

Touchstone

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CHRISTIAN PRACTICES

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Editorial

Touchstone has lost its founding visionary. John Hogman's death has intruded painfully on all of us who have been and are a part of this publishing venture. We have lost a helmsman and a friend. It was John who first pitched the concept of a distinctively Canadian and United Church theological journal. It was John who served as chairperson of the editorial board from 1983 to this year. It was John who guided and coaxed the process of moving the editorial and business offices to the Toronto area from Winnipeg. Nothing wrong with Winnipeg—hey, the Jets are back! However, a move was necessitated by the retirements of founding editor Mac Watts and long-serving treasurer John Daly. The move of our chairperson to Toronto also was a factor.

In remembering John, two special pieces are included. Mac Watts tells the story of the founding of *Touchstone* at the prodding of a young man returning from Princeton. In the moving sermon preached at John's memorial service, Neil Young marshals our spirits: in challenging times we are strengthened by the company of faithful "soldiers of the cross."

The theme of this number is Christian Practices, and our remembrance of John in it is apt, for he was a dedicated practitioner of Christian ministry. Our particular focus is spiritual practices as an activist church learns afresh the importance of sustaining disciplines. The lead article by Paul Miller advances a theory of Christian practices. He maintains that, in the face of adverse conditions for Christian mission in our context, the contemporary recovery of intentional practices is critical for the shaping of a Christian identity with staying power.

The theme continues with Nancy Knox, who celebrates the friendly supportiveness of many United Church congregations, but wonders just how accountable we are prepared to be to one another in congregational life. Fresh from receiving her Th. D. in liturgical theology, Nancy Hardy points to the transformative power of congregational song on individual lives and movements. Christine Smaller ponders John Wesley's characteristic teaching on the Christian use of money and finds it prescient for our own day. Sandra Beardsall speaks to the formation of pastors, taking the current practice of St. Andrew's College as an exemplary case. In a review article, Maggie Watts-Hammond treats of two recent works, comparing the contributions of Eddie Gibbs' and Ryan Bolger's "emerging church" and Bruce Sanguin's "evolutionary

Christianity.”

In our “Heart” column, David Bruce reflects on his journey into the United Church, and then of “swimming the Tiber,” crossing over to Rome. Key to his decision was the impact of the Roman Catholic practice of prayer. In the Profile, Joan Wyatt recalls the influence of a woman whom many consider to have been the leading exponent of Christian feminism in Canada, Shelley Finson. Spiritual practices also played a sustaining role in her life and ministry; in her case, they were practices associated with welcoming an “immanent spirit” in communal belonging. These two stories offer distinctive and contrasting paths, to say the least!

The specific topics treated in these articles are hardly exhaustive and each reader may note the absence of a subject that might well have been treated in these pages. However, our hope is that these articles may stimulate reflection and result in more imaginative strategies for personal practice and congregational life. Perhaps they even may stimulate you to write a note to the editor!—who would welcome such.

One area not touched in our articles is the practice of our institutional life in the courts of the church. In a recent review of a restructuring of Toronto Conference, the reviewer was invited to respond to the question of what had surprised him. He said that it was the quantification of the hours and hours of volunteer work that goes into making presbyteries and conference function. Can we afford so labour-intensive a polity? he wondered.

Our conciliar polity does demand the participation of many, and some presbyters no longer take much interest or any role in presbytery or conference. Many of us struggle with the same feelings of boredom and frustration as those who stay away, but dumb loyalty keep us coming back. I hunch that it’s the quality of conciliar life, not conciliarity itself that can be so draining of energy and hope. What we need is greater significance in our meetings, both in terms of content and inspiration. We are policy-driven now, caught up in so many issues of compliance with directives about this and that from both government and church. Complexification is the order of the day and we scarcely have time or focus to ask ourselves the question John Hogman posed in his January editorial: What business *are* we in?

Peter Wyatt, Editor

JOHN HOGMAN (1953-2012): LINCHPIN OF *TOUCHSTONE* **by Mac Watts**

One spring day in 1981, eight people sat down in a room at the Prairie Christian Training Centre (PCTC), Ft. Qu'Appelle, Saskatchewan: Gordon Harland, Jack McLachlan, Ralph Donnelly, Terry Anderson, Gordon Daly, David Hoffman, John Hogman, and I. All of us were ordained United Church ministers, and some of us also academics. (Alas, all of us, males, but that would be corrected later.) Until this point there had been some brief exploratory meetings regarding the founding of a journal, but this was really the first *planning* meeting, and the first with almost all of the people present who would later make up the initial editorial board. John Hogman was the youngest person present, but, without anybody saying anything about it, he chaired the meeting. Aside from the fact that John's natural gifts led all of us to turn to him as chairperson (in which role he would remain until his unexpected death on February 20, 2012), the gathering itself had come as a result of his vision.

In the early 1970s John had pursued a B.A degree at the University of Manitoba where he was affected by the inspired teaching of Gordon Harland. That John chose Harland's classes was no accident. Both of his parents were ordained ministers, and both had positive memories of Harland's teaching while they were preparing for the ministry in the Faculty of Theology at United College (now the University of Winnipeg). Harland's encouragement and a Rockefeller Scholarship led John to choose Princeton Seminary as the place to do his ministerial training. In addition to receiving an excellent theological education at Princeton, and finding there his life companion, Michelle, John returned from Princeton with a question about our church: we had *The Observer*—the kind of magazine virtually all the American denominations put out—but why did we lack a journal to nourish the minds and spirits of our ministers and our more intellectually curious lay members?

When John returned to Winnipeg in 1979, Gordon and I discussed with him the almost insurmountable obstacles to creating this type of journal for such a small denomination. In spite of a measure of embarrassment on our part at letting him down, he went away without receiving any encouragement from us.

However, John persisted. When the Settlement Committee placed him at a pastoral charge in Gilbert Plains, Manitoba, he found in his

senior neighbouring minister, Jack McLachlan, somebody who was not only enthusiastic about John's notion but also one who was convinced that the money could be raised to bring it into reality. So, the two of them inspired Gordon and me to join in the process of starting a journal. Given the theological orientation of the four of us, it was clear from the beginning that, if we managed to bring the whole thing off, the intent of the publication would be to foster discourse in our denomination that drew on the theological riches of past and present.

Looking back, I realize how much luck we had once we embarked on the project. The barriers to getting an income tax number at the time were minuscule compared with those existing now. David Hoffman had suggested the name *Touchstone*, but we discovered that a single word for the name of a company wasn't permissible; so it became *Touchstone: Heritage & Theology in a New Age*. We were then able without difficulty to get our little project registered as a Manitoba non-profit company, complete with an income tax charitable receipt number. Now *Touchstone* was a registered charity, and the money-raising campaign began.

