Professional Ethics and the Language of Pastoral Counseling
Karen Lebacqz and Archie Smith, Jr.

The Angel of Death: Narrative and Its Role in Grief
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Ralph Sockman: The Compleat Methodist
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Kierkegaard on Pastoral Authority and Authenticity
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The Radical Implications of the Eucharist
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Homiletical Resources on First and Second Corinthians
Neil Q. Hamilton

Review of Books on Clerical Ethics
G. Lloyd Rediger
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Falling within the purview of the journal are articles and reviews on biblical, theological, ethical, and ecclesiastical questions; homiletics, pastoral counseling, church education, sacred music, worship, evangelism, mission, and church management; ecumenical issues; cultural and social issues where their salience to the practice of ministry can be demonstrated; and the general ministry of Christians, as part of the church's understanding of its nature and mission.

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The bowl was perfect. Perhaps it was not what you'd select if you faced a shelf of bowls, and not the sort of thing that would inevitably attract a lot of attention at a crafts fair, yet it had real presence.

Would you read a story that began this way? The question is important, because unless a short story writer can gain the reader's attention quickly, the reader may turn elsewhere. Short stories, by definition, belong to writers whose creativity depends on economy. These writers like a small canvas. They are "contact" hitters rather than sluggers. They become inspired at the prospect of an early finish.

These are not the qualities we ordinarily associate with the big talent, the heavy writers, the flashy names. Big name writers produce novels—not merely 200- or 300-page numbers but fat books that may have 800 to 1,000 pages in them. Anthony Burgess, the English novelist and critic, has commented on the proclivity of American readers for the long novel. Where as in England writers have been compelled to write shorter and shorter novels to maintain reader interest, in America publishers think nothing of asking readers to consider novels, and series of novels, of thousands of pages. It is not unusual to hear people in this country talking about what they are "working on" or "tackling," meaning, what long novel they are engaged in reading. These novels may be popular best sellers like those of James Michener, or they may be the classics and others. I know at least three people in their sixties who are reading classics like the works of Thomas Hardy, Feodor Dostoevski, and Jane Austen.
This lust for prolixity may not be all bad, although one wonders if it is but one more expression of the work ethic. At any rate, those who write short fiction, or short stories, work in the shadow of the big writers. Short story writers in their own Lilliputian way have been doing some interesting things, though, and those whose profession depends on interpreting might profit from reading them.

Those who may not have read short stories in several years may assume that a good short story comprises traditional elements: a conflict, a development of a plot, a climax, and a denouement, with perhaps declining action at the end. This traditional scheme may still be found in short stories, but today's writers exhibit a great variety in the methods they use, and many writers ignore the conventional plot.

Metaphor, for instance. The quote at the beginning of this essay is the introduction to "Janus," by Ann Beattie, a story published in The New Yorker, May 27, 1985. A woman who works as a real estate agent places the bowl in houses that she shows to prospective buyers. After the visit, she removes it. The bowl is used to give an extra touch to the house, making it seem more desirable. The woman begins to dote on the bowl, surmising that part of her success depends on it.

Could it be that she had some deeper connection with the bowl—a relationship of some kind? She corrected her thinking: how could she imagine such a thing, when she was a human being and it was a bowl? It was ridiculous.

Even so, she loves the bowl and cannot even talk about it with her husband because it is so precious to her. She worries about it disappearing or being broken. Finally we learn that a former lover bought her the bowl several years before. He bought her several things, but the bowl remains her favorite.

Her lover had said that she was always too slow to know what she really loved. Why continue with her life the way it was? Why be two-faced, he asked her.

The lover cannot convince her to leave her husband, though. He breaks off the affair. The woman is left with her bowl. The conclusion reads:
In its way, it was perfect: the world cut in half, deep and smoothly empty. Near the rim, even in dim light, the eye moved toward one small flash of blue, a vanishing point on the horizon.

Here we have at least two metaphors, if not more. The one is that of two-faced Janus, a symbol of indecisiveness in this case. The other is that of the bowl, “deep and smoothly empty,” and perfect in its own way. Thus the bowl seems to be a metaphor for a passivity, a failure to act, that yet attains perfection. And what of the “small flash of blue” on the rim of the bowl? Does this detail hint at a future to be fulfilled, or is it only one more expression of the perfection of the bowl?

These guesses may seem to be making too much of a story, but metaphorical writing invites such speculations. And once the writer has intrigued us with metaphor, parable, symbol, or simile, then it may not be clear where we are to stop. We are often left wondering about the relation of the metaphor or other figure of speech to our own experience.

The metaphorical approach is only one of the methods used by contemporary short story writers, however. Some stories still follow a plot, depict admirable characters, and have a “socially redeeming value.” These stories are truly good—good in the point they make and good in the feelings they seek to evoke in the reader. Such a story is “A Small, Good Thing,” by Raymond Carver, originally published in Ploughshares and reprinted as the best story in Prize Stories: The O. Henry Awards, 1983. The story begins: “Saturday afternoon she drove to the bakery in the shopping center.”

It goes on to portray a mother who orders a birthday cake for her eight-year-old son. But before the birthday the child has an accident and goes into a coma. During his lingering illness the parents receive anonymous phone calls, wanting to know if they have forgotten something. The child dies, and the anonymous phone calls continue: “Have you forgotten something?” Eventually, through the noises they hear in the background over the phone, the parents deduce that the
an anonymous caller is the baker. They go to the bakery after hours and encounter the baker. They discover that the baker resents people who order cakes and never pick them up. He is a lonely man, a childless man. When he learns the child has died, he asks for forgiveness and offers the parents fresh hot rolls and coffee, which they accept.

This synopsis does not do justice to the writing style, which though straightforward conveys an air of seriousness. Carver is an accomplished writer. An English teacher at Syracuse, he has published stories in national magazines. In 1977 his collection of short stories, *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?*, was nominated for the National Book Award. Any reader will immediately sense that she or he is in the hands of a capable writer on reading a story like "A Small, Good Thing."

Yet I have a hard time understanding how readers can take such a "good" story seriously. Fiction writing has passed through many transmogrifications since the formative stories written by Miguel de Cervantes, E. A. Poe, Walter Scott, A. S. Pushkin, Honoré de Balzac, and Hermann Hesse. Today such stories may charm us but they do not cohere with our world and all its ambiguities. So it is with the narrative about characters who may suffer but do the right thing and end with reconciliation. In such matters, *de gustibus non disputandum*, and to those who can still receive such stories I say, "Good for you—but not for me."

In part because of the archaic nature of such stories the more recent genre of metafiction developed. Writers of metafiction have given up entirely on the suspension of disbelief. They work instead on the writing and not the reading. Donald Barthelme, John Barth, and John Irving exemplify the type. These writers are highly self-conscious, often satirical, and seemingly very academic. I say "seemingly" because it is not always clear whether literary references are authentic and meant to be taken seriously, or are so much spoofing. Part of my objection to this school of writers is that they appear to be thumbing their noses at the reader. This is a literature for the effete and the self-acclaimed sophisticates.
EDITORIAL

But we have another type of fictional narrative that stops short of the writing about writing that engrosses the metafictionalists. John Cheever, Peter Taylor, Mary Gordon, and John Updike belong in the tradition of Flannery O'Connor, William Faulkner, and Katherine Anne Porter. They tell stories that are for the most part representational, though occasionally metaphorical or symbolic elements are present. They depend on the reader taking the story seriously. One such story, to give an illustration, is “Safe,” by Mary Gordon, which first appeared in Ms. and was then reprinted in The Editor’s Choice, compiled by George E. Murphy, Jr., 1985. The story begins, “The morning starts with a child’s crying.”

The ambiguity in the sentence seems intended. Does the morning merely begin, or is it affrighted? The latter, possibly, since we find that fear and safety make up the polarity around which the story is told. The narrator, a woman, is happily married and has a baby. But she has had a lover years before, in London, and he visits her in a planned rendezvous. In the encounter the narrator finds the two no longer have any rapport. When he touches her, she panics and feels that now he cannot have access to her body. Her body has become “symbolic,” she thinks, it stands for something in the world. After this failed détente, the narrator muses on her aging. “I have never thought of myself as old; rather I fear that I am so young-seeming that I lack authority in the outside world,” she thinks to herself. “I feel the burdens of both youth and age. I am no longer dangerous, by reason of excitement, possibility—but I cannot yet compel by fear.” She returns home to be loved by her husband, a true experience of safety, like that of the baby feeding at her breast.

Here again the story works on several levels. It is realistic and symbolic, or thematic. The first person seems an effective point of view in these stories because it lends reality to the telling. We could surmise that such stories fit a little too comfortably into the marketing approach of publishers and editors. The strongest reading market for many magazines and books is that of the middle-aged, realistic, humane (in
their own view) middle class. Is it any accident that the themes of many of these stories are those of the “serious” dramatic films today?

The thematic writers may be giving way to yet another breed of writers, however. In magazines and published collections of short stories, we encounter a type of story that seems more relational than anything. These writers dote on banality—the details of family routines, the world of television, the plastic universe of shopping malls. Conversation in these stories goes on continually without always leading to a point or development. The endings do not resolve difficulties or provide insights. The stories merely stop. Anne Tyler is a pre-eminent practitioner of this type of story, although Tyler is known more for novels than short stories. But let me illustrate with a story titled “A Visit to Aunt Ivy’s,” by Walter Sanders, published in the North American Review, September, 1984. The story begins:

Aunt Ivy called at about five-thirty Thursday afternoon and in one of her methodically detailed and matter-of-fact explanations told me that she and Uncle Mort would not be driving over to South Bend for Grandma’s birthday party and that I should bring her to Valparaiso because Uncle Mort had died at about one-thirty that afternoon, the doctor had said that, and she would give me more details when Grandma and I got there but I shouldn’t explain too much to Grandma because she was so looking forward to her ninety-fourth birthday celebration.

On hearing this news, the family starts driving to Valparaiso with Grandma. The old woman is senile and does not seem to understand what is happening. The family attends the funeral and also has a birthday celebration for Grandma. At the end, Grandma asks where they have been. On being told they have been to Uncle Mort’s funeral and have celebrated her ninety-fourth birthday, Grandma replies, “Child, you’re as crazy as I am. You don’t no more know where you’ve been than I do.”

This story, like others in its genre, is flooded with conversation between characters, details of family activities,
and very believable but undramatic events. We might understand these stories as in the "slice-of-life" tradition, where the intent was to present an actual situation, with no conclusions. But the more likely key to understanding relational stories is television, particularly the soaps, but generally the whole social world generated in the programs and created in living rooms and places where people watch television.

Besides wondering why these stories are written, we might also ask why people read them. And this question could apply to short stories as a class. The utilitarian answers are: they help to pass the time, they can be amusing, they take very little commitment on the part of the reader, and they sometimes are written aesthetically. Utilitarian reasons count for very little when it comes to art, however. Perhaps the safest thing to say is that short stories have in the past been imaginative creations of some of our best interpreters of reality. If we are interested in being interpreters ourselves, we might find clues in these stories to the art of storytelling and the art of listening.

—Charles E. Cole
Enhanced communication and greater happiness are worthwhile goals in a therapeutic situation, but, as these authors point out, a Christian perspective requires attention to God's purposes for the individual and the larger Christian community, as well.

In pastoral counseling, sometimes referred to as "talk therapy," the parishioner represents to the pastor—through the use of words—a troublesome situation. The pastor listens, summarizes, and offers possibilities. The exchange is verbal.1

Because pastoral counseling is based upon talk therapy, the words and images used demand attention. Implicit in language are unspoken assumptions about the nature of human relations, the self, society, and God.2 The language chosen will have much to do with possibilities for therapy. Language contains the paradigmatic images that inform both the counselor's and the counselee's interpretations of "what

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Language organizes experience, gives it the stamp of "truth," fills it with certain meanings, and makes sense out of the confusion in which we grope. It helps us edit, classify, name, and interpret the reality of everyday life.

An ideal outcome in pastoral counseling is one in which counselees name and reframe their experiences and become more themselves rather than transformed into a facsimile of the therapist. But this ideal may not be realized. The therapeutic system tends toward symmetry, i.e., counselor and counselee tend to become more alike as the counseling relationship evolves. The pastoral counselor is entitled to be recognized by the counselee as a competent care giver in virtue of education, theoretical orientation, clinical training, developed expertise, and reputation, among other characteristics. The counselor's professional orientation and interpretation help to shape the communicative context of therapy. It also tends to shape the ways in which counselees come to frame their problems. The language used becomes a constituent element in the biography of the participants. The naming of experience in a particular language gives that experience a certain limited meaning and bestows certain possibilities for responding to felt problems. The language of therapy and the attendant definitions of the situation are derived from the wider culture and mediated through and modified by the therapeutic system. The pastoral counselor is an important member of this system and serves as a transmitter of social values in it. The naming and reframing of the counselee's problem will be determined in part by the language chosen by the counselor. The choice of a language for use in pastoral counseling is therefore an ethical decision.

As Charles Gerkin points out, pastoral counseling, as it has emerged in the late twentieth century, "has built most of its operationally primary modes of reflection upon . . . the images and concepts, the presuppositions and ontological assumptions of the psychological and behavioral sciences."
He observes that in order to have authority in the counseling situation—and to speak a language that connects with the language of parishioners—ministers and pastoral counselors often "buy into" the language of modern psychology. In so doing, they may also transmit value systems that they do not altogether intend.

Consider the following case offered by Howard Clinebell in his classic text on pastoral counseling. The Blackrights have come to see their minister about a marital problem.

The minister... noted that they talked to each other through him. Since they couldn't communicate directly, except for the mutual recriminations stemming from their suffering, they lacked the basic instrument for resolving their own conflict. Communication skills are the pathways by which people relate and thereby satisfy personality hungers. The "sickness" of the Blackrights' marriage could be understood as pathology in its communication system.

In short, the problem is diagnosed as one of inadequate and "pathological" communication.

This diagnostic impression will guide the pastor's therapeutic interventions. In this case, the language used implies that the goal of counseling is "improvement" of the marriage. As the following "wrap" suggests, such improvement seems to lie either in "mutual satisfaction" or in enhanced "happiness":

Each of you is suffering acutely as a result of the inadequacies of your ways of relating. A lot has happened between you. So I'm sure you can see that it will take some time to untangle the things that are causing you both unhappiness. ... You would like to try to improve your marriage. ... I am quite willing to work with you in helping you discover more mutually satisfying ways of relating to each other.

In many ways, this is a very successful "wrap." The minister recognizes pain, points to its source, recognizes desire for change, offers help, and indicates the goals of counseling. All
of this is done using nonjudgmental and relatively uncharged terms—"a lot has happened," "untangle" things that cause "unhappiness," "improve your marriage," "mutually satisfying," and so on.

But hidden within the choice of such seemingly nonjudgmental terms are some deep value commitments. The pastor's focus here is upon change in the private lives of the Blackrights. The word-images used to depict this couple's relationship are derived from assumptions about the separate and unique individual. The problem is described in terms of interpersonal communication. Such a focus obscures the social-economic context in which psychological and interpersonal factors play their part. The language chosen here is highly individualistic, focusing on feelings, satisfaction, and personal pain. The goals of counseling would seem to be limited to happiness and satisfaction.

No one would want to suggest that personal happiness or marital accord are unimportant values. Yet there are important dimensions missing from a diagnosis limited to these categories. The minister does not diagnose the problem as a lack of faith, failure of covenant, situation of oppression, or opportunity for forgiveness. Nor does he suggest that the goal of therapy is improvement in their relationship with God, better understanding of steadfast love, or appreciation of Jesus' liberating activity in the world. Such explicitly theological terms and concepts are notably missing.

We propose that Clinebell's minister is operating on an "individual diagnostic/language paradigm" which omits any reference to the larger social and economic context in which the Blackrights' relationship takes shape and is defined. This paradigm, with its emphasis on the abstracted individual and private lives, is drawn primarily from modern psychology and is imbued with the language of utilitarianism and modern secular humanism. Such a paradigm may be initially helpful for "touching base" with the value systems and assumptions of parishioners. But we propose that in order for counseling to become truly Christian and "pastoral," additional diagnostic
and language paradigms are needed. And an enlarged understanding of marriage is required.

When the goal of therapy is “maximizing happiness,” a hedonistic utilitarian ethic underlies the counseling. American society is marked by a central stress upon individual achievement and satisfaction. The Human Potential Movement, with its language of self-absorption and self-fulfillment, found ready acceptance in the soil of Western culture. Pastoral counselors trained in humanistic and growth models of psychology enter the pastoral situation with value commitments that reflect cultural assumptions about self-reliance and self-fulfillment. Their language and paradigms for diagnosis and interpretation are drawn from our cultural ethic.

Such an ethic reflects a value orientation that has become estranged from theological foundations. In its concern for the well-being of the individual, it largely fails to appreciate the social and public roots of private pain. Concern for individual well-being cannot be separated from concern for social justice. Pastoral counseling requires a language that recognizes the interweaving of the personal and the social. Such a language might be found in the Christian tradition. While Christian tradition uplifts the value of the individual, it always puts that value within the larger social context and in response to God. This suggests a different paradigm. Here, we can only hint at what such a paradigm might be, drawing upon two resources: the work of recent Christian ethicists, and the recovery of some difficult passages from Scripture.¹⁰

The first task is to capture a sense of marriage that puts it squarely into the public arena rather than the private. This task is facilitated by the recent work of ethicist Stanley Hauerwas.¹¹ In contrast to the self-sufficient, autonomous, free person who is the ideal in contemporary Western society, Hauerwas argues that the meaning of marriage is found precisely in the acceptance of limits that are not chosen. Thus, marriage by its nature defies the autonomous, self-fulfilled individual.

