

“WHO ARE WE FOR GOD’S SAKE?”

by Phyllis D. Airhart

I admire people who have the knack of coming up with catchy titles. I chuckled when I saw the name of our “More Franchises than Tim Hortons” conference and was happy to learn that my presentation this morning had been assigned a title too, relieving me of the responsibility of coming up with one myself. But I remember hesitating as I saw my presentation title for the first time, because I wasn’t sure how to read it aloud. The first three words, “who are we,” suggested a straightforward assignment, giving ample scope to talk about some of the organizational features of the United Church and how it has fared in the Canadian context. But what was I to make of “for God’s sake”? Often we hear that phrase used in a way that my mother would have frowned upon as “taking the Lord’s name in vain”—to express exasperation, as in “what do you think you are doing, for God’s sake.” I’m sure we can all think of times when that sentiment has been expressed in reference to the United Church, either in critical reviews of its actions in the media, in disparaging remarks made by detractors either inside or outside of the United Church, perhaps even in our own heart of hearts. What on earth is the United Church doing, for God’s sake?

But there is another way of thinking about “for God’s sake” that is crucial in thinking about how the United Church has thought about mission and ministry in the Canadian context. It expresses a sentiment of earnestness rather than exasperation, the belief of its founders that their venture in ecumenism would result not only in operational efficiency, but would create better persons, better communities, and a better nation—a “Christian Canada” and a “Christian social order” as the founding generation often put it. Its founding mission was encapsulated in the words added to the theological preamble to the Basis of

Union at a meeting held in 1914 to choose the name and make the final revisions: “It shall be the policy of the United Church to foster the spirit of unity in the hope that this settlement of unity may in due time, so far as Canada is concerned, take shape in a Church which may fittingly be described as national.” The founders had a vision of what they wanted to become as a United Church, and their mission was shaped by what they thought God expected them to do to build the Kingdom of God—for *God’s* sake as well as for *Canada’s* sake. Indeed, for many of those committed to social reform there seemed to be little distinction between the two.

I want to keep both sentiments—the earnestness and the exasperation—in play in talking about “who are we” this morning because there is a sense in which both are related to the issue of United Church “identity”. The United Church was deeply serious about making a difference in Canada. That aspiration was evident at the time of its founding, and accounts for many of its considerable achievements since 1925. But while its aims inspired some, they irritated others. Some critics were already predicting that the United Church would die even before it was formally launched. In the interests of time, I will lean toward the earnestness of the founding generation and what they hoped the United Church would become, but I’d like you to keep in mind that the United Church’s exasperated critics, both at the time of the controversy over church union and since, have affected both the public perception of the United Church as well as its own sense of identity to a remarkable degree.

Out of the many ways that one might choose to describe the United Church, I will take three easily identifiable features of the United Church “brand” of Christianity, and say a bit about how they gave the United Church a competitive advantage in Canada’s religious marketplace at one time. At times I’ll move

slightly outside my role as a historian to make some observations as to why in the current Canadian context the United Church “brand” of religion continues to inspire those who love it and irritate those who love to criticize it. These particular qualities have helped to generate a crisis of identity for the church at fairly regular intervals, but may also account for its resilience and provide glimmers of hope at a time when there seems cause for despair. So, in answer to the question raised in the title, “who are we?” I will say: the United Church aims to be theologically and culturally inclusive, for God’s sake; connectional, for God’s sake; and engaged with the community, for God’s sake.

1. The United Church aims to be theologically and culturally inclusive.

The United Church grew out of the conviction of Methodists, Congregationalists and most Presbyterians that Protestantism in Canada ought to be united rather than divided. It is easy to underestimate the achievement that church union represented in the religious world of the early twentieth century. To use a crass analogy of mergers and acquisitions, imagine awakening this morning to learn that Tim Hortons had merged not with only with Wendy’s, but with Starbucks and Coffee Time to form a new company called “United Coffee.” And imagine if the new company promised a new type of coffee shop, while assuring you that the best features of your old local coffee shop wouldn’t change. The creators of the United Church were convinced that God was calling them to do a new thing in order to deal with the organizational challenges they faced. Those who made the case for union were convinced that they would build a strong church by overcoming their differences; they sought unity in what they could believe and accomplish together. We find here some of the roots of theological inclusion that still mark the

United Church. With the hopes of the founders to create what they called a “national church” that would relate in a special way to Canada, we find as well an expectation that the United Church would appeal across a broad range of cultural differences. They had a vision—one that has proved to be more elusive than they anticipated—of becoming the church of choice for people already living in Canada, as well as for immigrants arriving from the UK, Europe and elsewhere, many of whom were not Protestants.