Another piece of luck was that Gordon Daly was in the right place at the right moment. Gordon, minister of a congregation in Calgary at the time, had been drawn into the circle of those trying to launch the journal. He was also a member of the Continuing Education Committee of the Ministry Personnel and Education Division of the General Council. At one of their meetings, Harry Oussoren proposed the creation of an ecumenical publication called *The Practice of Ministry in Canada (PMC)*. He proposed that the Committee subsidize an initial two-year subscription to *PMC*, thus encouraging a larger cross section of potential subscribers to give it a try. Gordon spoke up in support of the idea, but went on to outline the plan to create *Touchstone*. He proposed that whatever was done for *PMC* ought also to be done for *Touchstone*. The Committee agreed.

This was a great stroke of fortune. We knew, however, that the subsidy from the Con Ed Committee was to apply only to members of the order of ministry. That was all right for *PMC*, but our intention for *Touchstone* was that it would be read also by the more intellectually curious lay members of our church. So we approached the St. Stephen's-Broadway Foundation in Winnipeg. They had given us a grant toward the

start of the journal, and they agreed to provide the same subsidy for lay subscribers that we had managed to line up for ministerial ones. Therefore, when the first two issues of the journal (January and May, 1983) were mailed to every minister in the United Church and to many lay members, they contained a subscription form offering an initial two-year subscription to everybody for only \$10! We were sure it would be an effective lure, and of course it was.

We had something else going for us, as well. At one of our planning meetings, Jack McLachlan informed us that volunteers from his church, Dauphin United Church, would process the subscriptions. It was agreed that I would be the editor of the journal. At that point I was dean of theology at the University of Winnipeg, which meant that editorial correspondence would come to me at the University. John asked if the subscriptions could also come there, even though they would be processed elsewhere. When I indicated that they could, he recommended that the University's be the sole address we use, believing that the credibility of a journal that was turning up out of the blue, as ours was going to do, would be enhanced if its home base were at a university. He was quite right.

And what role would the Board play? John insisted that it meet every year. Gordon Harland, for one, was aghast at the idea, aware of how costly that would be and knowing how little money we had. John was adamant: the "annual meeting" would not be three people gathering to satisfy legal rules, but the whole Board, which would be responsible for identifying themes, subjects and authors for upcoming issues as fully as possible. Admittedly, the expense of the practice over the years kept us on a financial cliff-edge, but the journal's life blood was to be found in the maintenance of that policy.

Due to space limitations, I have not touched upon John's gifts and accomplishments as a congregational minister, as a member of the various church committees and courts, and as a thinker and a friend. By necessity, then, this memorial piece concerns itself with the origins of the journal. I conclude with this plain truth: without John Hogman *Touchstone* wouldn't exist, and wouldn't have survived as it has. I thank God for all he was to us, and pray that the momentum he has given the journal will be sufficient to allow it to serve our church for some time to come.

SERMON AT THE MEMORIAL SERVICE OF THE REV. JOHN HOGMAN (FEBRUARY 25, 2012)

by Neil Young

When you go out to war against your enemies, and see horses and chariots, an army larger than your own, you shall not be afraid of them; for the Lord your God is with you, who brought you up from the land of Egypt. Before you engage in battle, the priest shall come forward and speak to the troops, and shall say to them: "Hear, O Israel! Today you are drawing near to do battle against your enemies. Do not lose heart, or be afraid, or panic, or be in dread of them; for it is the Lord your God who goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to give you victory. Deuteronomy 20:1-4

At a lunch on Tuesday, we were talking about the idea current that the fifty-something years are the hardest, the most unhappy. We talked of how these years are experienced in church and faith. Later, I took the waiting message from my phone, and found that I was not at all ready to hear about my fifty-something friend, John Hogman.

Not ready for the kind of laugh that John Hogman laughed to be just gone. Many times we all have walked this path, caring for others who are grieving, but still it is not right; it is surreal. How much more for you, then, Michelle, Michael, David, Rachel, Susan, Kathy. With you, we are desolate today.

He was a bad influence: I made so many cantankerous remarks at presbytery, just to hear that laugh burst out, or to trigger it at our lectionary study group. Like shooting fish in a barrel to get him to laugh. The study-table is such a good and pleasant place to be friends, working together.

He would sort of cruise into the room, wearing that hat that looked as if it had been run-over by a truck. When the Rev. Kate Young, my spouse, chaired Pastoral Relations for Toronto West Presbytery, John walked into her office to ask about possibilities. Kate thought he was a benevolent client.

John would say, "Now, that's really interesting," meaning several things. He was perceptive of culture and the world. I once dedicated a sermon to him about "Purgatory." Not because of theology, but because of

astute things he said about the Alien Invasion movie, *District 9*, as a parable of purgatory. Only John!

At that table for years together, we all heard of his love for Michelle, his pride in his kids, how he could just “be there,” whether in the Holy Land, or at a wedding, or in the highs, lows, and misfires of his life. I learned that, with friends, he started up *Touchstone*, the Canadian theological journal. I thought, “Holy Cow! *Touchstone*?”

John didn’t just understand things, perceive and speak profitably; he did things—important things. It got so I’d point my friends in ministry toward him: “Talk to John Hogman.” They’d come back and say, “There’s a lightness about him; he gives me strength and affirmation. He asks what God is doing.”

I chose a reading from deep in the Old Testament—mainly because it might make John laugh, just one more time. But truly, he was a man for the Bible. So, here is the battle-line of the Lord our God. And the only thing that matters in a battle-line is who is standing beside you, and who is at your back.

I know that lots of people don’t care for this language and imagery, but John did. Take it up for one moment today: because we many gathered here who serve the cause and church of Christ, now, today, know what it is to see a great army arrayed against us, with its chariots of iron.

What makes us stand? How do we face it? The Lord is with us; Christ is at our right hand. But I find that I can stand because of the ones who are at my left hand, and my back. Their strength and courage build up ours. I would look across the study-table at John: he made me feel, “I can do this. It will be all right.”

You shall not be afraid of them, says the Lord; do not lose heart. As Jesus said a half-dozen times, in his most seemingly-useless teaching, “*Fear not!*” But then we find how God works, and it is in the company of those whom God sends to be with us. God is my strength and shield; that much is true.

John Hogman was the file-partner who strapped the buckler on my arm, and his strength beside me in the line was God’s strength to sustain me. And I was just a study-friend, fellow-worker. For how many of you did he do much more? We all know about how deeply he loved those whom he loved. Not only love, but respect—for the parents who rooted

him, for their ministries, for his sisters. That laugh went on and on, bursting out without control, as we all traded first-ministry-in-a-far-away-place stories and modern poltrooneries of the Pension and Benefits system.

