QUARTERLY REVIEW

Reflections on The Ministry Study Report
Faith J. Conklin

The Theological Task of United Methodists
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Exchange on Open Communion
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Homiletical Resources on the Psalms
Ted J. Dotts Jr.

Reviews:
Mark L. Horst on The Nature of Doctrine
Alice Cowan on American Church History
QUARTERLY REVIEW
A Scholarly Journal for Reflection on Ministry

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Articles for consideration are welcome from lay and professional ministers, United Methodists, and others, and should be mailed to the Editor, Quarterly Review, Box 871, Nashville, Tennessee 37202. Manuscripts should be in English and typed double-spaced, including notes, and the original and two duplicates, without the writer's name, should be submitted. No sermons, poems, or devotional material are accepted. Queries are welcome. A style sheet is available on request. Payment is by fee, depending on edited length.

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Spring, 1988
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FOCUS ON THE GENERAL CONFERENCE COMMISSION REPORTS

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God's grace calls us into mission, guides us in forming a disciplined church for mission, and impels us to join together in obedience to Christ to proclaim this grace.

The 1984 General Conference has been labeled by some observers as "the conference of the study commissions." Whether intended as institutional criticism or flippancy, the factual truth is that the conference mandated for study three critically important theological issues: ministry, mission, and theological standards. The bicentennial General Conference may not have been historically noteworthy in formulating bold new programs and forging new paths for the future. Among many delegates and observers there was, however, a strong sense that the church needed to become more intentionally and seriously reflective about what ails its own life. Leonard Sweet's observation was pointed: "United Methodism ended its second century with all the clarity of vision of a wiperless windshield in the middle of a storm." Certainly the call of the 1984 General Conference for three fundamental studies was indicative of our church's search for a sense of identity or direction. In the interim we have had a spate of books and articles analyzing our condition. The analysis has been helpful, but we need now to move from analysis to some, at least, tentative prescriptions. Perhaps the study commission reports can be a beginning in this direction.

James C. Logan is professor of systematic theology at Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, D.C., and a member of the General Conference Commission on the Mission of the United Methodist Church, whose report, "Grace upon Grace: God's Mission and Ours," will be presented to General Conference.
In 1787, approximately three years before his death, John Wesley made a journey across England and Wales to see how his "children" were doing. He then retreated to a village in Oxfordshire, where he wrote one of his last sermons, "On God's Vineyard." The text was Isaiah 5:4: "What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?" He had found his people wavering in their theological convictions, lax in their spiritual disciplines, comfortable in their rising affluence, and generally having lost their "first love" of the spreading of "scriptural holiness." In short, they were dangerously close to an identity crisis.

The 1984 General Conference was raising the same question, if not explicitly, certainly implicitly, about the people called United Methodists. Were we not also dangerously close to losing our sense of identity and hence the cause of our being a particular people among other Christian bodies in the universal church? In response to a resolution calling for a General Conference Commission on the Mission of the United Methodist Church, the conference directed the commission to identify "Christ's call for our third century." The commission is to report to the 1988 General Conference.

The Council of Bishops in consultation with the General Council on Ministries selected twenty-four commission members from Europe, Africa, and the United States of America. The members represented various racial and ethnic origins. Functionally the commission was composed of laywomen and laymen, clergymen and clergywomen, general agency directors, local church members, theologians, and bishops. Richard Peck, in an editorial in Circuit Rider, observed, "A casual look at the 24 members of the commission shows that nearly every ethnic group and theological opinion is present. Whatever your theological orientation, chances are you have someone who will champion your views in this group. It, therefore, seems unlikely that such a diverse gathering will be able to establish any set of fundamentals that is satisfying to all." The commission is now in the final stages of preparing a theological and implementa-
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ational statement on mission which we hope can be employed at ever level of our connectional system, from local church to district to annual conference to General Conference. Such a statement could be useful in assisting local churches to write their missional statements, set their missional goals, and evaluate their endeavors in being a faithful people. In fact, this is the hope which Peck held out for the work of the commission, “On the other hand, if members of this group really listen to one another and if they resist the temptation to label, categorize and dismiss their colleagues, I believe we will find a consensus of faith in a risen Christ and an affirmation of the redemptive role of the church in the world.”

Accompanying the theological statement will be a statement of suggested implementation. The report that the commission will present evolved through a long, arduous process of prayer, study of Scripture, critical reflection on our ecclesiastical histories, and the contemporary situations of the world. The process was marked by draft after draft of tentative reports. Would Peck’s fears be substantiated, or would his hope become reality? Throughout all the discussions and drafts there was a constant vision of God’s grace as motive and substance of mission. Beneath the differences and beyond the rich diversity there was the lingering conviction, “ ‘Tis grace has brought us safe thus far, and grace will lead us home.”

This is not to claim that General Conference reports and recommendations will be our salvation. If, however, a centered consensus can be found, perhaps that consensus can assist in clarifying our vision, sharpening our analysis, and deepening our commitment.

WHY MISSION NOW?

When there are so many complexities before the church, why should United Methodists focus upon mission? The answer is a direct one. Although the United Methodist Church may not have a doctrine of the church in the fullness evidenced by the Lutheran, Reformed, and Anabaptist traditions, there is nevertheless an ecclesial peculiarity of the traditions composing the United Methodist Church: In all our traditions we were
a missional movement, a missional people, before we ever organized as
churches. The original intention was not to organize a new
church, much less to formulate anew ecclesiology. Our early
leaders—Wesley, Otterbein, Boehm, and Albright—saw their
calling as one focused on the renewal of a church already in
existence. They fervently sought renewal through evangelical
outreach.

The first major Christian revival movement in modern
Western culture began in eighteenth-century England under the
leadership of John and Charles Wesley. The ancient yet
contemporary word of grace in Jesus Christ was spoken in the
context of a new historical situation. Western society was at one
of its epochal transition points. Economically, the society was in
movement from an agrarian to an industrial order. Politically,
the democratic spirit was in the air and new forms of
government were being dreamed. Subsequently the evangelical
work of persons such as Barbara Heck, William Otterbein,
Francis Asbury, Martin Boehm, Harry Hosier, and Jacob
Albright evoked a spiritual awakening in North America.
Clearly a new revival theologically and organizationally
well-matched to the new era was at hand.3

When historical circumstances required that the mission
movement be structured into ecclesiastical institutions, the
primary reason for doing so was to be more effectively engaged
in the mission to which the Methodists, the Brethren, and the
Evangelicals felt that God had called them. Originally our
connectional system and our local churches understood
themselves to be nothing less than mission societies. Plainly, in
our various traditions mission is not a derivative of ecclesiology
but an essential part of the very being of the church. This, even
more than our polity, constitutes our ecclesial peculiarity. When,
therefore, we are confused or have lost a unifying sense of mission, our
very identity as a people is in question.

The original missional vision and verve sprang from the
gospel of divine grace going before (prevenient grace),
pardoning sinful persons and setting them free from the
bondage of guilt (justifying grace), and cleansing persons,
restoring the divine image, so that they might manifest lives of
inward and outward holiness (sanctifying grace). God's
manifold grace calls us into mission, guides us in forming a disciplined church for mission, and impels us to join together in obedience to Christ to proclaim and enact “the riches of his grace” to the end that “the arms of love that compass me would all the world embrace.”

Mission has acquired varying styles and shapes. Originally revivalism and evangelism constituted the major components, although social reform of such practices as slavery, alcohol abuse, and material acquisitiveness was also an important motivation. By 1819 a Mission Society had been organized, and by 1832 missional outreach began to take on a global complexion with the work initiated in Liberia, to be followed soon by efforts in South America (1835), in China (1847), and in Europe (1849).

The gospel of God's plenteous grace available to all through repentance and faith began to express its implicit logic in a universal mission. The last three decades of the nineteenth century saw a flourishing of such global activity, most notably among the women as they formed their Home and Foreign Missionary Societies. Their special concern for women and children enlarged the vision of mission to ministries of education, social service, and physical health.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century the converging social forces of increasing industrialization, urbanization, and immigration brought a sobering challenge to the churches and called them to a clearer social focus in their outreach. Nowhere else in print is this extension of the vision of mission more clearly expressed than in “The Social Creed.” In 1988 we celebrate the eightieth anniversary of this social commitment.

The modern ecumenical movement, in which the United Methodist Church has played a major role, has some of its earliest roots in such missional endeavors as the Student Christian Volunteer Movement (under the leadership of the Methodist layman, John R. Mott) and the early twentieth-century ecumenical missionary conferences, beginning with the one in Edinburgh in 1910.

These various expressions of missional outreach were not mutually exclusive. In fact, across our history these dynamics have constantly been intertwined. The early revival had both a
reform dimension and an ecumenical spirit. The social vision had strong evangelical roots. Frank Mason North’s words, written in the early years of the twentieth century, poignantly express this linkage:

In haunts of wretchedness and need,
   On shadowed thresholds dark with tears,
From paths where hide the lures of greed,
   We catch the vision of thy tears.

O Master, from the mountainside,
   Make haste to heal these hearts of pain;
Among these restless throngs abide,
   O tread the city’s streets again.*

The traditions of the United Methodist Church were born in mission, and corporate life within those traditions was missionally structured. We have a rich history of being a mission people. At the same time, we must confess that we have not always lived up to that history. We betrayed that history in 1844-45, when the largest Christian church in this country split over the issue of slavery and thereby set a model for the nation to follow. What had happened to the mandate “to reform the Continent”? We compromised that history when we confused the doctrine of Manifest Destiny with the gospel of grace in our nineteenth-century global outreach. Today the United Methodist Church seeks to recover a unifying vision of the mission to which God is calling us in a new century. Where there is no vision, the sense of identity of being God’s called and sent ones becomes blurred, and we risk losing our very sense of being which undergirds our engagement in doing. When there is no vision, the people either perish or they substitute their own private, narrow visions. Our contemporary world is flooded with narrow visions of national self-interest, racial bigotry, sexism, militarism, political and economic injustice, and a profound spiritual dis-ease. Ours is a world lacking a consuming vision of God’s grace. In contrition we have to confess that the church itself is frequently lacking in that same consuming vision of grace. No commission of the church can generate a vision of
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grace. Only the God of grace can do that. Through analysis a commission can pinpoint the need and give some modest hints of what that vision through God’s grace might mean if it “catches” us and makes us new in the Spirit.

WHY GRACE?

The commission’s theological report is fundamentally a statement on the priority of divine grace. Grace is the theme which brought a focused consensus to the commission’s work. This is not accidental. There are two basic and interweaving reasons why grace became central to the thinking of the commission members. First, Scripture is supremely the story of mission—of God’s mission and ours. At the same time the biblical story is supremely the story of grace. In Jesus Christ we see that God is grace and that God’s way in the world is the path of grace. By grace God called the world into being, by grace God

called various persons to covenant relationship whereby they were by example, word, and act to be a blessing to the nations.

God’s gracious covenant is for special responsibility, not special privilege.

Today we are still constituted by and participate in the covenant of grace as consummated in Jesus Christ. By definition, to participate in the covenant of grace is to participate in the mission of grace. The covenant promise, promissio, and the covenant commission, commissio, logically presuppose missio.

This is no facile play on words. It is the very logic of the biblical understanding of covenant and grace. All believers, the local church, and the connectional church participate in the divine covenant of grace for the sake of a world loved and claimed by God in Christ. Jesus Christ, grace incarnate, gave the Great Commandment to love God with our total beings and to love our neighbor as ourselves. The same Christ gave his followers the
Great Commission: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19–20). These were not new laws. They express what the concrete, lived life of grace looks like: a life of grateful obedience to God in the form of witness and servanthood in and for the world. To those who live a grace-filled life, Christ’s missional promise remains steadfast, "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."

A second and interrelated reason for the theme of grace is historical. In our traditions grace has been the motive and substance of mission. God’s way in the world is the way of grace, and the way of God’s people in the world is the way of grace. Our early leaders knew this instinctively in their very beings. "Grace upon grace" (John 1:16) was the motive for their passionate engagement in the life and destiny of God’s people. "Grace upon grace" suggests concentric waves moving out from a center. Because those waves are both divine judgment and forgiveness, they alone have the rigor and the tenderness that can heal. The various traditions constituting the United Methodist Church were variously articulated by our early leaders, such as Wesley and Otterbein. All traditions, however, were fused with evangelical piety, which emphasized the inward workings of grace and the outer manifestations of such grace in changed lives and conditions. We name the names of Wesley, Otterbein, Boehm, Albright, and others because to name these names is to tell our story. What makes our story unitary is the commonality of a vision of threefold grace: prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying.

A definitional statement of mission cannot be content merely to replicate the past, but it should creatively re-appropriate that past and forge it into a faithful and lively vision of mission for the present and the future. Grace remains constant, though the forms of appropriation may vary. “Grace upon grace” is the dominant biblical experience; “grace upon grace” has been the distinctive experience of our traditions.

Although the theological theme of the mission report is grace, basic to the commission’s task has been the effort to provide a normative theological statement that will assist the church in its
ongoing missional life. Of necessity such a statement should express faithful identity with the sources of faith—Scripture and ecclesial tradition. On the other hand, a statement of mission must be relevant to present and coming generations of the church. Identity and relevance are not easily reconciled, but an adequate mission statement should endeavor to join the two responsibly. Identity implies that a mission statement is not a "new gospel" but rather a clear announcement of the gospel of grace as revealed in Jesus Christ. The missional vision is not created by the church, but it is the legacy given to the church in the witness to God's saving activity on behalf of the world. Relevance entails a serious analysis and description of the contemporary world and its projected future. In short, identity is the effort to establish the norm of mission, and relevance is the attempt to mold the form of mission. The purpose of a mission statement is, therefore, not to offer a program but to set forth as clearly as possible the gospel of grace as it impels us to evangelize and serve the world which God in Christ so loves.

THE DUAL SENSE OF MISSION

In the report mission is employed in two interrelated ways. Both of these form the basic formal definition of mission. First, mission is the action of the God of grace, who creates with no other motivation than grace, who calls a covenant community not for privilege but for responsibility, who redeems and reconciles a broken and sinful people in Jesus Christ, and who through the Holy Spirit calls the church into being as the community of doxology and mission. Second, in a derivative sense, mission is the church's response in gratitude to what God has done, is doing, and will do. The church needs a grace-cleared vision to discern both the graceful actions of God (criterion of mission) and the ever-changing conditions of the world (context of mission). A grace-formed community is by definition a mission-formed community.

The formal definition requires a functional definition, or else there is no active substance to the second part of the definition. In other words, the functional definition spells out the active implications of the church's response to God's action. Such
implications will need to be implemented in programs for all levels of the connectional system. Basically, the implications are: (1) to witness in word and act to the gospel of grace as incarnated in Jesus Christ and as seen through Jesus Christ in creation, covenant, church, and consummation; (2) to call persons to repentance of sin and personal faith in Jesus Christ and the kingdom which he not only proclaimed but embodied in his own being; (3) to incorporate persons into the body of Christ for growth in covenant with God, other Christians, and the wider global Christian community; (4) to celebrate within the church the God of grace through word, sacrament, and shared life; (5) to nurture within the church the lives of all persons for intentional holiness of life and ministry in the world; (6) to join actively in the reign of God for justice, liberation, and peace of humankind in all lands; (7) to minister to the immediate needs—spiritual, physical, and social—of the human family; and (8) to remain open to God’s future, realizing that forms of mission are relative to the gospel and changing historical situations.

On these definitional grounds we seek a unifying vision of mission for the United Methodist Church. Keeping in mind that mission is fundamentally God’s way of grace in the world, we, the United Methodist Church, are recipients of grace, and as such we become witnesses to grace. What, then, does it mean to witness to grace? We envision such witness as threefold: we envision lives changed by grace, a church formed by grace, and a world transformed by grace.

A LIFE CHANGED BY GRACE

A life changed by grace is the experiential reality of the inseparability of justification and sanctification. As United Methodists we are to witness to the salvation that God offers in Jesus Christ. When we who were created in God’s image deny God, we take on the image of other gods; we are disgraced. The tragedy of human sin is not only the violation of God’s law but the violation of God’s love. God’s grace in Jesus Christ is offered in spite of our rejection. God’s saving presence makes possible our response. Turning from idol worship to love of God in Christ is conversion. To be converted is to be won by God’s gracious
encounter; it is to be found by God and to acknowledge that finding. Once found, we become ambassadors of redemption and reconciliation.

Simultaneous with the experience of the grace of pardon is the beginning of the continuous experience of growth in grace through the Holy Spirit. This is sanctification. Those who have received new life in Christ are enabled by the Holy Spirit to grow into a radically different life, one that is lived in accordance with God's will. In a time when various truncated forms of experience are represented as Christian experience, we affirm that the fullness of the life of grace is both event (justification) and process (sanctification). It is our mission to hold before persons the message of the fullness of grace, justifying and sanctifying, and to call persons to a maturing life of faith through the Holy Spirit.

As United Methodists we come from a practical or experiential tradition. Theory and practice are inseparably connected. In our tradition we do not seek a definition of mission which we can then employ. The two are combined. We attempt to understand the mission God has given us. Doctrine and life are tied together. We respond to God's call as it comes to us, and then learn how better to hear and obey. We are given the responsibility of presenting the grace of God in the works of justification and sanctification: the wholeness of life is a gift of grace. God is calling us to reclaim the roots of our heritage and to produce new fruit in our time.

A CHURCH FORMED BY GRACE

To be shaped by God's grace is to live in covenant as a community of worship and service. Worship is not confined to a time of day or week; worship is a way of life. Self-giving to God in worship is to praise God with the whole of life. Service is not a series of isolated actions; service is a way of living. A community of worship and service is a community that bears in its very life the signs of the reign of Christ. Lines of division are broken down, institutional introversion is converted to outreach and service in the name of the servant Christ.

A church formed by grace is a community of people nurtured
by the means of grace. Through baptism God incorporates us into the body of Christ. Throughout our lives we are called to reaffirm our baptismal covenant which leads us into discipleship. Through preaching and hearing God’s word, we receive God’s grace. Through our participation in the meal of the Lord, God conforms us to the death and resurrection of Jesus. And there are other means of grace: the study of Scripture, Christian fellowship, fasting, and continual conversion of ways of life. In a world marked by unbelief, deprivation, hunger, and injustice the means of grace can become concrete, tangible, enabling us to confront the stark realities of the contemporary world. The ordinary means of grace remind us that although means are important, they do not limit God’s love. God’s grace is extravagant! God meets us in surprising and significant ways. Only a church formed by grace can meet Christ in the world in the extraordinary means of grace.

Mission is the vocation of the grace-formed church. Each member of the body has a mission to perform. Mission is not limited to the professional leadership nor to a few within the church, or else the church fails to fulfill its vocation. There are discernible marks of a missionary church:

The connection serves the mission; mission is never in the service of connection.

(1) A missionary church is composed of congregations that in their own locality are *missional societies*. Global issues have local manifestations. Missional congregations are those whose vision is bifocal. Through Christ we are able to see through the world’s pretense—to see a world sorely bent out of shape. Through Christ, we also see “a new heaven and a new earth” beckoning us to witness and service.

(2) *Our connectional system* was created as the most expeditious means of mission. Institutional structure, appointments, programs, and stewardship must be measured by our missional vocation. The connection serves the mission; mission is never in
the service of connection. Hence, connectional structures are always subject to formation and re-formation.