The person we married, suggests Hauerwas, will turn out
to be a stranger—either because we did not really know the partner before marriage or because marriage changes people. Hence, “the primary problem morally is learning how to love and care for this stranger to whom you find yourself married.” In short, the purpose of marriage is to learn those qualities of self and community that permit us to accept limits, love the stranger, and hope for the future. Focusing on personal satisfaction or mutual fulfillment alone is not consonant with this purpose.

The resources of the Christian story become important here. The Christian story is not primarily a story about personal fulfillment but about risk on behalf of the stranger and about liberation of the oppressed. As Hauerwas puts it, “both Christianity and marriage teach us that life is not chiefly about ‘happiness’.” For those who wish to build characters modeled on the Christian story, therefore, a focus on happiness, satisfaction, or fulfillment alone is contrary to the meaning of that story and to the characters they should be trying to build.

In this view, marriage also becomes a “political” act. It derives its meaning not from the mutual satisfaction or individual fulfillment of the partners but from the place of marriage as an institution in society. Marriage as an institution is meant primarily to offer an alternative to hedonistic utilitarianism. Thus, the goals of counseling for a troubled marriage would focus not on the fulfillment of the individuals but on whether their marriage is fulfilling the meaning of the institution as it takes that meaning from the Christian story. In this story, hospitality to the stranger takes precedence over personal satisfaction.

This interpretation suggests that the language appropriate to faithful pastoral counseling will require a communal emphasis. Such an emphasis is found in Ephesians:

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God . . . who is above all and through all and in all . . . For we are members one of another. (Eph. 4:4-6, 25b, RSV)
The New Testament world knows nothing of the abstracted individual approach to personal or family troubles. Its anthropology is dyadic, communal, and relational. The self cannot be adequately understood apart from its communal relations with other selves and with God who indwells humanity. Covenant, peoplehood, and body of Christ are terms that reflect such an understanding.

Using this relational understanding, the author of Ephesians speaks specifically to marital behavior:

Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord... Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. (Eph. 5:21-22, 25)

The language of submission is problematic today. It reflects the established cultural arrangements of first-century Palestine with its subjugation of women and suggests male domination and unequal power relations (i.e., wives, be subject to, but husbands, love).

Yet the passage is really a fundamental challenge to those very arrangements. It presents a vision of transformed humanness, membership in the body of Christ, where there is neither male nor female, slave nor free, but a new, integrated whole (Eph. 5:32). The admonition is to mutual submission to Christ. Mutual submission means a new relationship based on justice, acceptance, love, and respect. It also requires that each see her or his task as part of a larger whole, in which one's own being is completed only in community. The goal is not separate individual growth but growth in marriage (and family relations) in the context of community, with each person "joined and knit together" with every other person to produce an effective working whole. The language of union in Christ is characteristic of Ephesians: "For [Christ] is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility... that he might create in himself one new man" (Eph. 2:14-15). The emphasis is not on the
unique, separate individual but on the new, integrated humanity that God in Christ is creating.

Consider what this perspective might mean for the pastoral counselor dealing with the Blackrights. If the christological center of faith is held to be the key to pastoral care and counseling, then the reconciling work of God in Christ can be recognized as the basis of a new community in which marriage is embedded. Secular, atomized, privatized interpretations of marriage must be confronted. The counselor cannot simply seek "improvement" or "mutual satisfaction" or "happiness" for a marriage but must seek to place the couple into the context of the political meaning of marriage.

In Ephesians and in the work of contemporary ethicists like Hauerwas, we see that emphasizing the political aspect of marriage is meant precisely to provide a counterbalance to the dominant culture. Whether it countervails the subjugation of women in New Testament times or the self-fulfillment ethic of modern culture, marriage understood from a Christian perspective requires attention to God's purposes. Enhanced communication and greater happiness may be a by-product of those purposes, but they are hardly the essence. Pastoral counseling must lift up purposes for marriage that are consonant with the Christian story and vision.

The Blackrights might be challenged, for instance, to consider God's purposes in their marriage. In what ways are they called to mutual respect? In what ways does their marriage serve the needs of the larger Christian community? How do they reconcile their own needs for satisfaction and fulfillment with the call to serve others or to welcome the stranger? The changes in language would be subtle, but we believe not insignificant.

In sum, pastoral counselors make ethical decisions implicitly or explicitly in the choice of language used in counseling. We urge a broader base for language than that drawn from modern psychology. In particular, we urge attention to the political purposes of marriage and the development of a paradigm for counseling consonant with those purposes as
understood in the Christian tradition. A more relational language that sets the marriage partners into the broader community context would give the pastor's language an integrity that appears to us to be missing in Clinebell's language of "communication," "happiness," and "mutual satisfaction."

NOTES

1. More is involved in pastoral counseling than mere talk, of course. The therapeutic situation is a highly personal, face-to-face situation in which participants share common realities though they may experience their shared situation differently. The same problem can have a different meaning for each of the partners. Together, counselor and counselee create a context or frame in which the partners come to see events in a different light. Hence, reframing—thinking about things differently or seeing from a new standpoint—is at the heart of therapy. In this reframing, language is built up and becomes a constituent element in the biography of the participants. See Gordon E. Jackson, *Pastoral Care and Process Theology* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1981); Charles V. Gerkin, *The Living Humans Document: Re-attaining Pastoral Counseling in a Hermeneutical Mode* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984); Alfred Schutz and Thomas Luckmann, *The Structures of the Life-World* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1974).

2. By "language" we mean the choice of words and exchanges of verbal messages used to construct meaning and to facilitate communication.


5. Pastoral counseling appropriates a language of interpretation (a hermeneutic) which questions the framing assumptions around which the counselee has organized personal and interpersonal experience. At the same time, it mediates certain institutionalized values of the wider culture. To the extent that the therapeutic frame is couched in individualistic language, it mirrors and reproduces the dominant language paradigm of the culture.


8. Howard Clinebell, *Basic Types of Pastoral Counseling* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966), p. 103. This text has informed the practice of pastoral counseling for twenty years and remains a primary text in many seminaries.


10. For a more adequate exposition, see Archie Smith, Jr., *The Relational Self: Ethics and Therapy from a Black Church Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980).

THE ANGEL OF DEATH: NARRATIVE AND ITS ROLE IN GRIEF

JOHN L. TOPOLEWSKI

The narrative crafted in response to grief can give structure to our experience, articulation to our emotions, and, if carefully crafted, an issue out of our afflictions.

My mother was a tough bird. She lived alone in a small apartment in Jersey City, commuted each day by bus to her job at the bank, and asserted her independence from her two inquisitive sons by insisting that she was "all right." In spite of such protestations, she lived within the confines of a decaying inner city, had her purse snatched, and felt that special anxiety that comes with the end of daylight. She smoked too much, ate poorly, and was doctored infrequently.

She was generous to a fault, often setting aside her own needs, so that she might do something special for her family. During the preholiday season, she would take a second job in a children's store, and she received her pay in the form of clothing set aside for her grandchildren. Years ago, before she faced the unique responsibilities of being what we now call a single parent, she exercised leadership in Parents' Council, the church, and ward politics. In many ways, she was a formidable personality, both compelling and worthy of imitation.

Some time ago, when my brother lived in Nebraska and I in...
Pennsylvania, my mother heard a knock at her door. I’m not sure of the exact time of his arrival, but I do know that when my mother released the dead-bolt and opened the door, as far as the safety chain permitted, she was able to see who it was. There he stood, with yellowed and distorted face, a violator, a rapist, whose name was Cancer.

Mom called, and my brother and I ran to help. We told her that we were strong enough to lean against the door, determined enough to keep back the intruder, able enough to protect and defend her. We laughed; we reminisced; we made light of her problem, knowing that our mother had resolved other difficulties so well. But when she was not looking, we parted the curtains, pulled back the edge of the shade, and saw him standing, still waiting, on the stoop.

Time passed, and the ongoing demands of family and employment drew both my brother and me back to our homes and jobs. In some ways, it was a relief. Doing something took some of the edge from our anger and fear. We tried to lose ourselves somehow within the parochial concerns of everyday life, hoping against hope that there might be some reversal of our corporate future. And then, the phone rang again.

My mother had responded to a knock at her door. This time, she was slower to answer, frightened by her first encounter. But she had no real choice, except to look through the little crack which the safety chain afforded. There he stood again, with his grim and distorted countenance, with his withered and discolored hands, with a presence which was both awesome and yet strangely patient. And his name—his name was Terminal.

Again we came to lean against the door. We were not as sure of ourselves as before, but we did not let on, either between ourselves or with Mom. We tried to be sons, even when our mother became our daughter. We tried to be realistic, even when our planning was aborted by our guilt. And, when she was not looking, we parted the curtain, pulled on the edge of the shade, and discovered that he was still there.
Then, in the very early hours of the morning upon which
we were to celebrate the birthday of my oldest daughter
(Mom's first grandchild), the knock was heard again. We ran
to the door, willing to lean against it with all our might, straining to defend, her only protection against the intruder.

But in the very moment that we rushed toward the door, we
heard our mother's voice, strangely firm, reminiscent of an
"Open the door and let him in." We could no longer resist,
and in spite of our worst fears, we opened the door.

And there he stood.
And he was changed.
The ugly visage of the Angel of Death had been
transformed into something, someone oddly attractive—even beautiful. He came to our mother and held out his
hands. He offered two gifts, peace and rest. And then, on a
day now remembered for both giving birth and dying, our
mother went with the Angel.

"Then shall come to pass the saying that is written: 'Death
is swallowed up in victory.' 'O death, where is thy victory? O
death, where is thy sting?' " (I Cor. 15:54b-55).

"Tell me, what happened?"
In response to this question, or others like it, those of us
who grieve begin to create a narrative which gives structure to
our experience, articulation to our emotions, and, if carefully
crafted, an issue out of our afflictions.
The story we tell becomes, in time, a paradigm of the grief
with which we have labored. It is a retrogressive tale, which
often begins with a review of those events and emotions
which surround the time of death, and then reaches back into
the past, developing some semblance of chronology and
attempting to establish some overall perspective on living and
dying. It is a story which might take months or years to craft,
as we move through and among that continuum of emotions
and understandings that may lead us to various levels of
acceptance. Even later, with retelling and refinement, it is a
story that may bring a tightness to our throats, a thickening of
our speech, and tears to our eyes. Yet, there is grace in such a tale, and such grace comes with the realization that in the pain, we can find the cure.

In order to understand how important such a narrative is to our grief, and the positive impact members of the helping professions—specifically the clergy—may possibly have on its development, we need to examine why and how such stories are crafted.

Death is the experience, grief is the response, and acceptance, or reconciliation, is the goal.

To help us understand such narratives in their fundamental causality and subsequent structure, we may say that death is the experience, grief is the response, and acceptance, or reconciliation, is the goal.

Our first task is to deal with the reality of death. The experience can be all too personal and overwhelming. But it must not be misunderstood as something that can be factually verified and immediately externalized. As Edward Schillebeeckx, the contemporary Dutch theologian, has demonstrated, experience involves both encounter and revelation. Not only are we confronted with the actuality of death; we are also given some insight into the nature of that actuality and its impact upon us. Understanding might come in the form of an awareness of just how important those who have died might have been to us; it might be the realization, and fear, that we, too, will die; or, to borrow a phrase from the psalmist, gained from his encounters, it may be "a heart of wisdom" (Ps. 90:12). Crafting our story is necessitated by death, and it encompasses those revelations we have received.

Experience does not stand alone. It requires a response. To respond to experience is to sort through it, or, to use the Kantian phrase, to categorize it in certain specific ways. Experience takes upon itself the first veneer of structure with
our symbolization. Initially, our response to the experience may be nonverbal, or quasi-verbal, as with tears or the ventilation of gross emotion. Soon, however, our response turns to words, the very beginnings of our tale. Experience plus symbolization yields meaning. To make some sense out of our grief, we begin to craft our story and to manipulate our symbols in ways that may move us on, in, and through our loss. It is precisely at this point, when we are groping for appropriate symbols, struggling to find those words which both describe and give order to our confrontation with death, that those who stand with us in our pain—family, friends, nurses, physicians, clergy—can be of most help. Our symbolization will be shaped, in part, by the responses of those around us. If only in a secondhand way, nearly all of us have attempted to find some meaning in death, and although such efforts may be shallow or encapsulated by strong emotions or even digressive or denying, such meanings will be shared. Death demands a response from us all, and there is no effective way of screening or blocking the responses of those who stand in its presence.

The potential for care which the clergy brings to that period of time in which our grief is most intense is contained within the realization that symbols are the stock and trade of a clergy person’s calling. The profession is one whose execution is founded upon symbolization; in the presence of the clergy, a presence symbolic in itself, we are in contact with a heritage and tradition rich with metaphors, which are both accepting of death and affirming of life. Bondage and liberation, death and resurrection, are the very stories upon which our Judeo-Christian heritage has been built.

resurrection, are the very stories upon which our Judeo-Christian heritage has been built, and, in a variety of ways, these metaphors, and others like them or derived from
them, can provide help-filled ingredients for us as we craft our tale. By sharing their story, their response to death, and by the skillful use of faith's many symbols, members of the clergy can both help and care.

(Parenthetically, a word of caution needs to be introduced at this point, and I speak now from my own experience as a clergyperson who can often be found in the role and position mentioned above. When one crafts or tells a story, because of the very nature of stories themselves, the hearer is willing, within certain limits, to suspend his or her critical judgment. Our basic response to a story is one of acceptance and absorption, not one of criticism and unbelief. Members of the clergy need to remember this, for too often we find ourselves moving in upon the stories we hear in an attempt to demythologize their symbols and rationalize their content. We should not presuppose singular meanings for complex metaphors, even when such meanings are our own, or when we assume that such meanings are, or should be, those of the storyteller. Hear these stories in their entirety, and, if the choice of symbols is unwise, then retell the tale with appropriate substitutions. Just as we have responded to another's story, so when we become myth-makers, others will respond to us, appropriating what rings true and can be incorporated within their own narratives.)

One more word needs to be said about the role members of the clergy play as they seek to enable those of us who grieve to ventilate our emotions and articulate our responses. Narrative can help us to understand where we are in our grief, and it can also point us to where we might be. Symbols are pedagogical; stories are experiential, filled with encounter and revelation. I am not suggesting that it is the task of the clergy artificially to superimpose levels of acceptance or reconciliation upon those who grieve, but rather to hold them out as offerings of grace-bearing metaphors toward which we may move. Stories can model the entire grief process, from denial to acceptance, and such modeling, in times of personal sharing or in funeral homilies, can become expressions of healing, care, and reconciling love.
RALPH SOCKMAN:  
THE COMPLEAT METHODIST

WILLIAM B. LAWRENCE

A twentieth-century circuit rider with an eclectic approach to theology and a broad cultural appeal, Ralph Sockman offers a model of American Methodism.

One Sunday in 1911, a group of medical students in New York City invited a newcomer in their midst to accompany them to church. Their new acquaintance was an Ohio farm boy who had come to Manhattan with a Phi Beta Kappa key from Ohio Wesleyan and an intention to do graduate studies in history and law. He accepted the invitation of the young physicians-to-be, who led him to services at the Madison Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church. Apparently he was impressed enough to return; within a year he became a member of the congregation.

Fifty years later, the congregation held a testimonial dinner in his honor. Over a menu of prime rib at the Waldorf Astoria, two thousand persons gathered on November 7, 1961, to praise Ralph Washington Sockman "in recognition of his enduring contribution to the spiritual and cultural life of the nation and the world," as the program booklet put it. An invocation was offered by the venerable Methodist Bishop Herbert Welch, who had been president of Ohio Wesleyan in Sockman's student days. From commercial, political, and

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ecclesiastical circles came testimonials, one of them given by David Sarnoff, whose National Broadcasting Company had aired Sockman's sermons very week for the previous twenty-five years.

The church which Sockman had joined as a layman in 1911 had changed immensely during the fifty years of his association with it. A merger, a new building, and a new name were not the only differences: its image as a platform from which to engage in ministry was completely altered by the time of the Waldorf testimonial.

In 1913 Sockman had turned his academic attention from political science to theology and had become a student-assistant minister at the Madison Avenue church. Before long he had accumulated enough months of service to become the senior member of the staff: Dr. Wallace MacMullen, who had welcomed Sockman into membership, left for greener pastures on Manhattan's west side; Dr. Charles Mead, who succeeded MacMullen and welcomed Sockman to the student-assistantship, stayed only a year; when Lucius Bugbee and Robert Brown were asked to take the appointment, each in turn refused; Worth M. Tippy agreed to come, but he stayed only eighteen months.1

It was 1917. Sockman had completed his theological studies at Union Seminary and was at work on a doctorate from Columbia University. His duties at the church had expanded to those of a full-time assistant. Now he was asked to be Tippy's successor. He accepted, on the condition that his freedom to finish the dissertation be respected. To the prosperity of both the preacher and the parish, the appointment was made. By the twenty-fifth year of Sockman's pastorate, the congregation had nearly quintupled in membership, had increased its budget tenfold, and had constructed a landmark building to house its work.

From the distance which decades afford, one might marvel at the magnificent gifts and graces for ministry which must have been apparent in the young man of twenty-seven for him to be offered what was to be considered half a century later the denomination's most prestigious pulpit. But in 1917,
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as the difficulty in filling the position shows, it was not much of an appointment. Wiser pastors had turned it down or left it as soon as they could. It was known as the church of windows, perhaps because it had more glass than people. Still, Sockman accepted the opportunity. Forty-four years later, he sat at the center of the dais at the Waldorf, about to retire from the only pulpit to which he had ever been appointed.

In the annals of the denomination, his story is unique. No one moved as easily as he through a variety of ecclesiastical, academic, corporate, political, and social circles, while unifying them all in his regularly broadcast voice. His tenure spanned an amazing era: assuming the Madison Avenue pulpit when American soldiers were entering World War I, he remained while American soldiers were becoming "advisors" in Vietnam; having seen the automobile emerge as a common means of travel when he began, he retired about the time an American president was promising a trip to the moon.

