testament series by Herman Ridderbos.

Expository Commentaries. John Knox Press has published two Galatians commentaries which are designed primarily as homiletical aids. Why two such commentaries? The difference is one of scope.

Frank Stagg, professor of New Testament at Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, has written *Galatians and Romans* in the Knox Preaching Guides (John Knox, 1982). According to the back cover of this paperback publication the series will provide volumes "designed for quick reference" which will "lead to fresh homiletical values, pastoral application, and creative sermon outlines." The brevity of the format (Galatians is accorded only thirty-three pages) severely limits the depth of the treatment. Stagg is forced to skim through the text tossing off a stream of catchy sermon titles: "An Uncompromising Gospel in a Compromising Age," "Right Thinking about Righteousness," "The Legacy of Legalism," and so forth. Stagg's passing observations are generally astute, and they may serve to jog the memory or imagination of the preacher grooping for an "angle" on a sermon. Those who want to grapple with the text at greater exegetical depth will want to look elsewhere.

One good place to look would be Charles Cousar's *Galatians* (John Knox, 1982), which initiates a new commentary series called Interpretation, produced under the auspices of the journal of the same name. The series is designed "to meet the needs of students, teachers, ministers, and priests for a contemporary expository commentary." The key word here is *expository*: Cousar neither deals with technical problems nor provides a word-by-word commentary on the text. Instead, he offers interpretive reflections on each paragraph unit within the letter. This
approach enables him, in contrast to Bruce, to concentrate on the theological implication of major sense-units. The result is a readable and illuminating exposition of Galatians, grounded in careful exegesis and at the same time alert to the hermeneutical problem of what the text might mean for modern readers. Cousar, a professor of New Testament at Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, Ga., has allowed his reading of the text to be shaped significantly by recent advances in Pauline scholarship (see the well-chosen selected bibliography at the end of the book); consequently, his interpretation avoids the traditional Protestant pitfalls which are Luther’s legacy. Cousar’s interpretations are not original breakthroughs, but he has presented in a concise and unostentatious manner the insights of other scholars such as Stendahl, M. Barth, and Käsemann. In particular, Cousar’s discussions of Paul’s “conversion” (29-37) and of the social implications of justification (56-62) ought to be required reading for anyone who intends to preach on Galatians.

In short, Cousar’s commentary should prove a valuable resource for readers of this journal. It will not do the work of a critical commentary, nor is it intended to, but it offers important supplementation and correction to the theological perspectives of Betz and Bruce. Let us hope the publisher will see fit to make this worthwhile Interpretation series available in paperback at a price which might encourage more readers to purchase Cousar’s book.

Specialized Studies. In addition to the commentaries discussed here, the past five years have witnessed the appearance of at least four specialized scholarly studies which focus on Galatians. Space prohibits a full review of them; still, their existence may be noted here along with a brief indication of their contents.

George Howard’s iconoclastic monograph Paul: Crisis in Galatia: A Study in Early Christian Theology, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 35 (Cambridge University Press, 1979), contains the writer’s insistence that “the key to Paul’s thought in Galatians is his doctrine of the inclusion of uncircumcised Gentiles” in the church (82). With this key, Howard opens up many issues about the historical setting of the letter and takes a number of controversial positions. The most important of these is his contention that pistis (“faith”) in Galatians refers not to human faith in Christ but rather to God’s faithfulness in bringing Gentiles into the economy of salvation. The argument is simultaneously so novel and so condensed (only eighty-two pages of text) that non-specialists will find it confusing and specialists will find it unsatisfying.

Three recent dissertations dealing with Galatians have appeared in the Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series (SBLDS). David Lull’s The Spirit in Galatia: Paul’s Interpretation of Pneuma as Divine Power (Scholars Press, 1980), written at Claremont under the direction of Betz, is an
exegetical study of the phenomenon of the Spirit as experienced by the Galatians and as understood by Paul. Lull, whose own theological stance is influenced by process theologians such as John Cobb and Schubert Ogden, concludes his book with a reflection upon the relation between Paul's understanding of the Spirit and the pneumatology of three representative modern theologians: Bultmann, Pannenberg, and Pittenger.

Out of Andrews University comes a hefty dissertation by Bernard Hungerford Brinsmead, *Galatians: Dialogical Response to Opponents* (Scholars Press, 1982). Brinsmead undertakes an ambitious effort to reconstruct in detail the theology of Paul's opponents and then to interpret the message of the letter as a response to this reconstructed position. Brinsmead thus runs the risk of methodological circularity, but there is much valuable substance here.

