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QR

The Ministry of Deacons in Methodism from Wesley to Today
Kenneth E. Rowe

Diakonia *as a "Sacred Order" in The United Methodist Church*
Diedra Kriewald

Deacons as Emissary-Servants: A Liturgical Theology
Benjamin L. Hartley

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Introduction

Exploring a New Order of Ministry

Any time something new is created—especially when this new thing involves the creation of a new form of ordained ministry—there is bound to be confusion, speculation, discussion, and even outright opposition. And since its historic action in 1996 to create the Order of Deacons The United Methodist Church has witnessed all of these responses.

Times of uncertainty and volatility call for robust and imaginative thinking. Consequently, this issue of *Quarterly Review* is devoted to an exploration of the meaning of the Order of Deacons and to the theological, liturgical, and practical implications of an ordained diaconate for the life and ministry of The United Methodist Church. The contributors recognize that the questions are plentiful and vexing and the answers few and tentative. But they also realize that the hard work of thoughtful and imaginative theological reflection on the meaning and implications of the Order of Deacons is as necessary as it is unavoidable. Therefore, while they are meant to be voices in an emerging conversation, the articles in this volume do not flinch from engaging the tough theological, liturgical, and practical issues raised by the new order.

The Order of Deacons may be new to United Methodism, but the diaconate has a long and honorable tradition in the history of the Christian church. Thus, the first two articles provide a historical framework. Charles Yrigoyen, Jr., traces the origin, evolution, and significance of the diaconate through five periods of church history, while Kenneth Rowe focuses on one strand in that historical narrative:

the ministry of deacons in Methodism from the time of John Wesley to the present day. In both discussions, a theme emerges that is central to all the articles in this volume: the deacon's fundamental role is to relate the gathered life of Christians to servant ministry in the world, particularly with the poor.

Diedra Kriewald suggests that the significance of the deacon's role emerges precisely when the importance of the diaconate as a "sacred Order" is fully understood. Benjamin Hartley proposes a theology of the diaconate centered on the twin foci of "emissary" and "servant." When viewed in an eschatological key, the deacon as "emissary-servant" is called to proclaim the "already" and the "not yet" of God's reign in all aspects of his or her ministry.

Living into the meaning and implications of a new order of United Methodist clergy will not be easy—particularly, for many elders. However, as Daniel Benedict, Jr., shows, when it is acknowledged that the orders of deacons and elders are distinct, mutually complementary, and equal, then the work of deacons and elders in worship can portray a genuine partnership, based on mutual respect and love.

While not dealing with the new Order of Deacons in United Methodism, Rukudzo Murapa's 1998 Willson lecture is nevertheless devoted to the issue of leadership, including leadership for the churches of Africa. Murapa is clear-eyed about the crisis of leadership in Africa; but he is optimistic about the crucial role that Africa University (a United Methodist-related institution) can—and already does—play in preparing a new generation of leaders ready to meet the many challenges facing that continent in the next millennium.

In his Lectionary Study, Craig Hill examines Mark's Gospel in order to unpack the meaning of true discipleship. In face of the constant temptation to domesticate the radical nature of discipleship, Mark is unequivocal that Messiah Jesus is preeminently a *servant*. And, as Hill points out, this servant-king calls all of his followers—including those ordained to lead them—to live out their vocations of servanthood in the shadow of the cross. Potent words, indeed, as United Methodists discern the meaning of their ordering of ministry for the century ahead.

Hendrik R. Pieterse
Editor

Charles Yrigoyen, Jr.

The Office of Deacon: A Historical Summary

At its General Conference in 1996, The United Methodist Church instituted a new clerical order, the Order of Deacons. This historic step gave to the office of deacon a new meaning and status in United Methodism. While the Order of Deacons is new to The United Methodist Church, the diaconate has a long and rich history in the Christian church. As United Methodists live into the meaning and implications of the historic decision their church has made, viewing the diaconate in the wider context of the history of the Christian church can provide much-needed balance and integrity.

This article outlines such a wider historical context by tracing the origin, evolution, and significance of the diaconate through five periods of church history: the New Testament; the early church, from the second through the fourth centuries; the Middle Ages; the Reformation; and the modern period.

The New Testament

It is impossible to consider the term *deacon* and its significance in the church without dealing with it in the New Testament. The key Greek

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term in the New Testament is the verb *diakonein* and its cognate nouns *diakonos* and *diakonia*.[1] It is likely that the Greek writer Herodotus (c. 485–425 B.C.E.) was the first to use this group of words. In his writings, *diakonein* refers to attending to or serving a royal person or household. For the Greeks, this type of serving was not dignified. They preferred ruling others, not serving them.

In the New Testament, the terms for *deacon* are used in a complex way, but in the general sense of serving others. In places, the verb *diakonein* refers to something as ordinary as "waiting at table" (Luke 17:8; John 12:2). It is also used in the sense of household hospitality, as in Martha's serving in Luke 10:40 and in the selfless giving of Peter's mother-in-law in Mark 1:31. However, in most other places in the New Testament the term takes on the broader meaning of service to others. Jesus spoke of himself as one who serves (Luke 22:27), and he defined greatness for his followers by the way in which they serve others (Mark 9:35; 10:44). The life of Christ's community is a life of serving. Serving others is serving God.

The noun *diakonia* appears 44 times in the New Testament and refers to the ministry or service which Jesus and his followers render. Christ's followers are sent into the world and given the *charismata*, the free gifts of God's grace, in order to engage in *diakonia*, the ministry of service in the name of Jesus.

Another noun, *diakonos*, which appears 30 times in the New Testament, refers to one who ministers or serves. Before it came to refer to a specific office or order in the nascent church, *diakonos* was used in a very broad fashion in the New Testament. (See, for example, Mark 9:35 and Eph. 3:7.)

The specific references to *diakonos* as an office in the church appear in three places in the New Testament: Phil. 1:1, Rom. 16:1, and 1 Tim. 3:8-13. There is no description of the functions of these offices, but it appears that both *bishops* and *deacons* refer to positions of leadership in the church. Also, according to 1 Tim. 3:8-13 and Rom. 16:1, women as well as men take up the work of the diaconate.

New Testament students have disagreed whether the women mentioned in 1 Tim. 3 are female deacons (or deaconesses) or the wives of male deacons. There has also been some controversy about the meaning of the instruction that deacons marry only once: is its only purpose to bar polygamy or serial marriage, or does it also serve to prohibit remarriage after the death of the deacon's spouse?

First Timothy 3, of course, is also important because it describes the

office of bishop in the church (vv. 1-7). A possible additional office in the early church is mentioned in 1 Tim. 5:3-16, that of widow, to which reference is rarely made. There is some indication that in the early church there was a "circle of widows" (for example, Tabitha [Dorcas] in Acts 9:36-43) who had a special role in the community of faith, such as praying and engaging in social welfare. The widows apparently occupied a special place in the *diakonia* even though, so far as we know, they were not formally called "deacons" or "deaconesses."[2]

So the New Testament leaves us with considerable information about *diakonein, diakonia,* and *diakonos*. These terms generally refer to the service to which Christ calls his people and only in a few places designate a specific office in the church. We may wish that the New Testament gave a more descriptive account of the office of deacon, but we must be satisfied with what it provides.

The Second through the Fourth Centuries

Some scholars have referred to the period from the end of the first century to the end of the fourth century as the "Golden Age of the diaconate."[3] During this period, the number of deacons in the church increased significantly, their importance was enhanced, and their functions were more clearly delineated.

The earliest writer outside the New Testament to speak of deacons was Clement, Bishop of Rome. In his letter to the church at Corinth (c. 96 C.E.), he asserts that the apostles "appointed their first converts, after testing them by the Spirit, to be the bishops and deacons of future believers."[4] Some scholars have seen this as the first indication of apostolic authority and succession being transmitted at the direction of the apostles. Regrettably, there is no statement in the document about the functions of the deacons.

The *Shepherd* of Hermas, in its original section (c. 96 C.E.), also contains a reference to deacons in the church's life. This letter provides evidence of one of the long-standing functions of deacons in the church: They had a special responsibility to care for the poor, especially widows and orphans. If they did this poorly, and if for their own benefit they ransacked the treasury intended for poor, they had fallen and their only hope was repentance and accompanying acts to set things right.

The *Didache* (c. 100 C.E.) is another important document that speaks

of deacons. Although the *Didache* lumps bishops and deacons together, their functions appear different, just as the roles of the prophet and teacher are not the same.

The writings of Ignatius of Antioch (c. 105 C.E.) provide us with the first reference to three distinct offices in the church: bishops, presbyters (elders), and deacons. Ignatius uses

> the symbolism of the bishop as the type of God the Father, the presbyters as that of the college of the apostles, and the deacons as Jesus Christ: "Correspondingly, everyone must show the deacons respect. They represent Jesus Christ, just as the bishop has the role of the Father, and the presbyters are like God's council and an apostolic band. You cannot have a Church without these."[5]

Ignatius's epistle to the Trallians contains references to the deacons performing liturgical tasks at the Eucharist. Indeed, it seems clear from the whole of Ignatius's writings that deacons did not preside at the Eucharist but assisted in serving the bread and the cup. It is also important to remember that, for Ignatius, a bishop is similar to today's parish presbyter, pastor, or priest rather than to a diocesan bishop. The Ignatian presbyters are a council who work with and advise the bishop in the governance of the local congregation. The deacons, too, are servants of the church who assist it in fulfilling its ministry and at times assist its leading officer.

Polycarp's letter to the Philippians (c. 110-115 C.E.), another document which mentions deacons, sets forth moral and spiritual qualifications reminiscent of 1 Tim. 3:8-13. Since, for Polycarp, the deacon is a servant "of God and Christ and not of men," the deacon is more than an assistant to the bishop.[6]

During the early part of the second century, then, the leadership of the church was in a transition, from "charismatically appointed apostles, prophets, and teachers" to a threefold structure of bishops, presbyters, and deacons.[7] While the ministry of the church included the service rendered by all of its members to God, to each other, and to others, within this ministry three orders were assigned specific functions. Deacons, who had a close relationship with the bishop, performed certain administrative and liturgical functions.

The latter part of the second century as well as the third century witnessed the further evolution of the office of deacon. Justin Martyr,

writing c. 150 C.E., was the first to mention deacons administering both eucharistic bread and wine. He writes: "When the president has given thanks and the whole congregation has assented, those whom we call deacons give to each of those present a portion of the consecrated bread and wine and water, and they take it to the absent."[8] Irenaeus (c. 185 C.E.) was the first to assert that the "Acts Seven" (Acts 6:1-6) were ordained to the diaconate.[9] Most scholars today are reluctant to agree with Irenaeus, mostly because there is virtually no proof that deacons preached in the early church, and Stephen and Nicolaus among the Seven did preach.

The Pseudo-Clementines speak of the functions of deacons as follows:

> [L]et the deacons of the church, going about with intelligence, be as eyes to the bishops, carefully inquiring into the doings of each member of the church, ascertaining who is about to sin, in order that, being arrested with admonition by the president, he may haply not accomplish the sin. Let them check the disorderly, that they may not desist from assembling to hear the discourses, so that they may be able to counteract by the word of truth those anxieties that fall upon the heart from every side, by means of worldly casualties and evil communications; for if they long remain fallow, they become fuel for the fire. And let them learn who are suffering under bodily disease, and let them bring them to the notice of the multitude who do not know of them, that they may visit them, and supply their wants according to the judgment of the president. Yea, though they do this without his knowledge, they do nothing amiss. These things, then, and things like to these, let the deacons attend to.[10]

In his work, *On Baptism* (c. 200 C.E.), Tertullian states that deacons could baptize, with the bishop's permission. For his part, Hippolytus (c. 215 C.E.) gives the first detailed account of the ordination of deacons:

> When the deacon is ordained, this is the reason why the bishop alone shall lay his hands upon him: he is not ordained to the priesthood but to serve the bishop and to carry out the bishop's commands. He does not take part in the council of the clergy;

> he is to attend to his own duties and to make known to the bishop such things as are needful. He does not receive that Spirit that is possessed by the presbytery, in which the presbyters share; he receives only what is confided in him under the bishop's authority.[11]

In the prayer of ordination, Hippolytus invokes God's Spirit on the deacon "to serve the church and to offer in [the] holy sanctuary the gifts that are offered to [God] by [the] appointed high priests."[12] Deacons bring the offerings of the people to be eucharisticized by the bishop and also arrange the oblations on the altar, standing on the side of the people. According to Hippolytus, deacons were to assist in baptism, inform the bishop of those who are sick, instruct those in the church, and preside at *agape* feasts when a bishop is not present.[13]

The Syrian *Didascalia* (c. 230 C.E.) has several references to deacons and deaconesses, with the deaconesses having many of the functions of the deacons. Deaconesses were required for the ministry to women. They were to visit women who were sick and otherwise in need; anoint women in baptism; and instruct women following baptism in the necessity of living a holy life.[14]

By the time of the Syrian *Apostolic Constitutions,* deacons could read the Gospel lesson; announce various stages of the liturgy; bid intercessory prayers; announce the kiss of peace; keep order; bring oblations to the altar; stand by the altar to keep insects from entering the chalices; announce the end of worship with the words, "Depart in peace"; and perform other "minor" liturgical leadership functions.[15]

In the late-fourth century, as the church tried to meet the needs of growing numbers of the faithful, some deacons presided over the Eucharist (with the authorization of the bishop); this happened apparently when neither bishop nor presbyter was able to be present. In some places, deacons were in charge of small congregations, even where presbyters were available; this was the case particularly where the presbyter was younger and less experienced than the deacon.[16] Did deacons preach? Perhaps, but there is very little evidence that preaching was a regular part of the deacon's duties, except where the deacon was the principal leader of a given congregation.[17]

In the pre-Nicene church, the office of deacon was viewed as a permanent vocation. Although deacons could become presbyters, they usually did not. Some scholars have argued that this was natural because the office of deacon was not seen as inferior to that of presbyter. One did

not have to move from deacon to presbyter in order to be seen as an effective leader. Athanasius was a deacon during his important role in the Nicene controversy. The connection between being a deacon and an effective leader held true even in later periods, though it seems the exception rather than the rule. Hildebrand was an archdeacon when elected to the papacy in 1073 (Gregory VII). Francis of Assisi, according to his earliest biographer, was a deacon and was never ordained a presbyter. Some deacons even represented bishops at councils of the church; for example, Pope Sylvester sent two presbyters and two deacons to represent him at the Council of Arles in 314.

However, there were major modifications in the office of deacon in the latter part of the fourth century. The change was gradual. Some scholars place the chief influence for this change on the church's reshaping its life and structure according to the patterns of Roman government. As the church grew and developed the diocese, the bishop became a regional church leader, not simply the leader of a local congregation. The presbyter became a "priest." It became increasingly clear that the church considered the deacon inferior to both the bishop and the presbyter. By the latter part of the fourth century, deacons no longer formed the bishop's personal staff. Increasingly ministerial orders came to be seen as rungs on a ladder which individuals had to climb in order to advance in the church's structure, with a few making it to the episcopacy.

The office of deacon was increasingly understood as a step to ordination as presbyter. In his informative history of the early diaconate, James Monroe Barnett presents a time line showing how the office of deacon had changed from the pre-Nicene period to its post-Nicene status.[18] The classical *cursus honorum* (rising in the church's hierarchy through a succession of grades) includes eight grades: doorkeeper, lector, exorcist, acolyte, subdeacon, deacon, presbyter, and bishop.

The Middle Ages

Developments during the medieval period were important in the evolution of the office of deacon. One of these developments was clerical celibacy. At the Council of Elvira in Spain in the early fourth century, bishops, presbyters, and deacons were ordered to abstain from sex with their wives and forbidden to procreate. Anyone who

failed to live by this prohibition forfeited his rank in the clergy. As the church tightened its rules for the clergy, it seemed more concerned with clerical continence than with their marital status. Pope Leo I (440–461) allowed married men to live with their wives after ordination, so long as they did not have intercourse. But this arrangement apparently did not work well since many couples continued to have children. In the eleventh century, Pope Gregory VII attempted to enforce celibacy. However, it took another half-century before the marriages of priests, deacons, and subdeacons were declared invalid. Even for the next four hundred years, many parish priests were not celibate and had families.

The Eastern church adopted a different approach. Although marriage for the clergy after ordination was prohibited, priests, deacons, and subdeacons who were already married were permitted to live with their wives after ordination and were not expected to be continent. However, bishops were chosen only from among the celibate.

As celibacy became a binding rule in the West for both priests and deacons, even considering those circumstances where it was not strictly enforced, celibacy seems to have been a cause for the waning of the diaconate.[19] Barnett asks, ". . . [W]hat point was there for men who had to commit themselves . . . to abstain . . . to aspire only to the 'lower' order?"[20] If one had to abstain, why not do so as a priest, not simply as a deacon!

A second critical development in the medieval period was the growth of the monastic movement. The monastic orders, which included men and women, encouraged their members to be servants to the communities in which they were located, to establish schools, and to found hospitals. In the East, deaconesses were the core of women's monastic orders. They sometimes assumed liturgical functions that they would not have occupied elsewhere. They read the Epistle and Gospel lessons, lit the candles, burned incense, distributed Communion, and probably anointed the sick. As monastic women and men provided hospitality, fed the hungry, and visited and nursed the sick, they performed tasks which had generally been the assigned duties of deacons, thereby diminishing the role of the diaconate in places where there were monasteries.[21]

During the Middle Ages, there were periods when and places where the church generated numerous "works of mercy." Canon law provided for the relief of the poor, which was effectively given in

some places but not in others. In spite of the abuses in the system for conveying relief to the poor, it seemed to have worked rather well at the local level until the fourteenth century. While in some places the secular government was striving to become a more effective force in social welfare, the church was still an important provider. Monastics and, to a lesser extent, deacons did some of this work.

What can we say generally about the place and role of the deacon at the end of the medieval period? First, the deacon was subordinate to the priest, and the diaconate was firmly viewed as a transitional order to the priesthood. The diaconate was an apprenticeship to a higher order. Second, the deacon's role in social welfare and administration declined, while their liturgical functions increased. Deacons carried the cross in processionals, read the Gospel and Epistle lessons, read the names of new catechumens, and accompanied priests to the homes of the infirm who could not come to the church to confess their sins. The liturgical role of deacons was restricted, however. They could baptize, but only in situations of "urgent necessity." They could administer Communion to the sick in "grave" circumstances. Deacons were neither permitted to administer extreme unction nor allowed to hear confession or pronounce absolution. Third, deaconesses had largely disappeared in the East by the eleventh century and in the West by the thirteenth century. Fourth, archdeacons (whose office appeared in the late-fourth century) continued to be effective in fiscal, judicial, and charitable work. Some were legal representatives of bishops. Last, deacons were permitted to preach.

The Reformation

During the sixteenth century, Protestants attempted to break with the medieval view of the diaconate as a preparatory step to the priesthood. Luther led the effort to return the diaconate to what he understood to be its biblical function: to administer the church's assistance to the poor. In *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), Luther writes:

> And the diaconate is not the ministry of reading the Gospel or Epistle, as is the present practice, but the ministry of distributing the Church's alms to the poor, so that the priests may be relieved of the burden of temporal matters and may give themselves more freely to prayer and the Word. For this

was the purpose of the institution of the diaconate, as we read in Acts 6.[22]

In Wittenberg, the church under Luther's direction had a program of welfare, but the term *deacon* was not used to refer to workers with the poor. Using the term might have caused confusion with the medieval understanding of the diaconate of which Luther disapproved—although by 1528 Luther showed less reserve in advocating the function and title of deacons.

Luther was committed to the administration of welfare for the poor, but he did not insist that this work be done by those with the title "deacon." Luther's friend, Johannes Bugenhagen, wrote a church order for the town of Braunschweig in 1528 in which the people who did the work of poor relief were called "deacons." Chosen by the town council, they administered two funds—one for the poor and the other for repairs and supplies for the church, as well as for salaries and expenses for the pastors, schoolmasters, and other church employees.[23] Later in sixteenth-century German Lutheranism, the term *deacon* referred to men who were "ordained priests serving as curates or assistants to the rector of the parish."[24]

In Zürich, an important center of the Reformed tradition and a city much influenced by Ulrich Zwingli, there was a major attempt to establish a system for the relief of the poor. In 1525 a city ordinance set up a welfare structure which established a common fund for the poor under the direction of four persons chosen by the two city councils. These men were called "custodians," although they did what some considered the traditional work of deacons. The liturgy of the church in Zürich in 1525 did retain the terms *deacon* or *lector* as the designation for one who assisted in worship. The liturgy read:

> *Now the deacon or lector says:* The Lord be with you.
> *The people respond:* And with thy spirit.[25]

In Strasbourg, Martin Bucer successfully urged the city to create lay committees in each parish, called *Kirchenpfleger*, to be responsible for moral and religious improvement. In 1532 these *Kirchenpfleger* recommended that deacons and deaconesses be chosen to care for the poor and sick, a ministry similar to the ministry in the early church. In his treatise on ordination, Bucer refers to two types of ordained ministry. He writes:

> According to the teaching of the Holy Spirit, the ministries of the Church are of two kinds. One consists of the administration of the word, sacraments and discipline of Christ, which belongs especially to bishops and presbyters; the other of the care of the needy, which was formerly entrusted to persons who were called deacons.[26]

While serving as Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge in 1550, Bucer wrote his celebrated *De Regno Christi* (a book that did not have the influence on the Church of England that he had hoped). In the section of this work that dealt with caring for the poor, Bucer directed that every church should have deacons to administer alms to the needy. The deacons were ordered to keep excellent records of the funds collected and distributed and were accountable to the bishop and presbytery. Since deacons were expected to be occupied with the care of the poor, subdeacons and administrators had to assume all other responsibilities (e.g., care of church property and other mundane duties).[27]

It is likely that Bucer influenced John Calvin's views on the ministry, including his view of the diaconate. The ecclesiastical ordinances of Geneva drafted by Calvin state that there are "four orders of office instituted by our Lord for the government of the church."[28] These were pastors or ministers, doctors (i.e., teachers), elders, and deacons. Calvin did not hesitate to include deacons in the company of "ministers of the Word of God." Principal duties of deacons included administering the finances of the church and gathering and distributing alms. Calvin also believed that the New Testament office of widow was a type of female diaconate, and he wanted to restore this office in Geneva. He viewed Phoebe, mentioned in Rom. 16, as a deacon who exercised the ministry of widows to which 1 Tim. 5 refers.[29]

The Anabaptists also gave an important place to the office of deacon. Although there was some diversity among them, Anabaptists shared with Protestants the commitment to deacons serving the poor. Some Anabaptists, however, gave deacons a larger role than Luther, Bucer, or Calvin would by permitting deacons to preach and teach in the church.

The Catholic Church during the sixteenth century did not seem to alter its view of the deacon significantly. It continued to understand

the diaconate as a preparation for the priesthood. The Church of England generally also looked on the office in this way.