At the time onlookers wondered how it was that long-standing differences between the three uniting churches were so quickly resolved. With my crass coffee shop analogy in mind, you can see why there were skeptics, most obviously the nonconcurring Presbyterians who refused to join. One of their complaints was that theology had been compromised to create the new church. They immediately panned it as “modernist” and “creedless,” characterizations that its founders denied but which have stuck ever since. Roman Catholic leaders were obviously not impressed. The Catholic press dismissed the controversy over church union as typical of the turmoil that had come to characterize Protestantism since the time of the Reformation. “There is a merry war on among the sects,” reported the *Catholic Register* in 1925, seeing the debate as evidence “that no Presbyterian or Methodist clearly knows what or why he believes.” The squabbling revealed a “mass of conflicting doctrine, confusing incoherency and bewildering inconsistency.” One thing was clear, observed the editor: “a great part of Protestantism is tainted with modernism and pagan unbelief in Christ’s Divinity and is therefore not Christian in any sense.” The Catholic press concluded that Protestantism was incapable of unity because individualism doomed it to multiplicity,

subdivision and disintegration.¹

It did not take long for the United Church itself to admit that it was experiencing limits to the hoped-for inclusion. There were internal tensions that challenged the liberal-evangelical theological consensus on which it had been built. Optimism about further unions that would unite most Canadian Protestants was chastened by the reality of a still divided Protestantism. Adding to these theological challenges to their vision of inclusion were other contextual factors. In 1944 a commission was formed to study city missions and “non-Anglo Saxon” work, as were called missions to Aboriginals, Asians, and other non-whites, as well as the mainly white immigrants from continental Europe. The commission reiterated what had been the church’s general assumption since its founding: “that the United Church has a definite responsibility for providing leadership to every community in this country not otherwise served.” However, the commission found little inclination among those of Roman Catholic background to affiliate with the United Church. Some success was reported among Protestants whose own churches were “not functioning.” The report sounded a warning: “unless there is a change of attitude on the part of many ministers and people of United Churches, The United Church of Canada is in danger of becoming an Anglo-Saxon sect.” The commission urged that the church be “jolted out of its complacency,” and that a new emphasis be placed on what it called “comprehensive inclusiveness.”²

The realities of postwar immigration patterns further

¹“Sectarian Discord” [editorial], *Catholic Register*, 22 January 1925, 83.063, Church Union Collection, Box 38 (Scrapbook).

² “Report of the Commission on City Missions and Non-Anglo Saxon Work,” Board of Home Missions, 83.050C Series II, Section 1, Box 25/396, 1-2.

dampened old hopes of creating a “national church” on Anglo-Protestant terms. The new immigration policy adopted by the federal government in 1962 ensured the arrival of greater numbers of non-Christians, and made the prospect of creating a “Christian Canada” more unlikely. Coincidentally Canada experienced the impact of a broader global trend that philosopher Charles Taylor identifies as a “switch in mind-set” that has made earlier notions of cultural assimilation unsustainable: the beginning of the erosion (probably in the 1960s) of the assumption that “one ought to suppress one’s difference for the sake of fitting in to a dominant mold.” Religious minorities were among those who now demanded that the dominant culture be “modified to accommodate them, rather than the other way around.” While most migrants were prepared to assimilate, they no longer considered it imperative.³ And it was not just newcomers who were unwilling to conform. Women no longer automatically assumed their traditional family role, and insisted on freedom to make choices about reproduction and paid employment outside the home. Young people resisted “assimilating” to prevailing moral values as they moved toward adulthood, ignoring the received culture of either their family or their church. Men and women of all ages paid less heed to efforts to regulate their behavior. To “be different” and “do your own thing” captured the cultural mood of the times, and the size of the postwar cohort amplified the effect.

The challenges facing the United Church in this new Canada have continued to mount. StatsCan reports indicate that the vast majority of visible minorities live in metropolitan areas. Regionally this means a large non-white population in Ontario,

³ Charles Taylor, “Democracy, Inclusive and Exclusive,” in *Meaning and Modernity: Religion, Polity and Self*, ed. Richard Madsen et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 187.

which has historically been one of the areas of the United Church's greatest strength in terms of numbers of congregations. Some scenarios see the population of Toronto as more than half non-white by 2017, with those of Chinese descent making up half of that group. Some religious groups have done the math and appear to be developing a mission strategy accordingly. The United Church seems torn between wanting to include all comers, on the one hand, and wanting to avoid the mistakes now attributed to the colonial mindset of the past. And I think one could ask whether it is still on the way to becoming an "Anglo-Saxon sect," as the 1944 report warned.

