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QUARTERLY REVIEW
A Scholarly Journal for Reflection on Ministry

A publication of The United Methodist Publishing House
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Quarterly Review (ISSN 0270-9267) provides continuing education resources for professional ministers in The United Methodist Church and other churches. A scholarly journal for reflection on ministry, Quarterly Review seeks to encourage discussion and debate on matters critical to the practice of ministry.

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; eccumenical 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.

Articles for consideration are welcome from lay and professional ministers, United Methodists, and others, and should be mailed to the Editor, Quarterly Review, Box 871, Nashville, Tennessee 37202. Manuscripts should be in English and typed double-spaced, including notes, and the original and two duplicates should be submitted. No sermons, poems, or devotional material are accepted. Queries are welcome. A style sheet is available on request. Payment is by fee, depending on edited length.

Quarterly Review is published four times a year, in March, June, September, and December, by the United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry and The United Methodist Publishing House. Editorial Offices are at 1001 19th Avenue, South, Box 871, Nashville, TN 37202. Circulatium and business offices are at 201 Eighth Avenue South, Box 801, Nashville, TN 37202. Second-class postage paid at Nashville, Tennessee.

Quarterly Review is available at a basic subscription price of $15 for one year, $26 for two years, and $33 for three years. Subscriptions may be obtained by sending a money order or check to the Business Manager, Quarterly Review, Box 801, Nashville, TN 37202.

Postmaster: Address changes should be sent to The United Methodist Publishing House, Box 801, Nashville, TN 37202.

Subscribers wishing to notify publishers of a change of address should write to the Business Manager, Quarterly Review, Box 801, Nashville, TN 37202.

An index is printed in the winter issue of each year (number 5 for 1981 only; number 4 thereafter).

Quarterly Review: A Scholarly Journal for Reflection on Ministry
Spring, 1986
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CONTENTS

Editorial: Going to Church
Charles E. Cole................................................................. 3

Authority in Mutual Ministry
Letty M. Russell................................................................. 10

Responsible Grace: The Systematic Nature of Wesley's Theology Reconsidered
Randy L. Maddox............................................................... 24

Who Is the Director of Worship?
Richard F. Collman........................................................... 35

Computer Theology: A New Era for Theology
W. Paul Jones....................................................................... 41

Jewish Resources for Christian Worship
S T Kimbrough, Jr.................................................................. 56

Homiletical Resources for the Easter Season
David G. Buttrick.................................................................... 65

Where Is Current "Church Planning" Lending Us?
J. Michael Ripski.................................................................... 86

Book Review: Recent Titles in Medical Ethics
Larry R. Churchill............................................................... 97
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QUARTERLY REVIEW
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Today was Easter Sunday, and so all of us once more trickled off to church and all that sort of thing.

So wrote Lord Mountbatten in his diary. His view, we imagine, represents that of the masses. Going to church (i.e., worshiping in a congregation) remains low on the list of popular activities. We sense this reluctance even among committed worshipers. Those who are normally very devoted can be thrown off the track by the slightest distraction—a head cold, a visit from a relative, the prospect of a jaunt to the lake, the weather. What hope is there for churchgoing when worship, which ought to be primary, becomes subsumed under the et cetera principle?

This question perplexes us because it leads us not against principalities and powers but against ghosts and fantasies. Indifference and apathy make for targets hard to see and harder to hit. People rarely make cogent arguments for failing to be at worship—they just disappear. Give us the hardened sinner any day. Centuries of religious conflicts have perfected strategies for conquering 100 proof sin. Prophet and priest and pastor, we have been drilled by our mentors on confronting the hosts of evil. But we are less well equipped to handle the evanescent, amorphous nonchurchgoer.

These reluctant worshipers are not merely sinners—they constitute a subversive threat to the clergy. They have the power to convert the converter. Those who come into contact with this spiritual disease may inhale the germs that will infect them as well. Soon, having been sent as missionaries to convert the heathen, the clergy adopts their heathenish ways. The priest becomes the
confessee and not the confessor. The preacher becomes the lost lamb instead of the shepherd. The rabbi sits at the foot of the foot. How does this reversal take place?

Clergy may be tempted by nonchurchgoers because clergy members themselves resent the very things that Mountbattenites and their kin object to. For example, worshipers typically dislike being lectured to or preached at—they do not mind questioning or criticism as long as it is done with some allowance for their own opinions and value judgments. And there is nothing preachers dislike more than this same arrogant spirit. Worshipers also seem to crave ritual. This need is often expressed in pleas for familiar hymns and old-fashioned forms of worship, and educated clergy members regularly show their cultured despite of this kind of religion. Even so, much of the recent literature on worship emphasizes its ritualistic nature, and this in a social and cultural sense, not merely a religious one. And at bottom most clergy really do dislike worship that ignores this urge for the ritualistic. Another criticism that many worshipers have of worship is that it is dead—it is cold or too formal or dull, they say. Here again, designated leaders of worship feel the same way—sometimes the worship experience can be depressing. In such cases we can only sadly acknowledge the legitimate reasons for avoiding worship altogether. We can then begin to sympathize with the church member who prefers to drink a second cup of coffee and read the sports page on the day of worship rather than taking the trouble to go to church, where worshipers may be asked to sip grape juice in miniature plastic cups and to follow an order of worship that is badly typed and entirely conventional.

But some do go to church, and my guess is that they are very dedicated. Worshipers in general must be a committed lot; otherwise their faith would be undermined by going to church. Much of the responsibility for this subversion of faith rests on the poor performance of leaders of worship themselves. Believing that the ordained clergy surely have an edge on exegesis and theological insight, worshipers may find instead a preacher who reads the text as if he or she had never read it before, and whose sermon reflects no reflection. Trying hard to believe that history may yet have a purpose despite the threat of nuclear war and the horrors of crime and drug abuse, they may enter a service made up
entirely of catch phrases and clichés that hardly mention contemporary realities and the possibility of hope. Seeking strength to contend with their own destructiveness as well as that of others, they may find themselves mere observers in a service that is superficial and showy, a performance and not a liturgy, a "people at work" (laos and ergon). Some worshipers emerge from church only with a sense of stoic accomplishment, having survived these attacks on their faith one more time.

Not everyone goes to church under duress, however. Conservative Protestants seem to have little difficulty attracting worshipers, and enthusiastic ones at that. Fundamentalist, charismatic, and right-wing, they seem to offer a popular form of worship that strikes a responsive chord with many Americans. One way of understanding this phenomenon is through the concept of transposition, used by Martin Marty in describing contemporary religion. According to Marty, whereas Protestant conservatives (nowhere defined by name) once placed Christ over against culture, now they merge with culture, now they merge with culture. Roman Catholics used to seem backward in their social views, but now they offer more leadership than Protestants. Twenty years ago the secularists thought religion to be declining; now religion, particularly conservative religion, is thriving and the secularists are on the defensive. Black church leaders, who formerly seemed to serve only the religious interests of blacks, broadened their perspective to include whites and others. Jews, who formerly had made alliances only with the heirs of the colonial churches—the so-called "mainline churches"—now find friends among right-wing fundamentalists. (See "Transpositions: American Religion in the 1980s," Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, July, 1985.)

Within this context we can see that mainline religionists have lost power. These groups include some Roman Catholics and Reform Jews as well as Protestants. The ascendant groups are those who define themselves clearly. They stress "boundaries"—what sets them off from the culture around them—and identity, which Marty implies means social and psychological identity, not only religious identity. Identity and boundaries seem to be the crucial factors in determining whether religion grows or dies. Marty refers to a "Law of Cultural Dominance," which says that
cultural systems exploiting the energy resources of a given environment are those that grow, and the conservative religions are exploiting these resources by emphasizing personal experience, authority, and personal and social identity. The mainline religionists have "misread" the situation. They not only relied on careful reasoning with regard to religious authority but were ambivalent about contemporary technology. The conservatives now seem more world-affirming than the mainliners with regard to technology, affirming television and the commodity culture and even "blessing" nuclear weapons.

Marty further projects a "Law of Evolutionary Potential" at work, which means the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, measured by growth of membership. This law dictates that highly specialized and adapted forms at a given stage of development have less potential for entering a higher stage. Translated, this language appears to mean that mainline religions have no future, or at best a very limited one. By implication, we cannot expect people to go to mainline churches in any numbers or to participate in worship with the same liveliness we see in the conservative churches. Marty believes mainline religions will not die but will simply become atrophied. He might well quote from one of the old gangland movies of his hometown: "It's curtains for youse guys."

But before we sign the death certificate for the mainline denominations, perhaps we ought to remind ourselves of other, countervailing trends. One of them is a law of physics that militates somewhat against the Law of Evolutionary Potential. Simply stated, this law is: What goes up must come down. The conservative churches may be growing now, but, as recently as the 1950s, so were the mainline denominations. And conservative churches actually declined in membership from 1907 to 1923. Thus we are entitled to wonder if the current growth of conservative religions is only another "boom" in the continuing cycle of American religions. And if it is, then not only can we expect conservative churches to peak in a few years, but we can also expect future generations to revive the religion of the mainline denominations. For it will then be not a faddish or current "liberalism" but a romantic tradition. We probably ought not to speculate, however, because if we do have faith, we have to recognize that Other Powers may be at work: "And the Lord will
EDITORIAL

make you the head, and not the tail; and you shall tend upward only, and not downward” (Deut.28:13; italics added).

But perhaps this response seems defensive. Suppose Marty is right. Ought clergy in mainline churches simply to lower their expectations and be humble while serving in churches that Americans eschew? Probably a more admirable response would be to exploit the opportunities for faith given in a situation of decline. For example, when the Quakers ran the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in the eighteenth century, they were the establishment, and they found themselves torn between the temptations of worldly wealth and power, and the dictates of conscience, which called for the simple life. But when they lost out as a dominant group, they seemed to become harder and purer. Now a tiny group, they have a cohesiveness and power that other groups lack. Like Mennonites and other small religious groups, they give a powerful witness on such critical issues as peace and justice. Not to have power—what a relief it is! The conservative religionists who seem to want a theocracy are already finding that they will be blamed for whatever goes wrong in the culture at large. It is becoming harder to blame the mainliners, because after all, they are not in charge.

Adjusting to decline in this way may seem like making a virtue of necessity. We may feel that we too would rather be in charge, but since we cannot, we will take integrity. But decline throws into rather clearer relief the obligation that is always on us to be faithful to God and to our religious traditions. Let me confess that the Deuteronomy quote was not rendered in its completeness. The rest of the quote reads: “if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day, being careful to do them, and if you do not turn aside from any of the words which I command you this day, to the right hand or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them.” What are we called to do? What do we go to church for? This appeal to Deuteronomic criteria of obeying commandments may seem odd, since Deuteronomy is often considered a retrograde interpretation of the law. But surely the real sense of the text and the tradition is that we are to be obedient even in the face of unpopularity and even when conditions are not in our favor. The conservative churches formerly did this. They followed the code of their religion, even when they were outcasts.
Perhaps we too in the mainline churches need to follow our own code. This kind of faithfulness will mean emphasizing racial and cultural inclusiveness, questioning the beneficence of such dangerous technologies as nuclear weapons, and employing reason within revelation. None of these will help our television ratings or give us a larger share of the market. But to be the communities we are called to be requires that we remain faithful, not try to emulate conservatives as a way of enticing people back into church.

This plea for the faithfulness of a tradition could result in our rethinking the meaning of decline, or even our concern with it. To be obsessed with decline or its opposite—usually called “success” technically it should be “incline”—seems to express a sort of religious narcissism. It is as if we were forever asking, like the mayor of New York City, “How are we doing?” In comparison, those concerned with faithfulness would presumably be characterized by a sort of forgetfulness about self and institutions, a diffidence that would give new meaning to our positive terms for achievement or growth.

While we are declining, or worrying about declining, or both, we can still keep on worshiping and in fact may need to worship more than we need to do other things, like count heads. Perhaps we cannot restrain the clergy, who, like social scientists and historians, have a compulsion to quantify. But at least we can enter into a higher stage of statistical practice, where the divine economy comes into play and rebuts the pretensions of those who believe that the larger the crowd at worship, the better. One writer, a layman, has put it very well:

There was a time when I wondered why more people did not go to church. Taken purely as a human recreation, what could be more delightful, more unexpected than to enter a venerable and lavishly scaled building kept warm and clean for us one or two hours a week and to sit and stand in unison and sing and recite creeds and petitions that are like paths worn smooth in the raw terrain of our hearts? To listen, or not listen, as a poorly paid but resplendently robed man strives to console us with scraps of ancient epistles and halting accounts, hopelessly compromised by words, of those intimations of divine joy that are like pain in that, their instant gone, the mind cannot remember or believe them; to witness the
EDITORIAL

windows donated by departed patrons and the altar flowers arranged by withdrawn hands and the whole considered spectacle lustrous beneath its patina of inheritance; to pay, for all this, no more than we are moved to give—surely in all democracy there is nothing like it. Indeed, it is the most available democratic experience. We vote less than once a year. Only in church and at the polls are we actually given our supposed value, the soul-unit of one, with its noumenal arithmetic of equality: one equals one equals one. (From John Updike, *Pigeon Feathers and Other Stories*, Knopf, 1962, p. 249.)

—CHARLES E. COLE
AUTHORITY IN MUTUAL MINISTRY

LETTY M. RUSSELL

How can church leaders break out of familiar paternalistic and autonomous patterns of authority?

Recently I taught in a continuing education program for church professionals on the west coast. In one of the sessions we tried out a model of contextual Bible study that was based on a mutual sharing of life stories and situations that seemed to illuminate the text and its context. One pastor raised his hand and said, "I try to get others to speak in Bible study, but the women, and sometimes even the men, defer to me as having authority. What should I do?"

Every day we find such examples of the problems of authority in the life of the church. Every day we solve them in different ways, using different models for ministry and for Christian community. The problems and solutions are not new. They lead to reinterpretation of the traditions within the Bible as well as in the subsequent life of the church. But the challenges to patterns of authority take on new forms in contemporary society.

In the short space of this article I would like to explore the question of ministerial authority. After establishing a working description of authority and power, I will try to describe the difference between the exercise of authority in ministry through

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paternalism and through partnership. Then I will return to the pastor's question and any clues we might find to help in this search for mutual ministry.

AUTHORITY AND POWER

There is no one definition of authority, although there seems to be some consensus that the Latin word *auctoritas* derives from the verb *augere*, meaning "to augment." Hannah Arendt tells us that the concept of authority in Western civilization derives from the Roman idea that those in authority constantly augment the foundation of the ancestors or founders of Rome.¹ The English word *author* retains this sense that the one in authority imaginatively builds upon the prior work of others. God, the author and builder of life, is the authority in our lives as Christians. Those who share in God's work are stewards of God's continuing creative and redemptive activity (Eph. 1:9-10; 2:10, 19-20).

*Working descriptions.* For the purposes of this article I will follow Richard Sennett in describing authority as a relational bond that leads persons to give assent without coercion or persuasion because they find security in the real or imagined strength of others.² Emphasis here is on the relational bond that leads persons to respond with assent or obedience to the authority of, for instance, a person, business firm, government, church, or set of writings. Authority inspires obedience because persons consider those in authority to have legitimate power based on their ability to act for the common good. When, in the process of social interaction, force is used, this is an indication that the authority is no longer fully in control and must be supported by other means of evoking assent or legitimacy.

For the purposes of this article I will describe power as the ability to accomplish desired ends through various means such as authority, coercion, persuasion, and the like. Authority and power overlap in their meaning because to have authority is also to have power. Electric power carries the same type of meaning. It is "power" because it makes things happen when it is "turned on." In our society power is usually understood as domination or the use of force to control others. But it can just as easily be understood as the capacity for self-actualization. When the latter aspect is stressed by
feminist writers, they usually speak of empowerment: self-actualization through sharing power with others. When these writers describe power, emphasis is placed on the desired end or the action necessary to attain it, in contrast to an emphasis on the bond of assent in authority.

Source of authority. The self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ and through the Spirit is the source of authority in our lives as Christians. Thus the foundation of our lives is the faith claim that there is a God who is the source of life and love and that this God has chosen to be with us as Emmanuel. As Karl Barth has reminded us in *The Humanity of God*, God wants in fact to be our partner and savior and has shown this in choosing to share our humanity. In the New Testament we hear of a God whose authority works through the power of love. In hearing the story of that love in the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, we "fall in faith." (Subsequent theological development has stressed the image of a God who rules through the power of domination—"an omnipotent, impassible, immutable, Caesar-god," in John Skinner's words—rather than a God of suffering love and servant ministry.)

Christians often speak of the Word of God as the source of authority in their lives and actions. Here they are referring to the biblical story as a witness to God's actions, and especially to the gospel story of the One whom we call "the Living Word." God's Word has authority because it has been made known by God and experienced by the people of faith as life-giving, as a source of strength, a foundation for their lives. As a Christian community we hear the biblical message as the Word of God when it is inspired by God's Spirit so that faith shapes life. Because we trust God as the source of life, we also trust God's Word and are willing to wrestle with it in order to respond faithfully in our own context of obedience. As Phyllis Bird puts it, the Scriptures are "the place where the church hears God speaking and discerns God's presence when their words are studied and pondered and questioned—and opened for us by the Stranger who accompanies us on our journey and breaks bread with us." 

Authority of Jesus' ministry. Each Christian community has a pattern of criteria for what constitutes an authoritative witness to God in Jesus Christ. Usually that configuration includes the
resources of scientific knowledge and human experience as well as those of Scripture and church tradition. David Kelsey has pointed out that there are limits on theological interpretation as it seeks to discern this pattern of meaning. These limits are rooted in the need to continue to witness to the gospel message, and thus the criteria must reflect the biblical and church tradition, while at the same time being intelligible and seriously imaginable in a particular cultural setting.  

Whatever the pattern of criteria may be for a particular church, it is not that pattern that has authority. It is the relationship between that pattern and the divine self-revelation of God that gives it authority and limits its claims. For Christians, an important criterion is consistency with the use of authority in Jesus' ministry. When we look at the Gospels, we discover that Jesus has authority as the agent inaugurating the kingdom of God (God's new creation). Although the kingship metaphors were drawn from the contemporary social patterns, the content of this kingship is quite different—so different, in fact, that the disciples never seemed to have understood it and were always waiting for Jesus to expel the Romans and claim his throne. In an article on authority in community, Madeleine Boucher wrote that Jesus “rejected every authority role of his patriarchal tradition which the Messiah had been expected to assume.” His authority (exousia) and power (dynamis) were gifts of God for the work of ushering in the new age. Jesus had authority to forgive sins, cast out unclean spirits, and preach the good news. He taught with authority because he spoke of God’s will directly and not only on the basis of scriptural interpretation (Mark 1:22).

The Gospels describe power in Jesus’ ministry as the power to heal. There is no indication that he used his power to dominate. Rather, he was one who proclaimed release to the captives and brought sight to the blind (Luke 4:18-19). He proclaimed God’s radical reversal of the status quo: the very ones who were the least
in society were to be empowered for new life and partnership in God's kingdom. The authority of Jesus' ministry became the authority of his disciples and followers. They were to forgive, to cast out evil, to heal, and to preach good news. The authority to perform this ministry of service and care is the life-style of Jesus Christ. The mutual ministry of the church shares this authority only when its witness in word is lived out in actions of love so that the Word of God continues to be incarnated in our world. In this sense the authority of faith, which builds on this dual foundation, is every bit as much dependent on its orthopraxy as upon its orthodoxy. A teaching evokes our consent when we see it leading toward the actualization of Christ's ministry in both word and deed.

PATERNALISM, AUTONOMY, AND PARTNERSHIP IN MINISTRY

When we ask how this understanding of authority in community is expressed in Christian churches today, we discover instead that in many ways we are strongly influenced by the idea of authority over community. It seems that we have become the inheritors of a patriarchal paradigm or understanding of authority, which was shaped in the social world of the ancient Near East, rather than the partnering paradigm exhibited in Jesus' own critique of hierarchy and in his solidarity with the outcasts of society. In a patriarchy, a person's place in the social hierarchy is determined by blood ties to the elder males, who claim obedience through these ties. Although this tradition was called into question by Jesus' teaching about God's kingdom and by some of the models of early church life, it was reinforced by the culture of the Roman Empire as well as its theological traditions, whose image of God was that of a ruling patriarch.

In Western medieval society that paradigm of authority was patrimonial. That is, control, which still rested in the hands of the eldest males, took the form of property handed down from one generation to the next through this male line. According to Richard Sennett, the advent of modern industrial society has resulted in the gradual erosion of patrimony, so that we now live in a Western world where two patterns of authority predominate: paternalism
Sennett describes paternalism as an authority of false love because it offers nurture and care but results in dependence. He describes autonomy as an authority without love because it rebels against paternalism and seeks the freedom of the individual from dependence on anyone other than him or her own self. In my analysis of the ways professional church ministry can function I will be making use of these descriptions. I will also contrast them to partnership as an authority of freedom that responds to people's need for solidarity and care by empowering them through a relationship of mutuality.

