The Danger of Reading John Wesley’s Works
Pamela Couture Dunlap
Barth and Bonhoeffer
John D. Godsey
Orwell and Education
Robert H. Conn
Methodist Doctrinal Standards: Reply to Richard Heitzenrater
Thomas C. Oden
Peacemaking Ministry in the Local Church
Richard G. Watts
Preaching from Acts
Edwina Hunter
Review of Jesus: The Evidence
Walter Wink
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CONTENTS

Editorial: On the Danger of Reading the Works of John Wesley
Pamela Couture Dunlap................................................................. 3

Barth and Bonhoeffer: The Basic Difference
John D. Godsey................................................................. 9

Orwell and Education
Robert H. Conn................................................................. 28

What Are “Established Standards of Doctrine”?: A Response to
Richard Heitzenrater
Thomas C. Oden................................................................. 41

How to Establish a Peacemaking Ministry in the Local Church
Richard G. Watts................................................................. 63

Preaching from Acts: Homiletical Resources for Easter
Edwina Hunter................................................................. 76

Book Review: Ian Wilson, Jesus: The Evidence
Walter Wink................................................................. 103
EDITORIAL:

ON THE DANGER OF READING THE WORKS OF JOHN WESLEY

PAMELA COUTURE DUNLAP

1. Let the works of John Wesley be banned. Under no circumstances should Wesley's political thought, or any application of it to current events, be read or discussed. I call on all who care about Methodism and America—the General Conference, the General Council on Ministries, the United Methodist Publishing House, the Council of Bishops, and any other person or body who can wield the power—to denounce the works of Wesley for what they really are: anti-American and offensive to respectable Methodism. Let the librarians first remove all writings by Wesley from the shelves of the theological seminaries, where impressionable young seminarians could be exposed to them, and from the churches, where they could fall into the hands of the laity. Or, if for ordination's sake some theological students must read a few items by Wesley, let it be written into the Discipline that they shall read the Forty-Four Sermons, and no more. If they must read more, let them read a biography or two, particularly one which diverts the student's attention to Wesley's love life rather than exposing his thought, and absolutely no more.

Who is John Wesley? According to Albert Outler, American Methodists have been bred on the "eponymous" Wesley, the Wesley whose person was revered and whose thought was intentionally set aside by American Methodist leaders after the Revolution. Richard Heitzenrater, in "At Full Liberty: Doctrinal Standards in Early American Methodism" (QR, Fall, 1985) shows evidence of disagreement among early American Methodists as they attempted to choose which of Wesley's writings should be considered doctrinal for American Methodism. Wesley's political writings, with their Tory sentiments and highly polemical tone, are among Wesley's works with which Americans are least familiar. This piece, written in Wesley's satirical style, suggests that riches abound in the political writings of Wesley—the principles of which are prophetic when applied to today's world.

Pamela Couture Dunlap is a member of the QR editorial board.
2. I will make my case for the danger of reading Wesley in this obscure scholarly journal where the revelation of the facts will endanger the least number of American Methodists. I will object to his work on the basis of both content and hermeneutics, a safe method which will attract little interest among those persons who would be most endangered by reading Wesley, persons who might regard him with more than academic interest.

3. Consider first the content of Wesley’s political writings. His viewpoint is decidedly anti-American on philosophical rather than theological grounds. Heretofore Methodists have been safe in regarding Wesley as a rather kind but eccentric old man, a Tory ideologue who was naive and misguided about American politics, but who, in the dark moments of the American rebellion, overcame his political biases for the sake of the faith. Should Methodists today read Wesley, they might develop the dangerous opinion that Wesley was a political prophet. Consider three of his philosophical reasons for rejecting the American cause.

First, as he writes in “Thoughts on Liberty,” the Americans, particularly Mr. Hancock, were claiming rights, such as taxation with representation, which the British government never granted to the American colonies or to anyone else, including Wesley himself. Wesley, not being a British landowner, just as the American colonists were not British landowners, was also taxed without representation. Following Plato, he argues for a governing class of the wise rather than a governing class of those who are freely elected.

Second, he claims that the American argument, which maintains that “these truths are self-evident, that all men are created equal,” is internally contradictory. He writes that the fundamental principle is not that “all men are created equal” but that “all persons living upon the earth are naturally equal; that all human creatures are naturally free; masters of their own actions; that none can have power over another but by their own consent” (“Thoughts Concerning the Origin of Power”). Wesley says that the men of England and America who maintain this principle of equality are guilty of excluding first women, then youth, then the poor from those who may choose their governors. He concludes that “after depriving half the human species of their natural right for want of a beard; after having deprived myriads more for want of a stiff beard, for not having lived one-and-twenty years; you
robb others, many hundred thousands of their birthright for want of money! . . . and the poor pittance that remains, by I know not what figure of speech, you call the people . . . " (“Observations on Liberty”).

Third, he is appalled that Americans attempt to justify slaveholding on the basis that it is necessary to their economic system. To be clear, he states, “I absolutely deny all slave-holding to be consistent with any degree of natural justice.” He further develops his argument that even if one considers the “three origins of the right of slavery assigned by Justinian”—a kind of “just slavery” position—American slavery destroys the three norms of each of the prior rationalizations for slavery.

He is further incensed that the Americans will consider “taxation without representation” to be a relationship of “slavery to the British” when the Americans are undergirding their government by the most brutal system of slavery known to the world. When an American writer asserts, “He that is taxed without his own consent, that is, without being represented, is a slave,” Wesley replies, “Who then is a slave?” Look into America, and you may easily see, See that Negro, fainting under the load, bleeding under the lash! He is a slave. And is there no difference between him and his master? Yes; the one is screaming, ‘Murder! Slavery!’ the other silently bleeds and dies” (“A Calm Address to Our American Colonies”).

4. Considering these few examples from Wesley’s writings, I will show the possible opinions which could be developed by Methodists who read the writings of the old man.

First, the most obvious—but minor—problems. Feminists and liberation theologians reading Wesley’s “Thoughts Concerning the Origin of Power” could use Wesley to defend their position that women, children, the poor, and ethnic minorities have an equal right to their voice in government—and in the church. Feminists, especially those on the hymnal revision committee, might think that in his criticism of the American equality principle—“all men are created equal”—Wesley became aware that language affects practice. They might be led to believe that writers (by implication Wesleyan hymnists) who wrote “men” practiced “men,” to the exclusion of women, children, the poor, and ethnic minorities. They might go so far as to say that if Wesley were on the committee, he might change the language himself. If
necessary, men of reason could counter this argument by pointing out that, despite the fact that in Wesley’s logic “all men are created equal” means “all persons are created equal,” Wesley noted that “none did ever maintain this [equality], nor probably ever will.”

Second, a more subtle—but still minor—point. At the same time that Wesley was taking categorical stances on social issues, Methodism in the colonies and in Great Britain was undergoing one of its greatest periods of numerical church growth. If Methodists noticed that the founding Methodist evangelist also made radical social statements, the idea that the General Conference must choose between evangelism (numerical church growth) on the one hand, and a social concern (such as the ethnic minority local church), on the other, to be its “missional priority,” might lose its foundation. The whole concept of a “missional priority” could be called into question, and then neither side would be happy. Fortunately, church planners could point out that Wesley started the whole idea of “missional priorities” (when he said, “The world is my parish”).

Third, a more serious consideration. Readers of Wesley might conclude that there is something wrong in America—and in England—something systemically wrong. If they read “Thoughts on the Present Scarcity of Provisions,” they would discover that Wesley believed that the reason why hunger and poverty existed in England was the greed of the society. Hunger was created, for example, by unneeded luxuries of the upper class who had food-consuming horses, not to do work but to pull their carriages or chaises, and by the elimination of the small farmer in favor of farm monopolies. Hunger was most created by that industry which was draining the British food supply: the distillation of alcohol. Furthermore, in “Thoughts on Slavery” Wesley showed that those who receive the benefits of the end of a system, such as those who inherit slaves, are just as guilty as those who began the system, for example, those who traded slaves, because their consumerism perpetuates the social condition.

Consider the panic this could create in our churches. By analogy, a reader might conclude that there could be a relationship between the hunger and poverty in America and our greatest industrial drain: the nuclear arms race. By further analogy, a reader might advocate divestiture of stock in companies doing
business in South Africa on the grounds that American consumerism perpetuates apartheid. Furthermore, Wesley's political tracts are directed not at the Methodist societies but at the world. Methodists might begin to think their social statements could address the same. But a true Wesleyan can counter all such irrationality: for as Wesley believed it was a subject's duty to uphold a just king, by analogy American Methodists must apply the same to a just president.

5. As I have promised, I have argued for the danger in the content of Wesley's political writings. Now I will abolish any possibility of trust in his arguments by considering his hermeneutics.

A most explicit statement of Wesley's hermeneutic can be found in his preface to the Sermons (yes, those safe Forty-Four), points 9 and 10. Wesley asks for patience in dialogue, respect for the opposite viewpoint, and calmness in debate. In his tracts on social issues, Wesley particularly asks that one speak one's opinion with love, not out of self-interest. "Are you persuaded you see more clearly than me?" he writes,

Then treat me as you would desire to be treated yourself upon a change of circumstances. Point me out a better way than I have yet to know. Show me it is so, by plain proof of Scripture. And if I linger in the path I have been accustomed to tread . . . labour with me a little; take me by the hand, and lead me as I am able to bear. . . . May I not request of you, further, not to give me hard names, in order to bring me into the right way? Suppose I were ever so much in the wrong, I doubt this would not set me right. . . . Nay, perhaps if you are angry, so shall I be too; and then there will be small hopes of finding the truth. If once anger rise, this smoke will so dim the eyes of my soul, that I shall be able to see nothing clearly. For God's sake, if it be possible to avoid it, let us not provoke one another to wrath. If we could discern truth by that dreadful light, would it not be less, rather than gain? For, how far is love, even with many wrong opinions, to be preferred before truth itself without love!

Wesley frequently took stands that he recognized would arouse the ire of persons on both sides of an issue. His hermeneutic, however, was simply this: that it is as important to attend to the civility of the means of an argument as it is to attend to the truth of its end. However, those persons well versed in the political process of church debate on social issues can remind the
weak-kneed that it is more important to "take sides" and win the resolution than it is to have a fair debate. Fortunately, the realistic among us, who know that fair debate and truth are incompatible, can remind us all that this is Wesley's theological hermeneutical principle. Since theology is mere parlor talk, compared to politics where real issues are at stake, no one could really expect to employ such an open Wesleyan hermeneutic. After all, this is America, not eighteenth-century England, and everyone knows, religion and politics don't mix.

Having revealed Wesley for what he really is, I call again on the General Conference of the United Methodist Church, on the General Council on Ministries, on the United Methodist Publishing House, on the Council of Bishops—well, on second thought, not the Council of Bishops. After all, if the bishops were asked to ban Wesley's political writings, they might (re)read Wesley. What bishop-ly hubris would develop if they would discover in their very own tradition an ecclesiastical leader who had the audacity to preach as a pastor, speak as a prophet, and make appointments all the while? O fear that they should discover Wesley's "pastoral letters" in which Wesley spoke—for himself—to the church and to the world! O dread that they should find that his stands—on all issues of social importance—were equally as firm, and usually more clearly reasoned than, their recent position on deterrence in "In Defense of Creation." If the bishops read Wesley, they would be encouraged to speak their minds and hearts on other social issues, and then where would we be?

On second thought, leave the political Wesley where he is, dusty on the shelves where he can cause no harm. Call no one's attention to him. Preserve the quiet of America and the respectability of Methodism!
BARTh AND BONHoeFFER:
THE BASIC DIFFERENCE

JOHN D. GODSEy

Barth’s theology tends toward a theologia gloriae in order to ensure the graciousness of God’s action in Christ. In contrast, Bonhoeffer’s theology is a theologia crucis in order to ensure the costliness of God’s grace in Christ.

The title of this essay may seem presumptuous to the reader. On the one hand, it might be thought that the task of comparison is impossible, given the volume, variety, and complexity of the writings of these two theologians. On the other, some might think that the relationship between Barth and Bonhoeffer has been sufficiently explored and stated already.

Nevertheless I have chosen this particular topic for several reasons. One reason is personal: Barth was my Doktorvater and Bonhoeffer’s theology the subject of my doctoral dissertation, and yet during all the subsequent years of studying and wrestling with their thought, I have never felt that I had adequately comprehended their theological differences. This essay is an attempt to draw together some of my current convictions deriving from those ongoing struggles. Secondly, at a time when some in this country seem all too ready to cast Barth and Bonhoeffer upon the ash heap of past history, I want to reclaim the pertinence of their witness for the future of the Christian church.


This essay is a revised version of the author’s presidential address to the American Theological Society.
Rather than entering directly into the theological realm, I believe it will be helpful to highlight briefly a few biographical differences between these two men—differences that are not unimportant for understanding their theological relationship.

Karl Barth was a citizen of Switzerland, born in Basel to a Swiss Reformed pastor and his wife during the final quarter of the nineteenth century and reared in the capital city of Berne, where his father moved the family when he received a call to teach New Testament and early church history at the university. Karl was the oldest of five children: three sons and two daughters. The family was of reputable Swiss stock, sturdily middle-class, and equally at home in church and academia. The first two sons became theologians, the third a philosopher with theological interests.

After finishing Gymnasion, Barth pursued theological studies at the University of Berne and then at the German universities at Tübingen, Berlin, and Marburg. His most admired professors were representatives of the liberal Ritschlian school: Adolf von Harnack and Wilhelm Herrmann. After completing his formal education, Barth spent two years as a vicar in Geneva and then ten years as the pastor of the Reformed Church in the village of Safenwil, canton of Aargau. More than anything else, his parish experiences radicalized his social conscience and his theology. The plight of the nonunionized workers in village factories led him to join forces with the Christian socialist movement in Switzerland, and the terrors of preaching amidst the European cultural crisis turned him to biblical study and a theology of the Word of God.

The impact of his commentary on Romans, published in 1919, catapulted him into a teaching career in the heady academic arena of German universities: first at Göttingen, next at Münster, and then at Bonn. Fourteen years he labored in those vineyards, experiencing the end of the Weimar Republic and the beginning of National Socialism. He moved from relative obscurity to become the recognized leader of a new theological movement that firmly opposed the nineteenth-century liberal tradition, and step by step he carved out his own theological alternative: from the dialectical fireworks of Romans to the first systematic attempt.
of Christian Dogmatics and, finally, with a boost from Anselm's understanding of the rationality of faith, to the full flowering of his Church Dogmatics. At the end of 1934, the year of the Barmen Declaration that crystallized the German Protestant churches' opposition to Nazi ideology and interference, Barth was dismissed from his teaching post at Bonn by the Nazi government and forced to return to his native Switzerland. He was lucky enough to obtain a professorship at the University of Basel, where he remained until his retirement in 1962. He died in Basel in 1968, a world-renowned figure.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was born six years into the new century, Barth's junior by two decades. He was German, born in Breslau but reared in the capital city of Berlin, where his father, a neurologist, held the chair of psychiatry at the university. Dietrich and his twin sister Sabine were the sixth and seventh of eight children: four boys and four girls. If not patrician, the family was at least upper middle-class and embodied the best of the cultured society of Germany: civic responsibility, intellectual honesty, strong family ties, and appreciation of music and the arts. The family was nominally Christian but hardly church-going. One brother became a noted physicist, another a lawyer, a third died in World War I. Three brothers-in-law were lawyers. Dietrich's decision to study theology came as a shock to a family that questioned the worth of a church vocation.

Bonhoeffer's education during the 1920s took place for a short while at Tübingen but mainly at Berlin, where he encountered the liberal perspective of Harnack, the Luther studies of Karl Holl, and the modern-positive theology of Reinhold Seeberg, under whom he wrote a dissertation on the nature of the church. He never studied with Karl Barth, but he was attracted to the new theological movement and believed his own theological direction to be within its orbit.

After receiving the degree Licentiate of Theology in 1927, Bonhoeffer underwent such broadening experiences as spending a year as an assistant minister in a German-speaking congregation in Barcelona and studying during the school year 1930-31 at Union Theological Seminary in New York. Upon his return from America to Berlin in the summer of 1931 he began a teaching career at the university and also served simultaneously as a
student chaplain at a nearby technical college. A growing interest in the ecumenical movement and the problem of maintaining world peace led him to become one of the youth secretaries for the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches.

When Adolf Hitler and his National Socialist party came to power in 1933, Bonhoeffer's life and that of his family was irretrievably altered. Hitler's attempt to control the churches and to impose his anti-Semitic views on them led to the so-called German Church struggle between the "German Christians" who followed Hitler and the "Confessing Church" which arose in opposition. Bonhoeffer resolutely joined the latter.

In the fall of 1933, when his own Church of the Old Prussian Union accepted the Aryan Clause, which forbade those of Jewish blood to hold office in the church, Bonhoeffer left Germany for a pastorate in London; but within a year and a half he returned at the behest of the Confessing Church to establish and direct a seminary in Pomerania for its ordinands. When this "illegal" activity was finally halted by the Gestapo, Bonhoeffer sailed to New York for one last visit to America in June, 1939, but he remained only a month before returning to Germany. World War II began in September. Through family connections he joined the resistance movement against the Hitler regime, was ultimately arrested, incarcerated for two years, and hanged by the Nazis on April 9, 1945, as a traitor to his country.

The point of these brief biographical sketches is to highlight important differences in background and experience that help explain, even if they do not determine, the theological differences between two men who shared so much in common. In sum, the following differences are apparent. First, there is the age differential of twenty years. Barth was a generation ahead, which meant that Bonhoeffer looked upon him as his mentor, an older man who was leading a theological movement in which the younger theologian could be a participant. Although they became friends and allies, Bonhoeffer always addressed Barth with the more formal Sie rather than the familiar du.

Second, Barth was Swiss, Bonhoeffer German. Switzerland is a tiny country but defiantly proud of its independence and democratic ideals; yet it stands constantly in the shadow of its
immense neighbor to the north: sometimes jealous, often fearful, usually suspicious. Barth's life was intertwined with Germany, but he was always an outsider who spoke with a strange accent and had to struggle to make his way. On the other hand, his advantage was that he could always leave. By contrast, Bonhoeffer was German to the core, at home in its bourgeois world of aristocratic sensibilities, hierarchical structures, and Kulturprotestantismus (culture-Protestantism). Both men belonged to the educated elite, of course, but Barth, the small town from a small country, could never attain the cultural status of the Berliner. Bonhoeffer travelled widely and often, living for long periods of time outside Germany. Barth's world of activity was much more circumscribed, and it was only after his retirement that he ventured beyond Europe to spend a few weeks in America.

It is probably fair to say that Barth came from the church and remained in the church, whereas Bonhoeffer's journey led him from the world to the church and then, to an extent, back again.

Third, both theologians were reared in large, supportive, and generally happy families, but the atmospheres in the families were quite different. Barth's was unabashedly Christian and churchly, Bonhoeffer's more worldly. To be sure, Bonhoeffer's mother, Paula von Hase, was a pious woman whose forebears included some well-known Lutheran pastors and professors, but his father was agnostic and his older brothers were interested in secular affairs. It is probably fair to say that Barth came from the church and remained in the church, whereas Bonhoeffer's journey led him from the world to the church and then, to an extent, back again.

A final comparison must be made of the two men's experiences. Both lived through the dissolution of the old order in Europe, the trauma of World War I, the ill-fated days of the Weimar Republic, Hitler's coming to power, the struggle of the Confessing Church against the Nazi-supported Reich Church, and the madness of the Holocaust and World War II. That history left indelible marks on both, but the effects were much more
immediate, tragic, and catastrophic for Bonhoeffer. Barth may have heard the cannons firing and the bombs exploding to the north while he was writing Der Römerbrief, but the Bonhoeffer family was devastated by the loss of the second son, Walter, at the front; he was only nineteen. Barth certainly perceived the crisis of European civilization symbolized by the First World War, but the Bonhoeffer family experienced firsthand the numbing effects of dislocation and defeat. Barth may have been the intellectual leader of the Confessing Church and the virtual author of the Barmen Declaration, but it was Bonhoeffer who, after Barth's departure, directed the clandestine seminary and lived through the Nazi terror: joining the conspiracy, suffering imprisonment and ignominious death. It was Bonhoeffer who, as he wrote, "learnt to see the great events of world history from below, from the perspective of the outcast, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled—in short, from the perspective of those who suffer."

EXAMINATION OF THEIR PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP

With this biographical data behind us, we turn now to the question of the personal relationship that developed between Barth and Bonhoeffer. The theological influence of Barth on Bonhoeffer's early development is undeniable. Although he never became a slavish follower of anyone, Bonhoeffer clearly considered himself to be within Barth's theological camp. At Union Seminary in 1930-31 he became Barth's advocate, and when he returned to Germany in the summer of 1931, he visited Bonn to meet Barth for the first time. After attending lectures and seminars and discussing theology and ethics over lunch, Bonhoeffer wrote a friend that Barth in person was even more impressive than his writings, and that he greatly regretted not having heard Barth sooner. This relatively short encounter in Bonn initiated a friendly and respectful relationship that grew during the church struggle and continued to the end of Bonhoeffer's life. But it was not without its strains.

A spirited exchange of letters occurred after Bonhoeffer had withdrawn from Berlin to London in the fall of 1933. When he mustered the courage to write Barth of what he had done,
Bonhoeffer expected a sharp reply—and he got one! Barth wrote him to return to his post in Berlin by the very next ship, for this was no time for personal retreats into the desert when the German church was threatened by chaos. Bonhoeffer did not heed Barth's call, however, and remained in England for another year and a half, hoping all along to go to India to see Gandhi but returning instead to Germany when the Confessing Church needed his services as a teacher of its seminary students.

The next exchange of letters occurred in the fall of 1936. Bonhoeffer wrote Barth from Finkenwalde and confessed that during the intervening time he had carried on in his own mind a continuous controversy with Barth regarding the relationship between justification and sanctification in Paul as well as the interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount. Bonhoeffer's concern was whether Barth's great emphasis on God's justifying work for us in Christ had caused him to neglect Christ's sanctifying work in us as we respond through a life of concrete discipleship. He expressed the hope that the two soon could meet to discuss these matters personally. Bonhoeffer also disclosed his disappointment at not being asked to contribute to the Festschrift honoring Barth on his fiftieth birthday, an exclusion that he felt was intentional but unwarranted. Bonhoeffer also described for Barth the kind of communal life he was implementing as a part of theological education at the seminary at Finkenwalde and urged Barth to help the German church situation by writing something that would deal with the basic theological issues separating the Lutheran and Reformed communions.