This is a sampling of the contextual changes that have had important ramifications for the United Church. The variety that comes from its impulse to inclusion has been a source of strength and vitality. But now, as at the time of church union, critics still wonder whether this is also at the heart of the United Church's identity crises: in a culture that uses brand recognition to navigate choice, the United Church seems to have no fixed identity. And despite its continuing lip service to being an "inclusive church," I sometimes wonder if it is growing tired of the effort and short of the patience it takes to live with the various polarities it is trying to embrace. But issues of diversity—both theological and cultural—are unlikely to go away any time soon, and it will be interesting to see whether the vision of an intercultural church will make the United Church more or less inclusive than in the past. How inclusive can it be, for God's sake?

2. The United Church aims to be connectional.

Being "United" has been not only about being inclusive; it has been about being connected both as congregations within the denomination, and to the Christian church around the world. This connectionalism is evident in the way the United Church makes

decisions. It describes its polity as “conciliar,” a reference to the importance of accountability to the courts of the church beyond the congregation. But being connectional is also related to an operational strategy that for better or worse has shaped the organizational culture of the United Church. From the outset it aimed to make connections in many directions: east to west and north; global and national; personal and political. Rather than “franchises,” the image of a “machine” was commonly used by champions and critics alike as a way to picture how it worked. But being connectional involved more than just going to presbytery meetings. Many struggling congregations existed only because they were supported by thriving congregations in other parts of Canada. The materials used in Sunday schools, women’s missionary societies, and other congregational programs came primarily from the United Church’s publishing house, creating common bonds in religious formation. The priorities and programs of the church were connected as well: the tasks of national boards and their many commissions and committees intersected with regional structures (conferences and presbyteries) and local congregations. The United Church’s departments bore names similar to other North American denominations, suggesting ecumenical kinship in broad areas of responsibility such as evangelism, social service, overseas missions, home missions, education, publications, and financial matters such as pensions.

This organizational design drew criticism almost immediately, and tensions that were evident early on persist today: for example, how to balance institutional demands for order and efficiency with the yearning for spiritual renewal that is resistant to being “organized.” Not surprisingly those opposed to church union were suspicious of what they disparagingly called the “Big Merger Church,” and warned that “it would divide,

rather than unite the church and the nation.”⁴ Even some of the most ardent supporters of church union were frustrated by the model of church administration that the United Church had adopted. The denominational objectives set by the national church soon generated friction with pastoral structures at the congregational level, where preaching and faith development were of paramount concern. Four years after church union, D.L. Ritchie, a professor from the theological college in Montreal, reported that he was still hearing “not a little about the dread of the big machine” from outside critics and discontented insiders. The United Church seemed preoccupied with talk of, as he put it, “money and machinery and maintenance and schemes and buildings.”⁵ A decade later, Richard Roberts, a Toronto pastor who had recently served as moderator, warned in 1938 that a church organized like a department store “was under sentence of death.” He was bothered by the preoccupation with statistics, “as though it mattered very much how many of us there are, when the real matter is what kind of people we are.”⁶

We detect in these early concerns some persistent questions about the organizational culture of the United Church. The connections that link the United Church’s executive leaders, pastors, and the laity seem, if anything, to be more tenuous than at the beginning. By the 1960s, church executives themselves were asking whether “the machine” was broken. It is a question that is still being asked by the United Church and similar Protestant groups in North America as we head toward what many are calling a post-denominational era. The value of being

⁴ E. Lloyd Morrow, *Church Union in Canada: Its History, Motives, Doctrine, and Government* (Toronto: Thomas Allen, 1923), 296.

⁵ D.L. Ritchie, “The Fourth 10th of June,” *New Outlook*, 6 June 1928, 8.

⁶ Richard Roberts, *The Contemporary Christ* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1938), 119-20.

connectional is less obvious. Congregations are still resisting a top-down approach, and national church executives are pressured to adapt to initiatives to change the church from the bottom up. Technology has opened up new ways of connecting beyond the old denominational and ecumenical patterns of the twentieth century. What will this mean for the United Church's conciliar "brand" of religion? Do we see congregations moving away from being "franchises" connected by a sense of providing a United Church "brand" of religion, becoming instead a network of boutiques offering a style of religion that suits their own tastes and relying on their own resources? Is there a diminishing institutional sense of bearing one another's burdens? Apart from its property holdings and pension system, what is holding the United Church together as an institutional entity? If the old denominational machine is broken beyond repair, are there new and different ways of connecting, for God's sake?