Paternalism. Paternalism is an authority of false love that uses people's need for strength and assurance to dominate them through a relationship of dependence. Paternalism is an authority of false love that uses people's need for strength and assurance to dominate them through a relationship of dependence. It seems to me that paternalism is a predominant pattern of authority in ministry. It allows the clergy and other church leaders to continue to use the vocabulary and images of the patriarchal traditions even though that basis of authority has disappeared. Even when these leaders exercise power as domination over others, they are able to use the language of fatherly caring to evoke feelings and responses of dependence and thus can perform the caring, nurturing, serving tasks of ministry without any threat to their leadership positions. They can control which groups meet and when, what curriculum they will use, etc., even when there is no need for such care.

Persons do not need the kind of support and care that keeps them dependent, uncertain, and needy, but that which seeks the elimination of dependence so that persons can care for themselves and others. For instance, it would be paternalistic to use the authority of one's knowledge and expertise to keep people dependent by refusing to preach or teach in such a way that a
congregation has the opportunity of understanding and acting out the biblical story. When the hearers are only handed a message, rather than being encouraged to seek it out themselves through group story and action, they remain dependent on the messenger and do not learn to carry out the ministry of the Word together with others.

**Autonomy.** An extreme form of authority would be the paternalistic offer to care for people as a father, while carrying out many actions and policies that hurt them and keep them dependent. The opposite extreme is autonomous authority, in which a person projects an image of strength, appearing to be totally self-sufficient and invulnerable; needed by others but never needing others. This form of individualism is a valued and envied trait in our society. It is small wonder, therefore, that we seem to forget that all persons are interdependent. Carol Gilligan reminds us that growth in independence is part of a maturing process whose goal should be full interdependence; it should not be an end in itself, for those in ministry or for any other group of persons.

In preaching or teaching, an autonomous relationship of authority to the listeners would most likely involve a display of the preacher’s skills and knowledge in such a way that the preacher appears self-possessed and all-knowing. The bond of authority formed through this image of superiority is likely to be one in which everyone assumes that the speaker is so powerful and full of wisdom that he or she cannot be challenged openly. Unfortunately, this in turn discourages those who know that they are dependent on others from any attempt to develop a healthy independence of thought and action in the life of the church.

All persons need to develop independence in their lives, but being subject to the autonomous authority of pastors, employers, or government officials is more likely to reinforce feelings of inferiority and dependence. It follows that the exercise of autonomous authority is not a creative alternative for ministry because it leads persons to deny their co-responsibility with God for their neighbors and for the world. Nor, as we have seen, is paternalism helpful to the life and growth of the Christian community. Paternalistic authority continues to use patriarchal imagery to justify the dependent status of laypersons, and
especially of women. In my view partnership represents an alternative paradigm of authority that would foster mutual ministry and interdependence.

*Partnership.* Partnership is an authority of freedom that uses people's need for solidarity and care to empower them through a relationship of mutuality. This would not necessarily be the only alternative to paternalistic and autonomous forms of authority. Yet it seems to me that in bonds of assent based on partnership we can be more responsive to God's actions in freely becoming partners with humanity, as well as to the actions of Jesus in reaching out to restore human wholeness and community. In my books on partnership I describe it as a new focus of relationship in Jesus Christ that sets us free for others. Like faith, partnership or *koinonia* is a relationship of trust with God and others that comes to us as a gift of Christ's love. Like faith it is "caught, not taught." *Koinonia* is a word used frequently in the New Testament for sharing with someone in something, and it usually stresses a common bond in Jesus Christ, which establishes mutual community. The emphasis is on a two-sided relationship of giving or receiving, participation or community (1 Cor. 10:16-17).

In this new focus of relationship there is continuing commitment and common struggle in the context of a wider community. Such relationships happen as a gift; nevertheless we know that commitment is more likely to grow where there is responsibility, vulnerability, equality, and trust among those who share a diversity of gifts and resources. Because partnerships are living relationships that share the "already/not yet" character of new creation, they are always in process and never finished, as they draw us together in common struggle and work, involving risk, continuing growth, and hopefulness in moving toward a goal or purpose transcending the group. By definition, partnership involves growing interdependence in relation to God, persons, and creation so that we are constantly in interaction with a wider community of persons, social structures, values, and beliefs that may provide support, correctives, or negative feedback. There is never complete equality in such a dynamic relationship, but a pattern of equal regard and mutual acceptance of different gifts among partners is essential.
Authority in partnership grows in a community where people take time to be partners with one another. Using preaching as an example: This might mean that mutuality would be developed by group Bible study in preparation for the sermon. The sermon in turn would be a sharing of community action, insight, and questioning. Rather than providing answers to what the congregation should believe and do, the sermon would make use of the preacher’s theological training and gifts to lift up the ongoing life of that congregation as part of God’s continuing action. The stories of the participants could become the vehicles for biblical interpretation as the community discovers its mutual ministry of preaching.

**PARTNERSHIP IN MINISTRY**

Paternalism is a pale imitation of the old patriarchal paradigm of authority over community. In our society it has become a means of covering up alienation through empty rhetoric and family clichés. In the church it is an invitation to the sin of dependence and immaturity in faith and action. Autonomy, as rebellion against dependence through claims to egoistic authority outside of community, has led to equally disastrous results for the health of our technological society. In the church it is also an invitation to the sin of pride and selfishness, masked in the rhetoric of objectivity and excellence. Even though glimpses of partnership as authority in community are as yet few and far between, they offer a genuine invitation to the freedom of Jesus Christ, whose love and acceptance sets us free to bear our own burdens and those of our neighbors in mutual ministry (Gal. 6:2).

Perhaps it was this style of mutual ministry that the pastor from the west coast was looking for when he spoke about his difficult role as an authority figure in a Bible study group. As we look at his predicament in the light of our analysis of the problems of authority in ministry, it would seem that there are some principles for action that might help him develop a ministry of shared authority in Bible study and in the life of the congregation. Each of us would have a different set of principles for partnership in ministry, but here I would like to suggest four that might help that pastor and all of us as we seek to empower others by changing accustomed styles of paternalistic and autonomous authority.
Begin from the underside. If the gospel for the poor and marginal of society is the good news that they are not marginal in God's sight and are welcome in the kingdom of God, then it is likely that the poor and marginal are those who can help us hear it anew as good news. "Listening to the losers" not only helps us to understand the Bible more clearly, it also places us in a position to know the effects of domination and paternalism. It makes us aware of the wasted talents and lack of self-esteem among those who live their lives being treated as children because of race, sex, class, or physical disability. In exchanging places with the "least of these" by role and job exchange we can become suspicious of our own rhetoric and sensitive to the feelings of women, for example, who do not speak in Bible study because their ideas are not considered important.

When I worked as a pastor in the East Harlem Protestant Parish in New York City, I had to contend with my role in built-in structures of paternalism. Not only was I theologically educated, I had been sent to the church by the New York Presbytery and not called by the people. In addition I was white and middle-class in a community that was almost entirely black, Hispanic, and poor. Besides working to move the congregation out of "mission dependency," I sought to develop a team ministry as a model of partnership in the life of the church. In order to share the gifts of each person on the team it was necessary to share tasks so that each person not only exercised his or her own skills and responsibilities, but also learned those of the others. A black woman on welfare became the secretary and Christian educator. A Puerto Rican man who had been doing factory work became not only the janitor of the church but also a Spanish evangelist and worship leader. I did some of each of their jobs, and they learned my job of education, preaching, and evangelism. By risking the possibility of gaining
new skills we were all able to develop a partnership in ministry that welcomed the many gifts of the congregation by its example.

Follow the questions. In a group study context we can start by staying quiet and beginning with the questions and observations of others rather than with answers to questions that were not asked. Keeping quiet can help the leader listen for the questions and let them be the guide for a discussion in which the group searches for answers. In following the questions of others we signal a genuine regard for their struggles of faith, with the result that more people begin to risk speaking out. At the same time, such attentive listening helps the group find its own collective authority because we come to have "ears to hear" when a consensus is reached on an issue or question of importance. Such moments of group consensus can become starting points for action and ministry in the life of the congregation and foundational material for congregational sermons and continuing theological reflection.

Once in East Harlem I met with a group of women around a kitchen table to discuss a question that had come to us from a study group in the World Council of Churches in Geneva. They had sent us a letter asking what salvation means in East Harlem and we made this question our own. For many people in this multiracial ghetto of poverty it would mean the possibility of "coming out ahead" in their struggle for survival, perhaps hitting the numbers or getting a job. For others it would mean religious revival or the heavenly music of a storefront Pentecostal church. For those of us seated at the table it was a big question. How could we name the discovery of new life and hope? What did it mean in our experience? A few "conversion stories" later, one woman suddenly blurted out, "It means that I'm more free!" And that was that. We all agreed: in New York City, and in the year 1967, salvation had to mean freedom—freedom to hope in God, freedom to be somebody. Of course, we needed to do a lot more reflecting on the meaning of such words as these from Paul's letter to the Galatians, "For freedom Christ has set us free" (5:1, RSV). Yet following this question and listening for clues together helped us to speak the gospel in our own context.

Act together. None of us knows the answers to certain deep and difficult questions. It is only the need to be paternalistic that pushes us to assume that we can answer everyone's questions and
to feel threatened when we cannot. By admitting that we do not know an answer, we open up the possibility of acting together in little and small ways. That is, we can all go home and try to find out a particular thing, or one or two persons can volunteer to do some research. Or, more importantly, we can devise ways of working together on a project that helps us to “act our way into thinking.” For instance, if the group is puzzled about the increase of violence in the community and in the world, it can study this and share its findings, but, further, it can also undertake to work with victims of violence in a rape crisis center or a home for battered women and children. Being involved in this latter project may help us to get beyond the easy answers so that we can hear the voices of pain and suffering.

This sharing happens with other groups as well. In one church in West Haven a woman pastor was visited recently by a laywoman who wanted to reach out to the physically challenged persons in the church and community. The pastor welcomed this idea and worked with the parishioner to develop the Committee on Ministry with the Aging and Disabled (COMAD). More than half of the committee members were themselves physically challenged and welcomed the opportunity to plan for a ramp fund campaign, education programs, and services of worship. In only a year, one-half of the needed money had been raised for renovations and modifications to the church buildings, worship had been led by physically challenged persons, and the youth group had written and presented a play to raise the consciousness of the congregation about this issue.

**Demystify the structures.** Every important issue in our lives is embedded in social, economic, political, and religious structures. If we are going to work toward partnership in community, it is crucial to analyze the way these forces shape our understanding of reality and of the proper use of authority. For instance, the pastor I mentioned at the beginning of this article needed to understand the structures of church and community life that lead to a hierarchical understanding of teaching and decision-making. For if he had understood, he would not have expected women to speak out simply because he requested it. In order to work as partners people need to be political. That is, they need to look at the way power and authority are functioning in their group and in the larger institutions in order
to be able to understand how decision-making works and who should be held accountable. Without such knowledge of structures, people will continue to be dependent on those who rule "for them."

In working to demystify the structures of racism, sexism, and classism that functioned in East Harlem—those that promised a "Great Society" and delivered more unemployment, burned-out buildings, and miseducation—it was necessary for us to begin with the small things in our own lives: rent strikes against particular landlords; Head Start programs in local schools; installation of traffic lights where our children crossed the street. From this beginning people discovered the way city agencies work and began to gain self-confidence in organizing for change. The same demystification process needs to be at work in relation to denominational structures if the church is to be a full partner in the decisions that affect its ministry and mission.

Partnership as an authority of freedom is both difficult and risky. Difficult because it means learning to live out the signs of new creation in a world where we and everyone else have internalized the relationships of domination and subordination. It is risky because church leaders who share power may find that they no longer fit in the church as we know it. The purpose of exercising authority through partnership is not easy success but faithfulness to a God whose authority is exercised in solidarity with the losers of this present world.

NOTES

MUTUAL MINISTRY

10. In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development (Cambridge: Harvard
Univ. Pr., 1982, p. 74).
RESPONSIBLE GRACE:
THE SYSTEMATIC NATURE OF
WESLEY'S THEOLOGY RECONSIDERED

RANDY L. MADDOX

Wesley's theological writings have traditionally been viewed as those of a third-rank theologian, but the notion of responsible grace allows us to appreciate Wesley as a major systematic thinker.

An essay investigating the systematic nature of John Wesley's theology must strike many readers as misconceived. Wesley is widely respected as an evangelist and the organizer of a renewal movement within Anglicanism; however, even his strongest defenders are often willing to concede that, far from being a creative and systematic thinker, he was a third-rank theologian. There are two reasons for such an evaluation. In the first place, rather than pursuing theology primarily in dialogue with and in the scholarly language of professional theologians, Wesley opted for what Albert Outler has called a "folk theology," expressing the Christian message in its fullness and integrity in "plain words for plain people." Secondly, Wesley never composed a *summa*, i.e., a systematic work embracing the whole range of Christian revelation and relating it to the other areas of human knowledge.

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON
THE NATURE OF SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

In reopening the question of the systematic nature of Wesley's theology, we are not challenging the two characteristics of his...
theology just noted. Such a challenge is neither possible nor desirable. Rather, we want to challenge the model against which Wesley's theology was measured and found wanting. This model, whether in the form of a Thomist *Summa* or a Hegelian *Enzyklopädie*, has reigned throughout most of the history of medieval and modern Christian thought. The central premise of this model is that the ideal approach to theology is one concerned with: (a) the systematic summary of the entire range of Christian revelation and (b) the rational demonstration of the truth claims of Christian faith in view of the breadth of human knowledge. Within such a model, the theological reflections of Wesley (or Luther!) would obviously be second-rank at best. The claim to a truly scholarly and systematic theology would be limited to the likes of Aquinas and Calvin.

One of the most exciting and significant developments in recent discussion of the nature of theology is a growing rejection of this once-dominant model of theological reflection. In its place is emerging an understanding of the task of scholarly theology that is "practical." For this approach, the ultimate value of theological reflection is not to be found in its abstract theoretical moments, but rather in the use of the results of such moments for making critiques of and establishing norms for contemporary church discourse and life. The overarching goal of theology is to bring the tradition of Christian doctrine and the skills of disciplined thought to bear on the practical problems of the contemporary Christian community. Likewise, the goal of theological education is not primarily the memorization of a system of theology, but rather the cultivation of an ability to make theologically responsible judgments about contemporary Christian life and practice.

From the perspective of this new model, the criteria for being a scholarly and systematic theologian would undergo a corresponding change. The key questions would become: (1) whether the person used critically assessed methods in drawing on the Christian tradition, (2) whether he or she followed theologically responsible methods of weighing evidence in making occasional (i.e., situation-related) judgments, and (3) whether there was a consistency of perspective among the various occasional judgments.
The third question, dealing with consistency of perspective, has been most helpfully framed in terms of the "orienting concept" to be discerned in one's theological reflection. An orienting concept is not simply one topic among others to be discussed in a systematic theology. Rather, it is an expression of often primarily implicit convictions and provides the integrative thematic perspective in light of which all other theological concepts and judgments are given their relative meaning or value. Examples of such orienting concepts would include the concept of justification by faith, which provides the coherence to all Luther's theological reflection, and the concept of the sovereignty of God, which provides Calvin with his unique perspective on all of Christian doctrine. Discerning such an orienting concept would thus be a crucial step in determining whether a theologian merited consideration as a scholarly and systematic theologian under the new model being developed.

WESLEY AS A SCHOLARLY AND SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGIAN

What would be the effect on the conventional negative evaluation of Wesley as a scholarly and systematic theologian if this new model of theological reflection were accepted as valid?

In the first place, the fact that, far from forming a *summa*, Wesley's theological writings and reflections were nearly all occasional and directed to specific problems in the church of his day would no longer be viewed with disdain. It would merely indicate that Wesley departed from the dominant model of theological reflection because of his concern for the vital task of rendering theological judgments on the life and practice of the church. Under the new model such an approach would be applauded provided it were carried out in a scholarly and systematic manner (as defined by this approach).

Can Wesley's theology meet this provision? We noted earlier that there are three basic questions to be addressed in this regard. Concerning the first question on methods of researching tradition, it has been repeatedly demonstrated that Wesley pursued his theological reflection in light of the most responsible methods of research of his day. If anything, the answer to the second question on methods of theological argumentation is even clearer. The one
aspect of Wesley's theological method that has been most widely acclaimed is his self-critical awareness of the relative roles of the various sources of theology in formulating a theological judgment—i.e., the Wesleyan Quadrilateral.4

Unfortunately, the third question—whether one can discern an orienting concept that provides a consistency to Wesley's occasional theological judgments—has rarely been addressed, even by those involved in the recent renewed considerations of Wesley's theology. The major reason is that this recent work has largely limited itself to expositing and defending Wesley's understanding of the order of salvation, i.e., his doctrines of justification and sanctification. While it is true that Wesley himself understood the core of his theology to lie in the order of salvation, it can be argued that his contribution to theology goes far beyond this locus.5 Within his works one can find treatments of almost every major theological issue. Moreover, the topics and arrangement of his second series of sermons resemble the classical Protestant "salvation history" model of a dogmatic theology text. As such, it is entirely legitimate to pursue our re-evaluation of Wesley as a systematic theologian. As suggested above, the outcome of any such re-evaluation will hinge on whether it can be demonstrated that Wesley utilized, at least implicitly, a central orienting concept in rendering his occasional theological judgments.

RESPONSIBLE GRACE—WESLEY'S ORIENTING CONCEPT

Our major thesis in this essay is that there is such an orienting concept in Wesley's theology; namely, the concept of responsible grace. To substantiate this thesis we will first define this orienting concept and then illustrate its influence on Wesley's theological reflection.

The orienting concept we are calling "responsible grace" is not simply a doctrine discussed by Wesley. It is a fundamental conviction about the nature of divine-human interaction which provided the distinctive slant to all of Wesley's theology. The most succinct expression Wesley gives of this concept is actually a quote from Saint Augustine: "He that made us without ourselves, will not save us without ourselves." That Wesley quotes Augustine in
this regard is ironic, for, as Outler notes, "[Wesley's] driving passion was to find a third alternative to Pelagian optimism and Augustinian pessimism with respect to the human flaw and the human potential." Wesley found this third alternative in a concept of responsible grace, whereby salvation is clearly a gift of God (we cannot save ourselves) but nevertheless a gift that calls us to respond and to take responsibility (God will not save us without ourselves).

In the first place, Wesley was utterly convinced that human beings have neither the existing moral purity to merit salvation nor the power to achieve such purity on their own. If we have even one good thought or one good desire, we should be careful to give the honor to God because it is a gift of grace. Salvation, indeed even the desire for salvation, is fundamentally a free gift of God offered to undeserving human persons. Far from meriting this gift, we can only accept it in faith. Moreover, even the faith by which we accept salvation is a gift of God. Clearly, the theme of grace was central to Wesley's preaching and theological reflection.

The theme of responsibility was just as central and provided a type of dialectical balance to the theme of grace. It was Wesley's conviction that, although God may on occasion irresistibly constrain a person to perform a specific task in fulfilling divine providence, such was never the case in relation to personal salvation. The gift of grace upon which salvation depends operates so as to empower us to respond without compelling us to obey. By means of prevenient grace, God acts upon every human person to enable her or him to enter into a saving relationship. However, "God does not continue to act upon the soul, unless the soul re-acts upon God" ("The Great Privilege of Those That Are Born of God"). We must respond to God's grace, and ultimately we bear the responsibility if we do not do so.

This theme of responsibility is not limited to the initial acceptance of salvation. Indeed, Wesley's most characteristic stress is on the continuing responsibility to put the grace of God to work transforming our lives, lest it be received in vain. Concerning this transformation, Wesley is quite clear that even the most saintly Christian still stands in the tension found between two confessions of Scripture: "Without me you can do nothing" and "I can do all..."
things through Christ strengthening me." Wesley gives a detailed description of this tension in his sermon, "On Working Out Our Own Salvation":

[First,] in as much as God works in you, you are now able to work out your own salvation. . . . You can do something, through Christ strengthening you. Stir up the spark of grace which is now in you, and [God] will give you more grace. Secondly, God worketh in you; therefore you must work . . . otherwise [God] will cease working.

In brief, Wesley understood the essential Christian message to be one of God-given grace, but grace which both called for and empowered human response, thereby preserving human responsibility. We believe the title "Responsible Grace" captures well this perspective. It places primary emphasis on God's indispensable gift of gracious empowerment while carefully qualifying this empowerment as one that enables rather than overrides human responsibility. Moreover, this title invites ready and insightful comparison with parallel formulations for Lutheranism (unmerited or free grace), Calvinism and universalism (sovereign grace), traditional Roman Catholicism (infused grace), etc.

THE ORIENTING CONCEPT AT WORK

It should be evident by now that the dialectic between grace and responsibility that we are terming "responsible grace" is present in Wesley's theology. What remains to be shown is that this conviction functioned as an orienting concept, providing the basic consistency between Wesley's various theological decisions and formulations. Obviously, there is not space for an exhaustive survey of Wesley's theological reflections in this regard. Accordingly, we will focus on his doctrine of God and his doctrine of salvation.

Doctrine of God. Wesley's position regarding the various aspects of the doctrine of God has been chosen for first consideration because it provides the theological basis for his more extended discussion of the order of salvation. The major focus of Wesley's reflection on the doctrine of God was the nature of God's sovereignty. His main point, directed at Calvin (as he understood
Calvin), was that God's sovereignty should always be related to the other divine attributes. Failure to make this relation would ultimately lead to an abstract and deterministic view of sovereignty which would undermine both God's justice and God's love. It would also destroy human responsibility.

