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EDITOR'S NOTE

It is impossible in one issue of the *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* to convey adequately the importance of two people whose lives, ministries, and scholarly contribution have measured as significantly as have Paul Hoon's and Edmund Steimle's; indeed, it is in the inseparability of these three areas of effort that their success resides. With this issue, dedicated to worship and homiletics, we do seek, however, to glimpse the range of thought and the generation of ministry they have promoted. We recall the presence of Professors Hoon and Steimle here at Union Seminary by requesting two of their former students to indicate the paths on which their work was set by virtue of their professor's influence. We then call upon these two professors emeriti, who demonstrate in their own words the ongoing potency and import of their current work in retirement.

Several book reviews have been gathered which reflect recent investigations into the life of the church and its dependence upon matters liturgic and homiletic.

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In an offbeat aside to this writer, one of Paul Hoon’s sometime colleagues, Professor Cyril C. Richardson, recently remarked that liturgical reform and a visit to the dentist’s office were similar in that both evoked considerable pain! He was reflecting well the experience of many churches and denominations today. For that experience, with all its promise as well as pain, much of the Protestant Church in the United States is in the profound debt of Paul W. Hoon. His unique ministry over many years has been to clear a way for the reshaping and reforming of worship in churches of the so-called “Free” or non-liturgical traditions. As one of their earliest and most serious liturgical scholars he has mightily assisted the ministry of Word and Sacrament in their midst. It is the purpose of this article, retrospective especially of the writer’s own recent professional experience in the shaping of worship, and prospective of an emerging pattern, to sketch the dimensions and directions of this liturgical revolution throughout the ecumenical church.

We cannot do better than to take as a text for such an essay Paul Hoon’s own words in the Preface to his magnificent theology of worship, The Integrity of Worship: “our ecumenical time is perforce a liturgical time... the road to reunion starts more truly from altar, pew, pulpit, and font than from headquarters in Geneva or Rome...”

The point of this article will be to probe some of the liturgical content involved in “bring[ing] together both Catholic substance and Protestant principle and Protestant substance and Catholic principle.” If this intention can be found to be congruent with the information advanced and its interpretation, it may begin to appear that this conjoining of ecumenical and liturgical progress by Professor Hoon is both prophetic and promising. It might even be said that the richest fruit of ecumenical activity and the ultimate focus of its coming to fruition will be found in the emerging consensus in things liturgical, including such aspects as style and substance of both the dominical sacraments, new disciplines, and doctrines both of Baptism and of Eucharist which circumvent traditional battles about the age of baptism and the mode of communion, as well as a new perspective on ministry that such an issue as the ordination of women is bringing to light. So it is not surprising

2 Ibid., p. 17.
that as of this writing—Advent, 1975—the Consultation on Church Union is focusing deliberately on two liturgical and disciplinary matters as it encourages the generating of local ecumenical communities: (1) the implications of mutual recognition of Baptism and therefore of membership, and (2) setting acceptable rubrical, theological, and canonical guidelines for intercommunion.

The only particular contribution this writer would presume to make to a discussion fully mastered and expanded by such eminences as Hoon and Richardson, is his perspective on the recent liturgical scene from the bureaucratic splendor of 475 Riverside Drive where he served for five years as the liturgical officer of the United and Southern Presbyterian Churches, and, in addition, his more recent opportunity to assemble the experiences, conflicts, and pain of these years in such a way as to provide guidance for some brave students at Union Theological Seminary who, having no Paul Hoon on the horizon, elected a course with this one of his students, filling in as a Visiting Lecturer to teach “Worship Today in Theology and Practice.” One purpose of this course was to examine the diverse traditions of worship today so as to discover common problems and directions in an historical moment which can only be described as frighteningly, puzzlingly, and excitingly creative. Clearly the answer to the question in the title “Is there an emerging ecumenical consensus...?” is going to be Yes. The way to this answer will be to delineate first the elements of what we might call “A Creative Consensus.” This will include an analysis of both the structure and style of liturgical action. Next a look will be taken at “The Structures of Creativity,” ecumenical and professional. Thirdly, “Some Critical Issues” will be identified which pose most serious questions for ecclesiology, canon law, and the church’s liturgical artists. Finally, some conclusions will be drawn that threaten to turn the liturgical question, as it shapes and reforms the worshipping community, inside out; so as to lead inevitably to the imperatives which prompted Paul Hoon, toward the end of The Integrity of Worship to conclude that “the question of liturgical action must be seen as an ethical question.” Here he turned to another of his former colleagues, Paul Lehmann, whose own formulation of the same point led him to speak of the eucharistic community as “a laboratory of maturity” and “the foretaste and the sign in the world that God has always been and is contemporaneously doing what it takes to make and to keep human life human.”

A Creative Consensus

The structural cornerstone of a developing consensus among the principle Western rites is the historic Word-Sacrament pairing for the Lord’s Day assembly. As Howard Hageman once pointed out to this writer, the extraordinary thing about liturgical history is that even though the duality of Word and sacrament has always universally been defined as the norm it has rarely if ever been practiced as such by most churches. Though this might suggest that it is an inadequate norm, the facts of today’s liturgical experience belie such a conclusion. In recent years, North American Christians have seen their Ro-

3 Ibid., p. 327.
man, Episcopal, Lutheran, Presbyterian, and Methodist churches produce rites in modern English for the principal service of the Lord's Day. In every case, the assumption is made that ideally these rites will include both a liturgy of the Word and a eucharistic celebration, in that order. Add to this the continuing practice of the Disciples' churches—although the pairing is not always in that order—and it becomes a nearly unanimous consensus, in norm if not yet in practice.

Concerning this consensus a few comments might be made. As the consensus is arising in the context of a widespread attempt to break open the hegemony, if not the near-tyranny, of verbalism and intellectualism in Protestant worship, it is instructive that sacramental action is being emphasized. This is doubly important due to the danger of using other media and the senses of touch, smell, etc., to reinforce the non-sacramental and traditional Protestant sermon-centeredness. This is to say that it would only compound Protestantism's liturgical problems: liturgical drama, dance, and graphics to usurp or upstage the sacraments as the church's true and most authentic multimedia experiences.

The other side of this duality of Word and sacrament (idea-event, individual-corporate, verbal-sensual) is the extraordinary effort among Roman Catholics to develop a serious tradition and practice of preaching Biblical homilies. This has produced an entirely new genre of literature for the clergy, including weekly homily services and hard and soft-bound exegetical and homiletical aids geared to the new three-year Roman Lectionary (of which more later). Inevitably this will produce a new sermonic style and even begin to affect the traditional oratorical, topical type of preaching of Protestant clergy. The effects of this upon Catholic worship are not measurable yet, but so widespread is the development that Catholic commentators already worry about "theme-itis" in Mass preparation and the increasing "Calvinism" of Catholic worship. Thus: "Pius XI remarked that spiritually we are all Semites; the student of modern Roman Catholic liturgy might well add that liturgically we are all Calvinists."

The finest possibility for this new pairing of sermon and sacrament would be for a new style of liturgical preaching to develop alongside a eucharist that regularly reflected in text and ceremonial the specific Biblical material of the day, carrying yet further the system of propers which the Latin Mass employed. Thus Professor Catherine Gonzalez of the Presbyterian Church is now advocating a flexibility and freedom in eucharistic worship wherein even the manner of receiving the bread and wine and the mood or attitude


of the people would reflect the particular Biblical message and metaphors of the day's readings and homily.

The musical effects of the Word-sacrament structure are worth noting also. Just as Catholic congregations begin to learn a whole corpus of traditional Protestant hymns and modern Psalm settings, Protestant people are becoming as used to service music and sung responses as their Anglican cousins have been for four hundred years.

Another structural effect of the Word-sacrament norm is to be seen in the increasing use of an ante-communion order for non-sacramental occasions. This tends to "contain" the sermon within the order of worship rather than to relegate prayers, readings, and singing into a shapeless series of "preliminaries" to it, as in Morning Prayer and Sermon, or the usual Protestant "hymn sandwich" culminating in the sermon which in some cases is followed by nothing more than a hymn, blessing, and postlude.

Is this to say that Word-sacrament worship is less Biblical or less evangelical than it used to be? Not necessarily. To say that the sermon is less climactic or central is certainly not to denigrate the scriptures. (A good deal of preaching itself does as much: not all that is homiletical is either evangelical or exegetical!)

At the same time, both sides of the Western ecclesiastical divide are learning better how to do the eucharist. As Protestants celebrate it more frequently, it is being done more simply, more joyfully, more corporately. As Catholics begin to receive "under both kinds," and more informally, they discover more of the meal-like character of the rite.

Thus both Word and sacrament in their new conjunction and ceremonial development are being changed and reshaped. Considering the above-mentioned credibility gap of the Word-sacrament norm, this reforming is long overdue, longer even than four hundred years.

Another aspect of this new and creative ecumenical consensus is the temporal and Biblical context and content for this celebration. James F. White, one of Paul Hoon's most gifted students, in his excellent primer of the liturgical movement today, New Forms of Worship, describes the celebration of time as one element of a fourfold "canon of Christian worship." Temporal concern is expressed in the increasing use of the twin structures of the Christian Year and a lectionary related to it. The publication by the Roman Church of its new three-year Lectionary (years A, B, and C) has not only revolutionized the reading of the Bible at Mass, but also provided the occasion for a totally new ecumenical experience. Already that same lectionary has been adopted, in slightly varied recensions, and with varied degrees of required use, by the Episcopal, Lutheran, Presbyterian, and Methodist Churches, the United Church of Christ and the Consultation on Church Union.

The experience of sharing the same lessons and feast days by most of the churches of any given community in the United States has given rise to shared ecumenical musical programs and professionals and weekly exegetical conversations among the clergy. It also provides what may turn out to be the most potent ecumenical symbol operative in local commun-

8 White, p. 61.
ities. Even as Protestant churches begin to familiarize themselves with the classic double trinity of seasons: Advent-Christmas-Epiphany and Lent-Easter-Pentecost, the Catholic Church is struggling to re-emphasize this Christological calendar over the more traditional and popular sequences of saints’ days and theological and Marian feasts, and to redirect eucharistic piety from its daily, Low, non-communicating Mass tradition to the weekly, Lord’s Day, parish-wide Eucharist.

At the same time as this Christological structure provides Catholics with an evangelical center it encourages Protestants to make use of the traditional color symbolism and parish-domestic para-liturgies associated with the succession of feasts, fasts, and seasons. Furthermore, it suggests a succession and style of homilies which are new to priest and minister alike. It also furnishes a link to musical planning and performance that brings the anthem and instrumental music into far better coordination with scripture and sermon. (The author recalls, unhappily, a Sunday not so many years ago in a leading Presbyterian Church when the clergy were celebrating Pentecost and the musicians, Memorial Day.)

Because the use of set lections and Sundays seems to many Protestant clergy to be a threatening constraint, they are finding that the “Year” itself is only a half-year, the balance of Sundays (Pentecost-Trinity, and to a lesser extent, Epiphany, the old “green Sundays”), providing times to extemporize the lections and to work with topical or theological series of sermons.

The principal Sundays of the Year are becoming a natural set of occasions for increasing the frequency of the celebration of Holy Communion, and for tying its meaning and style to a diverse yet Christological succession of days which has infinitely more meaning than the unimaginative and secular quarterly timing of Presbyterian celebrations—monthly among many Lutherans and Episcopalians (where it is not the principal service every week).

The matter of participation. In the context of this emphasis upon structure and liturgical texts, another side altogether of this emerging ecumenical consensus needs description. This is the matter of participation. There are at least four ways in which this word identifies some new realities in the ecumenical liturgical picture.

The planning of liturgical event has, the Reformation notwithstanding, remained for Protestants entirely in the hands of the ordained ministry. Needless to say, the same has been true of Roman Catholic worship. We stand today however at the threshold of an entirely different situation. On both sides of the Reformation “fence” there is an astonishing proliferation of the parish liturgy committee or commission. On the Protestant side this is usually associated with an alternate, or early, Sunday service known variously as “contemporary,” “experimental” or “family” worship. The clergy may or may not have much of a role in this. Inevitably the musical style is less classic and hymnologically oriented and becomes more informal and folk-like. Sermon becomes conversation and Biblical readings are augmented with non-scriptural material. Interestingly enough there is often a greater emphasis on eucharistic celebration. Prayer tends
to be more specific, corporate, and life-related. On the Catholic side this process is more often related to one of the regular Sunday masses, and has the benefit of more professional participation in the persons of nuns and non-ordained teachers. Because of the invariable eucharistic center and the lesser place of the sermon (by contrast with the Protestant situation), the liturgical work of this group often will center around a theme, sometimes, but not always suggested by the Sunday’s lessons. This process has had as a resource a rather controversial device known as the “missal-ette”, namely, cheaply printed weekly people’s mass guides with suggested music and other liturgical materials. Among the better guides for the use of such committees is the Liturgy Committee Handbook published by the Liturgical Conference.  

This process for planning has already produced much soul-searching among clergy and professional musicians and not a little controversy within the parish. Often, after an initial burst of enthusiasm, the members of such a group find the process too time-consuming and exhausting, and soon settle for a more modest agenda of working on one Sunday per month, or on special festivals or services for special congregations, such as youth or children. But it also produces in congregations a sense of closeness to and aliveness in worship which is a rebuke to traditional clerical imperialism. It can also provide a serious cleric with his or her best sounding board for sermon-homily preparation.

The presiding function or presidency is also being more widely shared. The very word “presidency” (an exceedingly ancient one in ecclesiastical practice) suggests a diversity of leadership which is at least slightly related to St. Paul’s expectations for the liturgical life in Corinth: “let everyone be ready with a psalm or sermon or a revelation. . .” (1 Cor. 14:26). In Roman liturgies this shared presidency involves a number of lay or secondary ministries such as lector, cantor, commentator, and homilist. But the priest or celebrant’s position is none the less serious, indeed more so, and is symbolized by the chair, prominently placed, from which he presides and oftenpreaches. This shared ministry or ministries is also providing access to liturgical leadership by such non-ordained persons as women, religious and secular.

Most new Protestant liturgies call for lay leadership wherever possible, and of course this is quite traditional for the lector function in the Episcopal Church and even as celebrant in Disciples’ churches. Other features such as parish notices, prayers of the people, denominational emphases, and appeals; and certain musical functions or children’s sermons are often shared.

Just as in the case of the planning process, this increased and widened participation in leadership effectively relates liturgical action more closely and convincingly to all the people of God.

“Sensual” participation must also be noted. As mentioned above, increased sacramental life is both effect and cause of a new sensitivity for the diverse ways in which the laos ‘do their thing’. From increased use of congregational music, spoken responses, and even extended periods of silence, through the whole range of the human senses, the vocabulary of particip-

ation is being amplified. This can often lead to Baal-like "celebrations of life" which fail to discriminate between human self-gloryification or narcissism and a discreet praising the Lord with "all that is in me" (Ps. 103:1). On the other hand it must be admitted that Protestantism's avoidance of the visual, graphic, tactual, and emotional (often out of a fear of revivalism) has been an unfortunately large element in the sterility and coldness of its worship and its lack of appeal especially to the young.

Another characteristic of this new appeal to the senses is that its goal is markedly different from the traditional use of classical or "High art" such as gothic vaults, incense, and impressive organ and choral music, in that its intent is less to provide a sense of awe or transcendence (and this esthetic experience is often what is actually being lamented by those who contend that transcendence is missing from contemporary worship) than to aid the communications and participation concerns of liturgy.

This same care for communicability in liturgy is of course much of the purpose of the single most controversial aspect of participatory liturgy, that is, the use of modern English wherever possible. Virtually every major tradition in the English-speaking world which has any liturgical texts, either required or optional, has now opted for the use of contemporary English, including such vocabulary translations as "you" for "thee" when addressing the Deity, exchanging Anglo-Saxon words for Latin-rooted ones and such syntactical matters as abandonment of the relative clause structure and balanced modifiers, phrases, and clauses of the Anglican Prayer Book style. It is of course in this family of churches that ensuing strife is greatest, in that it alone has an inflexible, required set of liturgical texts which were set in Elizabethan English. Other Protestant churches, apart from some Lutheran denominations, although they have tended to use the same archaic English, did not have a set text. And the Roman Church was able to "leapfrog" from Latin to contemporary English, even though the influence of Protestantism has been largely responsible for retention of the traditional language of the Lord's Prayer.

One ironic and somewhat contradictory result of this revolution in language has been to complicate yet another attempt to communicate liturgically: that of the Christian feminist movement. Its rejection of the generic use of masculine words to refer to the people of God ("man," "mankind," "brothers," etc.) has had more trouble with contemporary language (ipso facto specific, and therefore sex specific) than it would have had with more classical English (to say nothing of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, in that they are inflected languages).

Informality in liturgical style is also developing as a means of participation. Although spontaneity in itself can be remarkably unproductive liturgically, there is undoubtedly a considerable need for it, especially as worship does take on a more structured character in terms of text and temporal context. This is achieved by opening up prayers to spoken contributions from members of the congregation, or providing times of reflection upon the sermon or homily within the service. Parish announcements or local concerns also are voiced often in a spontaneous way.

Informality however can be expressed more subtly, in terms not of set,
open moments in the liturgy, but by means of the relaxing of the cold, formal atmosphere most Christians outside the black, evangelical, or pentecostal traditions assume to be normative. As children are increasingly brought into public worship, even to participation in the Eucharist, this becomes an increasingly pressing matter.

It is possible to trace much of the formality of Protestant worship to cultural expectations of certain classes of North Americans or to a necessary propping up of what is essentially a non-structured or non-liturgical service. Further, if liturgy has been reduced to a clerical monologue, broken only by a few hymns or choral contributions, it stands to reason that the only possible atmosphere within which such can happen is utter and respectful silence. But as the communications' media become more varied, and the introduction of new texts and tunes increases, another mood becomes necessary which is less inflexible and allows for moments of rehearsal, surprise, repetition, and commentary. The Roman use of an "instructed liturgy" comes to mind in this connection. It is also the case, however, that precisely as worship takes on a more structured character in terms of texts, Word-sacrament pairing, Christian Year, and lectionary-control, there is not only the need for a measure of informality but the freedom for it. (It has often been the "highest" churches’ rites which have best encouraged experimentation, innovation, and participation.)

It may be that today's ecumenical movement will produce an entirely new liturgical style: a structured informality, in contrast to what has characterized much of Protestantism: formalized dis-order. This could provide a very broad meeting ground for traditions which at one time were known as "liturgical" and "non-liturgical."

Ministration and instruction. The effect of this consensus in structures and participatory quality is to free liturgy for two functions which increasingly are devolving upon worship, if only because the structures which formerly served them have been coming apart at the seams. They are respectively: the pastoral and the catechetical.

As worship becomes more open to lay leadership and spontaneous participation it becomes more able to serve as the focus for pastoral concern and expression. Matters of deep personal concern and feeling may be expressed and acknowledged by the whole community. As the Roman communion begins to look to corporate worship as a time for common reconciliation to replace the collapsing confessional, the use of unison confessions and the exchange of peace makes considerable sense. With the use of modern liturgical and musical texts there is far greater possibility of celebrating personal and social experiences which has always been the "stuff" of pastoral care. The simple technique of naming persons in prayers for the sick or troubled broadens the pastoral dimensions of the congregation's liturgical life. At the same time an increasing use of sacramentals and the senses in worship, as in anointing, or laying on of hands, or standing and kneeling for prayer, or ablutions, performs far better many pastoral functions than if they were restricted to the ministrations of one clerical person.

The nurturing or catechetical function of liturgy is nothing new. Only
recent Protestantism, in the Sunday school, and Catholicism in the parish school, have seriously attempted to convey the faith "from one generation to another" primarily in a school rather than in the home and in the liturgy. Clearly this school-centeredness amounts to a confession of failure at the other two points. But as now the schools too seem to be slipping, perhaps a new look has to be taken at the ancient focus of catechesis in liturgy. Everything that has been observed thus far about current ecumenical liturgical directions suggests that it might be able to handle this role again.