Finally, in my own dissertation, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1-4:11* (Scholars Press, 1983), I contend that Paul's theological argument in Galatians is grounded in a story about Jesus Christ, a story which finds allusive expression in christological formulations which Paul employs at key points in his argument. Thus, while Brinsmead seeks to reconstruct the situation into which Paul spoke, this dissertation seeks to reconstruct the theological framework out of which Paul reacted to the Galatian crisis. An important part of the study argues that the phrase πίστις Ιησοῦ Χριστοῦ (3:22, compare 2:16, 2:20) should be understood to mean not "faith in Jesus Christ" but "Jesus Christ's faithfulness." Thus, this study agrees with Howard in rejecting certain traditional understandings of faith in Galatians but proposes a different constructive reading.

In view of this recent outburst of publications, we are well on the way toward having ample critical coverage of Galatians. Furthermore, within the next few years we await two more major commentaries, by Richard Longenecker in the Word Biblical Commentary Series and by J. Louis Martyn in the Anchor Bible. Thus, those who preach or teach on Galatians may choose among an increasing range of interpretive perspectives, including some that Luther never could have envisioned.

NOTES

2. On this point, see especially D. A. Asse, review of Betz's *Galatians, Religious Studies Review* 7 (1981): 324-25. This same issue also contains major reviews of Betz by W. D. Davies and Paul Meyer. These reviews, together with the review by Meeks, provide an appreciative but probing critique of Betz's accomplishment.
3. Much of this material was previously published by Bruce in a series of articles called "Galatian Problems" which appeared in the *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library (Manchester)* between 1969 and 1973.
Pastoral Theology:
A Review of Journals

DAVID K. SWITZER

No parish minister goes to bed at night with any assurance that she or he will not be awakened by some person in distress, nor does he or she awaken in the morning without the high probability that during the day there will be significant engagements with one or more persons in what the church calls pastoral care. Therefore, most pastors give considerable attention to this function of their ministry and are eager to learn how to be more effective and to become more knowledgeable about the biblical and theological implications of the various situations and interactions of pastoral care, and about the contributions of the behavioral sciences to our understanding of human beings and of procedures of helping. So we read books, listen to lectures, attend workshops, get supervision. We can also receive help from journals.

But which ones? It is the purpose of this article to let clergy know what is published, what these journals are like, and toward whom they are directed. My impression is that only a very small number subscribes to any journal in this field, and only a slightly higher number seeks them out in a library. Perhaps this seeming disinterest reflects a lack of awareness of what is available.

Five candidates for inclusion in this article quickly came to mind. However, I believed that once I began a systematic search several others would present themselves to me. They did not, though there may be some. The five are, in chronological order of their beginning publication: Journal of Pastoral Care, Pastoral Psychology, Journal of Religion and Health, Journal of Pastoral Counseling, and the Journal of Psychology and Theology.

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There are several roots to what we now refer to as "contemporary pastoral care," the pastoral care functions which have always been exercised by and within the church but which now take place in the midst of the complexities of twentieth-century life and are enlightened by the behavioral sciences. Particularly important events in this history are the founding in 1930 of the Council for Clinical Training, the split within the council in 1932, and the subsequent separate formation of the Institute of Pastoral Care in 1944. They developed with the common purpose of providing clinically supervised professional education for the ministry, and yet were somewhat different from one another and even competitive in some ways. Each of them became increasingly aware of the need for a professional journal to support their work, and in the fall of 1947, both groups published the first issues of their respective journals: the Journal of Pastoral Care (JPC) by the institute and the Journal of Clinical Pastoral Work (JCPW) by the council. JPC, according to the editorial in the first issue, saw itself as "striving constantly to stimulate and present original material in the field of pastoral care." JCPW presented a more elaborate statement of aims: "to bring together descriptive accounts of pastoral work . . . to clarify . . . the principles of relating to other professionals . . . to use the insights of other professions . . . as a means of further strengthening the clergyman's understanding of the needs and resources of his people and of his relationship to them . . . [and] to consider the principles and methods of clinical pastoral training of the theological student." Both of these journals were published through the winter of 1949, and their authors make up a pastoral care "Hall of Fame": Anton Boisen, Earl Bruder, Howard Clinebell, Russell Dicks, Rollin Fairbanks, Seward Hiltner, Reuel Howe, Paul Johnson, Robert Leslie, Wayne Oates, Albert Outler, David Roberts, Carroll Wise. Four of this group published in both journals. JCPW was more oriented toward institutional chaplaincy, especially in the direction of psychiatric hospitals. JPC had the greater number of articles dealing with the interface between theology and psychiatry and with pastoral counseling as such. Interestingly, they had the same number of articles which explicitly discussed pastoral work in the parish.