Moving beyond critique, Wesley provided several constructive proposals for understanding the nature of God in a way that holds divine sovereignty, mercy, and justice together. In the first place, he refused to follow the nominalists in making a distinction between God's will and God's nature. This view of the unity of will and nature removed the possibility of vindicating God's sovereign decisions by placing God above the divinely established moral law. In the second place, Wesley located the primary expression of God's sovereignty in the bestowal of mercy rather than in the abstract concept of self-sufficiency and freedom. This move purged the notion of sovereignty of its frequent overtones of arbitrariness and domination. Finally, Wesley argued at length that a conception of God wherein God could interact effectively and providentially with human beings while still allowing a measure of human free agency does not detract from God's glory. On the contrary, it immeasurably deepens our sense of God's glorious wisdom, justice, and mercy, without, at the same time, undercutting human responsibility.

This basic stance regarding God's nature as loving and just finds expression in Wesley's judgments regarding several related issues. To cite just one example, it led him to opt for a conception of divine foreknowledge that did not imply determinism. Wesley found such a conception in the notion of eternity as above time. From this perspective, matters related to personal salvation do not take place because God knows them. Rather, God knows them because they take place.

Clearly, Wesley's judgments concerning the nature of God are congruent with the notion of responsible grace outlined above. The more crucial point, which must now be argued, is that Wesley's strong convictions about responsible grace played a decisive role, albeit often implicitly, in arriving at these judgments. As evidence for this assertion, consider the following passage from "Free Will," concerning the Calvinist conception of God's sovereign predestining will:
RESPONSIBLE GRACE

It destroys all [God's] attributes at once: It overturns both his justice, mercy and truth. . . . You represent God as worse than the devil; more false, more cruel, more unjust. But you say you will prove it by Scripture. Hold! What will you prove by Scripture? that God is worse than the devil? It cannot be. . . . Better it were to say [Scripture] had no sense at all, than to say it had such a sense as this. . . . No scripture can mean that God is not love, or that his mercy is not over all his works.

Note how Wesley's convictions about the mercy and justice of God become criteria for determining the meaning of Scripture. In all fairness, this quote must be balanced by Wesley's claim that his convictions about God's justice and love are thoroughly grounded in Scripture. Nonetheless, it is a clear illustration of at least one area where Wesley's basic convictions about responsible grace were a decisive influence in his determination of issues of Christian doctrine and practice.

Doctrine of Salvation. The influence of Wesley's convictions about responsible grace is also evident in every major area of his doctrine of salvation. At the most basic level, its influence can be seen in his definition of major terms. For example, he defines salvation not merely as deliverance from hell or going to heaven but as present deliverance from sin. "Grace" is taken to include not merely our free acceptance by God, but the power of God at work in us both to will and to do according to God's good pleasure. In addition, faith is understood as more than mere assent. It is a disposition wrought in our heart that is productive of good works. Accordingly, in Wesley's terms, salvation by grace through faith can never be understood in an antinomian sense. But neither can it be understood as self-salvation, for Wesley is quite clear that the love that transforms our lives is a gift of God.

The tension between grace and responsibility is expressed structurally when the possibility of growth in Christ-likeness (sanctification) is made contingent on God's gracious acceptance (justification), while the continuance in God's acceptance (justification) is made contingent on growth in Christ-likeness (sanctification). It is a dual tension that allows Wesley to integrate "faith alone" with "holy living" in an authentic dialectic. A logical
corollary of this tension is Wesley's affirmation of the third use of the law—to guide Christian life.

The most distinctive element in Wesley's doctrine of salvation is his affirmation of the possibility of entire sanctification. This affirmation has been the focus of numerous critical evaluations. These evaluations typically charge Wesley with overlooking the presence of sin in all believers and with overevaluating the natural human ability to conquer sin. Obviously, such charges, if true, would be in radical conflict with the principle of responsible grace articulated above. However, a careful reading of Wesley proves the charges to be ungrounded.

Wesley states quite clearly that the experience of entire sanctification, if ever obtained, is a gift of God, not a product of human effort. At the same time, he stresses human responsibility in relation to entire sanctification. In the first place, Wesley considers the possibility of entire sanctification to hinge on a prior (typically long) period of responsible growth in grace which includes progressive victory over the sinful inclinations that remain in the life of a believer (sanctification in the larger sense of the word). It is clear that his major emphasis lies on this ongoing process of Christian growth, because he is (theoretically) willing to concede the possibility that entire sanctification may be a reality only at or shortly preceding death. In the second place, Wesley stresses the element of human responsibility within the state of entire sanctification itself by emphasizing the continuing need for growth in Christ-likeness even here, the absence of which would ultimately lead to the loss of the experience.

Indeed, it is characteristic of Wesley that his advice in A Plain Account of Christian Perfection to those who claimed entire sanctification was to avoid pride, enthusiasm, and antinomianism. In brief, while the affirmation of the possibility of entire sanctification may be distinctive of Wesley, the conception of sanctification (as a whole) as the progressive responsible application of the free grace of God is characteristic of Wesley. It was thus no accident that Wesley chose as a motto for the Methodists the phrase "not as though I had already obtained."

We believe the preceding analysis of Wesley's doctrines of God and salvation provides sufficient initial warrant for the claim that
RESPONSIBLE GRACE

Wesley was guided in his occasional theological reflections by a chief orienting concept—responsible grace. To provide further warrant it would be necessary to demonstrate the influence of this concept in other doctrinal areas. It is our conviction that such a demonstration is possible, and we would encourage investigations of such issues as Wesley’s view of sacraments or eschatology from this perspective.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

If our basic argument to the claim that Wesley’s various situation-related theological reflections were guided by the concept of responsible grace is accepted, then it has several implications for Wesley studies and Wesleyan theology.

In the first place, an awareness of the unifying perspective of Wesley’s work provides a significant help in understanding and relating the various parts of Wesley’s thought. It also provides a criterion by which to assess claims about unresolved tensions or significant changes in Wesley’s perspective.

Perhaps more importantly, an awareness of the defining perspective of Wesley’s theological reflection provides a criterion for guiding and/or assessing contemporary expressions of Wesleyan theology. Albert Outler has issued a timely call for a new phase in Wesley studies which moves beyond presentations of Wesley as either an idealized cult figure or a mere endorser of particular popular causes. Outler envisions an approach to theology, replacing these earlier phases, wherein Wesley plays the role of mentor or guide—a voice behind us saying, “This is the way, walk in it.” In light of the preceding analysis, it can be suggested that the way Wesley would lead us is in seeking an ever more consistent and relevant expression of “responsible grace.” At times this may mean correcting or moving beyond Wesley himself. Often it will mean liberating Wesley from the tradition of later Wesleyan theologians, both liberal and conservative, who have lost the dynamic balance embodied in the concept of responsible grace. Always it will mean carrying out our theological reflections in a way that addresses the burning needs of the present church and the world.
NOTES


3. On both of these points see Colin W. Williams, John Wesley’s Theology Today (New York: Abingdon, 1960), pp. 23-28.

4. This and other interpretations of Wesley are derived from his Works, available in various editions, which are not cited here but are available on request.


6. On the three major types of interpretation in this regard see Thomas Langford, Practical Divinity: Theology in the Wesleyan Tradition (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983), p. 33. We believe the second interpretation Langford mentions is clearly the most adequate and consider the current essay a validation of that judgment.


9. However, Wesley himself believed the experience was possible prior to death and attributed the alternative opinion, held by his brother, to an absolutist view of perfection. See Williams, Wesley’s Theology, p. 169.

10. To understand how one could be “perfect” or “sinless” and still need to grow in Christ-likeness, it is necessary to recall Wesley’s distinction between a “moral” definition of sin and a “strict” definition of sin (“On Perfection” and “The Repentance of Believers”). See John L. Peters, Christian Perfection and American Methodism (New York: Abingdon, 1956), pp. 30-46.

WHO IS THE DIRECTOR OF WORSHIP?

RICHARD F. COLLMAN

Who plans the order of worship in your church? The minister—or the church secretary?

Who directs worship in your church? The minister? Probably not always, because the demands upon him or her often prevent it. Then the role of director of worship is likely to be assumed by the music director, or perhaps by the secretary, who not only must type the bulletin but compose it as well! A director of worship is a person who thinks through and plans the worship in the local church. The task is far too important to be left to chance, but when the weekly deadline looms large for the minister, such planning is sometimes left for the secretary out of convenience.

If worship is not directed and coordinated, who is at fault? Few seminaries offer courses in the history and practice of Christian worship, in spite of the fact that parish pastors spend up to one-fourth of their time in preparing for worship (including sermons) and in leading it. Liturgy is too important to be up for grabs in the local church. I ask the question again—who is the director of worship in your local church? After all, such work should not be the job of the secretary who was hired to print the order and not plan the worship service.

Every local church, no matter how small, needs someone to think through, coordinate, and lead worship. In our day of changing and revised rituals, this becomes an even more urgent

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Worship is of primary importance to the life of every church and to the whole church. Whatever else the church does, it always worships, and all of its activities should grow from this center or heart of its existence. Historically, the church has always gotten into trouble when it has forgotten the confession "Jesus Christ is Lord" that is nourished and reaffirmed in its public worship.

The direction of worship is often a neglected area of pastoral attention. Why? Ministers are busy. We function with many deadlines and many pressing human needs. Counseling takes time; sermon preparation is ongoing; reading time is nil. There are many real excuses, and while we are often about, doing what we believe are crucial tasks in meeting human needs, we have forgotten the primary need of the church—guidance in prayer and worship.

Browne Barr, in his book High-Flying Geese: Unexpected Reflections on the Church and Its Ministry (Seabury, 1983) reports the words of a college-town radical to an activist pastor: "Your church tries to do in a half-ass way everything that someone else in this town does better—child care, education, food pantry, housing, political action. But you don't seem to know how to do the only thing you are expert at and which no one else gives a damn about—prayer and worship!" While that is hard counsel, it is appropriate. I am old enough to have lived through the social-activist phase of the church in the late sixties and into the current prayer and spirituality phase of the church, and I long for some balance between the two! The church should neglect neither social action nor worship, but each should inform the other and be held in balance. I would hope that one of the reasons we protest nuclear bombs is because we are persons who are praying for the health of the social order.

Direction of worship may also be neglected because members of the clergy lack knowledge of and interest in liturgy. How often we simply lead worship the way we experienced it as children or as college or seminary students! New rituals do at least make us think about what has to be done differently, but that can be intensely frustrating if we have not been prepared adequately for such change, either in seminary or in continuing education workshops. While nearly all seminaries require preparation for preaching, not many require course work in the history and practice of Christian
worship. This neglect is sad and even tragic. Continuity in the structure and content of liturgy throughout the church’s history has protected the church from the idiosyncrasies of the clergy. We are in a dangerous time, when preachers may disdain or toy with the given structures. The result could be the degeneration of the sacraments of Christian baptism and marriage into sentimental, secular ceremonies, and the Eucharist into a dreary afterthought to the sermon. We are not free to fly with creative worship unless we are first of all grounded in the history of worship of the ecumenical church and the denominational church.

Worship is one of the most important areas of pastoral attention and contact. It deserves careful advance planning and loving execution. William H. Willimon, in his book Worship as Pastoral Care (Abingdon, 1979), asks how pastors can help congregations to worship. He reminds us that edification or upbuilding is our chief pastoral goal. The thesis of his book is that worship is a major but recently neglected aspect of pastoral care. He then focuses on four familiar acts of worship to illustrate his ideas: funeral, wedding, baptism, and the Lord’s Supper. In his discussions of baptism as identity and of the Lord’s Supper as community, Willimon illustrates the ways in which worship offers opportunities for pastoral care that are often overlooked by parish leaders.

The direction of worship is an important need for every church. Barr emphasizes the centrality of worship:

The “being” of the church is realized in and through its worship, the breathing of the Body of Christ. It is only through the filling of its lungs, its bones, its whole body with the enjoyment and glory of God, that it can realize its power to help save a civilization on the edge of self-destruction. As a consequence, when Christians talk together seriously about the leadership of the church, they must talk about its liturgy . . . the work of God’s people.

People who attend church know whether or not they are being fed. They say so if they are, and they have amazing patience with the leader of worship if they are not! A unified, cohesive service built on a solid scriptural foundation with integrated responses and music does not go unnoticed. I have heard members of congregations say how much they have appreciated the
integration of all facets of a worship service. Some even act surprised that it has happened so well, which may be a commentary on how chaotic their experiences of worship have been. The laity notice the liturgy, and we must talk about whether people feel consonance or dissonance as they come for guidance and nourishment at pulpit and altar.

Many resources for cohesive planning for worship are now available. In some churches, progressive members are pushing their pastors to get involved. While this change can be threatening, it is also refreshing to see people calling for a deeper integration of the elements of worship in order to be fed more fully. If you as a pastor have a planning team that wants to do something special, or even to make changes on a regular basis, get out of the way and let them function. They may be in touch with their own needs and the Word of God in ways you never thought possible.

Public worship establishes our identity and declares who we are. In worship we rehearse over and over again the salvation story. Wesley declared that the Eucharist is “the chief form of evangelism and conversion.” Yet United Methodists lost appreciation for the Lord’s Supper in their quest to cover the country. Evangelism went ahead of church rather than remaining centered in the worship of the church. But we dare not forget the symbols that tell the salvation story and help us re-enact its power. Public worship is vastly important for the spiritual formation of persons who are being patterned and formed into Christian disciples. If worship does not dispose us toward loving God and our neighbors more fully, why should we participate in it? The world does not need sentimentality or nostalgia; it needs compassion and sacrificial love rooted in the conviction that we are loved by God and sent forth to redeem the world that God loved.

Who is in charge of worship? Someone needs to be, and most often the minister must be in charge of the formation of the celebration. This does not mean that he or she must always be the presider, but it does mean that this person should be the director and resource. The ordained person is in charge of the basic functions of the church and is responsible for its celebration of worship. James F. White discusses the role of the liturgical director in his book, New Forms of Worship (Abingdon, 1971):
Just as we have turned much of the educational work of the ministry on the large church staff over to a specialist—the director of religious education—so we may one day look for another specialist on such staffs—the liturgical director. He may not lead services himself (some have been laymen), but he will coordinate the numerous services of worship offered each week by differing groups within the congregation. And in some of these he may very well have a function not dissimilar to that of a producer in the theater. (pp. 36-37)

That "one day" may come sooner than we expect, as more congregations press for increased involvement in worship. The way worship is conducted over time can mean the difference between the church being faithful and being unfaithful to the Lord of history.

In the large church, the role of the director of worship would need to be filled by someone with training and skill in liturgy who can coordinate the team of musicians, ushers, and many others. Even in the small church, a director is needed to coordinate the contributions of those who prepare a bulletin or play a pump organ or piano. Barr spells out such work well in the chapter "Sharing the Lead," where he describes the minister as theologian, presider, and manager. The manager is the one appointed to help the right things happen but not necessarily to be the person from which every right thing flows. This versatility is what I call servant-hood—the ability to direct activities but take a back seat or even assume an invisible role when it all happens. When musicians, readers, altar guild members, communion stewards, and others are involved in public worship, the coordination had better be well-prepared in order that the people worshiping be nourished and not distracted.

Obviously, the role of servant often involves a threat to the ego. But does our ego have to be on display all the time? Let us remember our Lord, who sacrificed himself that we might have abundant life. C. S. Lewis once complained: "The modern habit of doing things unceremoniously is no proof of humility; rather it proves the offender's inability to forget himself in the rite, and his readiness to spoil for everyone else the proper pleasure of ritual."

I shall long remember the following incident which occurred on a communion Sunday. The senior minister was concerned about
the length of the service since his sermon had run overtime. He instructed an associate to make cuts in the communion prayers. As the prayer of consecration was started, the associate simply deleted all the words about the institution of the rite by Christ and gave only the proper preface and conclusion. Several minutes may have been saved, but at what cost? And the associate had been in ministry for more than twenty years! The service had not been talked through in advance, nor was there much communication in that large church staff. Did the senior minister or associate even have an awareness that cutting out basic prayers may have offended rather than edified the congregation?

The director of worship needs to plan well with others in advance and then get out of the way to let the celebration happen in all its fullness and joy. Rich resources are increasingly available in all our churches, and many of them are built upon the common lectionary. The role of the director is to coordinate everything that happens in public worship. The stakes are high. Followers of Christ are being formed.
COMPUTER THEOLOGY:
A NEW ERA FOR THEOLOGY

W. PAUL JONES

How can computers be used, not only in theological education, but in the service of theology itself?

Theology has been largely in retreat since the demise of its medieval claim to be the "Queen of the Sciences." And, today, theology remains largely deprived of function, for our culture has difficulty entertaining any question for which "God" might be an answer. The advent of the computer, however, is opening an era in which the theological enterprise might claim a centrality it never really had—that appropriate to a "Servant-Queen of the Sciences."

One central issue is memory. Medieval theologians were greatly hampered by the poverty (by recent standards) of available written data. Not only were personal libraries sparse and other libraries small and distant, but scrolls made research cumbersomely chronological. Indicatively, Saint Teresa—"Doctor of the Church"—did not even have a Bible available to her. Personal memory was the crucial resource for fulfilling theology's enormous goal—knowledge of God as context for understanding humanity's origins and destiny.

Paradoxically, the Renaissance saw both the culmination and dissolution of this medieval understanding of the theological task. On the one hand, the explosive increase in knowledge led to the emergence of the ideal of the person who could bring all available

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knowledge into a meaningful whole. In fact, Kant came to claim that the desire to construct such a whole is the structuring dynamic of reason itself. The ideas of God, universe, and soul focus the human yearning to bring into comprehensive unity all that is. Only then will the self be "theologically" satisfied. On the other hand, the growing enormity of available knowledge soon exceeded the capacity of any one mind ever to comprehend. This tragic situation, awareness of which atrophied the craving for holistic remembering, entailed inevitably the loss of the "theological mind." While the Renaissance ideal was temporarily reclaimed in the interdisciplinary emphasis of the Romantic movement and in the notion of "absolute knowledge" in idealist philosophy, the glut of information in our century has seemed to forestall any possible resurgence of the "theological mind."

This is the context in which one may begin to grasp the significance of the advent of the computer as a theological event. By the year 1988 even a pocket computer will have a memory capacity of four megabytes (four million characters). Even now, a simple home computer (e.g., Apple II) has a storage capacity of 64K (i.e., 65,536 pieces of information); and an inexpensive Radio Shack Model II uses eight-inch disks that can store one-half million characters. An Apple III can store up to 2,400 typed pages of information, and the memory capacity of large computers (now figured in gigabytes, i.e., one billion) can be augmented almost indefinitely. The emerging technology of "bubble memory" will make possible the storage of more than 130,000 bytes on one square inch. One video disk can presently store 55,000 pages on one side (twice the entire Encyclopedia Britannica), and soon a small number of such disks will be able to store the information contained in the entire Library of Congress. Further, a computer can now telephone automatically other computer systems for information it does not have. The rapid development of such technology is evident in the fact that UNIVAC, the pride of the industry in 1950 (costing several million dollars), which was housed in a large climate-controlled room, can be surpassed today by a thousand-dollar personal computer the size of a typewriter.

The first message for theology is clear—memory is no longer an issue. This fact alone is sufficient to re-open the question of theology's proper domain.
At a recent debate concerning nuclear energy, a surprising agreement emerged among adversaries as to the facts of the situation. At issue, rather, was a value question: Does continuation of our present level of energy consumption justify the risk to human life entailed by continued use and construction of nuclear power facilities? The contrasting answers given reflected the scope of the context each group used to define the problem. Given the adequacy of the parameters of corporate activity programmed into most research computers of the energy industry (return, risk, profit, market, etc.), their conclusions are irrefutable. But the "Renaissance" objection cannot be quieted—what of the larger picture without which such things as market, risk, etc., appear out of control? What of the whole? With the advent of the computer the question is no longer that of the impossible "how," but of the debatable "who." Urgently needed today are those whose work is with configurations of the whole, who seek a transcendence over narrow self-interest spawned by insular utility. This characteristic is precisely the defining nature of theology—detecting the meaning of the whole, within which parts take their significance in the impulsion toward completion. But this defining activity entails inverting the previous image of "Queen of the Sciences." No longer does the theologian deduce a priori the parameters of the possible in each discipline. Rather, the theologian is the inductive discerner of possibility, implication, consequence, interconnection, gestalt, and paradigm, correlating these with the imaginative implications of alternative theological hypotheses.

Such a role correlates roughly with the functions of a computer—remembering, condensing, interconnecting. Such narrowing and focusing can yield symbolic distillations; from configurations of such distillations from multiple fields we gain "hints and guesses" (T. S. Eliot) of what computer experts call the "galactic picture." Thus opens up a "field" of imaginal synthesizing and dialectic worthy of the name "theology."