The use both of classical texts, contemporary language, a wide spectrum of communications arts, and of a participatory, informal style should encourage the catechetical possibility. At a strictly practical level, the mere use of a calendar and lectionary is a vast assistance to the integrating of Sunday educational and liturgical occasions. The same is true with regard to music. And as calendar-lectionary become ecumenically accepted there appears the significant possibility of cooperative use of trained educators and musicians, as well as of printed materials.

Finally in respect to catechesis, the functioning of worship in this way will help to break down one of the most unfortunate and unreal distinctions in congregations today: the fiction that it is the young only who are in need of such basic training in the elements of faith.

This then will have to suffice, in an article of these dimensions, as a cursory description of what seems to be a serious consensus arising out of a fruitful interplay of the liturgical and ecumenical movements. It may be too soon to anticipate widespread church unity because of this interplay, but the kind of subtle similarities it might produce in many communities may yet result in the stealthy appearance "as a thief in the night" of a measure and experience of unity which will be more significant than all the bureaucratic efforts of denominational carpenters. This will be aided and abetted by a number of ecumenical structures and organizations, however, which are already giving shape to this liturgical consensus. To an enumeration of some of these we now may turn.

Some Structures of Creativity

In an impressive way, form and substance are being given to what may be ascribed to the breathing of the Spirit. There are now a number of interdenominational bodies which are channels for the formation of the kind of consensus just described. In enumerating them there may be concrete evidence of progress made and directions anticipated.

The Roman Catholic Church has tackled the linguistic question by assembling a group known as the International Committee on English in the Liturgy (ICEL) which functions in North America out of the offices of the Bishops' Secretariat for the Liturgy.10 In turn this effort brought into being an ecumenical body known as the International Consultation on English Texts (ICET) which has recently published modern English texts for the Lord's Prayer, the creeds, the Ordinary of the Mass, and several canticles.11 Provi-

10 The Bishops' Secretariat for the Liturgy, 1330 Massachusetts Ave., Washington, D.C. 20005.
sional versions of some of these texts have already found their way into the liturgical books of a number of the participating churches.

The American section of ICET has a continuing existence as a body known as the Consultation on Common Texts (CCT). Its principal work more recently has been to prepare for publication in 1976 a selection of Psalms for use at the Eucharist, in a translation which is designed explicitly for liturgical use (unlike those contained in any of the new Biblical translations). The Episcopalian liturgiologist, Professor Massey H. Shepherd, Jr., is the translator. If this meets with wide acceptance the CCT hopes to proceed to the publication of the entire Psalter and the commissioning of musical systems or settings.

Here in the United States the Consultation on Church Union (COCU) has had for several years a Commission on Worship, made up of two representatives from each participating denomination and observers from the Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and American Baptist Churches. This group has prepared worship for COCU’s plenary meetings and published two important rites: one for Word and Sacrament and the other for Baptism. The latter includes an excellent commentary and extensive bibliography and is designed to be used for the baptism of infants or of adults. The Commission is now working on “Another Order” for Word and Sacrament, the intention being to produce a rite less verbal and European than the first, and drawing more on the experience of COCU’s black constituency.

Many of the COCU Commission members meet again, at least annually, in a new organization with a most apt acronym, the Association of Worship Executives (AWE!). This is a forum for exchanging denominational programs and resources in this field of increasingly common problems and strategies.

A somewhat parallel but more specialized body is the Consultation on Ecumenical Hymnody which after several years’ work is about to publish a hymnal of 150-200 selections generally accepted by most American churches. Its administrative center has been that of the American Lutheran Church in Minneapolis.

Some unofficial denominational groups have also become ecumenically oriented and interested, such as the Liturgical Conference (originally and predominantly Roman Catholic), Associated Parishes, and the Lutheran Society for Worship, Music, and the Arts, which publishes the excellent journal, “Response.” And it should be mentioned that the three major Lutheran Churches have been able to work together in this area, cooperating in the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship (ILCW), which has published an excellent series of paperbound liturgical volumes, Contemporary Worship, Nos. 1-8. Its current project is production within the next few years of an entirely new Hymnal and Service Book.

In like manner the two largest Presbyterian Churches have been able to cooperate in a joint venture, the Joint Office of Worship and Music, of which

13 Associated Parishes, P.O. Box 5562, Washington, D.C. 20016.
14 Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, Indiana 46383.
this writer has been Director for five years. This office\textsuperscript{16} publishes a quarterly journal “Reformed Liturgy and Music” which also goes to the members of the Presbyterian Association of Musicians, a voluntary organization which sponsors an annual Conference on Worship and Music at Montreal, North Carolina and some Western center during the summer.

To this list should be added a number of professional bodies which cross denominational lines. In the musical field there are the American Guild of Organists (AGO) and the Choristers’ Guild. For architects there is the Guild for Religious Architecture, the Commission on Church Planning and Architecture, and a related group, the Stained Glass Association of America.

Neither space nor knowledgeability permits the listing of the many denominational, local, and personally organized centers for the production of music, liturgies, and techniques of renewal. This very proliferation, however, testifies to the extraordinary explosion of interest in this field. However unpredictable the quality of much of this effort, it is at least a sign that for all the churches, after many years and centuries of the \textit{status quo}, the liturgical question is “up” and open.

\section*{Some Critical Issues}

So similar is much that is happening in many churches that even the problems of the day have about them a certain sameness. In at least five significant areas, penetrating and radical questions are being raised which promise seriously to change some patterns and perhaps create some new ones. Naturally the Gospel sacraments are the focus in two of these. But before describing each in detail a general theological comment is in order.

There probably has not been such a moment of raising prior questions for sacramental theology in the Western Church as at the present time, except perhaps that of the sixteenth-century Reformation. The mid-twentieth century has seen both Catholic and Protestant theologians going back over every step of the way that has characterized disciplined thinking about Baptism and the Supper: What are the primitive roots of sacramental theology? Does the evangelical Church even need sacraments after Pentecost? Thus Karl Barth in the concluding fragment of the \textit{Church Dogmatics}.\textsuperscript{17} And what is the nature of grace as ‘conveyed’ through liturgical rites? Even the old arguments about transubstantiation and symbolism have been upstaged on all sides of the Reformation battle. Allied to these discussions is the new look that is being taken at the doctrine of Church Order and orders of ministry. With the development of new, lay ministries in the Roman Church and new more informal structures for Protestant churchmanship, as well as the advent of house communions and churches, and the coming to consciousness of women both in and out of holy orders, all the traditional lines and linkages between ordination, order, and sacraments have been weakened and opened up to new possibilities. It might even be said that it has never been so obvious how closely related are liturgics and dogmatics. \textit{Orandi} and \textit{crendendi} again may be seen so to interpenetrate one another as to defy a cause and effect analysis.

\textsuperscript{16} The Joint Office of Worship, 1044 Alta Vista Road, Louisville, Kentucky 40205.

Against this backdrop we may look first at Baptism and then at Holy Communion for signs of liturgical and theological change. Baptism in its larger context as center and focus of the church’s initiation process is undergoing drastic revision in terms of its discipline, liturgical shape, and relation to catechetical structures. The central theological shift seems to be taking place at the point of its corporate character — more specifically: seeing its results or “benefits” more in terms of incorporation than of its effects on the individual baptizand’s sin (original, committed, or prospective) and destiny (heaven, hell, or other). Interestingly enough, this is exactly the issue Dietrich Bonhoeffer raised thirty years ago in a comment on what he referred to as “indiscriminate baptism”: “As far as infant baptism is concerned, it must be insisted that the sacrament should be administered only where there is a firm faith present which remembers Christ’s deed of salvation wrought for us once and for all. That can only happen in a living Christian community. To baptize infants without a Church is not only an abuse of the sacrament, it betokens a disgusting frivolity in dealing with the souls of the children themselves. For baptism can never be repeated.”

Bonhoeffer locates the center of baptism’s theological gravity in the community’s unrepeatable act of incorporation, and with this stroke undermines the classic split within the Western Church over the issue of the age, or belief-status of the baptizand; and provides the theology for the clear liturgical drift of the moment, namely: to a reunion of the now-separated elements of initiation — i.e., baptism, anointing (“Confirmation”), and First Communion — as signs of community, and to a suggestion of the meaning of the ancient catechetical pattern of catechumens. These are the necessary theological and historical building blocks for the several denominations now rearranging their liturgies and discipline of baptism and the admission of so-called “unconfirmed” baptized persons to Holy Communion. And there are profound suggestions here for the symbolics of the occasion (immersion, candles, new clothing) and its return to its original date (Easter or Pentecost).

Turning to the other sacrament, Holy Communion, the same sort of theological drift is occurring in discipline, rubrics, and doctrine. As the Liturgical Movement has emphasized the corporate, family, domestic, Passover character of the sacrament, this has provided for the emerging ecumenical consensus an important set of questions about the symbolics and style of the Meal, its presidency, and where, how, and how often it happens in the life of the congregation. And just as Karl Barth explicity raised the question of sacramental theology against Baptism, so one of his students has now done so with regard to the Supper! Is that meal ... a sacrament? Is it eating and drinking Jesus? Or is it eating and drinking with Jesus? So Professor Arthur Cochrane in a recent follow-up to Barth’s latter suggestions.

Lurking behind this issue is the relation of Agape and Sacrament; and lying before it are all the liturgical issues now everywhere in evidence.

A third area of significant questioning and creating of new liturgical struc-

tures is not unrelated, and has already been alluded to: removing to corporate worship the actions of confession, pardoning, and reconciliation, especially in the Roman Church. As individual confession to an individual priest has gradually (or not so gradually!) become a more pastoral, informal counseling conversation, the liturgical expression of forgiveness and freedom is finding its way back to the assembly of the faithful on the Lord’s Day, once again and ever again hearing the risen Christ empower them to forgive one another’s sin, and thus be reconciled (John 20: 21-23). Whether, and how this is to be done liturgically has given rise to considerable searching and experimentation in Catholic circles. Ecumenically the fascinating feature at this point is that much of Protestantism has for some time had a grasp on a number of the elements involved: a weekly corporate act of confession conjoined with a general absolution or assurance of pardon, a developing pattern of an exchange of peace or a sharing of personal concerns and prayers, and an underlying confidence in the “priesthood of all…” and all of this in some sort of congregational context which, as among the Reformed churches, has implied a minimal shared ethical and eucharistic discipline — the Presbyterians going so far as to speak of the local, lay body with jurisdiction of the Table, the Session, as a “court”! And it is not only Rome and Geneva which have here a common concern; for that exists wherever the question of the integrity of the congregation as community is raised. As noted already, the concern is well-nigh everywhere.

A fourth and more specific area of common exploration, to which I also have alluded, is in the content of praise: the uncertain question of the Psalter. Much of the history of public worship can be written in relation to the place and use of the Psalter. Ever since the Reformation, the Western Church has seen an impressive series of musical and liturgical systems develop and collapse in this regard. The present time is almost universally one of collapse. Almost everyone has lost their traditional music (Gregorian, Anglican chant, metrical tunes), and all are confronted with a bewildering proliferation of new translations, none of which is crafted for liturgical, musical use. Even the Church of Scotland in its recent third edition of the Church Hymnary (1974) has mixed the metrical Psalms in with the hymns “of human composition.” To lose the Psalter, either totally, or just as music, is to suffer what must be understood as a devotional, liturgical privation of the first order, for those 150 Psalms comprise, in Bonhoeffer’s powerful phrase, “the Prayer Book of the Bible.”

It is this crisis that is already producing a body of church music to make possible again the congregational singing of the Psalter, which at the time of the liturgical-theological revolutions of Geneva, Wittenberg, and elsewhere, was such a powerful, even explosive experience. Thus today the Lutheran churches are producing a whole system of Psalmody of “sung recitation” employing inflected, musical speech in an antiphonal structure, and Roman Catholics are extensively using Father Joseph Gelineau’s very singable system of chant with responsive antiphons. It is to address this problem that the Consultation on Common Texts, as mentioned above, has undertaken to provide a new set of texts. It is surely the moment for creative and devout musicians to turn their best gifts to...

address this need. There has hardly ever been so pregnant a moment in the history of the Psalter.

Finally, among these critical issues, there is the all-embracing task of finding valid and viable ways of conjoining requisite liturgical structure with realistic freedom and flexibility. Worship, as an action of a community of individuals, can never escape the dilemma which lies here. It is just this dynamic which provoked that most impressive treatise on the public worship of the church, 1 Corinthians 11-14. Paul the parish liturgist is pushed to his most eloquent metaphors: the one body with its many members, and the one Spirit with its many gifts. In even more compact form the same metaphor-mix reappears in Romans 12 under the rubric of the definition of “spiritual worship” (Romans 12:1). Crucial, but somehow rarely noted, is the centrality to both these epistles’ liturgical reflections, of love (Romans 12: 9-10; 1 Corinthians 13). Karl Barth has noted this, however, and his reflections deserve our own notice and reflection:

in its New Testament form Christian ethics is never concerned only with the requirement of an abstract private morality but always with instructions for the edifying of the community... It is not only in worship that the community is edified and edifies itself. But it is here first that this continually takes place. And if it does not take place here, it does not take place anywhere. If it does not edify itself here, it certainly will not do so in daily life, nor in the execution of its ministry of witness in the cosmos.  

Taking seriously the fact that genuine worship in the Christian community needs nothing less than love, a kind of “fitting in” with one another, and, setting over against that the present realities of worship wherein nothing more is needed than formal attentiveness, total isolation from the neighbor in the pew, the absence of children and other noisy hecklers, and the most elaborate artistic forces of undoubted excellence, must surely alert us to the enormity of the liturgical task facing us today and some of the reason for the “pain” and effort of liturgical renewal. What is at stake is nothing less than the evangelical integrity of the church, in its liturgical life, witness, and mission. Liturgical renewal is considerably more crucial than fussing with rubrics, adjectives, and adverbs would seem to imply. To renew the liturgy is to touch the springs of the renewal of the true church on earth. That is, indeed, “work.” Happily there have been of late, willing and able laborers in that vineyard. Paul Hoon and his kind have introduced to us both the pain of this effort and its joyful fruit, which is in turn the fruit of that peculiar work named “prayer”. Laus Deo.

Theology, Death, and the Funeral Liturgy

Paul Waitman Hoon

A revealing lacuna in the literature on death the Church seems to be pouring forth these days is the scarcity of theological reflection upon the funeral liturgy. One would have expected that given the contribution of psychologists, anthropologists, and thanatologists to our thinking, our more sophisticated understanding of cultural attitudes toward death, and studies in the theology of death and of the Christian hope widely available, theologians would similarly have undertaken to restate Christian Faith as it becomes liturgically declared in the funeral. In free-church Protestantism at least, this has not generally been the case\(^1\) — a situation all the more strange because the funeral presumably is one occasion where theology should be expected to speak a confident word. Now one does not wish to read into this lacuna more than is really there, but theological diffidence is often a way of saying something. And while my hearing may have faded somewhat these latter years (sic!), I think I pick up the following.

Credible theological statement is awaiting an ecumenical consensus struggling to be born. Friends in other traditions, for example, are helpfully complicating things for us free-church Protestants by recovering the connection between the funeral liturgy and other rites of the church, notably Baptism. For them the funeral is the completion of the Christian’s passover undertaken when the baptizand died unto Christ in Baptism — the rounding out of the full paschal cycle (often symbolized by lighting at the funeral the Easter candle). But clearly, this assumes a view of Baptism that many Protestants do not currently bring. Hence, reform of the funeral rite is linked with reform of Baptism, indeed of all the rites of initiation and with instruction in their full meaning.\(^2\) Similarly, the relation between funeral and Eucharist is being re-thought. I would make the guess that the service of Word and Table will be the normative weekly service in much of Protestantism by the early-to-mid 1980s. If so, a sacramental reality many of us feel never

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1 Notable exceptions are the books by Paul Irion, *The Funeral and the Mourners, The Funeral: Vestige or Value?*; occasional writing by William Oglesby; occasional denominational statements such as *Death and Funeral Practices* published by the 108th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States; the introductions to the burial office in denominational service books.

2 Parenthetically, it is the absence of worshippers’ sense of having died unto Christ in Baptism — or anywhere else for that matter—that so often renders the proclamation of Resurrection at the funeral mechanical if not false.

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should have been lost, will be recovered and made available for the congregation’s rites of death as elsewhere. The present “torso” funeral liturgy with its verbosity will become unpalatable. But obviously, such a change in Protestant perception and practice takes time, and only slowly are we coming to terms with it.

Diffidence may also inhere in our unease in transposing into reflection upon the funeral the implications of other liturgical break-throughs we have made. We hesitate, for example, to import into the funeral the experimentation we welcome or may tolerate in worship elsewhere. One does not freewheel at such an existential moment as death, and thought is usually wise to accommodate itself to such an instinct. To be sure, conservatism is not necessarily healthy here or elsewhere. I have long pondered the phenomenon of “fortress theology” — the tendency of thought to fasten on God as the Great Conserver and to slip into equating what is true with what is unchanging. The funeral uniquely, I think, lends itself to this kind of theological — as well as psychological — regression. Yet, what is a truthful and healthful conservatism here? And what is authentic reform? I may paraphrase a quotation from Karl Barth: What matters most in the Church’s worship is not up-todateness nor progress but reformation: reformation, however, does not always mean to go with time, to let the current spirit of the age be the judge of what is true or false; rather, reformation in every age means to carry out better than yesterday the Christian community’s task to sing unto the Lord a new song. “It means never to grow tired of returning not to the origin in time but to the origin in substance of the community.” Surely the origin in substance of the Christian community and its song is Jesus Christ — his reality, his presence, his meaning. Theological reflection is as much bound to this substance as it is required to welcome fresh forms to impress and express it. But this tension, we well know, can tear people apart.

Indeed, this suggests a deeper source of our diffidence — a datum unique to the funeral situation that I explore at some length: the number, dynamism, complexity, and inter-relatedness of the several perspectives that converge here and the way these require theology to function contextually. In my own thinking I identify eight perspectives: theological, phenomenological, cultural, psychological, aesthetic, pastoral, liturgical, functional. These obviously elide, crisscross, and interlock; I mark them for purposes of analysis. But just to contemplate some such schema and ponder the issues it poses for thought, humbles the theological mind. One may believe that the

3 One symptom of this may be the glibness with which we conceptualize the nature of the funeral in theological clichés: “to communicate the Christian hope,” “to celebrate life,” “to proclaim Christ’s victory,” “to comfort those who mourn,” and so on. Certainly these are not untrue but often they strike me as convenient fall-backs, “rhetorical theology” I call them, that does not penetratingly grasp the real situation. The unhealth lies in the glibness, not in the clichés.


5 One could subsume one or more of these perspectives under another. The pastoral perspective, for example, could contain psychology, the liturgical could include function, the aesthetic is corollary to culture, and so on. One could also add others by differentiating meanings under almost any one of them—the funeral as a phenomenological and cultural rite, for example, requires one to think anthropologically.
sovereign norm for reflection upon the funeral or any other Christian rite is theological, as I do, and specifically biblical theology, but one cannot be arrogant or simplistic about this. Here peculiarly, thought has to combine firmness with resiliency, theological integrity with openness to other angles of vision. And as I have intimated, we should not be surprised that theology finds such a posture uncomfortable and hesitates to speak its mind.