Sockman's career embraced two world wars, at least two nonglobal American conflicts, one Great Depression, a few recessions, and a major re-assessment of Christian theology.

His career with one parish embraced two world wars, at least two nonglobal American conflicts, one Great Depression, a few recessions, and a major re-assessment of Christian theology.

As the Methodist tradition in America now moves into its third century, we should properly note the place of this one man whose life and ministry were so inseparably identified with a single parish and its successes for one-fourth of our first two hundred years. Yet, measured by the character rather than the chronology of Methodism's first two centuries, Sockman's ministry was not unique at all. His work embodied so much that is true about our denomination that
we can legitimately label him "the compleat Methodist."

At first glance, it would hardly seem so. For one thing, typical Methodist preachers in his day were supposed to move no less often than once every four years, not stay in one place for forty-four. Then there is the matter of the building constructed at Park Avenue and Sixtieth Street to house Christ Church after the Madison Avenue and East Sixty-first Street Methodist Episcopal Churches merged: anyone who is acquainted with the history of Methodist preaching and worship could step into that sanctuary and think a lot of things about it, but one of those thoughts would certainly not be its consonance with Methodist tradition, since it emphasizes Byzantine and other ancient motifs.

However, more attention to the elements of Ralph Sockman’s career encourages us to rediscover him not as an unusual figure in our history, but as a model of our identity. Three elements of his career justify that claim: first, despite his unbroken tenure in Manhattan, he was a circuit rider after the fashion of Francis Asbury’s itinerant style, albeit in a twentieth-century manner; second, his theological approach was very much in accord with John Wesley’s own eclectic practice and the subsequent theological developments in the Wesleyan tradition; and, third, in his role as a Methodist clergyman he enjoyed a broad cultural appeal. He transcended denominational lines (perhaps blurring them to the point of irrelevance), and in so doing he exemplified the characterization of Methodism as America’s most typical denomination and the feeling that America was the great testing ground to see if Christianity would work. These three observations about Sockman form the crux of the argument that he deserves to be known as "the compleat Methodist."

Of course, any preacher whose only appointment was to a station in Manhattan hardly qualifies as an itinerant! Yet Sockman used every means that the first half of the twentieth century put at a preacher’s disposal to develop a nationwide circuit and eventually to see himself serving a global parish. Nostalgia for the placid life on the Ohio farm may have
prompted him to say one Sunday that we would be closer to God if we did not have "all this quick communication," but he used all of the available media to get out the word. When radio was in its infancy, he was on the air, initially as a vacation replacement preacher for S. Parkes Cadman, and then as the regular weekly preacher on the National Radio Pulpit for a quarter century. His printed messages also appeared in a newspaper column, in a wide variety of professional and popular publications, and in twenty books. Regular readers of the New York Times (as well as other major Manhattan dailies) could keep track of his sermons through reports which the papers published each Monday on what was said in New York's pulpits.

But Sockman was not just an itinerant in print and on the air. An incessant traveler, he was in a personal way a circuit rider. He had no hobbies and no vacation retreat to which he might flee; instead, he took pleasure in travel, both to relax and to preach. At certain times of the year, notably Lent, he was on the road almost constantly except for his Sunday responsibilities in Manhattan. A typical schedule might have him preach at Christ Church (and on the radio) on Sunday and then travel to two or three communities in midweek, delivering a previous Sunday's message, while working during his travels on the sermon for the following Sunday.

Occasionally his sermon manuscripts leave a traceable trail of his journeys. A sermon called "Drifting into Danger," which he delivered at Christ Church on December 5, 1937, was written on stationery from hotels in South Bend, Indiana; Zanesville, Ohio; and Utica, New York. "Down to Earth," a sermon he preached on May 1, 1951, is inscribed on hotel letterheads from Rochester, Syracuse, Kingston, and Mohonk Lake, New York; from Duluth, Minnesota; and from the New York Central Railroad. The folder which contains his sermon "Where Is Thy God—Now?" (preached at Christ Church on September 25, 1938) lists scheduled stops in Cleveland on November 21, in West Pittston, Pennsylvania, on November 22, and in Worcester, Massachusetts, on November 23.
By the end of the week, when Sockman returned from his circuit, his Sunday preparations turned to that favorite weapon in the Methodist minister's arsenal, the Saturday night special. Typically he would withdraw to his study at home on Saturday afternoons to write out a full sermon text. Gathering his notes and the stationery he had accumulated during the week, he would work until 2:00 or 2:30 Sunday morning. What he wrote remained almost always unchanged: he did not believe in revising. After a brief sleep, he would awaken around 7:00, read the manuscript a few times, pick up a radio script (normally a sermon delivered a few weeks earlier at Christ Church), now carefully timed for the live broadcast from NBC, and then return to the church for another reading of the fresh manuscript before stepping into the pulpit with scarcely a note—except, perhaps, for some lengthy quotation.

He seems to have been aware that writing sermons on the run was not the best way to get ready for Sunday. His Recoveries in Religion contains a (partly personal?) confession: "Preaching often spreads itself too thin. By hasty, ill-considered utterances, based perhaps on insufficient data, the pulpit often forfeits the respect of careful thinkers." And elsewhere he expressed his awareness of the hazard of relying on superficial means of support. But his goal for a sermon was not to satisfy careful thinkers, anyway. Rather, he cherished practical results. His Saturday night efforts were directed not so much toward refining theological perspectives as toward creating consequences: "Preaching which results in no action or no change is worse than wasteful," he said; the church "must set out to discover its duties rather than to defend its doctrines." Therefore, his homiletical interest lay in the effect his rhetoric could have on someone's life. And he regretted that such efforts to bring religion to the people could be maligned.

When a minister of religion begins to attract the crowds, he is frequently deserted by the intellectuals who first discovered his talents, for even religion approved by the masses automatically arouses distaste among the classes.
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Without doubt, he attracted the crowds. About half of the worshipers at Christ Church each Sunday were visitors, helping the 1,750 members of the congregation fill the pews week after week. His glory lay in his oratory. As a pastor he was only marginally involved in the regular routines of church programming. He would, for instance, drop by a women's meeting if he were in the building when one was in progress; but he was a preacher, not a programer. Nor were his administrative skills widely lauded by his parishioners. But by the standards of almost any itinerant preacher, his work was a triumph.

His success as a twentieth-century circuit rider, however, was very much involved with the greatest personal tragedy of his life. In the spring of 1941, he was in Houston when word came that his son William had died, the victim of an apparent suicide. William was a brilliant student, a poet and Latin scholar who had been privately educated at the Hill School and then had gone to Harvard and Columbia. In part, Sockman seems to have been bitter about the loss, resenting the young man's death "just after he had finished a long and expensive education." His grief was private, however, expressed in tears at the homes and offices of a few close friends, and relieved through some counseling that he and his wife Zellah found under the guidance of a colleague. References to William's death were infrequent, though, with a line in a Sunday magazine article as a typically modest example. Zellah arranged a private publication of William's poetry. And Ralph published his Beecher Lectures on Preaching, delivered at Yale in the year of his son's death, in dedication to his deceased son's memory. But, for the most part, the grieving father handled his bereavement not in words but in action: his major response to the tragedy was to devote himself even more energetically to his preaching and his travels; he characterized the rest of his professional life as being devoted to the cause of living William's life as well as his own.

There is a good sense as well as a bad sense in which a man can live a double life. I know a father whose son died young. That
father feels that he must somehow carry on his son's work, and he does double duty rendering seemingly almost superhuman tasks.

There is a doctrinal dimension to that attitude which should not be overlooked. Theologically, Sockman was trained in that era of optimism and confidence which marked the hegemony of liberalism. His initial reaction to crises was usually to ask for renewed human confidence. "In my ministry, I have never stressed a note of pessimism," he said just before the outbreak of the war. "In our anxiety about the atom bomb," he warned six weeks after Hiroshima, "we may cease to be grateful for the progress of science." Crises of war, depression, and personal tragedy did not deter him from the conviction that Christian life and human destiny are fashioned by effort and good works through which Christians show their faithfulness. "Keeping faith with God," he said at Yale, "is prerequisite to finding vital faith in God."

So it was in his work that Sockman found the power to retain faith, and not that by faith he was able to work. That is an interesting reversal of classical Protestant theology, but it is very much in keeping with the trends in Methodist theology and preaching as described by Robert E. Chiles:

Twentieth century American Methodism has been much more concerned with contemporary problems and issues than it has with preserving the integrity of a doctrinal heritage which, in some abstract, historical way, is still legally binding upon it.

In Sockman's words, the church "must demonstrate its divine authority by showing its mastery of human welfare" and be willing to shift its role from that of "a divinely-appointed executive to a democratically recognized expert in things moral and religious."

The pulpit moral guide can be convincing not on the ground that he is sent from God but that he knows how to get to people. . . . The public will follow leaders on the basis of apostolic success rather than apostolic succession.
The intellectual milieu of liberal theology was Sockman's home. Its hallmarks have been identified by Kenneth Cauthen to include: (a) "emphasis on continuity rather than discontinuity in the world"; (b) "autonomy of human reason and experience rather than . . . authoritative divine revelation"; and (c) "forces which contributed to stress on the dynamic rather than the static nature of life and the world."

In Sockman's liberal theology, Christ was one who was master of himself in every situation and who, by example, imparts that self-mastery to us. Sockman stressed the continuity between human history and the kingdom of God—more specifically, a continuity between God's kingdom as it is approximated in human history and the kingdom as it is realized beyond history. He looked askance at those preachers who would reduce salvation to intelligence, effort, and adjustment, but he still believed in empirical verification through "modern experience" as the touchstone of theological validation. He considered Jesus to be a "gentleman" (in fact, "the world's first gentleman") and "the most lovable character ever created."

Jesus was "the world's first gentleman."

This general absorption into liberalism had a specific aspect which kept him in the leading Methodist theological camp of his day. On the issue of the human will, he was an advocate of "free personal agency" as it developed into pre-eminence in the Methodist doctrinal orientation. Sockman preached that we can make ourselves love by an act of will. He lauded those who by an "iron will" could "stir up God's gift" inside them, and he encouraged the notion that we can set our lives to God's standards "by an act of will." We can, he believed, "determine our destinies."

This hardly put him within a hair's breadth of Calvinism, but it did locate him very clearly on the point to which Methodist theology had come in the twentieth century. He
defined prevenient grace as an extra good which God puts into a situation beyond what humanity can do. And he defined justification by faith as God's judgment of humanity based not on what we are but on what we are becoming.

His liberal credentials were solid.

Yet his was an eclectic liberalism that employed not only the Methodist doctrinal trends of his day but also the theological style of John Wesley himself. He excluded a few things from the realm of doctrinal acceptability—Pelagianism, for instance, and that "German brand of theology" called Barthianism, which he considered defeatist. But he included elements from many sources, finding something positive and homiletically constructive in figures as diverse as Barth and Felix Adler (of the Ethical Culture Society). He praised the shift in theological mood from the imperative and the subjunctive to the indicative, and the shift in doctrinal focus "from the seeking man to the searching God." He longed for a greater appreciation of the mystical dimensions of religion and for idealism, too. He cherished the Apostles' Creed; but he said it was not final, and he accepted the pluralism of church members' interpretations of it. He mourned the loss of principles, but he said we have to compromise them to live in the real world.

An eclecticism that compromises too many principles, of course, becomes muddle-headed and confused. And Sockman's assessments of the real world were frequently confused. For instance, he was a pacifist until war came; then he was a patriot. He praised Chamberlain's trip to Munich, but six weeks later changed his mind. He expressed optimism that war could be averted if the president of the United States and the pope were to issue a joint appeal for peace; but when a national panel of Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish leaders was convened to work for peace, Sockman said it was pointless. Only late in 1939 did he renounce the "belief that the German leaders were conscientious in their objections to communism and that they were holding their people in subjection because of the fear of the communistic alternative."
Besides his words, Sockman left another tangible expression of his eclectic approach to theology and history—the building called Christ Church at Park Avenue and Sixtieth Street in Manhattan. For a temple reared to God, it was a grand testimony to human fortitude.

Ralph Adams Cram, the foremost planner of Gothic architecture in this century, was its designer. Cram had just recently been denied the contract for Riverside Church, and his plan for Christ Church was based on the argument that Gothic architecture was wrong for the city: soaring spires might be an inspiration in a community of three-story houses, but not in a neighborhood where office towers scrape the sky. Byzantine architecture was another possible style, but Saint Bartholomew's Church just down the street had taken that form. So Cram proposed an "early church" model, whose color and glitter expressed "emotion, that early Christian feeling." But it is an eclectic blend of that and more: the nave has the character of an ancient Roman basilica; the worship center is dominated by a medieval icon screen from the Orthodox Church of the Czar in old Saint Petersburg; the atmosphere of Byzantine art is pervasive; hints of Spanish styles in the chapel ceiling and Gothic glass add to the blend in what is predominantly a paean to the Christians of the East.

Like Wesley himself, Sockman revealed his fascination with the Eastern church in his words as well as his worship setting. Wesley drew significant inspiration from Oriental Christians like "Macarius the Egyptian" and Chrysostom. Sockman often spoke of yearning for a return to the mystical. Without doubt, the structure at Park Avenue and Sixtieth Street attempted to accomplish that return.

And although the building has, to some extent, become the landmark Sockman hoped it would, he admitted that had plans not been underway prior to the onset of the depression, the structure would never have been built at all. The costs of going to Italy for marble and Russia for art could have been avoided and the funds used to feed the hungry, Sockman knew, but the structure could be defended on aesthetic rather
than ethical or religious grounds. "The beauty of the building," he wrote, "would go on feeding the souls of men down the decades, long after people would have forgotten the food which could have been bought with the money spent on the building. The creation of beauty is not waste."

So Sockman could embrace a wide variety of theological, ethical, political, social, and aesthetic impulses. He desired a buoyant religion, filled with the uplifting spiritual strength of the more mystical religions. But he had confidence in the earthly values of beauty, truth, and the soundness of the common individual to make it happen. He opposed the ideology of positive thinking, but praised Joshua Loth Liebman's book Peace of Mind as "good" and even "great." He preached on topics ad hoc, but appealed for the liturgical rediscovery of the Christian year. He said that, in the New Testament, faith is an attitude of mind rather than a doctrine and that romantic attitudes were very much needed to restore faith, but he also said that sermons had to return to a concern for doctrine. Early in 1939 he said he was somewhere between defeatism and the notion that all is sweetness and light; later he said he was "half-way between the intellectualism of a Reinhold Niebuhr and the comforting nature of a Norman Vincent Peale."

To say the least, he was innocent of the stain of doctrinal rigidity. And that certainly kept his credentials as a "compleat Methodist" intact. It also enhanced his appeal to the broader society and exemplified the way in which his denomination was a cultural as well as an ecclesiastical phenomenon.

The blend of church and culture over which Sockman presided serves as a remarkable illustration of the thesis that America found its distinctive denomination in Methodism. He was at once the leading figure in his denomination and the leader of a trend toward denominational de-emphasis. A teacher of Methodist polity at Union Seminary, a delegate to nine sessions of the General Conference, a nominee three times for episcopal office, he was at the same time eager to
have the name of his Park Avenue congregation affix its denominational label as a suffix—"Christ Church, Methodist Episcopal." Thus it came to be called simply "Christ Church."

That could have signaled a triumph of christology over ecclesiasticism, but the evidence suggests that for Sockman the raison d'etre of the church was not purely christological but cultural. His national circuit-riding and his doctrinal pluralism fed into the proposition that the Christian church and the American culture were engaged in a common task. His parishioners on Park Avenue included a number of the dominant personalities in American society: J. C. Penney, Alfred P. Sloan, and Eisenhower's attorney general, Herbert Brownell, were all members of Christ Church. J. Edgar Hoover was a regular listener to the Sunday sermon broadcasts. Sockman's reading of history traced a direct line from Luther's reformation to the development of the American democracy. It was no accident, he said, that Christian lands produced the Magna Charta, the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, and the largest laboratories.

Sockman believed that God had laid upon the Christian church the burden of responsibility for America's destiny.

Sockman was aware of the dangers of fascism that could ally the destiny of the church too closely with the interests of the state, but he believed that the church had to act as the conscience of the state and be the unifying force in culture. The sense of philanthropy that establishes colleges, the civic spirit that supports public schools, the security which stabilizes law and social order, the spirit of investment and enterprise—all were undergirded by the Christian spirit, Sockman said. Democracy, which is to say the American democracy, needed Christianity, and therefore God laid upon the Christian church the burden of responsibility for
America's destiny. It is the church's obligation, he said, to keep America great.

Sockman not only articulated the alliance between Christ and culture; he looked the part, too. Dressed in his homburg and his cashmere overcoat, he resembled any broker or banker or barrister in New York. He felt the pains of the privileged more acutely than those of the poor, as he revealed one Sunday in the depth of the depression, with his assertion that it was "one thing for a nation to have a few million ignorant idle" but "quite another to have several million educated idle." His was the appearance and the attitude of a patrician.

Yet he was conscious of his privileged station in life as a white American, and he was aware of the special responsibilities which fell to wealthy whites to help improve and develop the lot of the world's nonwhite and poor people without exploiting them.

I predict that within a hundred years the white race . . . will be submerged by the colored races. Jonah was swallowed up. And such may be the fate of the proud white race if it continues to lord it over the earth without learning from the Lord what Jonah had to learn—that God is the father of all mankind.

Nevertheless, there is doubt about the degree to which he appreciated the pervasive effects of structural racism. "We are not responsible for the race prejudice in Harlem or Detroit," he said. "But each of us is responsible for his own heart."