Harvard theologian Gordon Kaufman, in identifying the method of theology as construction, explicates the theological task in a way consistent with this understanding:

Theology does not confine itself to this or that segment or fragment of experience—but rather addresses itself to the
whole within which all experience falls. . . . The theological artist must draw on wide ranges and types of experiences, show how each is grasped in the integrating vision and what each means, for the "whole" is nothing, an empty abstraction, apart from the parts that make it up. . . . No important dimension of experience can be omitted from the theologian's concern and interest and interpretation. . . . In these respects, theological work attempts to be descriptive and scientific and "objective," and it is dependent on the natural sciences, and history, for knowledge of the facts. . . . The work of artists and physicists, social workers and philosophers, historians and economists, urban experts and students of the "third world," spokespersons for the problems of blacks, women and other groups, must all be taken into account. (An Essay on Theological Method, Scholars Press, 1979, pp. 30-31, 59)

The theologian, then, knows that: (1) the meaning of life is determined by the manner in which we understand our experience, a whole; (2) what we understand results from images, gestalts, and paradigms which we detect, which in turn become for us the interpreting apertures for viewing the possible; (3) theological self-consciousness entails systematic conceptualization that makes the whole intelligible in terms of presupposition, order, novelty, consequence, and prognosis; and (4) this reflection returns full circle on the data for action with which we began, as reflection emerges in striving for a grounding coherence.

PRESENT COMPUTER ACTIVITY
APPROPRIATE BY ANALOGY TO THEOLOGY

Bibliographic search. As theologians enter the computer world, they are well-advised first to become familiar with computer usage in fields that have already made firm beginnings. Immediately one encounters the world of data banks, a vast network of stored research knowledge. Search centers rent access to data, accessible by using one's own computer terminal, long distance telephone lines, and a secret access code number. Large libraries offer access to large data banks by the use of "key word search." For example, one asks how many articles have been written in the last year on "neighborhoods." The reply to this "class" request?—"1,329." That's too many. So, one appends a second class code to ask how
many of these are on "renewal"; then "common ownership," etc. One continues this narrowing process by more precisely defining the subject. One may then request (via the printer) a list of these articles, or an annotation of each article, or a full copy of each. Examples of printed material of interest to the theologian might include the *Philosopher's Index* and *Dissertation Abstracts*. Data banks of interest might include BRS of Scotia, New York, Lockheed Dialogue Service of Palo Alto, and SDC of Santa Monica, California, and the Information Bank in New Jersey. A typical university library (e.g., the University of Missouri at Kansas City) draws from 37 diverse data bases. The costs per bibliographic search in 1984 averaged $30.00, while Video Text through Compuserve (Columbus, Ohio) was $6.00 per hour for off-time (nonpeak) use.

**Medical use.** All major hospitals have incredible complexes of computers. A typical one in Kansas City has 52 terminals, 12 printers, costs more than $300,000, and employs 17 persons. Uses are of six types: (1) demographic (complete patient records); (2) correlative diagnosis (entrée to records of patients who have had similar diseases in order to compare symptoms, treatment, drugs, results); (3) MEDLAR (a system for access to international abstracts of disease by topic, disease, etc.); (4) monitoring (assembling information on patient functions for central evaluation and alarm signaling); (5) inventory control (recording, ordering and distributing supplies according to a needs timetable); and (6) diagnosis. It is only a matter of time before a computer with a patient's medical and family records, queried by entering the patient’s present symptoms, will come up with the most probable causes, weighing most effective personalized treatment against possible side effects, all according to the very latest research.

**Social Sciences.** Econometrics interrelates economic and sociological data. The University of Illinois has developed ORBIT as one software package for correlating demographic and sociological data in order to detect patterns. The National Association of Social Sciences and the National Association of Economists have made important contributions here. SPSS is another important software package for social science research. But most important is the development of data banks themselves, to which the social
sciences have been late-comers. BOEING, one of the largest, is set up to gather, as one programmer put it, "all the information in the world." Yet, it is itself a subsidiary bank. The New York Times has a system called FLEXIS. Each day the Times is put on computer tape, and its data is available in differing configurations. One of the emerging public issues concerns the fact that many research data banks, owned by private enterprise, are closed.

Research Laboratories. Marion Laboratories is typical. Beginning with inventory control, its computer applications expanded to include a research and development component as its internal data base grew. The resulting environment is increasingly paperless: electronic mail, electronic filing, teleconferences, telemarketing. But particularly suggestive has been experimentation with projections (e.g., sales forecasting models) using inferences, regression analysis, projection, etc. Using the syntax of "what if" makes possible the planning of scenarios—how many of what; what we produce where; if so, when, how? "If this, then . . . " "But if this, then . . . " This is a process of playing with data by simulating the effects of changing parameters.

Financial Analysis. Waddell and Reed, Inc., relies heavily upon data banks provided by the government. One of its most impressive programs uses "color graphics" to display information on the CRT screen. "Name a stock," I was told. "Okay, say Whirlpool." "Fine, let's see how it went today." Onto the CRT came a graph formed by the intersection of the time of day and a scale of dollars. A "blip" promptly drew in the graph. "Want to see how it squares with the Dow-Jones average today?" Only then did I notice that everything thus far had been green, and now a yellow "blip" was counter-imposing its own line on the existing graph. "How about this past month?" The parameters expanded, and the present graph condensed. The new markers came into place, and the "blips" drew in the new information—this time in two additional colors, so as not to obscure the already graphed information. Each operation took a matter of seconds. What followed was an exhibition of such graphs within the parameters of the last ten years. But this was only a beginning. The next demonstration pushed our overlaid graph to the left side and, projected onto the right, was a continuation into the next ten years. On command, "blips" projected what the stock would do in the
future by months. And then, putting into effect the projection program intricately worked out on past performance records, a “blip” indicated for the foreseeable future when precisely that stock should be bought and when it should be sold.

Legal Use. By far the most exciting use of computers I have found of relevance to theology is in the legal field. The profession uses a data base called LEXIS, which stores all Supreme Court decisions, those of each of the fifty states, etc. The information stored in LEXIS includes case number, name, date, court, participants, text, ruling, and dissenting opinions. Since legal process depends upon precedent, this system is also set up to search for all precedents for a particular case.

To illustrate, let us feed a nursery rhyme into a computer, assigning numbers to terms, called “key words”:

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  1 2 3 3 4 5
Mary had a little lamb, its fleece was white as snow.
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One may then feed in another nursery rhyme, giving key words numerical equivalents, thereby linking words by whatever class grouping one might wish. For example, in “Jack be nimble,” “Jack” might be given the designation of 1, for it, too, is a proper name, as is “Mary.” Any other color mentioned might be given the number 4, other animals, 3, etc. Using this system of classes of key words, it is simple to inquire of the computer which nursery rhymes use proper names, or colors, or even subtly related diminutives such as “little,” “small,” “dwarf,” etc. With a slightly more complex system one can further research a subject by queries concerning frequency, combinations, proximities, etc., of certain classes of key words. For example, one can ask whether any document in the data base mentions a proper name within two words of a certain type of diminutive, within a sentence designating a color.

One can quickly see the usefulness of such a system for legal textual search, as in the case where one is presented with the odd situation of a robber suing an intended victim for an injury incurred in the attempted burglary through owner negligence. Add to such a system the subtlety introduced by Boolean logic, permitting the designations of “and,” “not,” “or,” “synonym,”
“adjacent,” “with,” “same,” “not quite,” “predominantly,” etc., and its capacity to deal with relational statements is greatly expanded.

Formerly, computers could only do string searches chronologically, that is, in a fixed order from start to finish, much as when a person goes back through a music tape, stopping and starting until one finds the exact place desired. This process makes research impractical. But now, through the process of the “random access,” the magnetic head of the data reader is able to move immediately anywhere on the storage disk.

STAIRS (by IBM) is an advanced software package which could provide equivalent capabilities for the theologian. It can scan many documents with eight major functions, such as “search,” “select,” “rank.” It can be hooked to 16 data bases, operating on “strings” at the level of word, phrase, sentence, paragraph, or document. And, more recently, it has been equipped with a thesaurus of use-determined language “descriptors” which link related words, terms, phrases, including all inflected forms (e.g., case, gender, tense, plurals).

The advantage which law presently has over theology is simply its concrete data bank, assembled using LEXIS by typing the data onto magnetic tape, which the computer reads by scanner. While OCR (optical character recognition) still reads only special print, research is close to permitting OCR reading from any published book or journal. This will mean an incredible breakthrough for the low-budget theological work that most of us will be destined to do. Further, the present method by which publishers print by computer makes these tapes available for the research we are suggesting.

FIRST STEPS FOR COMPUTER THEOLOGIZING

Most computer use for religious purposes has been practical (see Kenneth Bedell, Using Personal Computers in the Church, Judson, 1982). Software now available includes programs for Christian education, worship, membership, stewardship, library, etc.

Seminaries are only beginning to sense the importance of computers for their administrative needs in such areas as business, maintenance, development, recruitment, alumni relations, word processing, student records, and classroom registration. Louisville
Presbyterian Theological Seminary has been a leader here. But our concern is for the off-time use of such functional systems for the "doing of theology," at little additional cost to the institution. We turn to some of these possibilities.

**Teaching/learning:** Software is already developed in most fields other than theology for teaching-learning. Most employ a question-answer form, which allows the student to evaluate his or her own development in mastery of the material. Programming for biblical languages immediately suggests itself, as well as any field in which objective testing is appropriate (e.g., Bible, church history, etc.). More difficult to develop, but not impossible, would be responsive learning, using computer "loop" operations for subjects susceptible to "what if" query, such as a case study approach to pastoral care, ethics, and church administration. A situation would be presented, to which options would be suggested: the student would "walk," decision by decision, into the logic of sub-options, exploring probable consequences and implications.

**Projective Learning:** One possibility would be a program developed to help students identify their theological beliefs, beginning with a series of questions and responses. The second part would entail projections from this foundation, exploring implications through theology in a wide arena of thought and action. Such a learning process would teach "organic" theology, that is, theology in relation to the "meaning orientation" from which emerges one's attitudinal focus in every dimension of praxis. The comparative analysis of the theological assumptions underlying, for examples, the student's identified administrative style, counseling techniques, and the homiletic approach of the last six months of preaching, etc., would be revealing.

**Correlative Research:** Bibliographic searches. It is crucial that we develop abstracting of theological publications to the point that research possibilities within existing research resources become greatly expanded, both through on-line searches with other institutions but also within the internal resources of one's own institution.

**Taking inventory** ("To list ingredients or components"). The computer's capacity for inventory is limitless. The first computer-executed concordance of the Bible has recently been published.
Indexing can now become the science that before was never practical, making written works far more useful as research tools. One small step was the recent placement of the King James Bible (4.5 megabytes) on eight 5¼-inch floppy disks by Bible Research Systems (Austin, Texas, $159.95). It is paired with a menu-driven processing program, permitting such operations as word search, passage search, and the development of stored indexes.

Identify ("To recognize particularity so as to attest to purported identity"). Former research into, for example, the authorship of the Pentateuch, involved manual detection of cross-textual contradictions and duplications, varying vocabularies, contrasting literary style, hidden textual influences, sophistication of conceptualization, etc. In the recent "Genesis Project," two computer experts and a biblical scholar (at Israel's Technion Institute) examined the Book of Genesis using a large computer program specifically designed to do Hebraic linguistic analysis of words and larger configurations. The conclusions are purported to increase the likelihood of a single author for Genesis. The project now moves to Exodus. The possibilities are intriguing: for example, computer research into the "synoptic problem."

Detect ("To discern the unique action or character of"). It is exciting to entertain the thought of having within a data bank the corpus of a major theologian's writing. One could then begin a key word search. Examples abound: Where does Aquinas deal with grace within the same sentence as "free will"? Which key theological words appear most often in the writings of Luther? What difference is there in use and proximity of these words during select periods of his life? What biblical passages appear most often in Saint Augustine's work? One could learn for years, asking questions never asked before, nor never asked precisely this way, pondering answers not even known by the original authors. I remember Ray Hart's question to Austin Farrar about the role of imagination in his work. Farrar's reply was, "I really don't know—I never thought much about it." He was grateful when later Hart answered the question for him by researching his work on this point.

Collate/correlate ("To compare so as to exhibit what separates and what binds in coherence; to bring into mutual, reciprocal, or orderly connection or relation"). Rigorous computer-based
COMPUTER THEOLOGY

comparison of biblical books, investigating theological uniqueness and similarity, is much needed. Likewise, in the field of comparative theology, the computer can help to identify in certain authors not only the use of concepts within given parameters but to correlate the use of several of such concepts with subtle precision, using variables such as proximity, frequency, synonyms, and logical connectors that can designate intensities and modalities of understanding. To illustrate, if one is to investigate the linkage of human capacity and sacramental enablement in several theologians' writings, it is quite important to determine whether the connectors tend to be "always," "convincingly," "overwhelmingly," "greatly," "undeniably," or whether they are "often," "tend," "sometimes," "might," etc. What creative research could occur, if, for starters, one were to place in a data base the 100 "classic" theological treatises forging Christian thought to the present! Even now the majority of works by mainline classical Greek authors is available on a 2,400-foot tape from Thesaurus Linguae Graecae Project; and the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity (Claremont) has developed the IBYCUS system for it, with terminals in Greek, Hebrew, and Coptic.

Perhaps the most impressive effort in this regard to date is the Responsa Project, the result of 15 years of research by Rabbis Irving and Allan Rosenbaum at the Institute for Computers in Jewish Life. In conjunction with Bar-Ilan University of Israel, the project has placed 3,000 years of Jewish law (40 million words, 200 volumes) plus 40,000 formal rabbinic "responses" into computer memory. In a method similar to LEXIS, the decisions by the 1,500 rabbinic authors can be queried with respect to topics and subtopics covering all aspects of Jewish life.

Establish context ("To disclose internal and external connection so as to discover significance"). Business is learning how to identify and plot prime market locations by using computer analysis of facts about the distribution of age, sex, family size, income, class, neighborhood complexion, automobile ownership, etc. The theologian, on the other hand, is called to know reality so as to change it. Praxis is the predicate of theology. Jesus was deeply concerned about us, the ones "who can discern the face of the sky, but cannot discern the signs of the times" (Matt. 16:3). As social ethicists we are called to use the computer for discerning
correlations that become "calls," as when a map is overlaid with the data of race, age, class, income, educational standards, national origins, attitudes, nutrition, health care, taxation, services, police deployment, fatalities, etc. But the larger dream I have is of a room circled with computer screens with a circular desk in the middle for keyboard access. One begins to ask questions, say, about El Salvador: population, then income distribution, raw materials, U.S. imports, military expenditure, conditions of neighboring countries, government, elections—and can just keep asking. The data appear on various screens for ready comparison, in graphs of long- and short-term projections, answering "what if" queries. Hegel talked of each entity in reality as being a "concrete universal," meaning that we cannot understand anything until we move through its relations to encompass the universe. Analogously, one begins with crisis and then (as the prophets knew) follow expanding correlations until, as in an epiphany, one grasps the defining context. One discerns in the pattern the meaning of an event. Is it not the theologian's strange task to relate climatology, demography, political distribution, attitudinal polls, etc., within the broader question of the Spirit's luring, to discern the meaning of the signs of the times?

Indicatively, even John Naisbitt of Megatrends insists, "In a world where events and ideas are analyzed to the point of lifelessness, where complexity grows by quantum leaps, where the information din is so high we must shriek to be heard above it, we are hungry for structure."

*Model* ("To give shape so as to compare and find pattern"). Another emerging task of the theologian is to detect in the myriad of theological writings on a particular subject the anatomy of that issue, so as to identify alternative options for its resolution. Classic attempts at such typologies are H. R. Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture* and Gustaf Aulen's *Christus Victor*. A computer can be programmed to discover in theological texts similarities, linkages, and connectors implicit but often unrecognized. The result can be models for theological options derived from computer programming techniques, using matrices which relate dependent variables to an independent variable. Such a matrix, once established, can become a predetermined set against which future data is compared as a standard. A query-based language, then, coupled with
random access search capabilities, permits us to compress data by so imposing parameters that the data universe is distilled into alternative models.

Project ("To impel forward, to visualize"). Christianity is congenitally eschatological, in that the present finds its meaning within a future in view of the past as present promise. Carl Braaten identifies two possible eschatological methods: (1) extrapolation of the future from the present—this method stresses continuity, development, unfolding transition; (2) extrapolation of the present from the future—this more apocalyptic method tends toward discontinuity, dialectic, death and rebirth, revolution. T.E. Jones's typology is related—that between "exploratory forecasting," i.e., the likely; and "normative forecasting," i.e., the should. Letty Russell makes a comparable distinction: "diakrisis" is "the discernment of what is happening in society and in the complex systems of our life," and "prolepsis" is the anticipation of a hoped-for future in the present. Paul Dickson compares the "analytic futurist" (the likely), the "visionary" (the possible), and the "participatory futurist" (the preferred). All of this gives meaning to Robert Bundy's identification of the future as "the prologue to all history." The computer gives us unique processes for developing such scenarios with greater precision. By projecting into convergence the variables issuing from multiple disciplines and data banks, we can construct integrative visions that prophetically judge the present.

The Limits to Growth was such a computer study (by Jay Forrester at M.I.T.), using the five factors of population, pollution, food production, industrialization, and consumption of resources. About 100 relations among these variables were projected into the predictable future, with sobering results. Yet, even this study treated the world as if it were a single entity. Dieter R. Tuerpe (Lawrence Livermore Laboratory) conducted a similar study, adding the class factor of "developed" and "underdeveloped" countries, with even more alarming conclusions. Still, the political realities, for example, remained largely unanalyzed as major variables.

Neal Fisher's comment on The Limits to Growth identifies such enterprises as theological: the final question "is not a technological one at all. It is a value question: what is the good life? . . . [They are
struggling with] remarkably Biblical questions." Unfortunately, most of the futurists' work flounders under theological poverty. There is no such thing as objectivity, only subjectivity identified. And the subjective posture of most futurists is far too optimistic, they being themselves primarily Americans who stand to profit from a promising American future. Oriented by middle-class values, trained from a liberal perspective, and thereby preoccupied by such ideas as "continuity" and "development," they exhibit undue confidence in change through rational choice, eulogizing logical persuasion. Put another way, what is fundamentally needed in "projecting" is the perspective of theologians pondering the human condition, who tremble at the myopia of perspectives forged from the top down, who are deeply aware of the principalities and powers of racism, sexism, elitism, classism, imperialism, and who know how the issues in historiography relate to the formation of the necessary interpretative framework. The task of such projecting is thereby essentially theological. The deductive side of projecting is reflected in such papers as "Six Values Leading to a Preferred Future," prepared by the Urban Future Task Force of the United Methodist Church. This research represents first attempts to provide theologically derived norms for evaluating the inductively identified paradigms.

Assimilate ("To absorb into an organic whole"). Kant declared that the mind itself by nature craves to assimilate all things under increasingly inclusive rubrics, which for him were the "ideas" of God, universe, and soul. Computer programmers talk analogously of gaining the "galactic picture." A think tank to which I belong meets periodically to "pick" the minds of experts in diverse areas; we then struggle together for "emerging meanings." Next steps might include the development of a computer system that has access to data banks containing the latest findings in, say, astrophysics, the present state of microbiology, etc., for the task of detecting in the intersections of these bodies of knowledge, connections, translatable analogies, emerging convergences, impelling imagery. The theologian as "gestalting generalist" must have Einstein's "holy curiosity" to plunge into what Buber called "the infinite ethos of the moment." Annie Dillard speaks of an "average of 1,356 living creatures present in each square foot of earth," while hundreds of solar systems "burst into being as I shift
my weight to the other elbow." It is in this convergence that the theological trend emerges, in the mystery of "the creation of the universe and the existence of something as a sign and an affront to nothing."

Our times are withering under what some call a paradigm shift, where paradigm means "the unquestioned meaning-orientation structuring a culture." Thomas Kuhn's words describe our situation—"a watershed point is reached where the accumulated weight of discrepancies and anomalies that cannot be fitted into the old paradigm shifts the balance," and the only option is to "seek a new paradigm [rather] than to patch up the old." Tillich recognizes that such structuring symbols cannot be solicited; they emerge as "kairos" from the depths of the "collective unconscious." The theological bankruptcy of our time is the bankruptcy of our time, the largely unacknowledged death of our old orienting paradigm and thus the frantic hostility toward the paradoxically new. The theologian is midwife within the pain of such emerging nuances, in the thankless, desperate struggle for images that include, connect, grasp, evoke, congeal, and thus in grasping are graspable. The computer holds the potential for limiting the universe of data; the task of the theologian is to render in symbols the results of such defining cross-limiting. It is not surprising that when asked what important issue had not been adequately addressed in the literature on the future, Paul Kurtz replied: "images of the future." This is a theological task, in an epoch where, ironically, not only have the images capable of luring us forward been so atrophied that "the spiritual center of Western civilization has been rent," but the very task once known as theological has been largely discredited. Robert Bundy comments:

The death knell of Western civilization is perhaps being sounded unless we can find a new sense of mission, purpose, and reason for being—in short, new images of the future that speak to us in rich terms of human renewal and are appropriate to the problems and opportunities of our historical period. (Images of the Future)

This is the call for the rebirth of theology as "Servant-Queen."
What was it like to worship in the early church before the development of a specifically Christian liturgy? It must have been very much like Jewish worship of the same era, and Christians can enrich their own worship by using materials used by the Jewish community at Qumran.