To what degree, for example, should the funeral be accommodated to culture and sub-cultures, and where should it be prepared to contradict these? Theological purists do well to remember that funeral liturgies historically have varied greatly in different cultures and eras in reflecting the character of society, and surely we would want to affirm such accommodation as validating the Church's worship as incarnational and its ministry as relevant. But many questions arise here, some minor, some medium-sized, some big. For example, given the cultural meanings that different words semantically hold for different minds, is "celebration" the right term for a funeral service? Is the term "communication" — so prominent in our vocabulary and often applied to worship and preaching today — an adequate thought-form to denote the fullness of the liturgical experience the funeral proposes? Is there not a sense in which the funeral is to be informed with a mysterious "density," an act in which we deliberately ought not to worry about communication and instead just let God be God? Again, can we expect the funeral to embody the value of Christian identity in the way that ritual has classically bestowed identity, in an age so obsessed with novelty and so bored with repetitiveness — so Margaret Mead believes — that people's capacity to find ritual meaningful has been vitiated? Further, can archetypal Christian symbols be vivified in a time of cultural disjunction, secularization and collapsing symbol systems? The faith-statements that funeral symbols normatively make, for example, "the everlasting arms," "resurrection," "in Christ," "a spiritual body," "Alpha and Omega," "Jerusalem the Golden" — how truthful or spurious are these today? Again, how do people really deal with death, and its prospect or effect? Do they dismiss or repress it as much as we are being told, or is anxiety before death and craving for some "metamorphosis of being" still so real as to verify Paul Tillich's remark that "to point with inner authority to the eternal is the most relevant function" a pastor can perform today? How far should liturgy accept the alleged historicization of consciousness and how far should it war against our modern intoxication with time? Is there a libidinal need for mystical symbols that decontaminate consciousness of culture as well as a need for symbols that engage consciousness with it? It will be observed that I load some of these questions with my own answers!

Equally important issues rise out of the perception that the funeral must embody integrity as both a psychological and theological experience. Psychologically, the funeral must be seen in its here-and-now meaning, and its therapeutic efficacy inspected. While resonant with transcendental meanings, it is not to be isolated from the human process in which it is set comprising a series of dynamic elements and moments pregnant with possibi-

ilities for both unhealth and health. Here pastoral care is as important as theo-
logical sensitivity. "The wise management of grief" — in a phrase of Edgar
Jackson — must be initiated. Provision for the expression of feelings, not
their repression, must be made. Reality must be faced and the finality of
death come to terms with. The support of a sustaining community must
be evoked within which the shock of loss and the impact of pain can be
borne. The future must be opened up in faith and hope, and transition into a
new stage of life negotiated. Now let it be said that liturgical theology, in
structuring funeral liturgies in the past, more or less apprehended this psy-
chological perspective and enabled clergy to function as better pastors and
wiser psychologists than they may have known or have been given credit for.
Yet, what the mind of the Church had known by instinct we need to reap-
propriate in light of modern knowledge, correct, and make intentional. How-
ever, to repeat, theology in such a situation is not comfortable and reacts in
ways we are all familiar with. It can feel threatened and stonewall with its
fortress mentality. It can get thrown off balance, accept something secondary
or tertiary as primary, distort itself and become eccentric — that is, literally
off-center. Or it uncritically scrambles things together and comes up with
hash. Or, it blinks, yields to the imperialism with which psychology often
conducts itself, and ends up offering secular therapy in a Christian idiom in-
stead of Christian reality in a therapeutic idiom. (One sees this latter in the
typical claim of many pastoral psychologists that "the funeral service is only
for the living," a device to enable mourners to do their "grief-work" rather
than, let us say, an eschatological action of the Church Militant joining with
the Church Triumphant to declare in the face of death that Resurrection
Life in which God shall wipe away all tears from human eyes.) In the last —
and first — analysis, as I wish to make clear in a moment, the funeral is
kerygmatic before it is therapeutic, certainly in the order of thought; only as
this baseline is sustained can the funeral be an act of liturgical integrity. Yet
the therapeutic and the kerygmatic should not finally be seen as polar. And
how do you validly meld liturgical psychology with liturgical theology?

One would like to explore other issues theology faces in functioning con-
textually, particularly in regard to the aesthetic perspective, but space forbids.
Questions of language, art forms, music would surface here, and the tensions
as well as the affinities (we ignore the tensions too readily, I think) between
liturgy and Art and the arts that underlie them. Perhaps most prominent
would be a reevaluation of the importance of ritual and ceremonial (these are
not the same), for in the funeral — as in worship generally — acting-out is
vital. Here as elsewhere the physical body is the liturgical "organ of experi-
ence," and, to indulge in a serious play on words, worship is too spiritual
a process to dispense with the physical. (It is a commentary upon our aes-
thetic poverty that undertakers have commonly invented ritual forms for us —
according to their lights, improvised substitutes for what the Church should
have provided.) Why should not liturgy enlist the vitalities of our whole
being? While black funeral practices vary, for example, surely the black
experience instructs us with its emphasis upon the whole person, its rich
provision for physical expression of emotion, its understanding of the
funeral as an exodus rite of liberation typically acted out in the cadenced
processional or the boisterous recessional in which the deceased almost lit-
erally is “blown” into heaven to the sound of trombones and trumpets. The rubrics in traditional services which stylize the restrained conduct of the funeral may have served a useful purpose, but surely we need to re-think how muscles and nerves and tissues reify theological meaning too.

Lastly, the unease of theology before the funeral liturgy may also inhere in the fact that theology does not know its own mind, or rather, that its mind does not really know its own Faith. I say “may” because the picture is confused and changing. Also, I am unsure of my own perception here, and I further do not want to be judgmental in a bad sense. There may well be good reasons for theology’s diffidence. What are we to make, for example, of the whole body of psychical research? Frankly, I do not know, but I do think that theology must come to terms with it and not patronizingly dismiss it as we have largely done in the past. But this particular conversation is not easy. Again, are we to continue to oppose Immortality and Resurrection as biblical theology has been fond of doing — sometimes arrogantly? Were the Greeks and pagans, and are some modern Greeks and pagans we happen to know and respect, even love, all that wrong? Despite my own predilection for biblical theology, I have come to believe that the concept of Immortality is another way in which religious consciousness of a certain attrait is symbolically stating truth. Chesterton once remarked that the important thing about any heresy is not that it is completely wrong but that it is partly right, and so it may be with Immortality. Is biblicism a danger here? Again, whatever else may be the net deposit of “secular” theology in our thinking, it seems to have effected a kind of change in the genetic strain of our theological consciousness whereby thought is to be validated by its being true to the darkness as to the light. Ours perhaps is a time when theology is more honorably characterized by humilitas than by majestas, when theology must walk crippled and exchange certitudes for stig mata. We should hardly expect — as a colleague recently wrote — that theology is to be immune from the uncertainties and anxieties that haunt humanity today, and in one sense to be clear-minded is to be out of touch with reality.7

Yet, having registered all this I must go on to say that at the point of the Church’s thinking about the funeral, one finally has to make, if not a judgment then some sort of determination simply because so much is at stake. If theology does not know, or does not speak its mind here, then something is gravely if not fatally wrong. To suffer the confusion of our age is one thing. To be humble before the need to think contextually is another. For theology to stammer at the most fateful point of human existence and to withhold that word which above all else the Gospel charges it to speak, is quite another. Reflection upon death and destiny, and some form of affirmation about their meaning, is theology’s business. If not, what is theology’s business? This is to say, theology cannot be let off here because the most momentous issues imaginable converge here. Fateful decisions have to be made and their consequences borne. Your reading of the universe has to be declared. You launch out over the abyss, or you do not. Angels and dragons arise, and the Resurrection, truly, does become all or nothing. There

is a throne with a right hand and a left hand, a holy city let down out of heaven, a river of life bright as crystal, and you announce whether these are illusion or the most real Reality. In a word, the thinking the community of faith puts forth in dealing with death and destiny, and the way it transposes its thought into what it liturgically does at the funeral, is probably as pregnant a clue as we have to the truthfulness of its vision, to the bravery of its mind, to the integrity of its convictions and to the trustworthiness of its own self-understanding. Here, the bell really tolls! Here, we have to take off our masks, stop playing our theological games, and declare who we are. It has been written:

No religion is worth its name unless it can prove itself more than a match for death; hence the need for valor at the heart of it . . . Christianity, now debased almost beyond recognition in secularized versions of it, came into the world as death-conquering religion. It centered in the figure of a death-conqueror . . . Its power through the ages is derivative from that. Like a tree severed from the roots, its vitality declines the instant the connection is broken. Christianity will never revive until it rises to its original height, perhaps in a transfigured form . . . The last enemy it still has to destroy is death.8

To establish our roots, then, that is our theological task. I suggest the following as an outline for thought.9

Ecclesial Aspects of the Funeral

The funeral is kerygmatic: It proclaims the Gospel. The Gospel is Jesus Christ himself who has come, who comes, who will come, and who is present, acting amidst his people. He acts through our human action, but in the order of thought he first holds the service, not we. He is the host, we are guests. The funeral — as all Christian worship — is constituted by this kerygmatic reality. We may say, for example, that we hold the funeral to remember the deceased or to provide healing for those who mourn. These intentions are rightly in our hearts and minds, but in the order of thought they are not primary. The point of departure for thinking theologically about the Christian funeral, in short, is christological.

The meanings of Christ’s presence are manifold and liturgy is always servant of their fullness.10 However, liturgy rightly particularizes meanings congruous with moments of particular fatefulness in human experience such as death. While the funeral kerygma is the same kerygma the Church proclaims elsewhere, the liturgy that enacts it should be permitted to engage us with meanings that address us where we are. However, choice here can not be arbitrary, much less whimsical. And Christ’s presence dialectically understood as mercy and judgment, or alternatively as promise and demand, most reliably governs theological decision and liturgical particularization here. The

9 Obviously, beginning here and passim I fall victim to my own charge of propositional thinking.
10 I immodestly refer the reader to pp. 119-148 of my The Integrity of Worship (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971).
reality at the heart of this dialectic which it is intended to convey, is grace; and judgment should be understood as grace as much as mercy, demand as promise. Both are the same Gospel, the same grace in different modes.

On the one hand, as mercy the kerygma is the human-divine presence of Jesus Christ with us and for us. His mercy in its human character is probably most appropriable through images from his historical life in which he humanly grasped and enabled people to stand in the situation of death and not be destroyed; and scripture, song, prayer, ceremonial should abundantly embody these. In its divine character, his mercy supremely grasps us in the mode of the Resurrection. No, one should say, rather, “as the Resurrected One,” not “as the Resurrection.” In thinking about the funeral there is a danger that we will think too propositionally. The funeral kerygma is not a concept of Resurrection, nor announcement of the historical event of the Resurrection, nor a witness to the Resurrection. Witness, history, doctrine are all a stage removed from the thing itself. Rather, the kerygma is the risen Presence of one who lives and comes and whose life grasps our life. This Presence bears a number of aspects I only cite here: victory over the demonic and over death; the breaking of the power, and remission of the guilt of sin; freedom from fate and exodus into God’s future; eternal life now and hope for a fuller life to come; promise of preservation of personal identity in fellowship with God and with other persons; healing and comfort. I shall elaborate some of these shortly.

However, like point and counterpoint the judgment of the kerygma is corollary to mercy. Jesus Christ’s presence is over against us as well as for us. Grace bears an “anti” as well as a “pro” character. Again thought appeals to both the human Jesus in his historical life and the divine Christ in his risen existence to verify the nature of judgment. A passage from Gunther Bornkamm to which I find myself returning again and again, profoundly unites these incarnational human and divine meanings to portray the “anti” character of grace. In describing the effect with which he perceives the resurrected Jesus, now the risen Christ, to confront the disciples on Easter Day, he writes: “They, the disciples . . . are the ones marked out by death . . . Those who have survived him are the dead, and the dead one is the living.”

This perhaps is hyperbole not untypical of biblical theology. Yet, Bornkamm’s words strangely move us. And they move us, I think, because of their truth that Jesus Christ in his “anti” (yet also in his “pro”) presence works a shattering reversal in the way we define “life” and “death.” Indeed it may not be too much to say that this reversal constitutes what theology calls “salvation.”

Now it is exactly this reversal that the funeral service is to recapitulate, and judgment must be seen as conditioning the meanings of mercy named above — victory, freedom, eternal life, healing. These remain in a sense absurd and their proclamation takes place in a vacuum if the demand that Christ’s presence also bears is unpronounced. Thus to understand the funeral as kerygmatic requires us to understand it also as salvational, as confrontational as well as supportive. Indeed, it can only be authentically

supportive when it is confrontational. That is, only as the funeral summons people to respond to both the judgment and mercy of Jesus Christ in actions that theology conventionally calls repentance, faith, obedience — in short, only as the funeral in various ways summons people paschally to die and rise with Christ can they be brought into reality and apprehend what is truly “death” and what is truly “life.”

This way of thinking has many implications. I cite only one here — its importance for the relation between theology and psychology. We have said that these should not be seen as polar, but this is not to say that theology should not be seen as prior. An understanding of the theological dynamics of the funeral precedes psychological understanding. Otherwise the funeral readily becomes corrupted into cheap grace because of psychology’s tendency to bypass the reality of judgment, of demand, as it has regularly done in most of the pastoral psychology literature dealing with the funeral that I at least have read. Perhaps this inheres in psychology’s habit of uncritically importing into the funeral the canons and procedures it uses in one-to-one counseling in grief situations, and its failure to understand how the funeral is kerygmatic before it is therapeutic. In any case, when the funeral is denatured of its paschal character, the depth and fullness of the self’s experience are not searched, current emotional states tend to be dealt with more than the self’s core of moral and spiritual being, the Christian person — not merely the human person — is not addressed, and consequently healing becomes prematurely offered. Ironically, the Christian grace that can heal as nothing else can heal, is not made operative and one has on his hands the secular therapy in Christian idiom of which I have written.

Now how to incorporate kerygmatic judgment and grace into the funeral in a way that does not browbeat people when they are peculiarly vulnerable, is admittedly a difficult problem. Not seldom has evangelical Protestantism on its part corrupted the funeral into a fire-and-brimstone experience capitalizing on people’s grief and guilt to bludgeon them into “salvation.” Always this is a Scylla and Charybdis situation, or more accurately a place where liturgy must be impaled upon its own theological dialectic. But I do not think that the problem is insoluble.

(II) The funeral is oblational. Theologically, its character is offering, or — to use an alternate term — sacrificial. Whichever term is used, we need to denominate the people’s response to the kerygma, and here as everywhere in liturgy, theology’s chief concern is that this response be to God. At stake here is the fundamental aim and purpose that govern the movement of worship; and without some such term as “oblation,” worship goes away. At the same time, theology is also concerned that worship in the funeral or elsewhere be for the people. Yet this latter concern is as situational as theological, and, liable to misunderstanding as the statement may be, it is secondary, not primary. That is, worship is to be offered to God in a sense that it is not to be offered to people. Correspondingly, while the funeral service is a thoroughly human service and enlists all the perspectives mentioned earlier if its human character is to be understood, the first datum for thought must be theological and the funeral first seen as oblational.

Many implications flow from this way of thinking, among them a reexamination of the claim that the funeral is “primarily for the living.” (I touch on
this several times in this essay because it is so prevalent and can be so misleading.) Situational, this is the case in that the funeral is a human, liturgical apparatus for proclaiming the kerygma and for providing for the people’s response. It is also the case in that one must be as cognizant as possible of the effects of the funeral upon the people. But heartless or stupid as it may seem to say this, it is not the case in the sense that the self-evident — and especially the surface emotional — needs of the people are to be controlling. The funeral is not first, for example, an occasion when people’s grief is to be assuaged, nor first an act in which they are made to face the finality of death and loss. These are very important values but they belong more to the hierarchy of the values of psychology or anthropology than of theology. For liturgical theology the first and the last “value” — to use this reductionist term — is God and the oblation of the soul to him. I may summarize this labored if not tedious exposition by saying that in the funeral as elsewhere, worship is to be addressed to people and offered to God.

What is offered? All things within the range of human experience. Pain, obviously. Brokenness. Tears. Sins. Regret, remorse, guilt, repentance. Fear. Anger. Unfaith mingled with Faith. Memories. Thanksgiving. Love. Joy. Hope. Vows. Human life and the human heart will write this part of the liturgy for us, and we should be quite concrete in naming these realities with their true names. Theology has traditionally subsumed these under the categories of offering I have mentioned — faith, repentance, confession, dedication. I will let these conventional terms stand, but who can ever disentangle the realities behind them and say what they are in the human soul? A great pathos must brood over thought here, so much so that I for one would say that the very bewilderment and anguish of offering up experience in these tangled modes can become a meeting with Christ and a dying and rising with him. To be sure, we can sentimentalize oblation in this sense. The sheer experience of anguish is not necessarily the same thing as being graced in Christ. But here we touch a great mystery.

The soul of the departed is also offered (the ritual acting out of this in the committal needs to be amplified and vivified) together with intercessory prayer for the dead. Free-church Protestantism in my opinion has missed a profound meaning in deprecating if not eliminating this kind of prayer. Not only has it been faithless to Tradition in doing so; it also has mutilated itself theologically.  

Perhaps one puts a finger on our sorest theological wound by simply asking what appears to be a disingenuous question: do we believe that God is affected by human prayer? More radically, do we believe that God can be so affected that there are some things he can or will do if we pray that he can or will not do if we do not pray? Probably most of us would reply that we believe God is affected, otherwise the whole Christian thing is a hoax. But if God is affected, then why should not oblation in the form of intercessory prayer be the most appropriate act possible at this most poignant of moments? If we believe in intercession at all, then why not here? Are love and faith put forth in prayer for the dead unmet by the Love we

12 That is, it has contradicted its own Credo: “I believe in the Communion of Saints.” It has violated its own eschatology. It has misread its own Christian anthropology. It has misunderstood its ecclesiology. And in the Pauline sense of “the Body,” it has distorted its Christology.
believe grasps both the dead and the living everywhere? And if all this be true, need we shrink from the next step for thought, that prayer does affect the destiny of the souls of the dead? I use the word “moment.” By this I do not mean clock-time. Nor do I suggest that we can plot the sequence of divine-human interaction or that God’s action toward the deceased necessarily awaits the instant of our action. But I do suggest that realities deep in our human nature answer to realities the Christian believes are deep in God’s nature, and that these require a full-orbed theology of the funeral as oblation that incorporates bold intercession for the dead.

Oblation also includes the offering of the worshipper in his/her inmost selfhood. To a degree I have anticipated this meaning in speaking of the “experience” the worshipper offers. But there is something more, namely, the self that experiences “experience” — what Christian spirituality means by a term I wish to use flagrantly in this essay: “the soul.” (I have indeed used the term “selfhood” but it will be observed that I do not use here “consciousness” or “identity” or “personality” or “mind” or “psyche.”) Oblation in this sense, I think, bears a certain absoluteness. That is, the commendatio animae is that without which there cannot be true response to the kerygma, and that without which the evangelical nerve of the funeral is cut and the motion of liturgy does not carry through to fulfillment. The existential poignancy of this moment, of course, heightens this meaning. The situation is one of fate and threat; its corollary is security. But the absoluteness is more than humanly existential; supremely it is Christian. That is, the face of death “diminishes” the worshipper down to that self which alone is, and which alone remains before God when death destroys everything else — even the mind and its sanity, and extracts from the worshipper a cry to Reality and a closing in faith with Reality whose great paradigm is Jesus’ final cry from the cross: “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.” However, while spoken at the moment of death, this commendatio is the signature of Jesus’ entire life. Correspondingly, it is the ground and signature of every Christian life.

Now the funeral, I suggest, is to be cast in this mode. It is to require the worshipper to conjugate before God, as it were, the meaning of what it is “to be” in both future and present tenses — although in a flash. When so cast, the funeral can transform the moment of fate into the moment of realization of the Christian meaning of “life” now and proleptically of “life to come.” For a moment, at least, the worshipper is made to face his destiny. More precisely, he is made to face, and to close with his Christian destiny. The End beyond all other ends unto whom he lives and unto whom he dies, confronts him. Indeed, in his act of offering it can grasp him. Which is to say, in the funeral the eternal life the Gospel proclaims can be experienced now. Is anything more ultimate than this? Hence the absoluteness of which I speak.