(3) A missional church is an inclusive church. As a gracious community a church in mission embraces those whose appearance, behavior, mental or physical conditions mark them as different. People who represent ethnic, class, age, and gender differences are one in the body of Christ. Being a church formed by grace is prerequisite to a being a church that bears the gracious witness in word and act in the world. In fact, the church's is-ness of grace constitutes one means of witness to the gospel.

(4) A missional church is an ecumenically open church. Our mission as United Methodists is ecumenical in that we seek to live in cooperation and communion with the many authentic Christian communities that God in grace calls into existence. We are thankful for all sisters and brothers in Christ and we seek unity amidst our diversity.

(5) A missional church is globally aware. Our world increasingly is a global village. What happens in the local community makes an impact upon the global community and vice versa. The universal gospel of grace makes global awareness a necessary mark of a missional church.

(6) A missional church expresses various modes of obedience to the call of Christ. So we, as United Methodists, provide nurture and support for decisions of conscience, for distinct modes of faithful action, for different interpretations of situations and responsible action. As communities we learn from and are corrected and encouraged by one another.

A WORLD TRANSFORMED BY GRACE

The world setting for mission is bewilderingly complex. Our world is a split world—split ideologically between East and West, split economically between North and South. The grace of Jesus Christ knows no “walls of separation” and transcends ideological and economic divisions, which are manifestations of the “principalities and powers” of our world.

Our world is a religiously pluralistic world. We are experiencing a resurgence of new life in the various world
religions. At the same time we are witnessing the emergence of divisive and destructive tribalisms. Our vocation is nevertheless to witness to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, while listening sensitively to members of other religions. As religious traditions interact, we are called to participate by presenting Christ in the spirit of Christ.

In our world the Christian population is growing most rapidly in the non-Western world. There is a shift in the power of decision making and in the vitality of life in the newer churches. We live in a time of basic reordering of international Christianity. Christians in Europe and North America will be receiving as well as sending missionaries, as will all the nations, and we will all be renewed by the strength of partnership and mutuality in mission, which is nothing other than living the witness to the universality of the gospel.

The church in our world is presented with opportunities for mission but also threats to mission. United Methodism needs to be alertly critical of its context and self-critical of its relation to the new world situation. Temptations to affluent indulgence, the heresy of the gospel of prosperity, increased clericalism, subtle forms of racism and sexism, uncritical adoption of cultural values, and distraction from true goals must all be dealt with directly.

A bowl of water, a towel, and some tired and hurting feet to be washed.

Grace received is the motive for mission. This grace we see incarnate in Jesus Christ. Therefore, our witness is not a cultural triumphalism. In contrast to the world’s conception of power, our symbols, like Christ’s, are a bowl of water, a towel, and some tired and hurting feet to be washed, and the shadow of a lowly cross within a weary world.

In a world where the craving for power becomes belligerence, where greed threatens the ecologically delicate web of life, where injustice seems to triumph over justice, where new
technologies can dehumanize—in this world we, as United
Methodists, witness to the presence and challenge and struggle
of grace. We cannot do everything, but we believe that with
God’s grace we must commit ourselves to be:
authentic witnesses to the gospel, not stumbling-blocks
peacemakers, not merely peacekeepers
stewards of the earth, not exploiters
agents of justice, not perpetrators of injustice
developers of a truly humane technology, not victims of
technique.
All of this we seek to do in the name of none other than Jesus
Christ.

A primary role of the church is to kindle, nurture, and live out
a vision of God’s missional intention, that is, the reign of God.
We are people who “live toward a vision.” The world of God’s
missionsal intention is revealed in Jesus Christ. It is a world that
knows Jesus Christ as the divine grace which destroys hatred
and the barriers that separate people. In God’s world, hope in
Christ conquers despair and meaninglessness.

The role of the church is to articulate and live out God’s reign
of grace. We are the keepers of the vision of God’s mission in
Jesus Christ. Being keepers of the vision requires that we
through grace give ourselves faithfully and unstintingly to being
participants in that vision. The God of grace is still calling a
people, calling us to live in a new world in the midst of an old
world that God is seeking to redeem.

NOTES
1. Leonard I. Sweet, “The Four Fundamentalisms of Oldline Protestantism,” The
4. From “Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life,” The Methodist Hymnal (Nashville:
5. See the clear, carefully crafted statement on sanctification in “The Confession of
Faith of the Evangelical United Brethren Church,” Article XI, in The Book of Discipline,
The report of the commission on mission calls attention to responsibilities for mission for all members of the United Methodist Church, at all levels of organization.

The United Methodist Church over the last two decades reminds one of George Santayana’s comment about Americans: “Having forgotten our purpose, we redouble our efforts.” Preoccupied with relevance, United Methodists have frantically tried to stem the tide of membership loss and to regain influence in the wider community, without conspicuous success in either endeavor. While the rate of decline is down, we continue to lose members, and the political effectiveness of our social witness, although hard to accurately measure and obviously successful in some areas, seems marginal in most sections of the United States and in most countries of the world. While the theological and social principles articulated by General Conference have been consistent with Scripture and occasionally prophetic, United Methodist leadership has been unable to bring a significant percentage of its own membership into mission.

In response, the 1984 General Conference formed a commission to identify the mission of the United Methodist Church.

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That group has now completed its work. From its report a statement on mission will be suggested for inclusion in the 1988 Book of Discipline. That statement, entitled "Grace upon Grace: God's Mission and Ours," will emphasize that mission is the action of the God of grace who calls our covenant community not for privilege but for responsibility in and for the world. Mission becomes our response in gratitude for what God has done, is doing, and will do. Mission is understood as the essential being of the church.

The report recognizes the fundamental changes occurring in the world and deals with them in the light of God's grace. It reaffirms the mission "to save souls," the fact that "persons estranged from God, captured by willful sin, sit in our congregations and walk our streets," and the imperative to the church to "recognize victims and be advocates of their cause." It calls into question a church that is "comfortable." The report affirms that lives may be changed by grace, that the United Methodist Church may be formed by grace, and that the world may be transformed by grace.

The commission gave attention to practical ways in which a mission of grace may be implemented at every level of our church. In recent years the General Conference has mandated many programs and emphases through which the biblical mandates might have been carried out, but we have been generally ineffective in substantially changing a significant number of our members, our local congregations, our conferences, and our general boards and agencies. The decade-long emphasis on the Ethnic Minority Local Church is a conspicuous example. Despite abundant justification in the biblical witness, we have been unable to find the transforming power of grace. Most individual members of congregations, most local churches, and much of the superstructure of the church have not been dynamically involved. Despite the actions of three General Conferences and promotions over ten years, the Ethnic Minority Local Church is not at the center of attention for most United Methodists or most local congregations. Thus, the commission recognizes that its report, even if well done, is practically worthless without a plan of action that calls attention through the Book of Discipline to specific responsibilities for
pastors, boards and agencies, annual conferences, and local churches.

The commission recommends that the General Conference authorize that the statement of mission, with improvements, be placed in the beginning pages of the 1988 Book of Discipline, and that additional references to that statement be included in several sections that follow.

In light of that statement, it is hoped that each local church would write its own statement on mission, based on that endorsed by the General Conference, update that statement each year, and evaluate its work annually. Each leader of the church, from chairpersons of local committees to bishops and general church executives, should then evaluate their work primarily in terms of effectiveness in mission. We pray that regulations, procedures, and customs that inhibit mission would also be eliminated.

The commission recognizes that its report, even if well done, is practically worthless without a plan of action.

For instance, it is obvious that clergypersons alone cannot effect fundamental change in our church to enable mission. Laypersons must be involved in all opportunities of mission and ministry. In the tradition of John Wesley, laypersons must be encouraged to take on the most significant tasks of discipleship.

Too often our church appears to exist as a support structure for the clergy.

Too often our church appears to exist as a support structure for the clergy. The percentage of income we spend on the custodial care of ourselves and on institutional structures is amazing. Mission has everything to do with stewardship—of our possessions, of our time, of all our resources. On every level we too often model in reverse, as if institutional survival and denominational health were our primary values. We often hold
our meetings in the most luxurious of hotels and set salary structures and benefits according to the standards of secular society. The percentage of our total income that we spend on ourselves is so great that it inhibits mission.

In the list that follows I attempt to give examples of the questions that a church in mission has to address. I should emphasize that it has no official status. None of these specific suggestions have at this time been formally endorsed by the commission, but we are eager for people to explore and discuss ways to make the mission statement real. Many of the suggestions listed below may be helpful in implementing the final action of the General Conference. You can communicate your suggestions and response to delegates to the General Conference from your area as you take part in shaping the mission of the church.

Specifically, the following possibilities might be considered:

— that the mission statement printed in the Book of Discipline be the theme of an entire Annual Conference session early in the next quadrennium and that the theme of mission be an emphasis once a quadrennium thereafter. At worship, at services of celebration, in discussion, and in workshops conferences would concentrate on the mission statement printed in the Book of Discipline. Each resident bishop and conference lay leader could be asked to make an action statement to the conference, based upon “Grace upon Grace: God’s Mission and Ours,” suggesting specific goals for implementation and a challenge in mission for local churches.

— that units based on the mission statement be integrated into church school literature at each age level.

— that seminaries be challenged to shape the task of ministry in terms of mission.

— that annual conference councils and local church councils develop specific goals and plans of action based upon the statement and that they develop methods of evaluation and accountability.
— that each local church, conference, board, and agency develop action plans for mission in accordance with the statement.

— that confirmation and membership training materials include study and action suggestions based on the statement.

— that the charge conference and the annual meeting of each local church review and evaluate annually its total mission and ministry in light of the statement, and adopt objectives and goals recommended by the administrative council or administrative board.

— that the work area chairperson of nurture and membership care, the chairperson of outreach, the chairperson of education, the chairperson of stewardship, the chairperson of finance, the chairperson of the board of trustees, and the chairperson of the pastor/parish relations committee plan for implementation of programs to aid spiritual growth and missional outreach based upon the statement.

— that special ministries for lay persons be developed in each local church. Our church must develop many areas of specialized lay ministries if it is to effectively be in mission in today’s world. The section on lay life and work of the Board of Discipleship might develop materials for training lay ministers for mission, consistent with the statement in the Book of Discipline. Each local church could be challenged to recruit at least 5% of its membership and train them as an active corps of lay persons in mission. In cooperation with the pastor, they could have responsibility to implement the mission goals of each congregation.

— that new programs in short-term (one week to two years) mission service be developed to involve young people in the mission and ministry of the United Methodist Church, especially in local churches (a group from the district or conference would be hosted for a few days or weeks by a local
church to accomplish specific tasks in mission that would be beyond the capacity of the local congregation alone, or individual young people would intern in mission in local churches for a defined period of time).

— that new intern programs in mission be developed in cooperation with campus ministries and that opportunities for large numbers of young people to be short-term interns in mission (one week to three years) be created by the Board of Global Ministries.

— that there be a designated Mission Sunday each year to highlight the biblical foundations of the mission statement and its implications for worship and life.

— that the Council of Bishops consider developing and implementing a churchwide program in mission that would involve every United Methodist in witness and action.

— that each bishop make effectiveness in mission major factor in clergy evaluation and appointment making.

— that district superintendents implement the program developed by the Council of Bishops through district and cluster structures. Pastors should know that their work and future appointments would be judged on the basis of effectiveness in mission and ministry.

— that study and action resources for use by annual conferences, districts, and local churches be provided.

— that the General Council on Ministries, as part of its evaluation and review function, emphasize the effectiveness in mission and outreach of boards and agencies.

— that the General Board of Church and Society develop study and action programs implementing the mission statement throughout the general church, annual conferences, dis-
tracts, and local churches, and that it witness to and act upon that statement in reference to the society in which we live.

— that the General Council on Finance and Administration make the statement on mission a major factor in its self-evaluation of its work and explore ways the United Methodist Church might be in mission through the best use of its financial assets.

— that the General Board of Pensions make the statement on mission a major factor in its self-evaluation of its work and explore ways it might be in mission by means of its investment portfolio.

— that the General Board of Discipleship shape its efforts to win persons to Jesus Christ as disciples and to help these persons grow in their understanding of God and in the knowledge of their responsibilities to witness and work in the world according to the statement on mission.

— that the appropriate church agencies develop resources for the conduct of public worship in the churches—including liturgy, hymnody, preaching, the sacraments, music, and the related arts—that would give emphasis to the implementation of the mission statement. (The commission would like to see, if possible, a special emphasis on mission in the new hymnal, including appropriate hymns, prayers, litanies, creedal statements, and an affirmation statement based upon the mission statement for use in worship, etc.)

— that the General Board of Discipleship develop resources, support services, and designs for the development and training of lay leaders in the local church based upon the mission statement, with special emphasis on the founding of a program of special ministries for lay persons in mission in each local church.

— that the General Board of Discipleship develop new materials based on the mission statement for:
CHURCH AND PEOPLE

- worship
- training booklets on mission for elected officers of local churches, districts, and conferences
- United Methodist Youth Fellowship programming
- Church School teacher training
- books of devotion and on spiritual life for clergy and laity.

— that church school materials be designed with the mission statement in mind, both in terms of explicit sections dealing with the document, and as a dominant theme in all other curriculum materials.

— that the General Board of Global Ministries be asked to implement at every level of the church and in all parts of the world the statement on mission. (The commission has appreciation and respect for the recent statement on mission developed by the board and encourages such ongoing activity for every agency and board of the church.)

— that the National Division and the World Division integrate their current statements of purpose in the 1984 Book of Discipline (1413-1417, 1431-1439) to include further specific implementations of the statement on mission.

— that the objectives and strategies for the mission of the United Methodist Church be shaped by the Board of Global Ministries according to the statement on mission approved by General Conference.

— that the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry foster within educational institutions the highest educational standards and a commitment to teach and implement the mission statement. (The first goal of seminary training should be to provide the resources necessary for the pastor and the church he or she serves to be in mission.)

— that the General Board of Publication develop a wide variety of multimedia study materials and resources to implement
the mission of the church according to the statement. (They should publish books expanding on the mission statement as part of continuing education for pastors and books based on the statement for use in seminaries.) At least three new books might be commissioned:

- one for pastors, providing the biblical basis for the statement, practical suggestions necessary for implementation of the mission statement at the local church level, and background material for preaching and training others for mission.
- one for lay leadership, giving the biblical base and practical suggestions for implementation at all levels of the church.
- one as a guide book for action for councils on ministry.

In addition several study guides for different leadership groups and age levels ought be developed for use in local churches.

- that the United Methodist Women continue and expand their already fine work in implementing mission. A suggestion is that the statement on mission be the foundation for a yearlong study emphasis.

- that the Commission on the Status and Role of Women and the Commission on Religion and Race be encouraged to review their work on the basis of the statement and continue to monitor all the areas of their specific concern. They should give particular attention to the ways in which racism and sexism inhibit the mission of the church.

- that the church continue to develop an ecumenical focus for mission, cooperating in every way with other Christian churches and with all people and groups working in mission.

- that all use of church property and resources be constantly monitored to assure consistency with the mission statement. Especially important are the style of living issues, which do not seem to be adequately addressed at any level of the
church. Real involvement in mission implies that those who minister be servants of servants, that the mission of the church be inclusive of all people, and that "temptations of materialism, the heresy of the gospel of prosperity, increased clericalism, subtle forms of racism and sexism, and uncritical adoption of cultural values" be rejected.

— that a time line following General Conference could be established as an introductory emphasis so that the whole church will become acquainted with the document and respond in specific ways. For example:

A. Fall of 1988—organizational meetings of general boards and agencies might spend time looking at the report and statement in the Book of Discipline for the purpose of developing goals for its implementation in their work.

B. Fall/Winter of 1988–89—make the document the centerpiece in the jurisdictional quadrennial program resource meetings.

C. The General Council on Ministries could highlight the statement and the council's role in its implementation as a part of the council's contact with annual conference council directors in 1989.

D. Each conference council on ministries might develop specific goals based upon the statement as a part of the conference program planning meetings in 1989.

E. A study guide could be prepared for use with the document by local churches by the fall of 1989.

— that the Board of Discipleship develop a descriptive statement of the characteristics of a "missional congregation" based upon the statement.

— that the mission statement be used as the basis for a study unit in the conference schools of Christian mission during the quadrennium.
The essential task for mission is not to increase our membership or to reform society but to bring others to Christ.

We have also been particularly blessed by the rich ethnic traditions and world perspectives that are increasingly important to United Methodism. These have been important correctives for the ways the gospel has been addressed by Western civilization. In many ways the gospel is being read anew with minds opened by shared witness and experience. Vitality and a fresh new look at life are marks of grace. Christ is forming new communities as agents of that grace within and beyond the United Methodist Church.

To find the embodiment of grace we have only to look to Christ. Christ provides us with vision and enables us to respond
to that vision. God’s grace is expressed in Jesus Christ, crucified and resurrected. The United Methodist Church and every local congregation exist for mission. Through grace, Christ by means of the cross forms the church. We look at life from the perspective of the saving love we have experienced. When, in the light of God’s grace, we see poverty and hunger, violence and warfare, injustice and racism, greed and indifference, we are cast into mission whether or not we want anything to do with mission.

As stewards of the gifts of the Savior, congregations are essentially missional societies in which every member contributes her or his gifts of ministry. Juan Luis Segundo speaks of the church in South America as a youthful church, indifferent to its own internal problems, its survival, its administration. Instead, with youthful idealism, its commitment is to the essential task—the transformation of society and individuals. Its word is the word of salvation, which converts, redeems, and transforms.

The essential task for mission is not to increase our membership or to reform society but to bring others to Christ. The grace which does convert and which does transform is found only in Christ. The church is in mission only when it becomes the agent of Christ. Then lives will be changed by grace, our church will be formed by grace, and our world will be transformed by grace.
"Changes beget tensions. The ways in which people and organizations deal with tensions establish critical paths for the future, for tensions create possibilities for constructive change."

The report from the Ministry Study commission indicates the presence of such creative tension in the United Methodist church. Hopefully, it will also lead to the possibility of constructive change.

The critical issue is whether the church's current forms of ministry are adequate for its present and its future mission. Even that which is "not broken" may be ineffective for changing situations and new needs. When any proposal for change is made the church must raise the fundamental question: How does this help us to be more faithful to the mandate and mission of the gospel?

The recommendations from the study commission must also be considered in light of that question. The primary focus of those recommendations is set forth in these words:

The study report "The Church and its Ministry" as published in the report section of the Advanced Edition of the Daily Christian Advocate [is
The commission made no legislative proposals. Their report does not advocate any change in legislation or practice over the next quadrennium. Instead, it recommends additional process and study to give the church sufficient time to struggle with the issues and their implications.

The focus of debate and question about the report itself has to do with the commission’s decision to affirm a permanent ordained diaconate. That decision was not made lightly. Although the 1984 ministry study had brought a similar recommendation to General Conference it was by no means a foregone conclusion that this commission would also. In fact, I was one of those who came to my work on the commission with the conviction that it should not!