The liturgical raw material of the early church was largely of Hebrew and Syrian origin, although the direction of liturgical development in church and synagogue followed different paths. Intimate relationships may still be found in the music and the spoken word of liturgy in both traditions. The nature of these relationships varies, however, between the two major divisions of the church; the Western church was conservative and strict in its liturgy, while the Eastern churches tended to be more flexible. By about 600 C.E. the former had absorbed as much as it could from Eastern traditions, preserving those elements alongside many Jewish ones, such as refrains based on the “Amen” and “Alleluia,” antiphons, responsories or short verses sung by a soloist and repeated by a choir before prayer or Scripture, and intonations, used for psalms and the reading of the Gospel and Epistle, which are some of the oldest chants in the liturgy and may have come directly from the Hebrew chants of the synagogue.

It is indeed difficult for twentieth-century worshiping Christians to project themselves back in time to a period prior to Christian liturgies, to a time in the early church when the primary worship resources for Christians were those of the Hebrew Scriptures and pre-first-century Jewish worship traditions. But such an exercise can be valuable for the contemporary church in an age of ecumenism when there is a need to become more sensitive to the breadth and depth of the church’s heritage and to grasp more readily the meaning of the common liturgical heritage of all Christians.

The Jewish community at Qumran by the Dead Sea, where the celebrated library of scrolls (first called the Dead Sea scrolls) was discovered beginning in 1947, existed in the period between the composition of the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament, that is, during a time before a developed Christian liturgy. Its life extended from the second century BCE into the first century CE, and was probably destroyed in 68 CE in the Roman onslaught during the reign of Vespasian. This was a community steeped in the tradition of the Hebrew Scriptures. Fragments of every book of the Hebrew Bible, except Esther, were found in the Qumran caves. It was a religious Jewish community that had retreated to the desert in order to pursue the purity and practice of its faith apart from urban society with its entrapments and distractions. The Qumranites were a worshiping community, and they reflect a development of worship and liturgy rooted in the Hebrew Bible.

Christians as followers of Jesus, who himself worshiped in a community rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures, can find resources for spiritual growth in the richness of their Hebrew heritage. The Qumran scrolls give us valuable insight into the worship practices of a community from the time of Jesus’ life and ministry, before “Christian” liturgy existed.

What follows is not an attempt to reconstruct a first-century Jewish service or an early Christian liturgy. Rather, selected passages from the Qumran scrolls have been incorporated into the structure of a simple Protestant order of worship. Although these texts, in some instances, have been adapted for corporate worship, there has been no change in their meaning. The appended labels, such as “Prayer of Confession,” “Words of Assurance,” and “Litany of Praise,” do not designate the intent for which the
passages used here were specifically written, but the appropriateness of these designations for the Qumran texts will become obvious to the worshiper.

Jewish worship does not include a creedal statement (a statement of beliefs) as such, but the selection from the "Hymn of the Initiants" included in the liturgy is appropriate in the place of a creed and perhaps more vital than might at first be imagined for Christians in worship. Creeds tend to be filled with static nouns describing the necessary definition of belief. The Qumran statement of intent to serve God describes in active verbs the necessary definition of acted-out belief.

It is hoped that this simple exercise in worship can increase the awareness of what some of the elements of worship in the first century might have been like and, hence, what it might have been like to worship as an inheritor of a rich Jewish tradition of worship before the long line of development of Christian liturgy began, which has led to the multiple liturgical diversity in twentieth-century Christianity. It is a common heritage all Christians share and may prove a vital element in drawing them together in an age of ecumenism.

A LITURGY FROM THE QUMRAN SCROLLS

Call to Worship (unison):

We give thanks to you, O Lord, for you have illumined our faces with the light of your covenant. Day by day we seek you, and you shine upon us bright as the perfect dawn.

Hymn "Ancient of Days, Who Sittest Throned in Glory"

Text: William C. Doane Tune: Ancient of Days
Daniel 7:9-10 J. Albert Jeffery

Prayer of Confession (unison):

Lord, I have called on you; pay heed to me.
I have spread forth my palms toward your holy abode.
Bend your ear
and grant me what I ask.
Build up my soul,
and cast it not down,
neither let it be left naked
in the face of the wicked.
Let the evil that I have earned
be turned away from me,
you who judge rightly.
Sentence me not according to my sin,
for no one living
can be justified in your presence.
Put the sins of my youth far from me
and let not my transgressions
be remembered against me.
Lord, you have upheld me. You have rescued me
and I have cause to shout! Amen.

Words of Assurance (liturgist):

O God,
You have opened our hearts
to the insight which comes from you,
and unstopped our ears to your teaching,
and, although our minds be unquiet
on account of hidden wrongdoings,
and although our hearts have been melting like wax
because of transgression and sin
which we have kept concealed,
we have come to rely on your goodness and grace.

A Litany of Praise:

Liturgist:   Great and holy is the Lord,
the holiest of the holy for all time.
People:     Before God goes splendor;
behind God a surge of many waters.
Liturgist: Lovingkindness and truth
        are round about God's presence;
People: justice and right
        are the mainstay of God's throne;
Liturgist: Who has parted light from darkness
        and, through discerning wisdom,
        turned the glimmer of dawn
        into bright day.
Unison: Blessed be God
        who by power made the earth,
        by wisdom founded the world,
        by understanding spread out the skies.

Gloria Patri

Anthem (suggested): “Of the Father’s Love Begotten”
Robert Powell

Readings from the Dead Sea Scriptures:

Isaiah 30:15-18:
Thus saith the Lord, the Holy One of Israel: “In going back to
your homes, in dwelling tranquilly, you shall achieve your real
triumphs; in quiet, unruffled living shall lie the proof of your
strength.” But you would have none of it. “No! To horse!” you
said. “We must be off and away!” Then off and away shall you
be—away in a headlong flight! Or, again, you said, “But we like
to gallop around!” Then galloping you shall have—of men
chasing after you! At the threat of one single man—or, at best,
of a handful of men, a thousand of you shall flee, till your lone
survivors are left like a mast on a mountain top, an ensign on a
hill. This is the reason why the Lord is biding his time before he
shows favor to you, why he is keeping aloof from showing
compassion for you: the Lord is a God of justice. (Yet happy,
withal, are they who stand in wait for him!)

The Wondrous Child:

After two years he will know this from that. . . . When he
reaches puberty, he will not be like the average man who
knows nothing until he has mastered the books. He will then acquire shrewdness and commonsense. Even professional seers will come to him on their knees. For all their longevity and age, he will surpass both his father and his forebears. He will be possessed of counsel and shrewdness and will know what men keep secret. Moreover, his wisdom will go forth to all the peoples. He will know the secrets of all the living, and all their schemes against him will be brought to an end. The turpitude (or, defection) of all the living will be great, but it is in his plans that will prevail, inasmuch as he is the chosen of God. His birth and the very breath which he draws have been ordained by One whose plans endure for ever.

_A Statement of Intent to Serve God_ (unison):

All my music shall be for the glory of God;
my lyre and my harp shall be devoted
to tell of his holy dispensation;
I shall put the flute to my lips
to rehearse the due poise of divine judgments.

_With the coming of day and night_
I shall come ever anew
into God's covenant;
and when evening and morning depart,
shall observe how God sets their bounds.

Only where God sets bounds
—the unchangeable bounds of the law—
will I too set my domain.
I shall hold it as one of the laws
engraven of old on the tablets
to face my sin and transgression
and avouch the justice of God.
I will choose the path God shows me,
and be content with divine judgments.
Whenever distress breaks out,
I still will praise God;
and when salvation comes,
join the chorus of praise.
I will heap no evil on anyone,
but pursue all with good,
knowing that only with God
lies the judgment of all living,
who will award all persons their deserts.
I will cherish no baseness in my heart,
nor shall there be heard in my mouth
coarseness or wanton deceit;
neither shall there be found upon my lips
deception and lies.
I will temper justice with mercy,
will show kindness to the downtrodden,
bring firmness to fearful hearts,
discernment to spirits that stray,
enlighten the bowed with sound doctrine,
and reply to the proud with meekness.
To God I commit my cause.

Pastoral Prayer

Offertory

Hymn “The God of Abraham, Praise”
Text: Daniel Ben Judah
revised version of The Yigdal
Tune: Leoni (Yigdal)
arranged from a Hebrew melody.

Sermon

Prayer of Intercession (liturgist):

Lord, we beseech you,
in accordance with the greatness of your power,
You who did forgive our fathers,
when they rebelled against your word.
Though you were angry with them, to destroy them,
yet, through your love of them and for your covenant's sake,
you did spare them.
So now, we beseech you,
to the end that your great power may be known,
and the abundance of your mercies also,
JEWISH RESOURCES

to all generations for ever,
turn us again to you with all our heart and soul,
and so plant your teaching in our hearts
that we depart not from it to the right or left,
having cured us of madness and blindness and
bewilderment of heart.
We praise you for you have delivered us from all distress. Amen.

Hymn: "Thou Whose Almighty Word"
Text: John Marriott  Tune: Dort
Genesis 1:1-4. Lowell Mason

Benediction (liturgist):

The Lord favor you with a spirit of sound counsel and with
perpetual strength and with a spirit of knowledge and with
the fear of God. May righteousness be the girding of your
loins and faithfulness that of your thighs. . . . The Lord lift
you up unto the summit of the world, like a strong tower on a
lofty wall. Amen.

An optional Benediction (liturgist):

May God bless you with every good: may God keep you from
all evil, and illumine your heart with the knowledge of life,
and favour you with eternal wisdom. And may God lift up the
face of divine, sure mercies upon you to everlasting peace.
Amen.

Since these Jewish resources from the Qumran scrolls have been
adapted for Christian worship, it is anticipated that customary
Christian formulations, such as, “in the name of the Father, and of
the Son and of the Holy Ghost (Spirit),” or “through Jesus Christ,
our Lord,” or ascriptions of praise before and after the reading of
the Scriptures, will be utilized by the liturgist who leads in
worship. Of course, other elements of various Christian liturgies
may be used at the discretion of the liturgist. However, specific
Christian formulations have not been added to the Qumran texts
so as to avoid confusion and to maintain the stated goal to honor
the richness of the Hebrew heritage and to draw upon and experience resources from the Jewish worshiping community about the time of the inception of the New Testament church but before a developed Christian liturgy existed.

Although there are many other Jewish resources for Christian worship, this is a very limited attempt to discover a small part of the common worship heritage shared by all Christians.

NOTES


2. All but one of the selections are from the book, The Dead Sea Scriptures by Theodor H. Gaster (3rd ed., copyright © 1976 by Theodor H. Gaster and used by permission of Doubleday & Company, Inc.). In some cases excerpts have been used, and the language has been modernized and adapted for use in corporate worship. Sources of the selections are as follows (page numbers refer to Gaster’s book): “Call to Worship” is from the Book of Hymns, column IV (p. 157); “Prayer of Confession,” from a Plea for Grace, and “A Litany of Praise,” from the Morning Hymn, poems III and VI, respectively, from Poems from a Qumran Hymnal (pp. 221-22, 227); “Words of Assurance,” from fragment 4 of the Book of Hymns (p. 214); the reading from Isaiah, from fragment 23 from Expositions of Scripture (p. 368); reading from the Wondrous Child (pp. 448-49); “A Statement of Intent . . .,” from the Hymn of the Initiants in the Manual of Discipline (pp. 137-40); “Prayer of Intercession,” from a Prayer for Intercession (pp. 272, 278); and “Benediction,” from a Formulary of Blessings (p. 99). The optional “Benediction” is from the Manual of Discipline and is adapted from the translation found in John M. Allegro, The Dead Sea Scrolls (Middlesex: Penguin, 1956), p. 120.
Easter is a glad season. Christian faith is Easter faith, for it is founded on the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Though a glad season, Easter is a tough time for preachers. The Resurrection may found our faith, but for many folk it prompts doubt. In some ways the Bible stories of resurrection do not help—full of appearance and disappearance, of Galilee and Jerusalem, of ephemeral vision and crass, almost embarrassing detail. The stories cannot be patched together with any consistency, and, jampacked as they are with apocalyptic fancy, they are bound to raise eyebrows. Moreover, in many pulpits the Easter message has been reduced to not much more than reassurance—"We won't really die"—so that the full significance of Easter has slipped away. Easter may be a glad time, but for preachers it can be trying.

What do Easter stories tell us? Oddly enough, the Easter stories do not tell us what the risen Christ looked like. Descriptions in the stories are as paradoxical as Paul's famous phrase *soma pneumatikon*, "a body by the Spirit." Jesus may float through walls in one account and munch boiled fish in another. Likewise, we do not get a description of the disciples' inner experiences other than vague "sampler" words such as "joy" and...
"peace." In other words, the stories do not answer the very questions we are apt to ask: What did Jesus look like? What did the disciples experience?

Instead, in the Easter stories we get three things: apocalyptic imagery, creedal recitations, and symbolic allusions to common Christian life.

**Apocalyptic imagery.** In the stories there are white-robed "messengers," rolled-away stones, quivering recognitions, opened-up graves, etc., all of which are "stock" devices drawn from apocalyptic literature. If we do not find the "stock" images incredible, we may still stumble when confronted with apocalyptic theology, with notions of a "last trump" and of a final resurrection of the living and the dead at a "last day."

**Creedal recitation.** In the earliest Resurrection material, 1 Cor. 15, Paul opens his remarks by reciting early church tradition (vss. 3-6), a kind of creed. However, if we poke around in the other accounts, we will also happen on creedal material: for example, the angel message, "He is not here; he is risen," was almost certainly an early Christian liturgical confession. Form critics have spotted similar material in virtually every Resurrection account.

**References to corporate church life.** Willi Marxsen has demonstrated that the commands, "Go tell . . . .", featured in most Resurrection stories, were understood as a commissioning for the church's evangelical mission. But there are also meals, clear allusions to observances of the Lord's Supper in the early church. Also, we find assurances of mercy, which may well refer to formal acts of reconciliation in worship. Of course, there are white baptismal robes, seated "messengers" preaching, and formal announcements of "Peace," which were featured in early church liturgies. So, though we do not get an actual description of the Resurrection, we do find creeds, symbols of the church's common life, and an apocalyptic theological framework. A puzzle!

We have suggested that Easter theology is crucial to our Easter preaching; it is. Easter passages are not much concerned with what will "happen to us after we die," except to affirm that we will be with the Lord. Easter passages are not terribly interested in us at all—neither our death-fears nor our prospects for survival. Instead, the account of the Resurrection is news of Jesus Christ, whom we crucified, but whom God has raised! If Jesus Christ is raised, then, though rejected by "powers that be," he is acquitted by God—everything he said and did is true. Now we can live in his new way, free from law or social pressure. If Christ is risen, then we are reconciled; we who betrayed, denied, and deserted him. The Resurrection is God's great "Assurance of Pardon." If Christ is risen, then the promised new age has begun, the kingdom is. We need not run scared of any political or social domination; Christ is Lord of God's new age. No
wonder that Easter is all wrapped up in apocalyptic imagery—the old age is over and the new age has begun!

Why do the stories pack together creedal recitations with references to the common life of Christian community? Perhaps because the risen Christ is not known in the personal inwardness of religious experience so much as in the patterns of our common lives; the corporate Christ among us testifies to a risen Christ "above us." Christ's own ministry—preaching, teaching, serving, forgiving, rescuing, confronting—is going on in the ongoing life of the church, the patched-together body of Christ. So we confess good news, "Christ is risen," and then catch sight of his living ministry in our corporate ministry—"Look, we are preaching, teaching, forgiving, bread-breaking, confronting, rescuing as he did!" Of course, if churches are playing it safe, selling out for social approval, trying to keep up the "body count" in a game of competitive denominationalism—refraining from whooping it up with "sinner," neglecting visits to county jails, or turning over the "indigent" to a welfare "safety net"—it may be most difficult for us to sing out, "Christ the Lord is risen!" Yet when our confession of faith is ratified by common ministry, Easter faith is a sure thing.

In speaking of the church's common life, we are actually referring to the Holy Spirit. Evidence of the Spirit is not so much feeling as doing—doing the ministry of Jesus Christ. No wonder that the Resurrection passages are so emphatic: "He is not here." The phrase is crucial. Because the risen Christ is not here, our worship is full of longing for his coming—"Maranatha, Lord come!" Popular piety must never be permitted to undercut the flat-out statement, "He is not here; he is risen!" Instead, we have among us (not inside of us), the Holy Spirit, Christ's own Spirit, in shared life together. So, Easter good news is quite precise: Christ is risen; he is not here, but now we live in the Spirit of the new age. The beginning of Easter preaching is a thoughtful grasp of the Easter message.

What about us? What happens to us when we die? (The mortality rate still runs around 100 percent.) When Jesus was quizzed on the subject, he all but dismissed the question (Mark 12:18-27), implying that resurrection involved a new order. Christians do not believe in continuation, which, given our chronic sinfulness, is a tedious hope at best. Instead, resurrection implies a new order, life redeemed! So Christian faith does not shout nonsense—"We are immortal!" The fact is, we are dust. However, God is good and can be trusted; the same God who raised up Jesus from the dead. So we have large confidence in God but no confidence in our own durability. Images of resurrection life in the New Testament are communal, a resurrection of the whole "body of Christ," and joint—"The song of them that triumph/The shout of them that
feast.” God save us from drear dreams of mere survival; parties are much more fun. Trusting God, we celebrate Eucharistic parties in the Spirit, looking toward a glad festive communion with risen Christ the Lord!

EASTER SUNDAY


Luke has deliberately built the story of the Emmaus road around two events—a sermon and a Eucharistic meal—to emphasize the centrality of resurrection faith to the common life of the church.

The lectionary selection comprises two different stories in Luke 24 and, therefore, offers material for two different sermons. We shall work with the second of the two, the well-known story of the Emmaus Road. Most preachers have preached the story and most congregations all but know the story by heart. Nevertheless, let us take a second look, for the Emmaus road account is packed with wonderful nuance and excitement.

Structural design: When we approach a Scripture passage, it helps to pick out the structure of the passage before poking around in commentaries or glancing at theological treatises. The basic structure of Luke 24:13-35 is artfully designed:

- The road from Jerusalem: characters and setting (vss. 13-16)
- Report of Jesus' Crucifixion (vss. 17-21)
- "Rumors" from women at the tomb (vss. 22-24)
- Jesus' sermon on the road (vss. 25-27)
- Jesus and a Eucharistic meal (vss. 28-32)
- The return to Jerusalem: good news announced (vss. 33-35)

Although Luke may have drawn on three separate sources, the story as it stands is a Lukan composition. The story begins with the disciples leaving Jerusalem, and it ends with disciples returning to Jerusalem. In between, we seem to have two big sections, each subdivided: verses 17-21 and 22-24 tell of Jesus' death and a "rumor" of his Resurrection; verses 25-27 and 28-32 offer Word and sacrament—a sermon and a Lord's Supper, both given by Jesus. This structure will give us some clue to our own sermon design.

Notes on the text: Luke 24:13-35 is chock full of wonders. The passage is crammed with flashing image and subtle wordplay. Let us review a few details, following the structure section by section:
The Road from Jerusalem (vss. 13-16):

(13) "That very day" refers to "The first day of the week" of verse 1, which was not only the day of resurrection but was, of course, the day for worship in the early church, the "Lord's Day."

(14) "Talking," in "talking with each other," could be translated "arguing" because the Greek word used is also used of rabbinic question-counterquestion debate; it implies back-and-forth animated discussion.

(16) "Their eyes were kept from recognizing": Use of the passive voice implies that God has veiled their sight, and the particular verb chosen suggests divine sleight of hand. In effect, God has cast a spell over them.

Report of Jesus' Crucifixion (vss. 17-21):

(18) "Cleopas": Most sermons suppose that the disciples were two men. Who knows? If "Cleopas" is identified with "Clopas" in John 19:25, the two disciples might be Mr. and Mrs. Cleopas (a.k.a. Clopas). The issue is not important but may warn against sexist presuppositions.

The reply of the disciples expresses strong incredulity, saying in effect, "Are you, you alone, the only one who does not know . . . ?"

(19) "A prophet mighty in word and deed" refers to the messianic expectation of a superprophet (Deut. 18:18) who would be a Moses-Elijah-Elisha rolled into one and the Judge-Redeemer of Israel.

(20) "Chief priests and rulers": Luke is explicit—the leaders handed over Jesus to the cross, although he was regarded as "mighty" by "all the people" (vs. 19).

(21) Utterly poignant: "We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel." In popular expectation, the redemption of Israel would be accomplished by power, an elevation of the nation and a destruction of enemies. But Jesus' condemnation in court, followed by a cruel death (a sure sign of God's disapproval), proved that he was not "the one." Besides, "the third day," a traditional day for rescue and/or triumph, was nearly over.

Rumor from the Women at the Tomb (vss. 22-24):

(22-23) Here Luke connects the Emmaus road narrative with the earlier record of the empty tomb (vss. 1-11). Luke seems to echo a touch of first-century sexism: although women were believed to be sensitive, they were also viewed as hysterical and, therefore, as unreliable witnesses—a notion which lingers. However, the Christian tradition that women were the first sure witnesses to the Resurrection ought to prevent such nonsense from circulating in our churches.

(24) "Him they did not see": Possibly, the disciples who checked the tomb were looking for a resuscitated corpse and, therefore, were blind to
the glory of the risen Christ. Notice that the disciples would not accept hearsay from women witnesses.