(III) The funeral is ecclesial: It is an act of the Church as a human-faith-community. “Human” refers of course to the sociological nature of the congregation — its physical place and its social constituency. It also refers to the congregation’s cultural character, its place and time in history, its denominational heritage, its inherited mindsets and sensibilities and folk customs. “Human” also denotes the congregation’s psychological ethos, its
Lebensgefühl, its emotional attitudes toward death and the way it rituales them. These and other realities are all conjoined under the perspectives cited earlier, and it is vital that theology consult them in order to affirm the ecclesia’s human concreteness. At the funeral, distinctively, we need to remember how the oldest definition of “Church,” “The People of God,” includes the defining noun “people.”

But whereas the terms “people” and “human” are defining, the term “faith” is constitutive. That is, what brings the ecclesia into being is not its humanity but Jesus Christ evoking its faith. The ecclesia is constituted a “Christian” ecclesia not just as a socio-religious entity but as a community of faith in Jesus Christ. This is its esse. Correspondingly, the funeral is not ecclesial just because it is conducted with people present or by a person reputed to be a “minister” or in a church building. Rather — and this is what I have been leading up to — the funeral is ecclesial only when it is confessional (and I would also add, catechetical), that is, when the community declares at the crisis of death in no uncertain terms the Faith it holds and that holds it. Hence it follows that the funeral is to be conducted on the ecclesia’s own faith-terms. Otherwise there is no ecclesia or the funeral is not a Christian funeral.

Here we run head-on into the question that probably most troubles us today. In a secularized era when increasing numbers of people are non-Christian, and at a moment when the human pathos of death appears to undercut confessional lines, what kind of a service would we hold? Should we tone down the faith-statements that Christian liturgy unequivocally makes — the great statement, for example, that is a cross-over point for Christian existence, that “in Christ” the dead are made alive? There is no simple answer because in the largest analysis we are dealing with the whole question of Christ and Culture. In another sense, though, the very asking of this question contains its own theological answer. The Christian ecclesia has no alternative but at the funeral as elsewhere to speak its truth in love — always in love, but still the truth. Otherwise the people are deceived, the Gospel is falsified, and the Church is corrupted into being something other than the Church.

As ecclesial the funeral is also priestly and intercessory. These terms may sound strange to a free-church ear, but for me at least they specify certain meanings that accredit the ecclesia’s functioning as Christian. The congregation may or may not think of itself as priests and we may or may not use this word out loud. But the truth within the term “priestly” is that the living, interceding Christ is the first agent in worship, and that he acts “in, with and under” the forms of the people’s action. They mime the Christ event, as it were, reach into it and reenact it to one another. His priesthood becomes real through theirs. Thus understood, the funeral is intensely mutual and the liturgy should concretely execute this character. Here, surely, is rich opportunity for the congregational participation we speak of so much. It would be hard to think of an occasion that offers a better opportunity for the laity to minister liturgically to one another. Personally, I do not see why any part of the funeral cannot be conducted by a lay person.

I append the term “intercessory” in order to elaborate here, within the doctrine of the Church, the obbligative meaning stated earlier. While members
of the ecclesia serve one another as priests, their vision and their action reach beyond themselves to the whole Ecclesia, universal as well as local, Triumphant and Militant — in a word, the Communion of Saints. The worship of the local ecclesia joins with that of the whole Ecclesia to transcend time and space. It becomes trans-historical as well as historical. On the one hand, the earthly ecclesia — as we have said — intercedes for the saints. On the other hand — and this is not as often understood — the saints intercede for the ecclesia, what T.S. Eliot once called "the backing of the dead." The motion of the liturgy, as it were, is circular, reciprocal, and gathers all into a mystical unity. What else can the great Tersanctus mean: "Therefore with angels and archangels and all the hosts of heaven, we laud and magnify Thy glorious Name . . . "? Hence one must think of the funeral as involving the dead as well as the living. And when we are told that it is only for the latter, or that its purpose is to help people accept the finality of death, theology must harshly reply that its purpose, rather is to bring the ecclesia on earth to experience the continuity of its life with the Church in heaven.

As ecclesial, the funeral is also edificational. It is to build up the congregation. It does so through "the pastorhood" as well as the priesthood of believers, and here the funeral as comfort can most reliably be understood. "Comfort" in its verbal root means to "fort"-ify, to strengthen, and the ecclesia functions in this way. For several centuries the Church acted out this meaning by caring for almost everything before and after the death of a member — the vigil, chrism, washing of the body, solace of the bereaved, preparation of the liturgy, procession, the tomb and burial, memorials of the martyred, etc. (Subsequently these functions were undertaken by specialists — hence "undertaker.") The congregation should not be disenfranchised of the equivalent of such building-up ministries today. They can be nothing less than sacramental when the people build up one another in Christ, not just in their own humanity. As both pastors and priests, they are "Christ to one another."

But edification has a more radical meaning: the judgment and mercy of the funeral kerygma summons the congregation qua congregation to reexamine itself, to repent, to renew its faith and to vow again its obedience. The event of the death of one member kerygmatically confronts all. A student once wrote in a term paper for me: "Caught up in numerous activities based on the popular premise that the church should be lively and dynamic, death comes as a sober witness to the finiteness and sinfulness of any human community, even one living under grace. The shock of death ought to call the community back to its foundations, bring it to die and rise again with its Lord, and remind it that it lives because God has chosen it for his own." 13

The funeral edifies in this sense. It re-situates the congregation on its true foundation — that One in whose death we die and in whose Resurrection we are made alive, and then, re-turns the congregation to live out its paschal life in the world.

(IV) Which is to say, lastly, that the funeral is missional. As a service of the Church, how can it be anything else? The Church by definition is a missional community. In the funeral — as in all its worship — its members gather as those who have been sent, and they, are sent as those who have been gather-

ed. Their apostolate is present in their liturgy as their liturgy is present in their apostolate. Unless this sanction is pressed home, the ecclesia is not a true ecclesia. To be sure, in one sense the funeral is a moment of disengagement from activity in the world, and here distinctively the congregation is entitled to that “rest which belongeth unto the people of God.” Yet, Christian rest is not a narcotic rest. It is for the renewal of life in both a homely and a theological sense. It is a paschal rest. Hence the funeral is authentic only when it grasps the people amidst their rest, with the great motif of death and resurrection as the figure not only of their life in the world to come but also of the paschal life they are to live out in their world, now. One of the great funeral prayers of the Church that many of us have come to know and love, nobly voices this meaning: “Help us, O God, to live as those who are prepared to die. And then, when thy summons comes, help us to die as those who go forth to live. So that, living or dying, our life may be hidden with Christ in thee, and nothing henceforth in life or in death be able to separate us from thy great love which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.”
The Preacher as Storyteller

Charles Rice

Edmund Steimle, preacher and teacher at Union Seminary when I was there as a student in 1962-63, has never been easily categorized. How would one describe his style: direct or subtle? personal or didactic? experiential or traditional? the language of Zion or of the street? Did he live — in the sense of dwell — in the office in Brown Tower, or out on Broadway where he could be spotted as a professor only by a student or colleague who knew the walk and the pipe? Was he a man of the hearth, or the study, or the social hour, and how did that bear on his being a man of the cloth? I can recall still a slight shock upon seeing him for the first time in cassock and surplice: Was that who he was? His most recent sermons celebrate the surprise of grace, the coming of the one for whom we wait in unexpected times and places. In the style and content of his preaching, as in his person, Edmund Steimle is one model of Morris Niedenthal’s ironic servant of the Word.

Dr. Steimle, by the very focus and intensity of his vocation (he is one of the first people I heard talk about what has become “doing your own thing”) managed to hold together the life that surged around us — New York, the sixties, a complex seminary—and the Bible. In his classes he made us aware of the three calendars by which we were all living: January—December, September—May, Advent—Christ the King. Without neglecting the first two, he seemed in some special way to live in the third. At least it became clear in the seminar on doctrinal preaching that he was marking off a calendar that was moving not only toward Halloween and academic deadlines but toward All Saints and Advent as well. What that meant has become clear only in retrospect, as I have tried to understand, with my own students, what lies behind the wholeness and integration of preaching which is both historical and existential, churchly and worldly, theological and human.

Professor Steimle has introduced a whole generation of preachers to Frederick Buechner, John Fry, and B. D. Napier. Their sermons are very different as to style and content, and Steimle’s preaching is different from all three. What the four have in common, however, is their humanity and courage in communicating as persons living with other persons. Buechner and Napier


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are poets. John Fry’s sermons, on the other hand, are so unfinished that he calls them “non-sermons.” Steimle’s preaching lies somewhere between the two: more refined than Fry, less stylized than Buechner or Napier. But the appeal which The Magnificent Defeat, Come Sweet Death, and Fire and Blackstone have for Steimle, and subsequently for his students, is the appeal of a homiletical approach which is deeply human, of the earth and earthy, imaginative, and unconventionally Biblical.

Edmund Steimle goes to the Broadway theater and he reads the Greek New Testament. For years, in a course with Professor J. Louis Martyn, he has led students to take seriously the parables of Jesus and to find, at the same time, fresh images to accompany them today. The people who know him think of a man in loafers and sport coat filling a corncob pipe, and of a crisply spoken man in vestments at ease in a high pulpit. That may be, in fact, the best image for understanding what Dr. Steimle himself means by preaching as story: the sermon as word-deed brings our own story, our humanity in community, in touch with the Story.

Pardon a Personal Reference

This paper has grown out of my own experience as a student, as a preacher, and as a teacher of preachers. It becomes increasingly clear that we have not worked out the relationship between our experience as human beings and our efforts to witness to the Christian tradition. The gap between the two has been quite explicitly stated in a good many classes in homiletics where students have been taught to apologize: “Pardon a personal reference.” Not so many years ago we were taught that to be homiletically kosher was to preach the text, the whole text, and nothing but the text. Access to the text was by way of historical critical method, just as application of the text’s meaning was by way of rather formal, stylized methods of illustration. The result was the sermon which we have come to expect: exegesis, exposition, application, usually in three points. Or, if the sermon is topical, we expect a proposition to be laid out, (again, more often than not, point by point), buttressed by scripture, and applied to our common life.

Who would say that either of these is a bad way to preach? There is something majestic—and too rarely seen—about a person taking a text of the Bible or a significant topic and in an orderly, clear manner opening it up to a congregation. What I have to say about the preacher as storyteller accommodates easily both of these approaches to preaching. I wish to do no more than point to an essential element of homiletics which is sometimes lost in the didactic, hortatory, academic sermon.

In recent years I have started my own students toward learning to preach by having them tell stories. The one requirement is that the stories be their own, rich for them. The stories may come from books, plays, everyday conversation, television, events in a community, or from very private experience, so long as the story has become one in which the student, to one degree or another, lives. The results of this, both for the doing and teaching of preaching, have been remarkable. The first image the preacher gets of himself or herself is that of a storyteller—a person leading a group of people through a sequence of events or impressions toward a meaningful climax—and that
image, once formed, tends to shape subsequent sermons. The simple act of storytelling has the effect, in many cases, of liberating the student who has been intimidated by stereotypes of authoritarianism and formalism which surround the pulpit and of enabling the student to be authentically expressive. Also, storytelling tends to secularize the content of sermons and to energize delivery (there is noticeably more body-language when students are telling stories and in the sermons which follow this exercise).  

Joseph Sittler, in a book which wears well, says that preparation to preach is not just a matter of teaching certain homiletical tricks but is the formation of a whole person:

Preaching is not merely something a preacher does; it is a function of the preacher’s whole existence concentrated at the point of declaration and interpretation. The act of preaching is organic to the placement of the man himself as believer, doubter, sinner, aspirer . . . .

No method, in my experience, is more effective in making that connection between the person and the sermon-in-community than the simple act of storytelling. The very genre of story tends to open students both toward the communities in which they preach and toward the tradition as well.

Several questions emerge. Is there an essential connection between preaching and storytelling? Might story be a prime homiletical model? What difference would the recovery of storytelling make in the sermon? Can everyone tell a story? Haven’t preachers always told stories, even too many at times? How does storytelling relate to the Bible and to our vocation as witnesses to the gospel? Having these questions in mind, I intend to attempt three things in this paper: to set the current theological interest in storytelling in cultural context; to provide some theological underpinnings for a homiletics oriented toward story; and to lay out some of the specific implications of such a homiletics for preaching in a Christian community.

Quiddities and Graces

Josiah Royce, whose great interest was in finding a loyal community that valued individuality, predicted that the American melting pot, popular at the turn of the century, would produce an insipid stew. The giant state, ease of communication, popular education, centralization of industry and population—all seemed to force people

. . . to read the same daily news, to share the same general ideas, to submit to the same overmastering social forces, to live in the same external fashions, to discourage individuality, and to approach a dead level of harassed mediocrity.

Royce wanted, instead, an enlightened provincialism which would value regional dialect, ethnic differences, distinctive customs. (As he looked

around for a model of such a community, the best he could find was the ideal Christian church as interpreted by the Apostle Paul. Royce believed that in such an environment, where both human uniqueness and interdependence were held together, there would be both personal and social health.

Now, a hundred years after Royce graduated from college and left what he regarded as "anarchic" California for the tight little villages of Germany, we find ourselves up against what he predicted: "a dead level of harassed mediocrity." Our technological, highly organized society has succeeded to the point of leading people to think of themselves as manufactured objects: lost in the crowd, as lacking in individuality as an assembly line item, incapable of really significant action, conforming consumers of goods and advertising. Stephen Crites views modern society's success story as the "story to end all stories": "It is perhaps a genuine human possibility that faces should be reduced to complex stimulus-response systems, names to numbers, dates to matters of bookkeeping, history to the undifferentiated consistency of mashed potatoes."

Given such a society, Harvey Cox argues, what we need, from religion especially, is more personal ways of communicating which will make room for the eccentric, the particular, the concrete — for the quiddities and graces of human personality. We are too prone, says Cox, to live by "signals," those unambiguous and impersonal means of communication which allow society, or even a highly organized church, to hold together. What we need today, Cox thinks, are more provincial and personal ways of communicating — autobiography, "corporate autobiography," testimony — which help individuals and groups of people to identify themselves as persons with roots in the past and a place in the present.

Most of us oscillate, it would seem, between the two environments toward which Cox points in his discussion of "signals" and "stories," both of which are necessary channels of communication in any society. On the one hand there is the world where most people are able to function only by becoming both competitive and conforming, where one tries, ironically, for autonomy and independence. From that environment, where communication is more often than not by broad-gauged, impersonal signals, we are constantly returning to a more personal world, where we are more directly dependent and where we identify ourselves by stories which we share with a smaller group. Here we are secure not by virtue of our command of information or our competitive prowess but by the sharing of deeply human experiences which are celebrated as episodes in the context of an ongoing, remembered story. It is to this oscillation that Dr. Steimle points in trying to relate the private to the public world. In the context of discussing the need for a proper relationship between hearing the gospel and going on mission, he writes:

Behind and beneath the summons, the call to commitment, the charge to act responsibly, must be the word of the gospel addressed to the 'need of man for a basic security from within which he can be free for change.'

Any given sermon is likely to oscillate between these two "worlds."

This oscillation is characteristic of American life and appears in our literature as a radical split between inner and outer life, between the signals which we are expected, in our social roles, to receive, acknowledge, and relay, and the stories which we tell ourselves and which are told to us by persons who sustain us. Such oscillation is clear in Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt*; the more Babbitt succeeds in the world of business, the more he is driven to live in the child's world of his fantasies. The same compensating pattern is in "Modern Times," a movie made in the Thirties. Charlie Chaplin, an assembly line worker who for eight hours a day is a machine, creates an imagined world: a cottage set among roses with an orange tree growing into the living room and a cow standing at the kitchen door ready to give milk at suppertime. Or, for another example, one could ask: What is the connection between the paved-over environment of the automobile and fast food and look-alike houses, all revolving not so much around human pleasure as the cash nexus, and the creation of such storybook enterprises as Disney World?

The picture becomes confused and then clarified, particularly in terms of Cox's categories, if one considers how advertising relates to these two "worlds." Most of the storytelling going on in our society today is either outright advertising or in the context of selling consumer goods. Can we overstate the irony that in the personal, small world of the church, imaginative narrative appears in the exceptional moment — the children's sermon, Christmas programs, the sermon illustration — but is the stock-in-trade of the commerical media? It is not so much that the art of storytelling has been lost in our culture; the stories are there, in one-minute spots and in whole evenings of stories (families, blacks, wasps, ethnic groups, professionals, swingers, etc.). Rather, storytelling has been taken over, to a large degree, and put to practical use by the media. The media have learned how to use the private world to power the marketplace. Who is telling people the stories by which they live their lives? Who, for example, tells the story of Christmas in America?

The more impersonal and complex our environment becomes, the greater will be our need for communication by the most uniquely human means, sharing a personally owned and significant story with a group of people. Recent titles suggest that theologians are responding to this felt need out of a sense of the special stake of religion in recovering storytelling: Robert Jensen, *Story and Promise*; Sallie TeSelle, *Speaking in Parables*; James McClendon, *Biography as Theology*; Michael Novak, *Ascent of the Mountain, Flight of the Dove*; Wesley Kort, *Narrative Elements and Religious Meaning*; and Frederick Buechner, *The Alphabet of Grace*. And the work of Sam Keen and Anne Valley Fox (*Telling Your Story, To a Dancing God*).

John Killinger, Robert Raines, and Amos Wilder should be mentioned as well. Their writing has suggested for some time now the close connection between hearing and telling stories and doing the work of both theology and ministry. All of these writers, in one way or another, help to open the way toward what Ernest Campbell hopes for:

What many of us need is deliverance from the sub-plots into which we have thrown ourselves unconditionally, so that we might connect up with the big story that is pregnant with meaning and excitingly open to the future that God is seeking to bring. The very depersonalizing of our environment, the commandeering of our most personal experiences by commercial interest, and even the turning of the story toward mere promotional uses— all serve to alert us to the need for the recovery of storytelling in the churches.

story and STORY.

We live by story. It once struck me as strange that my family began the day by reading the obituary page of the local newspaper in that small Oklahoma town where everyone seemed related in some way to everyone else. My grandparents seemed never quite satisfied until the persons mentioned on the black-edged page had been fitted into the skein of blood relationship and ownership of land out of which their lives were woven. “So and so was related to so and so, who lived at such and such a place, and she married such and such who was related to us....” It was, it now seems, a way of locating themselves in that town and country, and it suggests our way of locating ourselves in some more ultimate sense. These same people, who had time for sitting on the porch and going to funerals, used those occasions to rehearse over and over the stories which bound them to family and friends, to blood and land.

At the very least, our sense of identity depends upon our being able to tell—to others and to ourselves—some kind of coherent story into which we fit. Stephen Crites writes:

The decisive question is not whether the stories are ancient or modern. But a great deal depends, the meaning of our names and dates and perhaps the very cast of our faces, on the kinds of stories in which we establish our identities.

If one is asked, “Who are you?”, and wishes really to identify herself, the answer will be a recital of something like a narrative of events tied to specific times and places and having recognizable characters. And just as our identity is established by story, so are the diverse experiences of our biography organized into meaningful coherence by stories that become for us primary, i.e., mythic. It is the primary story which organizes one-damn-thing-after-another into a life that is recognizable and livable.

One way to talk about religious experience is to describe it as entering

12 Stephen Crites, unpublished paper.
into, committing oneself, to telling and retelling of primary narratives, mythic stories, to which every other experience is related. Following any story, says W.B. Gallie, depends upon our being able to recognize it as human, as having connection with what concerns us as human beings. Our following the story depends upon its humanity, and our humanity depends upon following such a story. That is certainly one way of describing the Christian experience, as history answers to ontology and ontology gives access to history. In this view, religious experience is entering into the Story which interprets — and is interpreted by — our several stories.