So, by the end of the sixteenth century, the diaconate was mostly of two types. Protestants emphasized the importance of deacons in the care of the poor and social welfare. Roman Catholicism maintained the medieval tradition in which the deacon was basically serving an apprenticeship for the priesthood. Anabaptists had feet in both camps; their deacons exercised financial obligations but also engaged in some pastoral duties, such as preaching.

The Modern Period

During the centuries after the Reformation there were continuing developments for the diaconate, especially among Protestants. The Reformers attempted to reinstitute the office of deacon as they believed it had been in the early church. However, social and cultural changes in the decades following the sixteenth century made it very difficult to reproduce the office as it had previously existed. Denominations maintained or changed their diaconates to fit the needs of the time.

Deacons continued to be major administrators of funds for the poor in the Reformed churches, at least until the secular government became more active in benevolent activity. In England in 1643, the Westminster Assembly recommended a form of ecclesiastical government in which there were "[d]eacons as distinct officers in the church . . . Whose Office is perpetual . . . . To whose Office it belongs not to preach the Word or administer the Sacraments, but to take special care in distributing to the necessities of the poor."[30] Eleven years earlier, the Mennonites drafted their Confession of Dordrecht, in which they provided for deacons and deaconesses to have "oversight of the poor."[31] Deaconesses were chosen to assist the deacons to "visit, comfort, and take care of the poor, the weak, afflicted, and the needy, [and] also to visit, comfort and take care of widows and orphans; and further to assist in taking care of any matters in the church that properly come within their sphere, according to their ability. I Tim. 5:9, 10; Rom. 16:1, 2."[32] Deacons, however, were given an additional role: "they (particularly if they are fit persons, and chosen and ordained thereto by the church), may also in aid and relief of the bishops, exhort the church . . . and thus assist in word and

doctrine . . . ."[33] This gave deacons the authority to preach and teach in the church, tasks not offered to the deaconesses.

European Lutherans viewed the role of deacons in two ways. They were seen either as those who managed relief funds for the poor or as assistant pastors. Up to 1820, there were two types of deacon among Lutherans in the United States. One was the lay deacon who was responsible for the business of the local congregation and care of the poor. The other was the ordained deacon who served as preacher/pastor, especially in places where there was a shortage of pastors to serve congregations. In 1816, the Pennsylvania Lutheran Ministerium adopted legislation that made it possible for an ordained deacon to advance to the office of pastor by the declaration of the ordained pastors and a handshake. Some considered this an action that essentially gave ordained deacons the status of assistant pastors and recognized the ordained diaconate as a preparatory step to full clergy status.[34] In other places, such as France, where pastors were sometimes in short supply, deacons simply took on the role of pastors.

Roman Catholicism and the Church of England retained the "medieval diaconate," in which ordained deacons were basically in training for the priesthood.

The Industrial Revolution gave birth to new forms of the diaconate. Throughout the nineteenth century, as the churches attempted to cope with the growth of cities and attendant social problems, the offices of deacon and deaconess were raised to a new level of importance. In Germany, urban work known as the Inner Mission (a program of evangelism and social action) gave birth to *Brüder*—later called "deacons"—who worked in slums, prisons, and other places where pastors could not or would not go. The Inner Mission also produced a new deaconess. Most of them were nurses, some were teachers, and others, like Amalie Sieveking, engaged in benevolent visiting.[35] The deaconess movement was a prominent presence in Europe, particularly in Germany. From Europe it spread to Great Britain and the United States.

Jeannine Olson claims that there are several reasons for the success of the deaconess movement. First, it gave women, especially single women, an opportunity to dedicate themselves to full-time, church-related service. Second, the deaconess "mother houses" (or deaconess homes) offered companionship, a strong sense of sisterhood, and even security in the later years of life. Third, in the nineteenth century there was a great need for nurses and social and

parish workers; women filled these positions with great skill and compassion.[36]

Recently, there have been changes in the diaconate in various Christian communions. For example, at the Second Vatican Council Roman Catholicism made possible the restoration of a permanent diaconate. Today the Roman Catholic Church has two types of deacon. One type is transitional: the deacon is ordained and on the way to fulfilling the call to the priesthood. The other type of deacon is also ordained; but his or her call is to be a deacon, not a priest. What functions do these "permanent" deacons perform? They baptize; witness marriages; preside at wakes and graveside services; lead liturgies of the Word; assist at Communion; and bless persons, houses, and rosaries and other sacred objects. However, they may not celebrate the Mass or pronounce absolution. Like transitional deacons, they must be installed in the ministries of lector and acolyte before they are eligible for ordination to the diaconate.[37]

There have also been some changes in the diaconate among Protestants. For example, while retaining the transitional diaconate, the Episcopal Church has made provision for permanent deacons.

Within the ecumenical church today there are generally four types of deacon: (1) ordained deacons who are transitional to presbyter or priest; (2) ordained permanent deacons; (3) communities of deacons and deaconesses whose offices evolved from the Inner Mission movement in nineteenth-century Europe (such as United Methodist deaconesses and their predecessors); and (4) lay deacons, elected in a local congregation to serve the church in the local community.

Conclusion

The offices of deacon and deaconess have evolved considerably since the first century. There remains diversity among the churches regarding the nature and authority of those who occupy these places in Christ's ministry. Whatever their status, lay or ordained, deacons occupy a critical ministry in the body of Christ.

The United Methodist Church has decided to make the office of deacon a permanent order in its ordained ministry. It will be interesting to observe how this order develops in the near and longer term. Several critical questions will be at the forefront. How will deacons view their role among the ordained? Will they be fully

welcomed in their annual conferences as members of the ordained? What place will deacons occupy in congregational worship? How effectively will they serve in their ministry of bridging the congregation and the world?

There are questions to be answered and challenges to be met, but there is little doubt that the church's ministry can be strengthened by a dynamic, competent, and committed diaconate.

Notes

1. See Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 2, trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 81-93.

2. Jeannine E. Olson, *One Ministry, Many Roles: Deacons and Diaconesses through the Centuries* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1992), 26-27. This volume displays an enormous breadth of information on the history of the diaconate.

3. James Monroe Barnett, *The Diaconate: A Full and Equal Order* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995), 43.

4. Cyril C. Richardson, ed. and trans., *Early Christian Fathers* 1, in *The Library of Christian Classics* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), 62.

5. Barnett, 49.

6. Richardson, 133.

7. Barnett, 53.

8. Richardson, 286.

9. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers* 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1956), 352.

10. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Christian Library* 17 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1870), 12.

11. Burton Scott Easton, trans., *The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934), 38.

12. Ibid., 39.

13. Ibid., 53-54.

14. *Didascalia Apostolorum: The Syriac Version*, trans. by R. Hugh Connolly (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929), 146-48.

15. "Constitutions of the Holy Apostles," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* 7 (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1895), 485–91.

16. Barnett, 74-77.

17. Ibid., 80-83.

18. Ibid., 124-25.

19. See Barnett (113-23) for an excellent discussion of the issue.

20. Ibid., 121.

21. Olson, 81.

22. Martin Luther, "A Prelude on the Babylonian Captivity of the Church," in *Three Treatises,* trans. by A. T. W. Steinhauser (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, 1947), 235.

23. Olson, 104-107.

24. Arthur Piepkorn analysis, quoted in Olson, 107.

25. Bard Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Co., 1961), 152.

26. David F. Wright, trans. and ed., *Common Places of Martin Bucer* (Berkshire, England: The Sutton Courtenay Press, 1972), 254.

27. Wilhelm Pauck, ed., *Melanchthon and Bucer* 19, in *The Library of Christian Classics* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), 306-15.

28. J.K.S. Reid, ed., *Calvin: Theological Treatises* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954), 58.

29. Olson, 117.

30. J.M. Ross, "Deacons in Protestantism," *Theology* 58 (November 1955); 433-34.

31. John H. Leith, ed., *Creeds of the Churches: A Reader in Christian Doctrine from the Bible to the Present* (New York: Anchor Books, 1963), 301.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

34. Olson, 171-72.

35. Ibid., 204-206.

36. Ibid., 230.

37. Walter M. Abbott, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: The America Press, 1966), 55-56.

Kenneth E. Rowe

The Ministry of Deacons in Methodism from Wesley to Today (1998)

The most radical change in the 1996 reordering of ministry in The United Methodist Church was the creation of a new order of deacon. This person is ordained, a full member of the annual conference, non-itinerant, and called to a lifetime ministry relating the gathered life of the community to servant ministry in the world. The General Conference intended to create something *new* in this new deacon. To be sure, this new order of ministry is related in name, heritage, and mission to other ministries of service in the Christian church—from the deacons of the early Christian communities down to the deaconesses and diaconal ministers who continue to serve the church today. Yet it is also quite a new thing within the ordering of ministry in The United Methodist Church; and it is a significant departure from the understanding of the deacon in the Roman Catholic/Anglican tradition which three centuries ago John Wesley adapted to the needs of the Methodist movement.

At first glance, there doesn't appear to be a lot to say about the status and role of deacons in the Wesleyan tradition. When the Methodist societies in North America turned into a church after the War for Independence (1784), Wesley left the inherited diaconate much as it had been in the Church of England: a transitional step

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toward becoming a priest. The new Methodist church in America practiced a two-step ordination of deacon to elder for the next 112 years.[1] Some, like Asbury, were deacon only for a day before being ordained elders; for others, the probationary period as a deacon soon lengthened to two years or more. Deacons were ministers who wanted to become elders. It seemed that this would be the pattern for deacons among us for all time—until 1996.

In the three centuries that separate us from our founding mothers and fathers, what more can be said that will offer wisdom and inspiration to us latter-day Methodists as we go about fashioning a new, lifelong, world-oriented, service-driven deacon for our time and for our future?

We are not the first generation to fashion fresh forms of diaconal ministry to Christ's needy. In what follows, I highlight three moments in our church's life when servant ministry flowered freshly among us.

Founding-Era Adjustments

Although Wesley kept transitional deacons when his societies in North America turned into a church, he appointed deacons and deaconesses to minister to the poor and the sick in the Methodist societies.

The name *deacon* is absent from early Methodist nomenclature and polity. Its omission may be accounted for on the ground of Mr. Wesley's unwillingness to adopt church terms to distinguish his office-bearers, since the Methodist societies were not a church. The issue is complicated by the presence of officers within Methodism whose roles resembled those of deacons in some Lutheran and Reformed churches. Chief among these were the stewards. *Society stewards* collected and disbursed money to keep the chapel building in good repair and to pay off any debt. *Poor stewards* prepared for the Lord's Supper and ensured that a collection for the poor was taken at the Sacrament; they also saw to it that the funds collected were made available to needy persons. *Circuit stewards* were financial officers and leaders in the groupings of Methodist societies in circuits. Although little has been written about the ministry of these stewards, they were Wesley's way of relating the gathered life of the societies to servant ministry in the world.[2]

In addition to stewards, local preachers and class leaders played an important role in the servant ministry of early Methodism. However,

since I judge their primary ministry to be presbyterial rather than diaconal, I shall take no note of them here.

There is one other diaconal office in early Methodism that does need to receive our attention: deaconesses, or visitors of the sick. Beginning in 1736 the young Wesley appointed three women "deaconesses" in his Georgia mission station. They assisted him in parish visitation, especially of the sick. The appointment of women deaconesses was on the list of indictments brought against Wesley when he hightailed it out of Georgia the next year![3]

Back in England and in charge of an emerging revival, Wesley again recruited women to share in the pastoral care of his needy network of religious societies. As early as May of 1741 he appointed 12 women to visit the sick of their London neighborhoods and asked them to join him on Tuesday evenings for conversation about their work.[4]

Wesley found precedent for reviving the ancient office of deaconess in three sources, each of which exerted powerful influence on the young missionary. The first source was Scripture. In his *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (1755), Wesley clearly describes Phoebe, mentioned in Rom. 16:1, as the model deaconess: "In the apostolic age, some grave and pious women were appointed deaconesses in every church. It was their office not to teach publicly, but to visit the sick, the women in particular, and to minister to them both in their temporal and spiritual necessities."[5] Wesley also found precedent for the deaconess in two other sources: the primitive church as rediscovered in the work of his Anglican mentors, and in the practice of the Moravians, a group of Lutheran Pietists whom Wesley first encountered en route to Georgia.

Throughout his long ministry Wesley continued to appoint women deaconesses, though exact numbers are difficult to determine. In his eighties the aging evangelist was still pressing women to consider this Christian vocation: "You too are called of God, as you have time, to 'do good unto all men.' "[6] Wesley knew, I think, that the original ordination of deacons was not to the care of souls but to the serving of tables, and he took steps to expand the ministry of his societies to include the deacons. Though his "stewards" and "deaconesses" lacked the formal ordination by prayer and the imposition of hands of apostolic practice, in many a depressed village or hideous slum they showed to one another, and to all in need, countless diaconal acts of kindness and of love.

After Wesley's time no deaconesses were appointed for more than a century. The office of *steward* remained for a time on both sides of the

Atlantic, though with a job description weighted more toward managing the church's money than toward dispensing it to the poor.

Bishop Asbury is the father of permanent deacons among us, though not permanent deacons as we know them.

In 1799 Francis Asbury ordained a lay preacher named Richard Allen as deacon—the first black deacon in The Methodist Episcopal Church. The General Conference of 1800 approved Asbury's initiative on ordination of blacks to the diaconate but bowed to pressure from delegates from the South and agreed to keep the rule private. In the next 16 years, Asbury ordained at least half a dozen black deacons—always apart from regular conference ordinations—but made none of them elders. This, of course, was a sore point among the black preachers. Most of these black deacons eventually left to join the AME Church (1816) and the AME Zion Church (1821). In these new churches, black deacons could move on to elders' orders, enabling them to preside at the Table and to vote in conference. Not until 1864 did the Methodist Episcopal Church get around to ordaining black elders and giving them full clergy rights.[7]

Native Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Asian Americans experienced the same racist reluctance to advance deacons to elders' orders as our church expanded its ministry among their people. This is the sad part of the story of deacons among us.

William Otterbein knew of only a single order of ordained ministry but affirmed the Reformed practice of lay deacons.

In the rules that Otterbein drew up in 1785 for the German Reformed Church of Baltimore that he pastored, he outlined a basic Reformed pattern for ministry. The pastor, elected by the male members of the congregation, is ordained only once by clergy colleagues to preach the Word, to celebrate the sacraments, and to provide pastoral care to the congregation. Lay elders, selected by the pastor, exercise discipline among the flock and govern the affairs of the church. Lay deacons, elected annually by the congregation, lead the congregation in its ministry to the sick and to the poor.

When in 1800 the preachers and congregations who united around Otterbein took steps to form an independent church, this single order of ordained clergy became the basic pattern for ministry in the new Church of the United Brethren in Christ. By the time the first

"Discipline" was drafted in 1815, lay elders became *local* preachers and lay deacons became *class* leaders, due no doubt to fraternizing with the Methodists. This step enlarged the pastoral marks of United Brethren ministry but blunted the diaconal marks.

To highlight the servant ministry of the church, beginning in 1813 Otterbein and other early United Brethren leaders gave permission to pastors and churches to practice foot washing, no doubt due to the growing presence of Mennonite converts among them. Bishop Christian Newcomer frequently included the rite at quarterly sacramental meetings.[8] Foot washing had become a divisive rite in the Pennsylvania German community since it distinguished "sect" Germans (Mennonite and Amish) from the "church" Germans (Lutherans and Reformed). As the United Brethren mainstreamed themselves from "sect" to "church" early in the nineteenth century, the practice fell into disuse. Though the practice of foot washing was challenged several times in United Brethren general conferences, no action was taken to abolish it until 1889, when the church reorganized itself for its second century.[9]

Jacob Albright and the Evangelicals associated with him never sanctioned foot washing or direct ordination to the eldership, as the United Brethren had done. Following Methodist practice, the Evangelical Association shunned foot washing and adopted ordination of deacons as preliminary to the eldership when they organized themselves into an independent church in 1803.

When The Evangelical Church and the United Brethren united in 1946 to form The Evangelical United Brethren Church, the United Brethren pattern of a single order of ministry prevailed and transitional deacons were phased out. However, when The Evangelical United Brethren Church united with The Methodist Church in 1968 to form The United Methodist Church, the Methodist practice of transitional deacons was continued.

The Methodists who protested episcopal and clerical power in the decade of the 1820s broke away from mother Methodism in 1830 to form the Methodist Protestant Church. The new church had only one order of ministry: no bishops, no superintendents, no deacons—only elders. The deletions should not be missed in our quick romp through the waning years of our founding era.

Victorian-Era Recovery

The middle of our history was a second defining moment for our church's understanding of the ministry of deacons.

The pressures of urbanization and industrialization led Methodists in Victorian America to bless a revived diaconate for women.

As cities in the United States grew under the impact of industry and immigration, urban churches became islands surrounded by a sea of strangers. Until the 1880s Methodism, like the United States itself, was predominantly rural, agrarian, and Anglo-Saxon. Confronted with the realities of a modern urban society, the denomination saw the immediate usefulness of a religious order of women trained to serve the physical and spiritual needs of the new immigrant populations. An idea that had found little support among Methodist women or men in the decades before became meaningful in the 1880s.

Once Methodist women accepted the logic of their own reasoning, they approached the hierarchy with their plans for a deaconess order. At the General Conference of 1888, approval was granted for the creation of the deaconess office; and plans for the training of deaconesses were placed in the hands of churchwomen. Women were to follow a two-year training period and a probationary period, after which they were eligible for consecration by a bishop.

Two women—Jane Bancroft Robinson and Lucy Rider Meyer—shared the leadership of the movement, although not always amicably. Bancroft Robinson was introduced to the deaconess model during her studies in Europe. Observing Protestant deaconesses in France and Germany, including Methodist deaconesses who had formed a deaconess hospital in Frankfurt in 1876, Bancroft Robinson saw potential for the office in the United States. To convince American churchwomen and the Methodist hierarchy, she researched and wrote *Deaconesses in Europe and Their Lessons for America.*

Lucy Rider Meyer founded the Chicago Training School for City, Home and Foreign Missions in 1885 because she thought female talent was going unused by the church. Out of her experience as principal of the school, she developed the idea of reviving the deaconess office. In the summer of 1887 she invited a few women to take up deaconess work in Chicago's tenements and to live communally in a Deaconess Home. She and her colleagues decided

upon rules and garb and upon pressing their cause before the upcoming General Conference.

Rider Meyer saw the office as a lifetime commitment, a religious vocation that set women apart and freed them as far as possible from the usual female commitments—marriage and family. Although Rider Meyer herself was married when she established the order, she determined that women who were consecrated to the diaconate would be at least 25 years of age, single, and willing to live on a small allowance and the charity of others.

The office of deaconess flourished for many years. Of the 2,000 Protestant deaconesses in the United States at the turn of the century, more than half were Methodist. Southern Methodists adopted the deaconess order in 1902 and Methodist Protestants did so in 1908. The United Brethren and the Evangelical Association also provided for deaconesses, in 1901 and 1903 respectively. British Wesleyans established a deaconess order in 1890. Trained for widely varied ministries, particularly in the inner cities of the United States and in the church's mission programs overseas, deaconesses were responsible for the founding of many hospitals, orphanages, homes for the elderly, and other philanthropic institutions. Their work provides a proud chapter in the story of true diaconal service to Christ to the "least of these."[10]

At the same time that women in North America were forming a *new* diaconate, churches in missionary settings overseas took steps to close down the *old* diaconate.

Missionary pressure led many autonomous churches overseas in the early years of the twentieth century to abandon transitional deacons as serving no useful purpose. The Korean Methodist Church (1930) is a prime example.[11]

When Methodist missionaries from the United States began to settle in Seoul in 1885, the government banned evangelism, restricting Christian work to education and medical treatment. That did not completely deter those missionaries from quietly preaching and secretly baptizing converts, but the apostolic diaconal tasks at first were primary. Henry Appenzeller built a school for boys, Mary Scranton founded a school for girls (now Ehwa University), and Dr. Scranton opened a hospital—all before Methodists organized their first church in Seoul.

The ban on public preaching did not last long, so Methodism's ministry in Korea soon became properly presbyterial. Beginning in

1895, additional missionaries showed up to lend a hand. From the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, they went about developing work in different sections of the country—except in the city of Seoul, where the two Methodisms squared off against each other.

By the late 1920s, leaders of both churches began to think about burying the hatchet. They began talking openly to Korean nationals about forming a single Methodist church in their country. Korean church leaders did their own thinking, commissioned their own modern confession faith—known to us as the Korean Creed—and abandoned the order of transitional deacons in the new autonomous church they organized in 1930. Since 1930 the Korean Methodist Church has had only one order of ordained ministry.[12]

Modern-Era Revisioning

This brings us to the third and final defining moment in our quick romp through the history of deacons among us—our own time.

Ecumenical pressure in the post-World War II period promoted a reformed, lifelong, service-driven, world-oriented diaconate.

The era from the Second World War to the present brought changes in the diaconate. With the war and its aftermath many church leaders, especially in war-torn Europe, thought the time had come to reaffirm the church's mission to the poor and disadvantaged. This reemphasis focused attention on the deacon as a symbol of the servant ministry of the church. Ecumenical dialogues raised issues around ministry. A shortage of priests and pastors in some denominations encouraged a search for alternatives. All this brought to the forefront discussion of the status and role of the deacon.

The roots of the ecumenical discussion about the ordering of ministry go back to at least the World Conference of Faith and Order, which met in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1927. When the World Council of Churches (WCC) was formed in 1948, the Faith and Order movement became a constituent part of the ecumenical establishment. By the mid-1960s, this commission of the WCC, now with Roman Catholic observers, began to envision a major consensus statement on ministry—and also on other major issues, such as baptism and Eucharist.

Ecumenical leaders tackled the ministry of deacons first. In 1964 the WCC held a major consultation on the matter. The report, widely

circulated in a WCC study book *The Ministry of Deacons* (published in 1965), noted widespread agreement among several churchly traditions to work toward recovering a permanent, service-oriented diaconate in their churches. Further ecumenical dialogue and study followed, the gist of which found its way into the major document *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry* (BEM), presented to the 1982 Faith and Order Conference in Lima, Peru. Later that year, the Central Committee of the WCC authorized the transmittal of BEM to the churches. Methodist scholar Geoffrey Wainwright was the principal drafter of the final text.

BEM strongly advocated for an ordained diaconate focused on servant ministry:

> Today, there is a strong tendency in many churches to restore the diaconate as an ordained ministry with its own dignity and meant to be exercised for life. As the churches move closer together there may be united in this office ministries now existing in a variety of forms and under a variety of names.[13]

Respondents applauded BEM's broad description of deacons as representing to the church its calling as servant in the world: "By struggling in Christ's name with the myriad needs of societies and persons, deacons exemplify the interdependence of worship and service in the Church's life."[14]

The outcome of the publication of BEM was unprecedented interest. The Lima text is the most widely translated, published, and used text in modern ecumenical history. Six volumes of official responses from 200 churches (from Pentecostal and Quaker to Roman Catholic and Orthodox) have been published. BEM influenced ecumenical dialogue and the position of various denominations on deacons. For instance, the description of the diaconate in the Consensus of the Consultation on Church Union (1984) self-consciously resembles BEM.