*Jesus Preaches a Sermon on the Road* (vss. 25-27):

(25) "O foolish men" is a bit tame; "You blockheads!" might be nearer to the force of the words.

"All that the prophets have spoken" is not spelled out. Of course, early Christian preaching drew on the prophets and declared that Christ's suffering was a prelude to glory (see 24:7).

(26) "Necessary that the Christ should suffer": The word "necessary" is a loaded word that works two ways: Sin would necessarily murder Christ, although his death was "necessary" in God's saving purpose.

(27) "And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted . . .": This verse is crucial, for it contains allusions to formal preaching from "Moses and the prophets." "Interpreted" is a technical word for scriptural exposition in preaching. Surely Luke's audience would have pricked up their ears and thought, Jesus is preaching a sermon!

*Jesus Presides at a Eucharistic Meal* (vss. 28-32):

(28) "He appeared to be going further" could be veiled allusion either to Jesus' leading of the church in the world or to his coming Ascension.

(29) "The day is now far spent" may also be allusive, perhaps an oblique reference to the end of the age.

(30) A key verse, for it contains a familiar Lukan formula for the Lord's Supper: "He took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them." Again, Luke's audience would have been startled to hear that Jesus was presiding at a *formal* Eucharistic celebration!

(31-32) "Their eyes were opened": The passive voice here indicates divine action; God lets them see.

(32) "Burn within us" implies a continuous action, "burning," while Jesus preached. Notice that in Eucharist, the disciples are "strangely warmed" as they recall preaching. So, Eucharist confirms the message of Christ.

*The Return to Jerusalem with Good News* (vss. 33-35):

(33-35) These verses serve as a kind of epilogue to the story: the disciples who left Jerusalem in sadness now return to the city in gladness. However, please note, they are doing the evangelical mission of the church; from a celebration of Word and sacrament they go out into the world with good news. The phrase, "The Lord has risen indeed," may well be an early Christian liturgical "confession of faith."

**Homiletical concerns:** Luke has designed the story of the Emmaus road not as a historical report but as a "theological" plot. The crucial issue:
Why has Luke deliberately built his story on a pattern of sermon and sacrament, preaching and the Lord’s Supper? Obviously, Luke’s congregation would have recognized both sections of the story, in effect saying to themselves, “Look, the Lord is preaching a sermon” and “Look, the Lord is conducting Eucharist.” If we try to preach the Emmaus road narrative as a “this is what happened” historical event, we will inadvertently skip over the blatant “signals” Luke has built into the account, namely, references to Word and sacrament. Apparently Luke wants to put together resurrection faith with the common patterned life of the church, as if to say, the risen Christ is known to us in sermon and sacrament, and still sends us into the world with good news!

Notice the bind we are in. If we preach the Emmaus road story as a past-tense historical happening, we shall thwart Luke’s intentional purpose. But, if we chase Luke’s theological intent, we may have to give up the aura of historicity. Of course, Luke himself may not be concerned with reporting history; he is speaking to faith. The homiletic problem we face can be stated simply: How can we do what Luke intends in our sermon?

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

John 20:19-31

The story of doubting Thomas does not champion the cause of doubters nor does it grant approval to blind faith. Rather, John announces that there will be no more spectacular “signs” to compel us to have faith, that “hearing is believing” in the life of faith.

The lection for this Sunday is a lengthy reading that contains two pericopes plus a conclusion. So we have here material for two sermons: verses 19-23, which report the Resurrection to frightened disciples, and verses 24-29, which tell the story of doubting Thomas. (The final two verses [vss. 30-31] were the original conclusion to the Gospel of John before an extra chapter, chapter 21, was added.) Though the first passage (vss. 19-23) is a carefully constructed theological drama that includes reconciliation (“Peace to you”) as well as a commissioning of the church (“As the Father sent me, so I send you”) and the giving of the Holy Spirit, we shall work with the well-worn story of Thomas, which, though often preached, may still surprise us.

Despite Paul Tillich’s happy affirmation, “We are justified by doubt,” the passage does not champion the cause of doubters by showing Jesus’ affection for Thomas. Instead, Thomas represents us, later-generation
Christians, who are called to believe on the basis of the Easter message and not to ask for "signs and wonders." In fact, Jesus chides Thomas, backing him down on his knees with near sarcasm, until Thomas confesses faith. Therefore, we will not turn the passage into a sermon on Jesus' appreciation of "honest doubt," which, while perhaps true, is not what the text is all about.

In the Gospel of John there are two special words worth pondering: faith and sign. The words are used throughout the Gospel. According to John, "faith" is doing the word of Jesus, a trusting-in-action commitment. "Sign" is a display of God's power in Christ that confirms and, indeed, enlarges faith. There may be six sign stories in the Gospel (2:1-11; 4:46-54; 5:1-9; 6:1-14; 9:1-38; 11:1-45) culminating in a seventh great sign, the sign of the Resurrection and the gift of the Spirit (20:11-23). The community of the Spirit now confirms our faith. Thus, John seems to assume that there will be no more signs given to faith; instead we will believe on the word and have our faith enlarged by our life together in the Spirit. Yet here in verse 25 we find Thomas refusing to believe in the word he has heard and demanding a sign before he will believe. When, finally, Thomas does declare his faith (without having touched wounds, contra Bultmann), Jesus announces: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe"—a word of encouragement for us.

Structural design: The passage follows verses 19-23 and repeats features of the earlier Resurrection account: Jesus appears on the same day of the week; he greets disciples in the same way, "Shalom"; and he enters through a locked door in the same miraculous fashion. The repetitions are, of course, deliberate. Look at the design of the passage:

The disciples "preach" but Thomas refuses to believe (vss. 24-25)
Jesus appears, saying, "Peace" (vs. 26)
Jesus challenges Thomas (vss. 26-27)
Thomas confesses faith: "My Lord and my God" (vs. 28)
Jesus gives a final "Beatitude" (vs. 29).

Notice that the passage begins with the disciples "preaching" the good news of the Resurrection and ends with a call to believe on the basis of the message. Between the beginning and the end, we have Jesus' challenge and Thomas's confession of faith. Though the story is about Thomas, it is actually written for us. The best place to interpret the passage is where we are, namely, in a "being-saved" community created by the great "death-Resurrection-Ascension-giving of the Spirit" event of Jesus.
Christ. In community, we hear the word, believe, and have the word confirmed by shared new life together.

Notes on the text: The Gospel of John, though penned in simple style, is incredibly complex; it has meaning on many levels, all at once. The Gospel is a symbolic book and, therefore, should not be read as hard-fact history. Instead, the Gospel of John is like a misty cathedral crammed with mysterious carvings and stained-glass images for us to figure out in faith. Let us try to see what is going on in the text:

The disciples “preach” but Thomas will not believe (vss. 24-25):

(24) “One of the twelve”: Presumably, without Judas there are only eleven disciples. The phrase “the twelve” is used to denote the first disciples.

“The Twin”: Some commentators read significance into the appellation, but, probably, there is none. Evidently Thomas had a twin sibling.

(25) “Other disciples told him”: The Greek could better be translated “kept on telling him.” They were preaching the good news of the Resurrection and, thus, fulfilling the commission in verse 21: “As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.”

“We have seen the Lord” is a deliberate repetition of Mary Magdalene’s words in verse 18.

“Unless I see . . . I will not believe”: Apparently Thomas wanted to be certain that the risen Christ is the one who was crucified. The phrase “place my finger” is a weak translation; instead of “place,” read “jab!” The Greek syntax suggests that “I will not believe” is stubbornly emphatic, in effect, “I will never believe.”

Jesus appears, saying, “Peace” (vs. 26):

“Eight days later”: Almost certainly the phrase refers to the next Lord’s Day after the first Resurrection appearance (in calculating weeks, it was customary to count both “Sundays”). So John is probably signaling the “Lord’s Day,” the day of Christian worship. Some scholars have pushed the notion of the “eighth day” as a symbol of the new creation which, possibly, may also be intended.

“The doors were shut” as they were in verse 19. Thus, Jesus’ entrance into the room would seem to suggest a “glorified body.”

“Peace” is, of course, the traditional Jewish greeting, “Shalom.” However, given the double use of “Peace” earlier in verses 19 and 21, John has packed the word with much more meaning; “Peace” is mercy and communal reconciliation. Recall that the word “Peace” was also used in early Christian worship as an opening greeting and, perhaps, in connection with a liturgical act of reconciliation, “the kiss of peace.”

Jesus challenges Thomas (vs. 27):
Though it may be pleasant to speculate that Jesus has a special concern for doubting Thomas (after all, Jesus does show up to address Thomas), the phrase in verse 27 will scarcely support the conjecture. Jesus' words are blunt and almost taunting, as if he were saying, "O.K., you want a sign? Take a look; cram your whole hand in my side!" With harsh overstatement, Jesus backs Thomas down to the ground. Earlier in the Gospel, Jesus has been critical of the demand for "signs and wonders" (see 4:48).

"Do not be faithless, but believing": The phrase may be translated literally, "Don't become unbelieving, but become believing." Thomas confesses faith: "My Lord and my God" (vs. 28):

"My Lord and my God": Scholars have noticed that the phrase parallels a title preferred by the Roman emperor Domitian. Other scholars remark a similarity with the phrase from the Jewish Shema: "the Lord our God." More likely, the words should be understood as a climactic statement of John's theology, for John views Jesus as God-with-us as well as "Lord" of the church. So, though Thomas has been thick-headed and balky, here on his knees he articulates a great Christian confession of faith. Possibly the words served as a baptismal creed in the Johannine community. Certainly, "Jesus is Lord" was an early Christian confessional cry in worship.

Jesus gives a final benediction (vs. 29):

"Blessed" is a difficult word to say in contemporary usage. Nowadays we might say "Happy" or "Congratulations" or better, a combination of both.

"Have you believed because you have seen me?": Some scholars suppose that the phrase can be translated as a flat statement, "You believe because . . . ," but the question seems more likely. John implies that we are now called to believe on the basis of the Gospel message (see vs. 31), which is ratified, of course, by the reality of new life in the Spirit. "Hearing is believing," according to John.

Homiletical concerns: The passage does not offer us a "topic" to preach on, such as "Doubt and Faith." Instead, the passage is carefully designed for a theological purpose. John is announcing that there will be no more spectacular "signs" to crowd us into faith. Instead, we have preaching, the Word of Christ, which the Spirit brings to mind in Christian community. No wonder that Jesus upbraids Thomas for chasing evidence. The only sign we have is "being-saved" new life in the community of the Spirit, which, of course, is confirmation enough. So, though we believe by the word alone, our faith will be ratified by the "Shalom" of Christian community. Good heavens, what else could we require!
The text does seem to address our peculiar twentieth-century world. On the one hand, we are surely empiricists who insist that “seeing is believing”; on the other hand, we are turned on by religious spectacles. We pump our cash into “miracle workers” such as exotic Ernest Angely on television, who certainly plays up to our lust for “signs.” Though the text slaps down our demand for evidence as well as our wide-eyed hunger for signs, we must be cautious lest we turn Jesus’ final beatitude into a carte blanche approval of anti-intellectual religious ignorance. “Blind faith” may well be “faith,” but it is also assuredly “blind”! Our faith, if true faith, will be a faith that seeks understanding. So we will hear, learn, study the words of the gospel, and not merely believe on the basis of emotion or some sort of “leap of faith.” We believe on the word.

Of course, the passage is not ultimately concerned with individual faith. Notice that the passage began with the disciples, a community of faith, preaching. Obviously, when Thomas confesses, “My Lord and my God,” he is declaring the faith of Christian community. The story of Thomas is, we have said, a theological drama having to do with the nature of faith; it is not a story of personal conversion—one man’s religious experience. In preaching, we will be trying to bring out theological meaning. Therefore we will not go into Thomas’s feelings (about which the passage deliberately tells us nothing). All in all, though the story of doubting Thomas is well-known and, indeed, well-loved, it is a tricky story to preach.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

Acts 9:1-20

The story of Saul’s conversion is not complete without the story of his incorporation into the community of believers—no baptism without community.

The story of Saul’s conversion on the Damascus road (vss. 1-9) is often preached alone, without the subsequent account of his incorporation into the Christian community (vss. 10-19a). Theologically, it is better to keep the two parts of the story together. If verses 1-9 are preached as a separate story, they tend to be interpreted through revivalist notions of conversion. Instead, if the whole story is preached, we can see that conversion is a call to life in Christian community and, further, that conversion is never merely a personal event but has meaning within God’s ongoing purpose for the world.
The story in Acts 9:1-20 is one of three different accounts of the Damascus road “event” in the Book of Acts (see also 22:3-16 and 26:9-18). Of course, in addition, there are mentions of the event in Paul’s letters, notably in Gal. 1:11-17; 1 Cor. 15:3-11 and, possibly, in II Cor. 4:6 and Phil. 3:7-11. If we compare the different texts we are bound to spot contradictions. Some discrepancies are minor: In Acts 9 bystanders hear a voice but see no light, whereas in Acts 22 they see light but hear no voice. Other differences are more substantial: Paul himself regards his experience of the risen Christ as on a par with appearances to “the Twelve.” However, in Acts, Luke views Paul’s conversion as an apostolic call, a vision of a lesser order than the first resurrection disclosures. Though scholars have struggled to bring the differing accounts into harmony, the several reports do not dovetail.

We should not read the text in Acts 9:1-20 as a documentary history. Although Luke is often labeled a historian, he is not a historian in our modern sense of the word; he is a historian for faith. Luke is writing to churches and painting a portrait of true, evangelical Christianity as a model for churches. Luke is less interested in historical accuracy and much more interested in depicting an ideal Christianity. Therefore, it is not surprising that the story of Saul’s conversion includes references to early church practices such as fasting before baptism or “commissioning” by the laying on of hands. In addition, Luke seems to draw on material from the Hebrew Bible, notably, Jer. 1:4-10 (the call of Jeremiah), 1 Sam. 3 (the call of Samuel), as well as allusions to Isa. 52:5-6; 59, and particularly the apocalyptic vision reported in Dan. 10. These allusions offer interpretations of the Damascus road event. So, in preaching, we need not try to reconstruct “what actually happened,” a bootless enterprise. Instead, we can let Luke guide us in preaching Saul’s conversion as a story for faith and for the upbuilding of the church.

Structural design: A look at the passage will show us that we have a drama in two acts, each with a sequence of scenes:

Act I:
- Saul “breathing threats” (vss. 1-2)
- The experience on the road (vss. 3-5)
- Aftermath of the event (vss. 6-9)

Act II:
- The vision to Ananias (vs. 10)
- Dialogue between Ananias and the Lord (vss. 11-16)
- The baptism of Saul (vss. 17-19c)
The two acts tend to parallel one another: each begins with a focus on a character (Saul, Ananias), each involves an encounter with the Lord, and each reports “aftermath” events.

Notes on the text: The following notes may help us gain a deeper understanding of Luke’s purpose in these passages.

**Act I (vss. 1-9):**

1. Notice that Saul is self-motivated. He is not sent to Damascus by Jerusalem, but rather he himself, “breathing threats and murder,” initiates the persecution.

2. Despite the evidence of Macc. 15:15-21, some scholars doubt that the high priest had power to arrest and return heretics to Jerusalem for trial. Possibly, the “letters” are commendations to give Saul status in the synagogues. Notice that here, for the first time, the Christian life is called “the Way.” Apparently, they were regarded as a Jewish sectarian group, a heretical halakah (“way of life”). The reference to women testifies to their active presence in early Christian communities.

3-5) Here we have a “Christophany” featuring blinding light at noonday and a voice that says, significantly, “I am Jesus.” The account is somewhat troublesome, as we have mentioned. In 1 Cor. 15:1-11, Paul lists his experience in sequence with the initial Resurrection appearances—to Peter, to the Twelve, to James, and to other witnesses. Luke, however, regards the experience as secondary and, therefore, has Saul encounter nothing more than light—a voice in dazzling light. In verse 5 Saul asks, “Who are you, Lord?”—an odd question. Some commentaries argue that “Lord” here means simply “Sir.” No, more likely, “Lord” is being used to address a divine being.

6) Notice that though Saul was initially in charge, now he is down on the ground, helpless, being told what to do. Subsequently, he will be led by the hand to Damascus to be cared for by Christians. The dramatic reversal is emphasized. We are told nothing about Saul’s inner feelings (and ministers would be wise not to speculate psychologically); but we are shown a dramatic role reversal. In verse 6, the phrase “but rise” may be symbolic; Saul has been dumped to the earth, but now he must rise.

7) Here is a discrepancy in parallel accounts. The onlookers “stand” (= they are almost paralyzed); they hear a noise but do not see the blinding light. In 22:3, the pattern is reversed. Arguments, often grammatical, to bring the two accounts into agreement are not
convincing. In view of Dan. 10:7, the report in Acts 9:7 may be preferred; the event is apocalyptic.

(9) The three days of fasting may deliberately match an early church custom which made the days prior to baptism a time of prayer and fasting, a parallel with the three days from cross to Resurrection.

*Act II (vvss. 10-19):*

(10) "Here I am, Lord": The language here may echo I Sam. 3:4. "Ananias" was a common name; Ananias of Damascus should not be confused with Ananias the husband of Sapphira, who was killed by the Spirit in Acts 5.

(11) The street Straight was a main artery in Damascus, perhaps a prestigious avenue. Thus, the house of Judas was located in what we might call "a better neighborhood."

(12) Notice that, though sightless, Saul is handed a dream to prepare him for Ananias's visit. The laying on of hands was, of course, associated with healing and commissioning in the early Christian community.

(13) Ananias's remarks to the Lord are amusing. He feels he must call the Lord's attention to Saul's unsavory reputation as an evildoer who has inflicted pain on countless Christians. It is exceedingly difficult for us Christian "moralists" to remember that the Lord seems to have a penchant for selecting rascals.

(14) "All who call upon thy name": This phrase brings to mind Rom. 10:13: "Every one who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved" (see also Joel 2:32 and Acts 2:21).

(15-16) Notice that the Lord's reply is tailor-made to counter Ananias's objections. Has Saul done evil? Yes, but he is a "chosen vessel" to spread knowledge of the Lord's name. Is Saul responsible for the suffering of Christians? Yes, but he himself will suffer in the name of the Lord. The Lord's purposes frequently ignore our moral criteria.

(17) Ananias now addresses Saul as "brother." Brotherhood is not formed by our affections but by the election of God. Notice that the double effect of Ananias's visit is sight and an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. "Sight" here means more than eyesight; Saul will see Christian truth. Moreover, the Spirit will replace Saul's previous hostility as the source of his motivation.

(18-19) Saul sees the truth and is baptized; early Christians associated enlightenment with baptism. After baptism, Saul takes food which, again, matches primitive Christian practice. In some communities, the newly baptized were fed symbolic foods, milk and honey, and in all communities baptism was followed by the Eucharistic feast.
Homiletical concerns: The problem for preachers can be simply stated: How can we prevent a two-act passage from turning into a split-down-the-middle sermon? From the standpoint of theological concerns, we ought to preach the entire passage. If we merely focus on the conversion, we could end up describing a drama of inner change and then advising our congregation to have an experience of Christ as did Saul—a ridiculous request. Or, we could preach from verses 10-20, the story of Ananias, and eulogize the church and its practices of baptism, fasting, instruction, and mission. No, somehow we must hold the two episodes together so that our congregation may see God acting throughout—God taking hold of Saul, God contending with Ananias, God baptizing, God working out an evangelical purpose for the world.

The solution to the problem may entail abandoning a usual pulpit convention, namely, a "third-person-objective" telling of the Damascus road story. If we talk about what happened, our sermon will inevitably split into two sections. However, we can make two changes to our usual style; we can look at Acts 9 as our story and we can begin the sermon where we are—in a Christian community that still welcomes the converted, still instructs, still baptizes, and still spreads news of God in the world. A sermon that tells all about Saul will be instructive, but will be more a history lesson than a sermon. Somehow, the passage must bring a word to us where we are.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

Revelation 7:9-17

The vision of the white-robed throng, the angels, the elders and the creatures praising God is not a comforting image of the hereafter; it is a call for faithfulness to the point of martyrdom.

What on earth are we to do with the Book of Revelation? We are familiar with members of the tent-meeting set who preach Revelation as future history, identifying "signs of the end" with current events and "beasts" with political powers. If, to counter the tent-meeting crowd, we locate Revelation in its time and place, we may produce a tedious sermon on past-tense persecutions. But if we preach Revelation as a gospel for now we may end up with more than we bargain for; the Book of Revelation is the most radical book in the Bible! Revelation is not much interested in morality, nor piety, nor our personal problems. The only thing that
Revelation wants is fidelity, faithfulness to the point of martyrdom. Nowadays, in the midst of “sell-out” American Christianity, perhaps it is time to reread the Book of Revelation—if we dare.

Revelation was written by a prisoner on the Alcatraz of the ancient world, the island of Patmos. The author was steeped in Jewish apocalyptic and, while some passages have been “baptized” with Christian meaning, other sections could be interleaved with Jewish apocalyptic writings without much change. Apocalyptic was handy; it provided a code for sub rosa Christian documents, but, also, it offered radical theology for a time of terrible crisis. The book is given structure by a series of sevens: After seven letters to churches there are seven seals, seven trumpets, seven visions, seven bowls, seven more visions, and, finally, the great image of the Holy City, new Jerusalem. Chapter 7 opens after six seals have been broken, portending dreadful destruction. The chapter interrupts the sequence of the seals with a sudden soaring vision of a martyred choir, in chorus with angels. The vision is not a depiction of the hereafter, a sweet comfort for funeral services; rather, it is a call for brave Christian resistance now.