Do they make men like this anymore? Let me be exclusive, for that is what he was, a man, and among the best of them. I know his answer: he would say “Yes, of course,” and with his wise, calm, amused spirit, name this one and that one. He leaves me hope: that I can one day be, for someone, as he has been for me.

Hope that I can—that we will—stand. We ask, “Why has God chosen us for these unrelenting, unrewarding times?” As ever, the answer is found in the faces and the names of those who stand beside us, and that, as one falls, another steps up to fill in the file. And when I fall, yet the line will hold.

It is the Lord your God who goes with you . . . to give you victory. This victory is hard and sad, as many must be. But I believe in it, in part because John believed in it, and I stand where he stands. To Christ be all praise and thanks, who gives us his finest with whom to stand. They in glory shine.

A THEORY OF CHRISTIAN PRACTICES

by Paul Miller

One of the interesting and significant developments in North American Protestant churches over the last decade or so is a renewed interest in “Christian practices.” Protestant Christians have been rediscovering and re-appropriating ancient practices in forms that speak to the spiritual needs of our time. One example that would be familiar to older members of mainline churches is Sabbath-keeping, not in the punitive sense of the “nothing fun on Sunday” days, but in the sense of following an intentional rhythm of rest and work to deepen one’s gratitude and dependence on God.

An example of a practice that may be less familiar is *lectio divina*,¹ or the spiritual reading of Scripture, in which one’s own interpretive agenda gives way to listening for the voice of God in the text. Other practices include contemplative prayer, acting justly, and hospitality, in the sense of radical openness to the stranger.² These individual practices are connected to a larger desire for a disciplined Christian way of life. Some people speak of committing themselves to a kind of monastic rule, not lived out in a literal communal setting, but through a geographically dispersed community of practice.

Disciplined communal practices are not new. Shared practices are the glue that binds Christian community together and they enable faith to be passed from one generation to the next. It is the task of needing to recover practices that is a particular issue for mainliners. When I told a Roman Catholic friend that I was writing this article, he looked at me with bewilderment, wondering what Christian faith *without* practices could possibly look like. Evangelicals, with their greater emphasis on personal piety, have maintained a fairly unbroken tradition of practice.³ Mainline Protestants have always had practices as well, but what has been lost is a sense of awareness and intentionality.

So, the significant question for mainline Protestants is not “Practices

¹ <http://www.ocarm.org/en/content/lectio/what-lectio-divina> provides a good description of *lectio divina*.

² See <http://www.practicingourfaith.org/what-are-christian-practices> for a list of twelve Christian practices including “household economics,” “saying yes and saying no,” “forgiveness,” “dying well,” and singing.

³ Richard Foster (*A Celebration of Discipline*) and Dallas Willard (*The Divine Conspiracy, The Spirit of the Disciplines*) are two pioneers of this movement.

or not?” but “Why now?” What has rekindled interest in practices at this point in our history? One key factor is a growing intuition that something essential has been obscured or even lost by the polarizing and fragmenting tendencies of modernity. Modernity has tended to dichotomize the *public* and the *private*, the *individual* and the *corporate*, the *theoretical* and the *practical*, *reason* and *faith*, and the *traditional* and the *innovative*. Mainline Protestantism has been the form of Christianity that has embraced modernity most enthusiastically, so it is not surprising that mainline churches have felt its polarizing and fragmenting effects most keenly. In response to this situation, mainline Protestants have been seeking out practices that have three essential features. They are *intentional*, they are *historic*, and they are *communal*.

As Christianity has become more culturally marginal, the need for intentionality of practice has increased. In a culture permeated by Christian faith, people are not always conscious of their spiritual practices. They are simply the things Christians do, woven into the seamless garment of a life in which there is no separation between being a Christian and being a citizen, or a family member, or a producer of goods and services. I remember as a child feeling little tension between our “practices” as a church-going family—saying prayers, observing Christian holidays such as Christmas and Easter, Bible-reading, structuring family relationships—and our lives outside the church. But then in the 1960s, critiques of Christianity that had been fermenting among elites for four hundred years suddenly went mainstream. As modernity has morphed into something called “post-modernity,” Christian identity has been shaped more and more by the church’s minority status. In this context, the need for practices that will define and form Christian identity distinct from the surrounding culture has been felt more urgently.⁴ All people of faith have to grapple with this reality, but Roman Catholics and Evangelicals, as well as Jews and Muslims, because of their more

⁴ John Howard Yoder, commenting on Karl Barth’s essay “Christian Community and Civil Community,” says this: “Barth is affirming for the first time in mainstream Protestant theology since Constantine the theological legitimacy of admitting, about a set of social structures, that those who participate in them cannot be presumed to be addressable from the perspective of Christian confession.” “Why Ecclesiology is Social Ethics,” in *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Theological and Ecclesiological*, ed. Michael J. Cartwright (Scottsdale, PA; Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1998), 108.

counter-cultural stance vis-à-vis modernity, have been better at maintaining distinctive practices which they have not needed to “recover” as much as mainliners have.

There is no end in sight to the number of books and essays that touch on Christian practices. I will limit myself to a very few representative samples. Each regards the renewal of practices as a way to mediate between theological and pastoral dichotomies, and to reintegrate essential aspects of Christian faith and experience.

Mediating Modern Polarities

Diana Butler Bass is one of the principal proponents of Christian practices as a tool for mainline renewal. In *The Practicing Congregation*,⁵ she argues that practices furnish a means to move beyond the liberal-conservative divide marking American Protestantism since the beginning of the twentieth century. As the title suggests, Butler Bass sees practices as a way to transcend the false dichotomy between the traditional and innovative. She critiques popular portrayals of Christianity dominated by the themes of institutional crisis and cultural conflict. The self-understanding of mainline churches, she writes, has been “colonized by story-tellers outside their tradition [and] agendas that benefit from stories of conflict and decline.”⁶ Mainline churches are engaging in a process of creative “de-traditioning and re-traditioning,” taking up practices that transmit spiritual identity, healthy community, mature spirituality and mission, and re-imagining them for a contemporary context.

According to Butler Bass, practices “embody belief,” and mainline Protestantism is a distinctive form of Christian belief that is particularly suited to renewal through the adoption of ancient practices. She names three categories of practice that are capable of regenerating and transmitting that tradition. “Moral practices” aim at community formation, and include hospitality, healing, “dying well,” stewardship, justice and caring. “Ascetical practices” lead to connection with God and spiritual maturity, and include prayer, contemplation, silence and other spiritual exercises. “Anthropological practices” refer simply to “the things

⁵ Diana Butler Bass, *The Practicing Congregation: Imagining the New Old Church* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2004).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

Christian people do—‘eating, meeting and greeting’—as they negotiate their faith in relation to the larger culture.”⁷

Butler Bass is concerned with the continuing vitality of the mainline churches in a pluralistic context. To that end, her approach is primarily sociological and functional: practices enable the community to flourish by connecting it creatively to its roots. She draws on the work of French sociologist Danielle Hervieu-Leger who describes religion as a “chain of memory,” and the contemporary crisis of the church as a crisis of amnesia.⁸ Practices are shared actions that can “re-member” the church by restoring connection with historically grounded identity.