Episcopalians were the first in the United States to affirm permanent deacons. In the early 1950s, under pressure of expanding membership, the Episcopal Church had already opened the diaconate to candidates who, with no intention of seeking advancement to the priesthood, would retain their secular occupations. In the late 1950s, the Lambeth Conference (the worldwide council of Anglican bishops)

recommended that each province of the Anglican communion take steps to restore the permanent diaconate.

At the Second Vatican Council in the mid-1960s, Roman Catholics followed the Anglican lead. The study of the liturgy and ministry of the early church, the call of individual social workers and teachers, and the writings of Karl Rahner (and others) led to the restoration of the diaconate at Vatican II in 1964. Married men of mature age and younger celibate men could become permanent deacons. Pope Paul VI implemented this decree in 1967, and the next year the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in the United States approved the restoration of the diaconate for this country. Archbishop Fulton Sheen ordained the first permanent deacon in June 1969. Since then, in ever-increasing numbers Catholic bishops have been appointing these deacons to the pastoral care of parishes in view of the shortage of priests.

Early Episcopal and Roman Catholic efforts to revive the diaconate did not emphasize the social-service aspects of the deacon's role. Rather the new Episcopal and Catholic deacons looked more like assistant priests. Of late, both churches are trying to recover the distinctive ancient and apostolic marks of the servant order.

Methodists in the modern period take steps to ordain deacons to a lifetime ministry of relating the gathered life of the community to servant ministry in the world.

Since the mid-1940s, The Methodist Church (and later The United Methodist Church) appointed one commission after another to study and reform the church's understanding and practice of ministry.[15] From the 1960s onward the ministry study committees tried to change the way Methodists thought about the diaconate, but quadrennium after quadrennium the church's governing conference rejected proposal after proposal. A first step was taken in 1968 when the General Conference gave the title consecrated *lay worker* to laypersons who are employed by the church, professionally certified in a specific area of ministry (notably Christian education and church music), and consecrated by the bishop.[16] In the years that followed, using the title *deacon* for anyone other than transitional deacons who intended to become elders seemed non-negotiable.

A breakthrough occurred in 1976 when a new name—*diaconal minister*—was proposed, instead of deacon. With the blessing of the General Conference, The United Methodist Church added diaconal

ministers to its stable of ministers. Diaconal ministers were laypersons called of God; employed by the church or an outside agency, either part-time or full-time; and set apart through consecration for specialized ministries of love, justice, and service.[17] The ministry of service took place largely in the context of the church, not in the world, because most of the people who were commissioned as diaconal ministers in the quadrennia after 1976 were Christian educators, church musicians, church business managers, and secretaries.

Clarity on matters of ministry eluded the church in the 1980s; confusion, even resistance, reigned. In 1987, a book titled *Called to Serve: The United Methodist Diaconate* (written by Rosemary Keller, Gerald Moede, and Mary Elizabeth Moore) was rushed into print to show that the diaconal movement is as old as the church itself and not alien to the Methodist spirit.

By the early 1990s, yet another ministry study commission wanted to phase out the diaconal ministers, deaconesses, and transitional deacons in order to inaugurate a permanent, service-oriented—but lay—diaconate. The proposed changes received a cool reception at the General Conference of 1992. At the last minute the legislative committee changed the proposal from a lay order of deacons to an ordained order. The General Conference defeated the proposal. Some delegates objected to the elimination of the transitional deacon in the plan; others preferred the title *diaconal* minister to that of *deacon*. Most delegates felt uncomfortable with the last-minute nature of the amendments to the plan.

To bring order out of confusion, the General Conference asked the Council of Bishops to lend a hand. While the bishops were making up their minds, the Methodist Church in England restored a permanent, serving diaconate at its conference in 1993. As 1996 approached, many people remained skeptical that it would be possible for the bishops, let alone the entire General Conference, to agree on any ministry proposal. Yet, the study document developed by the bishops was strongly affirmed—with two exceptions: the portion on the Lay Ministry Steward was deleted and sequential ordination of elders was dropped in favor of direct ordination to both orders.

According to our denomination's *Book of Discipline* (1996), the new Order of Deacons is a *lifetime* ministry of service; it is not an internship or stepping-stone to elders' orders. This is a major step toward returning to the practice of the early and undivided church in which baptism was the only sacramental prerequisite for ordination.

(I believe The United Methodist Church is the only major church so far to do this.) According to ¶319 of the *Book of Discipline,* United Methodist deacons are "called by God to a lifetime of servant leadership, authorized by the Church, and ordained by a bishop." This paragraph also states that deacons "fulfill servant ministry in the world and lead the Church in relating the gathered life of Christians to their ministries in the world, interrelating worship in the gathered community with service to God in the world."

Other functions of deacons include teaching and proclaiming the Word; assisting elders in the administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper; forming and nurturing disciples; conducting marriages and burying the dead; and—most important of all—leading the congregation in interpreting the needs and concerns of the world. In both person and function it is the distinct ministry of the deacon to "embody, articulate, and lead the whole people of God in its servant ministry" (¶319). Deacons are accountable to the annual conference and the bishop for fulfillment of their call to servant leadership.

The 1300 active diaconal ministers consecrated since 1976 were given the option to qualify for the new Order of Deacons or to retain their present status; however, the program of diaconal ministry would be phased out. The office of deaconess was retained. A single General Board of Ordained Ministry gives oversight to deacons and elders. A proposed new ordinal, provisionally published in 1998, expresses the equality, connectedness, and distinctiveness between our historic orders and ministries.[18]

Conclusion

Our hasty romp through Methodism's struggle to come to terms with the diaconate has taught us at least the following:

First, neither is the new ministry of deacons that the 1996 General Conference set in motion foreign to the spirit of Methodism, nor have the marks of its envisioned ministry been absent in our tradition. The *Discipline* rightly notes that the new ministry of deacons "grows out of the Wesleyan passion for social holiness and ministry among the poor" (¶319). *Diakonia* in the New Testament sense arose spontaneously as the Methodist, Evangelical, and United Brethren societies of old sought to promote scriptural Christianity. It sprang

from the closeness of *koinonia* and the awareness of human need and Christian responsibility which the Spirit gives. To us latter-day Methodists, this still has much to commend it.

Second, the office of deaconess, a movement begun by the initiative and energy of women in the middle part of our history, comes closest to the description of the new deacon we envision for our time and for our future. The church's recent treatment of deaconesses has fostered feelings of isolation, of "being left out," or even "discarded." We need to reexamine this movement and our ideas about it as a new generation of women follows in the tradition of Phoebe (Rom. 16:1).

Third, *diakonia* is too scriptural an office, too closely related to the heart of Christianity, to be left entirely to chance—especially for people called "Methodists." Because we latter-day Methodists, with Christ's love in our hearts, can sometimes be deficient in imagination or simply ignorant of the real needs of our sisters and brothers, it is absolutely crucial to take into our hearts and into our polity a diaconate primarily concerned with dreaming dreams of a humane world and leading the rest of us to find a place to minister to Christ in the person of the needy.

Charles Wesley put the matter well in one of his many hymns that did not get into our most recent hymnal:

> Meanest of all who Thee confess,
> The least of all Thy witnesses,
> Oh that I may be counted meet
> To wash Thy dear disciples' feet.[19]

Notes

1. When Methodists in England got around to ordaining clergy in 1836, they did not follow the pattern of their American cousins. They abandoned the ordained, probational diaconate and practiced direct ordination of presbyters.

2. In its report to the 1996 General Conference, the Bishops' commission to study the ministry proposed reviving the office of "Lay Ministry Steward"; the proposed change was voted down.

3. For the full story, see Paul Wesley Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1991).

4. Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 128.

5. John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (London: The Epworth Press, 1954), 580.

6. "On Visiting the Sick," *The Works of John Wesley* 3 (Bicentennial Edition), ed. by Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 396.

7. Will B. Gravely, "African Methodisms and the Rise of Black Denominationalism," in *Perspectives on American Methodism: Interpretive Essays*, ed. by Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1993), 108-26.

8. Christian Newcomer, *Christian Newcomer: His Life and Journal*, ed. by Abram W. Sangrey (Lancaster, PA: Otterbein District, Eastern Pennsylvania Conference, 1996), 65, 93, 133, 165, 174, 233, 308.

9. A full study of foot washing among United Brethren still needs to be done. A few references to the practice may be found in the index to J. Bruce Behney and Paul H. Eller, *The History of the Evangelical United Brethren*, ed. by Kenneth W. Krueger (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979).

10. For a full modern study, see Mary Agnes Dougherty, *My Calling to Fulfill: Deaconesses in The United Methodist Tradition* (New York: Women's Division, General Board of Global Ministries, 1997).

11. The Methodist Church in Germany is another example, having dropped the transitional diaconate in the late 1940s.

12. Ju Sam Ryang, "How Two Methodisms Unite," *Missionary Voice* 21/10 (October 1931): 14.

13. *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No. 111 (Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches, 1982), 42.

14. Ibid., 41.

15. Richard P. Heitzenrater, "A Critical Analysis of the Ministry Studies since 1948," in *Perspectives on American Methodism: Interpretive Essays*, 431-47.

16. *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church—1968*, ¶¶501-508.

17. *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church—1976*, ¶¶301-311.

18. See *Services for the Ordering of Ministry in The United Methodist Church: Provisional Texts* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1998).

19. *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley*, 5:483; also cited in *Wesley's Prayers and Praises*, ed. by J. Alan Kay (London: The Epworth Press, 1958), 139.

Diedra Kriewald

Diakonia as a "Sacred Order" in The United Methodist Church

United Methodists are unaccustomed to thinking of the ordained minister as belonging to a holy "Order." While a methodical spirituality attended the beginning of the Wesleyan movement in the eighteenth century, with an orderly structure of class meetings, bands, societies, and conferences, the various groups and leaders in this arrangement were never set apart as distinct and permanent organizational entities. There are no equivalent associations in the Wesleyan movement to the Order of Friars Minor (Franciscans), the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), or other permanent church societies created for specific missions. Distinct religious communities within the church, whose members pronounce solemn vows and who choose to live a common life and discipline, have not been a practice of evangelical Protestants. No wonder some United Methodists are puzzled about the new disciplinary requirement that reads: "All persons ordained as clergy in The United Methodist Church upon election to full membership in the annual conference shall be members of and participate in an Order appropriate to their election."[1]

On the other hand, The United Methodist Church has used the term "holy orders" to refer to the *process* of the ordination rite for the authorization of its clergy members. Until recently, however, ordained

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deacons and elders were not understood to have their own discreet organization within the church. The ordained diaconate many centuries earlier had lost its independent status as a major ministerial order and had become a transitional probationership for ordination to the higher clergy status of elder. The same fate was true of deacons in all Western-rite communions until the second Vatican Council restored the permanent ordained diaconate in the 1960s. After Vatican II, Protestant communions within the ecumenical movement, including The United Methodist Church, began to study their own ordering of ministries in light of new biblical and patristic studies.

This essay focuses on the concept of the diaconate that is now operative in The United Methodist Church, with particular attention to the creation of distinctive orders for the ordained. I argue that the creation of specific orders can prove to be an effective means for the continued formation of clergy persons for ministry and mission.

From Organic to Hierarchial Ministries

United Methodists will do well to remember that an organic vision of ministry was the original and earliest ordering of Christian leadership in the New Testament. The first standard working description of the ministries of the church was the "organic" image of the *body of Christ,* as proposed in 1 Cor. 12. This unique metaphor suggested that church leadership should function like a physical body: pastorally and missionally alive, with many working limbs and organs, each differentiated but equally important for the whole.

There were a variety of ministries in the apostolic church. In addition to the three-fold pattern of deacons, presbyters, and bishops, officers in the apostolic church included sub-deacons, lectors, singers, doorkeepers, exorcists, virgins, widows, deaconesses, and acolytes. In an organic understanding of ministry, each partner in the Body would be essential for the work of the whole.

In a study of the diaconate, James M. Barnett concluded that for centuries baptism was the only sacramental requirement for admission to any ministerial office.[2] So the great African theologian Tertullian, writing in the third century, used the term *order* to indicate the ministry of both laity and clergy. At this time, a layman could pass directly to any office in the church. In 590 C.E., Gregory the Great was ordained to the episcopal office directly from the diaconate. Not until

the ninth century did it become a rule that a man must progress from a lower to reach a higher ministerial order. Women essentially performed the same ministerial functions as deacons until the eleventh century, especially in Eastern-rite churches. There are early records that deaconesses cared for the poor and sick and assisted at the baptism of adult women. These women were "charged" as deaconesses, rather than "ordained." The modern deaconess movement began in the nineteenth century. The question of women as deacons in the apostolic church has been much debated.

During the first five hundred years deacons were "a full-time and professional ministry, with clear liturgical and administrative functions at a time when the presbyters were hardly more than an advisory board."[3] Deacons held considerable power in the Western church. Not until the Middle Ages did the *parish priest* become "the local embodiment of the church's life, while the diaconate lost most of its real functions."[4]

In the Eastern-rite churches, the permanent deacon, from earliest times, has remained a distinct and honored order. In the West, however, in both Catholic and Protestant churches, the diaconate became a "level" of ministry through which a candidate had to pass to reach a higher ministerial order. Exceptions to these graded orders developed in some Protestant faith-families, such as in the Reformed and Baptist traditions, where deacons are laypersons who are usually elected for life.[5]

The Ministry of All the Baptized

With the general acceptance of the report of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, and particularly with the success of the Lima document published as *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry,* many communions within the worldwide body of Christ have reordered their polity toward a common understanding of ministry. As a result of Vatican II and the great ecumenical assemblies of this century, many churches now accept the theological argument that baptism is to be understood as the distinctive mark of ministry. We forget how revolutionary this anchoring of ministry in baptism is and how rapidly this common acceptance has become our "tradition." All baptized believers, we now affirm, are truly ministers of the gospel faith. Clericalism—with its belief that one ministerial order is higher

than another and that the ministry is the possession of the ordained pastor or priest—has been undermined, although clearly not abandoned.

One of the most far-reaching results of this reassessment of ministry has been a strengthening of the ancient sacred Order of Deacons. A strong and revitalized lay ministry is also a commonly recognized goal among the Christian assemblies. *Laos* and *diakonia* are increasingly understood as separate-but-equal partners for the mission of the church in the world. As The United Methodist Church has moved to reorganize the Order of Deacons, many worry that a permanent and ordained diaconate will weaken the ministry of the laity. There is good reason to be suspicious, for the ordained have indeed developed a cultic class system. Time will tell whether the clergy will follow a class-conscious or more organic and egalitarian pattern. When the permanent diaconate functions liturgically, pastorally, and missionally as it was historically patterned, then a partnership with laity, on the one hand, and elders, on the other, can provide a much-needed bridge to servant ministry.

The Order of the Permanent Deacon

A place to begin this bridge to servant ministry is to understand the historical nature of a church order. Lutheran theologian Gordon W. Lathrop argues that the apostolic church "did not so much invent new leadership roles as adopt preexistent roles for Christian purposes."[6] This is indeed the case with the origin and use of the term *order* in Christianity. The probable origin of the church term *order* (from Latin *ordo,* plural *ordines*) was adopted from Roman civil life, but its ecclesial use and its assignment to church leadership began early in biblical tradition. The Greek terms for *order* appear in two places in the New Testament, both times in reference to priestly functions. Zechariah, the spouse of Elizabeth and soon-to-be father of John the Baptist, functions as a priest "in the order" of the Temple (Luke 1:5). The Book of Hebrews describes Jesus as having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 5:6). These examples show that *an order was the designation that differentiated the various types of representative ministry.*

Ancient records indicate that some early-church leaders were responsible for obtaining the food and drink for the Eucharist. They

assisted at the Communion table and then collected food in the church and distributed the food to the community, especially to the poor. The church gave them its blessing and authority to do this work by saying prayers and laying on hands. The early church thus authorized these men and women to be the servants of the assembly. They were called "deacons" and given clearly defined liturgical and charitable servant duties.[7]

An *ordo,* then, contains persons who desire to undertake a particular configuration of responsibilities in the local church and are authorized to do so by the ordaining body. The current ecumenical understanding of the permanent "Order of Deacons" is that it is made up of a distinctive body of believers who are given authority to do what deacons have always done: as representatives of the whole Body, deacons exemplify the servant ministry before the laity, the presbyters, and the bishops.

The Order of Deacons in The United Methodist Church is an officially constituted covenant community within the *ecclesia,* created to "support, care for, and hold accountable its members for the sake of the life and mission of the church."[8] The bishop of the area convenes and provides spiritual leadership for the Order of Deacons and also for the Order of Elders. The board of ordained ministry of the annual conference provides financial and spiritual support for the two orders. As The United Methodist Church returns the diaconate to an *ordo,* great care must be taken to maintain the integrity of its intention. Deacons in full connection *must* be allowed their own historic and distinctive mission.

What, Then, Have Deacons Always Done as a Distinctive Order?

Liturgy and Social Welfare

It may be a surprise to United Methodists that the most constant role of the permanent Order of Deacons has been to act in the worshiping assembly as the embodiment of servanthood. All other diaconal functions emerged out of the liturgical leadership of the deacon. From the beginning, the deacon was particularly responsible for service at the Lord's Table. The deacon procured the best bread and wine available, attended to the vessels, set the table, assisted at the celebration of Holy Communion, and then served the sacramental food.

The deacon has always been associated with food.[9] W. A. Beyer notes that the secular use of *diakonos* includes the work of bakers and stewards.[10] The word *diakonos* means "waiter at a meal" or "waiting at table." The apostolic church turned to such an "absolutely ordinary, non-religious word," Hans Küng believes, because the word could not "awaken any associations with any kind of officialdom, authority, dominion, positions of dignity and power."[11] Küng suggests that, while there surely is authority in the biblical church, that authority is based on service and not on power or office. *Office,* he claims, is not a biblical term; it emerged from later reflection. The apostles avoided secular or religious terms for "office" that denote hierarchy in favor of words that connote ministries—such as the word *diakonia.*

In the mind of the early church, the ritual meal at Holy Communion was intimately connected with the mission to the poor. In the postapostolic congregations, and for hundreds of years since then, the Communion bread was supplemented by other food; and the deacon set off after worship to attend to the nourishment of the community. In his *First Apology* (155 C.E.), Justin Martyr notes that the deacons serve the bread and cup to the people at the Eucharist and carry them afterwards to those who are absent.[12]

In addition to partaking of the ritual bread and wine, the goal was that no member of the church was to go wanting for food, fuel, clothing, or other physical needs. The deacon was ordained to insure the just distribution of goods. The deacon, therefore, took the sacrament to those who were sick and homebound and made sure that the poor among the Christians always had food. The deacons represented their worshiping community by distributing the money offering (alms) to the needy, ministering to the sick and disabled, and taking leadership responsibility for the social concerns of the congregation. No wonder that in the second century, Ignatius of Antioch could write that "the deacons (my special favorites) be entrusted with the ministry of Jesus Christ."[13]

Other traditional duties in worship register the importance of the deacon in the life of the postapostolic church. As the servant representative of the body, the deacon led the intercessory prayers of the people. As a sign of esteem, the deacon also read the Gospel lesson for the day—the most important of the assigned Scriptures. In addition, deacons assisted with baptism and, in some cases, could perform the liturgies that married and buried parishioners. They would also preach and teach—although the roles of catechist and homilist, as

well as that of sacramental leader, were usually the domain of the presbyter and bishop.

As the people of God watched the deacon provide leadership both in worship and in assuring the just distribution of goods to persons living on the margins of society, their respect for the deacon deepened. This combination of worship and service leadership has changed little over the centuries and is still the current ecumenical understanding of the role of a permanent deacon.

Seventeen years ago, Joe Morris Dos, commenting on the restored order of permanent deacon in the Episcopal Church, wrote: "A recent survey of Episcopalian deacons demonstrates that deacons whose ministry is only liturgical, or who only perform works of service without a liturgical ministry in which to signify that service, tend to be unfulfilled and unhappy in their office."[14] There is no reason to believe that this assessment has changed. The permanent diaconate requires both the *sign* of office before the people in worship and the *function* of that sign in service.

Association with Bishops

The association of deacons and bishops is very ancient. The opening greeting in the letter to the Philippians reads: "To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops (*episkopois*) and deacons (*diakonois*)" (1:1). This salutation may be the earliest evidence of the deacon as a separate *ordo*. The exhortations in 1 Tim. 3:8-13 also testify to the close relationship between deacons and bishops.

The deacon was ordained to be in servant ministry, representing the entire worshiping assembly. There is a clear distinction between the order of deacons and the order of bishops in the early writings of Ignatius and Polycarp. However, by the third century, as the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus indicates, there is evidence that the deacon was indeed becoming the servant of the bishop. As centuries passed, and as bishops became diocesan leaders, some bishops had forgotten the original intention of the diaconate. They began to assign deacons to be their personal secretaries and administrative assistants.

During the Middle Ages, deacons increasingly became associated with ministry in the cathedrals. Cathedral service tied the sacred order of deacons more closely to patron bishops; consequently, deacons lost their traditional identity with the laity. United Methodist historian

Charles Yrigoyen has pointed out that monastic movements took over the charitable functions once performed by the deacons.[15]

This development stood in sharp contrast with the practice of the church in the third century, at which time, it is estimated, thousands of urban poor were dependent on the church. The Christian *deacon* was the minister responsible for the welfare of these poverty-stricken people. For example, the care of the poor in the city of Rome was divided into seven districts, with each district under the direction of a deacon.[16]

If handled carefully and with great humility, the role of the deacon as the "eyes and ears" of the bishop among the people—especially among the poor—may energize the work of annual conferences in today's church. For this to happen, however, the deacon's close connection and partnership with the laity must be restored. The permanent deacon at work among the people can appeal directly to the bishop of the area for assistance. The success of the deacons' association with bishops will hinge on the bishop's sensitive use of power and on the formation of deacons to understand rightly their distinctive mission.

Permanent Deacons in "Tent-Making" Vocations

There is a long tradition of permanent deacons who choose to make their living in the secular world. These deacons are not paid church employees. Neither do their secular jobs necessarily engage them in "helping" vocations. They may work in any field of employment, from government to sales. Whatever be their job, on the Lord's Day these deacons take their appointed place in worship, wearing the vesture of their order. In addition to worship responsibilities, the deacons represent the congregation in its mission to the sick, the poor, and those in need.

Deacons may be community organizers who challenge the structures in our society that weaken and cheapen human life. They may be specialists in community development programs, or they may walk the urban streets as evangelists. Deacons are always involved in the just distribution of goods in their communities. These "tent-making" deacons live out their ministerial vocation in solidarity with both church and world.