The lection for this Sunday, taken from verses 9-17, follows a vision of 144,000 persons who are “sealed” against impending destruction. Who are the 144,000, referred to in verses 1-8? The situation is clear: four winds of destruction, scheduled to sweep the earth, are being temporarily held back by angels until the “servants of God” are sealed. The idea of “sealing” goes back to the beginning of Hebrew tradition—to protect his life Cain was “sealed.” Likewise, in Exod. 12, the firstborn of Israel are protected by a “sign” on their doorposts, a seal against judgment. Probably, Revelation is drawing on Ezek. 9:1-8, where angels mark the righteous with a “seal” before the destruction of Jerusalem. So, here in Revelation, a remnant, the “new Israel,” is marked against the scourging of God. As for the number 144,000: it is not intended to be precise, but rather a “perfect number” (twelve—the number of the tribes—times twelve times a thousand), representing a pure remnant community. While some scholars suppose that the people described in verses 1-8 are a different group from those depicted in verses 9-17, other scholars suggest that we are dealing with two visionary glances at the same glorious company, a company of martyrs.

Structural design: The passage is a stunning vision of triumph that unfolds in three defined sections, as follows:

Depiction of the scene (vss. 9-12)

a. The martyrs sing, “Salvation...”
b. The angels (and elders and creatures) sing, “Amen. . . .”

Dialogue and Explanation (vss. 13-14)
The Great Hymn (vss. 15-17)

Notes on the text:
Depiction of the scene (vss. 9-12):

(9) The martyrs of “new Israel” are drawn from Christian community everywhere. They wear white robes which, though possibly baptismal robes, are symbols of purity and triumph (see 3:4-5), and they carry palm branches, signs of victory.

(10) “Salvation”: Though the word may be translated “salvation,” here as elsewhere in Revelation, it may better be rendered “victory”—“Victory belongs to our God. . . .” The notion here is that God’s rescue involves triumph over enemies, and thus victory.

(11) The elders and the creatures have previously been introduced in 4:4, 6. Scholars have argued over the identity of the elders for centuries: Are they angels or are they elevated earthly patriarchs? The question cannot be resolved. Evidently they are a heavenly council. As for the creatures, they recall the cherubim of the Hebrew Scriptures. Again, they cannot be identified with certainty.

(12) Notice that the angel’s ascription of praise contains seven attributes. The perfect number seven is featured throughout the Book of Revelation.

Dialogue and Explanation (vss. 13-14):

(13) Question-and-answer dialogue is a familiar apocalyptic device. Notice that the dialogue serves to acknowledge human ignorance and reliance on divine disclosure: “Sir, you know!”

(14) The “great tribulation,” or “great ordeal,” does not refer to agonies of martyrdom so much as the internal testing involved, a struggle between going along with the way of the world or standing firm in faith whatever it may cost. The conflict is a conflict of allegiances.

The crowd of martyrs from every land and tongue have “washed their robes and made them white.” Notice that they have washed their own robes. Although, as forgiven people, we have all been scrubbed in the blood of the cross, that is, declared pure by the atoning death of Christ, the martyrs have a brighter whiteness. They have shared the sufferings of Christ and, therefore, have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb. In preaching, we may not reduce the sufferings of the martyrs to the psychological struggles that most people endure, no matter how painful; no, Revelation is referring to actual martyrdom.

(15) “Shelter them with his presence”: The RSV translation does not bring out the allusion to Exodus which is hinted at in my own translation, “will tent-cover them.” God is making a tabernacle with faithful servants.
The verses draw on Isa. 49:9-10, which reads:

They shall feed along the ways,
on all bare heights shall be their pasture;
neither scorching wind nor sun shall smite them,
fore he who has pity on them will lead them,
and by springs of water will guide them.

Additional allusions to the Hebrew Scriptures have been incorporated: perhaps the shepherd image, from Ps. 23; the “living waters,” from Jer. 2:13; and “God will wipe away tears,” from Isa. 25:8.

Homiletical concerns: The vision in Revelation 7 poses a problem for preachers. Although there are a few scholars who argue that the vision includes the whole church gathered in final triumph, most scholars insist that the white-robed “saints” are a gaggle of martyrs who will participate in the harsh sufferings of Christ and, thus, “wash their robes in blood.” The vision is staggeringly beautiful: the martyr throng stands with angels in the heavenly court and joins in the praise of God. The trouble is that you sense a “P.S.” beneath the vision, reading, “American Christians, please disregard!” The blunt fact: Nobody, but nobody is persecuting us. We American Christians do not anticipate martyrdom. Oh, our “mainline” church rolls may shrink compared with third-world Christian expansion; but by and large Christianity in America is a “success story”: we are culturally approved. Many Christians sense no real tension between the American way and the Christian way because, after all, the nation has been instructed by Christian values. Perhaps in communist lands the vision in Revelation 7 could encourage stalwart Christian communities to be faithful, but here in our own land, the passage may not apply. Most churchgoers in America feel that national purposes and the purposes of God are not far apart. Martyrdom, we believe, is not a “live option.”

Maybe we are blind. Despite recent White House pieties, are American “values” all that Christian? At present, America is committed to a military buildup; we are now the world’s number one arms merchant. Meanwhile, in our age of diminishing expectations, we have been backing away at welfare spending and justifying our cuts with high-sounding phrases, such as “protecting initiative” or “free enterprise.” Fogetting God’s well-known concern for the poor, we settle for a “safety net” minimum. Of course, we could push further and ask point-blank whether capitalism is intrinsically Christian. If we paint the
world in black and white contrasts, capitalism versus communism, we may be able to make capitalism look sweeter than it is; but, bluntly, is "making a buck off your neighbor" demonstrably Christian? There is some tension between American policy and Christian faith.

What would happen if we took a stand? Suppose the churches were outspoken (something more than the usual cautious pronouncements). Predictably, we'd get it! As long as we dabble in prayer amendments or launch our usual attack on hootch and wanton sex, we're safe enough. But imagine the uproar if we set the gospel up against the "American Way." Not only would we lose status in society but, probably, we would end up Christian against Christian in a war of words. Meanwhile, in each one of us the internal conflict would grow large. Social acceptance is a built-in desire, and social disapproval is something most of us would willingly sidestep. Suppose that by speaking out the church were to become an "embattled minority," a decidedly risky membership.

Well, if nothing else, we might learn what it is like to share the sufferings of Christ! Jesus Christ never sold out: his strange, stubborn faithfulness to God got him a cross. All through his life, he was asked to conform, to go along with the going "mind" of his land, but he refused. From the temptation in the wilderness to the taunting on the cross, he held firm. As a result, Jesus Christ was crucified. Crucified. The word strikes terror, and should. Crucifixion was public rejection, replete with catcalls, obscenities, not to mention raw hate. In a sinful world, God's ways will always incur rejection. So, if we take our stand beside Jesus Christ, the world will surely carve a cross for us. Think of being a rejected people for the sake of Jesus Christ.

How encouraging, how wonderfully encouraging the vision of Revelation could be! If we are rejected in the world, think what it would mean to be welcomed into the very throne room of God. If we have been put down and our reputations bloodied, imagine the wide-eyed surprise of white-robed glory. Risen with Christ, that's the vision! Tears wiped from our eyes by the bending tenderness of God. Cool living waters for our fevered lives. No wonder the martyred host breaks into song, "Victory is God's Victory. To God be blessing and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and might. Amen."

Well, the vision is not pie-in-the-sky. The dream is not a "payoff" in heavenly places. Instead, the vision calls us to here-and-now brave Christian lives, stubbornly clinging to the words of God. Yes, the Christian life is love in action, no doubt about it at all; but the Christian life is also resistance. If God accepts us in Jesus Christ, we need not play games for social approval, even denominational games (nowadays, often called "church growth"). We can speak out for God's peace and God's
justice and God's own intense social concern, even if it may mean a speaking out against our own national purpose. If we live as citizens of the kingdom, we cannot be docile American citizens in the midst of national disobedience. For heaven's sake—and for heaven's vision—let us be Christian people in the land; free, bold, stubborn, loving Christian people. We are called to be faithful!

How can any preacher preach the vision in Revelation 7? Oh, we can ignore the study of Scripture and preach away, saying to congregations that after a lifetime of internal struggle they can look forward to a handout in heaven. But, unfortunately, we are stuck with a vision of martyrs. We cannot give you a sermon sketch. However, if you glance back through this section, "Homiletical Concerns," you may find one!

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


WHERE IS CURRENT "CHURCH PLANNING" LEADING US?

J. MICHAEL RIPSKI

In our eagerness to appropriate managerial techniques, are we radically altering the institutional character of the church? It appears that we are, and in ways not always consonant with the church's task.

As the barometer of institutional vitality among the mainline denominations has fallen, and as the seminaries have become obsessed with plundering the social sciences and secular professions for theoretical and technical enlightenment, management-by-objectives has assumed messianic overtones. The question, Who will save us? becomes now, What (process) will save us?

We must give the business community its due. Experience has proven management-by-objectives to be an effective discipline for a church whose gangly body has often appeared conspicuously uncoordinated and directionless. Intentional planning, which has guided business to new heights of accomplishment, is now doing the same for churches on both the local and denominational levels. Churches have been told that the future is not merely to be entered but created. They have "put their hand to the plow" in large measure because business has taught them how to plow. The resultant sense of power has itself produced a new vitality within the churches. Despite this new-found power and its tangible productivity, some have begun to ask, "The crop we are harvesting is more plentiful than it used to be, but what exactly are

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we harvesting? The annual church reports are lengthy, but what are we reporting?"

My concern is this: In our eagerness to discover a remedy for our ecclesiastical erosion and to legitimize our ministry through the baptism of managerial technique, are we becoming—have we become—like that from which we have borrowed? Is the church’s institutional character in the process of being radically altered? A recent voice, that of Leonard L. Sweet, echoes my concern:

Any community that seeks to be faithful to God will need to organize itself carefully. The question is, what model of organization should it employ? Oldline Protestantism has chosen a business model over a biblical model, management techniques over charismatic techniques—planning rather than prophesying our way forward, trusting in goals and objectives, instead of discerning the spirits, lobbying rather than praying, using Robert’s Rules of Order instead of Paul’s rules of the Spirit.

The church has been blessed by those who have detected the need to adapt the “gifts” from business to the unique character of the church. We will consider here two of the most popular contributors to the field, Kennon L. Callahan and Lyle E. Schaller. How well have they avoided the temptation to become like that from which the tools for planning have been received? Or, to focus the issue more sharply, what kind of church is evolving from our current planning methodologies?

CALLAHAN’S CHURCH: BOTH MISSION AND SUCCESS

To those accustomed to the usual management-by-objectives style of planning, Callahan, in his book, Twelve Keys to an Effective Church: Strategic Planning for Mission (Harper & Row, 1983), offers an alternative: “diagnostic and strategic” planning. It is diagnostic in that, instead of the aimless data-gathering that occupied previous planning methods, Callahan directs attention to twelve characteristics that he has observed in “effective and successful” local churches. Consultations in hundreds of churches substantiate this list. His approach is strategic in that it seeks long-range planning resulting in a few select goals that will actually influence the future of a local church.
This is how Callahan’s long-range planning formula works. First, the church is to claim its “foundational strengths.” God has given every church some gifts. These should be acknowledged and their divine origin claimed. Many churches, he notes, plan by fixating on their needs and weaknesses, only to end up wallowing in them and the accompanying despair. Second, the church is to plan by expanding those foundational strengths. It is more realistic to take baby steps than giant steps. Third, after the church has expanded its foundational strengths, it can commit itself to adding new missional thrusts over a period of several years.

These are the twelve foundational strengths to be claimed, expanded, and added: (1) specific, concrete missional objectives; (2) pastoral and lay visitation; (3) corporate, dynamic worship; (4) significant relational groups; (5) strong leadership resources; (6) streamlined structure and solid, participatory decision-making; (7) several competent programs and activities; (8) open accessibility; (9) high visibility; (10) adequate parking, land, and landscaping; (11) adequate space and facilities; and (12) solid financial resources. The major portion of his book consists of a detailed explanation of each of these characteristics.

Callahan draws on his expertise to provide some very useful information. He has devised numerous formulae for helping churches assess and project their future. There is a “Visitation-Mission-Growth Formula” for calculating the number of families who have the potential for becoming active in a local church. Drawing on this data, there is a “Mission-Growth-Finance Formula” for figuring a church’s future income. There is a “Maximum ‘Comfortably Filled’ Seating Capacity Formula” for determining the adequacy of one’s space for worship. There is even a “Church Parking Formula” which correlates available parking with worship attendance potential and even puts an “annual value” on each parking space.

Callahan’s facility with formulae and fondness for scattering bits of time-tested wisdom leaves one sufficiently impressed. One is persuaded that any church, following his approach, can “leap tall buildings with a single bound,” or its church equivalent, reverse “the self-fulfilling prophecy of negative demographic trends.”

Like a late-night TV advertisement for a wonder-working kitchen gadget, it sounds too good to be true. I think it is. I say this
with some reservation. Three years ago Callahan conducted one of his consultations in the church I serve. We used the manual which has become his book. His recommendations have been implemented. The church as an institution has prospered. This has been immensely gratifying for myself as well as the congregation. Still, the question gnaws at my mind, does our institutional prosperity reflect fidelity to the kingdom of God?

I have my doubts that it does. My critique of Callahan is at the same time a critique of myself and my susceptibility to a more palatable, less demanding discipleship.

I believe that Callahan's implicit theology of the church (the only one he gives us) is suspect. His entire planning program presupposes a particular understanding of what is meant by "an effective and successful" church. Such a church, in Callahan's experience, is defined largely in terms of what "works." But "works" by what standard? His analogies give him away.

To illustrate what is meant by "foundational strengths," he turns to football. A football team with all-pro players on the right side of the line runs in that direction—not to the left side.

Too many churches with strengths at "right guard, right tackle, right end, and right half-back" spend too much time trying to run around left end. They wonder why they do not have many "winning games." (p. xvii)

When he wants to describe the kinds of relationships persons have with the church, Callahan turns to the business world:

To use business terminology, members are stockholders, constituents are regular and occasional customers, and persons served in mission are the client pool. . . . Indeed the art of making a solid business grow is that of effectively serving the range of people who are in the client pool. Some of these will become regular and occasional customers and some of these will become stockholders. (pp. xviii-xix)

When the determinative motives are winning and success, what does this do to the mission of Callahan's church? It is domesticated. There is little likelihood for witness in word and deed to a reign of God that judges and challenges the present order.
Callahan’s sleight of hand might well go unnoticed due to the lip service he pays to a more encompassing definition of mission:

“Missional” refers to the fact that in doing effective mission, the local congregation focuses on both individual as well as institutional hurts and hopes. . . . Limitation of mission either to self or to societal issues is inappropriate. It is not possible to help individuals genuinely and effectively without also taking seriously societal dynamics that impinge upon the plight of the individual. (p. 2)

Nevertheless, when he gives specific examples of churches becoming “legends on the community grapevine” because of their mission and outreach, it is in terms of “the church that helped John and Mary” (p. 9). He mentions churches who help alcoholics and their families, epileptics and their families, persons experiencing grief, and those struggling with cancer (p. 8). Nowhere does he mention less “marketable,” less popular missional activity. We know what kind of “legends on the community grapevine” are those churches who offer sanctuary to illegal aliens, protest the manufacture of nuclear arms, and work for open housing.

From where does the inspiration for mission come? Callahan believes the most effective way to develop mission is to “grow it up from within” as opposed to looking “out there” for societal problems and then planning to do mission “from the top down” (pp. 4, 5). Mission is grown from within by tapping the “longing to help” which resides in church members.

My questions for Callahan are these: Who among us longs for a major revisioning of the status quo, for the first to become last and the last to become first—especially if we are among “the first” in the present order of things? Or, if you are among the church’s “stockholders,” how inclined toward risk taking are you going to be? Won’t you tend to go with relatively safe investments of the church’s capital?

So, what might serve as inspiration for a church acting for reasons other than its own self-interest? I don’t believe it lies in our ambivalent longings or in our desire for the church to prosper by marketplace criteria. Does it not have to arise from devotion to a theology of the church which defines the church’s purpose according to God’s intent for it rather than according to the cultural yardstick of what “works”? Seductively, Callahan has lured us
away from attention to "God's will" to the promise of visible signs of worldly success. Because Callahan bypasses the weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth related to theological reckoning, he is able to plan for a church which inherits unconsciously the sins of the culture. It is the means which justifies the end of institutional aggrandizement.

SCHALLER: HEAVY ON DESCRIPTION, LIGHT ON PRESCRIPTION

Unlike much of what has been written on church planning (which explains how more effectively to apply management techniques to the church), Lyle E. Schaller's recent writings urge a caution against adopting alien management practices which will subvert the church's central purposes.

Schaller delineates three types of organizations: (1) the profit-oriented company or entrepreneurial bureaucratic organization; (2) the nonprofit organization and voluntary organization; and (3) the Christian church. The entrepreneurial bureaucratic organization exists to produce a product or service and to sell it at a profit. The nonprofit or voluntary organization seeks to advance a cause and/or offer a service. The Christian church's purpose is to advance a cause.

In Looking in the Mirror, Schaller notes the consequences when the Christian church behaves as though it were a profit-oriented company:

An excessive emphasis on business-oriented goal setting and management techniques tends to subvert the central purposes of the churches. The priorities tend to reflect the programs that can be fitted into an entrepreneurial goal-setting procedure based on a short time frame. One result may be an excessive emphasis on quantifiable goals such as a financial campaign, a building program, numerical growth, or the defining of the commitment to mission in dollar terms. (pp. 41-42)

Especially poignant are Schaller's comments about the effect this has on the church's leadership:

A managerial ethic tends to reward such institutional tendencies as (a) doing is more important than thinking or the end justifies the means, (b) loyalty means blind obedience to superiors without the
freedom to criticize either the people at headquarters or the priorities that originate at headquarters, (c) an avoidance of any statement or action that might disrupt internal harmony or "rock the boat," and (d) an excessive tendency to place a high priority on one's own successful career. (p. 46)

Despite his critique of the unreflective use of managerial techniques, he does little to advance an alternative which does justice to the church's character. In fact, at times he sounds resigned to the fact that since any planning approach one uses will produce a distorted church, all one can do is be aware of it. The following, from Effective Church Planning, is an example:

The PBE (planning-budgeting-evaluation) planning model usually produces recommendations on church finance. The use of a church-growth planning model usually will produce recommendations on evangelism, new member recruitment, and improved assimilation of new members. The use of a social action planning model will produce recommendations on great community involvement by the congregation, increased allocation of staff-time to community affairs, and increased use of the building by neighborhood organizations. (p. 94)

So, what sort of planning model does Schaller favor? As best as I can determine, it is a model which can be summarized in three questions:

1. What is the principal business we are actually engaged in today as a congregation? What are the priorities and concerns that dominate today's agendas here?
2. What do we understand the Lord is calling this congregation to be here in this community, and to be doing in the years just ahead?
3. How do we get from here to there?

For all the praise Schaller deserves for his sociological wisdom on how church organizations function, he fails his audience at the point of providing norms for "understanding what the Lord is calling this congregation to be and do." He overwhelms us with a cafeteria line of endless organizational theories and walks away, leaving us bewildered by the impression that, in Schaller's mind at least, one choice is as good as another.
On occasion, when he talks about church size, Schaller appears to be on the verge of leaving description for the land of prescription. It is there that one must excavate his theology. The following two passages from *Effective Church Planning* are suggestive:

If a high value is placed on meaningful participation, the proportion of members attending corporate worship, the spontaneity of the caring and supportive fellowship among the members, the quality of the relationship between the pastor and the members, the opportunity for people to express their commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior through the worshiping congregation, the nurturing of the creative skills of the members, and the sense of being a called-out community, a strong case can be made for the thesis that the maximum size of a congregation should be 150-200 members (60-90 households) with a full-time pastor who has a high level of competence in developing and nurturing small groups. . . .

Many of the most influential leaders in the churches find their needs are met more adequately by large congregations, and thus the "reward system" in most denominations reinforces the belief that bigger is better. (pp. 51, 78)

Do we hear in this issue of size the resonating of Schaller's theological chords? Nevertheless, just when you think you are homing in on Schaller's theological underpinnings, he goes and writes a book, *Growing Plans*, on how churches can grow bigger! Whereas Callahan's planning approach reveals him to be in the mold of a marketing consultant, Schaller's writings portray him as an expert organizational technician. He is heavy on the "how" of church management but light on the "what" with respect to the kind of church we believe we are to be managing.

**TOWARD A "RELIGIOUS" PLANNING MODEL**

Is it possible to employ the insights from business and the social sciences while ensuring that they remain subservient to a church whose integrity will resist compromise in either the direction of subtle character evolution (Callahan) or sociological relativity (Schaller)? I believe that it is. What follows is a proposed planning methodology that appreciates the intentionality and responsibility inherent within the process of analysis, comparison, aspiration,
goal setting, action, and evaluation. It should be noted, however, that this technique is meant to be set within a practice which is characteristically religious: the church's practice of worship.

