

Editorial

It is both a challenge and a delight to catch the torch from Mac Watts, long-serving and faithful editor of this journal. Mac's retirement has triggered not only a change in editor, but also a move of both editorial and business offices of *Touchstone* from Winnipeg to the Greater Toronto Area. John Hogman, currently minister of Westminster United Church in Mississauga, continues as the Chair of the Editorial Board. We welcome Christine Smaller as Business Chair and Cindy Bourgeois as the new Treasurer.

Along with the physical move, we have adopted a new cover format and posted a new subtitle on it, "Theology Shaping Witness." The point of theology, after all, is to help the church reflect on its identity and witness. We hope that in this spirit *Touchstone* can offer ongoing encouragement in shaping a more faithful witness to the mission of God in Jesus Christ.

A second modest departure is that we would like to explore the use of the inside pages of the (coloured) centerfold to print readers' comments on the articles in the previous issue. Our goal is to create an opportunity for dialogue between our readers and our authors. So please respond to what you read!

I have taken up the responsibility of editing *Touchstone* believing that it has a significant role to play in the United Church today, namely, offering perspectives of theological insight to church leaders in the Canadian context. On the one hand, academic journals rarely reach the desks of most pastors. On the other, the popular church press rarely offers viewpoints of any theological depth. *Touchstone* offers a *media via* between the two, providing accessible articles of theological substance.

While some may deny that the language of crisis is appropriate to describe the situation of the mainline churches in North America and of our own United Church, "crisis" seems to

me to be precisely the right word. The question is whether we will live or die. As we face such a transfixing question, nothing can be more important than the achievement of renewed theological vision. In providing a forum for clarification of this vision, *Touchstone* aims to be a vehicle of encouragement and hope.

Speaking of which, this May issue is the second installment on the theme of hope begun in January. While that issue focused more on hope for individuals, this focuses more on the larger picture. Mac Watts kicks it off by asking whether there is a need for a little journal like ours, implicitly arguing that the story of God's love in Christ is the foundation of our hope.

At the invitation of the planning committee for the June 2008 "More Franchises" conference, Phyllis Airhart delivered a sparkling and informative address on the question of United Church identity, "Who Are We for God's Sake?" Her address, only slightly revised for print, is reproduced here, still bearing the immediacy of oral delivery. Airhart notes that the journey of the United Church began with both great hope and not a little criticism. In the light of the founders' hopes, where are we now and who have we become?

New Testament scholar Leif Vaage offers us a survey of New Testament teaching about eschatology, returning us at the last to a vision of an earth renewed. In particular, he traces the developing reflection and teaching of the Apostle Paul about last things, arguing that significant change occurred. Vaage's keen eye and lively prose provoke us to think not only about the variety of biblical expectation, but also about our own hope for humankind and the creation.

In the Profile section, Richard Allen continues his account, begun in January, of the influential ministry of Salem Bland. Bland, of course, was one of the great Canadian exponents of the

social gospel, a great flowering of post-millennial eschatology and a still influential factor in the life of the United Church. We find in it a gospel long on hope for what our present world might be — if only human hearts and wills were attuned to the heart and will of God.

In our “From the Heart” section, Barry Morris, an inheritor of social-gospel hope, and long a campaigner for social justice, reports on his personal journey, one that has taught him the importance of keeping hope, justice and prayer in ongoing relationship.

The last contribution is Carlos Colorado’s review article on *A Secular Age*, by Charles Taylor. Taylor, an internationally acclaimed Canadian philosopher, also happens to be a Roman Catholic Christian. As Colorado points out, Taylor’s work probes not only the meaning of the secular, but also a Reformation development allegedly resulting in “excarnation,” or the sidelining of the body. While Taylor’s work is not eschatological in focus, it presents a worthy challenge as to how we might live more faithfully “in the meantime.”

May this issue of *Touchstone* provide stimulation for ministries of proclamation, education and leadership.

Happy reading!

Peter Wyatt