Many permanent deacons are married; however, there are also unmarried deacons in various denominations throughout the world who choose to live in houses supported by the church. Usually these houses are located in the communities that the deacons serve. To be

sure, such communal life is new to United Methodists. However, we should seriously consider this kind of living arrangement for deacons who are engaged in tough and often dangerous work in urban settings. Deacons in these situations need daily support.

United Methodists need not feel limited by older notions of communal life. They can explore newer models that include married and unmarried deacons living in separate, intergenerational arrangements, bound together by work and prayer.

Signs of the Order of Deacons

Throughout the centuries, deacons have been given a copy of the Gospel book (pre-Reformation) or a Bible at their ordination as a sign of the charge to read the Gospel lesson during worship. Also at ordination deacons were vested with special garments for worship that denoted their order. The wearing of distinctive clothing in worship as a sign of office did not matter too much when deacons were still on the way to a "higher" ministry. However, the issue of vesture has become important with the institution of a permanent diaconate. This is the case also for The United Methodist Church, as it strengthens the diaconate into an *ordo*.

All Western churches that have adopted the permanent diaconate have accepted the same ancient ritual clothing. When United Methodists gather with their ecumenical partners, the distinctive vestments of the orders should be easily recognized.[17]

Diaconal vesture has a long history. The white alb has become a familiar sight in worship services across the United Methodist connection. Laity and clergy alike wear this white tunic, which originally was the everyday dress of both genders in the classical world. At the beginning of the fifth century, after clothing styles had changed, the alb became the basic Christian vestment.

When wearing an alb, deacons, presbyters, and bishops drape a stole over one or both shoulders in ways that are distinctive of their orders. The stole is the descendant of the Roman scarf, worn by officials as a sign of office. Deacons in the West have always worn the stole over the left shoulder, across the chest, and fastened under the right arm. In the East, deacons wear the stole straight down from the left shoulder. Protestants follow the ancient Western vesture with the

stole worn across the chest. Stoles, as marks of orders, are worn over albs at all worship occasions.

The *dalmatic* is a festive, wide-sleeved over-tunic worn by deacons at sacramental and festival occasions. The origin of the dalmatic as a deacon's vestment is very ancient, dating from the early third century. The vestment was so named because it was introduced from the area of Dalmatia around 190 C.E. The dalmatic, the garment worn by most of the praying figures in the catacomb frescoes, has always been a deacon's vestment.

Why would a person belonging to the Order of Deacons desire to wear a stole draped as in an elder's stole? Perhaps deacons are tempted to wear the elder's stole if the church has made them feel like second-class ministers. The ritual clothing of the Order of Deacons has a long and proud heritage. Wearing the correct vestments will bring distinction and pride to the newly constituted Order of Deacons.

The Reason for the Order of Deacons Is Formation

Confusion about the actual functioning of the deacon is widespread in The United Methodist Church. Dire predictions have been spoken:

- "The temptation will be great to assign the permanent deacon to sacramental and pastoral functions held by elders."
- "No one in our system will want to be a permanent deacon anyway."
- "Boards of ordained ministry will not understand the permanent Order of Deacons and will continue to move candidates into the *real* ministry of elder."
- "Church leaders will never accept a secular, 'tent-making' livelihood for permanent deacons."
- "Permanent deacons will be vastly undereducated in the theological disciplines and will become undervalued and underachievers."

Put these gloomy prognostications alongside those of lay leaders who believe that the 1996 General Conference action instituting a permanent diaconate eliminated the distinct ministry of the *laos*, and the denomination is cooking up a recipe for failure. A low level of enthusiasm for the permanent diaconate among the elders can and will challenge any new directions in servant ministry. The denominational seminaries are agonizing on how best to prepare persons for the new order. The 1996 *Book of Discipline* is ambiguous about diaconal responsibilities, especially when it states that *all* the baptized are

called into servant ministry. The denomination's leadership must undertake a positive educational venture for all church members if the new Order of Deacons is to be accepted and understood.

A Covenant Community for Servant Leaders

Rightly understood and nurtured, a permanent diaconate could become a key element in church renewal, giving a needed boost to congregations in their mission to the poor and marginalized. *The Order of Deacons as a covenanted community can become the primary arena for the formation of ordained persons into servant leaders.* By establishing the Order of Deacons, The United Methodist Church has committed itself to more than a process of acquiring properly trained professionals to run the church. The deacon must no longer be viewed as a leader who ranks lower in a particular power structure. Rather, having the deacons as a permanent *order* helps the church respect deacons in full connection as integral partners in ministry.

The United Methodist Church now rightly locates all deacons as members of a proud and ancient tradition of ministerial orders. Church discipline leaves its ordained clergy no choice of membership. At the time of election to full membership in the annual conference, the deacon automatically becomes a member of the Order of Deacons in the same way that an elder does in the Order of Elders. The language of the *Discipline* is firm and clear in its call to obedience: "Acceptance of the status of full membership [in the annual conference] will constitute a commitment to regular participation in the life of the Order."[18]

The *Discipline* also sets out five ways in which the Order of Deacons must work to accomplish its purposes. These include:

- calling the order together for times of Bible study, and theological and ethical reflection;
- assisting in individual study and retreat experiences;
- developing a unified approach and common commitment to the mission of both the annual conference and the larger church;
- helping to develop relationships of support and trust among members of the order; and holding members accountable for achieving the purposes of the order.[19]

Within the order are stories to learn and cherish about deacons who courageously witnessed to Christ throughout the long history of the church. The foundational story for deacons is Stephen's defense and martyrdom, as recorded in Acts 6–7. An important contemporary story

is the witness of Episcopal deacon David Pendleton Oakerhater (1846–1931), a full-blooded Cheyenne American Indian, who demonstrated the strength of the diaconal witness. Oakerhater (whose name means "making medicine") was an elite Cheyenne warrior imprisoned in Florida for his role in the 1874 battle of Adobe Walls. He was befriended by Ohio senator and Mrs. George Pendleton and became a Christian. Oakerhater was ordained to the Sacred Order of Deacon in the Episcopal Church. He was assigned to minister to the Cheyenne Nation in Oklahoma.

No other missionaries were sent to join Oakerhater and he became known as the Cheyenne "Peace Chief" and "holy man" who married and buried the faithful. He trained Lay Readers to help him carry on the work of the church. Ignored by the hierarchy of his church, David Oakerhater and unnamed laity labored for 50 years among the Cheyenne—deacon and laity, partners in ministry.[20]

The church may be tempted to treat the Order of Deacons in a purely utilitarian way. That is, church leaders may choose to stress "usefulness" as a criterion for assigning deacons rather than capitalizing on the historic traditions of the new order. The church must resist this temptation. The diaconate is not a way to "make sure all the bases are covered" in professional church life. The mission of deacons in full connection is closely connected with the diaconate in the ecumenical church. Deacons in The United Methodist Church will find an identity and a solidarity in common with deacons in other historic communions.

The Relationship between Deacons and Lay Ministers

Deacons are already serving as ministers paid by the church in the areas of teaching, administration, evangelism, and music. Lay ministers can and do serve the congregation just as well as the deacons in these responsibilities. What, then, is the difference between the servant ministry of lay ministers and that of deacons?

Both the *laos* (laity) and the *diakonia* (deacons) have distinguished servant ministries. Part of the distinctiveness of the ministry of deacons in full connection is that they are called forth by the church to participate in a historic order with strong roots in both liturgy and mission. There is no reason to be ordained a deacon if the candidate is not especially concerned about serving in both the liturgical and missional life of the church. Deacons should yearn to conduct daily prayer for the people and to serve at the Font and Table. In turn, deacons

must also want to serve in the world as a representative of the church. The ties of the Order of Deacons to the alleviation of poverty must be strongly endorsed by the church. Deacons should always be engaged in the struggle for justice, freedom, and human rights, regardless of whether their livelihood is earned inside or outside the church.

Lay ministers usually make their living inside the church; for example, they may be educators or musicians. Deacons are not necessarily tied to congregational structures and locations. They may earn their livelihood in a secular profession. For deacons to accomplish their mission, their working alliances with the laity must be as strong as they are with elders and bishops. Lay ministers do not have the same double imperative as deacons in full connection.

Liturgy, Service, and Witness (Even unto Death)

From very early in the existence of the Christian church, the vocation of the Order of Deacons has been rooted *christologically*—in the social, liturgical, and pastoral ministries established by Christ—and inspired by the Holy Spirit. This implies that becoming a deacon is more than the vocational choice of a single person. Likewise, a covenanted order is more than the personal charisms (gifts) of any one individual. The identity of the deacon takes its life and mission from the servant ministry of Jesus. The establishment of the Order of Deacons should facilitate continued growth into the meaning of this unique vocational call to ministry.

One of the preeminent Christian stories that grounds the diaconate is the martyrdom of St. Laurence, attested to in the ancient document *Depositio Martyrum*.[21] Laurence was one of the seven deacons of Rome and was martyred in 258 C.E. Laurence was closely associated with Pope Sixtus II, who himself suffered martyrdom a few days before Laurence during the persecution of the Emperor Valerian. Deacon Laurence was prominent in the community for distributing church funds to the poor.

An unsubstantiated legend, but a wonderful Christian story, tells that when Laurence was directed by Roman authorities to produce the treasury of Christian alms, he appeared with a great number of the poor of the city. When the magistrate asked Laurence to produce the treasury, he gestured to the poor of the city and replied, "These are the treasure of the Church." Laurence was summarily arrested and became

the most famous postapostolic martyr. Laurence is called the patron of deacons. His story led to the ancient deacon's crest: *Leitourgia, Diakonia, Martyria*—Liturgy, Service, Witness (even unto death).

Liturgy, Service, and Witness, even unto death! What a privilege to be ordained a deacon in full connection—to become a participant in the history of such a distinguished order of church leaders. A rightly appropriated Order of Deacons will promote an effective partnership between laity and deacons and act as a bridge between laity and clergy within the organic ministry of the body of Christ. The order can be a strong communal force to help the deacons exemplify and encourage the servanthood to which all Christians are commissioned in baptism. The order is also a structure for the continuing education of deacons and a visionary vehicle for the formation of the Christian clergy. Let the whole church say "Amen!" and respond with energy and prayerful support.

Notes

1. *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church—1996* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1996), ¶311. See also ¶¶312 and 313.

2. James M. Barnett, *The Diaconate: A Full and Equal Order* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1981), 108-10.

3. P. Hinchliff, "Deacon," in *The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, ed. by J. G. Davies (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986), 208.

4. Ibid., 209.

5. For helpful material on what the various Christian bodies teach about ministries, consult Ted A. Campbell, *Christian Confessions: A Historical Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996).

6. Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 192.

7. Justin Martyr, "*The First Apology of Justin, the Martyr,*" in *The Library of Christian Classics* 1, ed. by Cyril C. Richardson (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963), 287.

8. *The Book of Discipline—1996*, ¶311.

9. For a linguistic analysis, consult John N. Collins, *Diakonia: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

10. W. A. Beyer, "*Diakonos,*" *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 2, ed. by Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 91.

11. Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1976), 486.

12. Martyr, *First Apology*, 287.

13. Ignatius of Antioch, "To the Magnesians" in *Early Christian Fathers* I, ed. by Cyril C. Richardson (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963), 95.

14. Joe Morris Dos, "The Ordination of Deacons" in *Liturgy: Journal of the Liturgical Conference,* 2:4(1982):15.

15. See the article by Charles Yrigoyen on pp. 334-5 of this issue of *Quarterly Review.*

16. Beyer, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament,* 93.

17. Sources to check include *The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship,* ed. by J. G. Davies (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986); Marion P. Ireland, *Textile Art in the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971); David Philippart, ed., *Clothed in Glory: Vesting the Church* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1997). For current pictures of deacons' vestments, consult the *C.M. Almy & Sons* catalog for 1996–1997 (1-800-225-ALMY) and *Wippell's,* a church furnishings company designing vestments for the Church of England (J. Wippell & Co., 1 Mill Street, P.O. Box 468, Branchville, New Jersey, 07826).

18. *The Book of Discipline—1996,* ¶314.

19. Ibid., ¶312.

20. David Pendleton Oakerhater's witness is celebrated on September 1 in the Episcopal Calendar of Saints. The above information comes from *Bridge Builders Images,* P.O. Box 1048, Burlington, VT 05402, who also distribute a contemporary icon of Oakerhater by Paul Mihailescu.

21. For information on Laurence of Rome, see Donald Attwater, *The Penguin Dictionary of Saints,* 2nd ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1983); *Butler's Lives of the Saints,* Concise edition (London: Burns and Oates, 1985); David Hugh Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints,* 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

Benjamin L. Hartley

Deacons as Emissary-Servants: A Liturgical Theology

At a recent annual-conference gathering, I had the opportunity to join in a beautiful memorial service for those persons in our conference who had died during the past year. It was a meaningful service for me as it celebrated the "great cloud of witnesses" who had gone before us. We ended the service with the celebration of Holy Communion, and we sang the song "Soon and Very Soon," which expresses the blessed hope that is ours as God's beloved people. It wasn't until after the service that I realized that something important was missing. No deacons assisted the elders at the table of the Lord's Supper. For most persons in the service, the deacons' absence went completely unnoticed, in spite of the fact that deacons are ordained to "lead in worship, [and] to assist elders at Holy Baptism and Holy Communion."[1]

The absence of deacons at the Table that day is a powerful symbol of the problems in understanding the new Order of Deacons in United Methodism. Our theological understanding of deacons is in its infancy. United Methodist deacons, elders, and laypersons do not yet understand the theology implicit in the deacon's important role as

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assistant in the sacraments and as clergy ordained to lead through Word and Service in the world and the church. Many questions remain to be explored. For example, what is the theological basis for the Order of Deacons? How is the theology of the diaconate expressed in their actions in Christian worship? How might the Order of Deacons strengthen—rather than overshadow—the ministry of all the baptized? How do deacons "lead the Church in relating the gathered life of Christians to their ministries in the world, interrelating worship in the gathered community with service to God in the world"?[2]

The many different ministries of service in which deacons engage—both in the local church and in the world—make it difficult to give simple answers to these questions and to describe a unified theology of the Order of Deacons. Therefore, to offer a unified "practical theology" of the deacon's vocation, a theology of deacons must also draw on the common activities that deacons as ordained persons perform in services of worship.[3] Deacons' ministries of service in the world must be interrelated with their functions in Christian worship. It is in Christian worship that the congregation can most vividly observe the deacon's vocational identity and see how it is distinct from that of laypersons and elders.

This article provides a modest start toward a more complete theology of the diaconate, which will hopefully emerge in the years ahead. I offer a theology of the diaconate that is based on recent biblical research into the meaning of *diakonia* (and related terms) and that interweaves this research with an analysis of deacons' practices in Christian worship. I begin by arguing that a deacon's "emissary-servant identity" is a central component of an emerging theology of deacons. As an emissary-servant the deacon is called to proclaim the "now" and the "not-yet" of God's reign. The second part of the article explains how this emissary-servant identity is fleshed out and strengthened by the deacon's liturgical role in Christian worship. I give special attention to a theological analysis of the deacon's role in the liturgies for Holy Baptism, Holy Communion, weddings, and funerals.

In these early years of the order's formation in United Methodism, it is tempting to settle for quick answers in order to reduce the level of ambiguity or outright confusion people feel toward the new Order of Deacons. This article urges the more difficult task of careful reflection on the diaconate on biblical and theological grounds and of then integrating such reflection with an analysis of liturgical practices that

have historically been performed by deacons. I address the function of the deacon *vis a vis* laypersons and elders as a matter of course, rather than as a starting point for the essay.[4] A theology of deacons that begins with a defensive posture or that focuses on the least common denominator of what the deacon can or cannot do is an unhelpful way to proceed if one's goal is to understand the Order of Deacons in all its creative potential. Resisting this temptation is especially crucial in these early years of the formation of the Order of Deacons in United Methodism.

Theologies of the diaconate *per se* are just beginning to emerge among denominations that have restored the Order of Deacons.[5] Even though the Roman Catholic Church has had a "permanent diaconate" since 1967 (similar to what United Methodists developed in 1996), the Vatican acknowledges that the "points of reference" for a theology of the diaconate "need to be developed and deepened."[6] Most studies, though noteworthy, have tended to be either broad surveys of the diaconate in the history of the church or careful biblical exegeses of a few pertinent terms related to the diaconate. With the exception of the book *The Deacon: Ministry through Words of Faith and Acts of Love*, published by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, and the articles in this issue of *Quarterly Review*, there have been few works published since the 1996 General Conference that deal explicitly with the United Methodist understanding of the diaconate.

The renewal of the diaconate in various denominations presents a valuable ecumenical opportunity. In my own research on the diaconate, I have benefited a great deal from conversations with deacons from traditions outside United Methodism. I pray that the theology offered here provides some measure of encouragement to persons in all denominations experiencing a renewal of the diaconate.[7]

The Deacon's Emissary-Servant Identity

Diakonia and related words are used more than 75 times in the New Testament. The *diakon-* words in the New Testament have prompted considerable discussion in the last decade. *Diakonia* is usually rendered as "service" or "ministry" in contemporary translations (Rom. 11:13, 12:7; 1 Cor. 12:5). The related word *diakonos,* meaning the person doing *diakonia*, is usually translated "servant," "deacon,"

or "minister." There is an emerging consensus, however, that the traditional—or, perhaps more accurately, modern—translation of *diakon-* words as "everyday acts of service" is insufficient.[8] The idea of *service* is certainly communicated in these Greek terms, but the emphasis may be closer to a notion of service within the context of the deacon's identity as *emissary* or *spokesperson*.

The term *emissary* is gaining recognition as a complementary interpretation of the traditional "servant" designation for *diakonos* and related terms.[9] Paul's use of *diakonos* to refer to himself (1 Cor. 3:5; 2 Cor. 3:6; 6:4; 11:23) is one of the more obvious pieces of evidence for a more nuanced understanding of the term. In these passages, Paul emphasizes his authority as God's emissary, or *diakonos*. This meaning does not negate the translation of *diakonos* as servant, but it helps to give a more complete understanding of the terms as they are used in the Bible.

This brief word-study of *diakon-* words suggests a closer look at what I call an "emissary-servant theology" of deacons to complement the more traditional "servant theology" of deacons. As an emissary-servant from God the deacon "points to" the source and authority for his or her servant ministry. In ancient times emissaries (*diakonoi*) were often sent by a king or other high-ranking individual to transact business on the ruler's behalf.

Deacons and Eschatological Hope

The apostle Paul had a similar understanding of his own ministry as a *diakonos* of God. Where a *diakonos* engaged in transactions on behalf of another person, the *diakonos* served as a guarantor or representative of *future* action by the ruler. This occasional function of an emissary in ancient times and the uses of *diakon-* terms in 1 Peter 1:12 and Hebrews 1:14 gave deacons in the early church an eschatological focus for their ministry.

While eschatology is often understood as the study of the "end times," a broader notion of eschatology is more fitting for our purposes. Jürgen Moltmann, in his book *Theology of Hope*, focuses on eschatology as the human response (hope) that is expressed by Christians who are living between the "now" and the "not-yet." Moltmann explains:

> [E]schatology means the doctrine of the Christian hope, which embraces both the object hoped for and also the hope inspired by it. From first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present. The eschatological is not one element *of* Christianity, but it is the medium of Christian faith as such, the key in which everything in it is set, the glow that suffuses everything here in the dawn of an expected new day.[10]

Similarly, eschatology is "the key" in which the theology of deacons in this article is set. The eschatological dimension of a theology of deacons can be seen in many of the activities deacons carry out in their lives of ministry and in their activities during the worship service. A deacon's ministry of compassion and social justice is oriented toward the coming reign of God. The deacon through his or her ministry of compassion and justice among the poor works to make this "kingdom value" a reality in the world and also highlights the reality of God's reign in the worship service. This is the reason for a deacon's service in the world and the reason for a deacon's representative role in worship.

The early church's interpretation of Heb. 1:14 implies an eschatological role for deacons: "Are not all angels spirits in the divine service (*diakonian*), sent to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?" The emissary in Heb. 1:14 has been sent to serve and announce a future reality: he or she serves those who "*are to* inherit salvation." Significantly, the early-church Fathers used the symbolism of angels around the Communion table to refer to the deacon.[11] Some months ago, while visiting the Cloisters exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, I was surprised to find a fragment of a medieval bishop's crosier that also depicted angels dressed as deacons on one part of the staff. The portrayal of angels as deacons points to the eschatological and emissarial meaning of a deacon's ministry.

Generally, the early church understood a deacon's emissary-servant identity in two ways. First, they were emissaries of God (as portrayed in the angel imagery); second, they were emissaries of the bishop. As the bishops' assistants, deacons were often placed in charge of coordinating ministries (particularly for the poor) among the local churches where the bishop had oversight. The historic bond between

bishops and deacons is observable today in some churches in which only the bishop lays hands on the deacon candidates. By contrast, in ordination services for priests, both the bishop and other priests lay hands on the ordinands. Much work remains to be done to explore how the historic link between bishops and deacons might be carried out in The United Methodist Church today.

The Deacon's Representative Ministry

An emissary serves as a "go-between" to bring the concerns of the people to the attention of another party. Deacons have historically demonstrated their emissary-servant identity most obviously by leading intercessory prayers in worship. A deacon's activity in the intercessory prayer, and in many other aspects of the service of worship, represents and brings into focus the ministry of all the baptized and also the congregation's celebrations and concerns. The terms *represent* and *focus* are used frequently in this article, in concert with descriptions of the diaconate by authors from other denominations.[12] These terms highlight the fact that a deacon's identity ought not be reduced to a purely functionalist perspective. As I will show later, an analysis of the theology that is implicit in the roles of representing and focusing illustrates the fullness of a deacon's vocation.

A deacon's vocation is important to the church for reasons that extend beyond a simple list of their weekly tasks. A deacon's liturgical functions have a representative and focusing power that makes the meaning of the ministries of all Christians in the world clearer. Nearly all of the functions (visiting the sick, preaching, teaching, and so forth) performed by an ordained elder or deacon may also be done by a layperson. But through solemn ordination deacons are given authority to *bring into focus* all Christian ministry through their ministries of preaching, teaching, and service. When an ordained person performs a liturgical function, he or she does not do so to highlight exclusive privileges; after all, he or she is called to serve rather than to be served. Instead, the ordained person's representative ministry is intended to focus attention on God and to represent the ministries of all Christians. Rather than detract from the ministry of all the baptized, the ministry of the ordained—understood in this way—*brings attention to all Christian ministry.*

The metaphor of *icon* helps to clarify the representative ministry of deacons. The purpose of an icon is not to draw attention to itself; rather, its purpose is to be a vessel that focuses attention on God. Similarly, any representative (ordained) ministry is important not only for what an ordained person does but also for the way ordained persons help focus everyone's ultimate concern on God. John Dally, an Episcopal priest, states this representative-as-iconic role succinctly in reference to ordained persons' roles in Holy Communion:

> A deacon is the icon of the Christ who gets up from the table and gives his status away by assuming the role of a servant, just as the [elder] is an icon of the Christ who understands flesh and blood and life itself as a gift made perfect by being offered up in gratitude.[13]

The icon metaphor also reveals how deacons may represent, or "make present," the reign of God. In the Eastern Orthodox Church icons remind the worshiper that while God's reign in the world is not yet complete, its beauty may be grasped in part through the act of worship. In the same way, in their ministries of service deacons help "make present" the beauty of the reign of God in the world around us. The "not-yet" dimension of the reign of God is, of course, still present in all ministry. But as the deacon witnesses to the coming reign of God he or she also proclaims that the kingdom is, in part, already here. It is precisely in living out of this "already-not yet" tension as an emissary-servant that the deacon keeps before God's people the priorities of God's reign.