A different approach, from a post-Evangelical perspective, is taken by Brian McLaren, who sees practices as enabling Christians to move beyond the sterile sectarian-catholic and reason-faith (or science-religion) polarities that dominated Christian discourse in the twentieth century. In most of his writing, McLaren reacts against the doctrinally rigid and myopic culture of American evangelicalism by incorporating practices from a variety of traditions.⁹ Christian practices provide a window to wider religious experience “across traditions and over generations.”¹⁰ So, while Butler Bass sees practices as a way of forging a distinctive identity, McLaren uses them to foster a more capacious, ecumenical and “generous” vision.

Dorothy C. Bass is one of the principal advocates for the recovery of Christian practices. She heads the Valparaiso Project on the Education and Formation of People in Faith.¹¹ With Craig Dykstra, she has written “A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices.”¹² Dykstra and Bass view practices as integrative tools for overcoming the modern dualisms of thought versus action and personal faith versus social engagement that

⁷ Ibid., 64-65.

⁸ Daniele Hervieu-Leger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000).

⁹ For which he is routinely savaged by evangelical commentators. See, e.g., *A Generous Orthodoxy*.

¹⁰ Brian McLaren, *Finding Our Way Again: The Return of the Ancient Practices* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 4.

¹¹ <http://www.resourcingchristianity.org/grant-project/valparaiso-project-on-the-education-and-formation-of-people-in-faith>.

¹² *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, eds. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), 13-32.

have bedevilled mainline Christianity. Practices have to do with the ways in which “God’s grace takes actual shape among human beings.”¹³ The theological principle that undergirds any theory of Christian practice is that grace is always embodied. God accommodates Godself to creatures by mediating grace through created things. The incarnation is the ultimate “embodiment” of God’s self-revelation, but those in and among whom Christ lives also give shape to their faith through specific shared practices. Practices, according to Dykstra and Bass are “things Christian people do together [*communal*] over time [*historic*] to address fundamental human needs in response to and in light of God’s active presence for the life of the world [*intentional*].”¹⁴ Practices integrate belief and action by forging “connections between thinking and doing, domesticity and public life, liturgy and social justice.”¹⁵ A practice is “a sustained, cooperative pattern of human activity that is big enough to address some fundamental feature of human existence.”¹⁶ Dykstra and Butler Bass also emphasize a fourth dimension of Christian practices: they are *missional* because they enable Christians to participate in the redemptive mission of God, and because “transgenerational communities are intrinsic to God’s way of being in and for the world.”¹⁷

There is nothing inherently Christian in the notion of a practice. The theological challenge in any contemporary account of practices is to demonstrate that the identity to which these practices contribute is Christian in some meaningful sense. This challenge is magnified in a culture increasingly alienated from its Christian roots. Practices are not necessarily Christian simply because they have been used for a long time, or because they are shared with others. Butler Bass suggests that the recovery of practices can be “a trend whereby religious communities focus on meaning-making by gathering up the past and re-presenting it through both story and action.”¹⁸ However, the fact that a community is engaged in a process of “meaning-making” does not in itself guarantee that the meaning that is made is consistent with the Gospel. A practice

¹³ Ibid., 15.

¹⁴ Ibid., 18.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 22.

¹⁷ Ibid., 26-27.

¹⁸ Butler Bass, *The Practicing Congregation*, 4.

such as labyrinth-walking, for example, could be more about narcissistic self-discovery than Christian formation. Similarly, Sabbath-keeping could be motivated by an individualistic concept of “self-care,” as could practices such as meditation or contemplative prayer. Brian McLaren is particularly vulnerable on this score. He writes that practices are “ways of becoming awake and staying awake to God . . . about somehow driving with the windows wide open to God, keeping our elbows in the wind and our hands surfing beside the side mirror. They’re about tuning our radios to the frequency of the Holy, turning up the volume and daring to sing along.”¹⁹ He needs to ask what distinguishes this from other self-centred, post-modern quests for spiritual experience. Butler Bass is right, mainline Protestantism suffers from spiritual amnesia, and practices are not sufficient on their own to restore memory.²⁰ Something more is needed.

The Crucial Element: Narrative

A key is found in Alasdair MacIntyre’s influential book *After Virtue*,²¹ a work that has provided a conceptual base for contemporary theology of practice. MacIntyre argues that moral philosophy is in a state of advanced disrepair because the concepts and vocabulary of morality have become radically disengaged from their roots. We still use moral language, but we have lost the sense of the “unitary life” which any coherent moral vision presupposes.²² Modern philosophy, he writes, is preoccupied with defining and analyzing individual human “acts” in isolation from the web of “intentions, beliefs and settings” in which those acts are situated.²³

The forgotten dimension in modern moral philosophy, according to MacIntyre, is the importance of *narrative*. Every tradition, every human act, both presupposes and contributes to a narrative. “I can only answer the question ‘What can I do?’ if I can answer the question ‘Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?’”²⁴ Morality, MacIntyre argues, is really the cultivation of virtues. Virtues, in turn, sustain the kind of relationships

¹⁹ McLaren, *Finding Our Way Again*, 17-19.

²⁰ I would argue that this is even more the case in The United Church of Canada which, in its quest for a distinctive “ethos,” sometimes forgets that church history did not begin in 1925.

²¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, Second Edition (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

²² *Ibid.*, 204.

²³ *Ibid.*, 208.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 216.

that are necessary for moral practices to be meaningful, including relationships with past and future generations. And, what is the meaningful connection of past, present and future but narrative? For virtues, and the practices that sustain them, to be meaningful requires narrative continuity because human beings are, essentially, “story-telling animal[s]. Stories are lived before they are told.”²⁵

Western thought and Christianity are deeply intertwined and, in my view, MacIntyre’s analysis resonates with the travail of the modern church. Christian faith is fundamentally narrative because it concerns, not universal religious ideas, but the history of a people, Israel, and a person, Jesus Christ. The life of each individual and of each community is a pilgrimage about which a story can be told; and these stories become theological when they intersect with “The Story”—God’s story. The major problem for contemporary Protestantism is that we have become estranged from our narrative. Practices are needed that restore that connection. MacIntyre reminds us that practices are third-order, not first-order, phenomena. They contribute to virtues, which are meaningful only when they are integrated into a narrative.²⁶ Christian practices derive their value from their dependence upon and contribution to the reuniting of Christian communities with their foundational narratives.