Before reaching a consensus—and it was indeed that—on this issue, the commission engaged in an extensive process of study, dialogue and discussion. This included reading previous reports and papers, hearing special presentations, consulting with representatives from the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, the General Board of Global Ministries, and the General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns, participating in a Multi-ethnic Consultation on Ministry, and establishing GREAT groups (Generative, Reflective, Educations, and Theological groups) in each Episcopal area. These last were especially helpful in gathering input from a broad constituency of local church persons, including clergy (deacons and elders), diaconal ministers, seminary faculty, local pastors, and lay members.

The commission’s report recommends the establishment of a permanent ordained diaconate. It describes the purpose and
function of that office within the life and mission of the church. Finally, the report raises issues regarding its form and implementation within the church. The report describes the deacon as follows:

Deacons are baptized members of the People of God who are ordained to represent to the church its own identity in Christ as a body of persons in service to the church and the world. The particular calling of the deacon is to struggle with and respond in Christ's name to the myriad needs of societies and persons. The deacon is also called to personify the interdependence of worship and mission in the life of the church (Study Report, p. 25).

The commission views the deacon and the elder in a collegial rather than a competitive relationship. Their ministries are not mutually exclusive. In their unity they represent the essential wholeness of the church's ministry. In their differences they are a visible reminder of the diversity of the Spirit's gifts for ministry. Similarly, the tasks of the deacon and the elder are complementary. Deacon and elder share some essential tasks, such as teaching, proclamation, education, nurture, and liturgical responsibilities, but each brings a different or distinctive focus to the exercise of that task.

The deacon thus joins with the elder in an interlinking servant ministry. The foundation for both ministries is the ministry of the laos, or the people of God; that is, the servanthood to which each Christian is called. Although the ministry of each (whether lay, deacon, or elder) is distinct, none may be seen as separate from or as a substitute for the other. "[As] the persons of the Trinity are separate but One, each form of ministry ought to be fulfilled in relation to, not in isolation from, the other (Study Report, p. 23).

Ministry describes the service to which all the People of God, individually or corporately, are called. To be a follower of Jesus Christ is to be in ministry.

From that perspective the commission specified the focus of each of these ministries:
TO SERVE THE PRESENT AGE

The Ministry of All Christians. Ministry describes the service to which all the People of God, individually or corporately, are called. To be a follower of Jesus Christ is to be in ministry. Each Christian's life is to be a conscious and intentional expression of the ministry of Jesus Christ in all dimensions of living. This ministry is carried out through worship, witness and service to others, both in the Christian communion and in the world. Among the various ways it may be lived out are:

— participating faithfully in the worship and life of a congregation;
— studying the Bible and praying regularly;
— striving to live a holy life and standing for righteousness in the community;
— living responsibly in family life, in one's vocation, and in political relationships;
— helping and serving those in physical or material need;
— working for peace with justice, after the mind of Christ (Study Report, p. 9).

Particular Ministries of The Office of Deacon. The Deacon’s ministry is a sign to the church, enabling the servanthood of all Christians. Deacons are called to ministries of service, witness and practice. Their ministry includes several dimensions:

— as servant the deacon represents to the church and the world the servant ministry of Jesus Christ to which all Christians are called;
— as care-giver the deacon demonstrates a loving care and concern for all persons, calling the church into active involvement with the hurts and needs of all humanity;
— as advocate the deacon proclaims justice, assists the poor, the needy and the oppressed, challenging the church to confront those systems which oppress or injure others;
— as evangelist the deacon witnesses by the power of the Holy Spirit to the grace of God, inviting people to become disciples and receive baptism;
— as teacher the deacon nurtures persons in the faith, assisting the community to claim its self-identity as servant ministers of Jesus Christ and communicating the teachings of the gospel by word and deed;
— as missioner the deacon lifts the global dimension of the Christian faith, models the link between those gathered for worship and
those scattered for service in the world, calling the church to intentionally engage in the world community and its struggles;  
— as leader the deacon assists in worship and aids in equipping and empowering the laity for their ministry in both the church and the world (Study Report, p. 29).

Particular Ministries of The Ordained Elder. Elders are baptized members of the people of God who continue in the ministry of witness and service given to all the people of God in their baptism. Following the call of God, elders are ordained for the serving ministry of Word, sacrament and order. The ministry of the elder also has its particular focus:

— as preacher the elder proclaims the good news of redemption and salvation in Christ, and invites all persons to receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and be baptized as disciples;  
— as prophet the elder calls the church to be faithful to Christ’s words and authority, advocating a concern for the poor, the needy and the oppressed and a commitment to social justice;  
— as teacher the elder communicates knowledge of the Christian tradition, interprets the scriptures, and challenges the church in Christian ethical reflection;  
— as pastor the elder, with Jesus as the chief shepherd, gathers, prays for and suffers with God’s people, mediating the healing power of God’s grace through the Holy spirit;  
— as priest the elder lifts to God the concerns of the people, through baptism marks the incorporation of persons into the church and its ministry, and in celebrating the Lord’s Supper, offers them forgiveness in Christ’s name, in union with Christ’s sacrifice;  
— as leader the elder performs the ministry of guiding and “ordering” the life of the congregation, of building it up in Christ, by equipping, encouraging and enabling all the people of God in their servanthood (Study Report, pp. 33-34).

Lay persons, deacons and elders are called to ministry. The call of each is for servanthood. The form that servanthood will take is diverse and depends both on the nature of the call one has received and on the gifts one has been given for that service.

God gives gifts for ministry to all members of the church. Through the guidance of the Spirit, in prayer, in reading the Bible, and in conversation with the community of faith, all
members are helped to discover their gifts and to use them. Each has a gift that is needed and no one goes away empty (Study Report, p. 8).

It should be noted that nothing in the study's proposal is contrary to the church's view of ministry, general or representative, or its understanding of the act and purpose of ordination as these are set forth in the 1984 Discipline. The work of the commission extends these understandings and widens some of the concepts without essentially changing them. In several instances the suggestions make the present statements more concrete and consistent. This is especially true with regard to the form and function of the diaconate.

From the beginning diaconal ministry has been an integral part of the church's self-understanding and practice. A recently published book, Called To Serve: The United Methodist Diaconate by Rosemary Skinner Keller, Gerald F. Moede and Mary Elizabeth Moore, demonstrates this most clearly. This book is an excellent resource for understanding the diaconate from its beginning roots in the early community to its place in the church today. The authors trace and examine the scriptural, theological, and historical contexts and traditions surrounding diaconal ministry in its many forms. They further consider these amid the challenges of today's mission needs. Their work should be read together with the commission's study report for a fuller and more detailed understanding of the issues involved.

QUESTIONS SURROUNDING THE COMMISSION REPORT

It has been suggested by some that the commission's proposal regarding the diaconate is too revolutionary and that it moves the church in an entirely new direction. Yet the concept of a permanent diaconate is not new, nor is the concept of an ordained diaconate. Neither is a radical departure from either our tradition or our practice. Actually in practice the church now has both ordained and non-ordained permanent deacons. The diaconal minister is a deacon consecrated for life-long service. Persons ordained in the process of becoming elders who retire before the process is completed remain life-long deacons with all
The concept of a permanent diaconate is not new, nor is the concept of an ordained diaconate. Neither is a radical departure from either our tradition or our practice.

The commission's affirmation of a permanent ordained diaconate emerges out of previous ministry studies authorized by the General Conference over the last five quadrenniums. It is also an outgrowth of the theology of ministry and the understanding of ordination which forms the first part of the commission's work and its report. The consensus is that the church would be served by the intentional establishment of a permanent ordained diaconate—one that emerges not by default, but by design, an office that is affirmed and authorized by the church and accountable for its ministry.

The concept of a permanent diaconate is not new, nor is the concept of an ordained diaconate. Neither is a radical departure from either our tradition or our practice.

The commission further affirms the need for a diaconate with its own integrity. Currently the deacon is seen as a transitional order before full entrance into ministry even though in practice deacons as pastors in charge serve all the functions of an elder, including sacramental ministry. In a paper presented to the commission in 1986, Bishop Edwin C. Boulton delineated the problem.

Until we come to terms with the Order of Deacon, we will bang away at the diaconate, and in the process get no closer to a healthy resolution of the questions surrounding our theology of servant-ministry. It will be difficult to dislodge our deeply ingrained notion that the Order of Deacon is a temporary station on the way to higher and better things, the Order of Elder.9

The Discipline perpetuates this dilemma with a most interesting dichotomy. The 1984 Discipline (¶ 428) describes ordination as a response to God's call. In "The purpose of ordination" (¶ 429) it is noted that this is "fulfilled in the ministry of Word,
Sacrament and Order”. This is further described in ¶ 429.2. In ¶ 430, which describes the qualifications for ordination, their purpose is for “sacramental and functional leadership”. In ¶ 431, which relates to the act of ordination, the reference is clearly again to the ministry of elders. Suddenly, ¶ 432 includes deacons in the ministry of the ordained even though they have been mentioned nowhere in the preceding paragraphs. In ¶ 432 deacons are described as “ministers who have progressed sufficiently in their preparation”—in other words, they are ordained for a ministry yet to come.

Such confusion also exists in local churches where a deacon must often explain how he or she is ordained and yet not really a full member of the clergy. It is worse yet for diaconal ministers who are really neither clergy or lay and yet perform functions of both. Their ministry is often misunderstood and as a result even more marginalized.

The commission’s consideration of the possibility of an alternative to the traditional “two-step” process from deacon to elder was seen as a means to further authenticate this office. It too is not without precedent in our history as a church. The Evangelical United Brethren Church did not have a transitional deacon. There are many elders serving in our local churches today from that tradition who were never deacons. There are many others who have transferred from other denominations that did not require such an ordination. The Council of Bishops in their 1986 “Response to Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry,” underscored this when they wrote:

BEM calls into question the United Methodist practice of making deacon’s orders the preliminary step to elder’s orders. It forces us to articulate a theological meaning of the “diaconal ministry” apart from itineracy and membership in the annual conference.*

The ecumenical context for discussions regarding the diaconate is also most helpful and encouraging at this point. The commission’s proposal is a move forward in ecumenical dialogue and opens new possibilities for communication and cooperation. Keller, Moede and Moore give a most helpful analysis of the focus of such conversations: “The most dramatic challenges for these churches are continuing ones: to reflect on
the diaconate theologically, and to define the purpose and shape of the reestablished diaconate in light of an ancient, but broken, history and in the light of the many needs for service in the contemporary world."

There is a concern by some that the proposed new order will diminish the ministry of the elder by removing from that office the dimension of servanthood. It is baptism, not ordination, that calls Christians into servant ministry. All Christians are called to servanthood and are ministers of Christ's gospel. Service therefore is never to be understood as the exclusive privilege or responsibility of any one part of the body of Christ. Out of these servants of the gospel there are those called to particular and representative ministries and ordained as deacons and elders.

To follow Jesus is to be called as a deacon in the best and deepest sense of that word. This is also the basis for the commission's understanding of ministry. "Basic to all ministry is service (diakonia). This underlies the existence and identity of the entire Christian community. A willing self-sacrifice is the calling of all those who are baptized in Christ's name (Study Report, p. 23)." The ministry of the deacon is intended to extend and enrich the ministry of both the whole people of God and the ordained elder. It is not meant to diminish either. Rather it embodies an integral part of the ministry of both.

There are also those concerned that another ordained order will "clericalize" the church. In truth let us confess and repent. The church is already clericalized.

There are also those concerned that another ordained order will "clericalize" the church. In truth let us confess and repent. The church is already clericalized. It would be foolish to assume that another order could prevent this. However, the ministry of the deacon is intended to make visible and audible the servant ministry of all of God's people. Deacons are called to serve as intentional reminders of the need to bring together one's liturgy and life style, one's work and worship. There is value in symbolizing the servanthood of all through an office that
embodies the holiness of all service and continually reminds the church of its identity as a servant community. The church affirms the priesthood of all believers and yet ordains some of the members of the Body to representative service in priestly functions. Is it not also feasible, even helpful, to affirm the servanthood of all and to ordain some with a particular responsibility for the focusing of that role?

The Council of bishops in their response to the commission's report affirmed that itineracy is for the sake of the church's mission, not for the convenience of those involved. Amen! That too must be recognized as a matter for confession. The report of the commission affirms the potential and the missional nature of our itinerant system. It also recognizes and calls the church to take seriously those issues which threaten its continued existence and usefulness. In practice the United Methodist Church no longer has a fully itinerant ministry. Many elders, even some serving local churches, do not itinerate for a variety of reasons. Many more serve in non-itinerant specialized appointments for most or all of their ministry. The itinerant system is also affected by concerns related to race, sex, culture, language, and spousal and professional needs. Pressures from outside and from within continue to act upon it. It is precisely for the sake of mission that the church needs to consider new forms and expressions of faithfulness to God's call.

A non-itinerating deacon may free the church to consider alternative forms for its mission where the demands and guarantees of the itinerant system may not offer the most effective or helpful means. Such a deacon also offers a means of response to those who are called to a life-long commitment of service other than that of the itinerant pastoral ministry of Word, Sacrament and Order. Wesley himself understood this. His guiding principle for the church was not preserving what had been for its own sake but finding what was needed for ministry in the present. Those who could not be available for appointment anywhere Wesley chose to send them would become "local pastors." They had no guarantee of appointment and they were not members of the conference. Nevertheless they served the needs of the people and moved the community forward in mission. The church today needs to be as flexible
as its foreparents in responding to changing needs and circumstances.

While the commission gave form and focus to the ministry of the deacon, it did not attempt to resolve all the questions regarding its place within our polity and our practice. The commission’s report surfaces several substantial issues in this respect. The tone of the commission is that given by Bishop Roy Clark in his words to the Council of Bishops, “From our perspective all the issues are fluid, and much is left to be done.”

Among that which the commission sees “to be done” are issues such as these: qualifications and prerequisites for the order of deacon; the place of the deacon in the membership of the annual conference; the possibility of both an itinerating and a non-itinerating deacon; structures of accountability and deployment; the relationship between the Annual Conference and elders in appointments beyond the local church; the injustices and inequities in the itinerant system as it is presently practiced and the relationship of the new order of deacon to existing diaconal offices and ministries.

This unfinished agenda is intentional. Many of the issues cited above cannot be resolved until the church settles its mind about the diaconate; permanent, transitional, ordained or lay. It was from that understanding that the commission made its proposal for continuation.

The commission for the Study of the Ministry [is to] be continued for the 1989-92 quadrennium for the purpose of completing the unfinished part of its 1984 mandate;

The 1985-89 membership of the commission [is to] be continued with additional members named by the Council of Bishops to assure racial inclusiveness and representation of local pastors, and to fill any
vacancies that might occur, and that the total number of commission members [may] not exceed 35; (Recommendations of the commission p. 5).

There have been studies of this kind for the last twenty years. Each one has made a contribution to the church’s self-understanding and its ministry. It is necessary that the church continue this process. Certainly no one group can claim to have all the answers. Nor does any one group know what is best for all the church. It would be arrogant and most presumptuous for this commission to assume otherwise.

Particular conditions do exist, however, which have often hindered the process. Each study has in a real sense started “de novo”. Obviously there has been access to the material of the previous group. But for all practical purposes each study group began again, which resulted in a lack of continuity and much lost time. This commission choose to spend a significant portion of its time laying the biblical and theological foundation for its work and being in dialogue across the church. The issues involved are complex, the implications are far-reaching. The problems cannot be solved simply or quickly but require careful reflection and intensive deliberation. They involve the institutional church at all levels. They also involve the lives of persons.

The church is called to model the future, not to mirror the past.

The commission’s proposal to continue its work was made to allow time for a process that is sensitive to those needs. It would give time to move from the past into the future with the least harm to those caught in the transition. The continuity provided can more effectively serve the church than a change midway through the process.

Dr. Kennon Callahan, in a seminar presentation entitled “The Effective Pastor—The Effective Church,” has remarked, “The church that looks to the past does not see where God is. God has already acted in the past and moved on to the present and is preparing for the future.” The church is at a critical point in
human history. Before us are wider mission fields than we might ever have imagined. Many of these are in our own communities and cities. To be faithful to the mandate of the gospel we must expand and widen our concept of how to be in ministry. We must stretch our understandings even at the risk of letting go of old patterns to claim new possibilities. The church is called to model the future, not to mirror the past. We must find a way to maintain that precarious, yet precious, balance between preserving our heritage from the past without sacrificing our hope for the future. In the case of the diaconate we may just have found a way to reclaim and renew that heritage and prepare and provide for that hope.

NOTES

2. (Unpublished) Report of the commission for the Study of Ministry to the General Conference of The United Methodist Church, recommendations, p. 3.
3. The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 1984 (See especially pars. 104; 106; 109-111; 301-302; 418-429; and 431).
7. Keller, Moede, and Moore, Called to Serve, p. 51; See especially the chart on pages 52-53.
IN QUEST OF A COMMON FAITH:  
THE THEOLOGICAL TASK OF  
UNITED METHODISTS  

THOMAS W. OGLETREE

It is no simple matter for a contemporary Protestant denomination to engage its people in a corporate process of theological reflection. Such an enterprise is especially difficult for a denomination as large, complex and diverse as the United Methodist Church. To be sure, virtually all Protestant denominations have formal doctrinal standards of some sort—creeds, articles of religion, confessions of faith. Yet only the United Methodist Church has ventured an official account of guidelines for the ongoing task of theological inquiry amid the changing circumstances of the church's life. This account, occasioned by the formation of the United Methodist Church in 1967, was adopted by the 1972 General Conference as ¶ 69 of the Discipline, entitled "Our Theological Task." In combination with ¶ 67, "Historical Background," and ¶ 68, "Foundation Documents," it describes the "Doctrine and Doctrinal Standards" of the United Methodist Church (Part II).

Many United Methodist people have experienced the 1972 treatment of "our theological task" as a mixed blessing. Its strength is that it directs us to ongoing theological inquiry in which we relate the promises of the gospel to the challenges and perils of our modern world. It summons us to take responsibility for our critical judgments, specifying only in general terms the reference points pertinent to our thinking. Its weakness is that it

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appears uncertain and apologetic about whether there are any clear standards of doctrine to which we are all answerable when we speak to and for the church. This impression is conveyed by its celebration of theological pluralism and by its warnings against doctrinal rigidity. Despite its disclaimers, it has tended to legitimate theological "indifferentism," the attitude that just about any sincerely held belief is acceptable among United Methodists.

The 1984 General Conference mandated the formation of an episcopal committee to prepare a new statement on the theological task of United Methodists. Advocates of the new statement were pleading for a stronger account of our doctrinal standards and their normative authority in our church's teaching. The resolution adopted by the General Conference specified a statement that sets forth the full scope of our Wesleyan heritage in its bearing on the mission of our church.

The Council of Bishops appointed the Committee on Our Theological Task, which has been at work throughout the quadrennium preparing the statement called for by the 1984 General Conference. In the course of its work, the committee found that it could not simply revise or rewrite ¶ 69 without also rethinking the whole of Part II of the Discipline. It has, therefore, produced a new version of Part II, now composed of four paragraphs: 66, "Our Doctrinal Heritage"; 67, "Our Doctrinal History"; 68, "Our Doctrinal Standards"; and 69, "Our Theological Task." The first paragraph recounts classic and reformation doctrinal traditions and describes the distinctive emphases of the Wesleyan movement in relation to those traditions. The second paragraph discusses the doctrinal histories of the denominations which compose the United Methodist Church. The third paragraph contains the "foundation documents" as before, but it calls them quite directly, "our doctrinal standards." The final paragraph is a new formulation of our ongoing theological task.