His celebration of the merger between the American way and the Christian way tended toward an uncritical acceptance of national policies and toward a distrust of (perhaps even a disrespect for) human realities outside the hegemony of the United States. "Life is worth more along the Hudson and the Mississippi," he asserted, "than [it is] in those lands which deny God's sovereign Fatherhood." North America, he said, was settled by people looking for God, while South America was settled by people looking for gold. And that stamped an indelible superiority on the North American way of life as far as he was concerned.
RALPH SOCKMAN

It also shaped a sense of America's relationships with its more distant neighbors. In the spring of 1947, Sockman attended a luncheon with Martin Niemoller and reported to his congregation the German pastor's obvious sincerity about his country's situation of guilt and need. Yet Sockman remained convinced that Germany was under obligation to pay reparations to the world "for the wanton cruelty of the Nazis." And he could not fully embrace the Germans' sincerity if they lacked the desire to do so. On another matter, some years later, Sockman lauded America's abandonment of the "war system" and the nation's use, instead, of an "international police force" to bring about a better quality of life in Korea. He believed that Christ was at work in that "police action." It seems that Sockman rode the crest of the wave which brought Methodism and Americanism together in what we have learned to call our own unique blend of "civil religion."

Thus, even if for negative reasons, Sockman should occupy an important place in our historical understanding of Methodism and ministry in America. He sincerely believed that a revival of Protestant doctrines in the pulpit would so stress the relationship between Christianity and democracy that it would "preserve our free society." We may criticize both his choice of doctrines for emphasis and his superficial handling of them. But, from a strictly historical perspective, we cannot ignore his contribution.

Sockman clearly enjoyed the respect of his colleagues and contemporaries. In the 1950s, a survey of homiletics professors rated him second only to Fosdick among pulpiters, and he was one of only four twentieth-century figures who made the honor roll of American preachers in the Pulpit.* The consensus about his greatness has not endured over the years. He was too much the celebrated star personality, too much the victim of his tendency to be optimistic, too much the product of his liberal training, too much the uncritical participant in America's drift into civil religion, and too little the careful presenter of doctrine. Yet if all of that has
diminished his personal eminence in the history of preaching, it has cemented more firmly his niche in the history of Methodism. Some of his instincts are typical of our denomination, even in the present. For instance, he had an appropriately Methodist sense of contempt for the institutional hierarchy, believing that ecclesiastical structures are top-heavy. He had a desire to expand the leadership of the laity in the church, with a sense of the minister's responsibility and opportunity to "enable" the laity to be in ministry. And he embraced a theological position that, if somewhat shallow and fuzzy, would at least have been at home in the pluralism of today's United Methodists.

Since his death in 1970, his star quality has greatly diminished. But across the two centuries and more of our story, he stands as a larger symbol of who we are. For Ralph Sockman rode a twentieth-century circuit, carrying on the tradition of eclectic theological discourse, and bringing to its fullest expression the symbiosis of the Methodist movement and the American story.

Ralph Sockman, for all his flaws and ours, was "the compleat Methodist."

NOTES


2. The research which resulted in the preparation of this paper included access to unpublished manuscripts of Sockman's sermons. Specific source references can be obtained by correspondence with the author. Acknowledgment is made, with gratitude, to the George Arents Research Library at Syracuse University where the Sockman archives are deposited and where the research was done.


7. After his trip to Russia, Sockman was accused of having communist sympathies. He called upon his friend J. Edgar Hoover to put out the word that he harbored no Marxist tendencies (Hibbard, pp. 162-63).

Does the pastor's authority derive from the office to which he or she is ordained or from personal sanctity? This author traces the development of Kierkegaard's understanding of ordination and the nature of the authority which accompanies it.

"By what authority do I do these things?" One can increasingly hear pastors asking this question today. We are moving from a time when the main concern was the function of pastors to one where theologians, educators, researchers, laypeople, and pastors themselves are beginning to recognize that the functions which pastors are called to perform depend upon something else, something prior. Pastors are no longer willing to understand themselves simply by what they do. Rather, they are interested in establishing some basis for their role. Perhaps it might be said that they are seeking a self-definition and self-identity not so much on functional grounds as on the ontological grounds of something given which grants them the right to carry out the functions of the pastoral office. Therefore, the question has rightly shifted to the source and nature of pastoral authority.

The question of pastoral authority is critical, for it impinges upon other matters, such as the nature of seminary
preparation, by what means a candidate for ministry is authenticated for ministry by his or her ecclesiastical body, and the question of the personal identity of the pastor. Moreover, as implied in the statement of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, the issue of pastoral authority is decisive in the continuing ecumenical dialogue.

In the nineteenth century, Soren Kierkegaard was addressing the matter of pastoral authority with intensity. His frequently abusive attacks on the Danish clergy might give one the impression that he holds the ordained ministry, and its authority, in low esteem. On the contrary, however, the vigor of his attacks upon the church and its ministry are indicators of how seriously he takes the whole matter of pastoral authority.

***SOME BASES OF PASTORAL AUTHORITY***

Before attempting to bring Kierkegaard’s position to bear on the contemporary discussion, it is necessary to refine our understanding of authority. To do so, I borrow from the typology of pastoral authority developed by Jackson Carroll, who defines authority as “legitimate power.” To exercise authority is to control, direct, coordinate, or otherwise guide the thought and behavior of persons and/or groups in ways that are considered legitimate by those persons and/or groups. Given this definition, Carroll then examines pastoral authority in terms of two dimensions: (1) bases of authority, and (2) the degree of institutionalization of the authority.

Carroll argues that pastoral authority generally has its basis in one of two categories, or a combination of these. They are (a) the minister as a participant in the power of the sacred, or (b) the minister as possessor of expertise necessary to the work of ministry. As a participant in the power of the sacred, the minister lives in a particularly close relationship with the deity which is generally unavailable to the laity. The “authority of expertise” refers to the knowledge and skills
that the minister needs in order to nurture the life of the religious group and its members. Pastors are generally expected to possess expertise in many areas, including the religious tradition of which they are ministers, such as theology, Scripture, and ethics. They can be expected to have expertise in preaching, teaching, and counseling, as well as possessing skills from other fields, such as sociology, psychology, and organization management.

The second dimension in the typology of pastoral authority is the degree of institutionalization of authority. The authority of the pastor can be understood as institutionalized in an office or as deriving from the personal attributes of the ordained minister. In terms of the former,

Authority of office reflects the religious group’s concern to protect the sanctity of its tradition, preserving the charisma and teachings of its founder(s) by institutionalizing them into an office, as in the doctrine of apostolic succession in the Christian tradition.

Where this approach is taken to its extreme, the personal nature of the minister becomes insignificant. Authority is based entirely on participation in the office.

At the opposite end of this spectrum authority is understood to derive from the personal sanctity and attributes of the minister. Here, the issue of “authenticity” is paramount, understood in terms of the correlation between the minister’s personal existence and public functioning.

Carroll then maintains that each of the two bases of pastoral authority can be combined with each pole of the spectrum of institutionalized authority. For example, authority that derives from the pastor’s participation in the power of the sacred can be seen in terms of either authority of office or personal authority. In the former case, one participates in the power of the sacred by virtue of one’s entry into the office of ordained ministry; in the latter, by virtue of one’s personal sanctity.

Similarly, authority that derives from expertise can be viewed in terms of office or person. Carroll notes that the
Roman Catholic institutionalization of the teaching office of the church in the priesthood rests on an assumption of expertise which is invested in the office, and is derived ultimately from the authority of the pope. But expertise can also be seen in terms of the personal dimension insofar as the individual attains this expertise through study, training, practice, etc.

Finally, it should be noted that authority based on participation in the power of the sacred and that based on professional expertise are rarely seen in mutually exclusive terms. They are usually brought together in some combination, perhaps with the weight toward one or the other. This would also be true of the categories of authority of office and authority of person.

With these various categories as background for our discussion, we shall now turn to Kierkegaard's understanding of ministerial authority. Our intention shall be to identify Kierkegaard's "theory" of pastoral authority, developing it in light of these categories.

KIERKEGAARD'S APPROACH TO PASTORAL AUTHORITY

Kierkegaard develops the role of the parish pastor around his understanding of the human condition. Every individual must climb through the three Kierkegaardian stages of existence—the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious—to the point of Christian faith, which Kierkegaard calls "religiousness A." This religious growth and development is facilitated by the individual's encounter with the Christ, God in time, who serves as a "Pattern." Through the pattern of his life, Christ expresses the essential nature of Christianity and prescribes the task for every follower. The goal of this encounter and the effort that follows is not a relationship based upon works, but the ultimate realization of one's need for grace. This process of encounter represents a movement from a preliminary form of faith in Christ as pattern to a mature understanding of Christ as redeemer.

The Kierkegaardian pastor helps this religious develop-
ment along by drawing the individual up through the stages of existence toward Christian faith. The pastor accomplishes this dialectically, applying mildness and severity, grace and law, as the situation and life-station of the individual might require, thus expressing within the person of the pastor the dual roles of Christ as pattern and redeemer. Not just any person can accomplish this task, though, for it requires meeting certain criteria, or possessing certain authority.

Kierkegaard acknowledges various stations within the Christian community, which he delineates in terms of a tripartite hierarchy. One’s position on this hierarchy is determined by what Kierkegaard calls one’s “God-relationship.”

The three levels on Kierkegaard’s hierarchy are (1) the apostles, (2) the “witnesses for the truth,” including pastors, and (3) the masses of people who have not yet struck out on the path toward Christian faith in its ideal sense. Apostles reside in the upper level of the hierarchy by virtue of a direct call or revelation that lifts them into that position. This direct call, which confers a direct God-relationship, distinguishes the apostle qualitatively from all others, entrusting the apostle with a new doctrine to proclaim.

The middle level on Kierkegaard’s hierarchy consists of the “witnesses for the truth.” Included in this category, ideally, is the ordained pastor. Like the apostles, witnesses for the truth are willing to suffer for their faith. Also, like the apostles, witnesses for the truth possess an authority based upon their God-relationship. Yet, because the basis of their God-relationship is different from that of the apostles, their authority is also of a different order.

The call issued to those who will serve as witnesses to the truth is not a direct call which sets one in the specific position of apostle, but a much more internalized call to be an “instrument” (Redskab) of God. Unlike the apostolic call, which is quite clear, the call to be an instrument of God remains somewhat undefined. Essentially, one thus called will follow the Christ. The call itself grants the individual the
authority to do so. But what this may mean at any given time is not always clear. Therefore, lacking a direct God-relationship, the witnesses will frequently be left to their own individual judgment.

The call to be an instrument lifts the individual out of the ordinary and grants him or her the authority to be a witness for the truth. It is prior to the individual’s activity and grants the basis of that activity. But the willingness and ability of the witnesses actually to fulfill their calling grants a second line of authority: the authority to proclaim the faith before others. Or, an individual verbal proclamation becomes credible because the individual’s life expresses the content of the proclamation. This second kind of authority, then, is not an authority given from the outside through some divine act such as the direct call of the apostle. Rather, it is earned through the constant striving to follow the pattern of Christ. Since it is earned and not given, it is of a lower order than the authority of the apostle.

Ideally, ordained pastors are included in this second level on the hierarchy. Kierkegaard describes the various levels of existence through the employment of ideal types. Kierkegaard’s ideal pastor occupies the middle position on the hierarchy, along with all the witnesses, just below the apostle (the extraordinary), yet above the rest of humankind (the ordinary). This pastor serves, therefore, as a “middle term” (Mellembestemmelse). Like the witness for the truth in general, the pastor is to be rigorously Christian, expressing with his or her life obedience to the harshest demands of the Christian faith. Also like the witness for the truth, the pastor’s authority in the eyes of the constituency comes from this faithful expression of the demands of Christian existence, which further expresses the pastor’s unique God-relationship.

In spite of this tendency to lump pastors and witnesses for the truth together, Kierkegaard does draw a significant distinction between them. Unlike the witnesses for the truth, pastors possess a second source of authority which they receive from outside themselves: ordination.
Kierkegaard argues that "when the ordained man's life is completely secularized he cannot personally plead that he is ordained."

During the period in which he wrote the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846), Kierkegaard/Climacus believed that the act of ordination paradoxically transformed the pastor in time, much in the same way that the direct call to the apostle transforms the apostle; A priest is essentially what he is through ordination, and ordination is a teacher's paradoxical transformation in time, by which he becomes, in time, something else than what is involved in the immanent development of genius, talents, gifts, and so forth. Indeed, he even argues that ordination grafts a *character idelibilis* onto the ministerial candidate.

With this ideal image of the pastor and the nature of ordination in mind, Kierkegaard looks to the reality of his nineteenth-century Danish state church and becomes increasingly doubtful of the willingness of pastors even to approximate the ideal that he has painted. Given this huge discrepancy between his ideal and the reality which he witnesses, Kierkegaard gradually comes to believe that ordination provides the individual with no such indelible
Kierkegaard stresses, first of all, the “secret call” to assume the role of the “witness for the truth,” and, secondly, the public fulfillment of that role.

Kierkegaard’s abandonment of the belief in ordination as a rite which provides a pastor with an indelible character marks his transition away from understanding authority as deriving from an office toward an increasing belief that authority derives from the personal sanctity of the pastor, to use Carroll’s terminology. First of all, as we have seen, the secret call to be a witness for the truth is not a specific call to assume the pastoral office but is issued to all who would assume a position on the middle level of the hierarchy of existence. Through this call, God isolates an individual from the rest of the world, usually through the imposition of sufferings which make it impossible for the rest of the world to understand the witness. Such an individual exists in a state of heterogeneity with the world.

Kierkegaard then maintains that the pastors of the church ought to be “recruited” from among those who have accepted
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this call through suffering, and have therefore broken with the rest of the world. Kierkegaard clearly places the stress, first of all, upon the “secret call,” which is a call to assume the role of the “witness for the truth,” and, secondly, the public fulfillment of that role. The call of the church, signified through the act of ordination, becomes nothing more than the public recognition of the witness’s unique position and personal sanctity, granting institutional authority to perform the public functions of the pastoral office. The individuals who accept this summons of the church would already have a clear understanding of themselves as “called” individuals. In short, these individuals already possess the requisite personal authority to perform public ministry prior to entering the pastoral office. Other than that certification, ordination adds nothing to the ordinand. In other words, ordination is no longer seen to grant the character necessary to perform the office of ministry, but rather serves as a recognition that that character already exists. This character, in turn, finds its basis in the secret call to be a witness for the truth, and in the fulfillment of that call through the constant striving to follow Christ as pattern.

TOWARD A KIERKEGAARDIAN THEORY OF PASTORAL AUTHORITY

In the contemporary discussion of the nature of pastoral authority, some of the questions being asked are, does the authority of the pastor derive from participation in an office, or is the authority more adequately connected with the personal character of the pastor? A related issue is whether ministerial acts are valid ex opere operato, or whether their effectiveness depends upon the sanctity of the individual pastor who administers them.  

These issues also bring into question the role of ordination. Does ordination confer something upon the minister insofar as it is a prayer for the presence of the Holy Spirit in that person’s ministry as well as an entry into the office of pastoral
ministry? Or does ordination simply confirm an authority that has already been achieved through the person's life?

Kierkegaard, as we saw, shifts his position on this point between 1846 and 1850. In the earlier stage, he places far more emphasis upon the institutional source of authority as expressed in the act of ordination. Ordination both establishes the individual in the pastoral office and grants the character indelibilis, according to this line of thought.

In the course of his further involvement with the church and its pastors, Kierkegaard changes his emphasis. What he considers to be a glaring contradiction between the ordination vows of the pastors and the way that they actually conducted their lives is all too evident. The pastors fail to exercise the kind of personal sanctity implied in their office. From their proper place, as those who stand above the people eliciting their spiritual growth, they fall down into the depths of secularity. Because they fail to reduplicate the demands of the Christian faith in their lives, thereby serving as prompters for others to do the same, they no longer possess the personal qualifications necessary to fulfill the demand of the pastoral office. In other words, they have relinquished their authority.

Given this failure, Kierkegaard begins to reverse the priority given to the institutional authority and the personal authority of the pastor. The personal authority gradually assumes a position of greater importance than the authority of the office. One can be a witness for the truth if one's life expresses or approximates the demands of the faith. But one cannot be a witness for the truth, regardless of ordination, if one's life does not express that faith. Such failure eliminates the pastor's authority to proclaim the word of law and gospel. In other words, the contradiction between word and existence removes the credibility of the word in the minds of the listeners.

Because he comes to believe that the pastor should be recruited from those whose lives already express what it means to be a witness for the truth, he also begins to believe that ordination merely certifies an authority which the individual already possesses. Ordination affirms that an
individual is already a witness for the truth, thereby setting that individual apart for the more particular tasks of pastoral ministry.

Given Jackson Carroll's categorization of authority of office and authority of person, it is clear that the Kierkegaardian emphasis is upon the personal nature of pastoral authority. Outside of the affirmation of the community, nothing is bestowed in ordination that enables ministry to be effective. Kierkegaard also addresses the relationship between sacred and profane authority, seen in terms of ministry as calling and vocation on the one hand, and as the accumulation of necessary expertise on the other. As we have seen, the calling by God to serve as an "instrument" clearly possesses priority, both in time and importance. One does not simply choose to serve as an instrument. The demands are too harsh. One assumes that role only at the prompting of the divine call. The call of the church to fill the pastoral office is merely a recognition of the extraordinary character of the individual. Kierkegaard's attitude toward the accumulation of professional expertise is not a negative one. He does not attack theological training that equips an individual with the skills necessary to function in the pastoral office. But he does attack the notion that one can adequately use those skills without personally expressing the demands of the Christian faith. For example, he frequently gives advice on the matter of the Christian sermon, both in terms of content and construction. But he roundly criticizes the pastor who relies on personal eloquence of speaking and other basically "aesthetic" skills, without reduplicating the truth in his or her life.

The goal of the sermon should be to elicit a desire on the part of the listener to imitate Christ as the pattern. By attempting imitation, the individual would eventually realize how far he or she is from the pattern and be moved to an awareness of the need for grace. But an individual will not be moved to follow the pattern by words alone. Words remain abstract and cannot have the necessary effect. Rather, the individual needs actually to witness, in concreto, an example of
what it means to follow the pattern. Hence, proclamation must always involve the dual task of verbally speaking the word and existentially expressing it.