Proponents of practices see them as tools for forging Christian identity. However, the gospel proclaims that our identity is not self-constructed, but can only be received as a gift. We are those to whom God has reached out and reconciled in Jesus Christ. Since Christian communities are composed of individuals, the identity of the church is also more of a gift than an achievement. God creates the church to be a sign, witness and foretaste of the kingdom of God. That is our basic identity, not self-generated, but accepted and lived out. Christian practices are intentional, historic and communal actions that help give expression to this God-given identity.

Two Examples

Two accounts of Christian practice that make this point well are *Body*

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ The post-modern prejudice against any kind of “meta-narrative” makes the faithful telling and living of the Christian story all the more urgent as Christianity becomes more counter-cultural.

Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World by John Howard Yoder²⁷ and *Practice Resurrection: A Conversation on Growing up in Christ* by Eugene Peterson.²⁸

Yoder is concerned to overcome the false dichotomy between the public and the private, between the personal and the political. He takes issue with the modern prejudice that the non-political is an inherently more spiritual mode of existence. The church, he argues, is a *polis*, a human community constituted to embody certain goods. But the political life of the church runs counter, in many ways, to other politics because it is rooted in the peculiarly God-given identity of the church as the body of Christ, which exists to witness to the reality of Christ before a non-believing world. Christian practices are not intended merely to edify the church, but to furnish “a paradigm for the life of the larger society.”²⁹ Christians must always be conscious of “the exemplarity of the church as foretaste/model/herald of the kingdom”³⁰ in a world that, while it does not participate in the kingdom, is “watching.”

Christian practices, according to Yoder, are simply everyday human actions adopted by the Christian community in such a way that they are able to point to the alternative mode of living of the kingdom of God. “Binding and loosing,” the first practice he examines, is derived from Matthew 18:15-18. It is the means by which the Christian community undertakes moral discernment and reconciliation. Binding and loosing is really about “redemptive and reconciling dialogue”³¹ and is “the mode whereby the community’s standards are clarified and, if need be, modified.”³² However, this practice does not only concern matters of in-house church discipline, but also offers to the world a radical alternative to modes of decision making based on conflicting power claims.

Likewise, “breaking bread” is not only a sacramental ritual, but a sign of the radical alternative economics of the kingdom of God. Acts 4:34: “There was not a needy person among them,” is the normative text.

²⁷ *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World* (Scottsdale, PA; Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1992).

²⁸ *Practice Resurrection: A Conversation on Growing Up In Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, ix.

³⁰ “Why Ecclesiology is Social Ethics,” 106.

³¹ Yoder, *Body Politics*, 13.

³² *Ibid.*, 5.

The breaking of bread in the early church was the practical enactment of “basic economic sharing among members of the messianic community” and the promise of a new way for the world.³³ The Christian community grounds economic justice in Christian mutuality, rather than in an Enlightenment concept of inalienable human rights.

The third practice Yoder examines is baptism, sign of the unity only possible in Christ (Galatians 3:27-28). “[T]he primary meaning of baptism is the new society it creates, by inducting all kinds of people into the new people.”³⁴ Baptism is followed by the honouring of multiple giftedness, as outlined in 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12 and Ephesians 4. This practice affirms that contribution to the church derives from the grace of God apportioned to each by the Holy Spirit, and relativizes human hierarchies by not basing value to the community on inequalities of aptitude, training or opportunity.³⁵

Finally, the practice of giving freedom to speak to all in the community concerns “decision-making through open conversation” rather than practices such as majority rule that tend to marginalize and silence minority views.³⁶ Yoder’s work is significant, not so much for the specifics of his rather idiosyncratic list of practices, but because the practices serve the God-given identity of the church as the body of Christ, rather than the simple edification of its members.

In the second resource, Eugene Peterson offers an extended exegesis of the Letter to the Ephesians as a paradigm for Christian maturity, naming practices as those actions that foster maturity. The basic practice from which all others derive their significance is what Peterson calls “practising resurrection,” intentionally living in the reality of the risen Christ. This includes worship, baptism, the Lord’s Supper, attentive reading of Scripture, prayer, confession and forgiveness, hospitality, working for peace and justice, and care of creation.³⁷ But these specific practices serve the church’s living out of its calling and identity “to be a colony of heaven in the country of death.” “Church is an appointed gathering of named people who practice a life of resurrection in a world

³³ Ibid., 20-21.

³⁴ Ibid., 32.

³⁵ Ibid., 55.

³⁶ Ibid., 63.

³⁷ Peterson, *Practice Resurrection*, 12.

in which death gets the biggest headlines . . . The practice of resurrection is not an attack on the world of death; it is a nonviolent embrace of life in the country of death.”³⁸

I argued earlier that narrative is the key criterion giving practices their value. The practices that serve the church, Peterson argues, are those that keep us anchored in the story, and prevent us from “consigning God to the sidelines, conveniently within calling distance to help out in emergencies and . . . available for consultation for the times when we have run out of answers.”³⁹ Practices, then, are firmly rooted in the being of the church rather than being seen only as a function; rather in ecclesial ontology more than in sociology or psychology. “We are being oriented,” Peterson writes, “in behaviours that provide the appropriate conditions for growing up in Christ, for developing a mature life. These behaviors are the forms that the Holy Spirit uses to give witness to the ways that God is God in Father and Son, through the church, to the world.”⁴⁰

In summary, the renewed interest in Christian practices is part of a quest for a more integrated and holistic Christian life. Mainline Protestantism has rediscovered the importance of shared practices that are intentional, rooted in historic tradition, and pursued in community with others. Practices are theological because they presuppose a God who elects to work through created things and persons to reveal and communicate God’s nature and will. But for practices to be Christian, they need to be grounded in, and give expression to, the foundational narrative of the Gospel.

³⁸ Ibid., 12-13.

³⁹ Ibid., 56.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 201.

BLEST BE THE TIE THAT BINDS

by Nancy J. Knox

“Blest Be the Tie that Binds” is a familiar old hymn that has meaning for many, particularly the older members, in our congregations. The somewhat maudlin but much loved words include:

*We share each other’s woes; each other’s burdens bear;
And often for each other flows the sympathizing tear.¹*

And these sentiments ring true, for United Church people are, for the most part, very good at supporting one another. We speak often of being “brothers and sisters in Christ” and being “a community of faith.” There is seldom a home to which grief has come where there aren’t casseroles and cakes carried to the door by loving United Church members. But I have spent some time wondering what accountability looks like in our congregations. We are good at offering support and sharing sympathizing tears, but how good a job do we do at keeping one another accountable?