The Deacon's Functions as Emissary-Servant in Christian Worship

Baptism

The deacon's representative role is clearly evident in the fact that the deacon's (as well as the elder's) call to ministry does not stem primarily from ordination but from baptism. The most succinct description of the deacon's ministry in the *Book of Discipline* begins with the following words: "From among the baptized, deacons are called by God to a lifetime of servant leadership . . . ."[14] Deacons are to lead and encourage the baptized in their ministries of service.

Baptism calls all persons to a life of service. Deacons re-present this calling by reminding all baptized believers of it.

In the congregation's reaffirmation of the baptismal covenant, the whole congregation is invited to "remember your baptism and be thankful." The deacon, as a representative of the common call to interrelate worship and service, is an appropriate person to lead this portion of the liturgy with the entire community. By encouraging believers to remember their baptism with thanksgiving the deacon is not only recalling the past event of baptism; he or she is also reminding the people of the *present* and *future* privilege of service to "faithfully participate in the ministries of the Church by our prayers, our presence, our gifts, and our service, that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ."[15] Baptism proclaims a present reality but also looks forward to a time when, in Christ, there is "no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female" (Gal. 3:28).[16]

Holy Communion

In the early church, the responsibility for extending the love of Christ to the poor in the church largely revolved around the deacon's action during the celebration of the Eucharist and the Agape meal. From the second to the fourth centuries deacons were responsible both for accepting the gifts brought by the people at the liturgy and for distributing those offerings of food and clothing to the poor. The Agape meal was a time of fellowship for all Christians after the celebration of the Eucharist; it was also a time when the poor were fed. The liturgical act of Holy Communion and the early church's practice of charity were seen as a unified whole with the deacon playing an important integrating function. As the church grew, the character of Christian charity changed. It became depersonalized. Instead of giving gifts to poorer neighbors whom they knew, the people in the congregation likely gave to a more abstract "poor relief fund."[17] Early Methodism practiced a kind of Agape meal as well. The Methodist "love feasts" (as they were called) provided opportunities for fellowship among various classes in a circuit and also helped to provide assistance to those persons in the fellowship most in need.

The connection between the celebration of the Lord's Supper and the coming of God's reign of justice was common in the early church's interpretation of the meal narratives in the New Testament. First Cor. 11:26 is perhaps the most striking example: "For as often as

you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death *until he comes*" (emphasis added).[18] A hymn by John and Charles Wesley also illustrates the eschatological theme relating the heavenly banquet with the Eucharistic celebration:

O that all men would haste
To the spiritual feast,
At Jesus's word
Do this, and be fed with the love of our Lord!

Bring near the glad day
When all shall obey
Thy dying request,
And eat of Thy supper, and lean on Thy breast.

Then, then let us see
Thy glory, and be
Caught up in the air,
This heavenly supper in heaven to share.[19]

The hope for the coming reign of God expressed in this hymn was not an empty longing for the end of the age. Wesley strove to embody his Christian hope in acts of service among the poor. Since the Eucharist is a sacrament of the Kingdom in the world, it must not be construed as a totally churchly event.

In preparing the Table prior to the gathered community's celebration, assisting the presiding elder during the service, and sending the people forth to serve in the world the deacon highlights the gathered community's anticipation of God's reign. Rather than viewing the preparation of the Table as a menial service, one should see it as an act of preparing *now* in hope for the Eucharistic celebration to *come* —the "heavenly supper in heaven to share." Moreover, in assisting the elder at the Lord's Table—assisting the elder in raising the cup; holding the book; making sure that other details are cared for—the deacon demonstrates a partnership in representative ministry.[20] This Eucharistic "table service" on the part of the deacon focuses and makes sacred the call to service in the world that belongs to all Christians.

After the Eucharist is celebrated, the gathered community leaves the sanctuary to, in their daily lives of service, work and *prepare for*

the coming of God's reign. Accordingly, it is appropriate for the deacon to proclaim the final words in the liturgy for Holy Communion:

> Eternal God, we give you thanks for this holy mystery
> in which you have given yourself to us.
> Grant that we may go into the world
> in the strength of your Spirit,
> to give ourselves for others,
> in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord,
> Amen.[21]

This is a vivid example of the deacon's call to interrelate "worship in the gathered community with service to God in the world."[22] The deacon acts as a visual reminder—an icon—of Christian mission in the preparation of the Table and at the end of the liturgy in the sending forth of all God's people into ministries of service in the world.

In all of his or her preaching and teaching, the deacon helps members of the congregation make the connection between worship and service. I was recently told a story of a Roman Catholic deacon who was observed by a young member of a confirmation class as the deacon served the homeless in the church's basement and also prepared the Table and assisted in the Eucharist in the sanctuary upstairs. After seeing both actions, the confirmand remarked, "Oh yeah, that makes sense. The deacon serves food to the homeless and he serves at the Eucharist, too."

The deacons' representative ministry in the celebration of Holy Communion and their historic tie to service among the poor is a challenge to contemporary deacons as they seek to live in the tension between the already and the not-yet of God's reign. Involvement in ministries among the poor may require deacons to make difficult choices and accept the charge that they received at ordination to carry out their ministry "even in the face of hardship and personal sacrifice." Writing from a Roman Catholic perspective, Patrick McCaslin and Michael Lawler suggest that poverty is a primary charism required of a deacon.[23] Like the circuit riders of frontier Methodism, United Methodist deacons are called to a difficult life of service where the not-yet dimensions of God's reign may be known all too well.

Weddings and the Deacon's Ecumenical Opportunity

Jesus' prayer for his disciples "that they may be one" (John 17:11) has fueled the ecumenical movement for decades. The Lord's prayer for

unity in the wider church is represented in services of Holy Matrimony, albeit in a microcosm. In marriage the couple announces their hope for a future life of growth into "one body." The witnesses who are gathered join the couple in the ceremony as they begin their life together to give the couple the guidance and support they need to make this hoped-for unity a reality in the present.

The hoped-for unity in marriage is a powerful symbol for the unity of the church. Eph. 5:31-32 states: "'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church." As marriage is a picture of the union of Christ and the church, so it is a testimony against the endless divisions that seem to occupy so much local-church and denominational energy. A deacon's opportunity to preside at services of Holy Matrimony is an opportunity to represent Jesus' prayer.

In their joint publication *The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity* Anglicans and Lutherans emphasize the eschatological reign of God brought into being and anticipated by Christ through the Holy Spirit. Rather than viewing the restoration of the diaconate only in terms of the deacon's function or in terms of ontological arguments for ordination, the Anglican-Lutheran Hanover Report argues at length for an eschatological perspective and an emphasis on Christian mission to bring about the reign of God. This has helped to refocus recent ecumenical dialogues on the purposes of Christian mission rather than on historic divisions. Deacons across denominational boundaries are called to "bring into focus central aspects of the mission of the entire church."[24]

The seven chosen in Acts 6:1-6 (whom church tradition has often considered the first deacons) exemplified this call to unity around the central aspects of mission. Luke tells his readers in Acts 6:1 that there was strife between the Hellenists and the Hebrews in Jerusalem. The seven who were chosen to minister among the widows and orphans in the Hellenist community were most likely leaders of the Hellenist community in Jerusalem. By choosing the seven, the apostles also proclaimed the equality of the Hellenist and Hebrew communities in the Jerusalem church and demonstrated the apostles' desire for unity among the community of believers.

As they find common ground in ministries of mercy and social justice, deacons are well suited to forming working relationships with other religious traditions across denominations. In local communities

where multiple churches or religious traditions exist that have not previously cooperated a great deal, the deacon could serve as a kind of ecumenical "go-between" or emissary among these various groups as they work to initiate cooperative ministries which anticipate the coming reign of God. This too has been emphasized in a 1997 ecumenical consultation among British Methodists, Roman Catholics, Anglicans, and other groups in Windsor, England. The *Windsor Statement on the Diaconate* states:

> Within and across the denominations, the roles can and do, differ. We increasingly perceive our role to be pioneering and prophetic, responding to the needs . . . within and beyond the Church. Opening doors of opportunity, encouraging others to take risks, the contemporary diaconate acting in its capacity as "agent of change," engages imaginatively and collaboratively with issues of justice, poverty, social and environmental concerns. We often find ourselves spanning boundaries, especially official ones of Church and society. We believe that the time is right for the churches together to explore what the Spirit is saying and address the many issues raised by diaconal experience.[25]

Funerals

A deacon's role in presiding at services of death and resurrection is yet another opportunity to emphasize the baptismal calling of all Christians to a life of service. Funerals are grounded in the hope of the resurrection of Jesus and his anticipated return. The bereaved persons are comforted by this hope. In funerals, the gathered community is reminded of their common call to discipleship as they remember and celebrate the life of a disciple who has gone before them. The deceased person is then entrusted to God, whom the congregation also is learning to trust.

A white cloth is often laid over the casket to remind all present of the deceased person's baptism and the "dying with Christ and the eventual raising with Christ" that was already symbolized in the person's baptism. As baptism represents the hope of a life of Christian discipleship and mission to the world, so death represents the hope of a life to come in which the faithful one joins the "great cloud of witnesses" who have gone before. The following words from the

United Methodist Service of Death and Resurrection point to this eschatological connection: "Receive us also, and raise us into a new life. Help us so to love and serve you in this world that we may enter into your joy in the world to come."[26] The deacon's prominent participation in the service can help to accentuate the connection between service in the world and the expected joy in the world to come.

Conclusion

The theology of deacons that I have articulated here has been set in the context of what a deacon does in the celebration of Christian worship, in dialogue with Scripture and church tradition. Whether it is in the Eucharist or in a homeless shelter where God's reign is proclaimed, the deacon's task is always to be a representative pointing to the hope that is ours as a Christian people. The development of the Order of Deacons in The United Methodist Church cannot afford to limit itself to past visions of the diaconate. It must draw on its heritage while also looking forward to an imaginative and creative understanding of what this Order can mean for the continued renewal of the church and the coming reign of God.

The new Order of Deacons will challenge our denomination to expand its vision for the reign of God as it leads all baptized believers in ministries in the world. The annual conference I spoke of at the start of the article sang "Soon and Very Soon" as part of its memorial service in order to emphasize our common Christian hope. May deacons around the world in United Methodism and many other denominations join together in proclaiming that unending hymn in their lives of worship and service as well.

Notes

1. "The Order for the Ordination of Deacons and Elders," in *Services for the Ordering of Ministry in The United Methodist Church: Provisional Texts* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1998), 22.

2. *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church—1996* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House), ¶319.

3. Practical theology involves a kind of correlation, or dialogue, between theory and practice. See Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

4. In a recent book that offers an overview of the United Methodist diaconate, Paul Van Buren and I have outlined the relationship of deacons with elders and laypersons. See *The Deacon: Ministry through Words of Faith and Acts of Love* (Nashville: The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, 1999), available through Cokesbury. This article takes a step back insofar as it reflects specifically on a *theology* of the diaconate.

5. The first modern attempts to explicitly develop a theology of the diaconate were undertaken by Karl Rahner in response to the decision by Vatican II to restore the permanent diaconate. See Rahner's "The Theology of the Restoration of the Diaconate," in *Theological Investigations* 5 (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), 268-314; "On the Diaconate," in *Theological Investigations* 12 (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974), 61-80. Roman Catholic deacon William T. Ditewig has written a brief outline of a theology of the diaconate, based on a draft of the *National Directory for the Formation, Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons in the United States*. This directory is scheduled for release in the coming year. See William T. Ditewig, "A Theology of the Diaconate," *Deacon Digest* (March/April, 1999):17-21. See also Robert Hannaford, "Towards a Theology of the Diaconate," in *The Deacon's Ministry*, ed. by Christine Hall (Herefordshire, United Kingdom: Gracewing, 1992), 25-44.

6. Congregation for the Clergy, *Basic Norms for the Formation of Permanent Deacons: Directory for the Ministry and Life of Permanent Deacons* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1998), 23.

7. See the Hanover Report of the Anglican-Lutheran International Commission, *The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity* (Published for the Anglican Consultative Council and the Lutheran World Federation, 1996).

8. Hans Conzelmann offers this translation in his *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, trans. by James W. Leitch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 208. John Collins argues that the more modern and limited translation of *diakon-* as "service" is the result of nineteenth-century deaconess movements in Germany. Collins provides ample evidence for the association of the *diakon-* terms with "messengers" or "go-betweens." See John N. Collins, *Diakonia: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

9. The proceedings from a symposium of the North American Association for the Diaconate, held in 1992, document this growing recognition. See P. Craighill, *Diaconal Ministry, Past, Present, and Future* (Providence, RI: NAAD, 1992).

10. Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 16.

11. See Norbert Brockman, *Ordained to Service: A Theology of the Permanent Diaconate* (Hicksville, NY: Exposition Press, 1976), 24-25.

12. See Hannaford above; see also the World Council of Churches' document, *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry*. The Hanover Report titled *The Diaconate as an Ecumenical Opportunity* also uses these terms in statements regarding the diaconate.

13. John A. Dally, "A Recent Sermon," *Diakoneo* 20/1 (Easter 1998): 3.

14. *The Book of Discipline—1996*, ¶319.

15. *The United Methodist Book of Worship* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992), 114.

16. See Joann Crowley, "Baptism as Eschatological Event," *Worship* 62/4 (July 1988), 290-98.

17. Edward R. Pirozzi, *Locating the Separation of Charity from Eucharistic Worship in the Ancient Western Church* (Th.D. dissertation, Boston University School of Theology, 1998), 30.

18. Geoffrey Wainwright documents this connection at length in *Eucharist and Eschatology* (London: Epworth Press, 1971).

19. Cited in Wainwright, 129. This hymn illustrates much of what the church has lost over the years. There appears to have been a steady decline in the number of hymns dealing with eschatological themes in church hymnals.

20. Ormonde Plater provides a detailed description of the function of Episcopal deacons in the Eucharist and other liturgies in his fine book *Deacons in the Liturgy* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1992). The deacon's "go-between" identity may be observed throughout this book.

21. "A Service of Word and Table I," *The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), 11.

22. *The Book of Discipline—1996*, ¶319.

23. Patrick McCaslin and Michael G. Lawler, *Sacrament of Service: A Vision of the Permanent Diaconate Today* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 43.

24. "Hanover Report of the Anglican-Lutheran International Commission," *The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity* (Published for the Anglican Consultative Council and the Lutheran World Federation, 1996), 21.

25. Cited in Richard Pemble, "Is the Diaconate 'the' Ecumenical Office?" *Deacon Digest* (September/October 1998): 8. The *Windsor Statement* may be found on the Internet at www.societies.anglican.org/dace/.

26. *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, 150.

Daniel T. Benedict, Jr.

Elders and Deacons: Renewed Orders and Partnership in Leading Worship

> "Do you believe that God has called you to the life and work of a deacon?"
> "Do you believe that God has called you to the life and work of an elder?"[1]

July 3 was to be a day of firsts at Bailey Street United Methodist Church. It would be the first Sunday that the church had a deacon in full connection appointed to the charge. It would be the first time the pastor, Pat Longhurst, would preside at Communion with a deacon assisting. It would be the first Sunday for Noreen West, the newly ordained deacon, to "assist the elder" in administering the sacrament of Holy Communion. When she and Pat sat down to make decisions about what part each would play in leading the service, Pat said to Noreen, "I'm tempted to say, 'You just take it up to the Scripture reading and I'll do the rest.' But part of me feels that that is a concession to ignorance. Aren't there some things a deacon is supposed to do?"

I suspect that this scenario is more charitable and enlightened than most. Ignorance about the distinctive work of each order, fear of

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shared leadership, and turf issues may characterize the relationship between deacons and elders in many settings where they will be called to work together.

The revised ordering of ordained ministry (*The Book of Discipline—1996,* Part V, Chapter 2, "The Ministry of the Ordained") invites extensive reflection and conversation across the church. The 1996 General Conference made changes, particularly establishing a deacon in full connection, that ask the church to reexamine its assumptions about ordained ministry. *How are deacons and elders to understand their relationship to one another within the total ministry of the church? When a congregation has both an elder and a deacon, how do they complement each other in their work? And what is their work in relationship to the active participation of all the baptized in worship and service?*

These are the broad questions that loom in the background of this attempt to articulate the relationship of deacon and elder when it comes to leading the church in the worship of God in both liturgy and life. The minimalist response, on the one hand, is that there are no real differences in the role of the deacon and of the elder in worship: they are both ordained, and either can do what needs to be done, except that deacons may not preside at the sacraments. Contributing to the minimalist view is the fact that for 200 years in U. S. Methodism, deacons have had a transitional status on the way to becoming an elder. Since the order of deacon was simply a brief stop on the way to somewhere else, why invest much in it? Beyond that, frontier settings and worship practices tilted Methodism toward indifference to such matters.

The maximalist response, on the other hand, approaches the question with the assumption that deacons and elders have definite and clearly different responsibilities in the macrocosm of the church's ministry and in the microcosm of liturgical practice. Those who lean toward a maximalist response know that the liturgical traditions, to which United Methodists have been largely indifferent, have the roles worked out with detailed responsibilities for elders (presbyters) and deacons. The maximalist response might be: "Why not do it right, like the Episcopalians and the Catholics?"

As an absolute position, neither of these approaches serves us well. The maximalist approach hinders us in adapting to the needs of concrete circumstances; the minimalist approach discounts the tradition as useless baggage. I propose to explore a third way that preserves a flexibility appropriate to the varied contexts of ministry and takes seriously insights

to be gained from the theological structures of ministry and our roots in church history and ecumenical practice.

In this article, I argue that the 1996 General Conference established two *distinct, mutually complementary,* and *equal* orders of ministry. To articulate this dynamic of distinctiveness, complementarity, and equality, I invoke the two biblical metaphors of *priest* and *servant.* Thus, elders preeminently embody and exemplify the office of Christ as *priest,* while deacons preeminently embody and exemplify the office of Christ as *servant.* Given this complementary and equally essential expression of Christ's life and leadership in and through the church, the work of elders and deacons in worship should be characterized by a *partnership* based on mutual respect and love. While each order's leadership is not limited to worship, the assembly's worship is the primary and constitutive setting where the ministry of the church is ritually enacted and sustained. If the distinctiveness and complementarity of both orders is practiced as *partnership* in worship, it has a stronger possibility of being practiced in the total ministry of the local church in and for the world. As far as competitiveness, mistrust, and invasion of turf are concerned, the evangelical counsel applies: "[I]f you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift" (Matt. 5:23-24). There can be no exemption for elders and deacons from the most basic dimensions of discipleship in worship and beyond it.

This general affirmation of the ministry of deacons and elders as complementary and equal still leaves the question: What, then, is the distinctiveness of the leadership of each order in worship and ministry? Responding to that question is the task of the discussion that follows.

The Distinctive Work of Elders and Deacons as Reflected in the Ordinal

The Book of Discipline (¶¶310-314, 319-327) serves as the juridical norm with respect to the distinctive nature and work of deacons and elders. The ritual texts for ordination, as found in *The United Methodist Book of Worship* and the *Services for the Ordering of Ministry in The United Methodist Church (Provisional Texts),* provide a fertile field for imaging and exploring the uniqueness of each order of ministry. These services reflect both the stated theological and

ecclesial formulations of the church in the *Discipline,* and with them the church ordains persons for leadership in the context of liturgy.

The services of ordination, practiced in the context of elders, deacons, and the *laos* as a whole, manifest our primary theology around holy orders. Ordination is always from and to the service of the assembly as the primary symbol of God's mercy and grace enacted for the life of the world. Elders and deacons have significance only in juxtaposition with the primary symbol of *assembly itself*—all of the people represented by the assembled annual conference and those who come from the ordinands' local churches. The practice of ordaining deacons and elders in the context of the assembly's prayer and praise is a faithful reminder that ordained leadership has meaning only in relationship to the community of all the baptized. The opening dialogue, in which the bishop greets the people with "The grace of Jesus Christ be with you all," and the response of the assembly, "And also with you," reminds all that ordination is not monadic; it is set in the dialogic nature of Christian liturgical action.

A comparison of the "Examination of Deacons" and the "Examination of Elders," voiced by the bishop in the church's liturgy, readily reveals the distinctiveness of each order.

From the Examination of Deacons
The bishop examines the deacon candidates:

A deacon
is called to share in Christ's ministry of servanthood,
to *relate the life of the community to its service in the world,*
to lead others into Christian discipleship,
to *teach and proclaim God's Word. . .*
to lead in worship,
to *assist elders at Holy Baptism and Holy Communion,*
to nurture disciples for witness and service,

From the Examination of Elders
The bishop examines the elder candidates:

An elder
is called to share in the ministry of Christ
and *of the whole church:*
to preach and teach the Word of God . . .
and *faithfully administer*
the sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion; . . .
to *lead the people of God in worship and prayer;*
to lead persons to faith in Jesus Christ;
to *exercise pastoral supervision,*

to serve all people, particularly the poor, the sick, and the oppressed. . .
to *interpret to the church the world's hurts and hopes,*
and *to lead Christ's people in ministries of compassion and justice,*
liberation and reconciliation
even in the face of hardship
and personal sacrifice.

These are the duties of a deacon.

Do you believe that God has called you to the life and work of a deacon?[2]

order the life of the congregation,
counsel the troubled,
and *declare the forgiveness of sin;*
to lead the people of God
in obedience to mission in the world;
to seek justice, peace, and freedom for all people;
and to take a responsible place in the government of the Church and in service in and to the community.

These are the duties of an elder.

Do you believe that God has called you to the life and work of an elder?[3]

Observations

First, *the liturgical leadership roles of elders and deacons serve the church best when these distinctives are not glossed but are enacted with clarity and charity.* In the examination of candidates for each order, the bishop asks publicly if they are called by God to the distinctive life and work of a deacon or an elder. Mutual respect and mutual accountability for the office and work of each order within the ministry of all Christians enable each order to sacramentalize (mirror) the nature and mystery of the church: Christ as *priest* (elder) and Christ as *servant* (deacon). Exclusiveness, territoriality, and subordination do not characterize the relationship of one order to the other. The work of deacons leading in Christ's work as servant and the work of elders leading in Christ's work as priest are not exclusive domains. Both orders are ordained to service. Both are ordained to Word. Indeed, all Christians participate in these dimensions of Christ's ministry. The distinctive work of each order does not exhaust Christ's work. In addition to priestly ministry and servanthood,

Christ's presence and work as prophet and sovereign are shared and embodied in different ways by both orders and in partnership with the rest of the baptized. The distinctiveness of each order is grounded in God's calling the community of grace and empowering it to live out its baptismal vocation of unity and service.