3. The United Church aims to be engaged with the community.

From the outset the United Church wanted to make an impact on Canadian society. Principal E.H. Oliver of St. Andrew's College in Saskatoon confidently wrote in the first issue of the new denominational paper: "Canada is our parish. . . There will...be not a hamlet or a rural community in the whole land where the United Church will not serve." Oliver saw the church's interests as being "as wide as human life itself." He added, "This does not mean that it will engage in political and partisan contests. It does mean that men who will give the country its economic, political and social salvation will be the products of Church life."⁷

As new and progressive as the United Church is usually

⁷E.H. Oliver, "The Place and Work of the United Church in the Life of Canada," *New Outlook*, 10 June 1925, 19-20.

thought to have been at the outset, there is a sense in which church union was an effort to invigorate an “old” idea: the long-assumed partnership between church and state in building a Christian society. It was a form of Christendom in the Canadian context. At the time of church union, religion was regarded, along with education, as an important ingredient of national well-being, as well as a purveyor of cultural identity and common values. “Being United” had a civic dimension that was practised in the web of associations both in and beyond the congregations to which its members belonged. Countless men and women in local congregations were active in their communities, their understanding of the Christian witness extending to time volunteered or financial support given to civic organizations, as well as gathering for public worship.

Given the recent decline in both numbers and influence, it is easy to forget how important the church once was to community life. When sociologist S.D. Clark assessed Canadian society after the Second World War, he described religion in robust terms. Canada “has been, and remains, a fundamentally religious nation.”⁸ He credited church union with having strengthened Protestantism “enormously”; indeed, in his view organized religion in the country had perhaps never been stronger. So strong were the churches that in his estimation “no political party in the country could survive” an open attack on them.⁹ The growing diversity of Canada after the war complicated but did not immediately suspend the United Church’s efforts to create a Christian Canada. The United Church was keeping a close eye on Canada’s spiritual frontiers, enthused editor Harold E. Fey to

⁸ S.D. Clark, *The Developing Canadian Community* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962, 2nd ed. 1968), 182; first published in 1947 as “The Religious Factor in Canadian Economic Development.”

⁹ *Ibid.*, 171.

readers of *The Christian Century*, the religious magazine published in Chicago, after observing its General Council in 1956. In fact, he added, no church assembly in the United States provided “a comparable sense of the church struggling for the soul of the nation.”¹⁰ To many observers the United Church was a success story, its civic piety respected even when considered a tad self-righteous.

But to many outsiders (and to be fair, even some insiders), the United Church has not been sufficiently “spiritual” among those who considered “other-worldliness” to be the leading indicator of religious commitment. There has been continuous criticism of the social issues it has tackled: whether issues of moral regulation such as temperance, gambling, Sunday observance, or the more recent championing of issues such as same-sex marriage. Some United Church leaders made enemies as a result of the positions they took. J.R. Mutchmor, the long-serving Secretary of Evangelism and Social Service for nearly three decades, and well known for his stands against beer, betting and Sunday shopping, had to put up with abusive telephone calls, often several dozen throughout the night. His wife, Helen Mutchmor, was told by one caller that he would like to kill her husband. One of the dynamics that I think of as Canada’s “other Quiet Revolution” is the uncoupling of the partnership between church and state since the 1960s. Far from being considered an essential element in the construction of national identity, religion is now often considered an impediment to national cohesion. Its pronouncements are more likely to be met with indifference rather than deep hostility. For its part, the United Church has become more cautious about its relationship with the state, and more critical of the overtones of “Christendom” it finds in the assumptions of previous

¹⁰ H.E.F. [Harold E. Fey], “A Church Grows in Canada,” *Christian Century*, 3 October 1956, 1125-1126.

generations. At the same time it is searching for an appropriate expression of public witness that is still part of its understanding of what it means to be faithful.