Holy Manners

Within a body like a church council or in the congregation as a whole, we use principles and practices of ethical accountability to improve the internal standard of individual and group conduct, as well as to present and uphold positions of integrity and honesty within the broader community. This means that we, both as individuals and in groups, take responsibility for our actions based on the commitments made at baptism and confirmation. Our behaviour is bounded by rules and lived out with an expectation of responsibility.

In recent years many congregations have adopted a code of behavior to ensure a style of accountability. “Holy Manners,”² a term first coined by Gilbert Rendle of the Alban Institute, was introduced to many in the United Church by Dr. Marion Pardy when she served as Moderator from 2000 to 2003. At the time she said, ““Holy Manners’ is far more than politeness or gritting the teeth and smiling. It has to do with assertively being in community with one another in the name of the church, in the

¹“Blest Be the Tie that Binds,” *Voices United* #602. Text: John Fawcett, 1782.

² Gil Rendle, *Behavioral Covenants in Congregation: A Handbook for Honoring Differences* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 1999).

name of Jesus the Christ and in the name of all that is holy.”³ Thus Pardy maintained that within the Christian community, accountability takes on a spiritual dimension that might rarely be found in accountability relationships in business, or political and civil interactions.

After a difficult and hurtful experience erupted in our congregation, we established a task group to write a “code of behaviour” for our life together. We put on paper the proper way to relate to one another, stressing in particular the appropriate standard for using e-mail in communicating. E-mail is a good means of communication for details around meeting time and place, but not appropriate for communicating concerns or critique. (Inappropriate use of e-mail to communicate to one of our staff members had caused hurt and disruption in the congregation.) The process was meaningful for those involved in drafting the document and it received approval by both the Council and then the congregation at its annual meeting. But I hazard the guess that most in the congregation are not aware of the document.

The Manual of The United Church of Canada is our resource for the standards of how we should function as congregations. Implicit within *The Manual* is the expectation that congregations are communities of support and accountability. Experience has proven that leadership is important and that a congregation is as strong as its governance structure and the faithful discipleship of its members. Experience also has shown that in most congregational settings we have a high level of respect for one another’s feelings and that anything that hints at confrontation or conflict is avoided at all costs.

Expectations and Transparency

So I set out to discover how members of my congregation and colleagues in other congregations would describe their experience of accountability. I discovered that there seems to be an increase in the standard expected as the responsibility increases. There is more latitude to excuse a member of the congregation who does not fulfill his or her discipleship duties, than there is for a committee member for whom there is a set expectation. There is a higher standard again for those who take on the responsibility

³ Marion Pardy, www.united-church.ca/organization/moderator/pardy.

of chairing a committee or fulfilling the role of treasurer or envelope secretary, even though these also are usually voluntary positions. These latter roles carry with them a higher standard of fiduciary responsibility.

When I posed the question, “What does accountability look like in your congregation?” to an acquaintance, she responded emphatically, “Well, I am not sure, but I know that it should include effective communication! I am on the church board and it often seems decisions are made by a small group and then the rest of us are told. Or, sometimes, meetings are held without all of us even being aware there was a meeting called. That is just not right.” Indeed, the weekly announcements included in most worship bulletins may list the officially called meetings, but “parking lot” meetings take place within a lot of congregations, and decisions are made without full involvement of all concerned.

Most often we associate accountability with the structure of governance, applying it to the successful functioning of our boards, councils or committees. However, accountability is a feature of any relationship. In the congregational setting, accountability is part of the governance, to be sure, but it is also experienced in small groups and functions implicitly among members of the congregation at large.

When I interviewed our worship committee on the question of accountability, its members were quick to respond that we get what we expect: if we expect people to perform their duties reliably, then usually they will. Interestingly, though, when fellow members do not live up to expectation, we often meet that lapse with a sense of humour, and give them a second (and sometimes third!) opportunity to improve their performance. If, after several opportunities, a person proves to be unreliable in a particular duty, most often we just quietly move on to someone else, rather than challenge, confront or question that person. This would be true in the carrying out of regular functions such as delivering a newsletter, or showing up when it is one’s turn to usher or serve communion. Committee members acknowledged that we are not good at holding volunteers to account—seldom in our congregation is a person ever fired! We don’t want to make it unpleasant; so we “take the high road” and put up with it. This is true with personality difficulties too. Time has shown that, with a prickly and difficult person, we most often wrestle through the struggle in love and, operating on the premise that in

Christian community no one gets left behind, do our best to see the other person's point of view.

The committee also recognized that within a congregation there is an element of peer pressure. As one member put it, "I don't want to disappoint others. I feel connected to the group and I don't want to let anyone down. It is the relationship with other people and committee members that creates the sense of responsibility."

Then our conversation took a turn to the spiritual. This occurred when a member of the committee said, "But really for me it is all to do with the Holy Spirit. It is really very personal. I see my job as a committee member as support for the ministers and the congregation, and I am accountable to God and the church, and therefore I do my duties. I am inspired when things work well and so I do it—if it pleases me, then I trust that it pleases others too—I feel like I am doing something for the greater good."

The process of accountability varies with church size—small rural congregations know one another with an intimacy that is not possible in larger urban congregations. But in most congregations active and responsible people stand out, and the faith community will elect or appoint those it knows can be trusted to make good decisions. In a community that celebrates God-given gifts with some intentionality, we acknowledge people's strengths and therefore find the right person for the right job. When this happens, accountability is implicit because dependable people are doing the job and the congregation lives out worthy work that is efficient and effective. But what do we do when this is not the case?

A colleague recently observed that, when things get difficult, the accountability strategy often used in congregations is one of ignoring. In many faith communities, we live with the hope that if we do not address a problem it just might go away. This colleague cited a recent experience in her pastorate where one committee made a decision to make a major purchase for the church building. The installation, however, was dependent on a second committee doing some background work. That committee, even though it had given oral assurance that it would do this, never undertook the required work. The stalling tactic or delay was so frustrating to the first committee that members eventually did an end-run,

and asked someone else, a person entirely separate from the existing committee and board structure, to do the necessary research and work. When the final plans for the project were presented, it was mentioned that the committee in question had “dropped the ball.” This seemed to come as a surprise to its members, and they claimed they were unaware that they should have taken a more active role.

One process of accountability is laid out for us in Scripture:

If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector (Matt 18:15-17).

In most United Church congregations this would be viewed as being a little harsh! Calling one another to account can be liberating and truthful when we grow in grace, but accountability should not be experienced as law enforcement. Wisdom knows when to accept people’s personal styles and particular gifts without constant challenge. This underscores the need for decisions to be made collegially and transparently. Shared accountability is, of course, the best thing and when it works well there is group ownership of decisions. In a healthy congregation, accountability means trust, open communication and transparency.