In the fall of 1986, the committee published a preliminary draft of its report, soliciting responses from church leaders. In light of numerous thoughtful criticisms, the committee then amended its statement, in some respects significantly, and adopted a final draft in the fall of 1987. This draft will go to the 1988 General
IN QUEST OF A COMMON FAITH

Conference as a possible replacement for Part II of the current Discipline.

Though the new statement involves a fairly extensive rewriting of the disciplinary paragraphs on doctrinal standards, it is, nonetheless, in essential continuity with their central intent. In both form and content, it builds upon the present statement, frequently retaining the exact wording of individual sentences and phrases. The purpose of the new statement, then, is not to reform the doctrinal standards of our church; it is to adjust our official account of those standards in response to the church’s present needs and concerns. If adopted, the committee’s report, like its predecessor, will doubtless require further reworking from time to time, just as we periodically prepare new hymnals and books of worship.

FROM THE CELEBRATION OF PLURALISM TO THE QUEST FOR CONSENSUS

The new statement differs from the old in its overall tenor: it drops any explicit affirmation of theological pluralism and stresses instead the urgency of a renewed quest for common grounds of theological understanding. In this notable shift of emphasis, it accepts as valid the contention that United Methodists can and should be more forthright about their doctrinal standards, and that such forthrightness is crucial to the recovery of a shared mission.

Currently the Discipline speaks of “the positive virtues of doctrinal pluralism.” It notes that “the theological spectrum in The United Methodist Church ranges over all the current mainstream options and a variety of special-interest theologies as well” (p. 75). It cautions against relying on “infallible rules” or
"reflex habits" or "precedesents for simple imitation" in doctrinal matters (p. 72). Such rules or habits would, presumably, dampen the lively inquiry which has been a special strength of the United Methodist traditions.

In my view, pluralism is a blessing when it expresses the richness of a diverse and vital church with a sure sense of its center. Such a church can readily "become all things to all people that it might by all means save some" (cf. I Corinthians 9:22). At the same time, pluralism is a problem when it signals a lack of accountability for critical standards of Christian teaching, or when it sanctions an avoidance of serious theological engagement with sharp and potentially divisive controversies within the church. Indeed, in these latter circumstances I do not believe that we have pluralism at all, but rather a fragmentation of the church's life and thought. When we face such fragmentation, we are obliged to redirect our energies toward clarifying afresh the convictions that express our common identity.

The new statement reflects a judgment that the principal threat to United Methodism at the present time is not doctrinal rigidity or narrowness, but theological confusion and fragmentation. Without necessarily precluding, still less repressing, the range of theological perspectives which are presently found within our church, it seeks to identify the standards to which we are properly subject when we represent the teachings of our church.

The new statement presumes that as United Methodists we do in fact have authoritative doctrinal standards. It provides an account of those standards and the criteria they generate for testing our theological judgments. Its aim is a heightened sense of our unity in faith. Drawing upon our doctrinal standards, it summons us "to articulate our vision in a way that will draw us together as a people in mission."

The emphasis on collective accountability will not suddenly resolve the conflicts that presently disturb our common life. In the short run, it could even intensify those conflicts because it impels us to take one another seriously and to engage one another theologically regarding the soundness and pertinence of our conceptions of the church's message. The new statement stresses, therefore, the need for patience and forbearance in
pursuing our theological discourse. The accent unquestionably falls, however, on the task of renewing, sustaining and extending a common faith.

THE PLACE OF SCRIPTURE AMONG THE SOURCES AND CRITERIA OF THEOLOGY

A second notable change in the new statement is that it reorganizes the discussion of the basic sources and criteria of theology. It treats scripture in a separate section, highlighting its primacy. It then links tradition, experience and reason closely to the interpretation of scripture.

In my view, this change has more to do with the form of presentation than with matters of substance. Both old and new statements attest the primacy of Scripture, and they also insist equally upon the necessity of bringing all four resources to bear upon every doctrinal consideration. The current statement however, has frequently been misconstrued as suggesting that the primary "guidelines" to theology are more or less equal partners, a misconception encouraged by their popular portrayal as "sides" of a "quadrilateral." The new statement

The new statement expands the discussion of the sources and criteria of theology in a number of striking ways. It acknowledges, for example, the importance for our theological task of "neglected traditions" within the church, particularly traditions arising out of "the sufferings and victories of the downtrodden."

corrects against this misconception, while continuing to insist that our appropriation of Scripture always involves tradition, experience and reason. In actual practice, the four sources and criteria interact reciprocally, so that each illumines and is illumined by the others. Thus, the primacy of Scripture is a reality for us not apart from the other three resources, but only in and by means of their full operation.

The new statement expands the discussion of the sources and
criteria of theology in a number of striking ways. It acknowledges, for example, the importance for our theological task of "neglected traditions" within the church, particularly traditions arising out of "the sufferings and victories of the downtrodden." Likewise, without in any way minimizing the centrality of the experience of new life in Christ, it also directs attention within the discussion of the sources and criteria of theology to wider senses of experience. It specifically mentions human experiences of terror, hunger, loneliness, and degradation, and the everyday experiences of birth and death, growth and life, and wider social relations.

The present disciplinary statement itself takes note of experiences such as those just cited, but only in its description of "theological frontiers and new directions." It lifts up such experiences, in other words, because they present us with special challenges as we go about our theological task. It does not yet include them within the internal processes of theological inquiry. In recognizing how essential these experiences are to our most elemental efforts to understand the biblical message, the new statement is a clear advance over the old.

Where United Methodists disagree, it is not over the primacy of Scripture, but over the way Scripture is received and interpreted.

It has been suggested that the emphasis on the primacy of Scripture establishes as normative one particular theological option: namely, "biblical theology." I would contend instead that any approach to theology is permitted, even encouraged, which clearly acknowledges the primacy of Scripture and recognizes at the same time the indispensable role of tradition, experience and reason in appropriating the biblical witness into our total understanding of reality. Where United Methodists disagree, it is not over the primacy of Scripture, but over the way Scripture is received and interpreted.

In this connection, the new statement recognizes the usefulness of "highly theoretical constructions of theology,"
among which I would readily include personalism and process thought. The legitimacy of more speculative forms of Christian thought is also noted in the discussion of reason, where attention is called to the significance of relating the biblical message to "the full range of human knowledge and experience." To be sure, reason is described not as a "source of theology," but as a "necessary tool." This assertion may be troubling for some since in popular usage "reason" is frequently taken to refer to anything we are capable of knowing independently of divine revelation. Conceived in such a broad and encompassing manner, reason is unquestionably a source of theology. In a stricter sense, however, reason refers simply to the formal standards of valid human thought and discourse. In this usage, reason in itself is devoid of content! It gains content from human experiences of the natural and social worlds, especially as these experiences are formed in human cultures and traditions. Even the experiences of divine revelation are mediated through human cultures and traditions.

In a similar vein, by emphasizing the place of experiences of oppression and liberation in theological reflection the new statement makes direct contact with recent discussions of liberation theology. Key themes from the latter are lifted up: regard for the poor, the disabled, the imprisoned, the oppressed, the outcast; the equality of all persons in Jesus Christ; the openness of the gospel to the diversity of human cultures with their distinctive values.

In the final analysis, the test of any theological formulation is whether it can help us express the saving promises of the gospel in "plain words for plain people."

I mention these two types of contemporary theology because some critics have argued that the new statement places them in a highly problematic position. My own contention is that the new statement does not favor any particular school of interpretation which we can readily identify. It rather shows how our standards, rightly understood, can provide a framework within
which our people can critically assess the contributions to our theological task of a whole range of classical and contemporary options in Christian thought. In the final analysis, the test of any theological formulation is whether it can help us express the saving promises of the gospel in "plain words for plain people."

THE SERMONS AND NOTES AS DOCTRINAL STANDARDS

There is a third matter which deserves special mention. According to the present Discipline, the Plan of Union for the United Methodist Church, while acknowledging that the language of the First Restrictive Rule in the Constitution has never been formally defined, stipulated that Wesley's Sermons and Notes "were specifically included in our present existing and established standards of doctrine by plain historical inference" (p. 49, italics mine). The new statement drops this claim, basically because the available historical evidence simply does not support the alleged inference. To be more specific, the 1808 General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church apparently did not intend to place Wesley's Sermons, and Notes under the protection of the First Restrictive Rule.

My colleague, Thomas C. Oden, has argued that the stipulation in the Plan of Union, noted above, has in itself the effect of including the Sermons and Notes in the First Restrictive Rule. He goes on to assert—erroneously, it would appear—that such inclusion was a constitutional act which cannot be "legislatively refashioned by a subsequent General Conference."

The Plan of Union which was submitted to the annual conferences for adoption contained four parts: 1) the Constitution and the enabling legislation; 2) doctrinal statements and the General Rules with preface; 3) the Social Principles with preface; and 4) legislation on organization and administration.

The contention that the Sermons and Notes were intended by the phrase "our present existing and established standards of doctrine" occurred only in the preface to the second part, "Doctrinal Statements and the General Rules." It did not appear in the main body of that section. Even in the preface, the claim was not offered as a proposition for debate and possible
action, but as a statement asserting a historical judgement about the "original reference" of the second clause of the First restrictive Rule. Finally—and this may be the crucial point—the "Message from the Joint Commissions," which serves as an introduction to the Plan of Union, specifies that the annual conferences are to vote only on Part I, the Constitution and enabling legislation. The remaining parts were submitted only for information.  

In short, the Plan of Union can be said to have stipulated that the *Sermons* and *Notes* are covered by the First Restrictive Rule only in the sense that the General Conferences of the two uniting churches accepted a particular historical judgment about what might have been the original reference of the First Restrictive Rule. Like any critical reconstruction of past events, this judgment remains open to historical review. Further, the action which included this stipulation in the Plan of Union had the status only of General Conference legislation. It simply cannot be described as a constitutional matter.

The next General Conference may still wish to interpret the First Restrictive Rule as covering the *Sermons* and *Notes*. However, it cannot do so any longer on the basis of an allegedly "plain historical inference." Nor can it claim constitutional protection for the *Sermons* and *Notes* merely by amending the document offered by the Committee on Our Theological Task. Such protection can be secured only by a constitutional amendment.

The new statement deals with the normative status of the *Sermons* and *Notes* by developing the distinction between formal doctrinal standards, which enjoy constitutional protection, i.e., the Articles of Religion and the Confession of Faith, and traditional doctrinal standards, which have their authority by their constant usage as major resources in doctrinal instruction, in particular Wesley's *Sermons* and *Notes*.

The two sorts of standards differ in both form and function. The formal standards consist of succinct propositions officially adopted as authoritative formulations of sound doctrine by specific ecclesiastical bodies. These propositions constitute the operative standards where judicial proceedings are involved. The traditional standards consist chiefly of full expositions of
selected biblical texts and doctrinal themes by the principal
teacher of the early Methodist movement. The latter are of vital
importance in the teaching activities of our church. Because of
their expository character, however, they are hardly suited to
furnish constitutional standards of doctrine, especially not for
use in judicial processes.

For my part, I do not believe that we have grounds to fear
the loss of Wesleyan teaching. It is strongly present in the
life of our church, especially in ministerial preparation.

This proposed restatement in no way implies that we are
about to "abandon" the Sermons and Notes as normative
doctrinal standards. On the contrary, the new statement is
pervaded by Wesleyan thought, indeed, to a degree that
surpasses the present disciplinary discussion. What is changed
is the basic conceptualization of the normative standing of these
Wesleyan writings. The new statement claims that the authority
of Wesley's Sermons and Notes resides not in an article of the
Constitution, but rather in the actual daily practice of our
church.

The anomaly created by the new statement, of course, is that
the articles which enjoy constitutional protection do not
strongly articulate some of our most distinctive Wesleyan
emphases: prevenient grace, the universal love of God for all
creation, assurance, disciplined communities, the connectional
polity. For my part, I do not believe that we have grounds to
fear the loss of Wesleyan teaching. It is strongly present in the
life of our church, especially in ministerial preparation. If we are
concerned about this matter, however, then we should venture
some additional articles which succinctly state the essential
matters, and undertake the process of constitutional amend­
ment which would incorporate them into our formal standards.
We would not be well served by trying to place the whole of
Wesley's Standard Sermons and Notes on the New Testament under
the restrictive rules of the Constitution.
CONCLUSION

The new statement on doctrine and doctrinal standards is by no means perfect. Personally, I would welcome the freedom to modify this sentence or that, adding a bit here, eliminating a bit there. On the whole, however, I believe it is a good statement, an appropriate advance over what we now have. While the new statement may fully satisfy no one, it does promise to encompass the major doctrinal sensibilities presently at work in our church. Insofar as it does, it can strengthen the bonds which hold us together as a church.

NOTES

5. Ibid., p. v.
7. Sanctification and Christian perfection are treated in Article XI of the Confession of Faith, and in an article taken from the Methodist Protestant Discipline which is included with the Articles of Religion though never voted on by the three bodies which united in 1939. Cf. Discipline, 1:62.
Open communion symbolizes the dilemma of an open church: Is there a minimum requirement for participation? Yes, these writers assert—baptism.

A CALL TO ECCLESIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Michael G. Cartwright

Among United Methodists, current understandings of “open communion” are curiously lacking in genuine theological grounding. Yet how we specify the openness of our sacramental practice offers an important clue as to how we understand the marks of the church. The fact that openness in communion practice is understood in widely divergent ways points not only to confusion about the sacrament itself but also to confusion about the church’s mission, unity, catholicity, and holiness. Our communion practices also betray the presence of a problem with which Methodism has long struggled, namely the lack of a “fully grounded ecclesiology.” As Albert Outler notes,

One of the most obvious of Methodism’s paradoxes . . . is that we are the only major “church family” in Christian history that began as an evangelical sect within a sacramental church and then evolved as a quasi-sacramental church . . . without an adequate self-understanding for doing so.¹

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Outler’s insightful analysis of this perennial problem of United Methodism suggests that ecclesiological confusion within our denomination will continue to elude resolution until we learn to see our mission within the scope of the wider “world Christian community” of which we are a part.

An instance of such confusion within United Methodism is the ambiguity that is created when nonbaptized persons are (implicitly) invited or allowed to participate in the “Great Thanksgiving” of the church, the Eucharist. This confusion arises, in part, from a misunderstanding of the invitation that begins the liturgy of the Lord’s Supper in our current United Methodist hymnal:

Ye that do truly and earnestly repent of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbors, and intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God, and walking from henceforth in his holy ways: Draw near with faith, and take this holy Sacrament to your comfort, and make your humble confession to almighty God.

To whom is this invitation directed? Many pastors would say that it is directed to “whoever feels led to respond.” Such an interpretation fails, however, to take into account the fact that “repentance” has always had clearly specified meanings within the Christian churches. Not simply a matter of how one feels on a given Sunday morning, repentance originates in an initial profession of faith, which takes place in the setting of Christian baptism. As far back as the sermon of Peter on the day of Pentecost, the response of the church to those who, upon hearing the gospel, inquire, “What must we do?” has been, “Repent and be baptized” (see Acts 2:37-39).

The answer that the history of Christianity brings to the above question is that the invitation to the Lord’s Supper is given to those people who constitute the body of Christ, the church. That is to say, all are invited to participate in the body and blood of Christ who have died to self and who have risen to new life in Christ through the sacrament of Christian baptism. Such specificity is further made explicit in the invitations to “The Peace” and “Offering” of the more recent liturgy for Holy Communion, We Gather Together: “Christ our Lord invites to his table all who love him and who desire to live in peace with one
another. Therefore, let us stand and offer one another signs of reconciliation and love." Following the exchange of greetings such as, "The peace of Christ be with you," and, "and also with you," the gathered assembly is addressed by the presiding minister, "As forgiven and reconciled people, let us offer ourselves and our gifts to God." Such greetings should not be treated as mere formalities with no bearing on who is actually participating in the Eucharist; rather, they identify the gathered company as repenting and reconciled disciples of Christ and, therefore, describe the appropriate limits of inclusiveness within which the Lord's Supper is rightly celebrated.

Not simply a matter of how one feels on a given Sunday morning, repentance originates in an initial profession of faith, which takes place in the setting of Christian baptism.

Thus, I would propose that the proper understanding of the openness of communion practice in the United Methodist Church be subject to the following two specifications: First, all baptized Christians, regardless of denomination, are invited to the Lord's Table. Second, within this wider company, all those persons who are willing to share in the reconciling peace of Christ at any given celebration of the Lord's Supper are welcome at the Lord's Table. Specifying the open character of communion practice in these ways conforms with the language of the above-mentioned invitations in that: (a) the precise meaning of "repentance" has always been specified within the context of the sacrament of Christian baptism, and (b) the fact that we have any understanding of what reconciliation is, is the result of the sharing of forgiveness enacted in the "passing of the peace" preceding the Eucharist. In those congregations where persons who are not baptized are present for worship, the invitation should be clarified in whatever way is deemed appropriate, whether this is a notice in the bulletin, such as, "All baptized Christians are welcomed to this our Lord's Table," or simply in a verbal remark prior to the beginning of the Great Thanksgiving.
No doubt some United Methodists will claim that such a suggestion is too restricted. Others may view this position as smacking of “closed” or “close” communion. The question such persons should ask themselves is, what value is being protected by defining “openness” with no specifying reference? The fact that United Methodism is one of few (perhaps the only one) denominations in the world Christian community that allows such unspecified “openness” of communion should give us pause. Those who might propose that there be no disciplines to restrict in any way the openness of communion would, I submit, have to give some alternative description of the four marks of the church: one, holy, apostolic, and universal.

A full defense of the position I am outlining would need to discuss each of these traditional marks of the church. Here I can only discuss two: the apostolic or missional nature and the holiness that mark the Christian community. Simply put, the fulfillment of the mission of the church is described with respect to the world to which it has been sent as a colony proclaiming good news of the reign of God. It is precisely in this sense that we can say that a principal task of the church, as an alternative community in the world, is evangelization. The church exists to help the world “see” God’s reign as well as to see itself in light of that kingdom.

Currently, our denomination is focusing more and more attention on the urgent need to reappropriate the task of evangelism, to return it to the heart of the apostolate of United Methodism. With respect to the question of open communion, my contention is that in inviting nonprofessing or nonbaptized persons to join in the sacramental celebrations of the church, we are also thereby conveying the message that being a part of the church does not necessarily require repentance. Further, such practice may convey the message that being a Christian can involve a range of individually specified commitments independent of a public profession of faith in Christian baptism. In short, any time the identification of the church becomes blurred by such unqualified openness, then a parallel shift in the focus of the mission of the church can also be discerned.

A second consequence of such unspecified openness in the
practice of Holy Communion among United Methodists is that such practice may send another message to those persons who are already members of the church, but who may not understand fully what Christian discipleship means. Such persons may be hearing, "It is OK that you are not obedient to the demands of the gospel." If such a message comes across through our practice of Holy Communion, then both the holiness and the mission of the church are being undermined. My contention is that without congregational practices of holiness within the life of the church, our evangelistic task will never take flight. Similarly, without vigilant efforts of evangelism—including practices that enable the unconverted to identify themselves as such—our church will never again succeed in "spreading scriptural holiness across the land." This interrelatedness holds among all four marks of the church: the tasks associated with one mark remind us of the other three.