Using Carroll's terminology, the pastor therefore is a participant in the power of the sacred by virtue of a calling to a special God-relationship possessed only by those who are called to be "witnesses for the truth." Moreover, pastoral authority does not rest upon the pastoral office but on personal sanctity which qualifies one to enter the office. Professional expertise, of itself, is not bad, unless it is used as a substitute for the living out of the doctrine. In no case is it a basis of pastoral authority. Similarly, one's involvement in the pastoral office is the result, not the source, of an authority already possessed. All authority of office clearly depends upon the person who fills that office. Ordination becomes not source, but affirmation, of authority.

Having established the basis of pastoral authority, Kierkegaard's understanding of pastoral identity now becomes clear. Just as the pastor's authority finds its basis in a special call, combined with the way in which one fulfills that call existentially, so also does the pastor's identity have an ontological and functional nature.

The middle position, below the apostle, but above the "ordinary," provides two reference points for the pastor. From above, the pastor is called into a special relationship with God and, on the basis of that relationship, is given the authority to function as an "instrument," a "witness for the truth." Yet, the pastor does not do this in isolation, but before, and on behalf of, a constituency: the ordinary people.

As one called out of the masses and into a unique God-relationship by a special call, the pastor possesses a certain ontological status, a state of being which is given. This ontological status provides the ground for the individual to function in society as a witness for the truth and, possibly, as a pastor.

But how the pastor is actually to function only begins to take on more precise form when seen in the light of the
constituency. The nature and the needs of that constituency determine and give priority to specific pastoral functions. All functions, however, revolve around the task of proclamation, through word and deed, by which one dialectically applies mildness or severity, as the case requires, always directed toward one goal: the lifting of the individual out of the masses and into a new God-relationship.

CONCLUSION

Rendered in the language of contemporary discussion, Kierkegaard’s conclusion is that the pastor possesses authority insofar as he or she stands in continuity with Christ, who is the ultimate source of all authority. There is a difficulty with this claim in that different people will say this same thing with very different meanings. For some it will mean that the pastor occupies an office which was instituted by God, and which places the pastor in the direct line of authority which was given to the office by Christ. Ordination thus becomes a central symbol and act by which this authority is conferred upon the pastoral candidate. Others will mean by this that the pastor possesses continuity with Jesus not so much through participation in an objective office but through a life which is modeled upon the servant ministry of Jesus. These arguments are expressions of Carroll’s dichotomy between authority of office and authority of personal sanctity. They indicate that the issue is not whether continuity is the source of authority but how continuity is to be achieved.

That there are some problems with Kierkegaard’s approach is clear. A central one is that according to Kierkegaard the validity of the proclamation of the word from the pulpit and of the administration of the sacraments at the altar rests squarely upon the personal sanctity of the pastor. This belief recalls the issues of the old Donatist controversy once again. Kierkegaard’s leaning in this direction became explicit in his call to sincere Christians to refuse to worship in the Danish state church. For, he argued, the very existence of that church could no longer be justified, in part because of the failure of its
pastors to express the Christian faith in their lives, or, at the very least, their refusal to admit their inability to do so.

The extremity of Kierkegaard's position was intentional. Rather than attempting to delineate a new standard of ministerial authority to be universally acknowledged, he was attempting to serve as a 'corrective,' whose task it was to set right the abuses of his time.

When seen as a corrective, Kierkegaard's insights can be rescued and applied to the contemporary discussion. What Kierkegaard wishes to restore to ministerial authority is ministerial "authenticity." To apply Carroll's words to Kierkegaard, his emphasis upon the personal sanctity of the pastor seeks to "guard against a clergy functioning that is devoid of personal authenticity." 12 Similarly, Regis A. Duffy refers to the pastor as "symbolizer," which I take in the fullest sense of symbol to mean that which embodies or incarnates that to which it points. Such an approach seeks to prevent a "one-sided notion of objective ministry which refuses to deal with the personal stance of the minister." 13 The recent study of the attitudes of lay people toward ordained ministry continues to emphasize the desire on the part of the constituency for an authentic ministry in which the pastor "incarnates the Christian life of faith." 14

Indeed, when ministry is understood as this kind of embodiment of the life of Christ, then Kierkegaard's claim is not such an outlandish one, namely, that the pastor whose life is lived in categories which deny this model cannot rely upon ordination as a source of authority. The Christian church has long claimed that the essence of conversion, in whatever sense that term is meant, lies in one's personal encounter with the Christ. The Kierkegaardian pastor becomes a means by which this encounter with the Christ, in law and grace, severity and mildness, might take place.

NOTES

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7. CUP, p. 244.

8. JP, p. 141.

9. A more fundamental question, which is not being addressed here, has to do with the source of the authority of the pastoral office. Does such authority come from above, divinely instituting the office, or from below, from the constituency on behalf of which the pastor functions? See Mark Ellingsen’s effort to deal with that issue in the light of Luther in “Luther’s Concept of the Ministry: The Creative Tension,” Word and World 1:4 (Fall 1981): 338-46; also, Ruben Jacobson, “The Ministry as an Office of the Church,” in This Is the Church, ed. Anders Nygren (Philadelphia: Muhlenburg, 1953), pp. 268-93; and Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry, by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, 1982, p. 35.


11. Carroll, p. 103.

12. Duffy, p. 99. The authors of Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry see the authority of the ordained minister “rooted in Jesus Christ, who has received it from the Father (Matthew 28:18), and who confers it by the Holy Spirit through the act of ordination.” This kind of continuity with Christ is balanced by a continuity with the life of Jesus, whose authority was “confirmed by his life of service and supremely by his death and resurrection. Authority in the Church can only be authentic as it seeks to conform to this model” (p. 34, my emphasis).

THE RADICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE EUCHARIST

VERNON LEE SCHMID

The celebration of unity in Holy Communion calls us to concerted efforts to countervail the agencies of brokenness in the world.

In the history of the church catholic the most significant example of the eschatological reality of Christ is found in community. In the twentieth-century American experience the communities of Christ alive are best exemplified in those groups who arise in solidarity against racism, sexism, militarism, imperialism, and the nuclear arms race. These communities may or may not have formal structure, denominational identity, or hierarchy. They exist as common prophetic activity that draws into the community those whose faith response brings them to stand as witnesses on behalf of the blessed assurance in Christ that is also a blessed disturbance.

Christian community, however, is unique. It is not something that can be formed or developed or shaped. Rather it is the body of Christ, existing before and now and tomorrow, with open arms for those who choose to join. The choice is always up to the one who chooses to respond to the Word who calls people to witness.

In such community there is also mystery. There is

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something mystical about the body of Christ in that those who become part of it do so as one in unity with Christ and, therefore, with the community. Persons need not even know the individuals within such a community to sense the oneness. Dean J. Snyder, a United Methodist campus pastor and member of the Brandywine Peace Community, which has been consistently protesting General Electric's involvement with the nuclear arms race for many years, says that the mystery of such community becomes evident when one is suddenly in the midst of strangers who have committed themselves to the same kinds of witness. He notes:

I have found myself walking into a room of mostly strangers (Jonah House, Baltimore, Maryland) with whom I knew immediately that I shared mission and "community" even if I was not intimate with the individuals there. They knew me, too, and our common commitments and the fact we had all been arrested in resistance brought us together in a way I will never experience with some folk in my congregation whom I know intimately, but who have different commitments.

The ingredients that make up community—total and absolute unity with another through commonality, coupled with a sense of unity with God—are, therefore, established a priori. In such a body the human ingredients are molded and shaped to be part of that loaf that Paul identifies as Christ's body, broken and reformed and shared with the world.

Broken and weak, we are, nevertheless, one with Christ on the cross, and that fact remains essential to understanding what the eucharistic community is all about. The words in the language of the eucharistic liturgy are the words of a broken, weak, repenting, and suffering people. The language recalls the saving acts of God in history and the sacrifice offered by God so that those who call themselves Christians may live out of that act as actors in the new order. In other words, if we are not broken and becoming weak, communion takes on an
artificial meaning and the language of the Eucharist is a language without reference.

Despite the historical understanding of Holy Communion, there remains a splintered perception of what Holy Communion means, and in that splintering people are in danger of coming to the Lord's Table without fully understanding its import. Stumbling and lost, they only increase their disunity as they approach the eucharistic event as a memory exercise performed only because it is called for in the script.

Alexander Schmemann has provided some insight into the confusion surrounding the Lord's Supper: "The western Christian is used to thinking of the sacrament as opposed to the Word, and he links the mission with the Word and not the sacrament" (For the Life of the World, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973, pp. 21, 26). Having robbed the American church for decades of its possibilities as a church enabled and sent forth in the eucharistic event, the confusion has, at the same time, deprived the church of true community.

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Models for the beloved community of Christ are most visible in the churches of Latin America

In the new order announced by Jesus the community is the manifestation of witness to God's Word; in the eucharistic celebration the community redisCOVERS itself as journeying toward full unity with God. In fact, the eucharistic liturgy exists primarily to keep telling the story of the journey and, as Massey Shepherd, Jr., has said, "to inform the Christian's vocation in the world and set him on fire for mission" (Liturgy and Education, Seabury, 1965, p. 110).

Informed, we become witnesses. Disregard for the information available within the context of Holy Communion serves only to perpetuate brokenness within the life of the church. A great deal of work must be done if the churches of American Protestantism are to become any sort of reflection of
the mystical, united force that announces the presence of the beloved community of Christ.

Models for such communities are found in many places, but in the last half of the twentieth century they have been most visible in the church of Latin America. These base communities are joined by common pain, suffering, and struggle, and they are pushed by their understanding of the good news to be communities expressing Christ’s intentions on behalf of the poor. Like all such communities they arise out of their commonality to become one body because they find it impossible to face the crowd alone. When we become weak, broken, disenfranchised in the world, we desperately need each other and God. In the Eucharist we find the way to express both our need and the reality of the support enabled by community engaged in sharing the work of the cross.

In The Sacraments Today Juan Luis Segundo says that the emergence of such strong base communities in Latin America as faithful witnesses is rooted in the fact that they must confront, debate, and transform what they receive through the gospel. He writes:

A large crowd in a church can simply listen to the Gospel with more or less attention. A group of people must discuss it together, reflect on it, compare it with real life, and see what import a gospel message has for its own concrete existence as individuals, families, and members of society. (Orbis, 1974, p. 32)

This is not to say that large congregations do not hear the gospel but that it is more difficult in that setting than it is in small groups where the most creative work is done regarding the Word.

Perhaps this is why Henri J. M. Nouwen has observed that the true church of the future will be found primarily in small communities coming together around mutual concerns and goals. His vision of these communities includes people with one foot still in the established institution, but also people outside the institutional church.
This kind of supportive community rooted in the Lord’s Supper is what Paul had in mind when he explained to the church at Corinth that it was in the mystery of the sacrament of Holy Communion that koinonia happens, a koinonia of both believers and Christ (I Cor. 10:15-17).

The issue of evil in the midst of community and its repercussions for individuals is also addressed in this letter from Paul. He emphasizes the necessity of unity and love in action when he says, “You cannot take your share at the table of the Lord and at the table of demons” (I Cor. 10:21). Drawing on images from the Hebrew Scriptures, he places before the people the imperative of choice between being the beloved community or being separated from Christ.

In our time the teaching of Paul has far-reaching implications. The question before us is, how can the body of Christ be one in Christ at the Lord’s Table and at the same time be one with manifested evil in the world? The answer is obvious: we cannot. To choose to be one with evil is to choose to deny Christ.

Therefore, we cannot be one with Christ and one with systems that oppress and dehumanize. We cannot be one with Christ and be one with those who inflict injustice on the poor. We cannot be one with Christ and be one with the military whose only purpose is war. We cannot be one with Christ and support the murderous vengeance done in our name: capital punishment. To ally oneself with any such evil manifestations is to reject Christ.

Cheslyn Jones (The Study of Liturgy, Oxford Univ. Press, 1978, p. 152) says that Paul’s admonition should not be taken lightly, for he made the statement knowing full well that the Corinthians also knew the ramifications of their actions—that they manifested either support or betrayal of the beloved community and Holy Communion. In fact, one who is not at peace with brother and sister, or is indifferent to those evils manifested in the world’s brokenness, is better off just not to come to Holy Communion.

Since the body of Christ cannot be one with Christ and at
the same time one with evil, how do we address the issue constructively? One place to begin is for local churches to reconsider what it means to be the community of Christ. To exist as Christ's body is to maintain a unity with God in Christ in our lives and especially in our understanding of the Eucharist. And once we begin to search out the ramifications of the Eucharist, we discover that the source of true community is in the eschatological presence of God in Christ, creating and empowering, transforming and transcending, in movements, resistance, action, and witness before the principalities and powers that fracture community and thereby endanger the new order that Jesus set in motion.
That would be a fair Wesleyan statement of the theme of the four Epiphany lessons from Paul’s letters to the Corinthians. I am persuaded, however, that if Wesley were alive today he would substitute the word “maturing” for “perfection” in the title of his famous doctrine of the Christian life. Put in those terms the theme becomes: a Corinthian invitation to spiritual maturing in a pluralistic church. The two indispensable dimensions of a true spirituality are implied in this theme, namely, the maturing of a community as the context for individual maturing. Paul addressed these two dimensions simultaneously and in so doing spoke to the two most bedeviling tendencies of our time. They are the tendency of pluralism to immobilize a church by settling for some lowest common denominator among competing factions and the tendency of interest in spirituality to degenerate into narcissistic individualism. By offering a way to put spirituality and pluralism together Paul has made an offer we cannot afford to refuse.

If you, too, see this as a major agenda item for the people of God in our time, then thank God with me for the church at
HOMILETICAL RESOURCES

Corinth. We did not invent a jumble of factions as a substitute for a church anymore than we invented preoccupation with the psyche as a substitute for spirituality. If anyone did, the Corinthians did. We have the Corinthian crazies to thank for becoming the occasion for us to hear a word from God that can save us from our own current craziness. For be assured, unless we hear some such saving word, a renewed and reformed church of the future will look back on us with just that mixture of amazement and amusement we reserve for Paul's most bizarre congregation.

METHOD FOR OUR MADNESS

When the people of God are in crisis, we need preachers who will respond with cool, deliberate judgment lest in haste they aggravate the very injury they are summoned to relieve. The beginning of wisdom for shepherds facing confusion in the flock is found in the paraphrased saying of Jesus: “If any preachers will come after me, let them deny themselves the exhilaration of chasing their own muses and take up the historical-critical method and follow me.” Properly employed, the historical-critical method offers access to an artesian well of living water that refreshes shepherd and flock alike. Too often we associate the idea of historical-critical method with finding fault with the text and so shy away from a full and serious exegesis in preparing to preach. Properly understood, the method is intended to open up access to a sacred past and to allow the text to become for us and our hearers the word of God.

Two primary convictions inform exegesis in the service of preaching. The first is the conviction that it was and continues to be God's custom to speak to the people of God through this book with a regularity and certainty matched by no other source. The second conviction is that God speaks as the occasion requires. The occasion that calls forth God's word is some crisis in the life of the people of God. When the life of faith of the people of God is at stake in some way, then God
loves to speak a comforting and confirming, or correcting and
directing word. And by that word the life of faith of the people
of God is saved for a new day.

The form of God’s speaking changes as the occasion
changes, thus allowing the word to be saving for each
particular occasion. Here we have the nubbin of the matter.
Since the form of the word of God changes with occasion, the
form of the word of God in the text must change in the
measure that the occasion of the preacher differs from the
occasion that called forth the text. The gift of discerning how
the preacher’s occasion resembles and differs from the
original occasion and the difference that comparison makes
for the form of the word of God to the preacher’s occasion is
the spiritual gift operating at the heart of the exegetical
process. Exegesis, then, ultimately involves receiving a
spiritual gift rather than merely manipulating historical data
and ideas until they yield a lesson for today. To be sure, the
process includes handling the historical data. There is no
other way to find our way back into the original occasion and
to detect how the original word spoke to it. But even then the
discerning of that original connection is already a gift in some
measure; and the gift of carrying forward the original occasion
and matching the word to our occasion so that we, too, hear
from God is beyond calculating. Given this mystery, method
alone can never deliver the word. What it can do is tell us how
to position ourselves so that when God does speak afresh to
our occasion, we are likely to be within earshot.

The foregoing hermeneutical considerations may be con­
densed into a working definition of exegesis that will suggest
the procedure we shall follow in handling the Epiphany texts
before us: Exegesis is a passionate attempt to suffer one’s way into
the life crisis addressed in the text and in the process to catch
something of the saving word offered there for oneself and one’s
hearers.

Note the emphasis on passion. If it is life crisis and saving
word we are dealing with, how can it be anything but a
whole-hearted, whole-brained enterprise in which our whole
being is totally, existentially engaged?
This all-consuming engagement with the text follows four steps: (1) the recovery of the original life crisis of the text; (2) the discovery of the similarities with and differences from our own crisis; (3) the identification of the saving word in the text’s situation; and (4) the discernment of the shape that saving word needs to take in our life situation. We take these steps not only for each passage but for the book as a whole as well. We begin with the book as a whole because the message in each particular passage will be an aspect of the message of the book as a whole—what I call the master message. Having the master message in hand, or, more aptly, by ear, prepares us to catch the particular word of each passage. One could think of our method as an acted-out prayer. Put in words it might be something like: “Illumine us, O God, with the Spirit of passionate engagement in the life of Paul and his Corinthian readers. Open our eyes to see ourselves and our congregations in their light. Then keep Thine ancient custom to save us Thy people by Thy word. Our prayer we make in commitment to Jesus Christ our Lord, the complete and final Word. Amen.”