There have been other important changes in how United Church congregations relate to the communities in which they are situated. At the outset, United Church leaders could still assume a nation of “spiritual settlers,” living in fairly stable communities—whether city neighbourhoods, small towns, or rural communities. The church was founded on the cusp of changes in media and mobility that have revolutionized our sense of place and hence how we think of community. The Second World War, for example, was literally an “unsettling” experience. An estimated one-sixth of the country’s population was uprooted before the end of the war, either by joining the armed forces or employment in war industries.¹¹ Many of those who found themselves living in new suburban communities had recently moved from towns and villages, and they yearned for familiar forms of fellowship. Little wonder, then, that church extension in the suburbs flourished in the 1950s, offering the hospitality and the moral values of the small communities they had left behind. The situation was different for their children. The baby boomers grew up in communities where changes in transportation eroded familiar features of civic life by separating the place where one worked from the place where one lived. Those raised as spiritual settlers beget a generation of spiritual seekers who have been shopping the religious marketplace, trying out new spiritual products or who have simply dropped out of “organized” religion. Children are now unlikely to remain in or return to the community they grew up in—in fact, they likely have lived in more than one community even before reaching adulthood. Church participation

¹¹ Malcolm MacDonald, *They Look to the Church* (Toronto: Committee on Camp and War Production Communities, 1944), 3.

has become one alternative among many lifestyle choices. This is a drastically changed experience of belonging, relationships, and commitment to community—very different from that of the founders.

By 1962 an assessment of demographic trends revealed a looming challenge for the United Church. Canadian cities had grown by 20%, but the number of Protestants who lived there was declining. The study found that while the United Church was still “unquestionably the rural church for English-speaking Canada,” the population there had grown only slightly in the last decade. Only in the suburbs was there room for optimism: a population increase of 85% and a boom in new congregations.¹² The world has since become even more unlike the settled communities that the United Church was created for and for which its civic piety was well suited. It is a contextually sensitive church designed for a nation and a world that no longer exists.

And what of present trends? One article in *The Economist* (10 April 2008) claimed that wireless technology is creating “urban nomads” who have a different relationship to time, place and even to other people. Observers are predicting that the resulting “nomadism” will bring people who are already close, even closer because of the new possibilities of social networking. This may be a change that will be as momentous for the church as the impact of the car for an earlier generation. Will “spiritual nomads” look to the church as a spiritual oasis at which to gather? But *The Economist* points out that nomads are tribal by nature, and sometimes have trouble dealing with strangers. “Nomadism” offers interesting possibilities for renewing a sense of community and engagement with the world; however, its “tribal” features will likely raise some interesting challenges for a church that aspires to be intercultural and thus presumably

¹² “Interpretation,” *Observer*, 15 October 1962, 12.

“intertribal.” Will the virtual social relationships of Facebook and Twitter make people long for face-to-face relationships forged by gathering as the body of Christ? Do human beings still crave being in real relationships with each other, or is technology changing the “nature” of human nature? These are not questions that a historian can answer, but they are questions that perhaps ought to be considered when thinking about vital ministry in the future. The United Church was founded with hopes of engaging communities of the “frontier” of the early twentieth century. How will it relate to this new world, for God’s sake?

Conclusion

The question that I’ve been addressing is one the United Church has been asking since church union and even before: who are we, for God’s sake? It has had an identity crisis at least every twenty years or so, and seems to be in another at present. Uncertainty about identity, survival, and continuing vitality is not new. Perhaps that should come as no surprise given the combination of contextual and religious DNA it has inherited. Having an identity crisis seems to be a national pastime in Canada. Canadians have been described as a people who regularly dig up their roots to see if they are still alive. On the religious side, the first Methodists were soon singing one of Charles Wesley’s hymns titled “And Are We Yet Alive” when they met together at annual conferences. Perhaps you can relate to the sentiment expressed in one of the verses:

What troubles have we seen,
What mighty conflicts past,
Fightings without, and fears within,
Since we assembled last!

Over the course of its history, the United Church's moods have alternated between confidence and crisis. For example, after a decade of impressive growth in the 1950s, the United Church was taken to task by those unhappy with its New Curriculum in the 1960s for being too modern. At the very same time it was hit with a barrage of criticism from a different direction. Pierre Berton's devastating picture of the typical Protestant congregation was captured in his book's title: *The Comfortable Pew*. He blasted Protestant churches (including even the United Church) for being behind the times in their approach to such issues as drinking, Sunday observance, abortion and pre-marital sex.¹³ The bad publicity was ill-timed. Rural and downtown city churches were already in trouble. Suburban churches had seemed a "success." Now they were mocked in Berton's best-seller. They had been willing to innovate, but were criticized from all sides—too traditional for some, too inclined to break with the usual way of doing business for others. I think it must have been a shock to the United Church to find itself cast in this new role: not as innovators and modernists, as critics of church union had claimed—but too traditional.