Barth's reply assured Bonhoeffer that the editor of the Festschrift had inadvertently overlooked him and that no adverse judgment was intended. On the more substantial issues, Barth expressed sympathy for Bonhoeffer's concern about the inexhaustible theme of justification and sanctification and for his desire to combine the theoretical and the practical at Finkenwalde, but he at the same time was anxious that these efforts to relate doctrine and life not lead the church back to the fleshpots of Egypt, that is, to a focus on human rather than divine activity—a perversion he detected among groups such as the Religious Socialists, the Wuppertal pietists, and Frank Buckman's Oxford Group. What he feared above all, he stated, was this: "resignation in the face of the original Christological-eschatological beginning
in favour of some kind of realisation (in fact becoming more and more abstract) in a specifically human sphere." Barth ended by assuring Bonhoeffer of his continued friendship and interest in his work. The fruit of that work was, of course, the publication of *The Cost of Discipleship* and *Life Together*.

The final correspondence between Barth and Bonhoeffer stems from the time of the latter’s three visits to Switzerland during 1941 and 1942—correspondence that was discovered in the Barth Archives in 1981. Bonhoeffer, now a civilian employee of the *Abwehr* (Military Intelligence Department) traveled to Geneva to conduct business on behalf of the resistance movement, but while in Switzerland he visited Barth in Basel on two occasions. His letters concerned those visits and what they needed to discuss. Two items stand out. First, Bonhoeffer disclosed in his letter of 13 May 1942 that he had obtained and was reading the galley proofs of *Church Dogmatics* II/2, the volume in which Barth treats election and ethics within his doctrine of God. This is pertinent as background for understanding Bonhoeffer’s development of “the command of God” in chapter 7 of his *Ethics*. The second is Bonhoeffer’s poignant letter to Barth dated 17 May 1942, in which he reacted to rumors he heard in Zurich and in Geneva that Barth was suspicious of him because of his ability to travel outside Nazi Germany on an official passport. Bonhoeffer writes:

> In a time when so much must rest simply on personal trust, then *everything* is really over when distrust arises. . . . Let me just add this: it would be unbearably painful for me if the admittedly difficult effort to continue our solidarity were to end in inner alienation. And why should I conceal my belief that, at least in the eastern part of Germany, there are few who have declared their loyalty to you as often as I have tried in recent years.

By return letter, written by his assistant, Fräulein Charlotte von Kirschbaum, Barth let Bonhoeffer know that he had never distrusted him for a moment and that he looked forward to his coming visit.

That visit proved to be their last meeting. Bonhoeffer disclosed to Barth something of the plan of the resisters to overthrow Hitler, and Barth raised questions about whether the military people would be willing to return the country to civilian rule if the *coup d’etat* was successful. After this, the only contact the two friends
had was through the cigar Barth was able to send to Bonhoeffer in prison by way of Eberhard Bethge.  

To summarize, Bonhoeffer and Barth had a cordial personal relationship from the summer of 1931 until Bonhoeffer's death in 1945. Bonhoeffer looked upon Barth as a mentor and theological leader; Barth thought of Bonhoeffer as a talented younger theologian and colleague in the German church struggle. They met infrequently but kept in touch by written correspondence. Although occasionally there were strains in their relationship, usually because of misunderstandings but also because their consuming interests differed at a given time, these strains occurred within a larger framework of mutual respect and cooperation.

THE THEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCE

We now come to the heart of this essay. Beyond biographical comparisons and personal relationships, we must ask how Barth and Bonhoeffer differed theologically. Although I recognize that differences are evident in their theologies from the beginning to the end, I have never found it easy to get to the heart of the matter. In the first place, the very bulk and complexity of their writings, not to mention the secondary literature, is forbidding. Second, their theologies changed, or at least progressed, over their lifetimes, so that one must decide at which point in their lives the comparison will be made. This is complicated by the fact that seldom were the two theologians interested in the same thing at the same time. Third, Barth rarely took account of Bonhoeffer's theology until after his death, when in his *Church Dogmatics* he praised Bonhoeffer's doctrine of the church in Bonhoeffer's *Sanctorum Communi* and his interpretation of discipleship in *The Cost of Discipleship*. In contrast, almost everything Bonhoeffer wrote was written with Barth in mind, so that one has a clearer view of what Bonhoeffer thought of Barth than vice versa.

Finally, Bonhoeffer and Barth held so much in common that, in a sense, it is easier to depict where they walked together than where they parted company. Both assumed that the church provided the sole legitimate context for doing Christian theology and that Jesus Christ, the saving Word of God attested in Scripture, was the indispensable source and norm for proper
Christian thinking and acting. Both considered theology to be an a posteriori enterprise, not an a priori one. Neither was interested in speculative or natural theology. Both were in revolt against the use of idealism in theology and the anthropocentrism of the mainstream of nineteenth-century theology. Both were theologians of grace, who wished to underscore its Reformation understanding. Both emphasized the importance of the Hebrew Scriptures as Word of God, of the indispensable witness of Israel, and of the Jewishness of Jesus—and this at a time when in Germany these matters were in dispute. One could go on and on with the commonalities, but the focus of my concern is the theological difference.

Given the fact that Bonhoeffer considered his work to be generally within the orbit of Barth's theology of revelation, and thus against the nineteenth century's theology of religion, wherein did he differ from Barth? It is tempting simply to say that Bonhoeffer is Lutheran whereas Barth is Reformed, that Bonhoeffer affirmed the axiom "finitum capax infiniti" ("the finite can contain the infinite") and Barth "finitum non capax infiniti" ("the finite cannot contain the infinite"). There is truth here, to be sure. Barth made no secret of his predilection for Calvin and the Reformed tradition, although at crucial points in his Church Dogmatics he leans heavily on Luther. On the other hand, Bonhoeffer quoted Luther more than any other theologian, yet much of his theology must be seen as a direct effort to correct his own Lutheran heritage, in particular its misuse of Luther's doctrine of the two realms, the civil and the religious.

Although the confessional differences are important, they are not decisive. More crucial, I think, is how they conceived their theological tasks vis-à-vis the modern world. Their world was one that had been shaped by the Enlightenment but shaken by World War I. The Enlightenment had fostered an optimistic outlook on the world and its future. Its turn from a theocentric to an anthropocentric perspective encouraged humans to use their reason to break their bondage to the dogmas of the past. Historical criticism undermined the authority of both Bible and church. In reaction to these developments, German liberal theology, from Schleiermacher to the Ritschlian school, accepted the anthropocentric starting point and developed a theology that located God within the realm of human religion. This accommo-
dation of Christian belief to modernity ended in what has come to be known as culture-Protestantism. When World War I shook the foundations of Western culture, it shook the foundations of culture-Protestantism as well. This is the situation that faced Barth.

Barth, who had been educated in the liberal tradition, revolted against its presuppositions. He turned to a study of the Bible, in which he discovered a wholly new view of God and the world, and he concluded that the main weakness of liberal theology lay in its christology. A statement in an early article on the theological principles of his teacher Wilhelm Herrmann indicates his attitude and where he was headed in his own theology. “Orthodox Christology,” he wrote, “is a glacial torrent rushing straight down from a height of three thousand metres; it makes accomplishment possible. Herrmann’s Christology, as it stands, is the hopeless attempt to raise a stagnant pool to the same height by means of a hand pump; nothing can be accomplished with it.”

Barth’s answer to nineteenth-century liberal theology was to develop a theology that took a completely opposite point of departure, namely, from divine revelation instead of human religion. From his Epistle to the Romans through his uncompleted Church Dogmatics, Barth, with great logical and analogical power, set forth a theology that moves from above to below, from God’s eternal decision, revealed once and for all in the history of Jesus Christ, to be gracious to humankind. A quotation from Church Dogmatics 11/2 puts his whole endeavor into perspective.

The election of grace is the eternal beginning of all the ways and works of God in Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ God in His free grace determines Himself for sinful man and sinful man for Himself. He therefore takes upon Himself the rejection of man with all its consequences, and elects man to participation in His own glory.

Barth’s way of dealing with liberal theology, then, was rejection by reversal. He opposed anthropocentrism, as this is seen epistemologically in Descartes and theologically in Schleiermacher and his followers, with a realism of revelation centered in the factuality of Jesus Christ as God’s eternal decision for human salvation. What the triune God has decided in eternity is carried out in history, so that God’s being as the one who loves in freedom is revealed in this event. Jesus Christ in his own person is both the true, electing God and the true, elected human in whom
all other humans are elected and saved. This, for Barth, is the
good news of the gospel. What part does human response play in
this saving deed? The first answer is: none! Deus dixit. God has
spoken, the deed is done. But Barth does not leave it at that, for
what God has done in Christ to effect reconciliation and bring
new life is meant for all humanity. Christ died for all and bore the
rejection that sinful humanity deserved. What is left for humans
is faithful acknowledgment and obedient new life as God’s
covenant partners. But even this is wholly dependent on God’s
enlightening and enlivening power, the power of the Holy Spirit.

Barth’s whole theology can be summed up in two words:
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In short, Barth’s whole theology can be summed up in two words:
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This brief description of the main lineaments of Barth’s
theology makes evident how drastic his reversal has been. Liberal
theology presupposed some continuity between God and
humans given in human nature itself, whether in feeling, mind,
or moral capacity. In Barth’s theology the only continuity is one
that God establishes from God’s side. Thus he consistently denies
the possibility of natural theology or of synergism. Analogia entis
(analogy of being) is replaced by analogia fidei (analogy of faith).
Pelagianism of any kind is replaced by sola gratiae. Consistent
with this is Barth’s view of the phenomenon of religion. Liberal
theology made religion—or, better, the religious person—the
center of its attention, for it assumed that here was located God’s
presence in humans as an original datum. Barth attacked this
notion of religion, declaring the phenomenon to be the inevitable
attempt of sinners to reach and control God. Thus religion is a
pervasive and permanently ongoing sign of human sin that must
ever and again be overcome by God through the gospel.

I want now to return to Bonhoeffer’s reaction to Barth’s
theology. Bonhoeffer had before him both liberal theology,
especially as he encountered it in the Berlin faculty, and Barth’s
counterproposal. He chose the latter as the general framework for
his own thought, for he too was in revolt against the ideationally
based theology of the nineteenth century, especially in its individualistic and pietistic forms, and he too wanted to recover the thought of the Bible and of the Protestant Reformers. Thus he appreciated Barth's theology of the Word of God, but he remained an independent thinker who went his own way and exercised the role of a loyal critic within the orbit of Barth's followers. The influence of the Berlin theology remained with him, in particular in his Luther studies and his interest in historical and sociological analysis. In a sense, he considered himself to be a "bastard theologian" who could never pass muster before the pure Barthians.

Bonhoeffer believed that every theological doctrine must be interpreted in terms of its sociality, that is, in terms of relationality and responsibility.

Before setting forth Bonhoeffer's reservations about Barth's theology, we need to see something of Bonhoeffer's own theological position. Bonhoeffer believed that every theological doctrine must be interpreted in terms of its sociality, that is, in terms of relationality and responsibility. Being with others, being for others, and acting on behalf of others were central to his understanding of the Christian life, which meant that his theology was shot through with ethical concerns at every point. This theological and ethical posture was grounded for Bonhoeffer in his understanding of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God who assumed sinful human flesh and bore that flesh to the Cross and there suffered for the redemption of all humanity. Christ he considered to be the center not only of the church but also of history and nature.

The burning question for Bonhoeffer's early theology was what it means to follow Jesus. That is, it was the question of discipleship, and this led him to an intense study of the Sermon on the Mount. He was constantly struggling with the questions of law and gospel, justification and sanctification. He came to believe that faith and obedience were temporally inseparable. He distinguished between fides directa and fides reflexa, that is, between faith as directed solely to Christ in discipleship and our
theological reflections upon that action. His own interest lay in
the former. Indeed, he criticized man-made doctrines and
dogmas as having become unintelligible obstacles to faith for
many of the common folk. Bonhoeffer was interested in the
church as a community of persons in whom Christ takes form.
The community was for him a form of revelation, along with
preaching and the sacraments.

Bonhoeffer’s later theology concentrates on the relation
between God and this world which was penetrated so deeply by
the Cross. His theme becomes “Christ and the world come of
age,” and he asks how Christ can be Lord of the godless. The
theme was set forth in a letter to Theodore Litt written in January,
1939. He wrote:

Solely because God became a poor, suffering unknown, successless
man, and because from now on God allows himself to be found only in
this poverty, in the cross, we cannot disengage ourselves from
humankind and from the world. For this reason we love the brethren.
Because in the Christian faith it is thus understood that, indeed, out of
the sovereign freedom of grace, the “unconditioned” has enclosed
itself in the “conditioned,” the “otherworldly” has entered into the
“this-worldly,” the believer is not torn asunder but finds God and
man united at the one place in the world, and from now on love of God
and love of the brother are indissolubly united with one another.”

Bonhoeffer became convinced that, because of the Incarnation,
Christians should no longer think in terms of two spheres: one
divine and one worldly, one sacred and the other secular. God
cannot be divided from the world nor the world from God. World
and God are united “polemically” in the one reality of Christ, to
whom the world is being continually drawn as its judge and
reconciler and liberator. The relationship of world and God is akin
to the Chalcedonian understanding of the two natures: distinct
yet inseparable, or like the ground bass and countermelodies in a
fugue. Bonhoeffer shifted the structures of his ethical thinking
from the spatially conceived notion of two spheres to the
temporally understood idea of the divine mandates of marriage,
labor, government, and church. This led him to a new concern for
the penultimate things of this-worldly life (alleviating poverty,
ignorance, bondage) precisely for the sake of the ultimate,
namely, God’s justification by grace. He wanted to recover the

22
importance of "the natural" for Protestants and developed a growing appreciation for the laws of life, the Lebensgesetze.

While in prison, Bonhoeffer became more convinced than ever of the necessity of a this-worldly or nonreligious interpretation of Christian faith for a world that was fast becoming religionless, that is, that gets along very well without recourse to the metaphysical idea of god beyond the world or the pietistic god who solves our individual inner problems of guilt and fear. The God of Jesus Christ, he insisted, is the God who suffers with us in the midst of ordinary life, and not the god in the gaps or at the edges of life. The God revealed in Jesus is the God who is forcing the world toward responsible adulthood through the weakness of the Cross. At this point in his life Bonhoeffer no longer had confidence in the words of the church to carry weight in the world. The traditional theological words rang hollow in a church that had fought for self-preservation and refused to take risks for the world. And so he advocated that the church for the time being confine itself to prayer and righteous action on behalf of the world, especially the disadvantaged. Its worldly existence for others should be complemented by an Arkandisciplin, the discipline of the secret that would keep alive the great words and liturgy of the church but spare them from profanation. Perhaps in this way, he thought, the church might someday learn to proclaim the gospel again in fresh meaningful words that would impress a nonreligious world.

We now have both theologies before us and can explore their differences. Bonhoeffer's criticism of Barth began as early as his habilitation dissertation, *Act and Being*, where he criticized Barth's emphasis upon God's freedom from the world rather than God's freedom for the world. Bonhoeffer explained:

> In revelation it is a question less of God's freedom on the far side from us, i.e. his eternal isolation and aseity, than of his forth-proceeding, his given Word, his bond in which he has bound himself, of his freedom as it is most strongly attested in his having freely bound himself to historical man, having placed himself at man's disposal. God is not free of man but for man.

_The Cost of Discipleship_ represented Bonhoeffer's above-mentioned silent controversy with Barth over the question of the relationship between justification and sanctification. Had Barth
done justice to the formation of the Christian through obedient discipleship? Finally came the charge in the prison letters that Barth's theology, which started in the right direction to overcome liberal theology by differentiating the God of Jesus Christ from religion, had ended in a 'positivism of revelation,' an ambiguous term that seems to imply that Barth recovered the mainline Christian tradition but failed to provide concrete guidance, either in dogmatics or in ethics, for a nonreligious interpretation of the great biblical and theological concepts. This positivism of revelation led in the end, Bonhoeffer believed, to a mere conservative restoration. All the great old doctrines were included in the *Dogmatics*—to be swallowed whole or not at all. Bonhoeffer's complaint was that this was not biblical and tended to turn what was a gift from God into a law of faith. More important yet, this restoration, in Bonhoeffer's view, made little impact on the masses of the nonreligious world of the twentieth century.

Barth could never understand Bonhoeffer's charge of Offenbarungspositivismus, and he tossed it off as a quibble over the matter of language. He too, he quipped, could use the language of Canaan! And when, he asked, had he ever told people to "take it or leave it"—all or nothing? But perhaps Barth could not afford to understand Bonhoeffer's charge, because had he done so, he would have had to face more seriously the basic difference in their positions.

The clue to that difference, I think, comes in a remark that Bonhoeffer made in a letter from prison dated 8 June 1944. He was writing to Eberhard Bethge about how he thinks liberal theology can be overcome, and in a parenthetical statement he stated his opinion that Barth was still too influenced by liberal theology, though negatively. How are we to understand this observation? Can it be that the basic difference between Bonhoeffer and Barth has to do with their assessment of liberal theology and how it was to be overcome? I believe this to be the case.

The negative influence of liberal theology upon Barth was exhibited in his 180-degree turn from its anthropological starting point. This overcoming by reversal, which entailed an invincible supralapsarianism that Bonhoeffer found when he read volume 2 of Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, meant that Barth—in his theology but not in his personal life—shied away from the experientially
oriented questions of the modern world that had engaged liberal theology and which Bonhoeffer still wanted to address: this-worldly questions of human formation and community and participation in the sufferings of God in ordinary secular life. This reveals a socio-existential side of Bonhoeffer that Barth refused to share.

Knowledge of God for Bonhoeffer, because of its foundation in Christ, could not be gained apart from immersion in the joys and sufferings of everyday existence, which is where one meets Christ in the other. Knowledge of God for Barth involves cognitive acknowledgment of a fait accompli, namely, the predetermination of human destiny in the works and ways of the same Christ.

Both theologies are Christ-centered, but their christologies function differently to secure diverse ends. For Barth, Christ is the God-bearer of the new humanity that marks the demise and transfiguration of the old. Questions regarding the old are relativized and, ultimately, theologically uninteresting. For Bonhoeffer, Christ, as the incarnate, crucified, and risen One—the divine lover, judge, and renewer of the world—leads his followers into the very midst of precisely this world, which is by no means to be prematurely written off. Thus Bonhoeffer is driven theologically—in this sense similarly to liberalism—to take seriously the questions of the modern world, although unlike liberalism he wants to answer them in nonreligious terms. In a letter from prison dated 3 August 1944, Bonhoeffer wrote this revealing statement:

The church must come out of its stagnation. We must move out again into the open air of intellectual discussion with the world, and risk saying controversial things, if we are to get down to the serious problems of life. I feel obliged to tackle these questions as one who, although a ‘modern’ theologian, is still aware of the debt that he owes to liberal theology. There will not be many of the younger men in whom these two trends are combined. 10

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, what are we to say of these theologians? I do not think one is right and one is wrong. Each was a witness to God at a particular time and at a particular place, and who can deny that God has used their witnesses and that both have made powerful impacts upon the church?
Holding common ground, they diverged because they perceived different dangers for the church. One difference involves the church's relationship to the world. Barth emphasized the proclamation of God's revelation to the world and eschewed apologetics. From his theological position, he could have engaged the modern world—its psychology, social theory, politics, and the like—more than he did, but he deliberately chose not to. He feared a return of the church to those human-centered "fleshpots of Egypt." Bonhoeffer, on the other hand, believed engagement with the world to be imperative if the church is to cut any ice, but the church would have to live its message in the world's midst and learn to speak a nonreligious language.

Another difference is christological. One of Bonhoeffer's criticisms of Barth's theology, at least as it was reflected in the Confessing Church, was that in the midst of God's trinitarian sovereignty the man Jesus tended to disappear from sight, and it is interesting to note that in the later volumes of the Dogmatics Barth writes less about the "Word of God" and more about "Jesus Christ" and the "humanity of God." Nevertheless, the difference in the christologies of the two theologians remains evident, which means that their deepest theological differences come at the point where they are most closely bound together. Both accepted the general guidelines of Chalcedon that in Jesus Christ there is united both true divinity and true humanity. But Barth tended to emphasize the divinity; Jesus Christ is the "Royal Man" whose divine power is the decisive factor. He runs the danger of Apollinarianism, the ancient heresy that failed to do justice to Christ's full humanity. Bonhoeffer, on the other hand, stressed the hiddenness of divinity in the humiliated One; for him Jesus Christ is the man for others, the one whose power is shown forth in weakness. Bonhoeffer preferred to err on the side of Ebionitism, the heresy that stressed the humanity at the expense of the divinity.

In the end, Barth's theology tends toward a theologia gloriae in order to ensure the graciousness of God's action in Christ. As he says at one place in the Church Dogmatics: "We not only have a theologia crucis, but a theologia resurrectionis and therefore a theologia gloriae, i.e., a theology of the glory of the new man actualised and introduced in the crucified Jesus Christ who triumphs as the Crucified." In contrast, Bonhoeffer's theology
BARTH AND BONHOEFFER

quite evidently is a theologia crucis in order to ensure the costliness of God’s grace in Christ. As he puts it in Christ the Center: “We have seen the exalted one, only as the crucified; the sinless one, only as the guilt-laden; the risen one, only as the humiliated. If it were not so, the pro nobis would be destroyed and there would be no faith. Even the resurrection does not break through the incognito.”

One final word about Bonhoeffer: as we know, at the end of his life he himself became a humiliated one and began to see the world “from below,” from the perspective of the outcast, the powerless, the oppressed—in short, from the perspective of those who suffer. This made a difference, for he firmly believed that “acquired knowledge cannot be divorced from the existence in which it is acquired.”

Barth and Bonhoeffer, Bonhoeffer and Barth. They make quite a team! It would be tragic, in my judgment, if Barth were listened to only by the conservative evangelicals and Bonhoeffer only by the liberation theologians. More tragic yet would it be if both were ignored. By their writings and by the examples of their lives, they have bequeathed to all of us a precious heritage.

NOTES

11. Barth, Church Dogmatics IV/2, p. 385.
ORWELL AND EDUCATION

ROBERT H. CONN

George Orwell’s hopes for society translate into good guidelines for the church’s classrooms—indeed, any classroom where individuals are cherished—from the smallest Sunday school to the largest church-related university.

Nineteen eighty-four came and went. As it went, it swept away a great deal of animated conversation about George Orwell and about the most popular book ever to have a number for a title. Most of us were pleased that 1984 proved not to be prophetic. Orwell’s classic describes a society with governmental control of the media, of science, even of language—a society opposed to almost everything American liberal arts education strives for. Orwell’s 1984 diagnoses totalitarianism. We prescribe liberal arts education. The two could not be more different.

Liberal arts learning and totalitarianism assume different things about society. Each has a different view of the nature of truth. Each has a different estimate of the value of individuals. All are matters of deep concern for those of us who care about education and the church.

Although Orwell was not a religious man, his passionate regard for persons has made him important to many people in the church. Next to the name of the beast in Revelation, 666, his 1984

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may have been the number most frequently spoken from pulpits for nearly a decade. More important, his hopes for society translate into good guidelines for the church’s classrooms—indeed, for any classroom where individuals are cherished—from the smallest Sunday school to the largest church-related university.