Almost immediately, wise heads came together to discuss the merger of the two journals, and as these plans developed, the idea to establish a single organization also began to arise. The decision to publish one journal together was made, though there was resistance to bringing the organizations together at that time. The spring-summer, 1950, issue of the Journal of Pastoral Care (its volume 4) was the first issue of the merged journals. According to a statement inside the front cover, this journal was published in the interest of sharing experiences and interpretations of
pastoral work, interprofessional relationships, the theology of pastoral care, and clinical pastoral training. It was, of course, to be the official journal of the two organizations engaged in the clinical pastoral education of ministers and would continue to appear quarterly.

Interest in the idea to merge the two organizations finally prevailed in late 1967, with the formation of the Association of Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE). The December, 1968, issue of JPC was the first to state that it was published by the new organization. All members of ACPE were to receive the journal. In the next year, another organization became associated with JPC: the September, 1969, issue indicated that JPC was "published by the Association of Clinical Pastoral Education, Inc. in cooperation with the American Association of Pastoral Counselors" and the editorial stated that the members of this latter organization (AAPC) would now begin receiving the journal.

Beginning with the 1979 issue of JPC the Canadian Association of Pastoral Education became a cooperating organization, joining ACPE and AAPC. A further step was taken when, as a result of deliberations with the Association of Mental Health Clergy and the American Protestant Correctional Chaplain's Association, these two groups also were included. At that time, beginning in March, 1983, the journal was enlarged and the editorial announced the possible future inclusion of yet another cognate group and the formation of a new board of managers which would represent their respective organizations in the ownership of the journal.

John Florell, a member of the editorial committee of JPC, indicated that they would be paying attention to the professional needs of these new groups while at the same time seeking to serve "those in education, counseling, institutions, and parishes." While I have supported and continue to support JPC's role as the professional journal for these organizations (three of which I am or have been related to in one way or another), I have a concern for the group named last in Florell's list: the parish clergy. Can one publication do all of this? It is a tall order.

At about the same time that the decision to merge JPC and JCPW was made, another major journal was coming into being, Pastoral Psychology (PP), its first issue appearing in February, 1950. It began with an editorial, "Why Pastoral Psychology?"—an appropriate question in the light of the current existence of the other two journals and undoubtedly with an awareness of their merger plans. The editorial response to its own question, while accurate, did not even mention JPC or attempt to compare, the purposes of the two publications. The editor spoke of ministers' need to have the insights and skills of dynamic psychology and psychiatry presented in a way applicable to their work. I take that to mean that PP would emphasize functions of ministry other than pastoral care.
and counseling and, in fact, it had such emphases in the years to follow to a greater degree than JPC. It might also have been a way to say that PP was not the official journal of any professional organization and to suggest the positive implications of that independence. It was to appear monthly, except for July and August.

The editorial board of PP and the additional persons mentioned as consultants during its development are a Who's Who of ministerial and psychiatric professionals of that time: John Southerland Bonnell, Ray Burkhard, Russell Dicks, Seward Hiltner, Karen Horney, Paul Johnson, Halford Luccock, Rollo May, Margaret Mead, Karl and William Menninger, Wayne Oates, Carl Rogers, Carroll Wise, and others. The first four issues included articles by several of these as well as by a number of other outstanding psychiatrists (Franz Alexander, O. Spurgeon English, Lawrence Kubie), pastors, and theological educators. Several persons who were active in both the Council for Clinical Training and the Institute of Pastoral Care and who had published previously in one or both of the journals of those organizations were involved in the origins of PP.

Over the next several years, PP published many “theme issues,” all of which were important and helpful and most of which were clearly focused on the work of the parish minister: two issues each on pastoral psychology and preaching, worship, church administration, evangelism, Christian education; three on group work in the church and ministry to children; two on ministry to youth; three on sex and the church; three dealing with the areas of grief and the funeral, the minister's own mental health, the minister and the minister's family, the minister and divorce, and numerous others.

After finding PP to be a unique resource for the parish minister, many subscribers, myself included, were shocked to read in the editorial of the October, 1972, issue that the publishing company responsible for PP had decided to withdraw and that this would be the last issue, although hope was expressed that it would begin again before long. “Before long” became longer, but through the persistence of several people, some of whom represented Princeton Theological Seminary, a new publisher was secured and PP appeared once again, though as a quarterly, with the fall, 1975, issue.