Contemporary United Methodists would seem to care more about genteel tolerance than about being apostolic or holy.

Contemporary United Methodists would seem to care more about genteel tolerance than about being apostolic or holy. We would be embarrassed to be put in the situation of saying that not just anyone can join in the Great Thanksgiving of the church. Yet much of the embarrassment and awkward feelings pastors and laity have about limiting the openness of communion could be dealt with easily enough if we bothered to attend to those disciplines that have long been practiced by other denominations. For example, what can we do to help the person who is seeking Christ but who has not yet come to the point of professing faith? Such persons could join the church at the Lord's Table and receive a blessing: "May the Blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be upon you, and may God's grace guide you into the way of salvation through Christ our Lord." The felt difference that such a practice might
generate within our church need not be seen as elitist or exclusive; rather, such blessing is simply appropriate to the situation of a person who has not yet come to faith. Moreover, the congregation needs to be called to awareness of those in its midst who have not yet professed faith lest it be tempted to forget its proper apostolic task toward those who remain unprofessing seekers.

Having begun with an assessment of the problem of United Methodist ecclesiology, I want to conclude by alluding to the potential ecumenical vocation of United Methodism. As Albert Outler has noted, “Methodism has within it the makings of a pneumatological ecclesiology with immense import for the world Christian community” (p. 35). I believe that Outler is correct in emphasizing one of the unique things that United Methodists bring to the world Christian community: the Spirit-led dimension of our church’s self-understanding. At our best, we United Methodists understand that being the church involves disciplines of faithful living. But at our worst, we fail to recognize that the Spirit guides us away from the pluralism of incoherent practices to an ordered sacramental life focused on disciplines of repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

I am suggesting, then, that United Methodism will not live up to its potential as a church with an ecumenical vocation unless we bring order to our sacramental practices, one feature of which is (currently) a nonspecific invitation to the Lord’s Table. Even non-Christians intuitively understand that the celebration is not for everyone but only for those who in fact do profess faith in Christ. Tragically, many people who are baptized stay away from the Lord’s Table because they do not feel worthy. I am suggesting that part of the problem in these cases lies in the fact that—in word and practice—we fail to make clear to the as-yet-unconverted world who should and who should not participate in this meal of the church, often in failing to offer repentance and reconciliation as specified activities or disciplines. In so doing, we also fail to make clear to our own membership that this holy meal is where the church is most fully what it has been called to be—one, holy, apostolic, and universal.
Persons not well acquainted with the roots of Methodism in the revival of eighteenth-century England are generally quite surprised to learn of the sacramental nature of Wesleyan spirituality. As Methodism in America went its own way, adapting to the frontier experience, the sacramental nature of its spirituality in the Wesleyan tradition was virtually abandoned. We have generally forgotten how vital a role the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper (or Eucharist) played in the lives of both John and Charles Wesley and in the revival itself.

It is not uncommon in popular thought to dismiss both Wesleys’ sacramental interest as a phase of their overzealousness during the early years in the Holy Club at Oxford, a sort of “High Church nonsense.” It was during that period of time when the small group of devout young men was nicknamed by some “methodists” and by others “sacramentarians.” Such a view suggests that following John Wesley’s “heart-warming” experience at Aldersgate his sacramental interests diminished. The record, however, does not support this. His tract, The Duty of Constant Communion, although originally written while at Oxford, was “retrenched” and published by Wesley more than fifty years later in 1788. He observed in the preface: “I thank God, I have not yet seen course to alter my sentiments in any point which is therein delivered.” John Bowmer concludes that Wesley sifted out the trivial from the essential in his Oxford experience and the balance became the “very warp and woof of his spiritual life.” He then adds,

Especially does this apply to his habits and beliefs about the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. They became, as we shall see, the rock to which he anchored himself when an extreme form of pietism . . . would have driven him, as it had driven others, to “stillness” or to “antinomianism” or even to despair. His Oxford training saved him from becoming a fanatic; his evangelical conversion from becoming a Pharisee.
The frequency of Wesley's own eucharistic observance is convincing evidence that his was a lifelong sacramental piety. It has been calculated that John Wesley communicated on the average of once every five days throughout his long life. His last ten years show no less frequency than his early period. During periods of intense activity he received the Sacrament daily. The following examples of Wesley's practice from his early period and his later period demonstrate his uniform concern:

(1) "Sunday April 3, 1737 and every day in this great and holy week, we had a sermon and the holy communion."

(2) "Easter Day, 1777 was a solemn and comfortable day... During the Octave, I administered the Lord's Supper every morning after the example of the Primitive Church."

All of the evidence presented by Bowmer gives the lie to the mythical figure of a Wesley who after Aldersgate changed from a High Church sacramentalist into a Low Church evangelical. Wesley's life and practice are convincing evidence that sacramental devotion and evangelical fervor are not mutually exclusive.

From the earliest days of the revival the members of the societies were required by their rules to attend their parish church for the Lord's Supper. However, it became increasingly difficult as numerous clergy barred them from the Table. By 1743, Charles Wesley in Bristol began serving the Sacrament to his followers in the New Room Chapel. Charles states that in November of 1743 he also served the Sacrament to about a thousand of the society in London. At times so many communicated in London that the service lasted at least five hours.

The sacramental tone of vital piety for the early Methodists was set also by the publication of Hymns on the Lord's Supper by John and Charles Wesley in 1745. The Wesleys grouped these 166 hymns under the following headings: "I. As it is a Memorial of the Sufferings and Death of Christ" (hymns 1-27); "II. As it is a Sign and a Means of Grace" (hymns 28-92); "III. The
Sacrament a Pledge of Heaven” (hymns 93-115); “IV. The Holy Eucharist as it implies a Sacrifice” (hymns 116-127); “V. Concerning the Sacrifice of our Persons” (hymns 128-157); and “VI. After the Sacrament” (hymns 158-166). One can readily see from these groupings of the eucharistic hymns that more than one-third of them (38%) are devoted to the topic of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper as “a sign and a means of grace.”

John Wesley taught that the Lord’s Supper is both a confirming and a converting ordinance.

The sacrament of Holy Communion, for the Wesleys, was not merely a memorial meal in which Christ is to be remembered in a kind of historical flashback. It is a sacramental means of grace. By a sacrament John Wesley understood, as the Church of England taught, that it is “an outward sign of inward grace, and a means whereby we receive the same.” As a means of grace, he taught that God has ordained that the Lord’s Supper is one of the events in which we meet the Divine presence and receive God’s gracious work into our lives. But it is a means. The emphasis is not, therefore, upon the means but upon the grace of God experienced in this ordained means. Wesley insisted that “there is no power in this. It is, in itself, a poor, dead, empty thing; separate from God, it is a dry leaf, a shadow.” Wesley was quite clear that “there is no power to save but in the Spirit of God, no merit but in the blood of Christ.”

John Wesley taught that the Lord’s Supper is both a confirming and a converting ordinance. The sacrament conveys to us “preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace,” according to our need. The Eucharist confirms and nurtures believers in their faith, giving to them confirmation of God’s continuing grace upon their lives. For unbelievers, the Sacrament can become the very beginning of their awakening and conversion to faith in God. So one of the “Hymns on the Lord’s Supper” calls the glutton to a richer food (st. 1), the drunkard to a more satisfying drink (st. 2), the distressed in conscience to a healing God (st. 3), the pleasure seeker to a more rapturous joy (st. 4), and the
sensualist to a truer love (st. 5). Finally in stanza 6, the hymn proclaims:

Lord, I have now invited all:
And instant still the guest shall call,
Still shall I invite to Thee;
For, O my God, it seems but right
In mine, Thy meanest servant’s sight,
That where all is, there all should be.

(Hymn no. 9)

Wesley observed that many persons present in his societies had experienced the beginning of their new life in Christ at the Lord’s Supper.

John Wesley outlined his teaching on the Lord’s Supper in his summary of the conflict in the Fetter Lane Society in 1740. His position was an insistence upon an active use of all the means of grace, in contrast to those who urged “stillness” or quietism. Wesley appealed to the practice of the ancient church, according to which “everyone who was baptized communicated daily.” His concern was to demonstrate that the Lord’s Supper was a converting ordinance. Wesley writes:

I showed at large, 1. That the Lord’s Supper was ordained by God, to be a means of conveying to men either preventing, or justifying, or sanctifying grace, according to their several necessities. 2. That the persons for whom it was ordained, are all those who know and feel that they want the grace of God, either to restrain them from sin, or to show their sins forgiven, or to renew their souls in the image of God.

3. That inasmuch as we come to his table, not to give him anything, but to receive whatsoever he sees best for us, there is no previous preparation indispensably necessary, but a desire to receive whatsoever he pleases to give. And, 4. That no fitness is required at the time of communicating, but a sense of our state, of our utter sinfulness and helplessness, every one who knows he is fit for hell, being just fit to come to Christ, in this as well as all other ways of his appointment.

At face value, one might conclude that there was no sacramental discipline in John Wesley’s practice of “open” communion. A wider reading of Wesley would suggest otherwise. First, it needs to be remembered that the Wesleyan revival was a movement within an established church. Nearly all members of the societies were baptized, except chiefly Quakers.
Evidence is that Wesley baptized very few, because few had not already been baptized. He even admitted baptized children to the Table, provided they received instruction. Colin Williams in his study of Wesley’s eucharistic practice concludes that for Wesley “baptism is the qualification for admission” to the Lord’s Supper.  

A second consideration is Wesley’s understanding of degrees of faith and hence his delineation of stages of spiritual development. Meeting a “fitness” requirement for Wesley meant having achieved a certain moral and spiritual level. There was no prescribed moral or spiritual level for those who were invited to the Table, but only “a sense of our state, of our utter sinfulness and helplessness.” Wesley clearly included the baptized among those who were sinful and helpless, particularly those baptized in infancy who no longer experienced an inward change. But even among adults recently baptized, Wesley delineates levels of spiritual development. He writes:

Of the adults I have known baptized lately, only one was at that time born again in the full sense of the word; that is, found a thorough, inward change, by the love of God filling her heart. Most of them were only born again in a lower sense; that is, received the remission of their sins. And some (as it has since too plainly appeared) neither in one sense nor the other.*

John Wesley’s “open” communion practice did not mean he held no discipline of the Sacrament. He simply did not restrict it to a confirming ordinance for those who had attained new life in Christ. He clearly perceived the Lord’s Supper as a converting ordinance also. As a means of grace, the Eucharist conveys “either preventing, or justifying, or sanctifying grace, according to their several necessities,” Wesley taught. Through the Eucharist the unconverted could come to new life in Christ.

Based upon my appreciation for the Wesleyan understanding and practice, and current ecumenical discussions, I have observed the following sacramental discipline. All baptized persons are invited to the Table, even baptized children. I have not allowed children who have not been baptized to receive. To assist parents in instructing their baptized children, I have prepared a ten-question catechism. It may be read to the child
prior to communicating. Neither do I invite unbaptized adults to receive. If such adults want to receive the church’s meal, then they may demonstrate this by becoming initiated into the church through baptism. The baptismal rite of initiation does not constitute a “fitness” requirement in Wesley’s sense of a moral or spiritual level of attainment. Baptism is simply a means of grace, which is offered first and is sacramentally nonrepeatable. The Eucharist becomes then the chief repeatable sacramental means of grace for those who have been initiated into the eucharistic community of the church.

For my practice of sacramental discipline, the minimum requirement for admission to the Lord’s Table, as I believe it was for Wesley, is initiation into the church through the sacrament of baptism. Such a discipline, I believe, recognizes that there is a general understanding of spiritual development and renewal in the church. The first step for those who would by faith enter into the way of salvation in Jesus Christ is to offer themselves for baptism, or, as children, to be offered for baptism.

As those who stand in the Wesleyan tradition, we can no longer, in fairness to our heritage, enlist Wesley on the side of an undisciplined sacramental practice of “open” communion. But we can continue to insist that the Lord’s Supper is a converting as well as a confirming ordinance.

RESPONSE TO MR. SHIPLETT

Michael G. Cartwright

I am grateful to Mr. Shiplett for his careful summary of the historical background of this question about which he and I share a common concern. In my own essay I tried to think systematically about the question of sacramental discipline from the perspective of how United Methodism should understand itself ecclesiologically. Shiplett’s study of the Wesleyan background of this question provides a nice complement to my own effort and, not surprisingly, I find myself in large part in fundamental agreement with Shiplett. I hope that through our two different studies we have dispelled certain historic misconceptions about the question of “open” communion.
By way of a response, I want to suggest two points at which we need to think more clearly about this issue as a church. First, I think we need to be more precise in our use of language. In Shiplett's article, at several points, the language of "unbeliever" is used in contrast to "believer" in combination with "unconverted." Although I am convinced that in fact there are people who do not yet believe in Christ, I am also concerned that we be careful not to apply such language to those persons who have been baptized. (Of course, it is possible to consider a person who has been baptized and later actually renounced following Christ, an "unbeliever" by his or her own acknowledged renunciation—what has historically been called "apostasy"—but so far as I know such persons are not referred to in the present discussion of open communion.)

Thus, I would propose—in line with what I take to be Shiplett's own pastoral practice—that we make a pastoral distinction between those persons who are neither baptized nor profess faith and those persons who are baptized and who may or may not have attained that "degree" of faith to which John Wesley alluded as "full assurance" of salvation. The former are appropriately denominate "unbelievers." The latter, however, are those who, like Wesley before Aldersgate, may or may not have discovered in the Sacrament that grace which is both converting and confirming.

Although United Methodists may well continue to think of the Lord's Supper as a converting ordinance for those "seeking full assurance" of faith (here I am deliberately staying close to the Wesleyan language), it does not make sense to imply that those who are baptized (whether infants, children, or adults) are "unbelievers." I think that such a distinction coheres more closely with the Wesleyan awareness that there are, in fact, "degrees of faith" among those who are professing followers of Christ: those who had not yet experienced the full assurance of salvation were called "seekers" in Wesley's writings. Although I acknowledge that this suggested distinction does not accord with certain assumptions about the "converting ordinance," I would contend that it offers clarification by way of taking into account the simple fact that there is a difference between persons who can place themselves in the eucharistic narrative of...
the death and resurrection of Christ (the baptized) and persons who cannot do so because they do not yet follow Jesus (unbelievers).

The issue, then, as I see it, has as much to do with how we United Methodists characterize the significance of baptism as it does with how we understand what is taking place in the Eucharist. If we really do think that not much of anything is happening in baptism, then, likely as not, we will treat the Lord's Supper as if nothing is happening. But if that is the case, then it is not at all clear how we can even talk about who should participate in the Lord's Supper, because we will have already determined that it does not matter and that the sacrament has no meaning except whatever individualized meanings people may want to assign to the experience.

The Lord's Supper is the Resurrection Feast.

Finally, I think that this discussion would be unfortunately skewed away from the heart of the matter if I did not remind readers of what we all know already: that the Lord's Supper is the Resurrection Feast. Precisely in the context of this meal, those who have died with Christ in the sacrament of baptism are reminded that their discipleship—"the way of the cross"—can only be accomplished by virtue of the victory which has already been won at the Cross and in the Resurrection. Thus, it is right that the church should be careful to invite only those persons who seek to live out the life of discipleship, precisely because the church is called to live out the new reality proclaimed in the Resurrection—a reality that is uniquely depicted for Christian disciples in the eucharistic anamnesis (the remembrance of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus). True, this new reality of God's grace will only be complete when we gather for the anticipated messianic banquet at the consummation of the kingdom, but until that time it is "meet and right and a joyful thing" that God's own should "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."
The church can dare to be disciplined in its sacramental celebration only because the Lord’s Supper is a resurrection meal, which at one and the same time looks backward with thanksgiving at what God has done and forward in the hope that God’s continuing sanctification can be accomplished in us and in all creation. For it is only because Christians do believe that something more is at work in history than our own individual appropriations of God’s grace that we can have hope of being transformed. My contention, in conclusion, is that we may be missing an even more crucial sense of the Eucharist as the “converting ordinance” by failing to consider that which the Eucharist empowers diverse disciples to become—the body of Christ. Such a transformation is “converting” indeed! But the real mystery is that it happens to the church!

**RESPONSE TO MR. CARTWRIGHT**

Gary R. Shiplett

Both Mr. Cartwright and I have called for sacramental discipline in the United Methodist Church. His appeal is grounded appropriately in ecclesiology, while I argued from the Wesleyan tradition. Yet both of us challenge what Cartwright calls “the pluralism of incoherent practices.”

Methodism, it appears, did not make a smooth transition from a revival movement within an established church to an American church on the frontier. We became not only “quasi-sacramental” (Outler) but also quasi church. Were our local churches preaching stations, meeting houses, or branches of the Christian church, which is truly catholic, truly reformed, and truly evangelical? John Wesley was grounded in a great national church. He did not know the schizophrenia we share as American Methodists.

Mr. Cartwright is helpful in attempting to ground the evangelistic mission in his ecclesiology. Those members of the clergy whom I know who advocate an undisciplined “open” communion do so out of a concern for evangelism. They fear that sacramental discipline becomes exclusive and undercuts the church’s evangelistic task. But rather than promoting an
evangelistic outreach, the lack of sacramental discipline sends mixed signals to those we want to reach with the gospel.

Confusion regarding the practice of the Eucharist is related to confusion also in the practice of baptism. If baptism is the proper initiation rite into the life of the community of faith, then it appropriately precedes invitation to the church’s “Great Thanksgiving” meal. “Repent and be baptized” (Acts 2:38) has, since Pentecost, been the church’s admonition to those who are outside the church. Through baptism, not through the Eucharist, they are initiated into the life of the church and made a part of Christ’s body.

The simple suggestion made by Mr. Cartwright that our invitation to the Lord’s Table make clear that all baptized Christians are welcome is hardly offensive. It serves notice that the Table is open to all the baptized, regardless of denominational affiliation, and thus is truly open. Those not baptized are confronted with the church’s claim that baptism is important to the church. The invitation to the Eucharist, thus stated, sends a different but distinct invitation for those not baptized: “Are you ready to repent and be baptized and make a public profession of your faith in God as revealed in Jesus Christ?”

Restoring sacramental discipline to Methodism is an urgent task that requires leadership from the members of the clergy as those ordained to “word, sacrament, and order” in the church. Unfortunately, not all clergy are well-informed in sacramental theology. Even new seminary graduates coming before boards of ordained ministry often have received little or no seminary training in the sacraments. For those desiring to read further about the sacraments, I recommend two basic books written by United Methodist theologians. They are James F. White, Sacraments as God’s Self-Giving, 1983, and Laurence H. Stookey, Baptism: Christ’s Act in the Church, 1982. Both are published by Abingdon Press.

It has become a practice in the Northern Illinois Conference to require that those seeking ordination to “word, sacrament, and order” in the church be able to demonstrate orally and in writing a proficient understanding of sacramental practice. Those not proficient are asked to do reading and to prepare a paper on the sacraments, while under supervision. The response among
ordinands both in sacramental practice and in growth of understanding has been very encouraging.

A restoration of sacramental discipline and practice in the United Methodist Church is, I believe, in process. A well-informed clergy whose members are conversant regarding the issues and who order their own practice of the sacraments in a thoughtful and reflective manner is the key to our success. People like James White and Laurence Stookey are leading the way for us.