Orwell wrote compellingly on behalf of the individual. He described himself as a political writer, but his political vision was always informed by his esteem for individuality. Because of that high esteem, he often overestimated the threat society posed to persons—much like those whose affection for children causes them to view all adults as threats. But his saving graces in this regard were two. His intense focus made visible social tendencies that remained hidden from those who kept their vision broad. And his concern for the individual was for the sake of a more humane society.

Orwell’s exemplary individual was the writer. In the writer’s struggle with others (politicians, academicians, other writers) he saw the more general struggle of the individual with society. He recorded that struggle from within. As he did, he said many things that we say, or wish we could say, about the value of education.

Reading Orwell, moving through his uncluttered prose, we rediscover what a liberal education can produce. Adding his voice and his gifted phrases to our own, we find a language for some of our deepest concerns.

HERESY

Most of us learned early in school that the point of democracy is the protection of the minority view. The majority can take care of itself. The small voice needs the protection of law against the yammer of the crowd.

Freedom of speech safeguards the small voice. It protects the few against the many. But that protection means little apart from a high appreciation for what the few are capable of.

In short, freedom of speech is the logical outcome of a belief in the value of individual experience. What many need to see may first be seen by only one. Stifle the first glimmer of a truth and risk losing all of its light—an almost indiscernibly small amount at first, but still a loss.

The writer, according to Orwell, guards those first glimmers by
scrupulous faithfulness to what he or she sees and feels. Society allows that faithfulness through tolerance. The writer achieves it through intellectual integrity.

Not that tolerance for intellectual integrity occurs automatically. It does not. Pressures, official and unofficial, steadily constrict, or attempt to constrict, the range of acceptable reportage, to prescribe acceptable points of view.

Orwell accented the conflict of intellectual integrity with those social pressures. He lived the myth of the solitary one, heroically withstanding the lures of easy acceptance and cheap rewards. The act at the center of his life, writing, pits the writer against the reading public. "Above a quite low level," he wrote, "literature is an attempt to influence the viewpoint of one's contemporaries by recording experience" (Orwell Reader, Harcourt Brace Janovich, 1965, p. 372). The equation—recording of experience equals influencing one's contemporaries—shows how centrifugal Orwell's view of writing is. The individual's view is not the social view; one's ideas move out from the center to persuade others.

"To write in plain, vigorous language, one has to think fearlessly, and if one thinks fearlessly, one cannot be politically orthodox."

In this hero myth, fate decrees increasing resistance to the individual. Writing becomes a trial of one's integrity and, if pursued, worsens the conflict between the individual and society. "To write in plain, vigorous language, one has to think fearlessly, and if one thinks fearlessly, one cannot be politically orthodox" (Reader, p. 374). Intellectual integrity means faithfulness to experience and emotions, one's own experience and emotions. Because they are one's own, no one can know them as the individual does. State them clearly, and one's experiences and emotions must rebut the prevailing orthodoxies. The writer, in other words, must be a heretic, in this historical sense of that word: "A heretic—political, religious, or aesthetic—was one who refused to outrage his own conscience" (Reader, p. 368).

In his own day, Orwell saw, rebellion pushed in the opposite direction. Conscience was ignored if it conflicted with ideology.
ORWELL AND EDUCATION

That reverse rebellion, carried on by the intellectuals of the Communist party and carrying with it the threat of totalitarianism, Orwell opposed. His understanding of writing dictated the terms of his opposition. For him, the true writer, faithful always to individual experience and emotion, would, in principle, reject totalitarianism—that system which, in the name of the whole, so easily justifies outraging the individual conscience.

Orwell may well make too stark a contrast between the individual and society. One can easily see another side of the case. After all, society provides the moral stability, the geographical constants, the language necessary for human existence—even the language necessary for us to defend individuality. And that paradox is worth reciting often: our tradition of individualism is socially transmitted.

But that paradox is only the introduction to the main idea, not the main idea itself. The main idea is that individuality must be jealously protected. Society, in some ways, builds up from individual experiences and emotions and not down from socially popular doctrines. One must be able, lawfully, to assert and defend claims against the many, for the good of the many.

Liberal education cultivates heroes in just that cause. It preserves tradition partly as a way of illuminating the individual. And, to do that, it cultivates not only the consciousness but the conscience of students. The consciousness, because one must be able to identify one's own experience and emotion—a task at least as difficult as finding the right path through a house of mirrors. The conscience, because one strives not solely for intellectualism, but for intellectual integrity. One must say as a hero, not as a parrot, "This is my experience. These are my emotions."

To those who slogged through the excesses of the 1970s, this attention to "me" and "mine" may sound like a return to the sloppy self-indulgence of those times. Any whimpering adolescent can stand before the world and chirp about "me" and "mine." But anyone who listened to those chirpings in the seventies began to hear a dreary sameness in them. They were borrowed from someone else's vocabulary, hand-me-down patches to conceal the naked absence of self-knowledge. Everyone had the same experience, the same feelings, the same lingo—like a thousand chain store managers singing "I Did It My Way" in unison.
Understanding one’s own experience and emotion does not come naturally. Nor does the skill to help others understand theirs. It is a rare teacher who can resist covering students with a favorite patchwork of social theory, rather than consistently pushing them to test ideas against their own limited lights. But it is the hammer of individual integrity against the flint of tradition that brightens their lights. And I believe Orwell is right to say that writers (and thinkers) discover their lights, at least at first, in their difference from the prevailing orthodoxies. Conscious of that difference, they must become conscientious about it.

"At present we know only that the imagination, like certain wild animals, will not breed in captivity."

Where students learn to attach their voices to their consciences, liberal education is taking place. The alternative, Orwell suggests, is that we train minds to acquiesce. If we do not intensify individuals’ concentration on their own experiences, we will concentrate it elsewhere, most likely on being true to someone else’s experiences and emotions (or, at the worst remove, to a humdrum mouthing of someone else’s phrases about experience and emotion), while their own spirits fade into an increasingly featureless background. The price for that is high. As Orwell wrote, “At present we know only that the imagination, like certain wild animals, will not breed in captivity” (Reader, p. 379).

POLITICS

There is no such thing as nonpolitical literature, and least of all in an age like our own, when fears, hatreds, and loyalties of a directly political kind are near to the surface of everyone’s consciousness. (Reader, p. 373)

1984 heightens to absolute visibility the claim that “there is no such thing as nonpolitical literature.” In 1984 everything is political, or, rather, politics is everything or the attempt to control everything. In that 1984, clear thinking about one’s own experiences and emotions means pushing up toward the light
through the fill of muck and sludge used by society to persuade one that darkness is truth.

Liberal education brings those political influences into the light of day. Why? Because it illuminates ideas, and all ideas in society are sponsored by somebody. Hucksters, pols, bureaucrats—none is neutral; each has ideas to sell. They want the mind and, eventually, the heart. Orwell makes the stakes clear: "A bought mind is a spoiled mind" (Reader, p. 379).

Liberal education, by its tolerance, criticism, and instability, keeps the mind from spoiling. Forced to hear ideas debated, claims contested, evidence cited and sunk, students become wary of renting their brains to just any pretty idea that comes along. In short, liberal education shows them that ideas have sponsors and consequences. Ideologies gush from many tempters, surrounding the unwary. The polls is the sum of those forces. From that perspective, even a kiss has political consequences, maybe especially so.

If a "bought mind is a spoiled mind," good teachers have an obligation to show how that is so. That does not mean that every classroom must become a place for sniffing out subversive meanings, or that every text be treated as a political tract. It means showing ways in which it is true that "literature is an attempt to influence the viewpoint of one's contemporaries by recording experience."

After all, all writing—scientific, social, artistic—arises from the writer's doings with the world and the world's doings with the writer, which is to say that it occurs within a field of influence. Each writing selects a few details from the thousands possible. And each selection expresses one set of values rather than another. Surely those selections, then, present a view of the world as surely as any portrait presents, not the subject, but a view of the subject.

It should be an important matter that a teacher distill the worldview and its implied behavior from the concoctions studied in any class. Take, for example, W. H. Auden's line, "We must love one another or die." Auden wrote those words after his brief and disappointing stint in the Spanish Revolution. Later, following World War II, he repudiated them, calling them dishonest. Certainly one could treat the line as a psychological outburst, a pimple erupting in the poet's psyche. But Auden
wrote it in response to the world, and he repudiated it in response to a very different world.

Surely students must study Auden's diction. But his diction worked in the service of engagement with the world. He not only wrote his ideas, he sponsored them. What sense of life infuses the lines of the younger Auden? Why, and how, is it true that either we love or we shall die? What behaviors follow from the belief? Does one learn the truth of a poem, in part, by asking about the behavior and the world it implies? If not, how does one discover what poetry means?

When one repudiates such a compelling, if hortatory, line in the name of greater honesty, as Auden did, what new relationship with the world follows from that? Is the choice before us that of honesty versus passion? Is that a legitimate choice? Can poetry survive without a passion for honesty? Each answer embeds an attitude about the world. Behaviors follow. It is political.

Eventually teachers must also come clean about their own attitudes. No sense pretending that their interpretations are neutral. We have learned a lot by attending to the values underlying theories of poetic interpretation. Some interpreters pretend to lift a poem out of its interplay with the world, like lifting the strings of a cat's cradle from the fingers that support it and pretending that it can keep from collapsing by virtue of its design alone. Others approach the poem as a lens into the mind of the poet. Others diagnose poems for symptoms of the "dis-ease" of their era. But each interpretive theory is a choice. Like all choices, they express values.

Those choices of interpretive theories should not be hidden from students. In fact, I do not believe they often are. But in another sense, the sources of interpretation lie deeply hidden away. And the greater the pity because they are so politically instructive.

That does not mean looking for the interpreter's Democratic party membership card. I refer instead to the hidden community of scholars pressing into every classroom. That quiet mass of scholarly opinion that legitimates professors and their enterprises, that determines what is valuable to study, and most of all, whatever it is that simply goes without saying. One might study and interpret the designs in a kaleidoscope a thousand acceptable ways, and two hundred controversial ways, and ten revolutionary ways.
Somewhere, behind them all, and supporting them all, is the silent consensus that says one can look as many ways as one wishes, so long as all looking is through the eyehole of this kaleidoscope.

But why look there? To whose advantage is it? To whose disadvantage? What function does it serve in scholarship, in school administration, in social organization—in other words, what is its political function?

One might start that kind of classroom procedure by quoting Orwell: "Political language—and with variations this is true of all political parties, from Conservatives to Anarchists—is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind" (A Collection of Essays, Harcourt Brace Janovich, 1946, p. 171). Then substitute for the words "political language" the name of the course, and for "conservatives" and "anarchists" the names of two or more schools of thought. Then ask, "Is this school of thought designed? By whom? Why? What signs of motives can be found? What can be inferred? What makes this a legitimate activity?"

**TOTALITARIANISM**

Orwell’s thesis can be viewed from the other end. The writer, accurately recording experience and thinking clearly, comes to odds with orthodoxy. Why? Because orthodoxy does not float freely, a detached cumulus of concepts. Orthodoxies are sponsored by groups hungry for control, groups eager to consume the individual.

When the entire state orchestrates an orthodoxy, the result is totalitarianism. Orwell saw the danger of totalitarianism in Russian politics, but he saw many of its frightening symptoms in the Communist party in England. The symptoms he noted most frequently were, unfortunately, frequently to be noted: political lying, malicious attacks on writers, and, beneath those, a deceitful use of "history" and "truth."

Orwell held England’s Marxist intellectuals in scorn. They were all too willing to deceive their readers about the atrocities committed by the communists in Russia. They may have viewed their deceit as a temporary strategy, but Orwell saw that it lay in the very nature of communist totalitarianism. He is worth quoting at length on the topic:
The organized lying practiced by totalitarian states is not, as is sometimes claimed, a temporary expedient of the same nature as military deception. It is something integral to totalitarianism, something that would continue even if concentration camps and secret police forces ceased to be necessary. . . . From the totalitarian point of view history is something to be created rather than learned. A totalitarian state is, in effect, a theocracy, and its ruling caste, in order to keep its position, has to be thought of as infallible. But since, in practice, no one is infallible, it is frequently necessary to rearrange past events in order to show that this or that imaginary triumph actually happened. . . . Totalitarianism demands, in fact, the continuous alteration of the past, and in the long run probably demands a disbelief in the very existence of objective truth. (Reader, p. 371)

Totalitarian governments support themselves with doctrines that they cannot allow to be challenged, hiding the fact that they are holding up the doctrines that they pretend hold them up, and creating the political mirage that their bootstraps are lifting them. When facts give the lie to their doctrines, totalitarian leaders adjust the facts, meanwhile arguing that followers must keep the faith. No wonder that for those who see the blatant discontinuity between fact and faith “totalitarianism . . . does not so much promise an age of faith as an age of schizophrenia” (Reader, p. 374).

A government that must use all of history to support its doctrines converts historiography into a string of sermon illustrations. It cannot afford tolerance, because some variant view might win the day; and it cannot afford intellectual stability because, at a moment’s notice, it might have to change a prevailing opinion to fit a doctrine. Above all, “it can never permit either the truthful recording of facts, or the emotional sincerity, that literary creation demands” (Reader, p. 374).

Writers refuse that option. Therefore, unless they are hacks and toadies, they pose a danger to the government. When writers insist upon truthful recording of facts, the government attacks with the full power of its lexical arsenal:

The enemies of individual liberty always try to present their case as a plea for discipline versus individualism. The issue truth-versus-un-truth is as far as possible kept in the background. Although the point of emphasis may vary, the writer who refuses to sell his opinions is always branded as a mere egoist. (Reader, p. 369)
For totalitarians, accepting the discipline demanded by one’s peers and superiors shows one’s seriousness. Governments and communities of scholars have a way of making that discipline into a rite of passage—one that weeds out those who will not accept the prescribed wisdom and the prescribing authorities.

Still, a few slip through. They teach, write books, upset their peers. Many manage, by virtue of their integrity, to show, when they are branded as egoists, that the lie lies with their accusers.

The tactics then change. The writer is trivialized, treated as a silly-minded scholar entering intellectual dotage. Like the Roman emperors who killed the bearers of bad tidings, the totalitarian government and the small bands of communist prophets in democratic societies hope to wound fatally the reputations of those who dissent from doctrine.

Freedom of the intellect means the freedom to report what one has seen, heard, and felt, and not to be obliged to fabricate imaginary facts and feelings. The familiar tirades against “escapism and individualism,” "romanticism,” and so forth, are merely a forensic device, the aim of which is to make the perversion of history seem respectable. (Reader, p. 370)

Were he alive today, Orwell would see the full range of horrible devices used by totalitarian governments against those who refuse to fabricate facts and feelings. He would be outraged—but not surprised.

He was so deeply persuaded that totalizing systems, intellectual or political, require deceit that he never expected from their followers a fair reading of himself or of history. All adherents of totalitarian systems “are alike in assuming that an opponent cannot be both honest and intelligent” (Reading, p. 369). In an odd way, totalitarians wrench truth from its customary relationship to the past and present and attach it instead to prediction. That is, based on the presumed truth of the totalitarian hunch about the future, the interpretation of the past and present, and of any person, becomes infinitely adjustable.

Of course, it could be argued that both Orwell and the totalitarians are wrong. It is wrong to treat the past as though it were completely plastic. But it could be argued that we cannot know the past and present absolutely any more than we can the future. In fact, what we call “history” has proven often to be an
ambiguous merging of ideology and information. When Orwell criticizes totalitarians for their disbelief in "the very existence of objective truth," he seems to claim that he believes there is such a thing.

The question confronting Orwell then is how he knows that what he knows is objectively true. He does not answer the question philosophically. Instead, he indicates the zone in which what he calls objective truth arises: the individual's field of vision and range of emotion. He assumes that what he and others have seen with their own eyes and what they have felt about it can be clearly written about. Further, he does not ask for consensus on objective truth but for the right to record what is seen and felt without the pressure to adjust that information to fit some party's ideology.

His use of "objective truth" is not philosophical but moral. He does not claim to hold all of reality in his prose in a squidlike embrace. He sees instead the travesty of a willful distortion of the record, of a willing denial of one's own experience, of a wanton use of the written word to gloss over or sweeten the evil of one's own cause.

Orwell is right to see that an entire political system is implied in those attitudes. Those to whom personal integrity matters cannot be totalitarians. Those who protect the space of another's experience and feeling must generate tolerance. Those who want to find only their own footprints in the experiences of others must be totalitarians; they cannot trust tolerance. Their heel marks show clearly.

Among the totalitarians who alarmed Orwell, members of the Communist party in England ranked high. They were mostly intellectuals, largely academics. One has every right to worry when those who should have the greatest stake in intellectual and individual liberty instead use their lecture platforms as pulpits and their journals to play judge and jury.

Perhaps the political powerlessness of academics makes them prey to those grandiose political pretensions. Orwell suspected so. In his day, academics had no political clout and, he thought, would not know what to do if they had any.

Probably they would not, by themselves, have proved bothersome as England crafted its future. But they gnawed away at a fundamental principle—like the fatal mice who nibbled away the future of dinosaurs by invading their nests and destroying the
eggs. Integrity—Orwell's shorthand word for clear statements about one's own experience and emotion—was being attacked in the place of its nurture; the university and the intellectual journal. He observed, "It is the peculiarity of our age that the rebels against the existing order, or at any rate the most numerous and characteristic of them, are rebelling against the idea of intellectual integrity" (Reader, p. 368).

A POSTSCRIPT ON EDUCATION

One can draw from Orwell's anti-totalitarian comments a view of education that is rigorous and liberating. Although his essays are now more than a quarter century old, they still bristle with moral power for all of us who believe in liberal education, who reject totalitarian thought and practice as inimical to the human community. And they speak as incisively to those who think that "value" and "cash value" are synonymous as they do to those who believe that communism and good conscience are Siamese twins.

There is no integrity in education that teaches students to falsify their own experiences.

Individualism. Orwell's individualism had nothing to do with the self-congratulating greed the word now commonly implies. He meant that an individual's experiences and emotions are the places to begin the quest for integrity and truth. There is no integrity in education that teaches students to falsify their own experiences.

Truth-Versus-Untruth. Liberal education keeps individuals from being absorbed into selfishness by steadily putting their "truths" to the test. Orwell never believed that "I feel" was a suitable substitute for "I think" or "I know." Claims about history, about one's own experiences, do not come to others self-certified as true. Individual claims need to be made public. Facing up to communal canons of truth keeps one from backing into an irresponsible subjectivity. But unswerving faithfulness to one's own experience and emotion prevents communal canons of truth from becoming absolute doctrines. Being made aware of that interplay is the gift of liberal education.
Influence. Information and influence cannot be separated. Every textbook selects certain information and, by that fact, influences students to believe that those facts matter more than others. Each sentence is cut from the stone of silence and ignores the substance of what is left unsaid. Speech is influence. Educators, in fact, espouse non-neutrality each time they speak. Students need to know that.

Labels. We pretend our labels have precise meaning; that they carry the authority of truth or, at the least, accuracy; that they are judicious but not judgmental. Orwell noticed not only what labels meant but how they functioned. None escapes influence, any more than the falling leaf escapes gravity. "Egoist," "romantic," "escapist"—each not only classifies its subject, it evaluates it as well (Collection, pp. 160-163). To which field of values do our cherished labels gravitate? A question worth pressing.

More can be said about liberal education and the cherishing of individuals. But Orwell's notions offer any teacher enough to take to heart for a quick and accurate self-test. Is the individual's experience and emotion valued and protected in my classroom? Are students forced to deal with tradition and with each other using the canons of truth-versus-untruth? Do I come clean about the influence I want to have and about what has influenced me to say what I do? Do I examine the labels I use for their force as well as for their fit?

To teach using those questions for guidelines is to teach for freedom. It is to give the imagination confidence that it can use its freedom responsibly. "At present we know only that the imagination, like certain wild animals, will not breed in captivity."

NOTES
WHAT ARE “ESTABLISHED STANDARDS OF DOCTRINE”? : A RESPONSE TO RICHARD HEITZENRATER

THOMAS C. ODEN

This writer sets forth reasons for retaining the current language of the Book of Discipline that specifies Wesley's Sermons and Notes, as well as the Articles of Religion, as constitutionally protected doctrinal standards.

"The General Conference shall not revoke, alter, or change our Articles of Religion or establish any new standards or rules of doctrine contrary to our present existing and established standards of doctrine" (The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 1984, ¶16). The same sentence, known as the First Restrictive Rule, is in every Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church and its predecessors from 1808 to the present. To what standards does this sentence refer?

The most commonly accepted interpretation is found in the 1972-84 Disciplines: "The Discipline seems to assume that for the determination of otherwise irreconcilable doctrinal disputes, the Annual and General Conferences are the appropriate courts of appeal, under the guidance of the first two Restrictive Rules (which is to say, the Articles and Confession, the Sermons and the Notes)" (1984 Discipline, ¶67). But is this interpretation historically correct and accurate in its textual specification of what the rules protect? That is what the current debate is about.

The thesis of this essay: John Wesley's Sermons and Notes have

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had an uninterrupted consensual history of being received as established standards of doctrine in the United Methodist Church and its predecessors. It sets forth reasons for retention of current language of the Discipline that specifies the Sermons and Notes as constitutionally protected doctrinal standards (1984 Discipline, §67). It sets forth a resumé of evidence for doctrinal standards from 1763 to the present, especially the disputed period of 1784–1808, showing that the Sermons and Notes were not rejected by the deeds of settlement, and that the conference of 1808 referred to them in the second clause of the First Restrictive Rule as "our present existing and established standards of doctrine." The undebated, nonconsensual view that the Articles only are protected by the constitution should not enter prematurely into the language of church law.

In 1749 Wesley drew up a "model deed," published in 1763, for all Methodist preaching houses, which restricted the use of the chapels to those who "preach no other doctrine than is contained in Mr. Wesley's Notes upon the New Testament, and four volumes of sermons." The "four volumes of sermons" were the Sermons on Several Occasions, which since the 1840s have been generally referred to as the "Standard Sermons." The 1972-84 Disciplines specifically hold that there is a dual norm operative in the standards of doctrine referred to in the First Restrictive Rule: "The original distinction between the intended functions of the Articles on the one hand, and of the Sermons and Notes on the other, may be inferred from the double reference to them in the First Restrictive Rule (adopted in 1808 and unchanged ever since)" (1984 Discipline, §67). Here the Discipline clearly endorses the "two-clause theory" of the First Rule: "On the one hand, it [the constitution] forbids any further alterations of the Articles and, on the other, any further contrary additions to our present existing, and established standards of doctrine (i.e., the Minutes, Sermons, and Notes)" (1984 Discipline, §67). The two-clause reading of the First Rule emphasizes the difference and complementarity between the two sources—Articles and other "established standards."