In an excellent editorial the new editor, Liston Mills, reflected on the purposes of the journal when it first appeared in 1950 and declared the intention not to part from its earlier tradition, that whatever it did would be “for the sake of the church and its ministry.” A central emphasis of the points he stressed was the understanding of “the parish as the locus of the ministry . . . . The journal has been eager to speak to those engaged in specialized ministries, but the thrust of our work has been in the direction of the parish minister.”
To move back a few years, in October, 1961, another journal had appeared: the *Journal of Religion and Health* (JRH), a publication of the Academy of Religion and Mental Health. Its purpose was to promote the concept of the psychosomatic unity of persons, with that concept including whatever might be conceived of as the spiritual nature. Since the field itself was an integrative one, the journal sought authors and readers from medicine, psychology and psychotherapy, sociology, anthropology, and religion.

The articles in this quarterly have been almost exclusively theoretical and almost always extremely well-written. They also have been in line with the stated purpose of the journal and, accordingly, seldom deal explicitly with pastoral care or pastoral theology. Many of the articles certainly have relevance for members of the clergy interested in increasing their understanding of persons in their wholeness, and this obviously has some application to pastoral care. Nevertheless, the nature of the journal is such that while I would recommend it to the parish clergy, institutional chaplains, pastoral counseling specialists, and perhaps clergy in some other contexts, it is not designed to have the sharpness of focus on the practice of ministry and doing theology in the context of ministerial practice which would justify discussing it in any further detail here.

The spring of 1966 saw the appearance of the *Journal of Pastoral Counseling* (JPCoun), to be published each spring and fall by the Graduate Division of Pastoral Counseling of Iona College, a Roman Catholic institution. Although its editorial board was predominantly of that faith group, it included a number of non-Roman Catholics. Its statement of purpose declared that it was to be a "forum for the exchange of broad ideas and information on Pastoral Counseling. . . . It strives at promoting better understanding of man as a total Gestalt." The early issues consistently focused on the role of the Roman Catholic clergy and the nonordained religious, their personal and professional lives, and a variety of subjects related to pastoral counseling. Theology and values and the moral life as these relate to counseling that is clearly pastoral received frequent emphasis. The majority of the authors were identifiable as Roman Catholic. However, the journal is not theologically doctrinaire or dogmatic, and there have been a number of Protestant and occasional Jewish contributors.

The last periodical to be examined is the *Journal of Psychology and Theology* (JPT), whose first issue appeared in January, 1973. The publisher is the Rosemead Graduate School of Psychology (California). The journal identifies itself as "An Evangelical Forum for the Integration of Psychology and Theology," and this statement is found inside the front cover: "The purpose of the *Journal of Psychology and Theology* is to
QUARTERLY REVIEW, FALL 1985

communicate recent scholarly thinking on the interrelationships of psychological and theological concepts and to consider the applications of these concepts through a variety of professional settings." Although accurate, this statement does not tell the full story, as the declaration on the front of the journal has already made clear. Farther down the page, almost hidden in the midst of the usual business matters found on the inside of front covers and which very few people probably ever read, is a statement with considerably more focus. "The intent of the editors is to place before the evangelical community articles that have bearing on the nature of man from a Biblical perspective" (italics mine). I am appreciative of the sensitivity that led them to change "man" to "humankind" several years later.

This journal differs from all the others described in this article not only because its statements of purpose declare an evangelical emphasis, but because it has approached the task of integrating psychology and Bible/theology with such consistent seriousness. In the first place, the emphasis is on psychology, not merely counseling and psychotherapy. In addition, there is a section on research in every issue, usually with one to three research reports. Many of the authors are professional psychologists, although pastoral counselors and seminary professors, other ministers, psychiatrists, and social workers also contribute. Second, although psychology is often applied to concerns of the church and its ministry (which includes but is not limited to pastoral care and counseling), the major effort is always toward the integration of biblical/theological understandings and psychology.

Although I assume that the founders of JPT probably thought that some parish clergy might read their periodical, and certainly throughout the years there have been many references to Christian ministers and ministry as well as to pastoral counseling, the journal seems to be directed primarily toward professional psychologists and psychotherapists who are committed Christians and who want to see their faith and their professional practice as a single whole.

NOTES


5. Pastoral Psychology 24:228 (Fall 1975): 4, 6.

Coming in QR
WINTER 1985

The Liberation of Language: Professional Ethics in Pastoral Counseling
Karen Lebacqz and Archie Smith, Jr.

Ralph Sockman: The Compleat Methodist
William B. Lawrence

By What Authority? Kierkegaard on Pastoral Authority
Barry L. Snowden

Radical Implications of the Eucharist
Vernon L. Schmid

The Angel of Death: Narrative and Its Role in Grief
John L. Topolewski

Homiletical Resources on Epistle Lections for Epiphany
Neill Hamilton

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