NOTES


2. United Methodists rightly invite baptized members of other denominations to participate in its celebrations of the Lord’s Supper. To refer to someone as an “unbaptized Christian” (as one occasionally hears or reads) makes no sense theologically.

3. This terminology refers specifically to those varieties of Baptist churches that restrict participation in the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper to (a) members of a single congregation, or (b) members of particular denominational “association,” or (c) persons who have received a particular form of baptism, i.e., immersion.


5. Other incoherent sacramental practices that one might mention in this context are “come-and-go communion,” where it is assumed that the gathering of the church has no real significance for the enactment of the church’s Eucharist, and the indiscriminate baptism of infants, particularly where neither parent has professed faith in Christ. In such instances, to ask what we think we are doing may be the first step toward a more coherent ecclesiology for United Methodism.


In one of his quarrels with Hegel's thought, recorded in his *Journals and Papers*, Soren Kierkegaard argued that a musician who wanted to explain to someone how a lead instrument penetrated the whole of a work of music should play certain passages on that lead instrument until the learner could recognize it among the hundred other instruments playing at the same time. So with the Book of Psalms—the lead instrument of the Bible. By vivid pictures the Psalms capture our attention; by unavoidable familiarity with our daily living they excite our curiosity. They know us well; hence, they can train us in the tone of the Bible.

Like Kierkegaard's musician, we preachers find ourselves reared by the Psalms to hear the tone in the orchestra of the Bible. The word "tone" comes from the Greek *tonos*. It means the act of stretching to gain lasting quality. The Psalms stretch us into characters with qualities, qualities that mirror those in the Bible.

Some preachers reading this material may respond with cautious agreement but inquire, what do the Psalms offer to preaching? "After all," they might argue, "the Psalms we know:

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we use them in our devotional lives; but—to preach?"

I began that way. Twenty-five years ago the Psalms did not interest me as preaching texts. I wanted to express my energies as a preacher on the texts given in the lectionary without bothering with the Psalter. Besides, I needed an intimate acquaintance with the Pentateuch, Prophets, Gospels, and Epistles. In the daily rounds as a pastor, a few verses from the Writings would suffice to drop a touch of comfort here and there. When struck by the issues of racism, protest of the war in Vietnam, education in the parish, and survival in the institution, I thought I needed not comforting-lamenting-thanking Psalms; I needed law, prophecy, parable, story, ethical code.

Except. Except the funerals. As much as I might want to teach, play the prophet, thunder about ethics, rehearse parables in their mystery, tell stories, and ignore my wounded and childish ego, I kept getting interrupted by funerals that required a sermon within a day or two. Where else could I find an echo of the familiar strain I heard in the death-stricken families, except in the Psalms? Not only did the Psalter beckon from the liturgy, but my childhood reading of Psalm 23 strangely soothed me. As an infantry rifleman I had discovered Psalm 27:14 in a time of great distress. A latent receptivity to the Psalms took up residence in my soul. Appropriate though the Psalms seemed, I needed help in bringing that appropriateness to the people I served. Who could teach me about the companionship that moves us from distress to praise in the Psalms?

Karl Barth. Before my first seminary class, I bought and skimmed Barth's Deliverance to the Captives. For six of the eighteen sermons, he used a Psalm text. After four years in two parishes I had harvested twenty funeral sermons from the six Psalms texts he used. That I got twenty out of six set my course with the Psalms; and Barth's preaching provided the guidance I needed to preach from the Psalms. Barth takes a Psalm phrase and lets it lead him through the text into the specifics for which congregations and pastors thirst.

Barth's preaching from the Psalms nudged open a door I thought had been secured for life: I had avoided taking Hebrew language in seminary by arguing that I could get by with Greek. I could read the Septuagint and that would suffice. Besides,
some of us do not possess language skills. Or, more likely, some of us receive a calling to expend ministry on things other than the Hebrew language.

True. But, I wanted to know: Just how well did Barth translate Psalm 31:15 in the second book of his sermons? How could I hear the purposeful intensity behind the force and wit of the Psalms? I could, as most preachers do, carry the tradition quite well with the many translations and tools on tap for preachers without Hebrew; but I wanted Hebrew.

And I got it, at least minimally, by returning to seminary. I discovered the vitality of Hebrew language. In Hebrew what we call a verb often packages action, subject, and object together. If Hemingway walloped us awake with his style, Hebrew language whomps up startling pictures that refresh us.

After my second stretch in seminary, I returned to the blessed crush of the parish. When funerals interrupted the schedule, I went to the Psalter, not to Barth. (That response must please Barth, who aimed to guide us ordinary preachers to the One who speaks from the Book.)

Barth's sermons and my acquaintance with Hebrew set up a method: I would live with the lection and it alone until I could get a homemade translation in order. Once I got the lection into play through my own work, then I would turn to the scholars and their commentaries. If I turned prepared, I could, thereby, best receive the gift of their work.

At first it seemed a thing of integrity to keep my mind ignorant of the work of the scholars in their commentaries. Nothing between me and the text. (Except, of course, those who had translated the pre-Hebrew into Hebrew, the Hebrew into English, and the myriad numbers of persons who for six centuries, at least, had revised and interpreted the Psalter.)

But, almost as if living out a hint of Sigmund Mowinckel's wonderful thesis that "life is . . . created through the cult," I found that my insistence on first establishing the lection—by which I meant getting a homemade translation together—led me to seek out the work of the scholars early on. Not only did I need all the help I could get to establish the lection, but a week holds a mere 168 hours. As much as I prefer translating the lection alone, the scholars know too much to keep them at bay
during the crucial first step. They help weave the first offering: a lection established from the Hebrew Bible and the commentaries.

(Of course, occasionally, when I wrestle time from the besiegers of my study schedule, I go back to the first old way, the way of me alone with the text. I do so because I enjoy, in the same way I enjoy adding an extra mile to my jogging on some mornings, the way my first result laid against the work of the scholars forces me to revise my work. Like a good editor who keeps the author at it with criticism and suggestion, so putting my amateur effort beside the professional labors of the scholar calls more out of me and out of the lection than I first imagined. A time-eating but gratitude-building way of study.)

When I welcomed the scholars into the first step, I also welcomed commentaries otherwise closed to me: for example, the Anchor Bible’s three volumes on the Psalms by Michael Dahood (Doubleday, 1965). Dahood’s work relies on a knowledge of the Canaanite dialect Ugarit, a dialect with affinity to biblical Hebrew: however, a preacher unskilled in this Canaanite dialect can employ the work of Dahood. His translation of the Psalms takes into account, through Ugaritic, of the influences combated or used by the psalmists. Dahood works with nuance. Preachers know about nuance—that subtle expression that surprises us into repentance. One of my favorite stories arose from the nuance of a furtive glance. A parishioner, a beautiful red-headed woman, told me that her life had changed when she happened to see a secret glance her husband gave her. In that less-than-a-moment she saw herself as she was then, saw a degenerate drunk. That seeing—occasioned by the mere nuance in her husband’s look—set her course for rehabilitation through Alcoholics Anonymous.

When I get the lection established, if possible by Tuesday evening, I hope for the following achievements and results:

1. Completed a “consultation” with scholars, especially Weiser, Terrien, Westermann, and Craigie.
2. Arrived at a sentence that nets the essence, the pervading nuance, of the psalm as a whole.
3. Let my translation lead me to a phrase from the RSV that makes remembering a delight, holds current interest for me.
HOMILETICAL RESOURCES

and my congregation, and fits the season of the church year.

If number 3 falls into place by Tuesday evening, I memorize
the phrase that fascinated me and do nothing on Wednesday for
text or sermon, except to allow its work in my unconscious.

If number 3 does not occur, I use Wednesday study time to
read through one or more of the pre-critical works I enjoy. I turn
to Augustine, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms,* first,
because his *Confessions* accompany me almost daily as devo­
tional reading. Then to Luther, especially volumes 10 and 11 of
his *Works* as edited by H. C. Oswald (Concordia, 1974), for the
jolts that that mighty German delivers to us as receptors of God’s
free offer of inspiration. Or to John Calvin and his commentaries
on the Psalms, especially if I own enough tranquility to
appreciate the brilliance of this immense and intricate mind, a
mind thinking some of its best thoughts while babysitting.
When no tranquility offers me a cool drink, I use Dietrich
Bonhoeffer, *The Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible* (Augsburg,
1970), to cool me down and unplug my awe. And, almost as a
happy duty, I turn to John Wesley to see what Psalms he
employed to spring into the controversies he needed to engage.
Nor should such use be derided.

When set to the task of sheepdogging a district, I tried my
method with some of the pastors of the district for one year. I
invited the pastors to join me once a month to study the psalms
designated by the lectionary for the second Sunday of the
month. We worked to establish a reading of the particular
psalm, preach from it, and share a recording of our preaching
with one another on a cassette tape. Each of us would critique
each sermon by recording our evaluation on the tape of each
sermon preached. One of our best sermons grew out of our work
on Psalm 94 through our study of Wesley’s sermon, “The
Reformation of Manners” (no. 52 in the 1984 Abingdon edition
of Albert Outler).

Finally and usually I turn again to Karl Barth, not a pre-critical
author but certainly in the inspirational category. I go to his
*Church Dogmatics*; using the index volume of Bomiley and
Torrance’s edition, I look over the listing for the Psalms. When
the bold print indicates that Barth did exegesis and theological
work on the lection, I rejoice and read the pages before and after his work on the text. Sometimes his theological arguments provide impetus and knowledge for my stumbling thought. On one blessed occasion, a full three-point sermon fell out of his work into my mind and made its way to the congregation. As the hypocrisy of trying to be better than we are may lead us to be better than we are, so plagiarism pursued after our own labors may borrow us and our congregation into inspiration.

Once all this is done, I sit down to write the sermon on Thursday morning. I must write, because writing opens me to the Spirit. Even if I cannot capture by my writing the Spirit’s gift, it is enough to live near the Spirit, however feebly, through writing.

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

Psalm 20

God answers when we call.

Recurring question: Why pursue the lectionary? Recurring answer: The lectionary keeps me in touch with much in the Torah, Prophets, Writings, Gospels, and Epistles. I like the discipline of following the lectionary. Besides, I am ordained to carry the message of the Book to the congregation. I would miss too much if left to my own designs. The immediacy of my historical circumstances would overly narrow my concerns.

I read Psalm 20 first in the King James Version. As a young preacher in small rural communities, I learned to read the KJV. The older people knew it and defended it against the newfangled RSV. That conflict at first made the KJV distasteful to me, but I chose to read the KJV with them rather than force the RSV on them. I liked it. Now I begin with it.

A quick glance at the title of Psalm 20, a title I assume came from the late Jewish community but probably before, or maybe during the translation of the Septuagint: “To the Choirmaster.” Simple enough; directions, I suppose. But I glance at the Septuagint—εἰς τὸ τέλος, “for the end.” Strange—I’ll tuck that difference away in case it means something later.
"A Psalm of David": David, the representative of all of us. Not that he wrote this psalm, but that the psalm may represent something common to our humanity.

Once I complete reading and musing over the KJV, I translate Psalm 20 from the Hebrew as I consult The Revised Psalter. I use The Revised Psalter because T. S. Eliot assisted in its translation and because it takes into account the English translations from Coverdale to the New English Bible. I also consult the New American Bible, a Bible I read for two years as an early morning devotional guide in a period when I studied the history, nature, and theology of Roman Catholicism. Like the KJV, it became companionable to me; it numbers chapter and verse after the Hebrew Bible. As always, I refer to the RSV, the version I most prefer, because the people can follow the readings in their RSV pew Bibles and the RSV pulpit Bible. Besides, I think the RSV best represents the Hebrew and Greek.

Not owning skills enough to translate the Hebrew text exactly leaves me interpreting the text as best I can—almost as I interpret poetry for my children. I, too, am a child. I need the slow search for words to get to the poetry; thus, I try my hand at the Hebrew text, but I make no attempt to make a translation that matches the Hebrew poetry. I hope my translation gets near the content and the effect of the Hebrew poetry, even if it misses the form.

I work on verses 1-4. My memory takes me back to the Septuagint’s line, “for the end.” What if this royal psalm provided the liturgy for the end of the celebration? The people gathered at the Festival of Ingathering to put into ritual their views of the political order in the midst of some harsh realities. I imagine some priest like me working out this liturgy to fit the end of one act of the liturgy. What follows is my translation and interpretation of the psalm.

The chief liturgist would say before the congregation and to the king:

1 The Lord heed you in the suffocation of a tight place; the power of the God of Jacob lift you high,
2 and stretch forth aid from the holy, and refresh you from the fortified hill.
3 to mark well your gifts,
   and to anoint the ascension of your deaths;
4 to bestow character
   and furnish purpose. Selah.

If verse 5 marks the place for the congregation to participate, then Selah marks the end of the chief liturgist's part and alerts the congregation to make their response.

OK so far, but verse 5 throws me into the commentary for the first time. I choose Weiser's work (see footnote 2). After twenty years with it, his work is familiar to me. Weiser discounts the argument that this psalm is a prayer on the eve of war, but I think he misses the liturgical form when he alters the order in which verse 5 falls. The current order makes sense to me, because it flows the way I write and edit liturgy for the usual and unusual celebrations of the church year. If the church liturgist spoke verses 1-4, then verse 5 reveals the congregational response:

5 We will call for your safety
   and with God's authority wave the flags
   that the Lord may bestow your requests.

Then the king answers:

6 Now I know God saves the consecrated
   by answers from holy places
   that liberate the mastery of the right hand.

How subtle the psalm. I imagine the people set in the midst of a Near Eastern culture that sought to meet life through kings endowed with divine talents denied the masses. But this psalm sets the king among the congregation as a worshiper, as one who also testifies to God, not to his own endowments or privileges. People in the Canaanite culture might recognize the language of the psalm and assume that it fitted their beliefs, but a close perusal would disallow them that assumption and set them on a new course, one that denied their old ways of giving privilege to a king. This psalm changes the king's special privilege and makes him a servant of God. I followed the same strategy when I undertook to learn the KJV in my rural parishes so that I could interject the recent scholarship of the RSV.
Verses 7 and 8 reveal the response of the people. Their response again holds a denial of the dominant culture that set the king forward as if full of divine endowments unknown to common humanity. The subtlety comes via the strategy of shifting focus to a threat and thus away from too easily accepted beliefs about the magical qualities of the kings. The psalm, in the response of the people, focuses everyone’s attention on the threat. Then it weaves an answer different from rescue by a divinely endowed human king. God does the rescuing:

7 They with their chariots and horses, but we with Yahweh our God will stand firm.
8 They feebly lie down, but we rise and stand upright.

Then the chief liturgist joins the congregation in a final versicle that cements the theology:

9 Free us, Lord!
Send the king, when we need.

With the translating work done, I summarize what I have learned:
First, the people must balance powerful kings, cultures that endow them with divinity, and threats to existence. These common and painful problems lead me to conclude that this psalm is pre-exilic, but used by the postexilic community. It guides us now in our relations to the politically powerful.
Second, the writers of the psalm know where to take the stress and distress of such a balancing act. They take it to God. That remains firm throughout the psalm.
Third, my translation of the Hebrew text runs too far from that of the RSV. Even though my translation helped me get at the psalm, I dare not rely on it to carry this tradition to the people on Sunday morning.
I turn again to the RSV. The last phrase of the psalm summarizes best what I learned: “Answer us when we call.” The RSV makes it clear that God, not the king, gives victories.
is God upon whom we call, not a self-endowed self, not even a God-endowed self, but God, only God.

That leads me to ask: If we call upon God, what answer may we expect? Does the psalm give us answers? It does. God answers when we call. With what? With gifts of a holy place, a memory, a desire, and a servant-king: a four-point sermon.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Psalm 57

Distress calls us to the patience of hard work.

When considering homiletical resources for preaching, the preacher must wonder about the preacher. What does the preacher bring to the text?

A quick reading of Psalm 57 in the KJV reveals a lament, an individual lament. Verses 5 and 11 appeal to God for an alteration of an affliction; hence, a lament, an appeal to God for help.

I bring the need for a lament—a trip into distress that bounces me into praise. So, I lay hold of a psalter I used in a retreat with the Benedictines—\textit{The Psalms: A New Translation}.\footnote{4}

As I read and as I translate, a nagging thought reaches me: Shouldn't I be selecting a theme for the season? Am I tied closely enough to the lectionary? Does my desire to enter the lament take me away from a context I should embrace?

As much as I trust and entrust my preaching to the guidance of the lectionary, I know it only hands out slices, sometimes uneven slices. Besides, this long season gives preachers opportunity to follow a text without too much attention to a high holy day immediately ahead. So, I relax and let the lament lead me as it will and where.

As I work to establish the text, to stay with the psalm long enough to let it take root, I search my card file for references to Psalm 57. I keep a 3-x-5 card file with notes from my reading, recording the book or the periodical that provides exegesis of a text. Thus, when I preach from that text, I can turn to the file and
find what I read. My card file fails me on Psalm 57 but provides material on Psalms, especially material in the periodical Interpretation.\textsuperscript{5} The work of the scholars in Interpretation keeps bringing me back to me. I realize I bring present weariness and distant apprehension to Psalm 57. Since the hard work of the budget drive last October and the setting of the budget for the new year, the distress of our economic crunch wearies me. That weariness increases as I listen to the poor who come to appeal for help from our Benevolence Committee. We provide food, medicine, utility funds, or other assistance to an average of more than 300 families each month. Talk of laments! I hear the appeals for compassion from skilled beggars and the unskilled destitute. They lament.

I bring apprehension. Not only do I wonder whether we can raise enough money for the poor, but already in Psalm 20 I see the distant edges of forthtelling that will reach for us on July 3, the Sunday nearest our great patriotic day, which too often degenerates into gross nationalism. And the not-so-distant November elections for the presidency of these United States will require some forthtelling, something I do not find easy or painless.

I also bring the desire to find a single verse or phrase that will stay with the people and with me. That desire leads me to verse 9, the very verse some scholars suggest "was originally intended for use by a king; only a ruler could be expected to give thanks among the peoples and sing praises among the nations."\textsuperscript{6} But I think that interpretation shortcuts the history of the psalm. The psalm did not get written by a king for kingly affairs; it got written by persons who lamented, who appealed to God for compassion. The word for nation, le'om, can be translated by the word community. Even the RSV title given to interpret the psalm, "A Miktam of David, when he fled from Saul, in the cave," implies that David faced a chaotic and complex environment that must have included weariness and apprehension long before David assumed the king's ritual responsibilities.\textsuperscript{7}

As David left the cave without answers to all that faced him, except that he must stay in company with Saul, he chose to keep at it, to do his work, to go to the tasks ahead. His unsteady
situation was covered by the good God. His lament made him ready for praise, praise that would come among his people and with the king he chose not to kill (I Samuel 24).

I brought my weariness and my apprehension to the psalm and the psalm in turn turns me to praise: “I will give thanks to thee, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing praises to thee among the nations” (v. 9). I will do my work among the people as the ancient psalmist guides me. That guidance goes against the usual intonation to let suffering carry us into patience laced with resignation; the patience of the psalm rings with hard work. David keeps at a patience of hard work. Distress calls us into work among the people, a patient work.