All Disciplines since 1972 affirm as an accepted view the theory that the 1784 Conference affirmed Wesley's Sermons and Notes as established sources of doctrine:
From their beginnings, the Methodists in America understood themselves as the dutiful heirs of Wesley and the Wesleyan tradition. In 1773, they affirmed their allegiance to the principles of the “Model Deed” and ratified this again in 1784, when they stipulated that “The London Minutes,” including the doctrinal minutes of the early Conferences and the Model Deed, were accepted as their own doctrinal guidelines. In this way they established a threefold agency—the Conference, the Sermons, and the Notes—as their guides in matters of doctrine. (1984 Discipline, 667)

There is no doubt that the current Discipline regards the Sermons and Notes as constitutionally protected doctrinal standards. It is generally agreed that during the period from 1855 (Bishop Osmond Baker’s Guide-book) to the present, the leading experts on American Methodist constitutional history (from Bishops Baker and Holland McTyeire to Albert Outler and Bishop Nolan Harmon) have included the Sermons and Notes along with the Articles as constitutionally protected doctrinal standards. Happily there is very little disagreement over the period from the inception of American Methodism to the Christmas Conference of 1784, during which time the Sermons and Notes were repeatedly stated in the Minutes (and incorporated legally into the deeds of Methodist preaching places) as doctrinal standards. That leaves at issue only a single disputed period—from 1784 to 1855, that is, between the Christmas Conference and the publication of Baker’s Guide-book.

It has been argued by Richard Heitzenrater in this journal that during this period the Sermons and Notes were not regarded as legally binding doctrinal standards, and that only after that time did Baker’s interpretation emerge as normative, whereby the Sermons and Notes were belatedly (and wrongly!) reinstated as binding doctrinal standards after a seventy-one year interruption. Our purpose is to present evidence to the contrary, so as to provide a reliable historical basis for concluding that the Sermons and Notes have remained established doctrinal standards steadily and without interruption from the inception of American Methodism to the present Book of Discipline.

The first “query proposed to every preacher” of the American Conference of 1773 was: “Ought not the authority of Mr. Wesley and that Conference to extend to the preachers and people in
America, as well as in Great Britain and Ireland?" "Yes." Second question: "Ought not the doctrine and discipline of the Methodists, as contained in the [British] minutes to be the sole rule of our conduct, who labor in the connection with Mr. Wesley in America?" "Yes." These two questions established from the outset three key principles that would enter deeply into the spirit of American Methodism: (1) Wesley would exercise authority within the connection as long as he would live, and the distance to America did not weaken or diminish that, so that Wesley or his authorized representatives would govern personally as Wesley did in Britain and Ireland. (2) The doctrine taught in Europe and America was the same—hence there was not thought to be a Methodist doctrine taught in one country distinguishable from that in another. (3) More importantly, the doctrine taught had a specifically defined textual basis and reference—that contained in the British Minutes which included a "model deed" requiring that preachers preach "no other doctrine than is contained in" Wesley's Sermons and Notes.

The American Conference of 1780 established the pivotal principle that all deeds of American Methodist Church properties "shall be drawn in substance after that in the printed [British] Minutes," and thus would incorporate the restriction concerning the Sermons and Notes. At the ninth conference of 1781 these same textual grounds were spelled out explicitly: "Ques. 1. What preachers are now determined, after mature consideration, close observation, and earnest prayer, to preach the old Methodist doctrine, and strictly enforce the discipline as contained in the Notes, Sermons, and Minutes published by Mr. Wesley . . . ?" This was thought sufficiently important to require formal subscription: "The thirty-nine preachers assembled in the Conference subscribed their names to an affirmative answer."

On five occasions between 1773 and 1784, supported by unambiguous documentation, the established standards of doctrine were clearly and textually defined as Sermons and Notes: (1) in the conference of 1773, (2) the conference of 1780, (3) the conference of 1781, (4) in Wesley's letter to the conference of 1783, and (5) the conference of May 8, 1784. All of these documents, criteria, and actions were well-known to American preachers when they met at the Christmas Conference in 1784. If there had been some rescinding or amendment of these standards in the
period 1784–1808, one would expect that there would be some record of it. There is no record of it whatever, either in conference records or private memoirs, and furthermore, no hint of debate that these established standards were under challenge or even being questioned. This was the conference whose record shows that preachers were specifically urged to “be active in dispensing Mr. Wesley’s Books.”

This minute was retained in numerous subsequent issues of the Discipline in the disputed period from 1784 to 1808.

We will summarize Heitzenrater’s case point-by-point and reply to each point. Heitzenrater has asserted that the omission of the “model deed” in the Minutes of 1785 constituted an implied rejection of Wesley’s Sermons and Notes as binding standards: “The section which contained the ‘model deed’ was omitted. The new Discipline therefore specified no doctrinal standards.” This argument hinges on a curious assertion: that whatever ideas are omitted or not repeated annually from the previous minutes of a deliberative body constitutes an implied rejection of those ideas. If one should take this premise seriously, it must be applied and tested with other ideas besides the elimination of the Sermons and Notes as doctrinal standards. Taking this premise rigorously, here are several of the ideas that one must also consider as having been rejected by the Discipline of 1785 since they were omitted (or better, simply not repeated): that faith is a “divine conviction of things not seen” (“Large Minutes”); that the labor of private instruction is absolutely necessary; that one should inquire into the state of the soul of the unconverted.

All of these points were in the British “Large Minutes,” but not in the American Discipline of 1785. By this reasoning, anything not included must be considered “consciously dropped” and deleted “as legally binding.” Only if one answers that the above items were intended to be consciously rejected, can one also answer that the omission of the “model deed” indicated a specific rejection of its doctrinal standards.

The more transparent reason we know that the Sermons and Notes were not rejected in 1784 is that the American Discipline of 1785 itself makes numerous references commending Mr. Wesley’s Sermons and Notes: “We advise you . . . from five to six in the Evening, to meditate, pray, and read, partly the Scripture with
Mr. Wesley's Notes, partly the closely practical Parts of what he has published." Among the 1785 instructions for preaching: "Frequently read and enlarge upon a portion of the Notes." "Searching the Scriptures, by (1) Reading: constantly, some Part of every day; regularly, all the Bible in order: carefully, with Mr. Wesley's Notes. . . ." A document that affirms these things could not at the same time be deliberately rejecting Wesley's Notes as established doctrinal standards. Further, there are numerous references to key themes dealt with in more detail in Wesley's Sermons: "go on to Perfection"; "gradual and instantaneous change"; "Holiness comes by faith," etc. None of these themes are dealt with in the Articles, which would be the only binding standards of doctrine remaining if it is imagined that the conference had just eliminated the Sermons and Notes as binding doctrinal standards.

The 1788 conference vigorously disavowed that it had changed any doctrinal standards. It specifically declared that it had taken actions "such as affect not in any degree the essentials of our doctrines." Surely "our doctrines" could not be the Articles of Religion alone, since the amendments made at this conference had no reference whatever to any point covered by the Articles. The next Discipline of the disputed period, that of 1789, did not hesitate to acknowledge John Wesley as one who, "under God, has been the father of the great revival of religion now extending over the earth by the means of the Methodists" (1789 Discipline, p. 3), language that would be repeated in the Disciplines of 1790 and 1791. In the "Notes" written by Coke and Asbury for the Discipline of 1798, as prepared on request of the General Conference of 1796 and reconfirmed by the General Conference of 1800, the encomium toward Wesley would accelerate. There he was regarded as "the most respectable divine since the primitive ages, if not since the time of the apostles" (p. 7)! This does not sound like the language of those who had just devalued Wesley's established standards of doctrine. Had there been any serious proposal that the Sermons and Notes be demoted from binding status, surely such a great issue would have been rigorously debated and prominently reflected in the Minutes of some conference between 1784 and 1808. No such evidence has been forthcoming.
The most crucial turn in Heitzenrater’s theory hinges conspicuously upon an argument from silence—the simple nonmention of Wesleyan standards—so as to allege broadly that the conference was “consciously deleting their force as legally binding standards of doctrine.” It is unconvincing to argue from silence that the simple absence of the Wesleyan standards in the deed of settlement constitutes a direct negation of, or withholding of approval from, them as standards for preaching. To the contrary, it is evident that the early Methodist preachers thought that they were holding fast to the “old Methodist doctrine.” Had changes been proposed, would not such an important matter have been widely debated by the preachers? Would not there have been a significant documentary residue of that debate? None exists. The more plausible hypothesis is that the American Minutes and the Disciplines following 1784 affirmed the existing standards of doctrine derived from the “model deed” so obviously as to require no further specification, definition, or extensive debate. It is non sequitur to conclude that since the “model deed” was not repeated in the American Minutes, its standards were implicitly being discarded. For the Sermons and Notes were so familiarly known by Methodist preachers who had been solemnly bound by the “model deed,” the Circular Letter, the “binding minute,” and numerous conference actions, that they required no repetitious further specification in American Minutes that stood in such obvious continuity with the previous tradition of Minutes. The contention that the British “Large Minutes” were “superseded and no longer had any binding effect” in American Methodism fails to take sufficiently into account the fact that Wesley’s Circular Letter, to which Asbury assented, required that the American conference “cheerfully conform to the Minutes both of the English and American Conferences.” This does not imply that the American conferences after 1784 remained bound in perpetuity to the British Minutes, but rather the doctrinal continuity between them was affirmed even while disciplinary refinements were being contextually adapted to the American situation.

There was a succession of similar deeds that eventuated in the “deed of settlement” enacted by the General Conference in 1796. They were: (1) Wesley’s “model deed” of 1763; (2) the virtually identical deed that appeared in the “Large Minutes” of 1766 and
following: (3) the deeds written in America after 1780 that were to be drawn up in accord with the "model deed" printed in the "Large Minutes"; (4) the English Deed of Declaration to provide for succession of property rights after Wesley's death, enrolled in chancery in 1784; (5) the anomalous absence of any printed deed in the revised Discipline of 1785, which Heitzenrater questionably takes to be an outright rejection of the previous deed; (6) with the decease of Wesley in 1791, the "deed of declaration," making the British conference a self-governing body, conveying to the conference powers that had been vested under law to Wesley during his lifetime; and (7) the "deed of settlement" that appears in the Journal of the 1796 General Conference. In this entire succession of deeds, there is no evidence of debate that doctrinal standards were being formally revised, amended, re-evaluated, or even debated.

Heitzenrater has argued that after 1784 a new doctrinal standard prevailed in American Methodism, that the standards of the earlier Minutes were "thus superseded and no longer had any binding effect on the American Methodists after January, 1785." But seven years later, in the record of the General Conference of 1796, we find that its first action was to reassure all American Methodists that no doctrinal changes had been made, and that, however the disciplinary language had been prudently restated for the American situation, its intent was not to alter doctrine. The second major action taken, after specifying the boundaries of the annual conferences, was to provide a plan for "a deed of settlement." This was the standardized, legal, post-Revolutionary American version of the "model deed." It was a legal instrument enabling properties to be set aside for a particular use: Methodist preaching. The purpose of the deed was to allow to be built a "place of worship, for the use of the members of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America, according to the rules and discipline" (italics added), rules which since 1773 had legally required trustees to allow preaching of "no other doctrine than is contained in" Wesley's Sermons and Notes. There is nothing in the deed of settlement that suggests that the Articles of Religion had displaced the Sermons and Notes as the only binding criteria for preaching in Methodist meeting houses. Had that been the conference's extraordinary intent, one would reasonably expect that there would have been some note on it, or
evidence of debate. None exists. The “rules and discipline” to which the deed of settlement referred had long before provided that no preacher could join the connection without agreeing to “abide by the Methodist doctrine and discipline published in the four volumes of sermons and the notes.” It is in this way that the same doctrinal standards continued after 1796 to impinge upon the use of church property.

Heitzenrater has argued that, in the procedure for trial of ministers, the reference to “a breach of the articles and discipline of the church” (1789 Discipline, Q. 2, ¶XXXIII) must be a reference limited exclusively to the Articles of Religion. Following the language of the Discipline of 1792 he concludes “that the only official measure or test of doctrinal orthodoxy within the Methodist Episcopal Church at that time was the Articles of Religion.” He thinks that the American Articles superseded “the earlier British Methodist standards, Wesley’s Notes and Sermons.” Yet these procedures for trial do not anywhere specifically prohibit other standards of doctrine from applying. The question rather is, simply: “What shall be done with those ministers or preachers, who hold and preach doctrines which are contrary to our articles of religion?” (1792 Discipline, Q. 3, continuing through 1804 Discipline, Q. 3, p. 41). Upon this thread Heitzenrater hangs the theory that the Articles only have binding relevance as doctrinal standards. Pertinent to this issue are the notes written by Coke and Asbury for the Discipline of 1798, especially as they apply to trial. They specified that one of the legitimate reasons for trial of a preacher would be if the preacher should “oppose the doctrines of holiness” (1798 Discipline, p. 113). These doctrines are not specifically to be found in the Articles of Religion, but are prominently addressed in Wesley’s Sermons and Notes. Hence the Articles could not have been considered by Coke and Asbury in 1798 to be the only standard doctrines, even in the case of trial.

There are in fact two very different contexts in which doctrinal standards may apply: (1) the recurrent and primary task of preaching; and (2) the rare and exceptional situation of the trial of a minister, where a much more concise, specific definition is needed than is applicable to preaching. The conferences may have decided that they did not want to encumber the difficult situation of trial with the details of all four volumes of Sermons and
the extensive Notes. It could have been thought prudent to
narrow, for trial purposes alone, the criteria of culpable offenses.
Keep in mind that the designation of the Sermons and Notes as
doctrinal standards for preaching occurred long before (1763) the
designation of the Articles as standards that may have had special
applicability to trial (1792).

The Discipline that the conference of 1808 had in hand when it
wrote the Constitution and Restrictive Rules was the Discipline of
1804. When the members of the conference constitutionally
prevented subsequent General Conferences from altering “our
present existing and established standards of doctrine,” they
surely must have assumed that the Discipline of 1804 was
consistent with those standards. If the standards were “present
and existing,” it is difficult to see how they could not be existing in
the 1804 Discipline. That Wesley’s Notes were assumed as
normative in the 1804 Discipline is evident in the section on the
duty of preachers, who are required to read the notes carefully,
“seriously” and “with prayer,” “every day” (1804 Discipline, Sect.
12, Q. 2). “From four to five in the morning and from five to six in
the evening, to meditate, pray, and read the scriptures with
notes, and the closely practical parts of what Mr. Wesley has
published” (1804 Discipline, p. 38). The Sermons and Notes were
widely distributed already, and obviously did not need (and
could not have allowed) quadrennial updating, as did the rules of
discipline. This is the simple and transparent reason why they
were not bound with the Discipline—not because they were
rejected. Since the Articles were much shorter, they could easily
and conveniently be bound with the Discipline, but that does not
imply that they were distinctly preferred or had higher
constitutional status.25

The preamble of the 1808 conference began on a rigorously
conserving tone: “It is of greatest importance that the doctrines,
form of government, and general rules of the United societies in
America be preserved sacred and inviolable,” and it was precisely
for this purpose that the constitution was written.26 This
preamble shows that matters of doctrine were not being debated
at this time, but were generally understood and viewed in a
settled way as being “established standards of doctrine.” Such a
consensus could not have occurred quickly. Consensual recep-
tion does not develop or become “established” in a single month
or year, but only over decades, and this had in fact occurred during the years between 1773 and 1808. What other understanding of “doctrine” could have been assumed than that which had been consensually shared for thirty-five years in the case of the *Sermons* and *Notes* and twenty-four years in the case of the Articles?

The language of the First Rule contained two clauses: (1) the first clause specified the “articles of religion” received from Wesley, as distinguished from the older criteria, (2) the “standards of doctrine,” which by long consensual tradition had been textually specified as the *Sermons* and *Notes*. These two clauses conceptually distinguished the two norms of classical Methodist doctrine: the tightly constructed twenty-five Articles of Religion, as distinguished from the much longer four volumes of *Sermons* and extensive *Notes on the New Testament*. Leading constitutional historians (McTyeire, Tigert, Neely, and Buckley) have subsequently read the rule as indicating this “duplex norm”—first clause: “The General Conference shall not revoke, alter, or change our articles of religion”; second clause: “nor establish any new standards or rules of doctrine, contrary to our present and existing and established standards of doctrine.”

Heitzenrater has argued that the entire Restrictive Rule refers only to the Articles of Religion. Yet if the intent of the 1808 conference had been to specify a single document, the Articles of Religion, as the only norm, it would not have required two clauses, but one. Under Heitzenrater’s hypothesis, the second clause becomes redundant, and one is left with the curiosity of why the constitution writers not only added it, but rigorously required that it not be changed. The major clue is the fact that the second clause is not stated in the singular (so as to imply a single document) but in the plural (implying more than one document of doctrinal standards). If one hypothesizes that “standards of doctrine” refers to the Articles of Religion alone, one is left with the dubious alternative that the plural—“standards”—refers to each separate article of the Articles of Religion. To the contrary, the rule required two clauses to convey the two dimensions of Methodist doctrinal accountability: first, to the teachings of the Reformation (Articles), and secondly, to the more specific Methodist teachings (Wesley’s *Sermons* and *Notes*). It is precisely
these doctrinal norms that the 1808 conference was determined to protect and ensure that they could not be casually revoked.

The two clauses can be compared and contrasted as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ARTICLES OF RELIGION</th>
<th>SERMONS AND NOTES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confessional form</td>
<td>Homiletical-exegetical form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ecumenical consensus</td>
<td>The Methodist emphasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglican theology</td>
<td>Wesleyan themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concise</td>
<td>Five volumes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criterion for trial</td>
<td>Criteria for preaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shorter history (as amended in 1784) of consensual reception</td>
<td>Longer history (since 1763) of consensual reception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textually specified by the constitution</td>
<td>Implied by the constitution by &quot;plain historical inference&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The vast majority of leading American Methodist constitutional historians have affirmed the two-clause interpretation of the First rule. Buckley stated the principal reason why: "The Articles of Religion, so far as they go, contain only the faiths of universal Protestant and evangelical Christendom, and the ‘other existing and established Standards’ contain, in addition, those Methodist teachings which in substance or mode of statement are not universal among Protestant evangelical Churches." 28

Why did the question of doctrinal standards not recur in each subsequent General Conference? Because once settled in 1808, having entered unalterably in the constitution of American Methodism, there was no need (and indeed no way) to return to it, unless one wished to try to amend the constitution. If one takes the odd view that the lack of mention of the Sermons and Notes in General Conference Minutes constitutes deliberate dissent from them, then the same criteria must be applied to other ideas acted upon once in the General Conference minutes and then not mentioned again.

Heitzenrater has argued that "at every point where the Methodist Episcopal Church had an opportunity to reiterate and reaffirm its allegiance to Wesley's Sermons and Notes specifically as doctrinal standards after 1785, it either consciously deleted the
STANDARDS OF DOCTRINE

references, failed to mention them, or voted to the contrary." Yet this claim assumes that the Sermons and Notes are not already embedded in the First Restrictive Rule, an assumption as yet insufficiently debated. Heitzenrater stands almost alone among major American Methodist constitutional interpreters of the last hundred years in this assumption. The alternative hypothesis is more plausible: that the very purpose of the First Restrictive Rule was to guarantee that these established standards (Sermons, Notes, and more recently Articles) not be amended. Hence, once acted upon, as it was so definitively in 1808, the matter of doctrinal standards needed no further mention or definition because this matter was decided as absolutely and irrevocably as any constitution-making body could possibly act—i.e., by strictly limiting the ability of the legislative process to amend these "established standards of doctrine."

Heitzenrater has argued that the 1816 General Conference's reference to "established articles of faith" was a reference to the Articles of Religion alone, and not the Sermons or Notes. But that could not be the case, because of the very nature of the issues to which they were attending, which focused specifically upon the defense of distinctively Wesleyan doctrines not even mentioned in the Articles of Religion. Among these doctrines "as defended by Wesley," the following were cited by the General Conference Committee of Safety: the doctrines of "the direct witness of the Holy Spirit, and of holiness of heart and life, or gospel sanctification." Hence, when the General Conference approved the resolution of the Committee of Safety, it could not have been limiting its view of "established articles of faith" strictly to the Articles of Religion.

Since more than sixty editions of Wesley's Sermons on Several Occasions were published in the years 1784-1860 (the years in which some have argued that Wesley was decreasing in influence and virtually ignored in American Methodism, when these sermons presumably were not regarded as binding doctrinal standards), why were so many editions required? Why was Wesley so avidly read? Why were most of these editions published under the official direction and with the standard publishing houses of the Methodist Episcopal Church? Would General Conferences that had denigrated or demoted the
sermons to secondary status continue to issue, finance, and distribute so many editions?

Similarly, Wesley’s *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* were republished frequently in the American connection, specifically in the following years: 1791, 1806, 1812, 1818, 1837, 1839, 1841, 1844, 1845, 1846, 1847, 1850, 1853, 1854, 1856, and 1856-60. These editions were largely published under the direction of the General Conference and issued by the same presses that printed the *Sermons* and *Discipline*. Other editions of the *Notes* were available during this period through other presses in Canada, England, and Ireland. The *Notes* were republished in the United States during this period as frequently as they were in Britain, where no one doubts that the *Sermons* and *Notes* were doctrinal standards for the Wesleyan connections.

Heitzenrater has argued that after 1784 American Methodists thought their constitutive documents, inclusive of doctrinal statements, were “significantly different in content from the British counterparts.” Resolutions from the General Conferences of 1820 and 1824 indicate the opposite: that “Wesleyan Methodism is one everywhere—one in its doctrine, its disciplines, its usages.” The affinity of American, Canadian, and British Methodist doctrinal standards was repeatedly reaffirmed and publicly stated by actions of American General Conferences. In 1820 the conference affirmed its doctrinal affinity with British and Canadian Methodists: “The British and American connections have now mutually recognized each other as one body of Christians, sprung from a common stock, holding the same doctrines” (italics added). If American and British Methodists had viewed themselves as possessing two different standards (as Heitzenrater argues), then these official actions would have been wholly inappropriate. If there was only one recognized international standard, as it appears from these quotations, then the *Sermons* and *Notes* must have continued as American doctrinal standards during this disputed period.

Heitzenrater rests much of his case upon one curious incident: the defeat of Francis Ward’s motion during the General Conference of 1808. He regards this as “conclusive evidence that the General Conference did not understand its standards of doctrine to include Wesley’s *Sermons* and *Notes*.” Francis Ward, it should be noted, was the assistant secretary of the conference,
and could have been himself writing down the minutes that we now have in manuscript. On Tuesday, May 24th, 1808, at 3:00 p.m., it was "moved by Francis Ward and seconded by Lewis Myers, that it shall be considered as the sentiment of this Conference, that Mr. Wesley's Notes on the New Testament, his four first volumes of Sermons, and Mr. Fletcher's Checks, in their general tenor, contain the principal doctrines of Methodism, and a good explanation of our articles of religion; and that this sentiment be recorded on our Journal without being incorporated in the Discipline." We do not know whether or how the motion was debated, or what particular reasons led to its defeat. In the original manuscript of the Minutes of the conference at the United Methodist Archives at Drew University, however, it is noted as "lost," and there is a note in the margin in the same hand: "NB: It was voted that this motion be struck out of the Journal." The motion has a single large "X" through it. That is all we know, with no further explanation.