Second, *elders and deacons are distinctive orders of ministry within the* one *ministry of Christ.* Any attempt at stating faithfully what the roles of deacons and elders in liturgical leadership are must be grounded in a twofold understanding of the church's ministry and a commitment to it. First, the liturgical leadership of elders and deacons (and bishops) is inseparable from the liturgical action of the assembly of the baptized.[4] Second, this liturgical leadership both *builds up* and *unifies* the church in Christ (the local community of faith with itself and with the church catholic) and *links* and *extends* its life in service to the poor and marginalized. These structures of ministry are grounded in God's mission of redeeming and reconciling the whole creation in Jesus Christ. This is the vocation of all of the baptized as Christ's royal and prophetic priesthood.[5] This baptismal vocation is the ground of all ministry, as the *Book of Discipline* makes clear.[6] It includes servant ministry in daily life and shared servant leadership within the community of the baptized. The primary focus is on the transformation of the world and the making of disciples who share fully in the *diakonia* of the church. Based on this communal vocation, the Holy Spirit orders the life of the church by ordaining some persons to a lifetime of liturgical leadership in order that all of the baptized may be supported and equipped in personal vocation of living the gospel.

Third, *the elder's liturgical function is to preside at the assembly's celebration of Word and Sacrament.* Elders lead in order to represent and preserve the catholicity of the church in its baptismal and eucharistic life. In the examination, the bishop says: "An elder is called to share in the ministry . . . of the whole church," to "faithfully administer the sacraments . . .", to "exercise pastoral supervision," and to "declare the forgiveness of sin." These are all actions of presiding and of unifying the baptized. Elders embody Christ's royal priesthood that all Christians enter at baptism, and they oversee the life of the congregation so that persons are reconciled and united to Christ throughout their lives. An encompassing circle may be an apt symbol for the work and office of the elder.

The elder's role of presiding within the unity of the church emerged

in the church's history. There are at least two reasons why, in the biblical period, the liturgical role of the elder and that of the deacon were not defined. First, at this stage the terms were more oriented to governance and management; and, second, worship was clearly focused on the priestly work of Christ's singular sacrifice and the continuing "priestly" ministry of the assembly of the baptized collectively. The work of elders (*presbyters*) derived from the model of the synagogue's governing board of elders. In the emerging church, the term *elder* was interchangeable with *overseer* (*episkopos*). Nowhere in the New Testament is the sacerdotal term *priest* (*hiereus*) ever used for Christian ministers individually. Through baptism into Christ's royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9), the whole church continued to proclaim and celebrate the all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ in the Eucharist, the weekly constitutive act of the collective priesthood.

But by the second century elders came to have a sacerdotal role in worship. The term *priest* was at first associated with bishops (overseers) but not with the presbyters (elders), who served as an advisory body to the bishop. In time bishops shared their presidential/sacerdotal role with the elders. This shared responsibility became necessary as urban faith communities grew to include multiple worshiping communities. In these contexts, the bishop called upon the college of elders to preside in the bishop's name in the several assemblies of an area.

There is an interesting footnote to the gradual evolution of the elder's role in the liturgy from that of presbyter to that of priest. In a letter to Decentius (416 C.E.), Innocent I explains the practice to be followed concerning the Eucharist: in towns, the bishop was to consecrate the elements and send these to parish priests; in the outlying areas, the priests were to consecrate the elements themselves. This opened the way to the medieval doctrine of priesthood. Thus, the liturgical role of presbyters (elders) developed in the context of the presidential work of the bishop. In time, this work transferred to the presbyters, who became extensions of the bishop to the many churches of each Episcopal area. The leadership of presbyters was always an expression of the bishop's leadership (who is the one to preside at the Table) as well as of the unity of all who shared the Communion with the bishop. In one sense, a spatial metaphor suggests itself for representing the liturgical role of the elder: The elder stands in the center of a circle made up of the bishop and all the people gathered for Word and Sacrament.

Fourth, *the deacon's liturgical function is to* link *and* extend *the assembly's celebration of Word and Sacrament to the community's service* (diakonia) *in daily life.* The deacon lives, looks, and listens on the margins of human life and human need. The deacon lives on the axis of the good news celebrated in the liturgy and the tragic news of the poor and oppressed. Deacons lead the baptized in Christ's servanthood. A connecting line can symbolize their work and office.

The bishop declares to the candidates for deacon's orders: "A deacon is called to share Christ's ministry of servanthood, to relate the life of the community to its service in the world"; "to teach and proclaim God's Word . . . to assist elders at Holy Baptism and Holy Communion"; "to interpret to the church the world's hurts and hopes; and to lead Christ's people in ministries of compassion and justice, liberation and reconciliation even in the face of hardship and personal sacrifice." The concluding phrase seems to underscore the costly vocational nature of the Order of Deacons as a mirror of Christ's servanthood.

The Ordinal's introduction to the examination suggests that the "assisting" role of the deacon is both *explicit* and *directional.* That is, the deacon's liturgical leadership is not *subordination* to the elder; it is ordination to a distinctive work of service that sacramentalizes (mirrors) and enacts Christ's servanthood in a wounded and needy world. Again, the underlying structure and values of our new (and historic) understanding guide us in outlining the shape of the deacon's liturgical leadership and ensure that deacons and elders avoid the evil of turf conflict, competition, and suspicion. To refer once again to the spatial metaphor of the circle, mentioned above: While the elder stands with the bishop at the center of the church's unity, deacons stand on the border of the circle, where they live in contact with the world's hurts and hopes. In the liturgy, deacons embody that boundary in "interpret[ing] to the church the world's hurts and hopes."

In the early centuries, the worship leadership of the deacon commonly included reading or chanting the lessons (especially the Gospel at the Eucharist); directing the prayers of the people during the service; receiving the offerings of the faithful (the gifts for the poor and the widows and the elements of bread and wine); assisting the bishop in the distribution of Holy Communion; and giving the signal for the penitents and catechumens to leave the worship before the beginning of the Eucharist.

In time, the power of the deacons threatened that of the presbyters (priests), and the subsequent power struggle led to the hierarchical

inferiority of deacons and their relegation to lesser roles. By the Middle Ages, the diaconate was a mere step in preparation for the priesthood. Deacons continued in some of the earlier liturgical roles at the discretion of the priest. Due to the short time normally spent in the diaconate and the scarcity of deacons, priests increasingly performed the liturgical functions proper to deacons.

For many centuries deacons had few specific functions in worship. Only with special permission was the deacon allowed to preach or administer baptism, present the offerings to the presider, invite the congregation to pray, chant the *"Ite, missa est"* ("Go, you are dismissed") at Mass, and to sing the *Exsultet* (the Easter Proclamation) at the Easter Vigil. Apparently, the deacon retained the right to read or chant the Gospel even when other functions required permission.

The point of recounting this bit of history is this: The practice and doctrine of the church as they evolved were influenced by circumstances and by the needs of the church as it expanded in its pastoral care and missionary thrust. In a sense, the relationship of deacons and elders has been a dance in which both at times moved in relationship to each other and, at other times, moved and developed independently. The evidence seems to be that the liturgical role of the deacon evolved very early and that it has persisted despite setbacks due to periods of hierarchical conflict and of the neglect of the servant character of the church as a whole.

While there is much more work to do in exploring the office and work of the deacon, the Ordinal is clear that the Order of Deacons is made up of persons whose vocation is to lead the baptized in linking liturgy to life. What emerges here is a call to leadership in service—servant leadership that assists in worship, that leads the baptized in compassionate *diakonia* to the poor and marginalized, and that prompts courageous *marturia* (witness) to the powerful and the oppressive. Such servant leadership embodies the linkage of worship and work, liturgy and life, which is the common vocation of all the baptized. Deacons are not only to embody such service; they are to train and lead the baptized in this service that enacts the gospel in works of compassion and justice.

The word *deacon* derives from the Greek *diakonia*. *Dia* connotes "continually or constantly" and, as Ormonde Plater notes, *ken/kono* means "active," suggesting "one who is continually active." He also notes another etymology which combines two Greek words to mean "through the dust," suggesting the image of a servant as the "dusty

one" hurrying along the roads, or a person who lives close to the ground in doing her or his work—messengers and personal attendants.[7]

Fifth, *new United Methodist liturgical practices should emerge in relationship to the practices of the ecumenical community*. For The United Methodist Church, ordination is an act of the whole church. This is confirmed in our practice: United Methodists recognize the orders of persons appropriately ordained in other Christian denominations.[8] United Methodists will be wise to steer a course that is simultaneously attentive to our unique vocation in the church catholic and to the latter's liturgical practice as we learn our way into the partnership of elders and deacons in the liturgy. Many denominations, including The United Methodist Church, have had little inclination to what are viewed as "liturgical niceties" and so have dismissed Lutheran, Episcopal, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox liturgical practice as mere preferences or rubricism. It may be time for United Methodists to see these practices as a gift to us as we seek to discern the shape of the relationship of elders and deacons in worship leadership.

Guidelines for Partnership in Worship

Based on the revised Ordinal's casting of leadership of elders and deacons and on insights from the church's historical practice, what follows is a proposal for construing the partnership of deacons and elders in worship. The core of the proposal focuses on the general services of The United Methodist Church—Word and Table, Baptismal Covenant, Christian Marriage, and Death and Resurrection—as found in *The United Methodist Hymnal* and *The United Methodist Book of Worship*. However, in many cases, I cite current ecumenical practice to support the integrity of the proposal.

1. *Since deacons are ordained to Word* and *Service, they are charged with faithful proclamation of the Word of God in worship as well as in daily life. Deacons share in the partnership of proclaiming the Word, and it is appropriate that they preach in the assembly from time to time.*

The structures of the partnership of deacons and elders, as well as of bishops, are clearly articulated in the twentieth-century landmark document, *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry* (BEM). The document's

articulation of the principles that should govern the practice of ordained ministry is particularly useful:

> The ordained ministry should be exercised in a personal, collegial and communal way. It should be *personal* because the presence of Christ among his people can most effectively be pointed to by the person ordained to proclaim the Gospel and to call the community to serve the Lord in unity of life and witness. It should also be *collegial,* for there is need for a college of ordained ministers sharing in the common task of representing the concerns of the community. Finally, the intimate relationship between the ordained ministry and the community should find expression in a *communal* dimension where the exercise of the ordained ministry is rooted in the life of the community and requires the community's effective participation in the discovery of God's will and the guidance of the Spirit.[9]

BEM goes on to state that the presbyters' function is service as "pastoral ministers of Word and sacraments in the local eucharistic community."[10] Deacons, on the other hand, "represent to the Church its calling as servant in the world. By struggling in Christ's name with the myriad needs of societies and persons, deacons exemplify the interdependence of worship and service in the Church's life."[11] Examples of the deacon's roles in worship include reading the Scriptures, preaching, and leading the congregation in prayer.

2. *Since elders are ordained to Service, as well as Word, Sacrament, and Order, they are not exempt from linking liturgy and life in their presiding and proclaiming.* For the foreseeable future, until there are many more deacons, most elders will have to fulfill the worship roles of both elder and deacon in the majority of United Methodist congregations.

3. *Elders most appropriately preside at the community's worship by greeting the assembly in the name of God, proclaiming and interpreting the Word of God in preaching, announcing God's forgiveness to the people (and receiving God's forgiveness from the people), presiding at Holy Communion, and blessing the people as they go forth into the world.*

Here the distinctive work of the Order of Elders, as articulated above (see "Observations," pages 391-96), as well as historic and current ecumenical practices, support this suggested leadership in worship.

In greeting the people, the elder initiates the liturgical action and establishes who is presiding by saying, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you." In response, the assembly just acknowledged and empowered now empowers the presider by saying, "And also with you." The blessing at the conclusion of the service is a similar presidential action by which the presiding elder blesses the assembly as it is about to be sent out (by the deacon) for the "liturgy after the liturgy"—extending the experience of worship into their daily lives. The other presidential actions listed above are specifically included in the Ordinal's description of the work of the elder. Other actions are left for others (deacons, readers, musicians, and the people) to do so that presiders may "lead" but not take to themselves all of the assembly's service to God.

Greeting, preaching, declaring forgiveness, presiding at the Table, and blessing the people before they are sent to serve reflect the historic work of the presbyter (elder) in the liturgy. This tradition is carried on in current Roman Catholic and Episcopal Church practice. The priest's (presbyter's) distinctive role is to preside at all celebrations of the Eucharist. The priest normally preaches. The priest (and bishop) alone may consecrate the Eucharist by leading the eucharistic prayer. The new British Methodist worship book reflects this historic and ecumenical practice as well.[12]

4. *Deacons most appropriately lead in* linking *and* extending *Christ's service in the community's worship, by reading the Scriptures (particularly the Gospel reading); preaching to interpret the hurts and hopes of the world; leading the people in prayers for the world and the church; receiving the elements and preparing the Table for the Eucharist; assisting in serving Communion; setting the Table in order after all have been served; and sending the people forth to serve, following the blessing of the people by the elder. Deacons appropriately train and guide others to do these tasks or to assist in doing them.*

In Roman Catholic practice since Vatican II, the deacon has been empowered to introduce the liturgy of the day; proclaim (read) the Gospel; preach; lead the intercessions; prepare the Table and the gifts; assist the presider at the altar; assist in the breaking of the bread and the filling of the cups; serve Communion; cleanse the vessels after Communion; and dismiss the people.

Ormonde Plater uses lyrical words to describe the liturgical role of the deacon in the practice of the Episcopal Church: "[D]eacons

proclaim the good news of Christ's death and resurrection. They bring the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world into the marriage feast of the Lamb. They feed the hungry and give drink to the thirsty. By exercising a role that illuminates the mystery of Christ and his church, they serve both the people and the Lord."[13] Furthermore, the deacon sends the people forth to "love and serve the Lord."

Plater's brief description manifests the almost iconic nature of the deacon's role of linking liturgy and life. He images the deacon's role in the drama of worship as that of an "angel," a "master of ceremonies," and a "table waiter," so that the presbyter (priest) may preside as "pray-er" and represent Christ as host at the feast. Plater notes, "If we train deacons to act in liturgy, we must also train bishops and priests to live and work with waiters. The main problem is to teach the presider to preside and not to wait on table. Presider, stay away from the altar until your time arrives, and be a model of quiet prayer!"[14]

In the Reformed tradition, deacons are charged with the care of the sick and the poor. Here the office of deacon is pastoral, charitable, and administrative rather than liturgical.

In Baptist and Congregational traditions, deacons, having a more clearly spiritual function in congregational life, usually assist the pastor with the distribution of the Communion elements.

5. *Deacons should assist or lead in weddings, funerals, morning and evening praise and prayer, and other pastoral liturgies. Sometimes, in ministering to the sick and dying or to persons preparing to get married, a close servant relationship can develop between the deacon and the people involved. In such cases, it may be more appropriate for the deacon to preside in a funeral or wedding service. According to their gifts, deacons should preach from time to time in the regular weekly services, too.*

In the Roman Catholic Church, the deacon may preach (with permission); distribute Communion; conduct Communion services, using the reserved sacrament; administer the Eucharist to the dying; visit and pray with the sick; conduct wake services; conduct the funeral service outside Mass; and conduct the committal service. In addition, the deacon may preside at the Liturgy of the Hours (for example, Morning and Evening Prayer); officiate at marriages when properly delegated for this by the bishop; and give all the blessings in the *Book of Blessings* (those not reserved for a priest or bishop).

6. *In circumstances where there is no ordained elder, the deacon may serve the assembly by presiding in worship without the Lord's Supper.*

Presiding at the Table is not appropriate, unless authorized under the provisions set forth in the Book of Discipline.

7. *When there is baptism, the elder should preside and baptize, and the deacon should assist with administration of the sacrament.*

Based on historical and theological grounds, it is currently unclear what the limitations on such assistance should be. The understanding and practice of celebrating the Eucharist, as well as the interpretation of the roles of deacons in other denominations, can provide United Methodists with valuable insight on this question. However, we need further conversation, so that we may clarify the appropriate role of deacons in the baptism ritual.

According to one line of reasoning, the elder should pray the prayer of "Thanksgiving over the Water,"[15] while either the elder or the deacon can then baptize the candidate. Proponents of this position hold that the practice of baptism should parallel that of the Lord's Supper in this way: In the service of Holy Communion, the elder leads the people in praying "The Great Thanksgiving"; afterwards, the elder and the deacon give the bread and cup. Likewise, in baptism, the elder presides by leading the "Thanksgiving over the Water"; afterwards, the elder *or the deacon* should baptize the candidate.

Another line of reasoning suggests that the elder alone should both lead the thanksgiving over the water and administer the water. This position holds that the bathing of the candidate is parallel to the presider breaking the bread and lifting the cup. On practical grounds alone, this argument commands strong support. In these early years of our new understanding of ministry as United Methodists, we should be careful to avoid confusion about the singular responsibility of elders to "faithfully administer the sacraments." If deacons administer the water of baptism (to resume the argument), then it becomes unclear what the elder's ordination to sacrament means. If we were to follow this line of reasoning, consistency dictates that elders would devote themselves clearly and faithfully to fulfilling their sacramental leadership. The minimal amount of attention given today to the sacraments as constituting the heart of the local church's life betrays both our impoverished sacramental life as United Methodists and the neglect of the faithful administration of the sacraments on the part of the Order of Elders.

8. *In circumstances where there is no ordained deacon, the elder appropriately serves the assembly by linking its worship to its work in daily life. However, it is strongly encouraged that one or more*

members of the assembly serve as assisting ministers in reading the Scriptures; leading the people in prayer for the world and for the church; preparing the Table for Holy Communion; and sending the people forth in service.

The struggle of the Lutherans in North America around the liturgy points to the urgency of maintaining non-clergy leadership in worship. North American Lutherans recognize only one clergy order—the pastor. The role of "deacon" in worship is fulfilled by either an ordained or a non-ordained person called an "assisting minister." Assisting ministers read the Scripture lessons (other than the Gospel), lead the intercessions, set the Table, distribute the cup, lead the post-Communion prayer, and dismiss the people.[16] It is worth noting that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America consecrates diaconal ministers but has so far resisted ordaining deacons. This is in part out of concern that the diaconate not be professionalized and clericized in either liturgy or life: "The liturgy is the celebration of all who gather. Together with the pastor who presides, the entire congregation is involved. It is important, therefore, that lay persons fulfill appropriate ministries within the service."[17]

Again, the focus on the deacon as a leader in and for the liturgy of Christ in the church and the world is essential. When the bishop declares that a deacon "is called . . . to lead Christ's people in ministries of compassion and justice," this clearly includes recruiting, nurturing, training, and scheduling children, youth, and adults for serving as assisting ministers (readers, Communion servers, leaders) in worship.

9. *The vesting of elders and deacons is problematic, due to the variety of regional practices and local-church customs. In light of ecumenical practice and current liturgical reform, the alb is generally seen as the appropriate basic garb for leadership in the liturgy, both for ordained and non-ordained persons. The alb, a simple baptismal garment, carries no hierarchical symbolism (in contrast to the pulpit or academic gown) other than reminding all of us of our common servanthood in baptism. The stole does signify consecration (to diaconal ministry) and ordination.*

For elders, the stole drapes around the back of the neck and hangs in equal lengths down the front. For deacons, the stole lays over the left shoulder (front and back) and fastens at the hip on the right. For diaconal ministers, the stole lays over the left shoulder and hangs straight down in front and back.[18] Cinctures in the form of a cord or

fabric belt are useful to gather the loose-fitting alb, though many people prefer the more flowing appearance of the alb without cincture.

The nine guidelines articulated above focus on the liturgical role of the elder and deacon as a ground for partnership. The list in no way defines or describes the distinctive work of elders and deacons in the larger picture of their respective ministry. It does point *to* it, though, in the sense that what elders and deacons mirror in worship will likely be what they embody in their day-to-day leading of the people of God. The scope of this article has been to examine the context of the liturgical partnership of both orders and to propose a basic perspective for this partnership.

Conclusion

During these early years of the new ordering of ministry in The United Methodist Church, conversation across the denomination is crucial. The formation of faithful practices growing out of this conversation and partnership is equally crucial. The Order of Elders and the Order of Deacons have the opportunity to forge a partnership with grace, mutual respect, and joy in leading the people of God into the fullness of Christian faith and service. An elder and a deacon appointed to the same charge should give priority to forming a partnership that suits their context and their styles of relating.

Establishing a sound basis for conversation is essential. This conversation should not be limited to those elders and deacons who happen to be appointed to leadership in the same local church. The deacon in full connection is a gift to the church, in part because in gaining clarity about the work of the deacon all of the baptized—including elders—are called to greater clarity concerning their identity and work.

Notes

1. *Services for the Ordering of Ministry in The United Methodist Church (Provisional Texts)* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1998), 22, 24.

2. From *Services for the Ordering of Ministry in the United Methodist Church (Provisional Texts)*, 21-22, italics added.

3. From Ibid., 24, italics added.

4. For more on this, see Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 180-203.

5. See *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry,* Faith and Order Paper No. 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), 29-30.

6. *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church—1996* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1996), 107-13.

7. Ormonde Plater, *Many Servants: An Introduction to Deacons* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1991), 17.

8. See the *Book of Discipline,* ¶¶337-339.

9. *Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry,* 39-40.

10. Ibid., 41.

11. Ibid.

12. See *The Methodist Worship Book* (Peterborough, England: Methodist Publishing House, 1999), 115.

13. Ormonde Plater, *Deacons in the Liturgy* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1992), 31.

14. Plater, *Many Servants,* 133. For a delightful expansion of this theme, see pp. 131-32.

15. See *The United Methodist Hymnal,* 36.

16. See Philip H. Pfatteicher and Carlos R. Messerli, *Manual on the Liturgy* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1979).

17. *The Lutheran Book of Worship: Minister's Desk Edition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 25.

18. See *Services for the Ordering of Ministry in The United Methodist Church,* 11.

Rukudzo Murapa

Nurturing a New Generation of Leaders forAfrica: The Role of Africa University
(The 1998 Willson Lecture)

In this essay I offer some views regarding the issue of leadership in Africa and the role that Africa University can play. This is a tall order, for Africa is not a single country but a very large continent. At the threshold of the twenty-first century, the issue of leadership—its quality, effectiveness, accountability, and responsiveness—is of central importance to the nations of Africa. The people of Africa desire a better quality of life, as well as prosperity, peace, and security. This desire is just as strong now as it was more than three decades ago, when the first group of African countries gained their independence from colonial powers. In fact, given the very mixed (and in some instances dismal) social, political, and economic accomplishments of post-colonial governments since then, it may be argued that the people's desire is even stronger and more pungent today, the result of high but largely unmet expectations.