Then, as now, prominent church leaders made the news when they commented on the church's future. In 2007, it was the United Church moderator who created headlines by speculating

¹³ Although the book was commissioned by the Anglican Church, Berton accepted the invitation with the understanding that his remarks would refer to all Protestant churches "since they are all united, at least in the similarity of the problems they face." Pierre Berton, *The Comfortable Pew: A Critical Look at the Church in the New Age* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1965), 11. An interview with the editor of the *Observer* made it clear that Berton was not letting the United Church off the hook. See A.C. Forrest, "What Berton Would Say Differently If Writing for the United Church," *Observer*, 1 February 1965, 31-33.

on the future of the United Church. In 1967 it was the General Secretary who got everyone's attention when he publicly voiced concerns about whether the United Church would survive the next five years. "The old idea of a world-dominating Christendom is dead," he bluntly stated. This was a startling remark from the executive head of a denomination that had started with such bright hopes less than a half century earlier. The United Church, of course, survived beyond five years, and indeed has proven to be far more resilient than many of its critics at the time of its founding or since have predicted. Whether the capacity for adaptive change it has shown in the past is still there remains to be seen.

Perhaps an observation about the world of coffee shops is fitting to offer in conclusion. In Canada, of course, Tim Hortons is a familiar sight at roadside stops, and there are quite a few in Maine as well. To my surprise I discover that Starbucks is now competing in the roadside coffee market, and even offers a Drive Thru service in some places. As I compare the two, I realized that customers familiar with Tim Hortons would never be confused about which shop they were in. It's the little things as well as the big things. I'm not a "double double" kind of person, and it frustrates me that I can't put just a little bit of cream in my coffee to doctor it as I like—I have to hope that the person behind the counter gets it right. Even at a roadside Starbucks, I can put in my own cream. The point is that Starbucks is adapting, learning from the success of other franchises, but adapting in a way that is still unmistakably its own brand. What might adaptive change look like for the United Church? Has our focus on ministry in the Canadian context left us with an underdeveloped sense of being part of the global movement of Christianity, both past and present? Maybe it is time for the United Church to look outside the Canadian context for new alternatives. For example, are there

lessons to be learned from other parts of the world where Christianity is thriving?

The workshops at this conference offer opportunities for conversation about the viability and vitality of the United Church's varied ministries, about its distinctive brand of Christianity. In these sessions you will be asking not only "who are we?" but "who do we want to become?" What are the signs of "vital ministry"? Is it measured in numerical growth in members and congregations, or does spiritual growth count? Do we need more franchises than Tim Hortons to be faithful? Is spiritual growth enough or, like a franchise, will the United Church go bankrupt if it keeps losing customers?

A final thought, as you consider what's at stake for the United Church in the Canadian context. I mentioned the hymn "And Are We Yet Alive" a few minutes ago. The sixth stanza of the hymn as Charles Wesley first wrote it, is often omitted in more recent editions of the Methodist hymn book, but is perhaps a fitting way to end as we ponder the balance sheet of spiritual profits and losses:

Let us take up the cross
Till we the crown obtain,
And gladly reckon all things loss
So we may Jesus gain.

necessity of the institutional? Or, to rephrase Milbank's question, how according to the Illich-Taylor model, does one comport oneself in an enfolded way *vis-a-vis* institutions or codified rules? If institutions and rules are inescapable for earthly politics and ethics, how does Incarnation reshape them agapeically? Or, alternatively, what does an "embodied" institution or law look like?

I think these are important questions to ask of the Taylor-Illich perspective, not simply to point out the shortcomings of the view, but rather to identify possible points of departure for further political, moral or theological engagements. Of course, we should not be surprised that Taylor offers no easy answers here given his recognition that the eschatological character of Christianity implies that humans live in the "not yet," in a time when the extent of God's reconciliation in the world remains not fully disclosed.

Though it may be a shortcoming of *A Secular Age* that it does not provide any straightforward answers on this issue, the book does present an interesting point of departure for those interested in the various intersections of religion and politics. At the very least, one major achievement of Taylor's book is that it highlights the ways that Christianity itself is implicated in the sidelining of the body, characteristic of secular modernity, and equally importantly that it directs its readers to valuable religious resources that can remedy the movement to excarnation. In all of this, he departs radically from those who conceive of secularity in terms of the mere subtraction of religion, a view which *A Secular Age* demonstrates to be far too narrow.

— Carlos Colorado