The fact that it was not included in the printed proceedings of the conference does not, as Heitzenrater assumes, imply outright hostility to the tenor of the motion. It is clear that the conference did not accept the motion, but it is not clear why.

For what possible reasons could the conference have preferred not to accept this motion at this time in this form? Heitzenrater concludes: "The General Conference was not willing to go on record defining its standards of doctrine in terms of documents other than the Articles. . . ." Is this the only possible or self-evident conclusion? If the conference members had meant their defeat of the Ward motion to be a publicly declared positive rejection of its entire substance and intent, they would have been much more likely to have left it in the record as acted upon, as Albert Outler has suggested. The X-ing suggests that there was a consensus that preferred the whole affair expunged, left in limbo, or to be returned to later after more study and reflection.

There are at least seven possible alternative reasons for the deletion of this motion other than the Heitzenrater hypothesis. We do not know which one or combination of these hypotheses might be correct, because we do not have enough written evidence, but there are numerous plausible possibilities, of which the first and last are the most credible:

(1) Ward's motion was quite likely rejected because the
conference did not wish to get into a highly controversial debate about Fletcher. The motion asked for an enormous innovation never before suggested, to my knowledge, in the previous literature on Methodist doctrinal standards: that Fletcher be inserted into the well-known list of traditionally received standards provided by the deeds and conference minutes since 1773. This would have been a controversial proposal at any time, but at this delicate time, it was quite impossible. The motion asked that the constitution protect against any future amendment not only those doctrines contained in Wesley's *Sermons* and *Notes* but also those in "Fletcher's Checks"! The Fletcher issue alone could have been enough to defeat it. For it constituted an intrusive innovation totally inconsistent with the rigorously conserving spirit evident elsewhere in the conference.

There are other potential reasons that a motion of this sort might be defeated: (2) It could be that the motion was rejected not because it was too strong, but too weak; or (3) not because it was too decisively Wesleyan, but not decisive enough; or (4) because it was proposed as a mere "sentiment of the conference," only to be recorded as such, and hence could be taken frivolously. (5) It could be that it was simply thought to be unnecessary, and so obvious as not to require formal action; or (6) it could have been regarded as poorly worded, or inappropriately formulated.

The more likely explanation, however, in addition to the Fletcher issue, is (7) that it was exquisitely ill-timed. The conference was not ready at that time to act on such a broadly stated and potentially controversial, innovative motion made without due consideration, referral, and deliberate study. At this critical stage of constitution-building, where many votes had been extremely close, alliances fragile, and many issues yet to come up, the deliberative body understandably may have felt (without any demeaning of theological debate) that it was more prudent not even to enter this hazardous territory and try to settle upon delicate language at this stage. Plenty was on its plate yet to be debated.

The conference had convened on May 6, and this motion did not come up until very late, May 24th, 1808, the nineteenth day. During those days many motions had been moved, debated, and defeated. Numerous amendments were made and lost. A motion to determine whether Coke would continue in Europe till called
by the annual conferences lost by 54 to 67. Numerous motions were made and then withdrawn. Many motions were made with no action reported in the minutes. Soule’s motion for electing presiding elders was defeated 53 to 61. On May 24, the Restrictive Rules were at length debated, and the hapless Ward motion came up in the afternoon session after the language of the Restrictive Rules had been settled upon. All of this is reported in order to show that the Ward motion for a change in doctrinal standards (to include Fletcher) was too much to handle under these sensitive circumstances. It was defeated and stricken, I believe, because it innovatively and abruptly required that Fletcher be added to the received texts of doctrinal standards, and because it was very poorly timed, but not for the reason that Heitzenrater gives—that the conference was deliberately rejecting Wesley’s Sermons and Notes as binding doctrinal standards. Had that been the case, there surely would have been some residue of debate.

Many times a motion is tabled or defeated without any implication that every clause or aspect of that motion is rejected. If such reasoning were consistently applied (that loss of a motion implies rejection of each particular clause of that motion), then a deliberative body could be immobilized because it would know that its rejection of a single clause of a motion might be interpreted as implying the rejection of all other clauses. Sometimes ambiguous or nonconsensual wording in a single clause may cause a deliberative body to defeat a proposal at hand, in order to make a new start, especially if it seems inappropriate to wrangle about it under those circumstances. Heitzenrater argues that the defeat of Ward’s motion implied a rejection of each clause of that motion, instead of its single most troublesome clause—that on Fletcher.

Heitzenrater’s historical speculation focuses primarily on why the conference struck the Ward motion from the record. Could it have been struck precisely for the reason of avoiding the kind of speculation that has been advanced? Heitzenrater bases much of his historical argument upon a motion that was stricken intentionally from the record quite probably to circumvent precisely this sort of uninhibited conjecture as to its meaning. Therefore is it not rudely transgressing upon the “intent” of the American Methodist founders to bring this stricken motion again
to the center stage of awareness, let alone to make it a linchpin of a new hypothesis with far-reaching ramifications?

Since there is no record of the discussion surrounding this issue, and since it was stricken from the record (the only instance of such action in the whole volume of the manuscript Journal), would it not be more prudent and respectful of the delegates' intent if we would also avoid such speculation? And particularly not to base a major reversal of a long-held constitutional interpretation on such a speculation?

Asbury later wrote that the conference of 1808 had perpetuated in constitutional form and language "the good old Methodist doctrine and discipline." How could the "old Methodist doctrine" have been perpetuated if the conference, according to this conjecture, was avidly resisting or circumventing Wesley's Sermons and Notes? What could Asbury have meant if the conference had been "reticent" to specify Wesley's writings as doctrinal standards?

Heitzenrater's attempt to reconstruct the intent of the constitution writers leaves out exactly half of the duplex norm of the First Rule. It provides a dubious conjectural basis upon which the Sermons and Notes might quietly be revoked as doctrinal standards 179 years later. No matter how diligently the General Conferences of 1808 and 1832 tried to protect the First Restrictive Rule, it is now ironically in danger of being subtly reinterpreted in a way that the writers would have found inconceivable, and in a way that the central tradition of constitutional interpretation has repeatedly rejected. Heitzenrater speculates on "the main intention" (p. 16) of the 1808 General Conference as if it were to block any legally binding use of Wesley's Sermons and Notes—at best a conjectural, at worst a projective hypothesis that stands contrary to virtually everything else known about the constitution writers.

Heitzenrater has argued that the case against the Sermons and Notes appears to be an objective, historical argument characterized by "careful consideration" of evidence. On closer inspection, it appears to espouse a hermeneutical predisposition which guides the selection of data to be investigated. The historical case is weakened by three deficits: (1) Its most important conclusions are based upon an argument from silence. (2) Its reasoning is focused speculatively upon discerning the
STANDARDS OF DOCTRINE

intent of founders in constitutional documents when documentary evidence for that is lacking. (3) The argument concentrates attention upon highly selective portions of the written record. It is hardly by accident that the argument concludes by conjecturally interpreting the intent of the language of early General Conference actions in a way that tends toward the limitation of binding doctrinal standards to their slenderest documentary ground.

Suppose one were to ask Asbury or Bangs or Timothy Merritt or Jesse Peck (all of whom wrote during the “disputed period”) whether Wesley’s Sermons and Notes were standards of doctrine among Methodists of the early nineteenth century; could one imagine them answering with Heitzenrater: They were “clearly never considered to be standards of doctrine” after 1784? If this assertion applies only to trials, that should be clarified. But if more than that, it strains the imagination, forcing one to hypothesize that some other expression of interest predisposes this hermeneutical bent. The underlying hermeneutic possibly may be explained by reference to the contemporary situation of ecclesial pluralism, and the tendency toward theological indifference (which Heitzenrater strongly denies concerning his own view and intent, but which exists among those to whom he is apparently willing to accommodate, who wish to reduce the formal force of traditional Wesleyan influence within United Methodism).

Heitzenrater argues for a sharp distinction between “legal standards of doctrine” and “the traditionally accepted doctrinal writings.” The former he thinks should include only the Articles of Religion, “the standards of doctrine.” The latter he expands broadly to include not only Wesley’s Sermons and Notes but “the broad range of Wesley’s works” and “the writings of Fletcher,” but all of these function merely “in a supplemental and illustrative role,” serving not as “doctrinal standards” but “as exemplary illustrations of the Methodist doctrinal heritage.” There are five principal objections to this distinction: (1) The proposed distinction is an invention of Heitzenrater that has little precedent in the previous 179 years of constitutional interpretation. (2) It needlessly adds to the corpus of “traditionally accepted doctrinal standards” the “writings of Fletcher” which have never gained sufficient consent to be given equal categorial status with Wesley’s Sermons and Notes. (3) It takes away from the Sermons
and Notes the long-accepted status of "Standard Sermons" or "established doctrinal standards" and reduces them to "statements." 45 (4) It neglects to distinguish the special place of the Sermons and Notes as doctrinal guides within the larger Wesleyan corpus. (5) Having invented this questionable distinction, he then projects it back upon the history of constitutional interpretation, and regards virtually all major previous interpreters of constitutional Methodism as "confused" and in error. 46 The twofold distinction is insufficiently discriminating and descriptive.

To avert these problems, a threefold definition is more in accord with the facts of the received tradition, which would show that there are two types of doctrinal standards protected by the constitution: (1) the concise standard that stands alone and separable only in the case of the trial of preachers (the Articles of Religion), and (2) the broader standard that applies to preaching and interpretation ("our present, existing and established standards of doctrine," the Sermons and Notes). In addition to these constitutionally protected standards of doctrine, there is (3) a third category of other writings of doctrinal instruction received by wide usage, that includes the Six Tracts printed at various times in the Disciplines of 1784-1808, the remainder of Wesley's Works, the Wesleyan hymns, the doctrine contained in the "Large Minutes," and the catechism.

All Disciplines from 1972 to 1984, since the Plan of Union, have contained a paragraph that cannot easily be circumvented by subsequent General Conference action—a statement of fact concerning what the Plan of Union decided:

In the Plan of Union for The United Methodist Church, the Preface to the Methodist Articles of Religion and the Evangelical United Brethren Confession of Faith explains that both had been accepted as doctrinal standards for the new church. It was declared that "they are thus deemed congruent if not identical in their doctrinal perspectives, and not in conflict." Additionally, it was stipulated that although the language of the First Restrictive Rule has never been formally defined, Wesley's Sermons and Notes were specifically included in our present existing and established standards of doctrine by plain historical inference. (1984 Discipline, 67)

This paragraph is a simple, factual report describing accurately the premise of the Plan of Union and its reasoning about doctrinal
standards. The Plan of Union cannot now be legislatively refashioned by a subsequent commission of a General Conference, for the Plan of Union brought together the constitutions of two bodies so as to form a new church. Even if the phrase is omitted by a later General Conference, that does not revise the terms of union. If a General Conference should attempt substantively to redo the Plan of Union (which is highly unlikely), that would eventuate, doubtless, in a complex series of judicial challenges.

With few exceptions, the only portions of the Discipline of 1808 that have been retained without change are those protected by the Restrictive Rules. Almost everything else has been repeatedly tinkered with, often every four years. The constitution writers of 1808 grasped an early version of Murphy's Law, that "anything that can be amended will be amended." We can be grateful that they had sufficient sagacity to prevent our doctrinal experimentation and superficial "improvements" for 179 years. But now a new situation has emerged. The Rule may be able to be circumvented, not by amendment, but by an imaginative reinterpretation of history.

NOTES

1. For the full text of the deed, see Robert Emory, History of the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church (New York: Lane & Sanford, 1844), pp. 70, 71.
2. Although technically disputed as to number according to various editions, whether forty-three, forty-four, fifty-two, or fifty-three, at least forty-three are undisputed.
4. Minutes of the Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the Years 1773-1828 (New York: Mason & Lame, 1840), vol. 1, Qns. 1, 2, p. 3. Hereafter this source is referred to as MAC.
7. Buckley, p. 163.
8. Minutes of Several Conversations . . . Composing a Form of Discipline, 1784 (Philadelphia: Charles Cist, 1785), Qn. 73, p. 27.
9. Heitzenrater, p. 11.
10. Tigert, pp. 544, 548, 549, and 545, resp.
17. Heitzenrater, pp. 9-12.
20. Tigges, pp. 142 ff.
23. Letter from John Wesley, received by the conference of 1783; text in Lee, History, p. 85.
27. The phrase "duplex norm" comes from Albert Outler's 1958 Handbook of Selected Creeds and Confessions, a mimeographed document used in classes at Perkins School of Theology, Dallas, Tex., pt. 4, p. 6.
37. Manuscript of the 1808 General Conference Journal, p. 68.
38. Heitzenrater, p. 17.
42. Heitzenrater, p. 7.
44. The quotes come from Heitzenrater, pp. 20, 21.
46. Heitzenrater, pp. 21-23. The interpreters I have in mind are Baker, McTyeire, Neely, Buckley, and Outler, as well as the writers of the Plan of Union and the 1972-84 Disciplines.
God's peace is offered wherever we experience violence and brokenness in human life, and God's call for us to be instruments of peace comes to us in every such arena of our experience.

Few pastors doubt that the church is called to be an instrument of God's peace in a strife-filled world. The dilemmas come where the rubber hits the road. How can a church deal with global peace concerns without seeming to be too "political"? How can a pastor preach peace without being tuned out . . . or losing a few pledges? How can we move from generalities (God's love for the whole world) to specifics (how to reconcile the United States and the Soviet Union)? And what, after all, can a congregation possibly do to make a difference?

The news is good: the local church can effectively equip Christians to be peacemakers, and pastors can exercise a leadership role without being tarred and feathered. That is more than a wish or a guess. Over the past five years, there has been an explosion of peacemaking ministry in our churches. We have a track record. We know some things about what works and what does not. We now know that a local church can get involved with even global-sized issues without loss of member support and enthusiasm. Indeed, an intentional peacemaking ministry can be a source of congregational renewal.

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OUR BASIC PROBLEM:
PEACEMAKING PERCEIVED AS A FRINGE ACTIVITY

In most congregations, peacemaking is perceived as a matter of social action projects out on the periphery of church life for the few activists who "happen to be into that sort of thing." Given this perception, the "liberal" church is one in which the activists are allowed to "do their thing," while the "conservative" church says "nothing doing!" But both churches are disaster areas for solid peacemaking ministry. Why? Because both see peacemaking merely as a matter of this or that current "issue" rather than as a central call of the gospel. Both make peacemaking an extracurricular activity for churchpeople rather than a required course. Diagram A pictures this view of peacemaking as tangential to congregational life. But since the ministry of reconciliation (a synonym for "peacemaking") is central to the New Testament definition of the church, our challenge is to move toward the image presented in Diagram B. Here peacemaking is understood to be integral to the faith and mission of every congregation.

Diagram A

Diagram B
A THEORETICAL FOUNDATION: PEACEMAKING UNDERSTOOD HOLISTICALLY

The first step in developing a church that takes peacemaking seriously is to interpret such a ministry holistically. By a holistic understanding of peacemaking we mean: God's peace is offered wherever we experience violence and brokenness in human life, and God's call for us to be instruments of peace comes to us in every such arena of our experience. Whether the brokenness is in the self, interpersonal relationships, the family, congregation, community, nation, or international arena, God both offers peace and calls the church to the work of making peace. Such a call can never be for a few activists alone or limited to global-sized concerns. It comes to us in every arena of life and involves the whole church.

Such an understanding of peacemaking is profoundly biblical. Any study of the meaning of shalom and eirene in Scripture leads us from the inner self (“And God's peace, which is far beyond human understanding, will keep your hearts and minds safe in union with Christ Jesus”; Phil. 4:7, Good News translation) to visions of global harmony (“They will hammer their swords into plows and their spears into pruning knives”; Micah 4:3). Church members are exhorted to “preserve the unity which the Spirit gives by means of the peace that binds you together” (Eph. 4:3) and Paul's counsel for personal relationships is to do “everything possible on your part to live in peace with everybody” (Rom. 12:18). The end to Jewish-Gentile hostility, which catches up what we should nowadays call religious, ethnic, and national hostility, is announced in the good news that “Christ himself has brought us peace by making Jews and Gentiles one people. . . . He broke down the wall that separated them and kept them enemies” (Eph. 2:14). Indeed, Christ Jesus is the one who refuses to let us accept the category “enemy” as the final definition of our relationship to any person or group (Matt. 5:43-45).

From inner self to personal relationships to congregation, community, and globe, God works to reunite what is estranged and calls us to be agents of that same reconciliation. Our challenge, then, is to make peacemaking as integral to the life of the congregation as it is to the Scriptures.
A HOLISTIC STYLE OF PEACEMAKING MINISTRY

There is a second sense in which we may speak of a holistic peacemaking ministry. Not only does peacemaking touch every arena of human life in which we experience brokenness, but we do peacemaking through all the usual modes of parish life. We do peacemaking holistically through the church's worship, education, pastoral care, group life, governance, and outreach. Diagram C illustrates the meaning of holistic peacemaking with respect to the arenas of human life; diagram D shows the meaning of holistic peacemaking in relation to the ordinary modes of parish life.

What might a local church peacemaking ministry look like? We can begin to see its outlines by thinking about how peacemaking relates to each of the six modes of ministry listed above.

**Peacemaking and Worship.** We tend to connect peace and worship, if we connect them at all, through special services on special occasions. Though such services are sometimes appropriate, they tend to reinforce the sense of most parishioners that peace concerns are peripheral, occasional, unusual, special, rather than part of the normal and ordinary focus of Christian
worship. We need to work at the regular integration of peacemaking concerns into worship so that they are seen as a natural part of, and not a special supplement to, the regular worship of God's people.

Let me offer an example. I recall the reflections of a Catholic layman that once jumped out at me from the pages of a long-forgotten article. He wrote something like this: "Each Sunday in the Mass we offer the 'prayers of the faithful'. And it suddenly dawned on me that I had never heard a prayer like this: 'That the Soviet Union may enjoy a bounteous harvest, let us pray to the Lord'."

Surely a congregation would be jarred awake by a prayer for a rich Soviet harvest. Yet it ought not to be considered remarkable that Christians pray for strangers and "enemies," for our Lord commands us to do so. Prayers express our understanding of God. And it is hard to resist the conclusion that many Sunday morning prayers are addressed to a family or tribal deity, not to the God of all nations. On an intellectual level, few of us doubt that the biblical God cares as much for the shalom of Volgograd as for that of Atlanta. But our customary worship instills quite a different understanding.

If we can picture, however, a congregation in which, week after week, enemies are prayed for with such specificity as pleas for a good harvest, we can imagine significant congregational growth in global awareness. Imagine intercessions that include not only Mrs. Brown who will undergo surgery next Wednesday morning, but also Mr. Kivitsinsky and Mr. Kampelman who will face one another across a negotiating table in Geneva. Even without "special" peace services, such a regular integration of peacemaking concerns into worship would, over time, effect a shift in the perception of who our God is, who our God cares about, and how we are called to serve such a God.

The same principle applies to preaching: it is more important to integrate peacemaking concerns into sermons regularly than to
preach a special "peace sermon" now and then. Such integration is simply a matter of asking about the social dimensions of the biblical texts. For example, "Christ is our peace, who has made us both one, breaking down the dividing wall of hostility" refers specifically to the overcoming of societal hatreds and separations, namely, those between Jews and Gentiles. Why, then, do so many sermons on this text use illustrations of husbands and wives making up after a spat and so seldom deal with today's societal separations—between white and black, or labor and management, or Nicaragua and the United States? It is not a question of dragging societal and global concerns into the text but simply of explicating these dimensions as they already inhere in the biblical story, and which our individualistic bias causes us to overlook. When we achieve such integration regularly, we will be "preaching peace."

**Peacemaking and Pastoral Care.** At an Iowa workshop on the nuclear arms race, a thirty-three-year-old man introduced himself to the others in the group like this:

I had this nightmare at the age of twelve.
I was at home alone, watching television after school. I was sitting on the floor about five or six feet in front of our large black and white TV when the program was interrupted. The civil defense test pattern took the screen as the familiar screaming alert siren pierced my ears. When the siren ended, a man's voice announced, "This is not a test; I repeat, this is not a test. Russian missiles have been spotted on our radar screens heading toward targets in the United States. We are at war with the U.S.S.R."

At that point I bolted out the front door to the front yard. As I looked to the downtown area of the city, where my parents were at work, I watched a pair of mushroom clouds rise from the horizon. The entire sky turned bright red. At that moment it was totally clear to me that I would never see my parents again and that I was left there alone, totally alone, to die alone.

Dennis Olson had his nightmare in October, 1962, at the height of the Cuban missile crisis. It was vivid enough that twenty-one years later it became his self-introduction to a group of aspiring peacemakers.

This story illustrates why peacemaking is a pastoral care issue. Pastoral care has to do with the ministry of believers to one
another around occasions of joy, hurt, loss, and sorrow. We seldom regard an issue like the nuclear arms race as an occasion for pastoral care; we are more likely to assume that we must “raise the consciousness” of people about the threat. But, as Dennis’s story shows, many of our people have already been affected by the arms race. It has burrowed into their psyches, invaded their dreams, blighted their hopes. In your congregation is someone who, in the 1950s, was taught to “duck and cover” when the ringing school bell warned of a Russian bomber attack. (And who, say some psychiatrists, grew up in the 1960s believing that the adult world was crazy because, despite what the teacher said, he knew very well that hiding under the desk would not save him if “The Bomb” ever fell.) Another member, as a young mother around 1960, got scared when she learned that her babies were drinking strontium 90 in their milk as a result of fallout from atmospheric testing. And, on the other hand, you have a woman in her sixties in your congregation whose first reaction to Hiroshima was “Thank God!” because her husband was somewhere in the Pacific and “The Bomb” meant that the war would be over and he would be coming home.

A pastoral care approach to peacemaking as it relates to the threat of nuclear war might begin, then, with the gathering together of small groups of people simply to tell and hear their stories of what it has meant to them to live in the nuclear age. Where has the threat touched them personally? How has it affected their view of the future? What might their church help them do about it? Such a pastoral approach to peacemaking on an issue of controversy has at least three benefits. First, telling pent-up, unexpressed stories is therapeutic in and of itself. Second, people tend to listen respectfully, sensitively, to one another’s stories; that respect then carries over to the church’s wrestling with controversial questions of how to be involved with such issues. Third, people who are enabled to express their own feelings and experiences are afterwards far more receptive than before to new learnings. Clergy who have never considered themselves “activists” but rather “pastors” need to reflect on ways to deal pastorally with international as well as interpersonal peacemaking concerns.