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The Legacy of Colonialism

A brief walk through the historical terrain is in order. During the period of the struggle for independence, Kwame Nkrumah of the then Gold Coast, now Ghana, called upon his people to "seek first the political kingdom . . . and all these things will be given . . . as well." Nkrumah, himself a student of divinity, planted in the people of Ghana, and indeed in the people of Africa, the conviction that the battle for independence would lead to the Promised Land—one flowing with milk and honey, where poverty would be no more and where peace and prosperity would reign forever. But, ultimately, this was not to be.

It is true that, during the period immediately following independence (the 1960s and the early 1970s), most African countries witnessed appreciable economic growth and political stability. Likewise the social sector, education, and health grew phenomenally, with primary and secondary schools built in both urban and rural areas. In my own country of Zimbabwe the number of primary schools nearly doubled in the first ten years of independence, growing from 2,401 serving 819,586 pupils to 4,501 with 2,268,960 pupils. The secondary-school level showed similar growth. In many African countries, this pattern of growth in the education sector was generally the norm. As the demand and opportunities for primary and secondary education grew, there was pressure for expansion of tertiary-level education. Each country felt the need to build its own university and other institutions of higher learning in order to develop the knowledge and skills required for national progress.

The first decade of independence in most African countries represented, therefore, a period of excitement and hope. Many felt that Africa was on the verge of a major industrial revolution; or, as Mao Zedong would say, "a leap forward." As investment in infrastructure showed signs of success, highways, electricity, and telephone lines began to tame the African terrain. The building of major hydroelectric dams, such as the Inga Dam, Cabora Bassa, Kariba, and Akosombo, seemed to usher in opportunities for agricultural development and brighten prospects for further economic prosperity.

But by the mid-1970s the bright stars of hope began to dim. Economies stagnated, and an era of economic decline set in. African countries that were once exporters of food now saw agricultural productivity fall steadily. Today most African countries are net

importers of basic food. The Food Policy Research Institute has documented that more than 25 percent of the people in Africa are currently hungry and malnourished and that tens of thousands are actually starving. In many countries, the manufacturing sector has all but collapsed, and in others it has remained static, with productivity at less than 10 percent of economic activity. The result has been rising unemployment, declining incomes, widespread poverty, increased rural-urban migration, and, of course, the inevitable social unrest.

Compounding these problems is rising population growth. Some calculations suggest that at the current rate of growth, Africa's population of about 650 million will double over the next twenty years. Lester Ventor put it more dramatically when he said, "Africa will add the equivalent of another Algeria to the continent every year for the next thirty years." This is indeed a frightening prospect. In recent years, perhaps as a result of the deteriorating economic and social conditions, we have witnessed social and political unrest followed by the outbreak of violence and interethnic warfare in several African countries, including Somalia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mozambique, Angola, the Sudan, Ethiopia, Central African Republic, the Republic of the Congo, and most recently Lesotho. And African islands like the Comoros and Malagasy have not been spared, either.

Peace is slowly returning to many of these countries, and that is encouraging. But I fear that it is only a tenuous peace—peace built on sandy ground. Until the socioeconomic and political conditions begin to improve, lasting peace remains but a hope, not a reality.

The Crisis of Poor Leadership

What went wrong? How did we move from a period of excitement to a period of disaster? There is no simple answer to this question. One can go back to the early stages of independence and question the character of the state that emerged out of the former colonial nations. To what degree could some of these colonies have been expected to function as sovereign states once independence was gained? Did they have the necessary ingredients to constitute viable states? Some have blamed international forces, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, for Africa's woes; others have argued that African economies were victims of the East/West rivalry during the Cold War.

Still others have pointed to issues of ethnicity and dictatorship as the root causes. It is quite possible that all of these arguments are correct. We do not have the space or indeed the facts necessary to explore how much each factor contributed to the political and economic decline of different African countries.

However, I wish to single out one factor: *leadership*—or, more accurately, *poor* leadership. I submit that the question of leadership is a major culprit in bringing about the dilemma I have described. If we go back to the time of the struggle for independence, we note that in most countries there was only one dominant mass movement that mobilized the population against the colonial authorities. The colonial authorities were viewed as the enemy, to be defeated and driven away. With the defeat of the colonial authority, the mass movement instantly became the ruling party and the government.

The new ruling party would not tolerate any opposition. In many countries the creation of opposition political parties was viewed as unpatriotic and was banned, and one-party rule was constitutionally entrenched. At the highest levels, the new leaders saw themselves as the ultimate authorities, there to control, impose, order, and direct. In many respects, they began to regard the new states as inextricably linked to their own survival and well-being. They would now direct the use of national resources for self-enrichment rather than national development. Important contracts would be awarded and positions filled on the basis of relations or favors rather than competence, efficiency, and benefit to the people. Corruption was rearing its ugly head. Abuse of power went unchecked as critics feared to raise their voices. Democracy was effectively proscribed. Those who dared speak against such excesses went into hiding or into exile. This led to massive loss of intellectual capital, or "brain drain," further impoverishing the countries. The public sector became a monopoly of the few, and in most countries there was no private sector to speak of.

The 1970s in Africa was the decade of military coups, just as the 1950s and 1960s had been in Asia and Latin America. Given the entrenchment of one-party rule, the military became the only force strong enough to challenge and remove those in power. But once in power, the military banned all political activities and ushered in the era of military dictatorship. It silenced any dissenting voice and was highly suspicious of the intellectual class. As a result the number of intellectuals escaping into exile grew in number as they found their way to Western Europe and North America.

Was this true of all African countries? The answer is clearly no. But the exceptions were few and far between. While it is true that the southern African region was spared the wave of military rule, it certainly had its share of one-party and one-man rule. For example, in Malawi Dr. Kamuzu Banda proclaimed himself president for life. South Africa, of course, continued to linger under apartheid. Zambia and Zimbabwe have been cited as exceptions because of their constitutionally declared systems of multiparty politics. But one can argue that even in these countries, while multiparty systems exist *de jure, de facto* one-party systems obtain. In both countries the ruling parties have been in power, sometimes under the same leadership, since independence in 1966 and 1980, respectively.

One-party systems or systems of military rule laid waste to national resources and sowed the seeds of disorder, intolerance, and division. Those in power consistently ignored the people's legitimate rights and eventually overcame even the people's expectation of ethical, efficient, and responsible leadership from those in top positions. These systems ushered in and nursed a culture of corruption, which now seems to have permeated the fabric of daily life in a significant number of countries. Over time, what exists at the top filters down into all levels of society. Corrupt leadership is alike, whether it is in business, in the church, in public service, or in politics. In every case, service and the general good of society are forgotten as leaders seek to serve themselves first.

Signs of Renewal in Africa

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War opened a new era of development worldwide. Its impact on development in Africa has already proved to be significant: witness the advocacy for human and civil rights, good governance, and the assertion of the right of civil society to play a more meaningful role in national and international affairs. We have seen the end of apartheid in South Africa and the emergence of multiracial politics in that country. In most African countries, one-party and military rule are in steady decline; instead, we are witnessing the introduction of multiparty politics and the demand for open and accountable governments. We have even begun to see heads of state take voluntary retirement; so far

we can count only three: Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Sir Kitumire Masire of Botswana, and Nelson Mandela of South Africa.

This new era promises to change dramatically the African political environment and the rules that will govern the leadership game. Here one cannot help but recall the words of John F. Kennedy, who told the Americans of his time: "It is time for a new generation of leadership to cope with new problems and new opportunities." This is equally true of Africa today.

In its 1995 report entitled "Our Global Neighborhood," the United Nations Commission on Global Governance focused on the need to cultivate a new type of leadership to deal with emerging challenges. The report noted:

> While leadership is once again urgently needed, it is leadership of a different character, in which reserves of commitment to public service are sought not only among politicians and civil servants but also in the voluntary sector, in private enterprise, and indeed throughout global civil society. [Such] leadership draws its strength . . . from solidarity much more than from authority . . . [and] operates by persuasion, co-operation, and consensus more often than by imposition and fiat.[1]

The challenge we face in Africa today is how to bring about this new type of leadership. It will be leadership that seeks to serve rather than be served; listen and consider opposing views on their merit rather than demand rote obedience and subservience from followers; facilitate and encourage people to do for themselves rather than control and restrict their rights to fully realize their potential; shun corrupt behavior and provide honest service and leadership, thus operating in a way that is transparent and accountable to constituents.

The challenge is to provide opportunities for the emergence of servant leaders. The major challenge facing African nations is that of nurturing a new generation of leaders with an appreciation of the basic mission of leadership, which is to serve. The challenge is clear and the opportunities are within our reach.

Leadership in Africa and Africa University

I believe that Africa is ready for leaders whose behavior and decisions are rooted in strong moral and social values, who listen and are accountable to the nations they serve, and who can see beyond their own needs enough to offer their people opportunities and hope for a better future. It is in this area that we at Africa University seek to make a contribution. How will this new breed of leaders emerge? It is my view that universities in Africa have a critical role to play in this regard. Africa University is particularly well suited to play this role. For one thing, it has no precedent and can, therefore, chart a whole new path. It is the only church-related, private, and international (in a pan-African sense) institution of higher learning on the continent.

Africa University has placed the issue of leadership at the heart of its mission focus. Though only in its seventh academic year, Africa University is already making a visible impact on the development of new leadership.

Africa University's mission statement speaks clearly to this commitment. Education is the fundamental means for fulfilling individual needs and personal development, achieving the goals of society, and advancing culture and the economy. The mission of Africa University is to "provide higher education of high quality, to nurture students in Christian values, and to help the nations of Africa achieve their educational and professional goals." Africa University will play a critical role in educating the new leadership of African nations. So reads our mission statement.

Each of the three features that give the University its status—being church-related, private, and international—offers significant opportunities and responsibilities which challenge Africa University to play its part in leadership development.

Africa University is church-related. Being church-related has important implications for the way Africa University approaches education and training. Our curriculum is driven by the need to provide academic programs imbued with Christian values. All students, regardless of their disciplines, are required to take a course in Christian ethics and values. In addition, we vigorously promote spiritual-life activities, worship, Bible study, and fellowship events. The chapel that has just been constructed with the assistance of the South Korean Methodist Church incorporates a Wesley Foundation. This facility will enhance fellowship and Christian values among the

students. Just as we aim to produce an individual with sound academic and intellectual attributes, so we also aim to produce an individual who will be guided by accepted ethical standards in all aspects of his or her daily life.

As I noted earlier, for a variety of reasons the economies in many African countries are not doing well because of poor leadership, lack of requisite skills, mismanagement, and, in some cases, outright corruption. These are the shortcomings we seek to address. The new African leadership must put a stop to cheating and corruption. At Africa University we place a high premium on ethics and moral values, and we seek to imbue our academic programs with these values. We aim at producing individuals who will espouse and demonstrate values of honesty, responsibility, and accountability.

Africa University is private. Its private status means that Africa University does not depend upon government funds for support. The University has to meet all of its operating expenses from its revenues, which are mainly fees paid by students. To date, the University has benefited a great deal from the support it has received from The United Methodist Church worldwide, through the General Conference. However, the University is acutely aware that such assistance is not meant to last forever. The challenge, therefore, is for the University to engage in serious thinking about how it can best strengthen its resource base in order to insure continued institutional growth. Ultimately, the challenge is to be self-reliant, and that is a good challenge. Already the University is meeting its own operating costs, the day-to-day running of the University. Payment of wages, salaries, services, books, and so forth has to be made from the University's own revenues.

A major consequence of our status as a private university of higher learning is the need for self-reliance. The principles of self-reliance and service are values that we seek to instill in the students through our programs and activities. Our academic programs emphasize the development of knowledge and skills not simply to enable students to be employable after graduation but also to help them become employment creators and employers. This requires that students be exposed to the technique of self-reliance. To put this principle into practice, the University has recently introduced a volunteer program for both staff and students to work on various projects, such as the construction of staff houses, cleaning and tending the grounds, and

planting and watering trees and gardens. The response to this idea has been most encouraging.

However, the ultimate objective is to build a sense of ownership and pride in the institution, to inculcate the spirit of community service, and to demonstrate the value of self-reliance. Good leadership must plant the seeds for the growth of a culture of self-reliance.

Africa University is international. Its international status distinguishes Africa University from sister universities through the University's deliberate policy and efforts to establish a cosmopolitan academic community. The current staff represents fourteen different nationalities. Nineteen nationalities are represented in our student body. Dr. Chombo, the minister of higher education and technology in Zimbabwe, recently characterized Africa University as a mini-United Nations. In fact, the charter of the University provides that the University strive to achieve a student-body ratio of 40 percent Zimbabweans and 60 percent students from other countries. This provides for a healthy and challenging cross-cultural learning environment. Students are encouraged to take full advantage of this unique environment and to forge close relationships among themselves. They are urged to study together, to play together, and to eat together. Through this emphasis we hope to enable students to learn about one another's countries, societies, and cultures.

We view diversity as a source of cultural enrichment and a strong foundation on which students may build a broad perspective. It allows them to engage in international issues with confidence and enhances the values of tolerance and understanding so much expected of a good leader. The more these goals are reached, the more we shall begin to realize one of the dreams of Africa University, which is to nurture a new generation of leaders, to bring African countries together, and to encourage understanding among these countries.

Africa University has recently established an Outreach Office to facilitate its capacity to carry out short-term projects and activities in various parts of the continent. This will enable the University to make an impact on a wider community and to provide programs in areas of immediate need. Through the Outreach Office, Africa University intends to draw eminent persons to its campus and to other forums across the continent to offer seminars, symposia, and workshops on such topics as leadership, governance, policy formulation and analysis, and policy utilization. The knowledge, expertise, and experiences of past leaders and senior officials in government, the

private sector, and civil society will enrich the discussions and will assist in the development of the next generation of leaders.

Already the Outreach Office is carrying out short-term training projects in emergency and disaster management and in pastoral care. Many other projects are still in the pipeline.

Conclusion

I conclude on the note that again emphasizes the crisis that we face—overcoming a tradition of poor leadership. This crisis permeates every level of every nation in Africa: the government and the various levels of bureaucracy; the private sector; civil society, including churches; and indeed the academic institutions themselves. While the crisis has its roots in the colonial period, it must find a solution in the current generation—we cannot leave it for the next generation. The issue of leadership poses serious challenges to the institutions of higher learning in Africa, and in particular to Africa University. However daunting this crisis appears, it is the one that gives Africa University its *raison d'etre*. It therefore behooves us all to stand firm and continue to give it the support it requires.

I end with a motto that has led me through time: *The odds may be great, but let our determination to surmount them be greater.*

Notes

1. See "Our Global Neighborhood: The Report of the Commission on Global Governance," chapter 1, found online at http://www.cgg.ch/CHAP1.html.

Craig C. Hill

Lessons for the First, Second, and Sixth Sundays in Lent and for Easter

Who needs Lent?

As celebrations go, Lent is a poor cousin to Advent. Both are seasons of expectation; but on a popular level, at least, Advent anticipates birth and Lent death. The former is easily preferred. Advent is a time for parties and carols and cookies, Lent for ashes and fasting and contrition. Christmastime preparation may be bothersome, but it is the work of outward provision, not inward alteration. Advent and Christmas are attractive even to people who are not Christians (which hardly can be said for Lent and Good Friday, although Easter has drawn a share of secular imitators). Positively, the season accentuates universal themes of peace, goodwill, family, and generosity; negatively, it becomes an annual excuse for indulgence and extravagance. By most accounts, Advent is fun. By almost any comparison, Lent does not stand a chance.

Modern department stores stretch Advent back all the way to September, but there is no similar move, commercial or otherwise, to extend the Lenten season. Ironically, it is our aversion to Lent that signals its importance. If religion is to be anything other than a seal on

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the status quo, its presence will be uncomfortable to those of us who do well under the present arrangement. Lent challenges us in a way that Advent does not, and our annoyance with it is telling. It gets in the way, which is precisely what most of us need most. The god we control is the god we ignore.

Of course, we can and should note that Lent concludes in Easter triumph, not in Good Friday tragedy. Accordingly, it may be viewed as a labor resulting in new life, a complementary bookend to the Advent and Christmas story. That is true, and it is important not to lose sight of God's Easter (and some day ultimate) victory; indeed, it is the central affirmation of Christian faith. At the same time, it is all too tempting to locate ourselves squarely in Easter, in its power and victory. In reality, we live with one foot in Friday and another in Sunday. Christ's triumph is fully his but now only partially our own. Some things have changed because of Christ, and some things remain to be changed. Lent and Easter present us with this irreducible eschatological tension, and they offer us a unique opportunity to reflect on the present and future character of Christian faith. That is important work, and it rightly occupies a key place in our consideration of the lectionary passages below.

Mark is the most fitting choice for Lent because it is the Gospel most sensitive to the meaning of the cross. Mark is keenly aware of the human tendency to approach religion self-interestedly, as just another method for securing the goods and status that we desire. As far as Mark is concerned, the cross slammed the door forever on that project; to follow Jesus, to be a true disciple, is to go the way of the crucified messiah. One traces that path in hope, knowing like Jesus that resurrection lies ahead; still, one must tread where he trod to get where he got. Religion is not a shortcut, and discipleship is not a pass. No wonder that we prefer both the remembrance of Christmas and the promise of Easter. It is the middle term, where our lives are lived, that is the toughest place. It is for that location that Mark would equip us. Interestingly, some scholars have speculated that Mark was written for the instruction of early Christian catechumens during the season of Lent. Whether or not this was Mark's original purpose, he could scarcely have done a better job of providing us with Lenten tutelage.

In the four lessons that follow, we shall return repeatedly to the interrelated themes of eschatological tension, the use and misuse of religion, and the nature of true discipleship. All three matters are important to the season of Lent, and all three are central to Markan

theology. First, however, it may be useful as background to our exegesis to consider the place of Mark in modern biblical interpretation.

Mark's Good News

No biblical text has received more from the hand of scholarship than the Gospel of Mark. Once thought of as a mere condensation (the *Reader's Digest* version) of Matthew, Mark is now widely regarded as the first Gospel, duplicated in form and copied in substance by both Matthew and Luke. Indeed, the author of Mark is thought by many to have conceived the very idea of gospel writing, which has various Jewish and Greco-Roman precedents but no true parallels. Not surprisingly, modern interest in the "historical Jesus" has led scholars to favor Mark above all for its historical primacy. This honor comes primarily at the expense of Matthew, whose rank has been proportionally depreciated by historical criticism. Mark also is hailed as the key to interpreting the other Synoptic Gospels, for if Mark is their primary source, we may see the ways (as it turns out, systematic and predictable) that Matthew and Luke altered their model to serve their purposes.

This change in fortune reverses Mark's historically bad press. As theology, the Gospel often was regarded as derivative, indistinct, and unimpressive. It contains less of Jesus' teaching than the other Gospels, which made it a comparatively unprofitable read. As literature, the Gospel was considered narratively crude and grammatically uncouth, its choppy Greek and awkward style evidencing to sophisticated readers its author's lack of intelligence and—less forgivable—refinement. Recent studies of Mark have altered such judgments dramatically, its author now being regarded as a far more subtle thinker and writer than earlier critics had supposed. Cleared of Matthean and Lukan alterations and additions, Markan theology is remarkably lucid and powerful. Of particular note is Mark's perception into the ironic and surprising messiahship of Jesus. Likewise, Mark's literary art is revealed as unexpectedly complex. For instance, Mark occasionally splits a story in two, inserting a second piece of narrative to interpret the first (for example, the cursing of the fig tree "sandwiches" the Temple cleansing in 11:12-26, and the denial of Peter surrounds the confession of Jesus in 14:53-72). Mark thus has become a favorite of both historical and literary critics, no

small distinction within the fragmented world of professional biblical studies.

Despite its newfound prominence, Mark remains an enigma in many ways. There are no universally accepted solutions concerning even the most basic problems of origination; for example, its date (was it written before or after the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 C.E.?), authorship, social location, and place of composition. The uncertainty surrounding such matters cautions us against relying heavily upon detailed reconstructions of the book's original setting and purpose. For all the strides that interpreters have made toward understanding this fascinating text, it is fair to assume that its mastery will always elude our grasp. Even more, its high spiritual demands will exceed the reach of all but the truest of saints. So, in matters both interpretive and devotional, Mark challenges our best effort and fullest commitment.

March 12, 2000—First Sunday in Lent
Mark 1:9-15

Gen. 9:8-17
Ps. 25:1-10
1 Pet. 3:18-22

To ponder Mark's Gospel in this season, it is best to begin at chapter 1. Among other things, this approach allows us to see, as it were, that Lent is not a surprise; in many ways, Mark is careful to anticipate the end from the beginning. Already in its opening paragraphs, the text offers insight into eschatology, religion, and discipleship, issues mentioned above in connection with Lent. All three matters are inextricably tied in Mark to the constitutional question of Jesus' identity. Already in verse 1 of chapter 1, Mark informs us that Jesus is the "Christ [messiah], the Son of God." What we readers know from the start others throughout the narrative will come to—or, more commonly, will fail to—understand. That 1:1 represents Jesus' identity truly is verified in the verses that immediately follow. The biblical prophets realized that such a one would come (vv. 2-3), as did the contemporary prophet John the Baptist (vv. 7-8). (Importantly, John predicts the coming of no "everyday messiah," but one able to "baptize with the Holy Spirit" [v. 8].) Finally and conclusively, God declares that Jesus is the "Son, the Beloved" "with [whom] I am well pleased" (v. 11). We are left with no excuse for participating in the

incomprehension that will characterize the human response to Jesus in the pages to follow, demonstrated even by his closest followers. Indeed, the ineptitude of the Markan disciples is almost comic; they are the Keystone Cops of the New Testament.

It is important to note that God's declaration that Jesus is the beloved Son with whom God is well pleased echoes the kingship passage Ps. 2:7, as well as the servant passages, Isa. 42:1 and 44:1. (In fact, the word used in the Greek translation of Isa. 42:1 [*pais*] can mean either "child" or "servant.") This juxtaposition of kingship and servanthood is at the heart of the Markan "mystery" (4:11), the very thing that the disciples could not or were unwilling to grasp. It is fitting that the only official acknowledgment of Jesus' identity, a sign that reads "The King of the Jews" (Mark 15:26), is offered at his crucifixion. Here is elevated the servant king of Israel.

Jesus' proclamation that "[t]he time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near" (1:15) would not have fallen on deaf ears. Anticipation that God would act to fulfill God's promises to Israel was intense; hope that a messiah (literally, an "anointed one") would come to redeem Israel from its misfortune was widespread (Luke 24:21). Jesus' announcement of the reign (*basileia*) of God therefore elicited a powerful, yet predictable response. Nevertheless, despite all that he may have held in common with popular expectation, even in understanding himself as the agent through whom God's eschatological purposes would be fulfilled, Jesus appears to have had very different ideas about the nature of God's "kingdom" and the method by which it would be brought into existence. In Mark, Jesus goes to extreme lengths to avoid identifying himself with the anticipated messiah. Instead, he is the anointed victim, not victor, the Son of Man who serves and suffers on behalf of all. This is a messiahship not easily or widely foreseen, an identity that even Jesus' closest followers decline repeatedly to understand, lest by such perception they might come under the hard requirement of his example. Not that the imitation of Christ should make us "victims" in the modern sense of the word (though Mark's language of the cross is often enough twisted into that shape). Is injustice simply a cross that some must bear? Surely not. Self-giving does not equal self-annihilation, and service to others does not require submission to evil. It was not passivity that got Jesus crucified.