THE LIFE CRISIS IN CORINTH

The crisis of faith of the people of God in Corinth was in part a reflection of the character of their city. It had the glorious reputation of a Hellenistic city rich in culture and religious freedom. Later wags said that in its heyday there had been a temple to the goddess Aphrodite with a thousand sacred prostitutes in service at the temple. While this saying was most probably not true, it conveys the flavor of popular opinion about Corinth. The common proverb was “Not for every man is the voyage to Corinth” (Conzelmann, 12; see “Suggested Readings” at the end of these resources for full references), i.e., only for the person equal to the challenge of the unbridled life-style that people associated with the city. Imagine having religious legitimation for your wildest fantasies! In Athens a trip to Corinth rated as the original Club Med vacation in the days before there was a family plan.
Corinth was indeed on the Mediterranean. It was also on the Adriatic, being a narrow land bridge between the two seas, with double harbors through which goods were transferred to shorten the voyage. This location between seas and between northern and southern Achaea guaranteed the city commercial and military significance. The city had the cultural heritage and the economic base to support a thriving culture. The fortunes of war had leveled the ancient Hellenistic city, but it had been totally rebuilt by the Romans in 44 BCE. It flourished under Roman gentrification until it became the provincial seat of Achaea. Cosmopolitan would be the word for Corinth. It was a city for all nations, all cultures, all social classes, and all tastes.

The church at Corinth reflected its cosmopolitan environment. The religiosity of Hellenistic culture provided the substructure of the form of Christianity that was flowering among the saints there. Hellenists were uneasy with the material world. Bodily existence seemed to be an unfair confinement of the human spirit as it sought union with the divine. Hellenists felt trapped by this connection with a material world fated to suffer, to decay, and to die. Their religious dream was to discover some esoteric wisdom that would be the key to unlock the cell door of mundane existence and show the way to the heavenly realms where the devotee could share the untroubled existence of the gods. Heirs of this kind of religiosity would in half a century build an elaborate mythological system for this vision of extraterrestrial redemption. It would be called gnosticism. The Corinthian church was not there yet—it would be fairer to call it proto-gnostic (Conzelmann, 15). The aim of the religious pilgrimage was escape—escape from the suffering that belonged to everyday life and escape, finally, from death itself.

The religious worldview of the Corinthians dictated the forms this escape would take. Ecstasy was the way to dodge the slings and arrows of outrageous daily fortune. Ecstasy was an altered state of consciousness that provided a foretaste of the out-of-body state of salvation Hellenists longed for.
Such states of consciousness were attended by dramatic behavior interpreted as manifestations of the divine spirit that swept the saint into heavenly intercourse. The surest sign in Corinth of this divine ecstasy was speaking in tongues. This supernormal behavior marked out those who were being saved. Any who could boast of being recipients of such divine influence were justly proud. Other manifestations of spirit, such as the interpretation of tongues and a miracle-working faith, were also evidence of ecstasy but did not rank with speaking in tongues because they did not indicate such heights of religious achievement.

Corinthian Christians were spiritual athletes intent on outdoing one another with amazing feats of spiritual prowess. The degree to which one manifested supernormal behavior in church gatherings gave evidence of how he or she was seeded in the race for the ultimate olive wreath. Flights of ecstasy in the present were taken to be previews of the final flight, the one to escape death. That flight was the flight of immortality in which the body was sloughed off, allowing the human spirit to escape the experience of dying altogether. This devotion to a doctrine of immortality explains why the Corinthian church required such a detailed lesson on the resurrection of the body (chap. 16). No doubt the whole of I Corinthians came as somewhat of a surprise to members of that church since they supposed their Christian variation on Hellenistic religion had been taught to them by Paul.

THE GATHERING LIFE CRISIS OF PAUL

Paul must bear some of the responsibility for the bizarre spirituality and the divided church that we see in the Corinthian correspondence. In that correspondence Paul emerges as a Hellenistic enthusiast. We know from other correspondence that he was an ex-Pharisee and an apocalyptic mystic. In Corinth all these traits seemed to combine so as to confuse his converts' understanding of his gospel. The ex-Pharisee in him encouraged libertinism by removing all legal strictures for ethical behavior without replacing law with
a doctrine of justification by faith coupled to a doctrine of sanctification. He was to repair that gap in the Epistle to the Romans, but, meanwhile, the Corinthians seemed bent on sinning that freedom might abound. Convincing as he had been to this point in his life that Christ was coming soon, i.e., before he would die, Paul adopted what must have appeared to be a rather cavalier attitude toward death. Assured as he was of his inclusion in the rapture of the Parousia, he expected to finesse his way past death without ever having to experience it directly. The Corinthians could easily have appropriated and adapted this expectation for themselves in the form of hope for immortality. Likewise, his flights of apocalyptic mystical experience, as in II Corinthians 13, must have translated in their minds into proto-gnostic flights from an evil material world. Then there is the matter of his ecstasy. When he reports that he spoke in tongues more than them all, do we not get a hint of his entry into the Corinthian contest and a claim to have won? The Corinthians were not the only ones who were boastful of their spirituality. I am convinced with C.H. Dodd that Paul was entering the most important spiritual crisis of his life when he wrote I Corinthians.

The church there contributed to that crisis by mirroring for Paul his own spirituality in a way that must have astounded him and then forced him to face the need for his own maturing. He diagnosed the Corinthians as immature, babes, still of the flesh (I Cor. 3:1 ff.). He may have felt weak, fearful, and trembling within himself (I Cor. 2:3), but all they saw was a strong, superior spiritual hero. Why had he failed to communicate to them how he really felt about himself? Sometime between the first and second parts of Paul's correspondence with the Corinthians a traumatic event in Asia (II Cor. 1:8), coupled with an unrelenting chronic ailment (II Cor. 12:7 ff.), triggered the transition to a fuller spiritual maturing. In II Corinthians he did admit how weak he felt and how weak he was. We lose the full force of the life crisis within the Corinthian church if we do not also see that in preaching to correct their spirituality, he was preaching to himself as well. What else is new? Describe the flaws in a congregation.
and you are likely to mirror the flaws of its pastoral leadership.

In the measure that you, the passionate reader, have been suffering your way along with me into the crisis of faith in the life of the church at Corinth and in Paul’s life, there have likely been points where your attention wandered to churches, persons, and spiritualities you know that are very much like those we have been describing. I know I have. As I write, I stop, get up from my desk and walk from room to room remembering congregations and spiritualities I have known that are so much like Corinth it is uncanny. I take that as a sign that our prayer of illumination is being answered and that connections are being given between the time of the sacred text and our own time that will become vehicles of the saving word of God when that, too, is given.

THE SAVING WORD OF THE BOOK AS A WHOLE

Before turning to the particular saving words of the four passage lections it is important to catch the message of First Corinthians as a single unit. It was written as a unit. We need to let it speak as a unit. The twofold saving word is concentrated in the first four chapters and in the final fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians. The essence of the first part of the word is: “I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (2:2). Chapters one through four ring the changes on that theme. “We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles” (1:23). Paul made this point to bring the Corinthians back to ordinary life, with its inevitable trials and suffering, as the site where they might expect to meet Christ in his power to provide spiritual gifts. If they sought him in flights of exalted escape, they would miss him altogether and remain spiritual babes, immature in their preoccupation with their own interests. This immaturity, stemming from obsession with one’s own self-interest, Paul called “unspiritual” or “natural” (2:14). A more literal translation would be the “psychological person.”

Many members of congregations today come to their
pastors seeking an understanding of the psychological sources of their problems and suggestions for changes in attitudes and improved handling of their feelings that will result in a happier adaptation to their environment. The Corinthian saints resemble today's congregations in their desire always to be strong and to overcome adversity. But Paul pointed to the weak in the world as the chosen of God. "God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are" (1:2). The message to congregations then and now is that God promises in Christ to reveal the depths and glory of divine favor to those who will stay with experiences of weakness and nothingness until the power of Christ reveals itself.

That brings us to the complementary second aspect of the saving word of the Corinthian letters. The form that the power of Christ takes is resurrection power. That means the believer never does become strong. Christ raises the saint to new life but the power of that new life remains Christ's—not ours. So if we are to boast, it will not be in ourselves as achievers, but in Christ, the only achiever on the scene. Until it becomes an actual literal experience, dying remains for the believer a metaphor of the way to spiritual growth. From the point of view of spiritual maturing, a charmed life would be the greatest misfortune. A charmed life would rob us of the greatest opportunities to experience the power of Christ. As these previews of the power of Christ in our deathly weakness accumulate, poise in the face of our actual death grows until we may hope some day to experience in that hour Paul's strange dilemma—whether to stay for others' sakes or go for our own. The saving word of the book holds out to people of achievement and strength life's peak experience—the powerful presence of the crucified Christ just when we are weak and failing.

Good exegetical procedure calls for setting the Corinthian lessons in the context of the flow of thought of the books, especially the sections immediately preceding the selected lessons. The expositor preacher will find that it is helpful to
the congregation to recap this information as a one- or two-minute introduction to the reading of the Scripture lesson. (In some liturgical traditions reading Scripture without this explanatory comment used to be called “dumb” reading.)

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPiphany

I Corinthians 12:1-11

Criteria for True Spirituality

The first criterion is submission to Christ as Lord (12:1-3). With these verses a new section of the letter begins. As the flow of thought shows, the response to each issue raised by the congregation in its letter to Paul is introduced by the words, “Now concerning . . .” The way these early Christians describe this issue is significant. They call it, literally, “pneumatics” or “matters having to do with spirit.” The RSV translates it as “spiritual gifts.” I find this translation to be misleading. The Corinthians do think of themselves as gifted people but only in the sense that they have superior equipment for spirituality for which they take the credit, hence their boastful posture. Since their giftedness is their own property, they reason, they may use it as they please without encumbering obligation to others. It is just this proprietary right over their own spirituality that Paul is about to dispute with the doctrine of the lordship of Christ.

By way of introducing the notion of Christ’s proprietary rights over their spirituality, Paul reminds them that all spirituality, pagan or Christian, is a matter of some other agency than one’s own—“you were led astray,” it was not your doing. Your old spirituality was a matter of “having been moved,” not moving yourself. So a central consideration of authentic Christian spirituality is, “Who is doing the moving?”

Verse 3 affirms that the only moving and leading agency in true spirituality is “the Spirit of God” or “the Holy Spirit.”
The mark of the work of this agent is the confession "Jesus is Lord." A sure sign of the inauthentic character of the Corinthians' spirituality was their indifference to the connection between the moving force behind their spirituality and the Lord Jesus Christ. It was even imaginable in Corinth for someone to declare "Jesus be accursed" and no one to bat an eye. "My spirituality led me to it." (It is no longer possible to reconstruct with confidence the occasion that may have led to such an outburst in Corinth or to tell if this is instead a rhetorical device of Paul to highlight indifference to Christ's lordship.) Paul clearly intended to set limits to the pluralism in Corinth when it invaded the area of christology.

A corollary of the main point of this section is that the moving force in authentic spirituality is the Holy Spirit who executes the lordship of Christ. It is this tie between Holy Spirit and Christ as Lord that translates a confessional posture into a living experience of God at work in our lives. The question then becomes: What kinds of things does the Holy Spirit do to express the lordship of Jesus? The initial assurance to Corinth is that the Spirit offers a pluralism of the Spirit's own.

The pluralism of true spirituality is a plurality of gifts of the Spirit (12:4-11).

There is a plurality of spiritual gifts serving a plurality of ministries. Here Paul offers his substitute for the Corinthians' word for spiritual matters. His word is *charisma*, appropriately translated as "spiritual gifts." The root of this word is grace. We are graced with spiritual gifts as a consequence of the unmerited favor of a generous God. True spirituality is not our own doing anymore than salvation may be gained by works of the law. Having little acquaintance with Judaism, the Corinthian church did not try to earn its status by obedience to the law. But the Corinthians were following a parallel route in their pursuit of spirituality, hoping to prove themselves pneumatic and wise, i.e., people destined for salvation, by their spiritual feats. Thus the form taken by Paul's doctrine of justification by faith in Corinth is a doctrine
of spirituality as a gift of the Holy Spirit, the power of the lordship of Christ apart from one’s efforts to become spiritual. In theological terms, unless we hold justification and sanctification together as a single work of God’s grace, we risk making our spiritual journey into an unending, weary task that we must accomplish by ourselves. From the point of view of a Protestant appreciation of Paul this was the fundamental error of the Corinthians. However well they had begun in justifying faith, his letter betrays the fact that when they went on to the spiritual life, they had dropped back to managing it all by themselves. This accounts for the isolation from one another, the neglect of neighbor at communion, and the boastful attempts to outdo fellow members in spiritual accomplishments.

The thing that prevents the plurality of gifts from becoming competitive is the same Spirit, Lord, and God behind them all. Here in principle is the solution to the scattered and cliquish character of pluralism.

The variety of spiritual gifts serves a various but unified ministry. Gifts, service, and working are three ways of referring to the church’s ministry that unfolds as the product of spirituality. The threefold reference to ministry hints at three signal aspects of it. As a charismatic ministry it is a gift of the Spirit. As a diaconal ministry it stoops to supply mundane needs of people with bodies dependent on material support. This aspect of ministry is paired with the Lord who was the suffering servant. The ministry of true spirituality does not begin with disclaimers such as, “I don’t do windows.” It declares everyday housekeeping chores equal with supernatural phenomena (Conzelman, 298). Finally, the ministry of true spirituality as the work of God is an energetic, effective ministry that accomplishes God’s will.

The common goal of the plurality of gifts and ministries is the common good of the community. This common goal binds the variety of gifts and ministries together, with the Spirit as the common source of giftedness. Complementarity of individual spiritualities is guaranteed at both ends. This goal of common good requires a commitment from members as intense as the
acknowledgment of the lordship of Christ in the power of the Spirit. Indeed, this commitment in terms of common life gives content to the confession of Jesus as Lord. It is the evidence that we have understood what commitment to Christ as Lord means in our life together.

Having laid this much theological groundwork, Paul judges it safe to bring up the aspect of spirituality that had snared the Corinthians, namely, manifestations of Spirit. They loved spirituality that showed in public gatherings. They prized spiritual display. They judged gifts on the basis of the attention they drew to the gifted person. By making common good the aim and by including mundane service Paul threw public credit into question.

Paul supplies a list of manifestations of the Spirit, i.e., gifts of the Spirit that show in public, in order of their importance. The first two, utterance of wisdom and utterance of knowledge, may not need to be distinguished. They refer to edifying instruction in any church assembly, including teaching of doctrine and practical application to life (Barrett, 285). It is what the Sunday school teachers and adult educators do in their classes, what the choir often does for us in song and rhyme, and what the pastors attempt when they teach and preach.

Does the congregation think of these people as special agents of God’s energetic doing? They (we) are not the originators of these functions. When these things go well it is God at work. Give God thanks when they do well and pray to God that we may be so favored again and again.

The rest of the list is frankly miraculous activity mostly reserved for rare and exceptional times and places. But even though they are rare in our experience we must not discount their possibility among us.

The saving word of this Sunday’s lection is a form of the saving word of the book as a whole. To receive true spirituality at the hand of our crucified Lord is to accept his lordship in our spiritual journey. This means to put ourselves at the disposal of the common good of this congregation in
ministry of humble and effective service. For those who feel drawn by the power of the Spirit to such commitment, there awaits the receipt and identification of grace-filled gifts to fulfill that ministry. No greater adventure is available to a human being. Verse 11 may be used as both a sermon summary and an invitation to see for ourselves what the Spirit will apportion to each of us.

**THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPHANY**

1 Corinthians 12:12-30

*Church Membership as a Spiritual Experience*

The church as the body of Christ binds us together as it bonds us to Christ (12:12-13). These verses ground the unity of the congregation in a new way by adding the metaphor of body to the unity already established by a common source in the Spirit and a common goal in ministry. But the new metaphor points to a new reality when Paul says “so it is with Christ.” The effect is to relocate our experience of intimacy with Christ from a private inner experience to an experience we have with one another. It is not that the private experience is rejected; rather, it is declared to be partial. True spirituality is not what we do with our solitude, but what we do with our togetherness.

We experience the power of Christ in the Spirit when we experience the bridging of all the racial-ethnic, social-economic chasms that set us apart from one another outside the church. Wherever this happens Christ is present in his body to empower and bless his members and to bless the world through them. The church whose policy is faithfulness to the vision of unity in Christ can truly call itself a cosmopolitan congregation. Such a policy is a mark of true spirituality and a sure sign that Christ is present wherever it becomes a reality.

The power for this experience of leaping barriers has been with each of us ever since our baptism. Whether we realized it
then or have realized it since, we have all drunk of one Spirit—Paul’s language for baptism. When we open ourselves to one another, we make place for the Spirit. When we refuse to reach out to each other, we quench the Spirit. Most of us do not think of ourselves as having the Holy Spirit in our lives. Paul assures us that we do. The Spirit has been with us ever since baptism and confirmation when we confessed Jesus as Lord. Each of us has been on a spiritual journey since then. Much of what happens as we reflect on spirituality is that we learn to name what we already are. The naming enables us to become what we are by divine intention.

The implications of the congregation as a body (12:14-26).

No member’s gift and function in the congregation is so unimportant that they are not a prized and essential part of the body. Verse 14 affirms the multiplicity of member functions. This point was intended, no doubt, to counter the Corinthian mistake of picking the most showy gift of the Spirit and declaring that the other functions in the congregation were not really forms of spirituality at all. For the Corinthians there was only one form of spirituality—speaking in tongues. Unless one had this experience, one did not have the Spirit. This attitude is reflected in the positions of many Pentecostal churches today. It should be noted, however, that it is not the position of many charismatics who find their spiritual homes in denominations like ours. They are welcome as truly gifted people but not as the only gifted ones. Those who speak in tongues among us, and those who do not, love and respect one another on that basis.