In times of apprehension and weariness, we need to pursue our asks among the people—patiently.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Psalm 46

Pass on the hint of order in the chaos.

Even before I read Psalm 46 in the KJV or begin my translating work, I sense excitement rising over this psalm. Two hymns from The Methodist Hymnal take up residence in my mind: hymn no. 20, “A Mighty Fortress is Our God,” and hymn no. 209, “Be Still, My Soul.” Well they should; for the fifty-plus years of my life they have woven their way into me. Little wonder that homiletical resources for the Psalms spring from the hymnbook. “Indeed, it was the Wesleyan hymnody that served as the most important single means of communicating the doctrinal substance of the gospel and in its guardianship as well” (1984 Book of Discipline, sec. 67, p. 45). I take up the bicentennial collection of 525 of the Wesley hymns to provide resources for my work in Psalm 46.* The Wesleys use Psalm 46 in twelve hymns. I will see how that usage leads me into Psalm 46.

On my way into the psalm, I use a new translation of the Psalms by Gary Chamberlain because his work highlights the hymnic nature of the psalm, not so much by his dynamic
equivalence translation as by his insertion of the refrain of verses 7 and 11 between verses 3 and 4: “The Lord of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.” That hymnic addition, which may be no addition at all but only a reconstituting of the psalm as it was earliest sung, helps summarize the intent of the psalm to perceive the overwhelming threat of history and nature. We do go about on the edge of a nuclear abyss; however, the knowledge that a refuge exists throws us into the camp of challenge, the challenge of Einstein’s part truth: “The power set free from the atom has changed everything, except our ways of thinking.” In a time of nuclear end, we do need a new thinking, but a new thinking that takes account of the old, of that already at hand, of a refuge safe against even the worst nuclear end: “The God of Jacob is our refuge.” Or, as Luther put it when himself was against the mortal ills prevailing, “Our God He is a Castle Strong.” History and nature may appear to crumble, but—relax (see Craigie, footnote 2). Relax because God is over both history and nature. For those who see relaxation as an impossible and immoral attitude, John Wesley wrote in a hymn often attributed to his brother, Charles, “Say to my trembling heart, ‘Be still!’ Thy power my strength and fortress is, / For all things serve thy sovereign will.”

It strikes me that this psalm is appropriate as we prepare for a day of sentiment—Father’s Day. In my younger years as a preacher I ignored the day (and others like it); now I give heed to such days. I learned to do so from the Psalms. The Psalms take account of their culture, the ways we symbolize dying and living, by shaping, molding, and influencing those symbols. This psalm teaches us to trust nature and creation. Even our cultural symbol of Father’s Day is a creation that gives us a hint of the order that molds and shapes the chaos, the brink of nuclear end. Fathering is part of creation and hence a hint, a hint to pass on.

What could a parent hope to pass on? What better than a hint about the order hidden in the midst of chaos? There is no perfected parenting in a parent. That would end our search and our hope for doing any parenting. At best, parents offer imperfect parenting, but that is to pass on the hint of order in the chaos: “He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks
the bow and shatters the spear, he burns the chariots with fire!" (v. 9). Fathers pass on the hint, not the perfection. It is enough. Be still and know that there is enough in the imperfect Jacob to grant us refuge against the flood of terrible ends.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Psalm 48

The God who leads by right judgment and justice.

The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible includes Psalm 48 among those sung by the Levites every week. I need, then, an everyday language to go along with that human activity. Because the psalm was sung, I need a sense of that human activity. To cover the everydayness of the language, I decide to use the Today's English Version to guide my translating work; I settle on the singing version of the Psalms by Joseph Gelineau to grant a flavor of the sung nature of the psalm (The Psalms: Singing Version, Paulist Pr., 1966).

Work with the text leads me to an important homiletical resource, a resource always available, but often used without consciousness of its presence. I refer to the imagination.

Psalm 48 leads the reader to imagine. In verse 1 the liturgist issues a call to praise. The people respond with verse 2. The liturgist chants the story (or singers and dancers dramatize it with their arts) in verses 3-8. For their part, the people sing verses 9–11. The liturgist directs the people with verses 12-13. The people follow directions, walk about the outer wall of Jerusalem (or the booth in later practice), and sing: "This God is our God forever and ever; he will lead us for all time to come" (TEV).

In my imagination, I see the people gathered for the Festival of Booths or Tabernacles, a festival that began in ancient Canaan to celebrate the grape and olive harvest, a festival that took on the character of an enthusiastic celebration.10

As a part of the whole celebration, Psalm 48 was used in the subtle way of religion to inculcate in the people a sense and an
understanding of the presence of God, a presence located by imaginative drama in a little hill—Zion. If one can imagine the little hill of Zion towering over the great mountains of the world—the real and the mythical—then one can also imagine the wondrous presence of God, of the God who leads.

The God who leads. What a stage-setter for Independence Day. Not flag nor patriot’s blood nor orator’s speeches nor politician’s promises lead us, but only God. Once we march around the hill of Zion and see it as the mountain of God, we will not, perhaps, give in so easily to the idolatrous claims of nationalistic fervor that influence us to sacrifice integrity to national security.

Once into the power of imagination, I turn to a stimulating resource for work in the Psalms: Praying the Psalms by Walter Brueggemann (St. Mary’s Pr., 1982). He argues in his chapter, “Language Appropriate to a Place,” that “imaginative speech may outdistance actual circumstance. But it is a first gesturing of a transformed circumstance” (p. 47).

With the Fourth of July celebration fast approaching, I could use Psalm 48 as a prelude to the work I will do on the Sunday preceding the Fourth: A first gesture to transform that too narrow celebration from nationalistic limits to godly infinity. In my imagination I follow the lead of Psalm 48. I see the little fortified hill grow into the mountain of God. Is there a way to take the nationalism of my country and grow it up, transform it from a fortified hill into Zion, into the presence of God? Is there aught in Psalm 48 upon which I can pin my imagination as the ancients pinned theirs to the hill that grew?

In the part of the psalm sung by the people, verses 9-11, two statements glow in the TEV: “You rule with justice,” and “You give right judgments.” God leads (v. 14) by right judgment (v. 10) and justice (v. 11).

These little hills—right judgment and justice—may grow up into God’s presence. What scholar will guide my imagination?

Norman Snaith will. In his The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament (Schocken Books, 1964) he argues that distinctiveness is the sole justification for the continued existence of Christianity and that our God does not exist, but does (p. 48). God does set things right (“rule with justice”) and God does
initiate a style of right living ("right judgments"). I have only, then, to find these little hills in the daily life I know and grow them up into the mountain of Zion. As a stage-setter for the celebration of national independence I could use the struggle of Martin Luther King, Jr., to set right the evils of racism and war; and, the right living that set Lincoln on course with the Emancipation Proclamation serves as a guide into doing right by living into it. These little hills can grow into the Zion of God’s leading.

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Psalm 24

When God orders chaos, and we think the right and do the right, then—glory.

My tradition claims that the Bible is both inspired and inspiring. Suppose, then, I let the psalm inspire me? Suppose the psalm itself is the best homiletical resource for preaching from the psalm?

The first two verses comfort as they lead the congregation in the praise of God who builds on water. God founded the earth "upon the seas, and established it upon the rivers" (v. 2). Water would make an impossible foundation, a chaotic one.

"The rivers" catches my memory. Last summer we borrowed a home on the banks of the Rio Frio in south Texas. After jogging in the midmorning heat, I would dive into the Rio Frio, let the current carry me downstream to the next boat dock, then turn and swim upstream to our dock. On the way back against the current I could feel the changes—change of temperature as I dove beneath the surface, change of color as I went from shallow to deep, change of current flow as I swam through placid pools and strained to swim in the narrow places.

This psalm is like the Rio Frio in its differences. The different parts of the psalm arose in different times and with different intent through the centuries. But the parts get bound together to
serve a purpose—then as a part of the enthronement liturgy, now as a guide to independence.

The Rio Frio ends in the Gulf of Mexico; the psalm aims to end somewhere too. It begins in the praise of God who orders chaos (vv. 1–2) and continues in its account of who gets to reach the end (vv. 3–6).

Who achieves the purpose? Answer: those who think the right and those who do the right. As one translator puts it, “who do not build their lives on appearances, who will not forge lies against others.”

In my little town the greatest of all boyhood glories rested in achieving the status of cowboy. We saw the cowboys come to town for errands or on their way to the city on Saturday night. We learned the way a boy became a cowboy. In the pens or at the branding chute, only those who could think through the appropriate steps and do the correct movements lasted. Those who excused their errors by blaming someone else or the beasts did not get into the cowboy inner sanctum. A hard code, but it separated the cowpunchers (a derogatory term) from the cowboys (the title of highest honor).

The psalm ends with a description of the end: When God orders chaos and when we do right and think right, then—glory.

Glory? Glory is nothing less than a glimpse of God. At the end, a glimpse of God. The people who act out this psalm dramatize the end with a mighty shout: “Who is this king of glory? He is Yahweh Sabaoth, King of glory, he!” (Jerusalem Bible).

One of my parishioners, a brilliant young attorney who pursued his graduate study of law at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin, reported to me years ago that his teacher, the brilliant, brave, no-nonsense Barbara Jordan of congressional fame, once told his class that their task was to reduce the number of cynics in this nation by one. How, he asked me, could he reduce the cynicism of his own heart when he lived in the tortured environment of our law courts?

At the time, I mumbled something about God. Now—now
that I know this psalm, I would refer him to this psalm. God builds on chaos to found new worlds; therefore, think the right, do the right, and then, glory—we see God: from such themes nations gain and keep independence.

NOTES

John Wesley frequently distinguished between outward and inward religion. He usually pointed out that outward or formal religion could be had without inward or “heart” religion. And in an age of religious formalism the point was usually well taken. But when pressed, even Wesley, the patron saint of warm-hearted religion, acknowledged that inward religion could not exist in the absence of outward religion. For Wesley the formalities of Christian doctrine and discipline were indispensable factors in the formation of the Christian heart.

In *The Nature of Doctrine* (Westminster Pr., 1984), George Lindbeck presses us to a new appreciation of religion as an external word. He encourages us to view the faith as a culture that shapes our individuality, our experience, and even our emotions. Religion, he argues, is not primarily a collection of true propositions, or—as we so frequently hear—a deeply personal experience of the transcendent; rather, it is a language or culture that enables us to characterize the truth and empowers us to experience the holy. Lindbeck’s provocative vision not only prods us to consider our own understanding of the faith; it gives us new categories for rethinking the mission of the church and the nature of its ministry.

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The book, which appeared in 1984, has been thoroughly discussed in academic circles, but its influence within the church has, until recently, been negligible. Whether rightly or wrongly, it was greeted by the academy as the manifesto of a group of theologians associated with Yale University. It is, perhaps, more appropriately characterized by its indebtedness to the work of the later Wittgenstein and to the sociology of knowledge, especially the work of Clifford Geertz. Only recently has it made its way into the repertoire of practical theology (this primarily through several articles in The Christian Century by William Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas; see the January 28, 1987 issue). There is some reason for this lapse: the book, though short, demands concentration and patience, not so much because the argument is obscure, but because, as Lindbeck acknowledges, its points are dependent upon one another and therefore mutually illuminating. “Its persuasiveness, if any, does not depend on moving step by step in a demonstrative sequence, but on the illuminating power of the whole. It may be that if light dawns, it will be over the whole landscape simultaneously” (p. 11). The book does indeed shed light upon the landscape of our life together as Christians, and it is well worth whatever patience it demands.

CHRISTIANITY AS CULTURE

Lindbeck’s central argument is really quite simple: the Christian religion can best be understood as a culture into which each believer must be initiated and trained. Christianity envelops us in a strange new world in which people speak and hear, think and understand, act and react in distinctive ways. He speaks of religion as “above all an external word . . . that molds and shapes the self and its world” (p. 34). Therefore, becoming a Christian involves us in something far richer than expressing our “personal religion,” and becoming faithful involves more than finding words for previous experiences.

This cultural model of religion stresses the degree to which our experience is shaped and molded by cultural and linguistic forms. Lindbeck reminds us that “there are numberless
thoughts we cannot think, sentiments we cannot have, and realities we cannot perceive unless we learn to use the appropriate symbol systems" (p. 34). He cites the cases of Helen Keller and of supposed feral children to illustrate our dependence on language. Unless we acquire language of some kind, we cannot actualize our specifically human capacities for thought, action, and feeling. Similarly, so the argument goes, to become religious involves becoming skilled in the language, the symbol system of a given religion. To become a Christian involves learning the story of Israel and of Jesus well enough to interpret and experience oneself and one’s world in its terms (p. 34). To say then that Christianity is a culture is to emphasize the power of the religion to shape and form our experience of ourselves and our world.

Lindbeck contrasts his cultural outlook with the view that religion is fundamentally experiential. We tend, he thinks, to view the external features of a religion as products of some inner experience. Lindbeck summarizes the theological expressivism that dominates the church of our day, using four theses taken from the Roman Catholic theologian Bernard Lonergan: (1) Different religions are diverse expressions . . . of a common core experience. It is this experience which identifies them as religions. (2) The experience, while conscious, may be unknown on the level of self-conscious reflection. (3) It is present in all human beings. (4) In most religions, the experience is the source and norm of objectifications: it is by reference to the experience that their adequacy or lack of adequacy is to be judged (p. 31).

Lindbeck, in contrast to this experiential outlook, wants to emphasize the extent to which these inner experiences are derived from the external features of a religion. He wants us to understand how our sense of praise and humility, of compassion and gratitude, of justice and joy are shaped and formed by the stories, the teachings, and the practices of our faith.

None of this is meant to suggest that Christianity should remain a formal or “external” thing; Lindbeck is not arguing that we can be nothing more than observers or “tourists” in this culture. He is, however, encouraging us to see that in order to become acculturated—in order to make our faith something
"internal"—we need to recognize the distinctiveness of our faith and the particular demands it makes upon us:

To become religious . . . is to interiorize a set of skills by practice and training. One learns how to feel, act, and think in conformity with a religious tradition that is, in its inner structure, far richer and more subtle than can be explicitly articulated. . . . Sometimes explicitly formulated statements of the beliefs or behavioral norms of a religion may be helpful in the learning process, but by no means always. Ritual, prayer, and example are normally much more important. (p. 35)

Lindbeck is very much interested in how we internalize this culture of Christianity. Unless we are to remain tourists, we must be immersed in and trained by the distinctive features of the culture. The process of enculturation involves new patterns of behavior, new emotions, and a new language. These changes take place in the context of a shared history, a shared community, and a shared destiny. More specifically the process of becoming a Christian involves orienting one’s life in a new and distinctive way. “To become a Christian involves learning the story of Jesus well enough to interpret and experience one’s world in its terms” (p. 34).

THE PRESENT CONTEXT

The Nature of Doctrine does not pretend to be a sociological study of religion. And yet the persuasiveness of Lindbeck’s discussion of religion and doctrine may depend on our ability to share his perception of the social scene. Through his eyes we picture a church perched precariously on the brink of banality; a church that, having accommodated itself to the prevailing culture, no longer has a distinctive voice; a church that seems to have lost the ability to shape and mold the characters of individual believers; a church all but silenced by the cacophany of individuals murmuring their personal prayers to a personal God in private relationship.

The church, according to Lindbeck, suffers from the general impression that Christianity is anything but a distinctive culture. “The impossibility of effective catechesis in the present situation is partly the result of the implicit assumption that
knowledge of a few tag ends of religious language is knowledge of the religion" (p. 133). This is partly a general sociological observation. Lindbeck refers to studies indicating that many of the unchurched insist on the genuineness of their Christian faith even when they deny central Christian beliefs:

The experience and self-identity of even the unchurched masses remain deeply influenced by the religious past. They often insist to sociological investigators, for example, that they are just as genuinely Christian as the pious folk who go to church; and they sometimes make this claim, interestingly enough, even when they deny life after death and consider the existence of a creator God unlikely. Jesus Christ is not the Son of God for them, and their picture of him may be drastically unscriptural, but his name is part of their being (p. 133).

For Lindbeck the problem is more than a sociological matter; the church must also bear some responsibility for our difficulty in grasping the distinctiveness of Christianity. The church, he thinks, has been far too accommodating to the prevailing culture and has failed to assert itself in its uniqueness: "In the present situation, unlike periods of missionary expansion, the churches primarily accommodate to the prevailing culture rather than shape it. Presumably they cannot do otherwise. They continue to embrace in one fashion or another the majority of the population and must cater willy-nilly to majority trends" (p. 133).

These general problems have both social and theological origins. The individualism of American culture, documented so persuasively in Habits of the Heart, underlies the resistance of many people to submit themselves to a distinctively religious form of life. Lindbeck argues that "the structures of modernity press individuals to meet God first in the depths of their souls and then, perhaps, if they find something personally congenial, they become part of a tradition or join a church" (p. 22). In this day religions are seen as "multiple suppliers of different forms of a single commodity needed for transcendent self-expression and self-realization" (p. 22).

From a theological perspective, Lindbeck argues that we have only accommodated to these social tendencies by emphasizing the primacy of personal religious experience. Personal piety and
modernism have joined hand in hand to undermine the importance of the Christian religion as a culture that shapes and forms the lives of its adherents. Lindbeck criticizes the church in general for becoming a purveyor of “individual quests for symbols of transcendence” rather than communities that socialize their members into coherent and comprehensive religious outlooks and forms of life (p. 126).

DOCTRINE, SCRIPTURE, AND EDUCATION

Out of his theme of Christianity as culture Lindbeck develops a number of variations that speak directly to the church. He suggests, among other things, a new role in the church for doctrine, for Scripture, and for Christian education. Lindbeck encourages a renewed interest in church doctrine. According to him doctrine is not something the church can afford to ignore if we hope to maintain a sense of shared identity. Doctrines, as he describes them, are “communally authoritative teachings regarding beliefs and practices that are considered essential to the identity or welfare of the group in question. They may be formally stated or informally operative, but in any case they indicate what constitutes faithful adherence to a community” (p. 74). This is not to say that all religious communities must deny individual formulations of the faith. On the contrary, Lindbeck argues, within the framework of doctrinal agreement there can be a “wide variety of theological explanation, communication, and defense of the faith” (p. 76). But it is to say that all religious communities have certain teachings that enable them to establish and retain their distinctive identity.

Despite the theological flexibility which doctrinal norms allow and even encourage, the modern mood is “antipathetic to the very notion of communal norms” (p. 77). Lindbeck offers a variety of explanations. He adverts to sociological analysis when he observes that “when human beings are insistently exposed to conflicting and changing views, they tend to lose their confidence in any of them. Doctrines no longer represent objective realities and are instead experienced as expressions of personal preference” (p. 77). So long as doctrines are understood
to be expressions of personal preference their use will seem arbitrary and coercive. "The suggestion that communities have the right to insist on standards of belief and practice as conditions of membership is experienced as an intolerable infringement of the liberty of the self" (p. 77).

In consequence the community suffers. The present-day aversion to doctrine invariably shakes the foundations of communal identity. "Inevitably in this kind of atmosphere, communal loyalties weaken and are replaced by an emphasis on individual freedom, autonomy, and authenticity" (p. 77).