It is important to understand that religion in much of the ancient

world was essentially a barter system by which one cut a deal with the universe to get what one wanted. Fertile crops? All it costs is the life of a sheep—or a child. Religion set the price of life's benefits and then mediated the sale. The Jewish idea that one's relationship with God is irreducibly moral is highly unusual and inexpressibly important. The Jews made animal sacrifices, to be sure, but the Temple cult provided a system of atonement, not of bribery (Pss. 40:6; 51:16-17). The notion that religion might require one to abandon—or at least to defer indefinitely—one's own good is all the more counterintuitive to the ancient (and modern?) mind. It appears that Mark wrote to Christians who approached their faith as a new means to a decidedly old set of ends. It may be that the threat of persecution revealed for the first time the costliness of their discipleship. It must have seemed to many a bad bargain. Mark establishes that authentic discipleship mirrors the genuine but seemingly paradoxical messiahship of Jesus; like Jesus, their greatness would come through service and their gain through sacrifice. It never was an easy lesson.

At the heart of Jesus' teaching is the offering of a new reality. To understand that is to comprehend a great deal of the New Testament. One way to get at the matter is to consider the human preoccupation with identity. Each one of us in our own way asks the questions, "Who am I?" and "Do I matter?" Religion extends the issue to encompass the very purposefulness of the cosmos. Is there a reason? Does anything matter? As William James put it, religion at its most basic level is the affirmation that "all is *not* vanity in this Universe."[1] From this perspective, our god is the one who tells us who we are, the one whose opinion of us we solicit and believe. In these terms, most of us worship the amorphous, undifferentiated "they": "What will they think?" "Wait until they hear about this!" "I hope they see me!" Theirs is the applause we covet, theirs the approval that justifies us, to use biblical language. But Jesus offers a different reality, the reign of God, which inverts normal human judgments, not least concerning status and identity. I am not somebody because they approve of the car that I drive or the clothes that I wear. It is God who tells me who I am; it is God who justifies. All other opinions are not only unimportant; they are, on an ultimate level, unfounded. Only the One who made me knows me truly.

It is precisely because Jesus' own identity was not in question that he was able to assume the role (and not, as the disciples seem to have feared, the status) of a servant. Compare the attitude of the disciples in

the well-known foot-washing story in John 13. Jesus was the only one in the room who knew who he was (see vv. 1, 3) and, therefore, the only one free to take up the towel and wash the feet of others. It is this great reversal, this inversion of perspectives that occupies so much of Mark's attention. In God's *basileia,* the poor are rich, the lowly are great, and the dishonored are celebrated. In truth, the gospel is an invitation to, not an inversion of, reality. It is the way things *really* are, perceived and received by faith.

The opening (even more, the "tearing") of heaven signifies that God, who had appeared distant and quiescent, is now acting decisively on behalf of humankind (Isa. 64:1; Ezek. 1:1). In this and other ways, Mark sounds the chords of biblical history and eschatology. The simple phrase "in those days" recalls myriad incidents (Gen. 6:4; Judg. 17:6; 1 Sam. 3:1; Esther 1:2; etc.) and expectations (Jer. 3:16, 31:33, 33:15; Joel 2:29; Zech. 8:23; etc.) in the Hebrew Bible. Mark was acutely conscious that the story of Jesus was both a continuation and a fulfillment of the story of Israel in the Hebrew Bible. If one is looking for a precedent for Gospel writing, one need look no further than the narratives of the Hebrew Scriptures. It is those passages that Mark deliberately extends by his chronicle.

Jesus' dramatic experience of baptism is directly followed not by his miraculous acts or authoritative preaching but by his temptation. (Testing in the wilderness is yet another biblical theme echoed in Mark; see Ex. 15:22-26; Deut. 8:11-20; Ps. 106:14; etc.) On some levels, the story is reminiscent of the account of Elijah's triumph over the priests of Baal followed by his flight into the wilderness, which included fasting and a journey of forty days (1 Kings 18–19). Of course, no rule requires that moments of spiritual insight and victory be followed by "wilderness experiences," but that is often the way of things. Moreover, success (certainly success in ministry) introduces new temptations to which the intoxicant of achievement may make one especially vulnerable. Nevertheless, we should not forget that it was the Spirit that "drove" Jesus into the wilderness, where angels ministered to him (Mark 1:12-13). The presence of temptation itself is no failure, and the tempted are not alone (1 Kings 19:11-12).

March 19, 2000—Second Sunday in Lent
Mark 8:31-38

Gen. 17:1-7, 15-16
Ps. 22:23-31
Rom. 4:13-25

Mark 8:31-38 is a key text located right at the story's epicenter, the pivot on which the whole Gospel turns. If we are to understand what Mark thought about eschatology, religion, and discipleship, there is no more important resource. In fact, it is a pardonable exaggeration to say that the whole of Mark's message appears in cameo in this and in the two other stories that parallel it.

Ancient writers commonly used repetition for emphasis. Thus the author of Acts reiterates the story of Paul's conversion twice (Acts 9:1-19, retold in 22:1-21 and 26:2-23), and, hardly drawing a breath between, repeats the story of the conversion of Cornelius from Acts 10 in Acts 11. Why? Because Acts was written at least in part to justify the inclusion of Gentiles into Israel, and so the conversions of the apostle to the Gentiles (Paul) and the first full-blooded Gentile (Cornelius) are exceedingly important. What matters is repeated. In Mark's case, there is no more important repetition than the threefold account of Jesus' passion prediction. It is striking that each prediction is followed by an uncomprehending response from the disciples, which in turn leads Jesus to teach about the nature of discipleship. Clearly, Mark is trying to tell us something.

The pattern of the three passion predictions is as follows:

1. Jesus predicts his death and resurrection to his disciples. In doing so, he reveals the character of true messiahship. He does so openly and clearly, which shows that there is no excuse for ignorance or misinterpretation. (See 8:31-32; 9:30-31; and 10:32-34.)
2. The disciples do or say something that demonstrates that they do not understand Jesus' messiahship and, therefore, misconstrue their own role as disciples. They still see things the old way and are engaged in the old enterprise of status seeking. Their obedience is self-advancement, and their discipleship a career move. (See 8:32-33; 9:32-34; and 10:35-41.)
3. Jesus calls the disciples to him (which signals the importance of

his words) and instructs them about true discipleship, which requires a reversal of their all-too-human perspective. True discipleship is modeled on the paradoxical but true messiahship of Jesus. (See 8:34-38; 9:33-37; and 10:42-45.)

In the eighth chapter of Mark, the disciples in the person of Peter profess for the first time that Jesus is the messiah (v. 29). Jesus immediately begins to teach them just what sort of messiah he is; namely, a "Son of Man" who "must undergo great suffering . . . and be killed" (v. 31). What was Peter's response? Peter "took him aside and began to rebuke him" (v. 32). It is not difficult to imagine the substance of Peter's lecture: "That is not what I had in mind!" Jesus in turn rebuked Peter, whose mind, being set on "human things," could not understand Jesus' vocation. Indeed, in seeking to divert Jesus from this path, Peter was in league with Satan (1:13). Jesus called the disciples to himself (in this case, with the crowd), and said:

> If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. (Mark 8:34-35)

Contrary to Peter's expectation, the *cross* is the way of the messiah and so the way of the messiah's followers (a poignant truth from the point of view of Peter's own martyrdom). The reversal language in each of the teaching passages is crucial. Jesus turns everything upside down. As the disciples amply demonstrate, the hardest part about following Jesus is living within Jesus' perspective, the only reality in which his words make sense, in which the sacrifices that he requires seem reasonable. The challenge to Christians is not so much to do as Christ did as it is to think as Christ thought. The doing follows.

The second passion prediction (9:30-37) is much like the first. Jesus clearly explains to the disciples what will befall him in Jerusalem. "But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him" (v. 32). The disciples' fear is repeatedly attributed to their lack of faith and understanding (4:40; 6:50; 9:32; 10:32, etc.). How thoroughly they misconstrued Jesus' intentions is revealed in the following verses:

> Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. (Mark 9:33-34)

Once again, Jesus called the Twelve and explained:

> "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me." (Mark 9:35-37)

Just in case his point is not clear, Mark repeats the pattern again in chapter 10. Jesus speaks at even greater length about his impending fate (vv. 32-34). The disciples get it by now, surely?

> James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking . . ." (Mark 10:35-38)

Jesus' exasperation (for example, in Mark 9:19) is entirely understandable. In response to this latest *non sequitur,* Jesus called the disciples to himself and said:

> "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." (Mark 10:42-45)

Mark is aware that the disciples' track record improved considerably after the resurrection (as 16:7 assumes). In a way, that makes his depiction of them during Jesus' ministry all the more intriguing.

Recent scholarship has focused on the literary power of the disciples' negative example. Naturally, it is the disciples with whom most readers would identify. Mark's depiction, which concludes in a decidedly enigmatic manner (see below), leaves the reader to say, "I can do better! I can be a true disciple." The later improvement of the disciples is not relevant to Mark's purpose; in this narrative, they stand for those who are attached to but misaligned with Jesus, who would have their will done on earth by heaven (cf. 14:36). If, as tradition holds, Mark was written for the church at Rome in a time of persecution, its message is all the more compelling. "Take up your cross" would have been disturbingly non-metaphorical to the earliest hearers of this "good news." Lent would not be so much a season as a choice.

We should not forget that the cross was a place of indescribable shame and dishonor. According to conventional wisdom, Jesus died an outlaw, spurned and repudiated not only by his society but also by his God (Gal. 3:13). To affiliate with Jesus, therefore, is to take upon oneself the weight of his humiliation and the burden of his dispossession. Nevertheless, Jesus warns that to take sides with convention is ultimately disastrous:

> "Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." (Mark 8:38)

As was said above, our god is the one to whom we turn to tell us who we are. Honor and shame are all a matter of perspective, framed within the reality that we choose to believe. Was Christ a failure? The worst ever, missing his big chance. A success? The most marvelous, "my Son, the Beloved; with [whom] I am well pleased."

April 16, 2000—Sixth Sunday in Lent (Passion/Palm Sunday)
Mark 11:1-11

Ps. 31:9-16
Ps. 118:1-2, 19-29
Isa. 50:4-9*a*
Phil. 2:5-11
Mark 14:1–15:47

With chapter 11 comes an important transition in Mark's story. From this point onward, the narrative centers on Jerusalem and Jesus' approaching death. It is fascinating, therefore, that Mark begins this section on a note not of foreboding but of triumph. The story thus serves as a dramatic contrast to all that is about to happen. Had the crowds and their leaders understood what they saw and said on that day, events would have taken a very different turn. Of course, Mark is quick to emphasize that Jesus knew what was to be and willingly journeyed toward it. Human failure is anticipated and, ironically, serves to advance God's plan for human redemption.

As with most such matters, it is impossible to say with confidence what really happened that first "Palm Sunday." Mark's account raises numerous questions. For example, commentators have noted that some of the details of the account (e.g., the branches and cries of hosanna) seem better suited to the autumn Feast of Tabernacles than to the spring festival of Passover. If so, did Mark conflate the account of the "triumphal entry" with that of Passion Week? Of greater significance is the question many scholars ask concerning the meaning of the crowd's statements. Clearly, Mark (and Jesus, for that matter; see vv. 2-3) interprets the scene as a messianic fulfillment of Zech. 9:9. But did those who shouted, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" (Mark 11:9-10) mean to announce the coming of the messiah to Jerusalem? The question arises because the demonstration appears to have been short lived and not to have attracted (at least immediate) official attention. The text may imply that Jesus entered the Temple either alone or else solely in the company of the Twelve. For these reasons, some interpreters believe that while the crowd may have hailed Jesus as a prophet, it did not understand the messianic significance of its declarations (an interpretation that might be bolstered by John 12:16, "His disciples did not understand these things at first . . ."). On balance, however, it seems more likely that Mark did intend to portray the crowd as hailing Jesus as the expected messiah, which, of course, in Markan terms Jesus is not. In favor of this interpretation is the simple fact that Jesus was arrested in three days and crucified as King of the Jews (15:2, 18-19, 26, 32), a title that echoes the crowd's speech in 11:10. Moreover, in 15:12-13 the people are asked by Pilate, "[W]hat do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?"

Obviously, the story assumes the existence of a popular (but now failed) expectation concerning Jesus. Of course, it is against just such a misconception of his messiahship that Jesus has labored throughout previous chapters. Historically, it is not difficult to believe that people anticipated great things, things even of messianic proportions, when Jesus ventured to the capital city. Finally, the identification of Jesus as the one "who comes" (11:9) is both messianic and eschatological (see below). Therefore, at least within the context of Mark's story, it seems likely that the crowds welcomed Jesus as the messiah.

If so, one may well ask: Is there a more paradoxical holiday than Palm Sunday? In most of our services, worshipers symbolically join the crowds hailing Jesus. Often, palm branches are distributed to children, who may sing songs of hosanna to the king. It is a colorful, delightful, and memorable pageant. As a child in Illinois, where palm branches were hardly an everyday possession, I felt uniquely and physically connected to the Jesus story each Palm Sunday (gold, frankincense, and myrrh being notably absent from our Christmas celebrations). Liturgically, we were encouraged to become part of the crowd.

Unfortunately for our symbolism, the crowd got it wrong. It was not Jesus whom they celebrated that day but their *projection* of him as conquering hero. In this fact, the crowds fit the Markan pattern precisely. Like Peter, they truly confess Jesus but do not comprehend the actual truth of their confession. Indeed, he is "blessed . . . the one who comes in the name of the Lord!" (v. 9). His advent does portend the "coming kingdom of . . . David!" (v. 10). But nothing occurs as they expect, and so they conclude that nothing has occurred (15:8-15). It is a religious and eschatological miscalculation. Jesus disappoints, and the penalty is severe.

It is clear that Mark meant to show that it was Jesus' own intention to fulfil Zech. 9:9 (and, with it, Gen. 49:8-12). Otherwise, the lengthy account in 11:2-6 is without explanation. Several of the story's particulars are worth noting. First, Jesus rides a colt (presumably of a donkey, a point made explicit in Matt. 21:2 and John 12:14), not a horse, which accords perfectly with his understanding of messiahship. He comes to the city "humble and riding on a donkey" (Zech. 9:9). Second, it is important that the colt had "never been ridden" (v. 2). This indicates that the animal was sacred, set apart from everyday use for God's service (see Num. 19:2; Deut. 21:3; 1 Sam. 6:7). Thus the passage has both kingly and priestly overtones, recalling Jesus' role as the (suffering) servant king. Also interesting—and somewhat puzzling—are the instructions given to the

disciples concerning the likely objection, "Why are you doing this?" The narrative appears to assume that prior arrangements had been made with the owner of the colt; the disciples explain their intentions only to bystanders. Above all, the story assures readers of the deliberateness of Jesus and the purposefulness of God. Everything happens as planned, as foretold. It would be easy to think that all is about to go badly wrong, but that is not the case.

The story ends on an unexpectedly tranquil note. Jesus goes to the Temple, surveys it, and, in view of the late hour, departs. Superficially, verse 11 reads like a postcard from a disappointed tourist. But Jesus is no sightseer, and his inspection of the Temple is complete, as the remainder of chapter 11 demonstrates. The next event in Mark's narrative is the cursing of the fig tree, which surrounds and interprets the story of the cleansing of the Temple. The entirety of chapter 11 thus seems to harken back to the prophecy of Mal. 3:1-3:

> [T]he Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness.

Jesus is indeed "the one who comes" (11:9), in whom the people delight, but who could anticipate—and endure—his coming? In this chapter, Mark again confronts us with the problem of using religion to advance human ends, the danger of collapsing the present eschatological tension, and the need for holding true to the high calling of Christian discipleship.

April 23, 2000—Easter Day
Mark 16:1-8

Acts 10:34-43
Ps. 118:1-2, 14-24
1 Cor. 15:1-11

We come to Easter, and we expect Mark to let us off the hook. He will not. In a sense, Easter concludes but does not complete Lent. The costly discipleship, the eschatological tension, the challenge to religious comfort and power that typify Mark's Lenten message are not to be undone, even by Easter.

On the basis of chapter 16 alone, Mark could claim the title "Most Enigmatic Gospel." The narrative began oddly and abruptly, and so it ends. It is not surprising that Matthew and Luke felt compelled to affix to Mark's beginning the story of Christ's birth and to tack onto Mark's ending stories of the resurrection appearances. In between, both authors smooth over Mark's rocky syntax and jerky narration. Think of Mark as AM radio and Matthew/Luke as FM. Mark is dynamic and disconcerting as talk radio; by comparison, Luke, in particular, sounds like a NPR documentary, smooth and scripted.

Every good commentary gives substantial attention to the textual problem of the Markan ending. In a nutshell, it appears that vv. 9ff. were not part of Mark's original Gospel. They are missing from the best manuscripts (for example, *Sinaiticus* and *Vaticanus*) and were disclaimed by some of the early church's leading scholars, including Eusebius and Jerome. It is worth noting that two separate additions to Mark have been preserved, the so-called shorter and longer endings. Both texts appear to have been written to solve the "problem" of Mark's ambiguous conclusion. Theoretically, it is possible that the Gospel did extend beyond v. 8 but that its conclusion was lost. Supporters of this view point out that a scroll's final section, its outside roll, was most vulnerable to damage. But this is more special pleading than explanation. Were the original scroll damaged, would it not have been replaced as nearly and as quickly as possible? (The two known endings qualify on neither count.) The safest approach is to deal with the ending that we actually possess; namely, 16:1-8.

Mark knows that the disciples, Peter in particular, were rehabilitated after the resurrection (see both 14:28-29 and 16:7), but he deliberately stops the story just short of that outcome. The consensus amongst interpreters is that Mark ends where it does to encourage readers to enter the story for themselves. Will they prove to be true disciples? Were the narrator to tell of the restoration and subsequent works of Peter & Company, the effect would be lost, especially since the faith of the disciples was fortified by Christ's resurrection appearances. Mark's readers hear the testimony that "he has been raised" but also must face the fact that "he is not here"

(16:6). How will they respond? Clearly, Mark intends that they should assume the mantle of discipleship that Jesus so carefully explained and, in his own self-giving, so faithfully modeled.

A cursory reading of this Gospel might lead one to conclude that Mark did not believe in the resurrection or, somewhat less extreme, in the resurrection appearances of Christ. Beyond question, Mark believed in both. Three times Jesus predicted not only his death but also his resurrection. As we have already seen, the resurrection is announced by the "young man" at the tomb, and the Galilean resurrection appearances are foretold in both 14:28-29 and 16:7. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that the resurrection is de-emphasized, which is no accident. It is interesting in this respect to compare the Gospels of Mark and John. In Mark, there is much cross (including Jesus' anguished prayer at Gethsemane and cry of dereliction at Golgotha) but comparatively little resurrection. In John, there is much resurrection (including eternal life as a present reality and the melding of Jesus' crucifixion and "glorification") but comparatively little cross. In large part, this difference is a function of the differing eschatological perspectives of the two authors. Mark has a more future ("not yet") and John a more realized ("already") eschatology. For Mark, the paradigm of present Christian reality is the cross (8:34). Here and now, life is tough, and God may seem absent. For John, the dominant symbol is the resurrection, in which Christians already share substantially. Typically, future eschatologies emphasize the example of Christ, the imperfection of all human (including Christian) knowledge and obedience, and the vast distance between ourselves and God. Those on the realized-eschatology side talk more about empowerment in Christ, absolute truth and complete submission, and the activity and immediacy of the Spirit. Historically, the church has swung from one to the other of these perspectives. John Wesley could be described as a reformer who attempted to pull stolidly futurist Anglicanism over to the side of a more vital, realized eschatology, complete with divine assurance, charismatic empowerment, and Christian perfectionism.

Those with a strongly realized eschatology accentuate faith's present possessions, which, for some, include healing and financial prosperity. The farther one goes down that road, the more tempting it becomes to transform Christianity into just another god-as-vending-machine religion, just another means to an end. This was precisely the problem that Paul encountered at Corinth. Spiritual gifts and divine visitations had became status markers (1

Cor. 1:12; 3:1-9, etc.). Interestingly, Paul challenges the Corinthians' eschatological pretense by juxtaposing it with his own, more "futurist" perspective (see 1 Cor. 4:8-13).

One could (and some do) speculate that Mark wrote to counter a quasi-Johannine view of Christ. The further one takes that argument, the less convincing it becomes, both historically and theologically. The better comparison is between the Markan and Corinthian churches. The Corinthians' thinking had been revised, not yet reversed, by Christ. They were still babes who knew only human things; they were still caught in the old reality (1 Cor. 3:1). This is not a group to whom one must write about resurrection power; this bunch needs the cross (see 1 Cor. 1:18–2:5). Such may very well have been the case in Mark's church—and all the more so, if persecution threatened.

This is not an argument for the triumph of future over realized eschatology. Too much sun makes a desert, and too much future eschatology makes a deist. At some point along that trajectory, God becomes so absent as to be irrelevant. At such a moment, we need a Wesley to remind us that God is knowable and active. But in divers times and places, Christianity has erred on the opposite side, not least in our day and culture. For those of us who would use Christ, who would possess the power and prestige that he renounced, Mark's Gospel is potent medicine and vital remedy. From these pages, the servant king calls us to be his true disciples. And he said, "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!" (Mark 4:9).

Notes

1. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 39.

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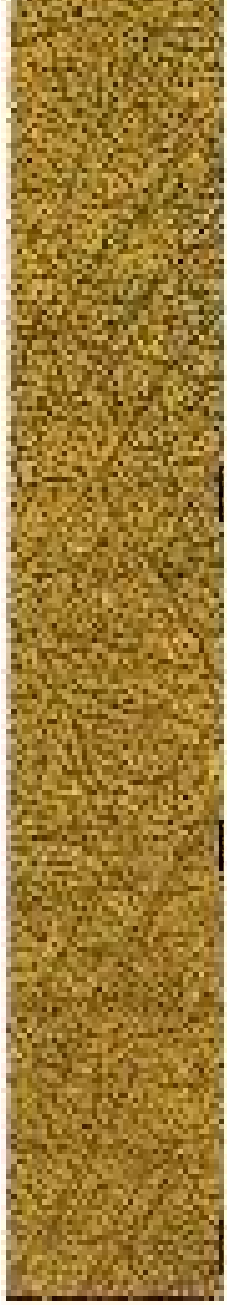

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