Peacemaking and Christian Education. Our first response in the church to almost any peacemaking concern—from the
Sanctuary movement to domestic violence to dealing with controversy to the biblical meaning of peace—is to engage in study. Many churches have a tradition in Christian education that makes study a logical place to begin. The following are four marks of effective peacemaking education:

First: it is broad-based and balanced, covering the gamut of peacemaking issues from the violence within persons to the violence between nations. A balanced diet will be best digested and most nourishing to the congregation. It will also help defuse the critics who are quick to charge that “all you ever talk about is politics.”

Second: it provides “covenant group” opportunities. The limitations of the Sunday morning adult study hour (which usually boils down to about 40 minutes) are overcome in groups of six to twelve adults who enter into a covenant together to meet in homes for a given number of sessions, who take the “inward journey” of prayer and Bible study as seriously as the “outward journey” of studying a particular issue, such as policy toward Central America, South Africa divestment, domestic violence, or whatever. “Lone wolf” peacemakers burn out very quickly; such small support groups are essential for “staying power.”

Third: effective peacemaking education builds in active responses to what is learned. One church, for example, offered a series of Sunday morning adult classes on the nuclear arms race—a quite traditional format. However, they invited candidates for Congress to the last two sessions, asking them to respond to five questions about national security and relations between the United States and the Soviet Union. The candidate who finally ended up in Congress began by saying, “I read your questions and didn’t know how to answer them, so I did some research, and I have a paper here I’d like to read to you.” That class had prompted a future member of Congress to do homework he had never done before. And because of their questions, their obvious concern and preparation, his door remained open to them and a continuing relationship between congregation and politician developed. Few members of that church would fall for the glum notion that “there’s nothing we can do” about global concerns. Their story illustrates a basic principle of good peace education: we must always offer learners some opportunity, however modest, to act on what they have learned.
Finally: good peacemaking education includes the children. Church school teachers and parents are commonly heard to wonder, "How can we expect races or nations to get along if Jane and Johnny can’t even share a book or toy without pushing and shoving?" Common sense tells us that the roots of violence grow in the soil of childhood . . . and that childhood is the time to start pulling them up. Denominational peacemaking programs are offering more and more resources for peacemaking education with children.

**Peacemaking and Group Life in the Church.** A common mistake in efforts aimed at creating a peacemaking emphasis in the congregation is to ignore the "captive audiences" in already existing groups. For example, in many churches a women’s association has a reputation for solid study of world missions. Perhaps that is the place to get a first hearing for a denominational emphasis on the relation between faith and our nation’s policies toward Central America. Do you have a youth group? Why not schedule a series of programs on the church’s historic stances toward war—pacificism, crusade, just war theory—concluding with the question of military service and conscientious objection, using a filmstrip like “Every Heart Beats True”? Or maybe a young couples’ club is the best context for teaching skills of conflict resolution, or reaching out ecumenically to form a local chapter of the national network, Parenting for Peace and Justice. These are but a few examples of how we can engage the parish with peace issues through the accepted and regular gatherings of its life.

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One major reason why churches avoid involvement with pressing issues of the world outside is that they fear controversy and conflict.

**Peacemaking and Church Governance.** One of the most important questions a pastor can ask is how sound peacemaking attitudes can be expressed through the church’s governance—its internal structures and methods for making decisions.

One major reason why churches avoid involvement with pressing issues of the world outside is that they fear controversy
and conflict. Such a church will never be able to accept a mission of peacemaking in the community or in global arenas when it cannot deal with its own internal differences. I often think that the most effective peacemaking step a church board could take would be to look at its own unwritten norms for dealing with conflict, most of which emphasize stifling disagreement and keeping a surface calm, and to study healthier patterns. I picture such a board, at the end of a retreat on conflict, explaining to the congregation its conclusion: “Resolved: that from henceforth in this church, conflict shall be regarded as normal, and we therefore will refuse to hide from any of the tough questions the world poses for us. We have learned that we can argue fairly, disagree without clobbering each other, make decisions amid controversy, and hang together as the Body of Christ.” Much of what passes for peacemaking in our churches is merely peacekeeping, a refusal to face up to issues that divide us. But the price of such surface peace is high: the failure of the congregation to address anything that really matters to the human condition. To affirm the inevitability of conflict and to become competent in the skills for handling it is an essential early peacemaking step for any congregation.

Peacemaking and Public Outreach. Since the church does not exist as an end in itself, but as a channel of God’s grace and peace to the world, it is always reaching out to the wider human community in witness and in work with others for the common good. Peacemaking ministries do not end with congregational education but reach out in public witness.

An example: congregational peacemakers may develop strategies for educating the surrounding community. Suppose, for instance, that a covenant group or a peacemaking committee has decided to focus on the question of violence in Central America, and has further concluded that its mission is to enlist support for the Sanctuary movement. That group might find an area map, draw a circle with a five-mile radius, the church being at the center, and then list all the regularly meeting groups within that circle. To such groups—women’s associations, Kiwanis and Rotary clubs, the AAUW and League of Women Voters, etc.—it might send a letter offering to bring a program on Sanctuary to one of their meetings, including a film or slide show, and at no cost. Since every community is full of groups with program
calendars to complete, a small group can, in such a way, exert considerable influence on the thinking of the wider community.

Another outreach suggestion: enlist as many members as possible for public policy advocacy groups, such as Bread for the World, IMPACT, or a denominational legislative network. Because public policy is one crucial way of plowing the biblical vision of shalom into the soil of our own history, we need to identify those church members who are ready to go public with their faith. Most such networks will then send out “action alerts” when letters and phone calls to legislators are likely to have maximum effect. Such invitations to public policy advocacy should probably not be made to all members; the pastor’s role is to help identify those who are ready for such a step. Thus those who are ready to go public are enabled to do so without the fears or antagonisms of others being aroused. But increasing numbers of people are looking for such ways to translate faith concerns into public witness.

VALUES OF A HOLISTIC STYLE OF PEACE MAKING MINISTRY

These reflections about a holistic style of peacemaking ministry have grown out of the experiences of hundreds of Presbyterian congregations over the past several years. This model works. Churches that use it with intentionality grow in peacemaking, some growth being measured by member involvement, financial support, depth of study, and action on controversial questions. Here we may summarize some of the values of the holistic approach.

Church members are offered a variety of entry points into peacemaking. Some persons who are simply unable to cope with issues of nuclear weapons may be very ready to become part of a group studying how to handle conflict in the family. As they discover that a “win-win” style is more fruitful than a “win-lose” approach to conflict at home, they may be encouraged to imagine
what a “win-win” style might do for arms negotiations in Geneva. Thus peacemaking insights in one arena of human conflict may lead to insights about other arenas.

Church members are offered a variety of involvements in peacemaking. From worship to Bible study to small group discipline to community organization to legislative advocacy to holding vigils to civil disobedience: holistic ministries make available a variety of ways of tackling peacemaking in the various arenas of conflict. For example, family peacemaking may include prayers at Sunday worship, intergenerational study units like Peacemaking in the Family with Mister Rogers, creation of a shelter for abused women and children, or lobbying Congress to restore cuts in family assistance programs. Involvement with the crisis in Central America may mean an adult education series, a “go and see” trip to Nicaragua, participation in an “overground” or “underground” railroad for refugees, or signing a “Commitment to Resist.” Different people are ready to take different steps at different times. The holistic approach makes room for them all within the parish program.

Legitimization is given to social involvement. A small minority of church members are self-consciously “activists,” or are involved in the riskier forms of public witness. They are often very lonely. Paradoxically, their modes of witness (picketing at the Federal Building, praying beside the “White Train,” sheltering refugees) find an accepted place within the community of faith when theirs are no longer assumed to be the only activities implied by the word “peacemaking.” Thus a holistic style of peacemaking extends new legitimacy to radical acts of witness, which are now seen as particular peacemaking acts among others in the totality of the church’s witness.

Peacemaking becomes understood as an ongoing pilgrimage. Because it is seen as a central gift and call of God, rather than merely a response to this or that current issue, peacemaking becomes a faith journey. It is not a program for a season, but a call for a lifetime. The “charter” for the Presbyterian church’s Peacemaking Program, “Peacemaking: The Believers’ Calling,” expresses it like this:

How will peace be achieved? By disarmament? Certainly, but not only by disarmament. By global economic reform? Certainly, but not only
by global economic reform. By the change of political structures? Certainly, but not only by the change of political structures. Basically, at the heart, it is a matter of the way we see the world through the eyes of Christ. It is a matter of praying and yearning. It is an inner response to God, who loves the whole world and whose Spirit calls for and empowers the making of peace.

The reason why peacemaking is received as a call in every arena of life, and is expressed through all the modes of the church's ministry, is that it is a matter of conversion, of seeing the whole world through new eyes. Announcing, celebrating, and acting out that conversion is the proper work of the church, and it never ends.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Several resources are mentioned in this article. The twenty-minute slide show, "Every Heart Beats True," is available from the Packard Manse Media Project, Box 450, Stoughton, MA 02072. The address of the National Parenting for Peace and Justice Network is 4144 Lindell Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63108. Peacemaking in the Family with Mister Rogers is a publication of the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, Room 1101, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115. Also recommended are three other Presbyterian Peacemaking Program pieces, a 105-page notebook entitled "Suggestions for Implementing the Commitment to Peacemaking," and two eighteen-page study guides, "Dealing with Conflict in the Congregation" and "How Beautiful upon the Mountains: A Resource for Peacemaking and Evangelism in the Congregation." Write for a listing of all Peacemaking Program resources in print. Another useful handbook is "Peacemaking and the Community of Faith: A Handbook for Congregations," available from the Fellowship of Reconciliation, Box 271, Nyack, NY 10960. The pastoral letter of the United Methodist Council of Bishops, "In Defense of Creation: The Nuclear Crisis and a Just Peace," may be ordered from the Cokesbury Service Center, Box 801, Nashville, TN 37202, at $25 per 100. A "Foundation Document" of ninety-six pages, amplifying the topics in the letter, is available for $3.25, and a forty-page "Guide for Study and Action" for $1.95.
Any study of lections from Acts must inevitably involve study of Luke as well. But where does one begin preparation for such a series? Here is a suggestion that will help the preacher get back in touch with the oral character of Scripture and the vividness of the narratives of Luke-Acts. Before reading further in this or any other resource, read straight through Luke-Acts, both volumes, aloud. (This works better if you are a member of a lection study group and you can read aloud to each other.) Taste the flavor of the stories, the speeches, the entire flow. Then read through again, and this time look and listen for themes and for the way in which Luke makes use of the Hebrew Scriptures. Spend some time, after reading, in reflection. Jot down ideas, images, connections that occur to you. Get the feel of the whole. Let the broad sweep of the narrative stir you as though you were encountering it for the first time. Next, read and reread the individual lections (aloud and to others as well as privately and silently), move into the original setting of each lection.
imaginatively, letting each come alive inside you. Then, simply live with each for a time; carry it around with you as you visit and listen to your people, as you watch the news, read the newspaper, interact with your family and parishioners. Live with it until you begin to “wear it.” Finally, let some personal story emerge within you, a story that has surfaced because of your involvement with the text. Let your story and the story in the Scripture intersect so that the Scripture becomes more truly your own. It is possible this will be a story that will become an illustration for your sermon. Whether you use it in that way or not, it will inform what you do preach and increase your own sense of personal energy and identification with the text. These initial experiences can make all the weeks of this series more exciting for you and your congregation.

A second stage in preparation may well be to ask the question: what is Luke’s aim in Acts? A review of biblical scholarship makes clear that, even though there are similarities between Luke and Acts, there are also discrepancies. For example, Erwin R. Goodenough calls attention to two such discrepancies: (1) the Gospel picture of the “great teacher of parables and ethics” does not appear in Acts; (2) the Gospel gives the story of the institution of the Lord’s Supper, but Acts does not record any instance of its celebration. When Goodenough compares the picture of Paul in Acts with what is known of Paul in his letters, he finds even greater contrasts.¹

It is evident from these brief examples that Luke’s purpose in Acts was not to write a precise, accurate historical or biographical account of the movement of Christianity from Jerusalem to Rome, although such geographical movement is a part of the ordering of the book. What, then, may have been his aim or aims?² In its preface to Acts, the Oxford Annotated Bible states:

Luke’s purpose was to awaken faith by showing the triumphant progress of the Good News and to defend Christians against the charge that they were destructive of Jewish institutions and a troublesome element in the empire. But he had also an interest in history for its own sake and in the men and women of the story, in the details of lodging, entertainment, and travel, and all that constitutes local color. From every point of view, the New Testament would be infinitely poorer without this first book of church history.³

Why would “the New Testament be infinitely poorer without this first book of church history,” given its obvious inaccuracies? Jacob Jervell may give the clearest answer to this question in his
In all the essays in Luke and the People of God the central theme is how Luke deals with ecclesiology, the question of the identity of a church which is heir to the promises given to Israel, a church which claims to be Israel and yet still includes uncircumcised Gentiles within its membership. Alienation of Jewish Christians after the influx of Gentiles into the church and rumors about Paul provide the problems Luke attempts to resolve for his readers. (p. 17)

In response to those who would use Paul against Jewish Christians, Luke writes about a Paul who is Jewish to the core, who is faithful to the law, and a Pharisee. He writes about "a church which is heir to the promises given to Israel." He writes about ecclesiology and theology; he even writes about homiletics—about preaching. Every lection in this series either is a part of a sermon or reports the results of a sermon. We are introduced to Luke's portrayal of Peter preaching, the results of Peter's sermon, and Stephen stoned as a result of his sermon. These are Luke's representations, to be sure, and Luke's words in the sermons, but they are constructed with a purpose: to demonstrate the identity of Israel and of the church and the nature of the gospel as preached in early tradition. Jervell says:

From the very outset, missionary preaching contained the following elements: the actual gospel message preached by the missionaries, mention of the missionaries who brought the gospel, and mention of people from other parts of the world who had received the gospel. The missionaries and congregations were from the very beginning part of the "gospel"; no "naked" kerygma ever existed. (p. 15)

Jervell's view is crucial for this study of Acts and is somewhat of a departure from earlier scholarship in Acts, which seems to favor the idea that Christianity becomes the true Israel after God rejects the Jews. Jervell's position is summarized in the following:

Luke never had any conception of the church as the new or true Israel. Luke is rather concerned to show that when the gospel was preached, the one people of God, Israel, was split in two. . . . Those Jews who do not accept the gospel are purged from Israel; the history of the people of God, of the one and only Israel, continues among those obedient Jews who believe in Jesus. The promises given to Israel are being fulfilled among the Jewish Christians. . . . These Jews bring the gospel to the Gentiles, thus fulfilling God's promises to Israel that Gentiles would join with them at the end of time. (p. 15)
HOMILETICAL RESOURCES

It is extremely important for Luke to demonstrate that not all Jews rejected Jesus; instead, many received him and were baptized. Those Jews who believed were the true or the new Israel, and by joining themselves to the believing Jews, Gentile believers participate in the fulfillment of God’s promises to Israel.

In Acts, the opportunity to believe was extended primarily through preaching. And, as has been noted, “when the gospel was preached, the one people of God, Israel, was split in two.” When Peter preached at Pentecost, just this happened. Thousands, approximately three thousand, of those who listened to Peter received his work and were baptized. This was the beginning of missionary preaching; by a Jew, to a Jewish audience; and thousands of Jews repented and were baptized. It is consistent with Luke’s purpose to give recognition to those believing Jews who formed the true Israel, who brought the gospel to the Gentiles. It is also consistent with that purpose to demonstrate that there were also Jews who rejected Jesus. This some did forcibly and violently as in the stoning of Stephen. But according to Jarvell, Luke’s view is that giving Jews the opportunity to accept or reject the gospel was required before the gospel was brought to the Gentiles, in further fulfillment of God’s promises to Israel.

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 2:14a, 22-32

The church, sharing in the promises of salvation made to Israel, stands as witness to the Resurrection.

Here we are. It is the Sunday after Easter, a letdown for almost everyone. Attendance is down; expectations are down; energy is certainly down. There was so much of a buildup toward Easter music, Easter pageantry, Easter sermon. It feels over, but it is not. This is the second Sunday of Easter and another sermon has to be preached. Here is a lection from Acts that is itself a part of a sermon—the sermon Peter preached at Pentecost. You remember the setting as Luke tells the story. It was the day of Pentecost and some amazing things had taken place. All of the disciples were together in one place when suddenly there was a great wind that seemed to fill everything and tongues of fire appeared on each of the disciples. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages.
Now this took place in Jerusalem, and dwelling in Jerusalem were devout Jews "from every nation under heaven," and these devout Jews spoke many different languages. Drawn by the sounds they heard, they rushed together in great bewilderment because they suddenly realized they were listening to words they could hear and understand in their own tongues. Here were people from Galilee praising God, it seemed, in a multitude of languages! Some of these Jews questioned what it meant; others accused the disciples of being drunk. It was in response to this accusation that Peter stood up to speak.

His sermon, as composed by Luke, begins in Acts 2:14b and ends with verse 40. Our lection, which is only a brief portion of that sermon, omits the first part (that part is reserved for the Pentecost lection) and begins with verse 22.

Eduard Schweizer has analyzed and compared selected speeches or sermons that appear in Acts, five attributed to Peter and three to Paul. It seems certain from Schweizer's analysis that all were composed by Luke and that the five by Peter and the first by Paul have very similar structures. For example, Schweizer observes that four of the six begin with direct address, followed in some with an appeal for attention. Three of the sermons point out a misunderstanding on the part of the audience; five begin with a quotation from the Hebrew Scriptures. All contain christological statements, and five give scriptural proof for what is said, specifically references to David. In every one of the six there is a proclamation of salvation, and in three of them this includes a call to repentance. There are other similarities and, of course, some differences; however, this should serve to demonstrate a fairly set form for missionary preaching according to Luke. The sermon in the lection exhibits this form.

What portions of this schema are present in verses 22-23? In 22a, there is what Schweizer identifies as a "new address and a new appeal for attention" (p. 208). Peter says, "People of Israel, hear these words ..." This is followed by a christological section (vv. 22b-24), and this, in turn, is followed by a scriptural proof section (vv. 25-31) in which David is referred to and quoted. Verse 32 picks up the christological section again, almost repeating verse 24. The best of missionary preaching today may well take this model in directly addressing a specific audience, claiming its attention, directing that attention to Christ, and supporting what is said with illustrations and examples from Scripture.
But saying all this does not capture what Luke conveys of a sense of excitement and movement in the scene in Jerusalem: thousands of people jostling each other, milling about, questioning the strange behavior of the disciples; then Peter and the eleven standing in their midst and Peter's voice rising and growing in strength as he warms to his subject. He is very clear to whom he speaks: "People of Israel." It is the beginning of the missionary proclamation. They are in Jerusalem and the gospel must be preached first in Jerusalem to Jews. The people of God, the people of Israel must hear first, must be given first opportunity to repent. Peter reminds them, once he has their attention, that they themselves know of Jesus of Nazareth and the works God did through him in their midst. Then, and this is important to Luke’s theology, Peter tells them this Jesus was "delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God. . . ." For Luke, all that has happened and all that will happen is according to the "definite plan" of God. Rome is not responsible. Rome was not in control; God is in control.

God is in control; Rome is not responsible, but "this Jesus, . . . you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless people." That is direct preaching. Those who listen share the guilt of those who handed Jesus over to the pagan "lawless" Romans. Peter exhibits no compunction about laying "guilt trips" on his listeners. What was Peter feeling? Anger? That accusation can be read aloud in such a way that anger is expressed. Sorrow? Perhaps a combination of the two. Conviction and passion are two elements often missing in contemporary preaching. Both of these seem to have been present to a marked degree in Peter’s Pentecost sermon. He cared about what he was saying and he spoke with a sense of urgency. You killed him. . . .

"But God raised him up." It "was not possible" for death to hold him. And why was it not possible? Because God raised him up, and Scripture provides proof that this was the way it was to be. Peter quotes from Ps. 16:8-11 and tells them that David, since he was a prophet, knew he spoke of the Christ who was to come—even this Jesus whom God raised up, “and of that we all are witnesses.” Did Peter turn at this point and gesture to include all the disciples who had been accused of being drunk? It was as though he said to those thousands of listeners, "I speak to you, but not I alone. Look at the strength, at how we stand together. We are all witnesses. See and feel the power of the witness we make together.”
A young man preached a sermon in a basic preaching class. His text was Acts 5:27-32, a text in which Peter speaks much as he does in the lesson we are considering. Peter's courage and strength had captured the imagination of the young man. As a result he preached in a way, with a power, he had not previously demonstrated. He said:

As I began to read this statement and others Peter had made, I realized that for Peter everything keys on one word: witness.

Well, the cynic in me says, I wasn't there. How can I be a witness? I never met Jesus; how can I witness to these things? How do I figure this out?


And you know, when I began reading, I realized I had misconstrued the word witness. For Kittle, witness can be an act of commitment. Witness means commitment—and I had a revelation!

Faith isn't the ability to figure it out before we act. Faith is the commitment to act, the commitment to live, the commitment to love, before you figure it out.

All this time I had tried so hard to figure it out . . . but that's not what Peter's asking us to do. He's asking us to be witnesses . . . he's asking us to make a commitment.*

Peter and the apostles were committed and Peter and the apostles were witnesses. Of what? Of whom was Peter witness? Note "Jesus of Nazareth, a man" (v. 22); "this Jesus" (v. 23); and, in verse 32 again, "This Jesus God raised up"; however, in verse 31, "He foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ." There are a number of signals that Luke's christology may well be different from the pre-existent logos theology of John 1. A reading of Acts certainly suggests the possibility that Luke's christology did not include pre-existence, and yet the birth narrative of Luke's Gospel suggests exceptional beginnings for the baby Jesus. It is interesting to examine both Luke's Gospel and Acts to see where the titles "Lord" and "the Christ" or "Christ" are used, and where "Jesus"; however, the truth is that christology is not Luke's focus (that appears to be a contemporary problem!). So, in whatever way Luke makes use of titles, in Peter's sermon he is absolutely clear that the primary theme is the resurrection of Jesus. He is witness to the Resurrection and to the living Christ!

But few of those who sit in the pews ever preach sermons as such. How do they witness to the resurrection of Jesus? What better way than by living as persons of hope? People do die. Those we love the
most go away. Earthquakes, tornadoes, plane crashes, wars kill the innocent. The miracle is that those who with David see the Lord always before them are not shaken—not at the roots. Of course the people of God grieve. Of course, there are times of despair or near despair. But it was not possible for Jesus to be held by death and it is not possible for those who belong to him to be held by any kind of death.