It is not unusual to hear members of a congregation describe themselves by the gifts they do not have. “I cannot preach or teach or sing or organize.” Paul says to us: Don’t tell us what gifts you wish you had. Pray and yield to the prompting of the Spirit that you may discover your gift. As a member everyone has at least one. The only real difference among us is that some of us have yet to identify our gifts.

Members with important public functions must not suppose that less noticed members are less important. This is the reverse of the
previous point. Some members in Corinth felt so superior that they declared that no one else had essential gifts for the life of the congregation. We have seen how in Corinth they were the speakers in tongues—what we call charismatics today. In most Protestant congregations it is likely to be the clergy who seem to have the only important function. Beside them all others seem weak or dispensable. The way congregations gather on Sunday morning for worship reinforces that misperception. It is as though the preacher is the only one present with something worthwhile to say. That makes the conventional Sunday morning worship experience misleading. I cannot imagine ever dispensing with the accustomed morning worship. But we need to explore augmenting it with other forms of gathering that more clearly display the church as a body of mutually gifted people.

Paul was worried most by the caucus mentality at Corinth. So in verse 25 he insists that there be no schism in the body. That was the division by parties who followed Paul or Apollos or Cephas or Christ [!] that we know, from chapter one, existed in Corinth.

The caucus mentality is a danger that accompanies a cosmopolitan atmosphere. But as each interest group is encouraged to pursue its interest there must be a limit. The limit is reached when one special interest group assumes an adversarial relation to the congregation. The party spirit destroys the body and the blessing of Christ’s presence in the Spirit. The only hope of a congregation continuing as a body in spite of competing interest groups is for all to submit to a commonly accepted polity which adjudicates all requests for funding, priority, and program. The contribution of true spirituality at this point is to care for one another and suffer with each other until the next stated time to review the present policy. Party spirit kills the body if, after the decision falls, some group spends the whole next year complaining of the policy in place.

By way of summary Paul reaffirms the reality of the church as Christ’s body and of the order of gifts within it (12:27-30).
Paul's list of gifts follows the order of verses 8-10. The preaching and teaching gifts come first (apostles, prophets, and teachers) because the church as the body of Christ is founded on the gospel and its implications for common life in the congregation. Paul exercised these gifts and functions in writing the letter. We exercise these gifts in reflecting together on its meaning for our own churches. The striking thing about this list of gifts is how little supernormal activity is included. The three gifts that entail striking displays of divine power are those of workers of miracles, healings, and speaking in tongues. They are more than balanced by five gifts without such display: apostles, prophets, teachers, helpers, and administrators. This is most probably Paul's version of the important gifts. We see him in the process of moving true spirituality away from uncommon happenings and altered states of consciousness to common kinds of events and everyday consciousness. Without denying the validity of the supernormal, Paul declared that the most important spirituality unfolds without miracle or ecstasy.

The two strikingly normal functions included by Paul in his list here are "acts of helping or support" and "acts of administration" (Conzelmann, 215; Barrett, 295). These are people who do windows. The sermon at this point might tell stories of the many seemingly unspiritual little acts of support and administration that make the life of the church possible and allow it to continue. After working one's way from furnace room to belfry, the good news to declare is that these acts are all gifts of the Spirit and, as such, evidences of true spirituality and of membership in Christ's body.

Verse 27 performs both functions of summing up the passage and of announcing its good news. Members of the church are, by virtue of membership, members of the body of Christ. They are not just members of an institution, although they are that, too. They are members, in a wonderfully mysterious way, of Christ and possess spiritual gifts. The culminating invitation of the sermon should be for the listening members of the congregation to accept this exalted
status in the Spirit and to begin the prayerful process of identifying their particular gifts, and of the ways Christ intends these gifts be used to build up this congregation as his body. The connection between this saving word of the passage and the saving word of the book as a whole is that if church members will die to the old estimates of themselves as people without spiritual status because they are so ungifted or as people of exalted spiritual worth because of their obvious gifts, then God in Christ by the power of the Spirit will raise them all to new life as truly gifted people, equally important to the life of the congregation and to Christ whose body they are.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

I Corinthians 13:1-13

A Truly Superior Spirituality

The theme of the ordering of gifts in the previous lesson raises the question of comparative status in the church in an unavoidable way. After declaring that teaching and preaching are more important than speaking in tongues, for example, Paul exhorted the Corinthians, “Earnestly desire the higher ‘gifts.’” Is there no way around the contest for superior status even in spiritual matters? Must we drop out of the world’s rat race of upward mobility only to find ourselves in a similar race for spiritual superiority? Paul seemed to recognize the trap that was being laid in rating gifts by their importance for the upbuilding and nurture of the church. Would not his ordering of gifts in time work upon the church in just the same way the Corinthian order had? Would boasting continue among them with the only difference being that now the teachers instead of the speakers in tongues would boast of their importance above everyone else? While this ordering continued to be important from the point of view of nurture, some other fresh perspective had to be found from whose vantage point even a true order of importance had no final importance at all. Paul found that fresh vantage point in love.
"I will show you a more excellent way." The more excellent way is itself a gift of the Spirit although it does not fit the class of gifts popular in Corinth. In Corinth they were interested in pneumatic things, operations of the Spirit that impress others as being of the Spirit. The class of spirituality to which love belongs is "fruits of the Spirit" (Gal. 5:22). Gifts are something to do. Fruits are something to be. Fruits emerge quietly, gently, without drawing attention to themselves. As ways of being they always accompany and qualify the things we do. Our being comes out in the way we do things. The lesson in chapter 13 is that unless we have our being from the Spirit in the form of love, the gift we may have from the Spirit is worthless. Some commentators suggest that chapter 13 is an intrusion here. In my opinion it grows directly out of the Corinthian situation. In the first lesson Paul explained that the purpose of gifts is the upbuilding of the church. Presumably that connection was not being made in Corinth. Love is the connection between spiritual gifts and the well-being of the congregation. This is so because the love Paul was advocating had a special quality to it. As a fruit of the Spirit it conveyed something of God's way of being. Agapic love (the word here is ἀγάπη) leads us to give of ourselves to others with no thought of return except the delight we take in the enhanced well-being of those we love. Without love spiritual gifts may be used only to enhance the well-being of the pneumatic. This was the case in Corinth.

Spiritual gifts require love to give them worth (13:1-3). Beginning with their favorite gift, tongues, and following with his favorite gift, prophecy, Paul shows that all gifts are equally worthless without love. We suspect that Paul is here holding up the mirror to life among the Corinthian pneumatics. Miracle-working faith is discounted in its most impressive display imaginable, removing mountains. Even the gifts of low profile like helping can be managed for maximum display by a public act of immolation. Such things were known in the Hellenistic world (Conzelmann, 222 ff.). In the later church, martyrs sought death as a manifestation of
their faith. This athletic spirituality fired the imagination of the Corinthians. But glory-seeking spirituality is worth nothing.

Preachers will need to apply this lesson with care or they will seem unloving. Perhaps the most effective way to bring this lesson home is for the preacher to confess a few of the thousand ways he or she has been disappointed, discouraged, and depressed when criticism instead of praise has followed a public "performance." To reveal that public speakers and actors dote on self-glory may enable the "showoffs" in the congregation to see how shallow their spirituality is.

Love heals and soothes congregational life (13:4-7). Here love is portrayed as the source of the other ways of being in the Spirit that fill out "fruit" spirituality. Again Paul holds up a mirror to life at Corinth. No doubt the gifted were impatient with the less gifted and not at all kind in pointing out their superior gifts to the ungifted. The ranking of persons by gifts produced constant jealousy. Boastfulness was a constant undercurrent at Corinth and consequently a continuing theme in all of the correspondence from Paul. Here, no doubt, Paul was also preaching to himself. The Corinthians had drawn him into defending his apostleship by boasting of his spiritual accomplishments. In II Corinthians he would show his shame at falling into their trap by speaking of himself as though it were someone else he was describing (II Cor. 12). It is quite possible to seem very mature spiritually to others but to be empty of a truly superior spirituality. By the test of this spirituality none of us ever arrives. For all of life we are only ever striving for it (Phil. 3:12-16). Love is what must save a congregation's emphasis on spirituality from becoming an occasion for the worst sin imaginable, spiritual pride. Verse 5 speaks of being puffed up (arrogant) and rude, insisting on one's own way; being irritable and resentful when, of course, one cannot have his or her own way. This is a portrait of all congregational life when fruit spirituality is overshadowed by gift spirituality.
Verse 6 makes it obvious that gossip was one of the main sports in the Corinthian congregation. People who practice gossip and people who listen to it betray their empty spirituality as they "rejoice at wrong." Verses 4, 5, and 6 are a catalog of congregational bad manners. It is not just a catalog for Corinth but in some measure for all congregations everywhere at any time. Until we grow into the truly superior way of spirituality, we are all bound now and then to treat each other badly. What will hold our congregation together when these things happen? What will keep congregational life from coming to an end? Love will—by its capacity to accept the worst that ill-mannered fellow and sister members dish out (bear all things) and to keep on working, regardless (endure all things). The church is able to manage this by believing all that Paul taught about the church as the body of Christ, full of his presence in the Spirit, no matter how individual members may act (believe all things), and by hoping that the grace of Christ will enable a congregation to grow more and more to be the body of Christ it already is. It is clear how love keeps congregational life from grinding to a halt. But suppose love grinds to a halt, what then?

Love is the superior spiritual way because it never ends (13:8-13). The great risk of an emphasis on spirituality is that people will, as in Corinth, choose the way of gifts to form an elite group who will look down their noses at everyone else. Paul makes the risk worth taking by giving us the means to minimize that risk. In this section he exposes all pneumatics who emphasize their giftedness as immature. Gifted pneumatics think of themselves as perfect. In this marvelous paragraph Paul points out that the tongues, the knowledge—all of us possess knowledge (1 Cor. 8:1)—and the prophecy that the Corinthians use as evidence of their perfection are all imperfect. The sure proof of their imperfection is that they will pass away. The wonderful, humbling implication Paul drew from this insight was that so long as we are in this life we are only children in our spirituality.

We must be careful not to allow Paul's backward glance at
his childhood to lull us into supposing that in this life we shall ever look back on our spiritual journey from the vantage point of a grown-up. As long as we live here we shall always see in a mirror dimly so that our spirituality will be incomplete and immature. We live in hope that one day, when in heaven we see Christ face to face, we will be transformed into spiritual maturity and then know fully as we are now fully known. Consequently, in this life we continue to live by faith, in contrast to sight, by hope, in contrast to realization, and by love, which has no contrast in heaven. Therefore love remains when the other modes of the spiritual life have become obsolete.

The truly superior spirituality of love upstages the spiritual way of gifts that the Corinthians had been following. Love gives worth to gifts by connecting all the gifts to the well-being of the congregation. As a mode of being rather than doing, it heals relationships within the congregation which the doing of gifts has harmed. Giftedness is bound to set up destructive friction in the congregation. Love has the capacity to soothe the hurt. If it were not for chapter 13, we could not risk an emphasis on spirituality. It would destroy our life together. Thank God for the saving word of Paul that there is a higher way that can cure the lesser way of all its ills. It, too, comes to us by God’s grace. To distinguish it from the lesser way we call it the way of the fruit of the Spirit rather than that of the gift of the Spirit. As we move into spirituality, earnestly pray for gifts, but even more earnestly pray for fruit—the fruit of love.

The connection with the saving word of the book will be obvious. The crucified Christ is the supreme illustration of the superior way of love. It is a frightening way. As those of us who are used to establishing our spiritual worth by our spiritual achievements turn from them to our neighbors in the congregation, with no thought of getting anything from them in return for our spirituality, we suffer the vertigo of temporary worthlessness. In the crisis of that transition Christ promises to meet us and to steady us on the new way.
Actually, he has already been with us. Our turning in the direction of the higher spirituality is itself a fruit of his presence in Spirit.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

II Corinthians 3:12-4:2

A Ministry of Splendor or a Ministry of Glory

With the move to II Corinthians we enter a new phase of Paul’s relationship to the church at Corinth. Until now we have been dealing with the confusion over spirituality that arose out of the congregation itself. Now an outside source of confusion appears with regard to Hellenistic religiosity. Other apostles enter the congregation claiming a superior form of ministry. Part of their appeal is their spectacular pulpit manner.

We are able to piece together their identity from polemical asides scattered through the letter fragments that compose II Corinthians. They pose as “superlative apostles” (3:1; 11:4-5, 11) outstripping Paul by their “letters of recommendation” (3:1-3); their impressive spiritual experiences, which Paul must counter with his own testimony (12:1); their professionalism, which deserves appropriate compensation (11:7-15); their power to work miracles (12:12); their Jewish heritage (11:22); and, most of all, their weighty “presence” (10:9). We remember that the Corinthians were prone to form attachments to impressive personalities like Apollos and Cephas (I Cor. 1:12). Figures even more impressive than the old idols had arrived. Probably they were in the mold of itinerant philosopher-propagandists who made their living traveling and speaking throughout the Hellenistic world. Typically, they offered a spirituality of immortality and a charmed life. Their untroubled lives were free of the suffering that Paul’s mission generated. No doubt their smooth professional manner had led to relative affluence (II Cor. 2:17). They were veritable fonts of a spirituality of positive thinking.
This lectionary lesson touches on the crisis in Paul's ministry when he was clarifying his own role in the spirituality of his charges. He had come to realize that his congregations had attached themselves to him in the past because he was so impressive a charismatic. Now that someone even more impressive had come on the scene it behooved him to make abundantly clear what the true source of his congregation's maturing spirituality would have to be.

The saving word of this fragment (2:14-6:13; 7:2-4) of II Corinthians speaks of a ministry carried on by a suffering apostle. Paul has not yet revealed it to the Corinthians, but he had had an experience in Asia that convinced him he would die some day of persecution and miss the rapture of Christ's return (1:8). Out of the despair of that experience he won comfort in the insights that a ministry given up to death allowed the life of Jesus to manifest itself more effectively (4:7-12), and that a heavenly dwelling awaited each believer at death (5:1-9). Now that Paul had foreseen his death, he could be no lasting stay for anyone else's spirituality. He was ready, then, in our passage not only to point beyond the intruders but beyond himself as well.

The ministry of the intruders mediated a fading splendor (3:12-14a). The context contrasts the ministry of the intruders ("peddler of God's word") and the sincere ministry of Paul ("men of sincerity"; see 2:17). "Written code" and "Spirit" are the terms of that contrast (3:4-6). Within our passage itself the contrast is between splendor and glory. Splendor emerged in the relationship that developed between Israel and Moses during the giving of the law. Moses' face shown so brightly as a side effect of direct conversation with God that the people of Israel could not bear the splendor. Probably the intruding superapostles used the story from Exodus 34 to buttress their claim to superiority over Paul by associating themselves and their ministry with the splendor of Moses. We may suppose that Paul's point in discounting Moses' splendor was to discount his opponents' as well. Although Paul does not refer to them specifically until 4:2, we are safe in assuming that the
opponents are constantly in his mind as his polemic against fading splendor unfolds.

Paul hopes for something far superior to the splendor offered in the intruders' ministry. This makes him bold, or more accurately, open, in his ministry—in contrast to the devious practice of the opponents (4:2). Paul likens this deviousness to the veiling of Moses. Paul implies that his opponents, like Moses, have veiled themselves so that the Corinthians, like the Israelites, may not see the end of the fading splendor of their ministry. Paul continues by bringing the experience of Israel with Moses into his own time. The refusal of people like the intruders to believe that the old covenant has come to an end shows that a veil of misunderstanding is still in place. This observation applies to the Corinthians as well in the measure that they fall for the ministry of the intruders.

In Christ the veil is lifted to expose this spirituality (3:14b-16). "In Christ" is the Pauline phrase pointing to the sphere of Christ's reign in which the benefits of salvation unfold apart from law. The implication for the opponents is that they are not operating "in Christ," so that their ministry perpetuates veiling and hides true spirituality from the Corinthians.

Verse 15 emphasizes 14a. Verse 16 repeats 14b but plays on "the Lord" from Exodus 34 where Moses 'went in before the Lord' with veil removed. Thus "turning to the Lord" in our text removes the veil for Christians. In turning to the Lord Paul implies that the Corinthians must turn away from the opponents. The turning that removes veils is not toward Paul nor toward any impressive ministering intermediary but toward the Lord. Authentic experience of Spirit does not come in attachment to any human minister—however splendid and impressive.

The Lord is the only source of true spirituality, which is characterized by freedom and transformation (3:17-18). These verses represent a climax in Paul's own maturing. Here
he leaves behind entirely the spirituality subject to the chaos of Hellenistic enthusiasm that unfolded in Corinth. The line of development runs directly from I Cor. 12:3, where the lordship of Christ began to set the context for ordering all charismatic spirituality ("no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit"), to verses 17 and 18 of our text, where the experience of Spirit is itself declared to be an experience of the Lord ("the Lord is the Spirit"). This must surely be the sense of the equation of Lord and Spirit in both of these verses. Nowhere does Paul ever suggest that Spirit and Lord are a single person (or substance). In the context of the present argument the point is to clarify the spirituality of authentic ministry. No doubt the opponents claimed a superior spirituality. Paul's rejoinder is that the spirituality of their message ended at best in an encounter with Moses. Paul's gospel, by contrast, offered a spirituality that led to an encounter with the Lord.

At this point Paul founded a Christian mysticism that has overcome the spatial distance that primitive apocalyptic Christianity had left between the believer on earth and Christ in heaven at God's right hand and the temporal distance between the believer waiting and a Son of man coming at the end of the age. This is a watershed in the history of the theology of spirituality.