The tradition out of which we live and to which we attempt to relate our experience is at heart stories which we have heard and which we tell, as a community and to ourselves. Frederick Buechner writes, in a sermon on Luke 1:25-35 (Buechner is interested in the concrete detail of Luke’s storytelling: the sixth month, Nazareth, Galilee, Joseph, Mary):

...that is the beginning of a story—a time, a place, a set of characters . . . . And I would like to start out by reminding my reader that in essence this is what Christianity is. If we whittle away long enough, it is a story that we come to at last. And if we take even the fanciest and most metaphysical kind of theologian or preacher and keep on questioning him far enough—Why is this so? All right, but why is that so? Yes, but how do we know it’s so—even he is forced finally to take off his spectacles and push his books off to one side and say, “Once upon a time there was...,” and then everyone leans forward a little and starts to listen.

Buechner’s point hardly needs laboring: the Old Testament reaches its high water marks in the telling and retelling of the story of a people freed and given a new land, and the New Testament, for all its diverse complexity, is the passion narrative writ large. The worshipping community too, the church moving in history, is itself a continuing story, its liturgy oriented to a dramatized meal and its time oriented to a calendar marked off by birth, death, beginning again, and hoped-for coming. In the Christian year the story of salvation merges with the events of ordinary human experience, as in the liturgy the body and blood of Jesus Christ become inseparable from the ordinary staples of daily life.

Jesus—it goes without saying—was a storyteller. And in the early church, though the preaching was as diverse as the church’s need required — teaching, exhortation, apology, testimony—the preachers were quite likely to rehearse again in any given sermon the story which began with Israel’s Exodus and which, in the minds of those preachers, reached its climax in the narratives of cross and resurrection. When Stephen, for example, facing death, is called to give an account of himself, Luke has him recite a kind of saga. And whenever the church, then and now, has attempted to give account of itself, to lay out the ground of celebration, to evangelize, to instruct the people, or to wrestle with the problems of the day, it has, at its best, done so in the context of telling the stories which it has heard and which carry their own ultimate demand and final succor.

Amos Wilder was among the first to point us toward the story as a natural speech-form for the gospel. The anecdote, the sort of simple story that people everywhere tell, belongs to the earliest speech of the church and is essential to the community’s initial and continuing celebration of the gospel. Wilder gives us an example of such an anecdote in Jesus’ cure of the blind Bartimaeus at the gate of Jericho. Wilder calls that story “a small companion piece to the Resurrection-drama itself” and suggests that the models for preaching as storytelling are in the gospels themselves.15

Apart from Biblical and liturgical precedent, is there any good reason for valuing and trusting storytelling in Christian communication? Does story, by its nature, have any peculiar promise for thinking and speaking theologically?

Some are quite direct in answering that question. Sallie TeSelle, in her recent book Speaking in Parables, asserts that metaphor is the most adequate vehicle for speaking of God:

There are no explicit statements about God; everything is refracted through the earthly metaphor or story. Metaphor is, I believe, the heart of the parabolic tradition of religious reflection as contrasted with the more propositionally oriented tradition of regular or systematic theology.16

Sam Keen argues that not merely metaphor but quite specifically a highly individualistic storytelling is the way to speak theologically:

Today’s theologian, be he Jewish or Christian, has more in common with the poet and the creative artist than with the metaphysician and the physical scientist. He communicates a very private subjectivity. . . . For the moment, at least, we must put all orthodox stories in brackets and suspend whatever remains of our belief-ful attitude. Our starting point must be individual biography and history. If I am to discover the holy, it must be in my biography and not in the history of Israel. If there is a principle which gives unity and meaning to history, it must be something I touch, feel, and experience.17

It may be that TeSelle tends to reduce religious experience to a linguistic phenomenon (Cf. Ronald Allen’s review in this issue, pp. 212 ff.). And we may hold out more hope than does Keen for the integration of the STORY and our stories. Such theologians as Paul Tillich and, more recently, Frederick Herzog,18 have suggested systematic ways of integrating the two. But we can begin by taking as seriously as TeSelle and Keen the theological importance of particular, concrete human experience, as if the synecdoche which we see in the Old Testament and the New—the Story appearing as many, diverse smaller stories—might still be the pattern of revelation.

Story is by its very nature theologically weighted. Just as the simplest metaphor raises our experience to the level of meaning by making words mean more than they ordinarily do, so the story organizes our experience into

18 Frederick Herzog, Understanding God (New York: Scribner’s, 1966).
meaningful coherence. Wesley Kort isolates three potentialities which narrative form and religious experience have in common: identity, the drive toward wholeness or totality, and an orientation toward the ineffable. Professor Kort concludes that "the elements of narratives are correlatives of the characteristics of religion." The very act of storytelling has a close affinity to both the content and form of Christian revelation: that God has been revealed—in an act of self-disclosure—in a particular person and in persons who have witnessed to that event; that God values and makes demands upon every individual life; that each person's life and history itself move toward consummation. Does the fact that a story has a beginning, a middle, and an end, and that it involves particular persons engaged in significant action, make storytelling itself theologically significant? At the very least, storytelling requires that we place value on human experience and that history appear to us as not merely disconnected absurdity.

Elie Wiesel says that God made man because he loves stories. And Susanne Langer (Philosophy in a New Key; Feeling and Form) sees story as an essentially human mode of symbolizing our experience (which implies that every person can tell a story, simply by virtue of being human). For Langer the story provides "virtual life" which raises experience to the level of meaning. As virtual form the story organizes raw experience into that which can be lived, "danced out," in a meaningful way. ("Virtual life" for Langer seems to correspond closely to Eliade's concept of the holy space.) Langer considers storytelling competent as a symbol. In storytelling the symbol stays close to the experience from which it springs. This is all the more the case when the story is spoken. If, following Tillich, we understand that the sources of all theological language are in experience, in concrete human events, then theology has a great stake indeed in story, in a form of symbolizing which does not allow experience and speech to fly apart into the abstraction which characterizes theological language and even preaching.

What these writers see in the story points not only to its theological competence but to the affinity of the form itself with the gospel. Sam Keen and Ann Valley Fox write:

The techniques of storytelling and the psychology which underlies them rest on a discovery of the obvious: that what all persons have in common is their uniqueness. Every person has a story to tell. That's what makes a person. There are no autonomous, anonymous, pragmatic individuals. We were all raised by an intimate group that had traditions, values, rites of passage, ceremonies, legends. We feel nameless and empty when we forget our stories, leave our heroes unsung, and ignore the rites that mark our passage from one stage of life to another.

The very idea of biography, even of the novel—to say nothing of the homely anecdote which celebrates daily life—is, at least, congenial to the value which Christianity places on individual persons. And the seriousness with which the

21 Sam Keen and Anne Valley Fox, Telling Your Story (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1973), p. 2.
storyteller takes the concrete factuality of human experience is well accommodated by the doctrines of the sacraments and the incarnation.

Dealing Out Life

What, then, are the implications for homiletics? Ralph Waldo Emerson, in his Divinity School Address of 1838, moves from a critique of preaching toward reconstruction of the sermon:

I once heard a preacher who sorely tempted me to say I would go to church no more . . . . A snowstorm was falling around us. The snowstorm was real, the preacher merely spectral, and the eye felt the sad contrast in looking at him, and then out of the window behind him into the beautiful meteor of the snow. He had lived in vain. He had no word intimating that he had laughed or wept, was married or in love, had been commended or cheated or chagrined. If he had ever lived and acted, we were none the wiser for it. The capital secret of his profession, namely, to convert life into truth, he had not learned. Not one fact in all his experience had he yet imported into his doctrine. This man had ploughed and planted and talked and bought and sold; he had read books; he had eaten and drunken; his head aches, his heart throbs; he smiles and suffers; yet was there not a surmise, a hint, in all the discourse, that he had ever lived at all. Not a line did he draw out of real history. The true preacher can be known by this, that he deals out to the people his life—life passed through the fire of thought. But of the bad preacher, it could not be told from his sermon what age of the world he fell in; whether he had a father or a child; whether he was a freeholder or a pauper; whether he was a citizen or a countryman; or any other fact of his biography. It seemed strange that the people should come to church. It seemed as if their houses were very uninteresting, that they should prefer this thoughtless clamor.22

Emerson's Transcendental views led him to place increasing emphasis on human experience, and his critique is directed at the sermon's indifference to what he calls "real history." Whatever the theological ground of Emerson's criticism, his words are timely. He describes the good preacher as a person who is alive to the world around himself or herself, open to the metaphors being born there constantly, and willing to trust the commonplace experience of daily life as material for preaching. Emerson's address puts in a vivid way the thesis behind this paper: that there are untapped affective sources for preaching in the minister's own life and in the vital experience of the congregation. There, in shared life which is opened up and celebrated by imaginative story-hearing and storytelling, are both the hermeneutical key to the tradition and the actual vehicles of the Word.

Emerson, of course, moved farther and farther away from the tradition. Part of the problem in trying for new models of preaching is the difficulty of maintaining a healthy tension between the poles suggested in the fre-

quently quoted text, “For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord” (II Cor. 4:5). A whole generation of preachers has come out of American seminaries—even preachers who took no courses in homiletics—who labor weekly under the burden of an assumed opposition between personal experience and Holy Writ. That notion persists, and it does service neither to sound Biblical preaching nor to the birth of saving images. So long as such a split is tolerated we will see twin perversions of preaching: sermons which take texts for the sake of taking texts; and sermons whose content, form, and style reveal little about the communities for which they are preached.

Phillips Brooks, who gave the Yale lectures in homiletics a century ago, defined preaching as “the communication of truth through personality.” It is a threatening idea, particularly if the word “personality” connotes individualism rather than a person living in community. We have had quite enough of the “personality” in the pulpit! Brooks, however, had a sense of the wholeness of Christian preaching, of the continuity between living with people in a given time and place and preaching to them on Sunday morning. In his lectures he shows himself precursor to both Joseph Sittler’s notion that all preaching is organic to time, place, and personality, and to Ernst Fuchs’ contention that the content of preaching (and the key to Biblical interpretation) is “daily life.”

Brooks, in fact, feared that lecturing on homiletics might lead to a misconception about preaching, that his hearers would think preaching “work complicated and difficult which to him who is equipped for it, and loves it, is the easiest and simplest work in life.” The model of the preacher as storyteller is one way of approaching Brooks’ vision of the wholeness and integration of living and speaking in a community. How does the idea of story contribute toward such wholeness? It is a question well worth raising: a good many ministers today perceive preaching as less integrated into their personal and professional lives than other aspects of the ministry.

**Story and sermon.** The “two elements of preaching,” to use the language of Brooks’ first lecture, are both available to us as story. Read any textbook on homiletics and it will tell you that preaching is two-tracked, that the preacher sees “bifocally,” that the sermon is an ellipse with two centers. However it is put, the preacher holds together the tradition and life as we live it. Access to both, tradition and experience, is by way of entering into and sharing a story. Ron Allen, writing on the significance of Susanne Langer for preaching, says: “In preaching ... the preacher not only lets the experience be recreated in him/her, but allows the symbol to interact with the world of his or her parishioners so that the experience can be recreated at the moment of preaching.”

Our access to scripture and to the communities in which we are called to preach is by way of entering into and participating in events that have happened to people in the past and similar events which continue to happen to people. The process is very close to what happens when we hear and tell almost any story.

**Following** may describe best what it is to enter into a story, whether we are hearing it or telling it. Following a story, W.B. Gallie says, is always a personal matter: “... there is something arbitrary, something due to the peculiar set and structure of our basic inter-human feelings, involved in the following of any and every story.” The opposite of “following” is what Brooks called the habit of “criticism,” refusing to put oneself in the power of anything, insisting always on using illustrations or handling texts, or turning experience into “points.” Or, to take another example, Walter Wink says that where Biblical exegesis is concerned, the Bible is open to us as we come to it with real human needs—that is, telling our story—so that the Bible opens to us in a “communion of horizons.”

Robert Raines, too, in the very format of such books as *Soundings* and *Creative Brooding*, in which he lays alongside each other Biblical passages and other kinds of literature, suggests a hermeneutic of story.

On both sides of the preacher’s task, then, in scripture and in the life-situation, access for the preacher is by sharing in a story, opening up and entering in as a person. Rather than taking and using texts, and washing out life into mere illustrations, we will learn to listen, to wait for the metaphor, to really enter into both text and experience as persons. Gallie writes: “In following a story, we must always keep our minds open and receptive to new possibilities of development, new hints, clues and leads, up to the very last line.”

Paul Scherer once counseled beginning preachers: “You may begin your career with a doctrinaire interest in theology or in preaching as one of the fine arts. But pray God you may find yourself, little by little, drawn to human lives and human hopes and fears.” Karl Barth wanted us to preach with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. In each case, it is an awareness of the human story unfolding there which gives us access to the sources of preaching.

Second, the preacher as storyteller is a person whose words come as gifts from the community. David H.C. Read says that he visualizes his congregation as he sits at the typewriter composing his sermons. Storytelling does not suggest that the preacher sits in the study “making up” stories; just the opposite. The helpful metaphors come from life with the people, and from bringing the life of the people to all that the preacher reads and does, including the study of scripture. John Fry suggests that when he says that “great preaching,” in the sense of the highly polished, rhetorical sermon, is not really at home in most churches today. It is being in touch with a congregation which matters. In fact, Fry says, “a new age of preaching has dawned which sees ... that the life of the congregation validates preaching and not..."

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23 Gallie, p. 165.
25 Gallie, p. 164.
the other way around." For example, one of my colleagues came to me shortly before chapel to apologize (as if the homiletics professor were Mr. Chapel or perhaps the one who stamps "Choice" or "Prime" on preachers): "I'm afraid you won't find my sermon very good story: I don't know any to tell." At the service he proceeded to speak directly to the needs of our community, straight from his own experience as a member of it and out of the resources of the New Testament for living in such a community. As he promised, he did not tell a lot of stories, but his down-to-earth images were powerful, and the sermon was, by virtue of its participation in the real events going on among us, story. Ron Allen puts this well:

"Story" can mean either "storytelling" in the specific sense or it can also mean a way of looking at the text, at the congregation, and at the preaching event itself. One can preach from a Pauline ethical exhortation in the story genre just as one can preach from the story of blind Bartimaeus. Ethics, after all, is part of the human story. The story perspective brings into focus the need to be in touch with the symbols and realities of a local situation. One does not simply "use" stories or storytelling. As a genre and mode of thought it speaks to us on the deepest level when we can most profoundly perceive it.

Preaching, as Bruce Barrabee has said, is two-thirds listening. The preacher puts himself/herself in the power of the community just as the storyteller surrenders to the metaphor, the concrete image, the homely detail. The difference between preaching in community and churning out sermons is precisely the difference which John Crossan sees between metaphor and illustration: we are used by the one, the other we merely manipulate.

Third, for the preacher as storyteller, personal experience becomes not only permissible but essential to the sermon. Brooks, working out of the doctrine of the incarnation, believed that the communication of the gospel depended upon the expression of unique personality. It was, he thought, an undue sense of solemnity, and the habits of "mechanism" and "criticism," which squelched the personal element in preaching. He hoped for the preacher who would appear in the pulpit not as a "personality" but as a recognizable human being whose understanding of and communication of the gospel was inseparable from his or her own experience. If we follow Brooks we ask pardon not for a personal reference but for hiding behind homiletical forms, theological jargon, pulpit manner, and mere rhetoric.

Fourth, the sermon as story becomes more and more a speech event, less the finished piece which aspires to publication in print. Storytelling is primarily an oral event: sensitive to the moment, the people present, and open, in the moment, to the possibilities of human interaction, and, shall we say, to the promptings of the Spirit. All good storytelling, as Paul Bernabeo shows in his discussion of performance in the theater, depends upon being present in the moment. In this sense the preacher is a performer, as were those

who told the stories which eventually were written down as Holy Scripture. If we took storytelling as a primary homiletical model, we would see fewer sermons resembling term papers or lectures on exegesis or timely topics, and much closer to the folk event with all the risk and freshness which that involves. Understanding this as performance, in the best sense of the word as being prepared and present in the moment, would save the preacher both from slipshod study, careless writing, and inadequate personal "psyching-up," and from slavishly following a manuscript, a stereotyped style, and the same point-by-point form week after week. It is his sense of the vitality of shared story—both as living with a congregation and speaking words which emerge fresh from that matrix—the words are given both as we prepare and as we are present in the pulpit—which leads John Fry to call his sermons non-sermons and his style as "flat-out." That is what John Killinger means when he says that sermons are out and preaching is in.\(^{35}\)

Fifth, the preacher as storyteller may be expected to be more evocative and celebrative, less hortatory and didactic, even in his or her role as prophet sometimes in conflict with the community. Telling the story of what is going on, in the light of the Story which binds and judges the community, is a prophetic act. The very celebration evokes recognition and therefore judgment. The social issues of the day are not treated in abstraction—laid on this community—but are met as part of the real life of these particular people. Living out a human story with a group of people, and letting our words spring from that kind of living, saves us from the kind of carping and cajoling which often poses as preaching. The same goes for preaching Christian doctrine.\(^{36}\) The cardinal doctrines will be celebrated as events in the Christian year and the congregation's life together rather than as abstract and superficially imposed formulations.

Sixth, we may expect the form, content, style, and delivery of the sermon to reflect the experience from which it comes.\(^{37}\) Notice what happens to experience in preaching. Something happens to us, something deep, real, and human which moves us toward speech. But by the time the experience appears in a pulpit gown on Sunday morning it is unrecognizable as anything human. Our experience has been canonized, i.e. like the stories of the Bible it has been bound in black and stamped "holy" by being given sermonic form and vocabulary. That seems to be Emerson's point: life in passing through the fire of homiletical thought comes out looking like something other than life, i.e. something we cannot follow. The homiletical forms—the rigid patterns in which sermons are outlined and tied to the style which we have come to expect in the pulpit; the very theological language which should serve preaching—all overlay the experience. But if more sermons began with something like "Once upon a time," the difference in preaching would be immediately noticeable. Sermons would be more like animated conversation—about things that matter to us—and the familiar outlines would give way to more imaginative, free-form ways of putting sermons together. Content, in short, would determine form, as story holds what is said and


how it is said, close to experience. Frederick Buechner, in a book which presupposes the theological importance of experience, writes:

At its heart, most theology, like most fiction, is essentially autobiography. Aquinas, Calvin, Barth, Tillich, working out their systems in their own ways and in their own language, are all telling us the stories of their lives, and if you press them far enough, even at their most cerebral and forbidding, you find an experience of flesh and blood, a human face smiling or frowning or weeping or covering its eyes before something that happened once.38

Killinger’s definition of preaching today is simple: a person struggling, with the tradition and with life, in public. It is a very human definition, but it describes a style of preaching which is in fact appearing in the American pulpit today. A hermeneutic of story provides both form and content for such preaching.

Seventh, we may expect more profoundly Biblical preaching, in which texts are allowed to speak as story, to open to human experience rather than merely being referred to, used as ammunition, employed as mottos or sops to meet popular expectation, or neglected altogether. The recovery of preaching as shared story means the recovery of really Biblical preaching in which texts are not used at all but are followed and opened up so that the congregation can follow them in its worship and in meeting the genuine needs of a community.

Eighth, if we follow this model, the illustration will give way to the image and the story. “Illustration” is understood here to mean the “professional” anecdote, the canned story which is not really owned by the preacher and the congregation. John Crossan, in quoting the poet Henry Rago, gets at the difference: “There is the metaphor that is less a metaphor because it is the metaphor I choose, there is the metaphor that is more deeply irrevocably a metaphor because it chooses me....”39 The difference may be suggested by comparing the minister whose congregants are his neighbors with the itinerant: the first is likely to be gripped by metaphor, the other to be compelled to find illustrations. Again, the difference is suggested by laying alongside each other a book of catalogued sermon illustrations—Love, Faith, Peace etc.—and Ernest Campbell’s little black notebook which he carries at all times, and the homiletical use of which he describes as “going back over my life.” The saving images and redeeming stories are born out of living, and they own the preacher and his hearers to the degree that we learn to trust and share human experience in such a way that people as people can follow the narrative, see the image. As Nathan Scott puts it: “... the common ordinary realities of our everyday existence suddenly open up and become transparent—and we are ‘shaken’: we are ‘moved’...”40

And there may be serendipities: a new sense of living out the Christian year, itself a story; and recovery of preaching in the context of the Lord’s

39 Crossan, p. 11.
Supper with all the concreteness and dramatic power which the early church found in it and to which Karl Barth tried to call us back. Might we recover the idea of preaching itself as sacramental, the gifts of God (life together, images, stories) for the people of God? The idea of shared story opens the way toward more congregational participation and lay preaching. Does not every Christian have at least one sermon? How do we relate to those stories, and how can we bring each individual story into contact with the STORY and so enable lay people to preach?