Perhaps the preacher will want to teach in this sermon. What did it mean to Israel—chosen of God, in covenant with God, led by God, judged by God? What does it mean to be the new Israel? To be literally, in Jervell’s way of thinking, grafted onto that base? What does it mean to see the Christian church not as the new Israel all by itself but as the true Israel emerging out of the roots of Judaism and born of those believing Jews who embraced and proclaimed Jesus as messiah to Gentiles, who then also believed?

A young Christian woman bought a personalized license plate for her new compact car. Because the car had come as a real blessing she named it Mitzvah. A member of the church she attended saw the license and demanded, “What do you mean, driving a car with an anti-Christ word on the license plate?” This church member had been so immersed in anti-Semitic prejudices that she could not be persuaded that we are all one people, that Christianity would never have existed for Gentiles if believing Jews had not borne witness to a Jewish Jesus. She could not believe that believing Jews—the new Israel—and believing non-Jews together share in the fulfillment of the promise of salvation made to Israel.

However it is approached, this lection seems made for preaching on the first Sunday after Easter. Let the preacher gain strength in the knowledge that she or he does not stand alone before those who challenge the worship and celebrations of the church, who question the relevance or veracity of the Easter celebration itself. Here is the opportunity to claim partnership with the people as Peter claimed partnership with the disciples, to proclaim the faith of all, to recognize that the preacher is not alone but is surrounded by a faithful people. Here is the opportunity to preach the power of Christ’s resurrection and our own hope, to speak for preacher and people alike: “Therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will dwell in hope.” Christ was not abandoned and neither are we. It is God who makes known to us the ways of life and God who makes us full of gladness at the presence of God! Here
is the opportunity to affirm that “we all are witnesses” to “this Jesus [whom] God raised up.”

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 2:14a, 36-41

The early church was full of power because it was a repentant and forgiven community.

This lection begins, as did the previous one, with verse 14a, which introduces Peter as the speaker standing with the eleven. And, again, it is clear he is speaking to Jews, to “the house of Israel.” Then immediately there is a christological assertion, that “God has made him both Lord and Christ,” followed by the direct accusation, “this Jesus whom you crucified.” It is clear that Peter’s audience is composed of devout Jews from all nations now dwelling in Jerusalem. He is careful to continue to address them as “people of Israel” and now “house of Israel.” But who is Luke’s audience, the audience for whom Acts is written? Why do they need to hear “Israel” reiterated?

Those first-century Christians who made up the original audience were caught up in all sorts of controversy surrounding the admission of Gentiles, uncircumcised Gentiles, into the church. Luke seemed to feel the need to stress that Jewish Christians, those of the house of Israel, formed the continuing true Israel and that believing Gentiles were now included in the promises to Israel because that was the plan of God. The acceptance of Jesus as the Christ by thousands upon thousands from the ranks of the faithful of Israel makes it possible for the gospel to be extended to Gentiles. Thus, it becomes essential that Peter emphasize that he is preaching to devout Jews of the house of Israel. It is also essential that these devout Jews recognize their responsibility, their guilt for the death of Jesus: “this Jesus whom you crucified.” Their repentance for this action and their acceptance of Jesus as the Christ are what will make it possible for them to become the new Israel or the continuing true Israel. Those Jews who reject Jesus as the Christ and refuse to repent will no longer be part of the true Israel.

But those who heard Peter on that day “were cut to the heart” (v.37) and asked “Peter and the rest of the apostles” (note the emphasis once again that Peter does not stand alone) what they must do. Peter
preached and those who heard were convicted of their rejection of Jesus and of their role in Jesus' death. Preaching occupies a fairly lofty position in Luke's theology. Preaching is important; it might even be said that preaching is necessary. David L. Tiede, in Prophecy and History in Luke-Acts, argues that "by means of the word of the apostles' preaching . . . , it is made known to Israel that the Jesus 'whom you crucified' has been exalted as Lord and messiah" (see note 7; p. 122, italics in the original). Once it is made known to them and they ask what they must do, Peter tells them they must repent.

And what is the content of this repentance? Tiede writes:

Luke's appeal for repentance . . . is . . . caught up with the plight of the people. . . . Luke is confident that even as the messiah-prophet was rejected and executed by Israel in accord with scriptural predictions, God's exaltation of the crucified Jesus as messiah and Lord was not merely a reproof of Israel and a demand for submission but a gracious offer of repentance unto forgiveness and unto life for Israel and the Gentiles . . . Even the vision or hearing that touches the heart is already a sign of the continuing divine intention to bestow the promises on Israel. (pp. 123-124)

The repentance Peter demands is repentance that results in salvation. They are to repent, be baptized, and be forgiven. Forgiveness is sure to follow repentance. Forgiveness is another essential component of Lukan theology. For example, Luke is the only one of all the evangelists who reports Jesus' words, "Forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). What happens now as a result of Peter's preaching is to be seen also as the result of Jesus' prayer on the cross. Those who were ignorant, who did not know what they did, now perceive what they did, repent, and are forgiven.

It is probable that in this context, repentance and forgiveness are to be seen as occurring in that order, with baptism following both. It is even probable that, considering the order in which the Gentiles at Cornelius's house receive the Holy Spirit and then are baptized (Acts 10:44-48), we are to assume that the gift of the Holy Spirit follows upon forgiveness of sins and precedes baptism. It is later that baptism with the Spirit appears to be the result of baptism with water (see Acts 19:1-7).

So Peter preaches. He tells the house of Israel exactly what they must do. This is a directive sermon! Then he tells them that the promise (of God's salvation) is to them and to their children, to all that
are far off, and to everyone called by God. Given the nature of Peter's vision of the ritually unclean animals in Acts 10 and his initial response to it, it is probable that Peter as characterized by Luke did not himself know that the Gentiles must also be included or that he, Peter, would preach to Gentiles. But Luke knew, for there was no doubt whatever in Luke's theology that God's plan called for the gospel movement to go from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria and to the whole world, and that Peter would be a prime instrument of that movement.

We know something about the form of Peter's missionary proclamation and we know something of the content of his sermon. What we do not know is how long he preached! Luke simply tells us that "he testified with many other words and exhorted them. . . ." However long he preached and whatever else he did, he must have preached well. Three thousand souls were added on that day. Three thousand devout Jews of the house of Israel believed and became faithful members of the new Israel.

What preacher does not yearn to know that there is some response, however modest, to the preaching he or she does? One of the best methods to arrive at the form for an effective sermon is to use the same form in which the Scripture text is cast. In other words, if the text is narrative, preach a narrative sermon; if the text is poetic, preach a sermon filled with poetic, descriptive language and imagery, etc. This text is a sermon so, obviously, a sermon is the appropriate response. But what type of sermon? One which helps a contemporary congregation to experience something of the same convictions, sorrow, and repentance felt by the congregation who heard Peter. The present-day preacher may not want to be as directive as Peter; however, there are surely ways in which, through action or inaction, most persons have a hand in one crucifixion or another. Most of the time we do not know what we do and how much we need forgiveness.

A seventy-year-old business man went on exposure tours to both Nicaragua and the Philippines. He heard so much and saw so much of the poverty and misery of people that he experienced what could only be called a conversion. As people in the Philippines talked about unemployment and about multinational corporations and wages of less than two dollars a day for back-breaking work in factories and sugar cane fields, this man's anger toward such injustices grew and grew. The obvious targets of his anger were the government of the Philippines and the government of the United
States for their complicity in bringing about such conditions; however, the more anger he expressed—and the more pain, for that was present also—the more it became clear that much of his anger was directed at himself. After he heard a young university student speak of his work as a student organizer and the alienation he experienced from his own family because of his work, this man said, "I have never been that committed to anything in my life." He had begun to realize that because of a lack of knowledge and through inaction he, along with so many others of us, was culpable and shared in the corporate guilt for the "crucifixion" of thousands of people, totally unknown to him.

Several years ago B. Davie Napier, then professor of Old Testament literature and dean of Calhoun College at Yale, wrote a little book entitled *Come Sweet Death: A Quintet from Genesis* (United Church Press, 1967). Part II, "The Brothers," is a poetic and updated retelling of the story of Cain and Abel. At one point Cain speaks to Abel:

> Let us go out into the field. Come, Abel, how shall I kill you? Let me count the ways, since violence is versatile and knows not only overt savage acts of murder but subtler forms as well, aesthetic forms which spare the sight of blood but just as surely remove the victim. Fratricide can be grotesque or beautiful. Community of brothers, sons of God, can be destroyed in crude brutality or, if one will, if one but exercise intelligence, in fashion cold and clean and rational. (p. 41)

So Cain does kill his brother Abel. And, "Yahweh said to killer Cain, 'Where is your brother Abel? Where is Abel?' 'I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?' " And to this Yahweh responds:

> What have you done? The voice of Abel's blood is crying to me from the ground. The voice of Abel's blood, a thousand, thousand voices crying to me from the bloody ground!

O Cain, my son, my son, who took the life of Abel, son of mine. The voice of Abel, the voice of Abel's blood, is crying to me from the bloody ground, the blood-soaked ground.

O Absalom, my son, my son, who took
the life of Amnon, son of mine; the voice of Amnon, Absalom, is crying to me from the ground. O bleeding son of mine, my son rejected, smitten, and afflicted; my son, my wounded son, my dying son, subjected to the public ways of dying and all the countless, private, hidden ways— in battle, execution, inquisition; in lethal oven or in lethal humor; lynching by the hand of brutal brother; or brutal psychological exclusion . . . ; and always wholesale murder by neglect.

My son, my son! The voice of Abel's blood is crying to me from the ground. O Christ, O Jesus Christ, my son, my dying son! (p.42)

Sometimes we cannot see whom we are “killing” until we go and see, but sometimes vivid preaching with stories and descriptive imagery can help us see, and we, too, will cry out, “What shall we do?”

So, what about the people to whom we preach? How can this lection speak most directly to them? In all likelihood there are at least a few persons in any church who have great difficulty praying a unison prayer of confession. As one couple insisted, “We don’t need those prayers. We haven’t committed those sins and we don’t need to ask forgiveness for something we haven’t done.” The people to whom Peter preached are described as “devout,” but they had been in ignorance of what they had done; they were in deep need of repentance and forgiveness. Is it possible some of the devout persons in any given church on any given Sunday morning are ignorant of their need to seek forgiveness? Individually? Corporately? Think what power the early church had because it was a repentant and forgiven community. Is it too old-fashioned to call for Christians to seek forgiveness, to reach for the power that comes in that kind of renewed and healed relationship with God?

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 2:42-47

It is the church’s task to learn not only how to break bread together but how to be bread broken for our needy brothers and sisters.

It would be difficult to find a more appropriate description of what a church is to be for its members than the one in Acts 2:42. Those who
were added the day Peter preached ‘devoted themselves’ to study, to prayer, to fellowship, and ‘to the breaking of bread.’ In this lection (vv. 42-47), we have a picture of the communal life of early Christians, a first stage in the beginning of the church. Allison A. Trites observes, ‘The Acts of the Apostles contains approximately twenty-five significant instances of prayer. The birth of the church was the result of prayer.’ From the beginning the reader is aware of a deep sense of commitment. This was no easy, loose affiliation for these people. They were caught up in something that took them out of themselves, out of their ordinary routine, their usual approach to life. Things were changed for them forever. They could no longer look at life as they had; they had a different view of themselves and of each other. Their conversion meant exactly that; they were changed. They did not begin a haphazard program of study nor did they get together every so often for table fellowship and prayer. They devoted themselves to this new way of life, which meant sharing the totality of their lives with each other.

Not only did the people pray for each other and for the apostles; we can be sure the apostles prayed for each other and for the people. Prayer must have been the very life breath of these early Christians. Would that it might be the very life breath of us later Christians. I have heard seminary students entering a class entitled ‘Spiritual and Creative Dimensions in Preaching’ confess that this was the first time they had read or thought of the fact that prayer and things spiritual were essential components of preaching and preparation for preaching! Surely preachers pray as they prepare to preach—not only for themselves and for spiritual direction for the sermon, but for the people to whom or with whom they preach. One pastor tells of letting the people be prayerfully present in the process of sermon preparation. She used a color pictorial directory of the members of her church. The preacher entered into a time of prayer and visual meditation, turning through the directory and studying the picture of each member with care and openness. This preacher reported getting “hung up” on a picture from time to time to the point of needing to stop and make a telephone call to the person or write a note. This kind of prayer invites the people to whom one ministers into the study and into an essential role in the preaching task itself. This kind of prayer can bring a church to rebirth! It must be very like the kind of prayer the apostles and the people prayed as they lived and worked together.

What the apostles and the disciples were about is summed up in the Greek word κοινωνία. One could wish that every church today
would take this as a guiding principle for the way in which members behave with each other and with other Christians. Jacques Dupont writes, concerning the meanings of the term:

The standard lexicon of Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich distinguishes four meanings of the Greek word *koinonia* in the New Testament. The word may designate: (1) association, communion, fellowship, close relationship with persons or things; (2) generosity, fellow-feeling, altruism, that is, the sense one has of community with others and of the obligations which flow from that community; (3) concrete manifestations of this sense of community: a proof of . . . unity, or even a gift or contribution; (4) finally, participation, sharing in something that affects others, such as their feelings, their actions, and their sufferings.9

It was in the midst of *koinonia* such as this that the apostles taught and the community gave attention to their teaching.

What was the content of the apostles' teaching? This lection does not report exactly what it was, but informed imagination suggests the new converts heard a great deal about the life, mission, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It suggests they heard Scriptures with a new hermeneutic, Scripture reinterpreted in the light of Jesus as messiah. It also suggests that they had to learn how to be in *koinonia* with each other. This may have been more difficult than these few lines would suggest. Robert J. Karris, O.F.M., offers some crucial insight to the circumstances, the *Sitz im Leben*, in which these new Christians had to learn new behaviors. Karris is convinced that the Greco-Roman audience for whom Luke wrote did "not share the Christian/Jewish concern for the neighbor in need and for the poor." He writes:

The evidence is considerable that almsgiving is not known among the Greco-Romans whereas it is a cultural expectation for those from an Egyptian/Jewish (oriental) background. The Greco-Romans would not come to the aid of a non-citizen; they would help a friend in need, but only to collect IOU's against future contingencies.10

He adds, "Luke's point, then, is: the Christians aid the neighbor in need and the poor in the community because they view each other as friends" (p. 116). Dupont observes: "This *koinonia* consists, more specifically, in putting whatever one has at the disposal of those in need, without reserving anything for oneself. Thus it is the concrete
manifestation and the sensible sign of unity of hearts and souls” (pp. 101-102).

The devout Jews who believed when Peter preached were from every known nation; they had to become friends; they had to learn to live together; they had to learn to care for each other’s needs. But the audience for whom Luke wrote was composed of other converts who came from diverse cultures and backgrounds with all sorts of expectations. Luke was writing about the first Christians for Christians of his time. (For Christians of the twentieth century as well?) What Karris says is important enough to quote in detail:

In sum, what emerges from the summary passages of Acts 2 and 4 is mission theology: how to make the Christian/Jewish teaching about the necessity of almsgiving and about fellowship intelligible to converts who come from a widely different cultural expectation. If the Christian community in Jerusalem, composed of so many different people, treated each other as friends, so too should the recent converts of Luke’s own time. Luke’s Sitz im Leben consists of propertyed Christians who have been converted and cannot easily extricate themselves from their cultural mindsets. (p. 117)

A rereading of the verses of the lection, with what Karris has said in mind, should provoke renewed excitement for what the early Christians were doing. What they did generated power. That is evident from what Luke says in verse 43: “Fear [or awe] came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.” History has taught us that whenever leaders perform most remarkable and courageous acts, there are usually followers whose deep commitment and fellowship have served to release the power in the leader; that early community must have been like that. With people so committed to learning and to prayer, so faithful in attending the temple and breaking bread together, no wonder others looked at them in amazement and wanted to become a part of the community they saw in action.

The “breaking of bread in their homes” was a significant part of this new behavior. In all probability it was not the Lord’s Supper as such, but it had a sacramental quality, nonetheless. Halford E. Luccock lifts up this action of breaking bread as a special message to all Christians from the earliest Christians. It is a message about the complexity of breadmaking, bread-winning and bread-distributing. . . It is to grasp more deeply and largely the social message of
the communion service, so that that service shall be a moving symbol of the mutuality of all breaking of bread, as a process of . . . [participation] in the spirit of Christ.**"** In a day such as this, when so many people are hungry and so many homeless, this lection is a clear message to Christians about sharing and caring—about actions on behalf of poor brothers and sisters wherever they are to be found.

Some American Christians on an ecumenical exposure tour in the Philippines were astounded and humbled when Philippine brothers and sisters living in extreme poverty invited them into their homes for rice and dried fish. The words, "We are poor but we can still give gifts," were words of mutuality spoken in the spirit of Christ. The message of Christians in the Philippines, engaged in a struggle similar to that of Christians in Latin America, is that it is long past the time for the church to be concerned only about doing works of charity, about feeding the poor. The time has come when the church must challenge the systems that make people hungry and homeless and poor. These early Christians shared their lives and their bread, and "they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God . . . " (vv. 46-47). But they were living at a time when they most sincerely believed that Christ would come again at any moment. Too long have Christians and the Christian church continued to engage in almsgiving as our primary act. Alms must be given, yes, but why are so many people hungry? Why are so many people homeless? Why are so many people living below the poverty level? Why are so many children condemned to lives of persecution and pain? The breaking of bread together is a call to concern for the whys of our existence together.

It is strange that Christians so often feel there is no scriptural justification for challenging the systems that cause hunger and oppression and political imprisonment of those who take a stand against such oppression. A primary theme around which Luke organized both the Gospel of Luke and Acts is just such a challenge. Is it so easy for us to overlook the clearest statement Jesus ever made of his sense of his own mission in the world? Should the mission of those of us who call ourselves "the body of Christ" be any different? It is time for the "body of Christ" in the world today to take a new, long look at Luke 4:16-30. David Tiede states clearly, "Luke's account of Jesus' 'sermon' in Nazareth is widely recognized as programmatic of the whole two-volume work" of Luke-Acts (see
What exactly did Jesus say in his statement of his mission? He quoted the prophet Isaiah (Isa. 61:1-2):

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. (Luke 4:18-19)

Then Jesus went on to give two sermon illustrations: the story of Elijah, who was not sent to any of the widows of Israel, but rather to the widow of Zarephath—a Gentile; and the story of the prophet Elisha, who, although there were many lepers in Israel, healed no leper from Israel but only Naaman the Syrian—a Gentile. How clearly, through story, the people were told that the message of salvation and liberation must someday move beyond Israel to all the world. And how angry they became! They tried to kill Jesus for what he had said. In so doing they proved his word, “No prophet is acceptable in his own country” (Luke 4:24ff).

Luke, then, early in the Gospel, sets up the difficulty that will become so clear in Acts: many of the people of Israel will reject Jesus because what he does, what he says, and what people do as a result of what he does and says are all too radical, too challenging to the religious and political structures. Two points emerge when we read Luke-Acts in this way: (1) it is dangerous to tell stories in sermons that help people see the implications of the gospel; (2) it is dangerous to try to live out the mission of Jesus and help the churches we serve live out the mission. Prophets are rejected. Churches and pastors who challenge the status quo and who dare to act as though the church has any right, much less obligation, to challenge its members to live in a way different from the world around them may become suspect in the eyes of other people, even other Christians. They may find themselves in a similar situation to one unnamed priest in Central America. He said and was quoted by his Philippine brothers and sisters, “When I fed the hungry, they called me a saint; when I asked why are they hungry, they called me a communist.”

This lection from Acts has often been lifted up as evidence that Christianity, properly embodied in a community, is a form of communism. Some people have reacted negatively to this; others have reacted positively. There have been many persons, including many Christians, who have lived communally, sharing all their
possessions. Some do not consider themselves communists but rather Christians attempting to live out the spirit of the early church. Since many such communities have ceased to exist, we can infer that they must have found this extremely difficult over a long period of time. This may not be the best way for this age, but surely we must find other ways of fulfilling the spirit of holding “all things in common” and “breaking bread.” All persons hold the environment in common; all persons hold the potential for peace in common. How can we facilitate the process by which these common concerns become crucial to our lives together as Christians? There is so much to learn from those earliest Christians. Perhaps an appropriate prayer is, “God, open our eyes; give us a vision of what it means to be devoted and to have all things in common with our brothers and sisters. Teach us how to break bread together.”

It is possible, if this prayer is truly meant and answered, that preacher and congregation will be able to understand Karl Gaspar of the Philippines when he says to Americans, “We are the least of your brethren. We are a broken people . . . But you are broken, too, a part of institutions and structures destroying life. We are in solidarity not because we are strong, but because we are broken. We are where we are but we are not hopeless. We are not people who cannot witness to the power of the Gospel.” It is possible we will learn not only how to break bread together, but how to be bread broken for our brothers and sisters who are hungry and oppressed and in prison—whoever and wherever they may be.

FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 7:55-60

When pastors realize there is no way they can do everything that needs to be done, perhaps it is time to release others to be fully what God has called them to be.

In Acts 2, Peter’s sermon received one sort of response. Stephen’s sermon received an altogether different response in Acts 7. What preacher would choose to be stoned for a sermon?! What caused the people who heard Stephen to react as they did? Who was Stephen anyway?

To answer these questions one must begin with Acts 6:1. Apparently the apostles had become too busy, as is often true with preachers. The number of disciples was growing, and they could not
get around to everyone nor could they do everything they were expected to do. The Hellenists who were now a part of their number began to complain against the Hebrews that their widows were being "neglected in the daily distribution" (6:2). But the twelve did not deem it right to give up preaching in order to serve tables! And right here is another sermon, but not the one for this lection. This other sermon is one preachers probably need to preach to themselves, anyway: something about waiting at tables (and all that it means) as being an essential part of sermon preparation.

Because they did not want to give up time from preaching to serve tables, the apostles gave instructions that the disciples should choose seven persons "of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom" to perform that duty. So the thousands of disciples ("the multitude") did exactly that, and Stephen was one of those chosen. It is uncertain whether Stephen had ever waited at tables. He may have already been known as a preacher. At any rate, "full of grace and power," he "did great wonders and signs among the people" (6:8). There were, however, many who were angered by what Stephen did and what he said. What happened is parallel to what happened to Jesus during the Passion. Those who had come to hate Stephen were successful in stirring up people to speak against him. They said: "This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place, and will change the customs which Moses delivered to us" (6:13). The people of the council saw that Stephen's face "was like the face of an angel" (6:15). At this point the high priest asked Stephen if what the witnesses had said was true. Stephen's sermon begins in Acts 7:2 and continues through verse 53.