The first benefit of this new spirituality is freedom. The freedom granted by the Spirit of the Lord, in contrast to the spirit of the opponents, is most obviously deliverance from the enslaving spirituality of law. That is the consistent meaning of freedom in Paul and fits the Jewish identity of the opponents. But the situation calls for a more specific connotation. This freedom includes escape from the clutches of the ministers whose code kills rather than gives life (3:6). In the situations of some churches, an analogy is close at hand. The longing of some for a past ministry that produced institutional success plays into the hands of a culture that seeks to establish worth by one's adherence to the code of upward mobility. Longing for a successful church mirrors the longing of the Protestant for salvation by career achievement rather than by the gift of God.
granted in an encounter with Christ the Lord. The Protestant ethic is our form of the law of Moses. The dispensation of the successful, achieving clerical leader is displaced by the dispensation of Spirit. Now we want clerical leaders who point beyond all middle-class dreams to the transforming glory of the Lord. This yields more than freedom from. It yields freedom for.

The second benefit of this new spirituality is transformation. In the encounter of the believer with Christ in Spirit, Paul escalates spirituality beyond splendor to glory. Where the Israelites saw only splendor on Moses' face (and the Corinthians only the splendor of the opponents), Paul's spirituality sees "the glory of the Lord." Glory characterizes the complete eschatological fulfillment of the dispensation of Spirit. It marks the perfect state of the future resurrection. Earlier Paul had said that only at the end could believers anticipate transformation—"we . . . shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet" (1 Cor. 15:51b-52a). Now he offers transformation as a present possibility. As believers behold the glory of the Lord in their experiences of Spirit, they are progressively changed into Christ's likeness on a rising scale from one degree of glory to the next. Only the Lord who is met in the Spirit of Paul's gospel can produce this transformation. It is not available through the ministry of the opponents.

The standard for this transformation is Christ's image or likeness. "Image" matches the verb "beholding," which means beholding as in a glass. The perfect and glorified Lord as image lets us see God, who must otherwise remain invisible. To have the ineffable privilege of knowing God in this way releases transforming power in our lives. This is the continuing effect of an authentic experience of Spirit.

The unique transforming effect of this spirituality authenticates Paul's ministry (4:1-2). The passage ends on a note parallel to the one sounded at the beginning of Paul's apologia for his ministry. The opponents came with letters of recommendation to authenticate their ministry. Paul had a
letter of his own. The transformed lives of his Corinthian charges, which grew out of his ministry, were his letter of recommendation (3:1-3).

"Therefore," on the basis of this transforming effect that has authenticated his ministry as a merciful gift of God, Paul refuses to lose confidence that the way he is going about ministry is the right way. It must not be allowed to matter that another form of ministry appeals to some, perhaps even the majority of the Corinthians. Their spiritual well-being and his own integrity require him to continue in his usual way. Yet it is not quite accurate to call it the "usual" way. His grumbling and defecting parishioners have stimulated Paul to see more clearly than even he had seen before what lies at the core of true spirituality.

To offer any other form of spirituality would be to distort shamefully the word of God. Paul closes the passage by returning to yet another note struck earlier. In verse 12 of the preceding chapter he had begun by declaring that he was quite open ("very bold") in his ministry. He repeats the claim here. He fully expected that this candor in contrasting the spirituality of the super-apostles with the spirituality of his ministry would win assent for his spirituality as the simple truth wins assent from any conscientious hearer.

A ministry that plays down the image of the minister as symbol of splendid personal and congregational success has the best chance of serving a transforming spirituality. The minister who stays with this simple truth points to Christ who becomes a transforming presence by the power of the Spirit. A ministry that emphasizes its own presence tends to veil the sight of its parishioners. The seductive quality of such ministry derives from its contrived splendor. That there is such seductive splendor cannot be denied. The Corinthians almost fell prey to it. But the spirituality of such splendor is a dead end. It leads at best to Moses offering some code on the basis of which the devotee must earn his or her own worth. For Protestants, that leads to the attempt to win salvation by works of upward mobility. In the end it leads to that.
reversal of the image of God we call "the self-made man."

We have a choice: a ministry of self-effacing witness that unveils the Lord as solid gold or a ministry that strives for a splendid appearance by covering base metal with chrome plate. The glory of a self-effacing ministry is that it forsakes appearance for substance—the substance of transformation.

SUGGESTED READINGS


BOOK REVIEWS
Clerical Ethics

G. LLOYD REDIGER

The need for contemporary studies and writings on clerical ethics is partially filled by two recent books: Karen Lebacqz, Professional Ethics (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985) and Sissela Bok, Secrets (New York: Vantage Books, 1984). Although neither of these books addresses professional or personal ethics for religious leaders exclusively, much of their content is relevant for the clergy.

Sissela Bok, a lecturer at Harvard University, is developing a reputation as a specialist dealing with the social phenomenon of information and the tendency to manipulate it. Her earlier book, Lying, dealt with moral choices in private and public life. In Secrets, she demonstrates her concern for common practices of managing information without regard for long-range consequences.

Bok begins with the myth of Pandora and offers imagination exercises in which citizens of four fantasy societies live with different varieties of secret-keeping, from total openness, in which secrets are impossible, to total impenetrability, in which any secret can be kept concealed. Secrecy and its convolutions are then discussed in reference to the effects on society and the secret-keeper. Several contemporary social dynamics (government, business, military, the professions, social science research, and journalism) are analyzed to demonstrate the struggle in regards to secrecy and confiden-
ciality. The author makes a case for a specific attitude and policy, professional and personal, which she regards as an urgent agenda for today's world.

Secrecy, according to Bok, is neither good nor bad necessarily—in contrast to lying, which she says is prima facie wrong. Secrecy "is needed for human survival, yet it enhances every form of abuse." Her discussion ranges from childhood training and the common choices we all have, to the seductive and intimidating power of corporations, governments, and professions when coping with information. "Powerful new techniques for storing and of probing secrets increase the need for careful debate," she writes. Then she discusses rationales such as "the right to privacy," "national security," "the freedom of inquiry," and "the public's right to know." She says human beings care most to protect and yet to probe the exalted, the dangerous, the shameful, the sources of power and creation, the fragile, and the intimate. She argues convincingly that deception has developed from natural human tendencies and needs, but inevitably leads to self-deception, interference in normal social processes, and oppression of those unable to handle the many deceptions which engulf them.

Her argument for a middle-ground stance urges openness for information and its management, yet allows for timing, caring, and even occasionally heroic investigations of information practices. Her burden is that, in every possible way, persons involved and affected be allowed to participate in the discussion of information management and the policies being formulated in institutions and society regarding this significant dimension of social interaction.

Bok's book is heavy reading, both because her issues are already practiced and defended in public policy, and because she takes great pains to analyze the pros and cons of each of her themes. In fact, one of the great strengths of this book is the careful analysis of each theme and scenario. Her writing style demands stamina from the reader, for she forces us to wade through every aspect of information management and to rethink our attitudes and policies. The repetition of her
thoughts demonstrates the relatedness of issues we may think are obvious or acceptable, but which at deeper levels produce a sinister web in our lives. The book has abundant quotes, significant illustrations, and guidance from ancient and contemporary authorities. I have seldom read a book in which my questions and concerns were so adequately anticipated.

Karen Lebacqz is Professor of Christian Ethics at Pacific School of Religion. Her book, *Professional Ethics*, is a valuable starting point for discussion of changes in the role of the clergy in ministry. Her main agenda is to show the significance of being a professional in our society, to indicate the complicated and changing nature of professional ethics, and to offer a three-part framework for simplifying and handling professional dilemmas. But Lebacqz has some additional points to make, along with her primary agenda. She illustrates the importance of gender in professional ethics by the consistent use of female identity in illustrations and in the constant use of the female pronoun. By implication, she also makes a case against members of the clergy who are not insightful and against conservatively oriented ministers.

Lebacqz begins her book with illustrations, including one in which a pastor is asked by a fifteen-year-old parishioner for help in getting an abortion. The author then proceeds to discuss rules in ethics and the reasons we typically use in applying them. Then she discusses duty and the writings of several well-known philosophers of ethics. She then begins to make her case for a primary ingredient of professional ethics—discernment, or insightful discrimination between priorities in situations.

Professional roles, images, models, expectations, and professional training next receive her attention. She writes that role definition links norms and situations and then synthesizes a role action. Since role definition is so important, Lebacqz proceeds to discuss the importance of character. This is a combination of professional codes, etiquette, and the personal morality and integrity of the person in the role.
makes an important point concerning the limitations the role forces on the person, and the pitfall of allowing style to become the definition of the role.

The author's well-founded concern for abuse of power by professionals leads her to point out specific dangers, and to remind us of the growing tendency of the public to pull professionals off their pedestals. This gives her an occasion to proclaim a new orientation for professional ethics—justice and liberation. In this mode, the professional is urged to share and seek redistribution of power. She shows the centrality of the struggle with social structures in order to move in this direction.

Focusing on the professional in the clergy, Lebacqz then analyzes the church as the primary setting for acting out clerical ethics. Pastors often face a paradox: they are powerful and are expected to exercise authority, and yet they are limited by the expectations of the church and the "suffering servant" ideal which emphasizes service rather than exercise of power. It seems to me that this paradox, though a real one, is not, as Lebacqz sees it, the primary one in the church. By implication she is urging the pastor to be a change agent—a champion for the oppressed—while society and the church give him or her less and less authority and power to accomplish this goal.

In her final emphasis on a realistic interpretation of confidentiality for clergy, she points out the value in empowering a parishioner and related persons to grow and make decisions, with a corollary need to nurture and make space and time for this growth. Confidentiality for clergy then becomes a resource for ministry rather than a struggle over rules and secrecy. This emphasis truly requires courage and discernment on the part of clergy.

While the author makes a notable attempt to cover all the bases in her development of themes and prescriptions, she becomes somewhat labored and redundant in middle chapters. But her use of periodic summaries helps lead the readers through the maze.

Lebacqz presents an ideal of the character of the profes-
sional that most of us would applaud. But my experience as a clergyperson, and for many years as a counselor to clergy, indicates that few of us meet this ideal, and yet good ministry comes from less than illustrious clergy, and from less than noble motivations and insights. Lebacqz misses a prime opportunity to emphasize the primacy of God's grace in the leadership of the church. I find great solace in knowing that the success of ministry does not depend alone upon the qualities of the minister.

There are similarities between these two books. Both books use the example of a young unwed girl seeking counseling for an unwanted pregnancy to examine the confidentiality issue for professionals. And both make a case for limited confidentiality, in which persons who need to know or who can help are made privy to the situation. The dilemma is familiar for clergy, who must constantly decide what is best and what is acceptable.

These two books give us occasion to consider the issue of clerical ethics. It is strange that the field of professional ethics contains relatively little specific work on the clergy. The related field of religious ethics has several valuable new entries. But such works tend to deal with formal and systematic ethics, not the everyday ethics actually needed to guide the behavior of the clergy. It is also interesting to note that although many other professions have a national code of ethics, the clergy has no standard national code. Each denomination has some form of a code for its own clergy, but no universally accepted ecumenical code exists.

There are several reasons for the difficulty of developing a practical clerical ethics. One is the great role change in what is ordinarily called professional etiquette. Once seminarians were warned not to wear brown shoes in the chancel, always to wear a tie and jacket in public, to have windows in their office door (to guard them from suspicion when with members of the opposite sex), etc. Now casual clothing is accepted, decorum is largely unrestrained, and many members of the clergy are women, which upsets the largely male-oriented rules.
Etiquette and decorum are only one dimension of clerical ethics. There is also a dimension of morality. Until recently members of the clergy were expected to model ideal morality, at least in public. It was assumed that pastors who violated the congregation’s ideas of morality were unfit and should be removed. This belief still exists in some communities and a residue remains in others. But the sheer frequency of divorce among members of the clergy demonstrates the revolutionary change in the clerical role. Finding a model for clerical morality, when there are distinct differences between liberal and conservative views, is a difficult but necessary task in clerical ethics.

A third dimension of clerical ethics is professional practices. Should pastors focus professional attention on preaching, keeping the peace, calling, competition with peers, denominational politics, spirituality, or all of the above? No one has spelled this out for the clergy.

These brief examples remind us that if we are to have some codification of standards for the clergy, those standards must be relevant for a constantly changing world and profession. Perhaps we will need local, regional, and international versions.

My many years of counseling members of the clergy in a confidential and ecumenical setting have shown that they want some guidelines for behavior which make sense. They want some guidelines for acceptable behavior and ministry which will protect them from most criticism while allowing the use of their individual judgment. I offer the following factors to a growing dialogue on this subject.

Factor one: Who and what we represent calls us to high standards of service and behavior. While many members of the clergy are freeing themselves of outdated expectations, it is helpful to remind ourselves that there is value in modeling what we preach. I am not speaking of pious smiles but referring to the joy and discipline of demonstrating the gospel in our everyday lives through our passion for peace and justice and our joy in caring for God’s creation. We still represent the highest aspirations and conduct human beings
can conceive of. It is not acceptable for parishioners to burden us with the responsibility for vicarious righteousness. But they may expect us to be a positive reminder of the faith and the calling from God which we share.

Factor two: Mobility and change are now persistent factors which must guide our professional ethics. Formerly, pastor and congregation expected a long-term relationship between persons who had time to get to know each other. Now about twenty percent of the American population moves each year. We are ministering to persons who live with the anxiety of change and who yearn for reassurance and guidance in a society which doesn’t seem to know what it stands for any more.

Members of the clergy should develop the skill of managing change and anxiety, in themselves as well as in parishioners. Such skills must be learned on the job and in study and prayer, for they are not normally taught in seminary. We can also teach ways to sort out right and wrong on the run, as many people must do today because of changes and hectic life-styles. This is not as difficult as it seems, if we have taken time to develop spiritual disciplines for ourselves. And we can make ourselves available to “hold” persons who are anxious, confused, and hurt. Nothing is closer to the heart of ministry. There are dangers, of course, such as letting people become dependent on us instead of growing, and such as burning ourselves out in caring for others rather than teaching them how to care for each other.

Factor three: The mental health movement, chaplaincies, and interdisciplinary consultations now require members of the clergy to speak understandably and work cooperatively with persons and groups whose agendas differ from ours. We have the task of translating the gospel in many settings other than the church, but in order to receive a hearing and to gain cooperation, we must be believable and trusted. This means we must avoid the temptation to judgmentalism and irrelevant religious advice. We can demonstrate to outsiders and other professionals that we are here to engage in dialogue and to help rather than to prove our righteousness. We can
also encourage others to function at their noblest levels. This means taking time to understand their goals and values rather than trying to indoctrinate. But we can and should help them take note of and understand the importance of people's need for wholeness and meaning in their lives. In this world of pluralism we can no longer presume that we have the only truth, and in settings of cooperation with other professionals, we have the privilege of relating to them graciously and creatively.

Factor four: We are in danger of defining our ministry now by the growing threat of lawsuits, as is the experience of many physicians and other professionals. Are there suggestions for handling this issue? Of course. First, protect yourself at all times. Second, don't offend powerful or neurotic persons. Third, be sure your best friend is a good lawyer! These are facetious remarks, but they are typical reactions to the new threat. More seriously, we can suggest that discussions of this issue begin in congregations and denominations before lawsuits are threatened. We no longer have the luxury of denial or untouchability. We can review our practices and habits in ministry with a legal consultant to avoid legal hazards. Even more, we can sharpen our understanding and practice of ministry so that we are sure of what we are doing and willing to take the risks sometimes required in caring for others.

Factor five: There are constant complaints from clergy spouses, their children, and members of the clergy themselves about poor living and working conditions and the lack of concern for their feelings by parishioners and denominational executives. Many such problems exist because clergy-persons and their families are viewed as a role rather than as persons. To deal with this problem requires, first, that you take time to assess the actual needs you and your family have. This may be complicated by accumulated irritations, unrealistic expectations, and internal conflict, but it is usually worth the effort. Next, learn to negotiate. Negotiation is an honorable, though often uncomfortable way to resolve differing expectations with integrity. At the same time, make
use of the congregation’s and the denomination’s support system for members of the clergy and their families.

Factor six: Self-management awareness and skills are crucial to professional ministry. Self-management is more than getting to the church on time or being nice to people. It is the skill of self-understanding so that realistic goals and limits can be set for personal wholeness and effective ministry.

It is much too easy to have an unrealistic fantasy about ourselves as members of the clergy. We tend to imagine what we ought to be or wish we were and thus miss the opportunity to minister well and demonstrate to parishioners the value of self-understanding and self-nurture, while living within human limits. These are not the same as selfishness; they are good stewardship of the self for which God gave us responsibility. For a realistic sense of your own strengths, weaknesses, and needs do a “fearless inventory” of your life, with a professional counselor, if possible. Set a schedule with self-nurture (physical, emotional, and spiritual) built into it. Unless you focus your life on thankfulness and the joy of living and ministry, other people’s problems and the responsibility of ministry will push you toward discouragement and cynicism. Mastering the skills of self-management will give one a more secure basis for handling oneself in the politics of the church, clearly an important part of clerical ethics.

Factor seven: The church has nearly succumbed to the business model of functioning. This means we will tend to think in terms of “the bottom line” (dollars, members, and products) unless we can keep a motivating “vision” of the community of faith. Business has valuable insights and resources for us, but it is not the most helpful guide for clerical ethics.

Can we make use of business insights and resources without losing our vision? Many churches already do. Efficiency, cost effectiveness, aggressive marketing, delegating, decision-making, motivating, the use of effective office tools, and goal-setting are some of the business techniques that can guide us. We can learn to think in terms of creativity
rather than defending traditions. Business teaches us to be aware of markets, customer satisfaction, and future opportunities. We can build these into our ethics if we carefully orient ourselves to human needs rather than profits. Our mission is not to establish a successful institution, nor to compete with other believers, but rather to be obedient to the God who called us to be faithful stewards.

If the clergy and the church expect to remain effective in ministry while societies and persons live in constant change, we must discover a core of ministerial leadership which can be standardized. Clergy members can use this code confidently as a launching pad for a variety of caring and prophetic ministries. Pious rules won't help, creative standards will. Since we are being forced to minister and relate across parochial lines now, an ecumenical version of clerical ethics appears to be a worthwhile venture.
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