Summary

It should be clear by now that the idea of the preacher as a storyteller is not a call for more literary efforts in the pulpit. On the contrary, I mean to suggest that we think of the sermon not so much as a finished piece but as a vehicle for communication and that we be open to those who are suggesting that sermons should not be written at all. Far from trying to make of the preacher an artist who writes timeless phrases, I am interested more in learning how to live and speak in community, in the form that most human beings use in communicating meaning, celebrating, and marking off time: by storytelling. If we turn toward less propositional, less abstract and academic preaching, we may become more and more provincial in the orientation of the sermon, less interested in producing sermons that would gain a wide market in print.

It should be said, too, that everything depends upon our being responsible theologically. Hearing and telling a community’s stories extends greatly the horizons of preaching, and that makes theological responsibility all the more crucial. Bruno Dreher writes:

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Nowadays preaching is no longer accountable to the biblical texts, but to theology . . . . the real sort of theological responsibility means that Christian discourse must show itself to be ‘a word’ in the actual responsibilities of those to whom it is spoken; it must induce a confrontation with tradition; then biblical tradition will become relevant for today’s world.  
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The more one attempts to be present to a community, and to be open to the creativity of the spoken word, the more important becomes theological reflection and that element in the sermon which is called “exposition,” when the preacher tries to listen to the church catholic. “Life passed through the fire of thought” is a very good definition of preaching.

But having taken the theological task seriously, the minister is free to live with the people and to let their shared story become the makings of imaginative preaching. A preacher these days could do worse than to aspire to W. H. Auden’s wish for the poet:

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A poet’s hope: to be,  
like some valley cheese,  
local, but prized elsewhere.  
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Preaching and the Biblical Story of Good and Evil

Edmund A. Steimle

My purpose in this lecture is twofold: First, to explore the biblical understanding of good and evil. And second, to approach this exploration from the perspective of biblical preaching. And I want to begin with the second purpose first.

After twenty-three years of teaching homiletics, I am convinced that the quality of worship when the community gathers for common worship would be enhanced considerably if the lay people as well as the clergy had some inkling of what is supposed to be going on when the minister gets up in the pulpit and preaches a sermon. And with a captive audience of lay people before me, I simply cannot resist the opportunity to share with you one man’s understanding of that portion of common worship which we call a sermon. The fact that it also provides a practical way of getting into the biblical story of good and evil seems to me to make it appropriate for this time and place.

What, then, is preaching? What is supposed to happen when a minister gets up in a pulpit and preaches a sermon? The very words associated with this portion of public worship bring negative connotations to our minds. The word, sermon, is synonymous with dullness and boredom. The sight of row upon row of glazed eyeballs sitting in the pews suggests that someone must be preaching a sermon. And as for the word, preach, no one ever wants to be preached to in any situation. “Don’t preach to me” is a familiar household complaint. Centuries of preaching have left their indelible mark on the meaning of the words, ‘preach’ and ‘sermon’.

But what, then, is preaching supposed to be? As I, like Job’s Satan, “go to and fro upon the earth and walk up and down upon it” preaching hither and yon, the reactions at the church door afterwards indicate some confusion in the minds of the listeners. “I enjoyed your talk,” for example. Well, yes, I suppose it was at least that, a “talk.” Or, “Thank you for the message.” And every time I hear that, I cannot help but think of TV: “We’ll be back after this interesting message.” Is a sermon a commercial, a plug for God? Does he need it? And then there is that dear soul down South somewhere whose total reaction to my sermon that morning was, “You ought to have your mouth washed out with soap and water.” And I wonder what her expectations of a sermon were.

Of course, preachers and theologians have not been at a loss to give theological answers to the question, “What is preaching?” Phillips Brooks said it was

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“Truth through personality.” And that seems to me to be both too broad and too limited at the same time and it also, unfortunately, fed the cult of the “great preachers” of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Harry Emerson Fosdick called it, “Counseling on a group scale.” Though true of some sermons, I suppose, his definition is certainly too limited. Karl Barth said, “Preaching is the Word of God which he himself has spoken.” And there is truth there I suppose. But “Word of God” tends to be an abstraction unless it is properly understood and it may lead the preacher to confuse his words with God’s Word. Moreover, I question whether there are many congregations left today who listen dutifully and reverentially to their minister’s sermon as the “Word of God which he himself has spoken.”

Almost all preachers and theologians, including myself, accept the definition of preaching as the “Proclamation of the Gospel.” But the word, proclamation, presents problems. For one thing, it suggests an activity much too formal, like the president’s Thanksgiving proclamation. And it is too remote. It suggests a king’s herald standing on a hilltop, far off and high up. It sets the preacher apart from and above his congregation, talking down to rather than with his people. As I understand the place of the ordained minister in his role as preacher, he—or she—is simply a member of the community of faith who in virtue of biblical and theological training, is called by the community (and ordained) to do on their behalf what he has been trained for, to interpret the biblical story in terms of their world and their stories. He does not preach at them. He talks with them. He is not above them. The most appropriate place for the preacher to stand is as close to the level of the congregation as possible, given the practicalities of being seen and heard.

Stalking the Story

Over the years I have been attracted by and even caught up in various theological answers to the question of what preaching is — proclamation, the Word, the Word-Event, dialogue, and others. They all have obviously something to say about the nature of preaching. But in the last few years I have been attracted by the possibility of looking at preaching in a different way: as essentially storytelling.

By that I do not mean a series of anecdotes or stories, necessarily, or even one long story told as a kind of contemporary parable-sermon, though these may have a place. What I have in mind is the sensitive interweaving of the biblical story with my story, your story, so that new light is shed on both.

I have been influenced in this approach by a New Testament scholar, formerly at Harvard, Amos Wilder (brother of the novelist, Thornton Wilder) whose thesis is that the form of the biblical materials cannot be divorced from their content. He writes, “We are concerned first of all, therefore, not so much with what the early Christians said as how they said it . . . it is not only in what they say that religions differ, that is, in their doctrines and myths, but also in how they speak, in the particular oral and literary vehicles which they prefer . . . Form and content cannot long be held apart.”

And the basic form of the Bible is that of a story told. What we know, as Christians and Jews, about the mystery we call God is embedded in this biblical story, beginning with creation and ending with visions of the future.

To be sure there is a wide variety of materials in the Bible. There are laws governing the way a man should live; there is poetry and prophecy and Wisdom literature and letters written to the early churches in Rome, Corinth, Galatia, etc., in addition to narrative. But the meaning and significance of the non-narrative portions of the Bible are derived from the story. If we are to understand the meaning of the delightful story of Jonah, for example, we have to understand the history—the story—of the people in post-Exilic times when they had become narrow and exclusive and had forgotten that they were chosen to be a blessing to all the nations of the earth. And if we are to understand the significance and meaning of the letters of Paul, we have to know something of the history—the story—of those early Christian communities to which the letters were written.

Professor James Sanders, in a lecture given in last year’s series of January Lectures, made the point with respect to Torah, sometimes called the books of the Law. He said, “To begin with, Torah means not primarily law but Gospel; that is, it is primarily a story of God’s ways with men and especially with ancient Israel and early Judaism. This is the reason we speak of the Torah story, for the Torah is primarily a story and not primarily a set of laws. There are indeed several codes of law imbedded in the Torah, but they derive their authority from the story—not the story from the law.”

When, therefore, we say that God reveals himself “in history,” we are saying, in effect, that God reveals himself to us in his story.

This has deep theological significance for our understanding of the faith we hold. As Wilder points out, “The new movement of the Gospel was not to be identified with a new teaching or a new experience but with an action and therefore a history. The revelation was in an historical drama. The narrative mode inevitably imposed itself as the believers rehearsed the saving action, including particular scenes of it that played themselves out in the marketplace or the Temple-court, at a dinner with guests or in a synagogue. The locus of the new faith was in concrete human relationships and encounters. Therefore the new community, living out a new kind of human and divine relationship, naturally rehearsed models of Jesus’ actions and interactions, since it was through these that the saving work of God had initiated its course. With this kind of a God the story was the proper kind of witness even more than the saying or the dialogue.”

And this is still true when the community gathers for public worship. As I understand the structure of public worship, its basic framework is that of a dialogue: We listen to the word from beyond and respond to it. Much of it is taken up with response: prayers, hymns, offerings, passing the peace. But the word from beyond comes primarily in the form of a rehearsal of the story, as a whole and in its parts: reading from Scripture, responsive readings, the sacraments, the sermon. Even the creeds which are part of our re-

4 Wilder, pp. 76-77.
sponse to the word from beyond are not propositional but rather brief rehearsals of the story. The Apostles’ Creed, for example, runs through the story of creation, the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit today, and ends by looking forward to the final judgment and the life everlasting at the end.\(^5\)

So in the structure of public worship, regardless of denomination, much of it is a rehearsal of the story so that we may be reminded both of our identity, who we are as the people of God, and also what our style of life should look like as a result of who we are. For a story is indispensable for telling us who we are, for establishing our identity. If I ask one of you who you are, you are bound to respond with at least a part of your story. I cannot understand who you are apart from your history; you cannot understand who I am apart from an awareness of my own individual history or story. And if I am confused about my identity so that it interferes with my ability to carry on my life and work, and I turn to a psychiatrist for help, one of his major functions is to help me unravel or rediscover those portions of my story which perhaps I have forgotten or repressed.

So now, when a man or a woman gets up in the pulpit to preach a sermon in the context of public worship, his or her primary purpose is to engage us in storytelling: in the light of the biblical story to remind us who we are and what our life style should look like as a result. If the word from the beyond comes to us primarily through the reading of Scripture and the enactment of the Sacrament, then it is necessary for us to recognize that the biblical story, whether read or acted out, is also our story. It is not just an ancient story; it is contemporary. It is your story—now; it is my story—now.

Thus the preacher’s primary task is not to give us three principles for living that we can carry through the week; or to blast the administration in Washington for the economic mess we are in. After all, we can read that in Harriet van Horne’s column in the New York Post. The primary purpose of the preacher is to interweave the biblical story with my story (your story) so that we can see a bit more clearly (even if we do not want to see!) who we are, what is expected of us, and what the future may hold for us. And that is precisely what the “proclamation of the Gospel” is all about.

Normally, the preacher does this by using a segment of the biblical story—a text or a passage. He brings it alive in its ancient setting and in its contemporaneity, and not necessarily in that order. He may start with a segment of our stories: the meaningless round of daily living, the just plain hellishness of our lives at times, or the persistent experience of God’s absence, or the influence to which we have become addicted which blinds us to the misery of the ghetto, the hunger in the third world, the poor guy lying in a ditch by the side of the road half-dead. But wherever he starts, with the ancient biblical story or with our stories, his task is to interweave these stories in such a way that light is shed on both. So Wilder again, “Perhaps the special character of the stories in the New Testament (and in the Old Testament) lies in the fact that they are not told for themselves, that they are

\(^5\) It is interesting to observe that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.) is now studying the adoption of a new “Declaration of Faith.” The format that has been chosen for the Declaration is in story-form; each point in the Declaration begins with a rehearsal of that part of the story pertinent to that section.
not only about other people, but that they are always about us. They locate us in the very midst of the great story and plot of all time and space, and therefore relate us to the great dramatist and storyteller, God himself.6

The books which I have suggested as background reading for this lecture are, I believe, excellent contemporary models of preaching as story-telling, each author doing it in his own unique way.7

Here, for example, is B. Davie Napier telling the story of Cain so that it becomes our story. It is Cain who is speaking but it is, of course, me and my story being laid bare through the mouth of Cain:

I hate his guts, I hate the guts of Abel.
I'm sick of Abel, sick to death of Abel.
Sick of Brother sick of Fellows
Blacks and Whites and Browns and Yellows
Sick of Negro sick of Jew
pressing pressing for his due
sick of white men bastard white men
arrogant and always right men
sick of sick men sick of sickness
Protestant—and Catholic-ness
sick of every lying bromide
Happy birthday Merry Yuletide
freedom truth and brotherhood
Reader's Digest motherhood
pledge allegiance to the flag
'under God'—now what's the gag?
Sick of vicious ostentation
sick of humor's constipation
sick of sickness human sickness
human greed and human thickness.
Get my brother off my back
White and Yellow Brown and Black.
Perish Abel perish quick—
One of us is awful sick.8

Good and Evil in the Biblical Story

Now, that rebellious outburst on the lips of Cain, which becomes through the preacher's sensitivity the same outburst on my own lips, brings us quite obviously to the problem of good and evil in relation to the biblical story. Actually, of course, the reason for the biblical story in the first place is the conflict between good and evil, the conflict between God's good will of love for mankind and man's refusal to live in accordance with God's good will.

6 Wilder, p. 65.
   John R. Fry, Fire and Blackstone (New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1969)
8 Napier, pp. 34-5.
The early stories in Genesis make this clear. The creation story ends with, "and God saw that it was good." And then, as you know, the trouble begins with the story of Adam and Eve and the serpent in the garden; followed by the story of Cain and Abel, with Cain murdering his brother. Things go from bad to worse, and finally, "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart." Then follows the story of the flood with God choosing the righteous Noah as a kind of second Adam to start the story all over again. But, as you know, that does not work very well either, with the righteous Noah ending up in a drunken stupor.

So the story begins with the conflict between good and evil, between God's will and humankind's refusal to accept and live by that will. But the biblical story is not of much help in explaining the why of evil in a world which God created good. The origin of evil is left ambiguous and mysterious. The biblical story is concerned more with the reality of evil and God's way of dealing with it than it is with any philosophical or theological or psychological explanation of the origin of evil. The existence of Satan is presupposed in the later writings and the story of a fallen angel accounting for Satan does not help much in explaining the why of evil.

The most satisfying answer to the problem which I have found comes from Reinhold Niebuhr's *The Nature and Destiny of Man.* A human being, by virtue of the fact that he is a mortal creature, and, so far as we know, the only mortal creature who knows that he is a mortal creature, is anxious because he cannot control his future. He knows that he will die. He also knows that there is more that he does not know. So he is anxious. This kind of creaturely anxiety is neither good nor evil. It is a given. It is just part of the existence of a creature who knows that he is a creature and who therefore knows that he cannot control his future or his destiny. "Anxiety," according to Niebuhr, "is the internal precondition of sin." In that creaturely anxiety he can either trust God and his will for him and his future, or he can say, "To hell with that; by God, I'll take my own future, my own destiny, into my own two hands and work it out for myself." The early stories in Genesis, the story of Adam and Eve in the garden, the story of Cain and Abel, the story of Noah, the story of the tower of Babel, simply illustrate how this initial rebellion issues in pride, lust, gluttony, murder, apathy, selfishness, greed, injustice, and all the rest of the evils which clutter up the landscape of our lives. Evil at its root, in the biblical story, is simply the refusal to trust God and his will for us and for our future. Which is why faith is so prominent in the story; it is the precondition of love.

The rest of the biblical story is a long account of how God deals with this problem. His strategy is to evoke man's faith and trust in him and his will while respecting man's freedom to choose. A large part of his love for us is this respect for our freedom. We are created "in his image" which means that we are created capable of response to the God who made us. He will not

9 Gen. 6:5-6.
bully or coerce. His judgment on our rebelliousness is simply to let the chips fall where they may. Meanwhile, he chooses a people who will multiply and be a blessing to all the nations of the earth—and the blessing is that through the lives and witness of this people to his faithfulness, his trustworthiness, they shall be a “light to the Gentiles,” evoking faith in God and his will.

So the stories of Abraham, of Moses and the liberation of the slaves in Egypt, the passing through the Sea of Reeds, the stories of David, of the prophets, right on through to the Christ story, are the working out of this basic strategy, to evoke faith in God and his will and thus to “save” the people from their sins. “Repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ” means, essentially, in your anxiety as a creature turn from taking matters into your own hands and trust the God who reveals his trustworthiness in Christ and his love for you.

It is evident in the biblical story that evil appears not simply in personal or individual terms. It is also social. It infects the structures of society. As, in a community, we gather strength and courage and hope from others, so also do we encourage selfishness and pride and violence and lust in each other and excuse and justify one another when we resort to selfishness and pride and violence and lust. The prophets, therefore, speak God’s judgment not only upon individual and personal evils, but also upon the evils of the church and the state. So Amos, “I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies, even though you offer me your burnt offerings and cereal offerings, I will not accept them, and the peace offerings of your fatted beasts I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” 12 Nor is the judgment in Amos limited to the chosen people of Israel: “Thus says the Lord: For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they have threshed Gilead with threshing sledges of iron. So I will send a fire upon the house of Hazael, and it shall devour the strongholds of Ben-hadad. I will break the bar of Damascus, and cut off the inhabitants from the Valley of Aven, and him that holds the sceptre from Beth-Eden; and the people of Syria shall go into exile to Kir, says the Lord.” 13

But the biblical story, even as it is carried along through the prophets, is not basically or primarily a story of judgment. It is a story of God’s grace, of his faithfulness, of his trustworthiness. For his strategy, even though it includes judgment, does not change. His strategy is to evoke faith, trust and thus obedience to his will. So he offers visions of the future which illustrate his faithfulness. So in Micah: “he shall judge between many peoples, and shall decide for strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore; but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and none shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.” 14

13 Amos 1:3-5.
14 Micah 4:3-4.
So, too, to the people of Israel under the judgment of exile in Babylon, through the unknown prophet of the exile: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings, who publishes peace, who brings good tidings of good, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.' Hark, your watchmen lift up their voice, together they sing for joy; eye to eye they see the return of the Lord to Zion. Break forth together into singing, you waste places of Jerusalem; for the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God."  

Despite the judgment levelled at hypocrisy in worship, at injustice and idolatry, the story is a story of God's faithful love for his people. He does not give up on them. The promise offered after the flood in the form of a rainbow is kept. His strategy for overcoming evil with good is to evoke faith and trust from the people, overcoming their anxiety out of which evil springs, with the assurance of his love and his promises for the future. 

Nowhere does this strategy for dealing with evil come through more plainly than in the Christ-story. Here God himself enters into human history in the Christ figure, places himself at our disposal, makes himself vulnerable to all the evil in the world—for love is supremely expressed in vulnerability—even to evil's supreme expression, death.

Paul, in the second chapter of his letter to the Philippians, as Professor Sanders pointed out last year, 16 celebrates the work of Christ in humility: "... who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross."  

Here is the very opposite of the early stories in Genesis where men were constantly attempting to "count equality with God a thing to be grasped." But the Christ figure is content to live with his anxiety as a mortal creature who knows that he is a mortal creature and to trust God and thus to be obedient, even if it meant death and darkness. "Have this mind in you..." says Paul.

If you are anything like me, you probably have trouble equating the New Testament emphasis on humility and meekness as a picture of the "good." For the words humble and meek have drawn to themselves unpleasant and even unhealthy connotations symbolized by the Caspar Milquetoast figure. But originally, the biblical words did not carry that connotation. The Greek word for meek, for example, as in "Blessed are the meek," is praus, a word used to describe wild chariot horses: wild horses, full of fire and strength and energy which had been trained to bit and bridle and thus sensitive to the reins in the hands of the driver without losing their fire and strength and individuality. The key meaning of meek is one who, without losing his individuality, trusts God enough to be sensitive to his will and thus obedient. So Christ "humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross."