"Is this so?" This is the question the high priest asks Stephen in 7:1. Stephen does not answer his question. Instead, he preaches. He takes the opportunity afforded him, by being brought before the council, to preach. His sermon (as composed by Luke) is similar to the sermons of Peter and Paul to be found in Acts. He addresses those who listen as "brothers" and as "fathers" and he speaks of Abraham as "our father." He is a Jew addressing Jews as one of them, with common history and common ancestry. He recounts their common history, albeit with slightly different emphasis at certain points. He begins with the story of Abraham. Nils A. Dahl says Luke's "only comprehensive survey of Abraham's history" is "found in the speech of Stephen, Acts 7:2-8." Dahl notes that Luke's
Stephen has for some reason left out the very stories of Abraham which are most often emphasized: “Abraham in Egypt, Abraham and Lot, the battle with the kings, Hagar and Ishmael, the three men and the destruction of Sodom, and, most remarkable of all, the sacrifice of Isaac.” Instead, Stephen includes “Abraham’s migration, God’s promise, the covenant of circumcision, and the birth of Isaac.”

What Stephen seems most interested in doing is setting the story of Abraham so it shows how God’s word is realized. So the Abraham story flows easily into the Joseph story, beginning with verse 9. In verse 16, this sermon then turns back to the fact that Jacob and others were carried from Egypt back to Shechem to be buried in the same tomb that Abraham bought from the sons of Hamor. The emphasis appears to be that Jacob, Joseph, and all the sons of Jacob were aliens in a strange land. This is further emphasized with verse 17, which introduces the story of Moses. And Moses is an extremely important figure to Luke. Tiede insists that Luke sees Jesus as “the prophet like Moses” (Deut. 18:15). There are probably two primary reasons for the importance of Moses to Luke: (1) Luke’s stress on the law and Moses as lawgiver; and (2) Moses and Jesus, “the prophet like Moses,” were both refused or rejected. Moses, even as Stephen says in his sermon (7:27-29), had to flee from his own people into exile. Verse 35 reads, “This Moses whom they refused . . . ,” and verses 38-39 carry it further: “This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers; and he received living oracles to give to us.” (Jervell notes that Luke is the only New Testament writer to refer to the law as “living”; Jervell, p. 136.) “Our fathers refused to obey him, but thrust him aside, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt.”

Stephen continues his historical sermon by reminding his hostile listeners of the “tent of witness in the wilderness” (v. 44) and of how Joshua and the fathers carried the tent with them into the promised land. Quickly, he draws them to remember David, “who found favor in the sight of God” (v. 46), and who wanted to build a habitation for God, but that was left for his son Solomon to do. Stephen reminds them that God “does not dwell in houses made with hands,” and he quotes Isaiah in verses 49b-50: “What house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? Did not my hands make all these things?”

At this point Stephen’s sermon turns into direct accusation against
his listeners, just as Peter's sermon did at Pentecost. If anything, Stephen is even more direct and prophetic. He says:

You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears [they may be physically circumcised, but . . .], you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it. (vv. 51-52)

Read these last two verses aloud and one cannot help but let something of anger and, certainly, a great deal of force enter one's voice. Stephen begins to sound like a prophet after the order of Moses and Jeremiah and Amos! Even a prophet as John the Baptist in Luke 3:7-9, or as Jesus in Luke 11:39-52.

Given all that Stephen had said to them and especially his strong words of accusation in verses 51-53, it is no wonder that "when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth against him" (v. 54). Such a picture! Their rage was such that they "ground their teeth." It is an image of savagery released, of a kind of pure hatred, uncomplicated by any thought of compassion. We do not have to look far to find one against whom hostile people "ground their teeth." The modern prophet, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., drew a very similar response. Those old enough do not have to search long in their memories for the scenes from network television news of enraged people, grinding their teeth and mouthing obscenities, turning hoses on King and his followers or setting dogs on them as they knelt in prayer. And yet, Martin Luther King, Jr., published a book of sermons entitled Strength to Love (Fortress, 1963). More importantly, he continued to love and refused to hate. He preached about loving your enemies and about forgiveness.

Preacher, here, is a primary word. If you preach like Jesus or Stephen or Martin Luther King, Jr., prepare to move people to the kind of rage that kills—or the kind of hatred and rage that will make some people leave your church and others to try to get you to leave. It is dangerous to be a prophet. Throughout the Bible that word is clear. A young pastor said that she had never received looks of such unadulterated hatred from persons who also named themselves as Christians as when she declared forcefully that God's love is for all people, without exception, and dared to be specific about whom she meant. That is the hardest part. Stephen was a Jew, Jesus was a Jew, but Jews were
moved to such anger and hatred. This is a very human response and Christians are no different. Christians who cannot believe the Christian prophets are the first to grind their teeth and pick up stones.

Stephen, as he stood there, having delivered his sermon and surrounded by those who were enraged at him, saw a vision. He was “full of the Holy Spirit” and he saw a vision, an apocalyptic vision in which the heavens opened and he saw the glory of God and he saw Jesus. He saw Jesus, not sitting at the right hand of God, but standing. It is almost as though this slightly altered picture of Jesus standing rather than sitting suggests Jesus’ identification and involvement with Stephen, a sense of urgency about reaching out to him and readiness to bring him into the presence of God. It is reminiscent of Jesus’ words to the thief on the cross, “Today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43b). It was probably a mistake that Stephen told those already angry people what he had seen. People who hated Martin Luther King, Jr., did not want to hear about his vision, his dream.

There is something about a true, God-given vision that only makes angry people angrier. Joseph found that out when he told his brothers his dreams. Martin Luther King found that out when he preached, “I have a dream.” Stephen found that out when he told his dream to those who surrounded him. For them it was the final straw. They had already ground their teeth against him now “cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together upon him” (v. 57).

Hands over ears, mouths wide open screaming! Those who heard Peter accuse them in his Pentecost sermon were “cut to the heart.” They asked what could they do to make amends. They became, in their belief, a part of the new Israel, but now the rejection of Jesus by some of his own people must be told. And so Stephen’s hearers stop their ears, scream, and rush upon him. These people, unlike the ones who responded positively to Peter’s sermon, reject Jesus as the Christ and they reject Stephen. They cast him out of the city even as Jesus was taken outside the city. They do not crucify Stephen; they stone him. Those who stone him “laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul” (v. 58). How subtle of Luke, how simply he introduces Saul into the scene. One line, and the picture is sketched in and there stands Saul, watching, with a pile of garments at his feet. Saul watches and hears as Stephen prays: “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Saul watches and hears as Stephen kneels and prays, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (v. 60). And Saul does not know that Stephen prays for him as well as
for those who stone him. Allison A. Trites writes: “The fact that the
dying Stephen acts like his prayerful Lord is apparent in the
deliberate parallels which Luke has drawn between the two
incidents. As Augustine once remarked, if Stephen had not prayed,
the Church would not have had Paul” (p. 180).

There is no way to read the words of Stephen without once again
seeing Luke’s picture of Jesus on the cross or hearing the words of
Jesus that only Luke records: “Into thy hands I commit my spirit!”
and “Forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:46b
and 34). Nowhere else in Scripture is Stephen mentioned. There is
only Luke’s picture of him here in Acts, but such a figure of the
Christ he becomes. Stephen’s name means “crowned” and, in a
way, that is exactly what he was. When Luke introduces him, he is
one of “seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom”
(Acts 6:3). Later he says, “And Stephen, full of grace and power, did
great wonders and signs among the people” (Acts 6:8); in 6:5,
“Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit”; in 7:55, Stephen
is “full of the Holy Spirit.” The Holy Spirit, grace, power, wisdom,
and faith: Paul S. Rees says, “There was a man ‘full’ for you!” Rees
goes on to enumerate other things persons may be “full of”: full of
 extortion (Matt. 23:35); full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity
(Rom. 1:29). It is possible that those who stoned Stephen were full
of all these things while Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit, grace,
wisdom, faith, and power!

Little did the apostles know whom they were releasing into the
world when they asked the disciples to set aside seven “to wait
tables”! Perhaps herein is another word for preachers: when
preachers realize there is no way they can do everything that needs
to be done, perhaps it is time to release others to be fully what God
has called them to be. At no time in the history of the church has the
church and the world been more in need of the Stephens who will
preach clearly the word of God in spite of all threats and in the face of
death itself.

What is important to realize is that Stephen was not an apostle. In
a real sense he was a layperson, set aside to wait tables. Herein is a
message for our people in a time when there is so much emphasis on
the ministry of the laity. Here is a challenge to all ministers, ordained
or not, to discover God’s will and call for themselves. Perhaps some
in your congregation are called to speak out, in a way to preach,
concerning some social justice issue or about education in the
schools of the community or about care for the elderly. Perhaps others are being called to a new sense of ethics in their businesses. Perhaps a lawyer is struggling with a sense of call regarding the cases he or she takes. Again, perhaps it is time for pastors to be re-called to the task of enabling the whole people of God for ministry—to set the Stephens and Stephanie\'s free to witness in whatever way God calls them to do. Set them free in the marketplace, the schools, the homes, the offices, and the businesses, fully aware of the risks they take and fully prepared to witness.

SOME CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

The lections with which we have dealt are but the first four of a longer series from Acts. The ones that come in the next weeks will include sermons by Paul and excerpts from the beginning of Acts, chapters 1 and 2. It is as though they come full circle—from Peter’s sermon at Pentecost, through other sermons throughout the book, and back to the experience of Pentecost itself. Perhaps an overall theme may well be found in this question: What can we learn from Luke’s description of the Christian community in Acts about what it means to be the church preaching and witnessing in the time in which we live?

Those first disciples lived and preached and served out of the vision they had caught from Jesus, a vision reinforced with power through the risen Christ, a vision that caught fire at Pentecost. Joe Holland and Peter Henriot, S.J., have declared that what is needed today, not just for the church but for human civilization, is “a new cultural vision.” They observe that some people have found a name by which to call this vision struggling to be born—“a communitarian society.” This could easily be a title applied to the community of believers described in Acts 2:41-47. Holland and Henriot stress that such a community “needs to be grounded on a vision which begins with the poor.” In addition, they acknowledge that “many have pointed out the ecological and feminist principles as foundational.”

Christian Americans who have visited Latin America or the Philippines have returned with amazing stories about “basic Christian communities” and the power they release in the participants. Basic Christian communities are “grounded on a vision which begins with the poor.” Their primary work is much the same as the community in Acts 2. They study the Scriptures together, they
HOMILETICAL RESOURCES

pray; they break bread together; they receive strength from the fellowship and bonding they experience. A group of people, some relatively uneducated, some illiterate, some with education, come together with a leader whose primary function is simply to introduce them, with minimal exegesis, to a biblical passage. The people themselves, the laos, the people of God, provide the hermeneutic. They interpret the passage straight out of the experience of their daily lives—out of their personal experience of poverty, oppression, and marginalization. In reading and interpreting the Scripture in this way, they receive power and become bold. They become convinced that Scriptures and the Jesus of the Scriptures proclaim liberation to and for those who know poverty and oppression as a way of life.

Holland and Henriot are convinced that even in North America, even in the churches of North America, there is "hunger for small, faith-filled community. Indeed the hunger for community is perhaps one of the most important pastoral indicators in a society so marked by rootlessness, fragmentation, and spiritual sterility" (p. xx, italics in original).

What if, emerging from a study of Acts, a pastor and a people here in the United States decided to study Scripture together in much the same way as the base Christian communities of Latin America? This would be a worthy goal, but what should such people expect? Robert McAfee Brown tells this story:

In . . . Latin America, a sixteen-year-old non-Christian with the very Christian name of Maria becomes involved in a "base community," one of thousands of such groups all over the continent who meet for prayer, Bible study, and social action, with a heavy enough emphasis on the "social action" so that their lives are always in danger. After a time, Maria wants to be baptized and confirmed. But the priest demurs. He thinks it might be better to wait a little longer for Maria to join the church, until she has matured more fully. "I'm not sure," says the priest, "that Maria is yet ready to die for her faith."

By her eighteenth birthday, Maria has been baptized and confirmed and has died for her faith. (Unexpected News, p. 152; see note 16)

Here, we say, we do not expect to have to die for our faith. Perhaps not, but surely there is sometimes danger in living for our faith. Reading Acts and seeing the kinds of things that happened to Stephen and Paul and others who bore witness to the power of the risen Christ must give us some indication that the gospel is more radical than we have let it be. Why do we not cause more commotion when we preach and witness? This gospel is powerful and, as Brown
says, "It is appropriate that anyone's first reaction to the 'good news' should be to find it bad news, because the condition of receiving the good news is change (what the Bible calls metanoia, 'conversion')." (Unexpected News, p. 157).

Peter preached for conversion and three thousand were added. Those three thousand converts became a part of that original community as changed people, radically changed. Together they began a witness, a mission, that has had a profound impact on the entire course of human history. This is the message of these lections immediately following Easter Sunday: the good news of the risen Christ is a gospel of new life and liberation for all people! We are all witnesses; therefore, let us preach.

NOTES
BOOK REVIEW

WALTER WINK

207 pp. $17.95.

The frontispiece of this handsomely illustrated volume shows a photograph of the earliest known depiction of Jesus’ crucifixion—an insulting, third-century graffito showing an early Christian standing in prayer before a crucified man with an ass’s head. The scrawled Greek inscription reads: “Alexamenos worships his god.” For the greater part of this book—indeed, right up to the last chapter—I was not sure whether the author agreed with Alexamenos or the wag who etched the scurrilous sketch. In fact, Wilson agrees with neither, but believes that Jesus was a Jewish man, and nothing but a man, through whom God chose to speak.

The author, a journalist best known for The Shroud of Turin (1978), has done his homework rather well, and the book is marvelously illustrated. There are two aspects of his approach that I found unfortunate in his otherwise at times original argument and always lucid presentation. The first is his penchant for engaging in a running dialogue with some of the least reliable and even zaniest writers in the field of religious studies. J. Allegro (The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross), Baigent, Leigh, and Lincoln (The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail), and H. J. Schonfield (The Passover Plot) are noted, though usually to be rejected. Morton

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Walter Wink is professor of biblical interpretation at Auburn Theological Seminary in New York City. He was previously a parish minister and has also taught at Union Theological Seminary. He is the author, most recently, of Unmasking the Powers (1986) and Naming the Powers (1984).
Smith, who has written many solid studies, is the second-most cited author in the book—but only in reference to his poison-pen attempts to discredit Christianity under the guise of serious historiography ('The Secret Gospel; Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark; Jesus the Magician'). Perhaps as a journalist Wilson feels obliged to engage in dialogue with books like these that have received sensationalist attention in the press; but his dependence on some of the more fanciful speculations of Morton Smith gives a touch of the sensational to this book as well.

Also unconvincing is the use of the hypothesis of hypnotism as the open sesame to every mystery in the Gospels. Divine healing and exorcism? Simply hypnotic suggestion, a practice that Wilson believes was widely in vogue among Jewish healers. The water turned into wine? "With a set of genuinely inebriated guests at a wedding feast Jesus would have had an already highly suggestible group of subjects" that could easily be made to believe and behave as if the water they were drinking was the finest of wines (112). The transfiguration? It "might have derived from nothing more than a hypnotic suggestion" (112). Those diverse individuals to whom Jesus brought release from suffering? In psychological terms, mere hysterics, easily cured by hypnosis. Lazarus’s apparent death? A deathlike, hypnosis-induced, four-day trance. The Resurrection? The stunning pièce de résistance in Jesus’ hypnotic repertoire: Jesus may possibly have prepared his disciples for his resurrection using the technique of posthypnotic suggestion. "By this means he could have effectively conditioned them to hallucinate his appearances in response to certain pre-arranged cues (the breaking of bread?), for a predetermined period after his death" (141).

The author does not seem to sense any contradiction between the high moral demand of Jesus’ teaching and the deliberate deception and manipulation implied by such a use of hypnosis. And though he tries to avoid crude reductionism in his reconstruction of "the evidence," he is finally unable to help us understand how merely a skilled performer could have precipitated one of the world’s most dynamic religions.

Wilson’s is but the latest in a long line of books of this genre going back to the eighteenth century. Under the impact of Renaissance rationalism, many intellectuals began to find the God-Man of classical Christianity unbelievable. The Virgin Birth,
with its Greek mythological parallels, and the idea of Christ's pre-existence, divinity, miracles, and resurrection, seemed the stuff of pure mythology. Those who attempted to undermine the foundations of such belief divided into roughly two camps: those who attempted to destroy the credibility of Christianity altogether, and those who sought to strip Jesus of mythical accretions and restore him to full humanity.

Wilson clearly belongs in the second camp. I am in complete sympathy with his goal of presenting the Jewish Jesus in fully human terms. What happens here, however, and in most other such studies, is that the process of reducing Jesus from mythological to historical dimensions leaves us with no adequate explanation for how his history became mythologized in the first place. And the mythic reduction issues in a Jesus of scarcely more than antiquarian interest—a versatile hypnotist, an able teacher, an adept magician, but nothing to write home about. The human Jesus of the rationalists is simply not gripping as a person.

No one can take on mythic dimensions who has not evoked mythic resonances during his life. It is simply not enough to say that the early church mythologized Jesus' human life. One must also account for what gave this mythological development impetus. It is not the result of rational processes. It grows out of the depths of the psyche. Jesus must have touched in a profound way the archetypal structures of Jewish memory and hope, and recast them in his own interior in a fashion that evoked the perception that a new age was dawning in him. But Jesus resisted the temptation merely to claim for himself the messianic roles which had crystallized Jewish hope. He seems to have internalized them, stripped them of their pretensions to political or sacerdotal power, and sought behind them for the emergent new possibility being asked by God. He would later be identified as the healing source; and while in his own lifetime he did not claim to be that source, he was clearly related to it and able to evoke it in others ("Your faith has made you well"). He would later be identified with the authority of the Word of God incarnate; and while he himself surely scarcely thought in those terms, he was just as surely grounded in his very being in the meaning (Logos) of the universe, and spoke out of that being with authority (exousia—literally, "out of being"). He did incarnate Logos; he brought the infinite Logos into the substance of his flesh, thereby transforming it.
He was probably not virginally conceived, and there were wings of the early church that stoutly resisted the claim that he had been, right through the second century (Ebionites, Carporatians). But he certainly did experience a new birth in his baptism, a birth from the waters, virginal in a symbolic sense, and in that experience discovered a new Paternity and Maternity, a new family (Mark 3:31-35), a new reality dawning in himself and in the world: God transcendent, immanent within human beings. And not Jesus only, but anyone who is willing to undergo this pattern of dying and rising can come to new birth as he had.

When the early Christians later experienced the same power within themselves that they had previously known as primarily resident in Jesus, they identified this power as Jesus risen from the dead. All the archetypal realities he had touched, internalized, and lived forward in his own myth—that is, in the meaningful unfolding of his own life—were now identified with him. By this identification the cosmic significance of his life was secured. He had revealed Logos in human flesh; now he became the Logos. But if he is Logos incarnate, our relation to the Logos must be mediated through him. The call for every human to incarnate Logos is lost; now Jesus Christ encompasses all Logos, and so the Paraclete of the Fourth Gospel no longer teaches us how to respond as co-creators of our history with God (Luke 12:12), but merely points back to what Jesus said (John 14:26). The possibility of speaking “out of being,” with authority, is compromised; like the scribes and Pharisees, we exegete the old texts to discover an authority mediated by Scripture from Christ. But does the Logos well up from the depths of our own relation to God transcendent, immanent within the self? We heal “in the name of Jesus”; in whose name did Jesus heal? We pronounce people forgiven through the blood of the cross; how then was Jesus, before his death, able to declare people forgiven? In short, when Jesus’ inner myth was projected out upon the cosmos as a divine-human drama of redemption, a religion of vicarious salvation was born, with great numinous power that still carries inestimable benefits. But what may have been lost is a clear sense of the divine-human process at work in our own depths, with its challenge to us to take up, not Jesus’ cross, but (as he put it) our own. Jesus’ journey opened to the world once and for all a new perception of human possibility.
through relationship with God. Spirit entered substance. We can relate to that new fact either by projecting it back into the realm of the mythic, or by entering upon the same kind of journey Jesus undertook and relating to these archetypal realities within.

In Albert Schweitzer’s famous image, Jesus grasped the wheel of history, tried to turn it, and was crushed by it instead. He remains impaled upon it ever since, the one immeasurably great man who ever lived. That heroic/tragic image no more accounts for Jesus’ impact than Wilson’s speculations about hypnosis. I would prefer to alter Schweitzer’s image of the wheel. Let us rather imagine two wheels, one the wheel of history, the other the wheel of myth. Jesus grasped the wheel of history and of myth and changed their relationship to each other, so that the wheel of myth no longer circled above the wheel of history in a transcendent way, but was now embedded within the wheel of history, like Ezekiel’s wheel within a wheel. Now myth was emptied of its more fantastic, grandiose elements and was rendered mundane by having been lived out in daily life. The ancient pattern of dying and rising gods was now made tangible in time, through being rendered into the everyday process of facing one’s inner realities and the structures of power in the world in a dying and rising way: by taking up one’s cross daily.

After his death, however, this process, by which the Holy Spirit was grounded in and available for the unfolding of human life, was once more mythicized. The wheel of myth moved out of its mooring within the wheel of history where Jesus had placed it, and now was made tangent to the wheel of history. What Jesus had lived, historically, was taken over onto the wheel of myth, and became the myth of Jesus, exalted to Logos and Christ. The historical incarnation of Logos, Holy Spirit, and the messianic is still affirmed of Jesus; the wheel of myth is still tangent at that single point to the wheel of history. But it is no longer seen as a continuing process of living these divine realities out in the fabric of human existence. Rather, the Incarnation is seen as a once-for-all act in a single human being, unrepeatable and unique, an existence which we cannot hope to emulate. It is done on our behalf by God, to be appropriated by faith. Jesus’ historical struggle to incarnate God, and God’s struggle to be born in human life, is now caught, like a fly in amber, in the mythic
story that would be given its definitive expression in the Middle Ages in Anselm’s *Cur Deus Homo? (Why the God-Man?)*.

Traditional Christian believers and the “liberal” reinterpreters who have sought to reconceive Jesus within the canons of rationalism both fall to touch the essential task. Wilson’s attempt to “humanize” Jesus by producing an “intelligible” reconstruction of his life founders on the same rock as every previous attempt. He is content merely to strip Jesus of mythological accretions, without asking what possible truth they served. It is not enough to render Jesus a Jew, if in the process the spiritual struggle of Judaism to live out the emergence of the one God is not seen enacted in and transformed in the Jewish Jesus. It is not enough to debunk the elevation of Jesus to deity, if in the process what Jesus did with deity, and for deity, is ignored. It is not enough to offer alternative “explanations” of Jesus’ miracles as mere hypnotism (which is as mysterious and little understood as spiritual healing at a distance, both of which are well documented and known to work), if we ignore the Source of Jesus’ power within his own depths, by whatever means it worked.

What we need is not a divine Jesus, or just a human Jesus, but an understanding of how Jesus walked the path to the transformation, not only of himself and of others, but of God. After three centuries, that quest has scarcely even begun.
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