What is the purpose of worship? Of course, no one answer can suffice. Nevertheless, can we not define worship as giving God God's due? Explication would entail, among other things, a discussion of human attentiveness to the voice of God and to the vision of God's kingdom and of the God-human dialogue through which the human being becomes more desirous of and more prepared for God's future reign.

The pitfall in the church's use of planning lies in the lack of attention to God. The main reason for this not so minor oversight is that the present planning methodologies readily lend themselves to an ecclesiology which finds it easy to collapse notions of faithfulness and prevailing definitions of success and growth.

Different controlling images are required. Instead of play making, scoring touchdowns, winning games, and marketing consumer products, planning models should be anchored in such theological referents as "the kingdom/reign of God" and "sanctification." The motif running through a planning model based on the former would be, what must we do in order to realize God's future in the present? Based on the latter, it would be, what kind of persons and community must we become in order that God's future might be realized, however partially, in the present?

The following is a planning model that has been used by many churches:

1. Write a statement of purpose for the church
2. List personal hopes, dreams, and concerns of the church
3. Define what is to be considered the congregation
4. Define what is to be considered the community
5. Analyze the church's organizational structure (actual and ideal)
6. Gather data on congregation and community
7. Assimilate all the above (trust the group dynamic)
8. Set goals, objectives, and strategies
9. Set priorities and establish a schedule
10. Gain approval from church governing body
11. Implement plan-of-action
12. Schedule regular checkups and evaluations
The model I propose does not discard the elements of this model. Rather, it places them within the attitudes and actions associated with worship.

Adoration, praise, and thanksgiving. We begin where our faith begins—with the recalling of God's salvation history. Composing a Eucharistic prayer of thanksgiving would be one way for a church to commence planning for its future. As we remember the God of the Bible, tradition, and the church's own history, we learn what it means to be people of promise and are made receptive to discovering what we are yet to be and do. This is more than a static statement of purpose. It contains the energy of a narrative within which we now see ourselves as the characters.

Confession, petition, and intercession. The concern of this movement is the honest recognition of what has been, what is, and what will be if nothing changes. It encompasses who we are, what we have done and not done, who we hope to be, and what we need to do in order to be faithful characters in God's salvation narrative. A solidarity with the entire human family is acknowledged. This includes the congregation, the neighborhood, and the whole of creation.

Just as a Eucharistic prayer of thanksgiving might be composed to begin the planning process, prayers of confession, petition, and intercession could be articulated here. They would be based on the specific information received from steps 2 through 6 in planning model above.

Word and sacrament. Through Word and sacrament (sacramental experience is included here also), the church discerns a mandate to incarnate its prayers. God's relationship to the past and present covenant community, recognition of what the church has been, and is, and hopes to be, awareness of creation's yearnings to be set free from its bondage to sin and evil—all combine to produce a context where God's call is heard.

Response and commitment. Goals, objectives, and strategies can now be articulated within the tension of what is and what God has promised is yet to be. These are to be implemented and regularly evaluated. But evaluation is not limited to a determination of successful accomplishment. Apparent progress (or lack of
it) must always be interpreted through eyes of faith, which leave a final valuation and vindication of human efforts to the God who originally inspired them.

Such a planning model that consciously intends “to give God God’s due” will, in my opinion, increase the likelihood for a revelation with the potential for converting the church at its roots. Instead of exhibiting the optimism intrinsic in accentuating strengths and assets, this model acknowledges our continuing need to confess and repent from the sins of self-sufficiency and pride. It manifests the belief that the church is called not only to do but also to be—to be amenable to God’s conversion and sanctification for the sake of that future for which the church hopes and prays.

NOTES

5. I am indebted to the Rev. Ed Grider, a former Executive Director of the Urban Training Organization of Atlanta, for this “Situation Analysis” model for local church planning.
BOOK REVIEW
Recent Titles in Medical Ethics

LARRY R. CHURCHILL

Medical ethics is a rapidly developing field of study, and one of increasing importance to the lives of ordinary people. As the possibilities for genetic therapies and life-extending technologies increase—and as more of the burden of fulfilling our aspirations for the good life is shifted to physicians—the greater the need for all citizens to entertain critically the moral implications of these possibilities. The clergy will, in all likelihood, be drawn increasingly into the debates, as persons faced with crucial life choices seek to ground their actions in theological traditions and scriptural teachings.

For many years, theologians and religious moralists were the only voices in medical ethics. During roughly the first two-thirds of the twentieth century most English-speaking philosophers were mired in the abstractions (and frequently the trivialities) of analytical language philosophy. Roman Catholic moral theology has long been attentive to medical-moral problems, and Judaism possesses the lengthy tradition of rabbinic responsa and the dicta on these subjects. Modern Protestant concern for these issues can be dated, with little distortion, to the publication of Joseph Fletcher's *Morals and Medicine: The Moral Problems of the Patient's Right to Know the Truth, Contraception, Artificial Insemination, Sterilization, Euthanasia* (Princeton Univ. Pr., 1954). Paul Ramsey's *The Patient as Person: Explorations in Medical Ethics* (Yale Univ. Pr.) and Harmon Smith's *Ethics and the New Medicine* (Abingdon) followed in 1970. All three of these works are still well worth a careful reading and have become standard references for later work in the field.

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97
The mid-1970s saw the emergence of sustained philosophical interest in medical ethics and an outpouring of monographs and anthologies. Today one must read both philosophical and religious sources to be well-informed, and it is for this reason that I have included a sampling of both in this review. Only a fraction of the books which could have been chosen are discussed here, and many worthwhile works are omitted. The selection follows a rationale of quality and diversity, in that order. All will repay a careful study.

General works. William F. May's *The Physician's Covenant: Images of the Healer in Medical Ethics* (Westminster, 1983) is a recent general work in medical ethics that takes theological perspectives seriously. Eschewing the overworked and often arid philosophical analysis of exotic dilemmas, May's approach invites us to consider the images we entertain for understanding the physician. Far from being a rhetorical embellishment, or illustration of a concept, image for May is "a definition of a social role," laying bare a "metaphysical setting" in which characters act out a normative story. May seems to claim that images have more evocative force than concepts or principles and are more proximal to the roots of the moral imagination. For May, ethics fundamentally is corrective vision; hence, the exploration of images is an important task for the moral theologian.

The bulk of the volume is devoted to an examination of four prominent images of the physician: parent, fighter, technician, and covenantor. As the title indicates, May argues that covenantor is the master image, including elements of each of the others, which are tempered to occupy a subordinate position in the overall theme.

Those familiar with May's writing will recognize portions of this volume as reworkings of previous articles, especially his seminal "Code, Covenant, Contract or Philanthropy," published in the *Hastings Center Report* (December, 1975). May has substantially reworked these portions to take account of other views. The differentiation of his covenantal motif from Veatch's contractual ethic is especially helpful. Also, some of the older material is well worth repeating. May's treatment of truth telling, for example, is still the most eloquent and discerning in the medical ethics literature. The book concludes with extensions of the covenantal theme as applied to the physician as teacher and to institutions. The chapter "Teacher" will be helpful to all academics and pastors as well as physicians.

There is much to admire in this short volume. May draws easily and well from a variety of modern writers—Hemingway, Dostoevsky, Faulkner, and others—and unapologetically from Scripture. He usually
manages the tricky task of noting the religious sources of his approach without falling into humility. Philosophical ethicists should do as well.

There are a few shortcomings. May’s treatment of implications of the covenantal image for the distribution of health services, for example, is too general and seems to lack a guiding thesis. On the whole, though, The Physician’s Covenant is a valuable contribution to the medical ethics literature and merits a wide reading.

A work similar in emphasis but broader in scope is James Childress’s Priorities in Biomedical Ethics (Westminster, 1981). The chapter titles accurately convey the concerns of the book: “Paternalism and the Patient’s Right to Decide,” “To Live or Let Die,” “Human Subjects in Research,” “Allocating Health Care Resources,” and “The Art of Technological Assessment.” These five topics are subjects Childress believes to require prior attention—matters of first importance in medical ethics. Childress, like most theologically trained ethicists, advocates grounding ethical thinking in principles of rightness rather than those of consequences or utility.

The chapter on paternalism (perhaps the best section of the book) is a mature piece of work, reflecting careful deliberation over several years. The criticism of paternalism as a medical policy is carefully stated and the rationale well-argued. It is difficult to imagine a better case being made, and it is done without any hint of castigation or disregard for physicians, or any suggestion of a diminution of their responsibilities. Arguing for practices which presume the priority of patient autonomy, Childress nevertheless draws an important distinction between respecting autonomy in patients and actively promoting it under difficult conditions. This measured assessment contrasts sharply with the frequent diatribes berating doctors and proclaiming patient autonomy as the new moral absolute.

Two other sections of the book are especially strong, both of them in the chapter on research. First, Childress’s “criteria of ethically justified research” are a model of clarity and cogency. They draw together central themes of other, more lengthy proposals and principles into brief scope. Additionally, Childress makes clear that the problem which necessitates such principles is the coupling of “medicine’s great power” with “medicine’s lack of accountability” to research subjects and the general public.

Second, Childress’s presentation of the features which obligate us to compensate for injuries incurred in research is similarly precise, well-articulated, and forceful. His insistence that consent does not cancel the need for compensation is deserving of a wide hearing in the medical community.
Near the end of the book, Childress offers a four-page section on "Theological Convictions" in his chapter on technological assessment. To this reviewer such a section is welcome and even essential to a balanced presentation. Childress stops short, however, of showing how these convictions would make a difference in assessing technology, except to say that the presumption of innocence in technological "progress" is foolish. I agree with his basic hunches about the problems here and only wish he had carried the assessment further.

Perhaps the best general work for a broad audience is *Health and Human Values: A Guide to Making Your Own Decision* (Yale Univ. Pr., 1983), by Frank Harron, John Burnside (a physician), and Tom Beauchamp. This volume is a model of lucid writing. It moves through arguments with ease and clarity and without prejudice. The topics covered (methods of decision-making, abortion, euthanasia, informed consent, the "right" to health, resource allocation, and genetics) are the typical ones. What sets this book apart is the skillful integration of perspectives, so that the reader has a solid sense of what the issues are, and the writing, which is done with a minimum of technical language. The chapter titled "Abortion and Prenatal Procedures," for example, includes two case studies, a brief history of abortion legislation and court opinions, a chart of normal stages of fetal development, excerpts from key articles on both sides of the issues, a brief, masterful summary of the key concepts and reasoning behind opposing positions, and an annotated bibliography at the end. Other chapters have a similarly rich array of resources. The book was obviously put together with a great deal of care and the selections from the wide variety of sources reflect a proper parsimony. There are other books which are more comprehensive, more detailed, or more thoroughly argued, but for its purposes—to be a study guide for the general, literate layperson—this is an excellent work. The two chapters on the "right" to health care and the allocation of scarce medical resources stand out as especially good, perhaps because so little of balance or quality has been done in these areas for the general public.

I would recommend this book as especially strong for church school classes who wish to give several months or more to medical ethics. It provides no easy answers but raises many of the right questions in the right way. There are, in addition, companion volumes—a *Reader's Manual*, a *Digest of Law and Policy Developments*, and a catalogue of *Audio-Visual Resources*, all by Yale University Press.

Many have said that the modern era is one in which technology overreaches wisdom and our capabilities to manipulate nature outrun our moral reason. No one says this with more depth of understanding than Leon Kass in his *Toward a More Natural Science: Biology and Human*
BOOK REVIEW

Affairs (Free, 1985). In the preface Kass describes himself as “by rearing a moralist, by education a generalist, by training a physician and a biochemist, by vocation a teacher—and student—of philosophical texts, and by choice a lover of serious conversation,” a description of the most unusual and perhaps the best observer of humanity, science, and medicine in current discussions of medical ethics. The title of the three parts of the book accurately convey Kass’s theses: “Eroding the Limits: Troubles with the Mastery of Nature,” “Holding the Center: The Morality of Medicine,” and “Deepening the Ground: Nature Reconsidered.” There are thirteen essays in all, eleven of them previously published in a wide variety of places over the past fifteen years. His ideas are by no means easy to summarize, but, roughly, Kass is concerned with our studied neglect of fundamental questions about human purposes and the human good. He believes that nature itself—if we pause long enough to consider it carefully and nonmanipulatively—will guide us to an understanding of true human purposes, finally teaching us our proper place.

The essay “Is There a Medical Ethic?” begins with assumptions that medicine is already a moral activity and argues that medical ethics must be grounded in medicine as a practice rather than in codes, social contracts, or religious ideals. It is largely a brilliant defense of the Hippocratic Oath as the best statement of what medicine is about.

Kass’s reconstruction of medical ethics and the role of nature in our self-understanding does not get us as far, I think, as he would like, but even those who fail to be convinced will find his essays provocative and insightful. What Kass offers are new ways to see what we already know, and new ways to think about what we are enabled to see by looking more carefully and respectfully at ourselves as part of the natural order. “Mortality and Morality: The Virtues of Finitude” is quite simply the best thing I have read on human finitude. It alone is worth the price of the book. A sample: “It is probably no accident that it is a generation whose intelligentsia proclaim the meaninglessness of life that embarks on its indefinite prolongation and that seeks to cure the emptiness of life by extending it.”

Kass is a true craftsman of the essay form, and readers will find his style rich and agreeable.

Particular Topics and Problem Areas. Occasionally a piece of solid scholarship in the humanities appears at just the right time to influence public and professional debate on a major social question. Such a fortuitous occasion is the appearance of Robert Weir’s Selective Nontreatment of Handicapped Newborns: Moral Dilemmas in Neonatal Medicine
In 292 pages Weir presents a history of infanticide, a descriptive outline of the positions of pediatricians, the current status of the law, the various positions of moral philosophers and theologians, and finally, an outline of his own ethical criteria and procedures together with their clinical applications. The strength of the book lies in the care and patience with which Weir reviews the positions of others and organizes differences and similarities so that the reader can grasp essential points from multiple perspectives.

Chapter 5 discusses the concepts of “wrongful birth” and “wrongful life,” as well as legal activity at the federal level through the DHHS (Department of Health and Human Services) regulations. Weir’s book went to press prior to the issuance of DHHS’s final rules in January, 1984, but he does briefly criticize the Baby Doe regulations on their most vulnerable logical point—the insistence that handicap never be considered in decisions not to treat. In some cases the handicap is so severe that it precludes any benefit to the infant from treatment. Not to consider handicap as the reason for not treating in such cases is intellectually and morally dishonest. The final chapter, on infant care review committees, should be read by anyone serving on such a committee or contemplating the formation of one.

Although there are flaws, this book has a great deal to commend it. Weir writes clearly, he knows his subject very well, and he is scrupulous in presenting the views of others. This book will likely become a standard reference.

A different sort of book on an equally important topic is Genetics, Ethics and Parenthood (Pilgrim, 1983), edited by Karen Lebacqz. The work is initially interesting because of its collaborators, which include a professor of biology, parents of a Down’s syndrome child, and two professors of Christian ethics—Lebacqz and Roger Shinn. Designed for use as a workbook for congregations, it achieves its aim with an admirably graceful style. The book is addressed to parents, or potential parents, and seeks to engage them in the ethical issues of genetics and reproductive possibilities within a theological framework.

The format of the book is well-conceived. Chapters frequently open with cases and end with study questions and/or exercises. Medical procedures are explained in lay terms and twelve illustrations dot the text in a helpful way. There is a very fine discussion of the scriptural meaning of parenthood and of the deep ambivalence in the Christian understandings of power, dominion over nature, and technology, a discussion
largely developed through an unpacking of the stories in Genesis (especially the creation narratives and the story of the tower of Babel). Genetics, Ethics and Parenthood has a humane tone to it. It is written with a great deal more awareness of human sensitivities than most books, though it does not lack for logic or consistency. Suffering and healing are taken on as explicit topics essential to a full understanding of our ethical choices and reasoning processes. Likewise, the section on ethical decisions per se emphasizes virtues and character as well as rules and principles.

The final chapter is “Getting Involved: The Responsible Church,” a fitting conclusion to a work which, both in its authorship and its style, affirms communal themes. I recommend this book very highly for church groups who wish to study these issues. I believe they will find the theology sound, basic, and nonsectarian—an unbeatable combination.

Sometimes significant works in medical ethics are not essays or treatises at all. Such is the case with Brian Clark’s play, Whose Life Is It, Anyway?, published by Avon Books as a paperback in 1980. Although written and first performed in the 1970s, it has been available as a text for study only within the last five years. This, and its brilliance, justify its inclusion here.

The story is about a witty, intelligent, charming young sculptor, paralyzed from the neck down, who battles for the right to die. His antagonists are a bevy of doctors, nurses, and bureaucrats, all dedicated to the sanctity of life and the “optimism industry” of medicine and rehabilitation. On one level the conflict is between paternalism and autonomy; at another level, between conflicting views of the medical profession as embodied in Dr. Scott, who sees both sides of the issues. The play is witty, loaded with sexual overtones, and intelligent. The dialogue between Ken Harrison and his chief physician, Dr. Emerson, recapitulates classic arguments for and against patient autonomy. The book reads fast but the character and plot stay with the reader for some time.

Of all the books I have used in teaching ethics to medical and undergraduate students over the past ten years, this work has the greatest pedagogical range.

Revisions. The two books discussed in this final section are in galley or proof stages at the time of this writing and were to be available by December, 1985, or January, 1986. Both make contributions to medical ethics and are, in different ways, revisions of traditional medical ethics.

A revision of the philosophical vision of a secular, pluralistic bioethics is provided by Stanley Hauerwas’s Suffering Presence: Theological
Reflections on Medicine, the Church and the Mentally Handicapped (Univ. of Notre Dame Pr.). In the introduction Hauerwas claims that the rise of medical ethics reflects the moral anarchy of our times, that is, that we as a culture are not sure what medicine should be about and, furthermore, that philosophical medical ethics may encourage physicians to ignore the moral demands inherent in their practical activities.

The book is divided into three sections: “Medicine as a Moral Act,” “Theological Reflections on Living, Dying and Euthanasia,” and “Caring for the Mentally Handicapped.” Altogether there are twelve essays, some of them new, some reprinted from other, frequently specialized journals. Typically, this collection of Hauerwas’s essays does not systematically develop one thesis, but it holds together well as a mosaic of themes and concerns which are central to the Christian perspective. The style of the essays is engaging, and they retain references to the places and occasions that originally sponsored the writing.

“Reflections on Suffering, Death and Medicine,” the first essay, provides a leitmotif for the volume. Here Hauerwas challenges the common idea that the goal of medicine is to eliminate suffering. Christian convictions, he believes, qualify this goal, and, moreover, no serious account of the moral life can ask us to avoid suffering. Suffering is intrinsically tied to our ability to be moral and finally to be human. The goal of medicine, he asserts, is to know how to teach the suffering that they are not thereby excluded from the human community. Eschewing the typical opposition between suffering and autonomy, Hauerwas claims that we gain autonomy by being willing to suffer and make suffering our own. The key thing for Christians is to know why they suffer. These themes arise again in different guises in many of the essays.

In “Rational Suicide and Reasons for Living” the argument is that, for Christians, “gift language” about life means that living is an obligation and not the result of a natural desire. It follows that Christians do not have to supply their own reasons for their continued existence. Here, as in other places, Hauerwas argues that the church has an important role in witnessing to the larger culture about the ultimate meaning and ends of human life.

In “Suffering the Retarded: Should We Prevent Retardation?” Hauerwas points out that the retarded suffer primarily because we teach them to suffer, not because they are retarded. Our response to the retarded, he says, is rooted in our own neediness. These themes will remind readers of some of Hauerwas’s previous essays, especially perhaps Truthfulness and Tragedy (Univ. of Notre Dame Pr., 1977). Suffering Presence is a continuation of the effort to see medical-ethical issues in a distinctively Christian perspective. Unlike other theologians,
Hauerwas refuses to back away from his convictions because they are unseasonable or may seem irrational to his philosophical critics. Like his previous work, Stifering Presence calls for revision of medical ethics away from a secular philosophical ethos toward one more theologically responsive. It is well worth a careful reading.

Another revision of medical ethics is found in Professional Ethics and Primary Care Medicine: Beyond Dilemmas and Decorum (Duke Univ. Pr.), coauthored by Harmon L. Smith and Larry R. Churchill.

This work is a treatment of the ethics of primary care medicine. Previous works in medical ethics have focused on decision-making in life-or-death situations in hospital emergency rooms, surgical theaters, or intensive care units. By contrast, this book deals with the ethics of routine day-to-day encounters between doctors and patients. It looks at the moral frameworks, habits of thought, and customs of practice that underlie choices.

The basic thesis of the book is that primary care, far from being merely a setting for the rendering of care, provides a new understanding of both doctor and patient and thereby provides a fresh basis for a medical ethics. Ethical problem solving, when grounded in this expanded medical ethics, will be collaborative rather than authoritarian and more respectful of the moral sensibilities of patients about how care is rendered. This approach is illustrated by case studies. The final chapter is an argument for a social ethics for primary care medicine. Traditional medical ethics is largely individualistic, and the authors indicate how social justice concerns are a natural ingredient of their approach.
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