Thus Christ becomes an example of the good, obedient, trusting life for us:

15 Isaiah 52:7-10.  
16 Sanders, p. 11.  
17 Phil. 2:6-8.
"Have this mind in you..." But if that were all, we would be of all people most miserable. For to hold Christ up as an example for me judges and condemns me and offers me no hope at all. I cannot possibly have the "mind of Christ" in me. But that is not all. For God vindicates this trusting and obedient Son of his in the Resurrection. And for me, the whole biblical story of good and evil and of God's strategy in dealing with evil comes to rest here, in the Resurrection. For the Resurrection means that evil does not have the last word. When evil has done its worst, in and through me as well as in and through others, there is always the possibility of a new beginning. "Behold I make all things new." The promise to the people of Israel that they will be a blessing to the nations is not revoked or dead. It is enlivened and empowered by the Resurrection of Christ from the dead.

So, "believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved," or, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes on him will not perish but obtain everlasting life"\(^\text{18}\) means, in the framework of what we have been setting forth here, that the God who has disclosed his faithfulness and trustworthiness in the birth, life, death and Resurrection of Christ has freed you, at least in part, from your anxiety about who you are and what the future holds for you and thus has opened for you the possibility of obedience and even of having something of the mind of Christ in you.

Biblical preaching, therefore, will rehearse this story week after week until it becomes a part of us, a part of our mind-set. It will not necessarily do in a single sermon what I have attempted to do here, to take a running start and cruise through the whole biblical story from the first chapter of Genesis on through to the Book of Revelation—although that might not be a bad idea once in a while so that we can see the unfolding story as a whole, for a change, rather than just bits and pieces of the story.

But normally biblical preaching will deal with one incident in the story through the exploration of a text or passage. A lectionary which is developed in terms of the church year will help guarantee that all the major emphases in the biblical story will be dealt with over a year's preaching.

This rehearsal of the biblical story will not be a rehearsal simply of what God did back there somewhere, for the battle between good and evil goes on, of course, and God's strategy for dealing with evil has not changed. Consequently, biblical preaching today will include judgment, or what is often called "prophetic preaching." The purpose of this kind of prophetic preaching is to uncover evil and the potential for evil in even the best of us. It will remind us, for example, that the Nazi atrocities resulting in the death of at least six million Jews occurred in a nation which also produced Bach and Goethe and Beethoven.

But the major emphasis in biblical preaching, as in the biblical story, will be to evoke faith and trust in God's faithfulness and thus make possible obedience and salvation from the anxieties which cripple us. It will not talk about faith because a relationship of trust and love is not created by talking about it. It will, rather, evoke it by calling attention to where God's faithfulness can be seen and experienced today and by pointing to his promises for the future.

18 John 3:16.
But this is quite abstract. Sin wears many faces. What face is it wearing especially today? What is the look of evil in our world—and in us—today? So let us take a look now at our stories in the light of the biblical story today.

Acedia: The Sin in Our Stories

Colin Williams, in a little study book on church renewal, wrote several years ago that “the forms” of the renewed life in the church must be allowed “to grow around all the shapes of worldly need.” This reflects the fact that the emphases in the biblical story shift in response to the human or worldly situation. The prophecy of Amos, for example, is directed to a people who were enjoying a long period of peace and prosperity and who were arrogant, corrupt and highly diligent church-goers and tithers. Consequently, the word of the Lord on the lips of Amos to the people of Samaria is virtually an unrelenting word of judgment. There is little grace or promise or hope in the book of Amos. On the other hand, the word of the Lord on the lips of an unknown prophet of the exile (Isaiah 40-55), is predominantly a word of comfort and hope addressed to the exiles in Babylon who, after fifty years, had almost despaired of God's love and care for them, of God's faithfulness. There is judgment too in this prophecy but the major emphasis is on God's grace as it is voiced in the opening lines of the prophecy: “Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people; speak ye tenderly to Jerusalem.” Differing human situations elicited different emphases in the Word of God addressed to them. Their stories were not unrelated to the way in which God addressed them.

The same thing holds true in post-biblical times. At the time of the Reformation the crying need of the people, symbolized by Luther's own experience, was how to find peace and acceptance in the face of an angry and wrathful God. So the central emphasis that Luther sought after and found in the biblical story was “Justification by grace through faith.” An angry God could not be placated by offerings or masses or self-flagellation or good works of any kind; God is a forgiving God, a reconciling God, whose grace overrules his wrath.

Well, what is the crying need among people today? I suspect that there are not a great many people lying awake nights tortured by the specter of an unforgiving and angry God. This is not to say that guilt is not a problem for a number of people. But I suspect it is not the overriding problem for most of us. Indeed, one scholar, observing the contemporary scene, writes, “... the New Testament’s profound understanding of men’s sin and suffering, and of judgment are no longer comprehended. Man, with immortality in his soul, has certain inalienable rights. He has the right to a full life and a good life, and can legitimately claim them, and the necessity of God's judgment or of man's suffering is totally rejected, as a denial of that abundant life to which every human being is entitled.”

But I wonder if that is really an accurate reading of the contemporary situation. It may be true for some; it may be a superficial veneer for others. I suspect that underneath the surface most of us are not so self-assured or optimistic. Amos Wilder suggests, in a theological analysis of modern literature, that "... the modern mood finds an insufficient sense of evil in the Christian Victorian writers, and, indeed, in the Romantic poets... If we turn back to the nineteenth century, we go to G. Manley Hopkins rather than to Browning; to Dostoievsky rather than to Dickens; to Emily Dickinson rather to the American 'household poets.' "22 He goes on, "... today it is widely true that the churches need to be awakened from their un-dogmatic slumber: they have lost awareness of the fateful issues of good and evil, of salvation and damnation. This kind of salutary shock is provided by the modern arts: not only by Christian, but by agnostic artists and writers."23

Perhaps the old cliché, an "age of anxiety," is not a cliché after all. Perhaps it is closer to the truth. For piled on top of the common creaturely anxiety of being a mortal creature who knows he is a mortal creature are all the massive and apparently unmanageable problems of our world: the population explosion and the shrinking food reserves leading to vast stretches of hunger and famines particularly in Asia and Africa; the energy crisis and the tension between finding and using coal as over against the ecological dangers; the devastating worldwide inflation coupled with a recession threatening to turn into a full scale depression, each feeding the other and no one quite sure how to cope with one or the other or both; the desperate plight of the cities choked by traffic, pollution and crime on the streets, along with the plight of the poor and the minorities squeezed into ghettos crawling with rats; and hanging over it all like the threat of doom, the bomb, the possibility of nuclear war. So for a lot of us the problem is not so much an angry wrathful God but the very real possibility that life is simply meaningless and hopeless. The problems we face are too overwhelming and unmanageable.

One understandable reaction to that situation is a flight to nostalgia. So we have had a spate of nostalgic musicals in recent years: Oh, Coward; No, No, Nanette; Irene; and Lorelei played to packed houses. If we cannot manage our problems at least we can escape them for an evening and long for an earlier time when life, apparently, was simpler. My wife, watching the dreary news at six o'clock night after night, frequently comments, "I wish I had lived and died before 1913." So we turn the dial to "Upstairs, Downstairs" to go back to an older and, at some levels at least, a more gracious world.

A number of contemporary theologians take a different approach to the problem. So Jurgen Moltmann: "... it is usually said that sin in its original form is man's wanting to be as God. But that is only the one side of sin. The other side of such pride is hopelessness, resignation, inertia and melancholy. From this arise the tristesse and frustration which fill all living things with the seeds of sweet decay. Among the sinners whose future is eternal death in Rev.21:8, the 'fearful' are mentioned before unbelievers, idolaters, murderers and the rest... Temptation then consists not so much in the titanic desire to be as God, but in weakness, timidity, weariness, not wanting

23 Ibid., p. 60.
to be what God requires of us." And further, "God honors [man] with his promises, but man does not believe himself capable of what is required of him. That is the sin which most profoundly threatens the believer. It is not the evil he does, but the good he does not do, not his misdeeds but his omissions, that accuse him. They accuse him of lack of hope."

Harvey Cox takes a less one-sided view but comes out essentially at the same place:

In my view, the disaster which seems about to overtake us springs not from our brash cocksureness but from our cynical suspicion that there is nothing we can possibly do about it. I am not arguing that man’s sin is solely that of abdication, sloth and cowardice rather than pride and swagger. I am saying that our sin is a curious admixture of both. It mingle arrogance and timidity, rushing in and sneaking away, hubris and acedia. I would further contend that in today’s world, for most people, fear and impotence and self-pity seem more central.

Furthermore, Cox finds the root of that situation in the ancient story of the Fall in Genesis:

If we read that old story carefully, we’ll see it is a sin of acedia. Eve shares with Adam the assignment of exercising mastery over all the creatures of the field. Her ‘original’ misdeed was not eating the forbidden fruit at all. Before she reached for the fruit she had already surrendered her position of power and responsibility over one of the animals, the serpent, and let it tell her what to do. Thus self-doubt, hesitant anxiety, and dependency actually preceded that fatal nibble that has fascinated us for so long and made us fuse sin with pride. Adam and Eve are the biblical Everyman and Everywoman. Their sin is our sin. It is not promethean. We do not defy the gods by courageously stealing the fire from the celestial hearth, thus bringing benefit to men. Nothing so heroic. We fritter away our destiny by letting some snake tell us what to do.

Dr. Karl Menninger, not a professional theologian, of course, still comes to the same conclusion with respect to the shape of evil in life today. He writes, ‘The message is simple. It is that concern is the touchstone. Caring and relinquishing the sin of indifference. This recognizes acedia as the Great Sin; the heart of all sin.’ He talks of the overwhelming problems of our times and deals with them in terms of “sin as collective irresponsibility.” He gives chapter and verse with respect to war, slavery, the ghettoes, big corporations, handguns, population explosion, the American Indians, environment, affluence and waste. These evils, he argues, are present because of the “Great Sin,” acedia, lack of caring, anxiety, indifference, sloth.

Now if these witnesses are accurate in their diagnosis of evil in our time—and I think they are, both as I look around me and as I look into myself—then the emphasis in the Word addressed to the people of our time will be

shaped around this worldly need. Biblical preaching will address itself to sin or evil as acedia.

And first of all it will expose the acedia within ourselves: the not caring, the refusal to accept responsibility, the temptation to give up and to give up hope. Actually, Menninger’s book is just that, a fairly long sermon in the prophetic mood designed to expose the acedia in all of us. He wants to bring about recognition of sin and then calls us to repentance, to turn and to accept our responsibility. He finds hope in this and quotes Seward Hiltner to that effect:

If we had something to do with getting things wrong, then the powers that produce wrong are not wholly beyond us, as would be true if the human predicament came solely from fate, or from a double-minded God, or from a devil who overpowers. Even the first statement about sin is, thus, a word of possible hope. It pinpoints what needs to be inspected if there is to be improvement. It is a very rough kind of diagnosis. If something is wrong, as it is, look first at yourselves, collectively and individually. However bad it is, we, you are involved in it. That should give you hope, not despair. 29

That may well be a necessary and salutary first step. But I need more hope than that, to “accept responsibility,” as Dr. Menninger exhorts me to do. For preaching is far more than exhortation. Indeed, we have had far too much exhortation from pulpits down through the years. I have to know that it is worth accepting responsibility, that something good can come out of it, that it is more than just treading water or jogging in place, that there is a future to look forward to. I need to be told the Story, the Story which tells me who I am, who God is, and what is to become of both of us. And this is the purpose of the promises for the future which run all through the biblical story: the promise of a land, of the coming of a Messiah, of visions of jewelled cities, of eternal life, of the Second Coming of Christ. The purpose is not to entice us through an escape from the evils of this present world, but rather by giving us hope at the end of time, we can engage in hopeful battles against evil in this present time. The biblical story, like any story, has a beginning, a middle (and that is where we are right now) and an end. And the end of the story is safely in God’s hands. Life does win out over death in the end. God’s good will for his world will defeat evil in the end. That is what all the gaudy promises and visions of the future in the biblical story are all about. All so that we can, as Paul urges us at the end of that magnificent chapter on the Resurrection in I Corinthians 15, “Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” 30

I do not mean to suggest that such a hope is easy to come by, or even that it readily issues in hopeful battles in the present. For a host of people in our time, the Story is no longer believable or relevant. One of the major reasons for the evil of acedia in our time is precisely because we have lost or forgotten the Story. As Sam Keen puts it:

29 Ibid., p. 220.
30 I Cor. 15:58.
Until recent years, the keystone of personal identity was participation in the shared stories, legends, and myths of a tribe, nation, cult or church. The past, present, and future of the individual were bound together by the memories and hopes of a people to which he belonged. With the birth of secular, pluralistic, technological society, a new type of man has emerged—the man without a story, the rootless, protean man living without the stability of a tradition which he remembers with pride or a future he awaits with longing. There is little immediate possibility that a new overarching myth will emerge to provide a common structure for Western man in the way the Christian myth once did. Pluralism means that we no longer have common histories or shared hope.31

Sometimes I know that I feel as Sam Keen does here. But then I remember the Story—which is my story—our story—and the Story includes long, long periods of disillusionment and despair and hopelessness. The Psalms frequently give expression to it: "How long, O Lord, how long? Will you hide your face from me forever?" And part of the glory of the Story is that it records precisely those periods of disillusionment and despair and hopelessness as a witness to a people who hung in there and toughed it out when the going got rough because they would not give up their Story of the faithfulness of God—even when everything around them seemed to deny it.

So biblical preaching today, along with all the other facets of the church’s life, of course, will keep bringing us back to the Story in the light of our stories and the story of our times. It will expose the acedia in us for the evil that it is; but even more will it prod our hopes in the faithfulness of God to his promises as that faithfulness comes to light in the biblical story. We may not know how to worship very well anymore, or how to pray very well anymore, or how to celebrate with abandon and integrity anymore; but if we can hang on to the Story, we shall not be lost.

There is a provocative story from Elie Wiesel:

When the great Rabbi Israel Baal Shem-Tov saw misfortune threatening the Jews it was his custom to go into a certain part of the forest to meditate. There he would light a fire, say a special prayer, and the miracle would be accomplished and the misfortune averted. Later, when his disciple, the celebrated Magid of Mezritch, had occasion, for the same reason, to intercede with heaven, he would go to the same place in the forest and say: 'Master of the universe, listen! I do not know how to light the fire, but I am still able to say the prayer,' and again the miracle would be accomplished. Still later, Rabbi Moshe-Leib of Sasov, in order to save his people once more, would go into the forest and say: 'I do not know how to light the fire, I do not know how to say the prayer, but I know the place and this must be sufficient.' It was sufficient and the miracle was accomplished. Then it fell to Rabbi Israel of Rizhyn to overcome misfortune. Sitting in his armchair, his head in his hands, he spoke to God: 'I am unable to light the fire and I do not know the prayer; I cannot even find the place in the forest. All I can do is to tell the story, and this must be sufficient.' And it was sufficient.32

Book Reviews


Sallie TeSelle may be spokeswoman for many when she charges that theology, especially the great systematics, has become a “sedimentation of metaphors,” for even the most heroic efforts on the part of systematic theologians tame the wild and passionate gospel story. In an attempt to recover the power and pathos of the Christian tradition, she proposes a new way of “getting in touch” with Christian experience through what she has called “intermediary or parabolic” theology, which is “... theology which relies on various literary forms—parables, stories, poems, confessions—as a way from religious experience to systematic theology” (p. 2). Dean TeSelle does not simply write a prolegomena to her self-designated task, for she intends that Speaking in Parables actually start us on the way of doing “intermediary theology.”

The crucial concept for the book is that of metaphor. A metaphor is a word used in an unexpected way which jolts us to new insight. Drawing heavily on the insistence of the new hermeneutic that insight comes through language, and following in the wake of Funk, Via, and John Crossan (all of whom insist on the intrinsic unity between language and experience) she echoes, “... metaphor is a way of knowing, not just of communicating. In metaphor, knowledge and its expression are one and the same; there is no way around a metaphor; it is not expendable” (p. 4). Metaphors are not just clever products of creative imagination; they are windows of the imperceptible and inexpressible. This is especially important for theology. “In religious metaphor ... the two subjects, ordinary life and the transcendent, are so intertwined that there is no way of separating them out and, in fact, what we learn is not primarily something about God but a new way to live ordinary life” (p. 45).

The parables of Jesus are such metaphors for they take ordinary people and events and give them a twist so that we see strange and extraordinary things. Only by participation in the rich detail of the parables does new insight come. There is no short-cut to meaning by reducing the parables to one-point stories (Juelicher), teachings about the Kingdom of God (Dodd), or aesthetic reversals (Crossan). For TeSelle, these metaphors of Jesus are the primary speech about God and the Kingdom.

This much is hardly new. In addition to the ghost of the new hermeneutic, there is an implicit debt to the current interest in storytelling with its concentration on discrete events. Indeed, it is the discrete event which gives birth to metaphor. The most provocative (and fresh) aspect of the book comes when she leads us to see that the parables of Jesus are not alone in their capacity to arouse insight, for poem, novel, and autobiography manifest the same metaphorical traits as the parables.

Throughout Part II, the author is consumed by the desire to see how the
ordinary is recontextualized by the graciousness of God. Again and again, the treatment of specific poets (e.g. John Donne, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Corita Kent) is careful and sensitive. She sees “story” as embracing all types of narrative, especially novels, and this is important because, “From the novelist as well as from the stories in Scripture, the theologian should take courage to concentrate on the experience of coming to belief, not on the ‘beliefs’ themselves (the sedimentation of experiences of coming to belief)” (p.139). Among those autobiographies considered are Paul, Augustine, John Woolman, and Teilhard, and each is shown to have written an autobiography which is a metaphor of the self. Indeed, Jesus is spoken of as the “metaphor of God” for through him we discover that the human experiencing of the familiar and mundane is in fact our way of discovering God. As the last page is closed, there is a fine sense of having done intermediary theology.

Questions, however, remain. There is much talk about the parables of Jesus. In point of fact, in the whole book only two are discussed (the prodigal and the marriage feast), and the chapter on parables mentions only the marriage feast and an intriguing parable by Kafka. The reason for the primacy of Jesus’ parables as speech about God and life is unclear. In the discussion of the marriage feast, there is no discrimination as to what parts of Matthew’s version (with no recognition accorded to Luke’s account) are to be attributed to redaction and what part is to be attributed to Jesus. The importance of this observation is immediately obvious. Metaphors are not simply let loose in the world; they are born in particular contexts and they appear strange not because they possess a quality of strangeness but because they appear strange to a particular world. The world of Jesus and the world of Matthew are not the same, and if integrity is to be preserved between a metaphor and its particularity, we need to know to which world the metaphor belongs. The problem of the cultural conditioning of a metaphor is left untouched. Is it enough to hear a first or fourth or nineteenth century metaphor, or do we not need first to enter the world which gave rise to the metaphor?

Yet, the most important test our author faces is the relationship between language and reality. Her own hopes are high: “Reality is created through this incredible complex of metaphorical leaps . . . .” (p. 52). “. . . all human discovery is by metaphor” (p. 56). Perhaps we need more clarification of what Dr. TeSelle means by metaphor. Is it akin to what the new hermeneutic calls “understanding” or is it more comprehensive? In any case, a question presses itself on the author: is there no possibility that insight and discovery might be mediated through direct experience? A child understands love before it makes any metaphorical leaps. A sweaty embrace with salty tears running together as we stand cheek to cheek creates the reality of forgiveness and understanding of community as surely as a metaphor of Jesus. Surely, in being liberated from the Greek (but still popular) notion that the best ideas are abstract, and from theologians who insist that the best theology is systematic, we are not to be enslaved to a new taskmaster which says that all understanding is verbal.