In this context Lindbeck proposes a new way of understanding doctrine. Doctrines, he argues, have an important place in the establishment and regulation of the culture. In this capacity they function not as expressive symbols or as truth claims, but as rules that guide our speech, our practices, and our attitudes. "The function of church doctrines that becomes most prominent in this perspective is their use, not as expressive symbols or as truth claims, but as communally authoritative rules of discourse, attitude, and action" (p. 18). In other words, doctrines actually help shape our identity as Christians. They assist us in our attempts to speak and think in accordance with the faith. They are no more expendable than the rule that directs drivers to drive on one side of the road and not the other. Without them our ability to live out the faith would be dramatically compromised.

Like the Reformers, Lindbeck advocates a return to the authority of Scripture. The Scriptures are essential in shaping the outlook of Christian people. But here again he emphasizes the formal or external elements of the religion while attempting to avoid dogmatism and inflexibility. He speaks of the Scriptures as a "world" that "supplies the interpretive framework within which believers seek to live their lives and understand reality." By immersing ourselves in the Scriptures we enter a new world. "This happens quite apart from formal theories... The scriptures themselves evoke a domain of meaning." "For those who are steeped in them, no world is more real than the one they create" (p. 117).

Scripture has a formative role. It gives us a way of understanding ourselves and the world. Lindbeck suggests that
the central stories of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament do more than reflect what we have already experienced; they point out to us who we are. "It does not suggest, as is often said in our day, that believers find their stories in the Bible, but rather that they make the story of the Bible their story. The cross should not be viewed as a figurative representation of suffering nor the messianic kingdom as a symbol of hope in the future; rather, suffering should be cruciform and hopes for the future messianic" (p. 118). When the Bible is properly employed, it enables us to understand and interpret our own lives. The teachings and stories, laws and prophecies enable us to pick out the pattern in the fragments of our lives.

Lindbeck wants to be certain that Scripture remains a means of enculturation and transformation, a word under which we live.

Christian education takes on a renewed importance in Lindbeck's vision of the church. He reenvisions the process of Christian education as one of initiation and immersion in the culture of Christianity. This means among other things that attempts to understand and explain the faith are most successful when they go together with learning the language of faith and the life of faithfulness. He looks back to the early days of the Christian church for a model of Christian training appropriate to the cultural-linguistic outlook. There, he observes,

pagan converts to the catholic mainstream did not, for the most part, first understand the faith and then decide to become Christians; rather the process was reversed: they first decided and then they understood. More precisely they were first attracted by the Christian community and form of life... Only after they had acquired proficiency in the alien Christian language and form of life were they deemed intelligently to profess the faith, to be baptized. (p. 132)

The essential task of Christian education is not to communicate true propositions or to elicit the expression of religious experience. It is rather the diverse and complex task of forming the lives of the faithful after the pattern of faithfulness.

These proposals, which I have only sketched in the crudest outline, have a kind of cumulative impact upon our thinking
BOOK REVIEWS

about the church. They engender a sense of the church as a community which in a very real sense identifies us, a church that takes our lives and forms them into Christian lives, a church that enables us to sustain our faith in the face of a rampant and aggressive individualism. Lindbeck not encourage us to retreat from society. But he does suggest that unless we find a way of retaining our religious distinctiveness, we may find ourselves without a faith to witness to.

The church he envisions is set apart from but not outside of the mainstream of modern life:

Religious bodies that wish to maintain highly deviant convictions in an inhospitable environment must, it would seem, develop close-knit groups capable of sustaining an alien faith. These groups need not withdraw into sociological ghettos in the fashion of the Amish or the Hasidic Jews, but can rather form cells like those of the early Christian movement . . . or develop ecclesiae in ecclesia [literally: little churches within the church] similar to those of monasticism, early Pietism, or some portions of the contemporary charismatic movement (p. 78)

Whether or not the time for such renewal has come, Lindbeck gives us a glimpse of the shape it might take.

With his book, The Nature of Doctrine, George Lindbeck challenges all who toil in the trenches of the local church to reflect on the nature and aim of ministry. And because his challenge comes in the form of constructive alternatives to widespread habits, rather than the easy criticism of the purist theologian, we can sense in his pages not condescension but the labor of a compatriot. The book is itself a fruit of Lindbeck's longtime involvement in ecumenical discussions and it is the honest effort of one faithful churchman to characterize "the kind of theological thinking that is most likely to be religiously helpful to Christians and perhaps others in the present situation" (p. 10). It is the kind of help that we are most fortunate to receive.
In history, as in all serious matters, no achievement is final. . . . Every new generation must rewrite history in its own way; every new historian, not content with giving new answers to old questions, must revise the questions themselves. . . . Historical thought is a river into which none can step twice.
(R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*)

Collingwood's dictum that each generation must "revise the questions" has guided scholars of American church history in recent years. In our generation, we have begun asking about the historical roles of women and ethnic groups, including black Americans, native Americans, and Hispanic Americans.

In the interests of ecumenical conversations, many historians schooled in Philip Schaff's pioneering methods have assumed rather too hopefully that American pluralism was not so pronounced as it is. In the last century, historians, prompted by Schaff, described a "mainline" unity dominated by white, middle-class, Protestant men. They thought, thereby, to defend the American experiment in the separation of church and state to curious and suspicious Europeans. In this century, the idea of the "mainline" has served as a springboard for important ecumenical cooperation. But women and ethnics, in the wake of consciousness raising and conscientization, have begun to complain about their exclusion and to research and write stories.

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of their own groups. Alert historians writing general surveys are beginning to incorporate this new material, either in the interests of broadening the "mainline" or of challenging the concept.

GENERAL SURVEYS

A fine book that takes the revised questions seriously but seeks to present a comprehensive picture is Martin E. Marty's *Pilgrims in Their Own Land: 500 Years of Religion in America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1984). Marty, with his flair for synthesizing masses of data in entertaining prose, does his best work so far. The volume is beautiful to look at and a pleasure to handle. Beginning with a stunning dust jacket—depicting three clapboard, steepled church buildings in the middle of a prairie, with nothing but sky, clouds, and grasslands in view—the illustrations alone are worth the price of the book.

The narrative is, however, the meat and the illustrations the sauce. Marty organizes his data around the theme of pilgrimage, reasoning that Americans seem always to have been on the move. He chooses key individuals and illustrative stories to support his generalizations. Though sometimes he loses sight of his theme, I found myself reading slowly and savoring the persons and events described rather than racing along in search of organizing principles.

Though a short reading list is attached, I found the absence of footnotes and of a more extensive bibliography a hindrance to full enjoyment. Marty notes that he eschews scholarly apparatus because he addresses a general readership, but promises fuller documentation in his forthcoming four-volume *magnum opus, Modern American Religion*. I look forward to its publication.

Marty successfully includes almost every group that I would like to read about, though some receive necessarily scant space. At certain points, a touch of enculturated condescension toward women and certain "sectarian" groups creeps in. For example, he almost makes fun of Mary Baker Eddy and Ellen G. White, founders respectively of Christian Science and the Seventh Day Adventists. My complaints must be viewed as minor, however. On the whole, Marty does an admirable job telling the
many-sided story of "Americans on a constant pilgrimage" (p. 430).

Two works commend themselves to those teaching courses in American religion. First is Catherine Albanese's *America: Religion and Religions* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1981). Albanese adopts a history of religions method, which allows her to be admirably inclusive. For example, rather than begin the story, as it is usually told, with sixteenth-century Protestant reformers, Albanese begins the story with descriptions of Native American, Jewish, and Roman Catholic religions, as a way to highlight what she calls the "manyness and oneness" of religions in America. Analyses of black American religion, utopian religions, occult and metaphysical movements, and Eastern religions follow as do thematic chapters which explore problems associated with the study of civil/public religion. One fascinating chapter is devoted to a case study in local history.

Second is Edwin Scott Gaustad's two-volume *A Documentary History of Religion in America*, a collection of primary sources. His is the necessary "update" of the kind of anthology edited by Sheldon Smith, Robert T. Handy, and Lefferts Loetscher in the 1960s. Gaustad has incorporated much material that illustrates the pluralism of American religion in ways that the earlier editors did not. The volumes are skillfully edited, the documents well chosen, and the pictures good. Choosing documents to compose the many pieces of the mosaic Gaustad wishes to construct must have been difficult. Even granting his generally wise selections, I was disappointed that too few of the selections were by women and ethnic minority people.

and augmented edition of Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience in America.

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL ISSUES

Describing and accounting for religious pluralism in the United States raises some thorny methodological questions. R. Laurence Moore asks them well in Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans (New York: Oxford Univ. Pr., 1986). The thorniest question arises from two facts: (1) religious freedom produces hundreds if not thousands of religious groups, and (2) most Christians wish to heed the biblical injunction that the church be one. Nineteenth-century interpreters such as Philip Schaff, the father of American church history, argued that “mainline” reformed Protestantism was normative, even for groups that did not belong to it. Schaff’s Hegelian scheme of historical evolution led him to expect the synthesis of reformed and catholic traditions. His successors in both historical studies and ecumenism have abandoned his view of the historical process but maintain a focus on the “mainline.” This, Moore contends, leads us to distort the past. Moore’s subject is not groups called “sects” but people who regard themselves as religious outsiders. He includes obvious choices like the Latter Day Saints, black churches, Jews, and Christian Scientists but also examines large alliances like the fundamentalists and large denominations like Roman Catholics. The common thread is that all regard themselves as unique because they stand outside the “mainline” Protestant denominations. Moore wonders if being “outsiders” is not the central and, paradoxically, unifying characteristic of the American religious experience. Whatever the merits of his hypothesis, Moore’s work is thorough and precise. The extensive notes indicate exhaustive research and constitute as good a bibliography of recent American church history as I have seen.

Women, Hispanics, black Americans, and American Indians address pluralism in another way. They argue that their stories have been left out of the historical record, either as a tool of oppressors or as a result of triumphalism. To correct these omissions, women and ethnic historians have produced several
kinds of books. Works of advocacy early in a movement claim a history because oral tradition points toward it—for example blacks, Hispanics, and women tell us what they have experienced. From these, historians construct anthologies that document a collective story—for instance, slave narratives or diaries of pioneering women or post-Vatican II liturgies reflecting Hispanic consciousness. Researchers also write monographic treatments of small pieces of the story. After several years of work, synthesizers write narratives that put the pieces together in a connected story. In the study of black, female, and Hispanic Christians, we have seen this progression from recognition of a new way of looking at the past to the completion of monographs. The synthetic surveys, with one exception, are yet to come.

Historians of women, black Christians, and Hispanic Christians give a lot of attention to events leading up to both finding roots and the development of liberation theologies. Milton C. Sernett, in his Afro-American Religious History: A Documentary Witness (Durham: Duke Univ. Pr., 1985), notes that black historical scholarship is not yet ready to write a synthetic or synoptic survey of the history of black Christians in the United States. He has chosen, as a step in that direction, to edit a fine anthology of black Americans' writings. They range from descriptions of transplanted African religious experience, to conversion in slave life, to the rise of black churches, to the liberation theologies of recent days. Scholars and simple people attest to the vitality and transformation of pain found in black Christianity.

Sernett has chosen to print each selection whole rather than to edit heavily. This is both a strength and a weakness, for the volume is both rich and rather too long (more than 500 pages). And he has, I believe rightly, selected not only Christian writers but Jewish, Muslim, and sectarian or cultic writers as well. He appends short and helpful suggestions for further reading.

Antonio M. Stevens Arroyo, C.P., in Prophets Denied Honor: An Anthology on the Hispanic Church in the United States (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1980), devotes a large portion of his pages to events of the past quarter of a century. Fr. Arroyo is careful to indicate the roots of the recent past including, for example,
Emilio Zapata’s 1919 open letter to the president of Mexico as prelude to a chapter on more recent pensadores (founding fathers).

As good as Arroyo’s book is, this reviewer looks eagerly for a work like Sernett’s that gives as much attention to early years as to the last twenty. Arroyo does not claim to write a “much-needed history of the Hispanos in the United States,” but he has helped make that possible and has begun the process, which someone else may complete.

The women’s liberation movement also began with polemic, but historians quickly moved into nonpolemical modes, because they perceived that change would come only when women were recognized as having contributed to the course of “civilization.” Reviving the practice of women’s history, first found in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Mary Beard in the 1930s first wrote about the contributions of women. Her book, *Woman as a Force in History*, served as inspiration and a model to women’s historians of the 1970s. They began looking for roots, found them, and began collecting sources. Analysis followed, and women’s historians began recasting the story, moving beyond “contribution historiography.” Of all the groups self-consciously writing their stories, women have done the most and most thorough work so far. The field is rich not only with potentially fine works but many actually excellent books.

Dorothy Jean Furnish, and other scholars, Keller and Ruether make a remarkably connected and coherent story of their disparate materials.

The volumes are handsomely bound and printed. The editors have supplied indices and footnotes, but not so many as to deter the nontechnical reader. They also do not assume a great deal of prior knowledge, therefore making their work accessible to a general readership. Well-chosen illustrations add appeal. A chronology might have been helpful, but this lack is a minor concern in such excellent volumes.

A good but all-too-brief general book about the history of women's religious experience in the United States is *Her Story: Women in the Christian Tradition* by Barbara J. MacHaffie (Philadelphia: Fortress Pr., 1986). MacHaffie covers the whole of Christian history in this synthesis of two decades of research in women history but devotes the last half to Christianity in the United States. Concise (183 pages from introduction to Scripture index) and readable, MacHaffie's book serves as a supplement to standard histories of Christianity, which do not say enough about women (including even the fine new edition of Williston Walker's classic or Justo Gonzalez's survey, *A History of the Christian Church, The Story of Christianity*, both of which include a large number of women in their treatments). MacHaffie's bibliography alone is worth the price of the book. Her work is tantalizing because she skims the surface of a deep, rich past and eschews analysis of the material and the methodological problems of such a study. More specialized treatments of parts of the story help fill the gaps. A richer, larger, and more complex synthesis still needs to be written.

One of the best of these specialized studies, Barbara Leslie Epstein's *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism, and Temperance in Nineteenth-Century America* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Pr., 1981) is an important book that has not received the notice it deserves. Epstein analyzes women's and men's roles in the revival/reform movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. She finds that men and women shared a great deal of the same kinds of experience during the first awakening but that their experiences diverged quite
dramatically during the second. She suggests that the temper­ance movement, the second most significant popular reform to emerge from the second awakening (the abolition of slavery being the most significant), furnished women with a socially respectable way to express their pent-up hostility. Caught in the trap of domesticity, Victorian women found themselves powerless to deal directly with their anger toward men and a society that, through industrialization, robbed the women of autonomy and dignity. From about 1870 to 1920, when the ill-fated prohibition amendment to the constitution was passed, evangelical women not yet ready to embrace the feminist critique of family structure in industrial society vented their frustration and often rage in the temperance crusade.

Some women, such as Frances Willard, transformed their hostility into cleansing anger and took decisive action to critique society and family life in a radical way, that is, at the root of the matter. The vast majority who took action joined only the temperance crusade, the safer way.

Epstein has researched primary documents thoroughly, making use of letters, diaries, memoirs, reminiscences, especially those of Frances Willard. The book is well-written, if a tad repetitious in places. Above all, the author's analysis of revival-inspired evangelical piety is brilliant. Besides all that, the volume is fun to read, full of remarkably fresh quotations, stories, and analyses.

Attention to the history of Native American religions is not properly a part of the history of Christianity but merits attention as necessary information to the proper study of Christian missions to Native Americans and the informed study of Christian Native Americans. This field combines several disciplines, including history, anthropology, folklore, and archeology (at least). The necessary interdisciplinary nature of the study makes it difficult to do well. Henry Warner Bowden has done well in his study, American Indians and Christian Missions: Studies in Cultural Conflict (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Pr., 1981). Bowden's work is a small and significant step toward a fuller understanding of the interrelation of Native American religions and their spirituality. Much more work
needs to be done in this area, and this reviewer hopes that Native American historians will take up at least a part of that task. To date, Native American scholars like Vine DeLoria have felt the need to raise our consciousness and write with present-day activism in mind. Such efforts need to be supplemented by more attention to historical background, much of which is hard to uncover because records are spotty and because history is an activity engaged in by the dominant majority, the winners in historic struggles. The Native Americans lost their struggle against white, Anglo-American expansionism and thus have more problems than white, Anglo-Americans when they seek to reclaim their past and tell their stories. Sources, however, are available and need to be tapped by historians.

Hispanic and Native American pasts merge to some extent because early Hispanic and Portuguese immigrants intermarried with Native Americans more frequently than did Anglo-American immigrants. Still, Hispanics regard themselves as a separate and identifiable ethne (or people) and constitute a large part of the population in the southern and southwestern parts of the United States, not to mention New York City. Estimates based on the 1980 census indicate that Hispanics number more than fourteen million in the United States, more than seventeen million if one includes Puerto Rico. From one-quarter to one-third of all Roman Catholics in the United States are Hispanic persons.

Part of the Hispanic struggle to gain equal opportunity and to free themselves from oppression by the dominant majority in the United States is the reclamation of their story, their past, their heritage. Enrique Dussel, president of the Commission on the Study of the History of the Church in Latin America, explains how difficult and yet how vital to human liberation it is in a work entitled *A History of the Church in Latin America: Colonialism to Liberation, 1491-1979* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1981), which appeared in English in 1981 and is a translation of the third edition of the Spanish version published in 1974. A short section on events between 1974 and 1979 is appended. Dussel notes that most of Latin America's history has been lost because its oppressors destroyed the civilizations of
Latin America. Yet, a people can become invisible when their past, their history is lost. Dussel deals with Indians in both North and South Americas and to a certain extent with the church’s role in the conquest and colonialization of both continents.

Dussel’s main concern is with the countries south of the continental United States and with the roots of liberation theology in that area; however, his hermeneutic and his suggestions for re-understanding church history with Latin America in mind and in the proper focus are relevant for the study of American church history for several reasons. First, a healthy percentage of the United States’ population is Hispanic. Second, the southwestern part of our country has a long, rich Hispanic past. Third, Dussel indict colonial powers, including Spain, England, and the United States, for their long history of political and economic oppression of Hispanic peoples. All of which is to say that Dussel challenges historians of Christianity in the United States as well as those in Latin America to consider the story of Hispanics in this hemisphere and to redefine our notion of American Church History.

At present, there is no survey or synthetic work that incorporates researches on and tells the story of Hispanics in the United States or in the western hemisphere. This is not surprising, considering the enormous hermeneutical challenges and the paucity of sources in some critical areas outlined by Dussel. However, there is a lot to be known, and a lot of good scholars are at work figuring out how to know it and tell us about what they know. As the Hispanic population increases by immigration and natural increase, I think that we may look for more treatments of their story in this country.

For now, it is hopeful to note that standard histories of Christianity in the United States take far more note of the Hispanic influence and the Hispanic story than was true several decades ago. Liberation theologians have made their points well with many historians, who include enough information about Hispanics to make the reader wish for a great deal more.

Many fine works in American church history are not, of course, included in this brief survey. One field of study that appears to be becoming practically a growth industry is that of
evangelical and fundamentalist Christianity. New and wonderful studies of Roman Catholicism, Mormonism, and much more flow from the pens of fine scholars. It is, indeed, an exciting time to be a student of American church history.
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