In her future volumes, one would hope to find reference to the novels of Frederick Buechner, who commends himself as one of the most metaphorical authors in print.
For this reader, as a preacher, the analyses of specific authors and texts is suggestive, not only for itself, but for reading other texts. This is, perhaps, the most appropriate response to the work. And, in a review which appears in a volume so closely related to the work of one of my great teachers, Edmund Steimle, it is appropriate to give thanks for sermon titles with which the author has inadvertently laced the book, particularly "The Metaphor of God" and "The Parable of God." Ed, after all, is both of those.

Ronald Allen

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WORSHIP AND THEOLOGY IN ENGLAND: FROM ANDREWES TO BAXTER AND FOX, 1603-1690 by Horton Davies; Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1975, xxiii + 592 pp., 16 illus. $25.00.

In one of the most distinguished volumes of liturgical scholarship of this decade, and the concluding book of a five volume series which is, with little question, the most significant liturgical series of the twentieth century, Horton Davies establishes new standards for all future scholarship in the area of Theology and Worship.

The author introduces us to that 'acrimoniously partisan century' (the seventeenth) with a vivid description:

This is a century of apparently implacable hostility, of fratricide between Christians, of almost unbearable proximity in pen and pulpit, of deliberate misrepresentation of one's theological opponents, of damnable dogmatism even in speculative matters, and of hideous intolerance. It is, at the same time, like lilies growing in manure, an era which produced the brilliant sermons of Andrewes and Donne, these exemplary and complementary pastors Herbert and Baxter, the two religious epics of the Biblical visions and musings of Milton and Bunyan, and the greatest constellation of religious poets England has ever seen. (p. xxii)

Professor Davies has outlined his study in a refreshingly clear manner. Part One, The Context of Worship, startles us by beginning with Church Architecture, for here theology is given 'outward and visible expression.' He follows aspects of architecture like symbolism, functionalism, social prestige, and economics, with the impact of Laud on Anglican structures, and the changes brought about through the most prolific of all architects of the period: Christopher Wren. Public Worship, however, was significant only when there were altars in the homes, and there follows one of the most incisive chapters on the manuals of devotion found among the spectrum of religious groups in the period. Preaching had a golden age with Andrewes, Donne, Jeremy Taylor, Bunyan, and Baxter all holding that proclaiming the Word of God made the pulpit both 'joy and throne.'

Section Two on the Cletic Controversies illustrates the abrasive and sometimes violent stances of men who differ profoundly on theological and liturgical issues. One of the most heated conflicts was over the Church Calendar: the plethora of saints days observed in both Roman and Laudian circles, as over
against the strict Sabbath (and avoidance of all saints days) of the Puritans. Sacred Music was another place of cleavage. Chanting in the Cathedrals by highly trained choirs contrasted with the congregational singing of Metrical Psalmody among the Puritans, representing an unbridgable liturgical gulf. The Sacraments, again, were viewed from widely different perspectives in the pluralism of that century.

Davies entitles Part Three ‘The History and Forms of Worship’ in which the Anglican Book of Common Prayer is defended, revised, and militantly opposed through a variety of political and cultural crises through the power struggles surrounding the reigns of James I, Charles II, Cromwell, and William and Mary. The author is especially helpful in providing historical perspective on the strong Puritan predilection for form and structure in prayer until the excesses of the High Church Anglicans forced Independents and Presbyterians into a ‘free prayer’ quite alien to their Calvinist heritage both in Geneva and Edinburgh. Nonconformist Worship, both Presbyterian and Independent, is interpreted skillfully, while Roman Catholic Worship, in both its High Baroque form (available at court at certain times) and the simple Mass forced ‘underground’, is vividly portrayed from diaries and letters. ‘Radical Worship’ reminds the reader how closely Baptist and Quaker were in some ways, and how different in others; and how both differed from extremist groups like the Levelers, Diggers, and Fifth Monarchy Men. Finally, a survey and Critique of New Developments and of Continuing Traditions is a most satisfying conclusion, full of perceptive comparisons and wise evaluations.

While the general reader will be both stretched and edified by the sagacity of this study, the technical scholar will be humbled, excited, and encouraged by the breadth of Horton, through the range and penetration of his research, and the soundness and vitality of his conclusions. The latter also will be grateful for an immensely useful scholarly apparatus: a listing of Liturgical Texts, of Manuscripts, of Periodicals and Publications, of Sources in English Literature, and of fifteen pages of books! Even the Index is considerate of the specialist: the three sections include Names, Places, and Topics.

This brilliant volume, however, cannot be reviewed in isolation, although it has an integrity and scope of its own. It must be seen in relation to the four previously published volumes under the same general subject, but with the following subtitles: From Cranmer to Hooker 1534-1603 (1970); From Watts and Wesley to Maurice 1690-1850 (1961); From Newman to Martineau 1850-1900 (1962); and The Ecumenical Century, 1900-1965 (1965). These five volumes comprise the only thorough study ever accorded this all-important subject.

The comprehensiveness of Professor Davies’ work can be viewed only in relationship to other major liturgical theologians. Certainly Louis Bouyer, Dom Gregory Dix, Massey H. Shepherd, Jr., Evelyn Underhill, and Yngve Brilioth would be among such scholars of significance. Yet with the sole exception of Underhill, all confine themselves, on the whole, to their own tradition. Even in Underhill’s valuable study, Worship, she writes most appreciatively of her own High Church Anglican Worship and its opposite: Quaker worship, but has little enthusiasm for anything in between. Davies, however, with utmost care, and with incredible range of primary sources (Jeremy Taylor, one of his heroes, quoted 1300 authors, but Davies out-
does him!), and with sound discrimination examines every type of worship known in England since the Reformation. And, after offering a stirring interpretation of the Biblical witness in Puritan worship, he brings this indictment of his own tradition:

Nor was Puritan worship able to minister to the mixed spiritual-physical nature of man. Its worshippers were expected to live as angels, as bodiless spirits, using their ears, but neglecting the senses of touch, of scent, of taste, and above all, of sight. Its prolix prayers and marathon preaching left congregations edified and often even elated, but also exhausted. (p. 532)

In the illustrations (so helpful in a study which includes the arts) one might wish for more attention to church buildings, 'meeting houses,' symbols—especially more interiors. Davies' interpretation of Zwingli on the Lord's Supper has been disputed by Professor Cyril Richardson and others. It may be true that the Puritan was not opposed to art, and simply loved religion more, but that was probably more true in the Old World than in New England. The statement that the Directory influenced Free Church worship in English-speaking countries (p. 426) for 300 years, hardly takes into consideration the pluralism of Free Church worship in the United States, especially in light of both the Great Awakening of the eighteenth century and the Second Awakening of the nineteenth. Errors in proofreading were noted on pp. 20, 26, 125, 157, 161, 171, and 335.

But these are minor matters indeed. What is major is that a scholar of rare competence, with disciplined mind and warm heart, has devoted the major part of his scholarly life to an examination of a seminal part of Christian history, which has either been neglected or treated only in part. Dr. Davies has set a new standard for all liturgical scholarship by the breadth of his work (what other historian of worship includes the arts?), the diligence of his research, and the artistry of his writing. He points the way to what desperately needs doing on this side of the Atlantic: a careful study of the history of worship in the churches of Canada and of the United States.

Moreover, Davies achieves what is rare in contemporary theological scholarship: he makes learning lively and fascinating (even Reinhold Niebuhr carefully deleted his beautiful humor from all his books), not through any forced artifice, but by simply letting the worthies speak for themselves. In explaining Laud's difficulty with convinced 'Protestants' he noted they "had been long accustomed to drinking a heady cocktail of English patriotism with a dash of anti-Catholic bitters, shaken by the vivid words and images of Foxe's Book of Martyrs" (p. 338). In describing how some Anglicans overdressed their naves, Pepys in his Diary reported that the pulpit was so swatched in holly and ivy, that "a light fellow in our pew took occasion to say, that the Congregation heard the Word out of a Bush, like Moses" (p. 392). Or again, describing how some Non-Juring bishops and clergy found it ethically impossible to say 'Amen' at the close of prayers (as they were required) took snuff at the appropriate moment and "sneezed their disapprobation" (p. 397).

In a day when fine printing and craftsmanship in bookmaking is almost extinct except in esoteric circles, the Princeton University Press deserves the
BOOK REVIEWS

gratitude of all who view printing as a high art, by publishing these five volumes in exquisite binding, and in a most readable and attractive format. To be sure the price will limit purchasers. But perhaps it is justified when one can be as sure as one is of the merits of this extraordinary work. To Horton Davies' theological and historical erudition the Press has added grace.

Harland E. Hogue

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Here comes another book by Robert Hudnut. First, The Sleeping Giant, 1971. Then, Arousing the Sleeping Giant, 1973. Now, Church Growth Is Not the Point, 1975—this one "harder hitting" than the one before. (Also forty fewer pages and $2 more expensive.) That's how important it is. Or how important he says it is. All those short, punchy, breathless sentences. All those italicized words. It leaves one gasping. Wow.

Do I detect in the title a rejoinder to certain books on church growth? If so, he does not refer to any, so it is hard to take issue with him on specifics. There is a church-growth gig going, with books and films and training institutes on how to get your church to grow. But to criticize it for selling out real discipleship for the sake of paper gains in numbers is to scoff at a caricature. It is one of those "we-they" things: we evangelize, they proselytize; we clean our rolls of deadwood, they have a turnstile operation.

My own book, Why Conservative Churches Are Growing (Harper & Row, 1972—the Book Review Editor of this publication asked me to mention it) has come in for a certain amount of this cheap scorn, though not from Hudnut, I'm sure, since he wrote a nice blurb for the dust jacket. It is not really about Church growth or "conservative churches"—whatever they are. (They are a figment of Harper & Row's inventiveness; if the title said what the book is about, it would be "Why Strict Churches Are Strong"—whether liberal or conservative, whether growing in numbers at the moment or not.)

If church growth is not the point, what is? Hudnut thought you'd never ask! "The Point Is to Be Objectified" (chap. 4). "The Point Is to Be Made Real" (chap. 5). "The Point Is Revelation" (chap. 6). "The Point Is to Preach" (chap. 8). "The Point Is to Create" (chap. 9), "... to Pray" (chap. 10), "... to Be Forgiven" (chap. 11), "... to Be Inspired" (chap. 12), "... to Be Humiliated" (chap. 13), "... Disclosure" (chap. 14), "... Peace" (chap. 15), "... to Suffer" (chap. 16), "... to Be a Disciple" (chap. 17). Each is one of those short, zingy sermons that is supposed to get you right in the solar plexus. But after a while one becomes a bit punch drunk.

Not that I would criticize the content. It is really one of the most forceful expositions and re-expositions of the Gospel I have read. It has all the subtlety and sophistication of a steam-driven rivetting machine, with lines of Scripture as rivets. The argument runs through all three books with almost
verbatim reiteration. His congregation must be able by this time to repeat it from memory. I wouldn't change it—except those references to church growth.

People are leaving the church. It could not be a better sign... Most churches could be two-thirds smaller and lose nothing in power (p.xi). Loss of growth in statistics has often meant increase in growth in the Gospel (p. ix). A building fund is being matched by a benevolence fund. That is a guaranteed way to lose church members and grow as a church! (pp. x-xi). To be a church member is to suffer. You cannot be a church member without suffering... None of that is particularly conducive to growth. (p. 130)

Fewer is stronger. Gideon's band. Send the stragglers and summer soldiers home! Who cares about numbers?

I couldn't agree more that "church growth is not the point"—or at least not the objective. It is at best a by-product and (sometimes deceptive) index of vitality. The church that is doing what Hudnut recommends is going to grow, sooner or later, because it will be a better church than the lax and leisurely kind. "Better," not only in the New Testament sense he presses for, but "better" as an effective religious organization—one which performs the important function of religion: explaining the meaning of life in ultimate terms. What makes such an organization effective and its explanation convincing is the high commitment it demands of its adherents.

Churches can "grow" on gimmicks for short periods, and they can shrink by trimming off the fat, for a short time. But eventually a serious and high-demand religion will attract people who are hungering and thirsting for an explanation that makes sense of life, and they are persuaded that it makes not by its content, but by its cost. (If this line of thinking is not familiar to you, it is spelled out at greater length in my book, mentioned earlier.)

Hudnut admits that there is a relationship between "effectiveness" and numbers. It slips out, almost inadvertently, on page 90:

Obviously Jesus was effective, but he isn't around any more... What about the church members...? Ineffective? Eleven. Seventy. The entire empire in three hundred years. Today one-third of the world. Nearly a billion people. Ineffective?

And he says church growth is not the point?

Dean M. Kelley

DEAN M. KELLEY is an executive for the Religious Civil Liberties Bureau of the National Council of Churches.


A magnificent title — arousing expectations that, for me at least, were sadly disappointed. Probably all of us in the denomination would like to gather our pet peeves under such an umbrella but Fry's are not mine, with the ex-
ception of his ruthless scrutiny of PEB (planning, budgeting, and analysis) as a substitute for action in the Church’s mission.

This book reads like a long letter written by an angry man in a hurry. The author lashes out right and left and scores some telling points but it is extremely difficult to discover what hopes he has for reform, in spite of a valiant effort in the last two paragraphs of the book.

Fry traces the origin of "trivialization" back to the Confession of ‘67 with its choice of the theme of reconciliation as the key word of the faith for this generation. He doesn’t object to the emphasis in itself but asks: “What is the good of any single term?” Then he goes on to give his own definition of the Gospel. “The gospel, or what they call the gospel, is the entire New Testament plus twenty centuries of reflection and commentary, plus what reverent imagination might supply any minute now. There is enough diffusion in the gospel to raise a question about an attempt to jam it all into a single term.” Many would suspect that such a ragbag definition would produce a much more serious trivialization of the churches than is described in these pages. It is hard to understand (sentence after sentence in this book are hard to understand) the vehemence of this attack on the Confession, although some of his barbs will arouse an appreciative chuckle. For instance, he sums up the Confessions attempt to relate the faith to contemporary social questions under the rubric of “Reconciliation in Society” with the words: “Henceforth, if you believe God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, and if you believe God gave a mission of reconciliation to the church, and if you believe God still means the church to do his will, you people out there will begin acting like regular liberal democrats.”

Trivialization in the United Presbyterian Church has surely other roots than an inadequate Confession, an obsession with structures (though, if Fry is really making the latter point, this reviewer is in hearty agreement). It surely has to do with such things as the decline in reverence and sense of the holy, the crazy cult of the “relevant,” the unmelodious chatter of the “Worshipbook,” and the eroding of the significance of ministerial ordination.

It is unfair to blame a writer for not producing the book one would like to have written, and Fry’s outburst will undoubtedly meet with some hearty Amens. But surely a very short book on the trivialization of the church that devotes page after page to “the case of Angela Davis” is exemplifying its own title.

David H.C. Read

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HEALING by Francis MacNutt, O.P.; Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1974, 333 pp., $3.50.

So that you might meet the critic before reading her evaluation of MacNutt’s book on Healing, I choose to briefly summarize my perceptions and experiential knowledge of the topic. A mathematics teacher who moved into the field of counseling psychology, and within the last four years active in the charismatic movement within the Catholic Church, I see the “gift of
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**CONTINENTAL PIETISM AND EARLY AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY**
edited by F. Ernest Stoeffler

Providing a new perspective on America’s religious heritage, these seven essays point out the profound influence of Pietism in colonial America. The chapters include discussions of Lutheran, Mennonite, Moravian, Brethren and Methodist pietism, separatism and communitarianism.

0-8028-3478-0 Cloth, 260 pages, $4.50
healing" as a focal point. My interest in sharing this review with you is high. May my witness be received with the same objectivity as my writing.

In Summer, 1974, I attended a week-long retreat-workshop on healing conducted by the author himself. I went to gain whatever insights I possibly could that would enhance my counselor role in a liberal arts college. What I saw, heard, learned, and experienced that week surpassed my expectations. I became deeply convinced

that "Healing is movement toward wholeness" . . . that "God’s Will for each of us is wholeness or holiness even though so many of us are physically ill, broken in spirit, bear emotional scars, feel alienated from self and others and God" . . . that "God in His Wisdom makes the needed healing available through many ministers rather than in rare and singular settings or through extraordinary ministers" . . .

The increasing number of healings attest to the truth of these observations. Morton T. Kelsey in Healing and Christianity, a book published after fifteen years of researching from Old Testament times into modern Christian practices, offers a comprehensive rationale in defense of the universal exercise of healing powers of the Lord through the ordinary ministers of His choice gifted with this charisma. These powers, too long ignored by theologians, are once again becoming as evident as they were in apostolic times. Public ministers of the Lord's healing power such as Agnes Sanford, Kathryn Kuhlman, Rev. Tommy Tyson, Rev. Francis MacNutt, John and Ethel Banks, and many others equally well known, as well as public healing prayer services where hundreds are present, are extraordinary occasions of healing; less extraordinary but equally potent are the occasions where only "two or three gathered in His name" are instruments through which greater wholeness in mind, body, or spirit is received by the person being prayed over. Thousands can give reliable testimony of healings they witnessed or experienced; thousands more are "hungry and thirsty" for healing graces. An increasing number of these needed ministers of healing are serving in the vineyard of the Lord where so many people in need are waiting and willing to be so served.

Let me share one of the most recent experiences of healing that touched me. Spectacular? No! Deep and real? Yes! Accompanied by two gentlemen with whom I regularly pray over others for a healing, I went to the hospital bedside of Art, a heavy set commercial artist of six foot two, father of nine, loving husband and parent. Art was dying of cancer of the liver. Respectful love for his wife led him to consent to being prayed over for a healing. As we prayed, quiet tears rolled down his cheeks. Next day, as his wife Dorothy approached him she noted a brighter light in his eyes, a broader smile on his lips and listened as Art full of awe said, "It’s a whole new world." Indeed, though his body had not been made whole, his spirit had surely moved into greater wholeness.

In my counseling experience I have seen several students relieved of long standing emotional scars after prayers for an inner healing. I myself have been prayed over several times and currently experience a deeper peace and joy and confidence in the Lord than have been mine for decades. Indeed, with St. Luke 4:18, I believe an ever increasing number of followers of Christ, since they have been called into the healing ministry, can say

The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me for He has anointed me, He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to heal the broken hearted, give sight to the blind, and freedom to the downtrodden.

My opinion is that MacNutt's book truly accomplished this verse through the widespread effects of his nationwide ministry and his book on healing. In Part One of the book, Father Francis answers many of the more serious questions evoked by the very concept of praying for a healing. His style is clear, his presentation very easy to read, his answers helpful in planting a positive attitude toward healing. Part Two presents an emphatic picture of healing against a backdrop of faith, hope, and charity with emphasis on charity, for as he says, "the minister is simply to pray as best he can and above all, to love all the sick who come to him."

The four basic kinds of healing are delineated in Part Three: repentance (forgiveness being a vital factor), inner healing (for emotional problems), physical healing, deliverance (differentiated from exorcism). Through personal testimony as well as anecdotes received from others across the country, MacNutt touchingly tells of the when and how and where of many healings. Evident in each account is the healing love of the Lord coming through in response to the prayers of the "two or three gathered in His name." His concrete accounts offset the all too prevalent Western attitude of actively accepting suffering and not actively being moved to pray with faith that the Lord, in his loving care and concern will use His healing power. Furthermore, rather than dichotomize praying with faith for a healing and seeking professional help, the author makes it clear that both approaches are mutually supportive on the basic premise that the whole person needs healing.

In the final section of the book, the author moves into special considerations of interest in pastoral care and in meeting critical inquiries as to why prayers for healing are not heard. Of special mention is the chapter on sacraments and their healing effects.

The resurgence of interest in and incidence of widespread gifts of healing it seems to me, is a challenge for each Christian. This gift along with many or all the gifts of the Holy Spirit or charisma found in the early Church in abundance, serve the community as detailed in 1 Cor. 12. Too long we erred in thinking, or living as if we thought, they have no place in today’s technological society. Indeed, they are obviously fast becoming the cause of a vibrant renewal of our Christian experience.

S. Grace Regina Wingenfeld, O. P.

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