Living It Out

Recently a family in one congregation experienced a loss. A neighbour, who had witnessed the parade of people coming to and from their door, asked, “Who are these people?” The answer came back, “This is our church.” With this information, the neighbours decided they wanted to be part of that congregation. They called to meet with the minister and expressed their desire to become members. In the conversation they asked what would be expected of them as members of the congregation. This, too, belongs to the theme of accountability that congregations must engage—integrating new people into the congregation.

How do we make expectations clear to new members? As people shop for churches, and people with little or no church history come to us asking what is expected of them, how do we explain the interactive responsibility that exists in a relationship between congregant and community? In the situation described above, the minister answered by saying, “We want you to see this as a community where you make connections. It is not necessary that you be here every Sunday (that is not a realistic expectation in today’s culture) but we do expect you to be part of the support system and the community.”

When I began in ministry I was told that there was a time in our United Church when the elders, members of session, would go to visit their assigned congregational members with Communion cards. It was expected that the members would return the card on that upcoming Communion Sunday to verify that they had come to worship to receive the sacrament. This was a method of holding members to account for the promises made in their profession of faith. Those who did not take Communion for a set period of time legitimately could be struck from the Membership Roll as they were not keeping faith with their commitment to the church. I am not sure how strictly this was practised in the past, but I think most United Church congregations would be loath to set such a standard today.

Perhaps the easiest and most direct accountability, and the one we are most familiar with in our congregations, happens within small groups. In UCW units, church choirs and Bible study groups, accountability happens most often in an informal way. If someone is absent another will make a phone call or drop by to check that all is okay. In these cases the main aspect of accountability is pastoral care.

In a recently formed small group we make accountability an integral part of our formation. At each meeting we remind one another of the intention of the group and our established group norms. We agreed to meet for a set number of times and to require a resigning member to come to one last gathering to give the rest of the members a chance to say farewell. In setting out these group norms and expectations, we built into each gathering our understanding of group accountability.

If we speak honestly about transparency and openness, then we must admit that accountability works both ways. What happens when a

member feels let down by the congregation, or feels that the congregation is not holding to the values and ethics it espouses? While a member might express a contrary opinion at a congregational meeting, would we ever embrace a ritual if a person were so in disagreement as to wish to leave? If one feels he or she no longer wishes to be part of the community, could we adopt a ritual similar to confirmation or the welcoming ceremony for transferring members, and in doing so give those who choose to leave an opportunity to tell us why they no longer wish to be part of the community? Would this expression of vulnerability strengthen our communal sense of accountability?

Holding to Account

Recently a young woman came to talk to me. Sitting in my office, she explained that she feels that God is calling her to a new direction in her life. She wanted to know if we could meet on a regular basis as she works through this time of discernment. She said, “I just need someone to keep me accountable as I discern God’s call.”⁴

Accountability in the congregational setting takes place in various ways. It can be one-on-one as we walk together in faith. It occurs when groups commit to meet and the members hold one another to account in keeping that commitment. It can mean holding committees and boards to account in the tasks undertaken to govern our congregations. Whatever the case, such a practice is possible when we strive for open and authentic community. It is enhanced when we practice Holy Manners and call upon God’s grace as we face our individual and collective brokenness.

⁴ With thanks to colleagues, friends, members of Bracebridge United Church congregation, the Worship Committee, and the Women in Spirit group for their reflections and insights.

THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF CONGREGATIONAL SONG

by Nancy E. Hardy

When I was a child growing up in the United Church I instinctively learned my theology from hymns. Sunday worship meant that while the adults listened to a sermon, the children went downstairs where the Sunday School assembly began with a hymn-sing. I can still picture that darkened basement and illustrated slides as we sang “Jesus Loves Me” or “Birds are Singing, Woods are Ringing.” The lessons that followed may have been informative; the teachers may have been kind, but I don’t remember them. What I do remember are the hymns—the wonder of God’s creation and the love of Jesus became alive through the music we sang.

It wasn’t until much later that I encountered the transforming power of hymns. In the late sixties, I was invited to be a delegate to the national meeting of the Canadian Council of Churches. I was very excited about attending, filled with enthusiasm, and thrilled to be part of a diverse assembly—people of all ages from all denominations, church officials, representatives from advocacy groups. Before long, though, I discovered that large church meetings were about the same as any other meetings. We suffered through the same procedural wrangles, the same competing groups, and the same exhaustion from long days of debates.

But one evening was different. It had been a long day, the tone of the meeting had been angry and bitter, and we finally quit because people were too tired to sit anymore. Little groups sat and talked, while the leaders planned strategy. Then I spied a piano in the corner, and a friend and I went over and started to sing.

At first, there were angry glares from people who felt their important conversations were being interrupted, but gradually others drifted over to join us. We sang for hours. We sang Welsh hymns and gospel hymns, old songs and new songs, and by the end of the evening, everyone was singing. The hostility and tension was dissipated, and we finally joined hands and finished with “We Shall Overcome.” It was a wonderful moment of reconciliation, and the next day we were able to continue our meetings with renewed energy.

For people of faith and Protestants in particular, congregational songs¹ and hymns have been foundational, formative, and transformative: the good news in Jesus Christ has been proclaimed in song; men, women, and children have learned their theology through song; and mission and justice have been encouraged and experienced in song.

It seems that *what* we sing and even *that* we sing in worship is of prime importance—perhaps just as important as what we say or hear verbally. Our singing is a way of entering into God’s mystery and a key to living out our faith.

Congregational Song as Primary Theology

The music in the church where I grew up just didn’t happen in the basement. Occasionally, children joined the adults for the entire worship service, and I found that the hymns didn’t only teach me about my faith, they actually had an affective quality. When we sang “Spirit of God, Descend upon My Heart,” I felt a hush come over the congregation and, I had the sense that we were in the presence of the Holy. And when we sang “Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life,” I felt we were called to go out and change the world. Little did I know that I was engaging in primary theology.

Congregational song can have transforming qualities because it is primary theology, working at a deep level where the experience of liturgy becomes most important in the expression of faith, and where liturgy is about *doing* theology rather than thinking it. As liturgical theologian Gordon Lathrop says: “To see what the assembly actually says about God, go into the gathering place.”² We come to understand and experience God as we hear the Word preached, but also (and sometimes even more so) as we participate in the sacraments, pray, and sing in the name of Jesus.

Congregational songs, when used in worship, can function as primary theology—theologically rich, but not necessarily systematic. As hymn writer Brian Wren observes, a hymn cannot formulate a comprehensive systematic theology because that would require

¹ In this article, I use congregational songs and hymns interchangeably.

² Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993), 87.

viewpoints to be elaborated, questioned and argued, something a hymn text in its poetic, epigrammatic form cannot do. “A hymn invites us, not to step back from faith and examine it, but to step into faith and worship God.”³

Even so, most hymns do express a theological viewpoint.⁴ The hymn “Take up Your Cross,” for example, presents the viewpoint that discipleship means emulating the cross-bearing of Jesus.

Take up your cross, the Saviour said, if you would my disciples be;
take up your cross with willing heart, and humbly follow after me.⁵

Similarly, “He Came Singing Love” is a contemporary portrayal of God’s self-giving love in Jesus Christ who calls for our obedient response.

He came singing love and he lived singing love;
he died singing love. He arose in silence.
For the love to go on we must make it our song;
you and I be the singers.⁶

Perhaps most important, hymns have the ability to provide the singing assembly with an eschatological vision of transformed creation, an imaginative construal of the world as it might be if we lived according to God’s intentions.

O for a world where everyone respects each other’s ways,
where love is lived and all is done with justice and with praise . . .
O for a world where goods are shared and misery relieved.
Where truth is spoken, children spared, equality achieved.⁷

In the primary liturgical experience of congregational song, people of faith can uncover deep theological truths about who they are and Whose they are. Their singing can help them connect their singing and doing.

Connecting Singing and Doing

In the first few days of his ordained ministry, the Rev. Mark Giuliano was called to conduct a funeral for a sixteen-month-old toddler tragically killed in an automobile accident. Naturally, he was overwhelmed with deep anxiety as he prepared the service. He writes:

³ Brian Wren, *Praying Twice: The Music and Words of Congregational Song* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 351.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 368.

⁵ “Take Up Your Cross,” *Voices United* #56. Text: Charles William Everest.

⁶ “He Came Singing Love,” *Voices United* #359, v.1. Text: Colin Gibson.

⁷ “O for a World.” *Voices United* #697, vv.1, 2. Text: Miriam Therese Winter.

I remember going to the 1969 United Church *Service Book* for some guidance. It seemed strikingly odd to me that it would instruct me to include near the start of the funeral service the singing of a hymn ‘setting forth the greatness and goodness of God.’ I wondered how we could possibly draw forth strength to praise God when our hearts were so heavy with grief. But as we began to sing ‘Praise to the Lord, the Almighty’ on that day of remembrance, our weak and quiet voices began to fill with strength and hope. Even through our tears, people who were bent down from the steely weight of sorrow were able to stand straight. I learned some important lessons that day . . . praising God isn’t a solo activity; we do it with and for each other.⁸

What Giuliano discovered on the day of that funeral was the connection between singing and doing, and the possibility of transformation as we sing our faith.

The connection between faith and action has been similarly explored by moral theologian William Spohn, who reflects on the relationship between belief and behaviour. “The Gospel narratives make it clear that Jesus taught his followers both how to pray and how to act in a manner that befitted their new relation to God.”⁹ Spirituality, says Spohn, is about the relationship between what we believe and what we do, and perhaps more important, the relationship between what we do and what we can become.

In other words, as people of faith, we become what we practise. Don Saliers argues that music plays a particularly important part in connecting what we do and what we believe: “Doctrine and creed are more profoundly shaped by what we do or fail to do in the music of worship . . . than by hundreds of sermons.”¹⁰ Moreover, over time the community of worship is actually *shaped* by its musical language and forms. When the worshipping assembly sings about love and justice, the very “doing” of

⁸ Mark Giuliano, “Where We Find Hope,” in *Singing A Song of Faith*, ed. Nancy E. Hardy (Toronto: The United Church Publishing House, 2007), 68.

⁹ William C. Spohn, “Christianity and Theological Ethics,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality*, ed. Arthur Holder (Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 269.

¹⁰ Don E. Saliers, “The Integrity of Sung Prayer,” *Worship* 55 (July 1981): 294.

repeated song predisposes them to believe in love and justice and to act on that belief.¹¹

Singing Between the Lines?

This predisposition to believe and act is aided by the use of symbolic language in our hymns. Paul Tillich has said, “Religious symbols have a character that points to the ultimate level of being, to ultimate reality, to being itself, to meaning itself.”¹² Symbols can help us discover new ways of understanding by operating on different levels of meaning. Water, for example, can be liquid that gushes from a tap; it can also symbolize refreshment, nurture, or the life with God promised by Jesus to the Samaritan woman at the well. Light can illuminate dark corners; it can also symbolize knowledge, revelation, or openness. “By engaging in symbols, by inhabiting their environment, people discover new horizons for life, new values and motivation.”¹³

Sometimes, the symbol is part of the text, a reminder that “symbols, by their evocative power, arouse the imagination and invite participation.”¹⁴ “By the Well, a Thirsty Woman,” reminds us of the Samaritan woman who met Jesus and found living water. The water becomes both a symbol of new life and a reminder that we can become new life for others.

By the well, a thirsty woman found the life that you could give.
We, too, thirst like empty vessels; fill us full that we may live . . .
May we be your streams of justice; as the water, may we move
through your people by your Spirit showing mercy, sharing love . . .¹⁵

Music itself possesses symbolic import. Albert Blackwell asserts that music as “moulded sound” has the potential to bear sacramental meaning.¹⁶ He calls our attention to “music’s dark resources,”¹⁷ especially

¹¹ Judith Kubicki, *Liturgical Music as Ritual Symbol: A Case Study of Jacques Berthier’s Taizé Music* (Leuven: Peeters, 1999), 168.

¹² Paul Tillich, “Art and Ultimate Reality,” in *Art, Creativity and the Sacred*, ed. Diane Apostolos-Cappadona (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1984), 109-110.

¹³ Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1983), 136.

¹⁴ Dulles, 257.

¹⁵ “By the Well, a Thirsty Woman,” *More Voices* #117. Text: Elizabeth Stilborn.

¹⁶ Albert L. Blackwell, *The Sacred in Music*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 16. Blackwell, 105 ff., also acknowledges the critique of Susan McClary who is suspicious of the claims of transcendent meaning in the sound of music of composers like Mozart.

harmonic dissonance, which disturbs the singer and brings home the message more deeply than a simpler (and more familiar) diatonic melody undergirded by straightforward major or minor chords. Consider, for example, the hymn, “Silence, Frenzied, Unclean Spirit.”¹⁸ The dissonant harmonies and repetitive melodic line reinforce the text and symbolize the “demons of the mind,” and the incoherent ramblings of the man “with an unclean spirit” (Mark 1:21-28). The music evokes the frenzied, unclean spirit and the cry from Jesus to “cease your rantings.”

Congregational songs also derive transformational value through the use of metaphorical language. Metaphors generate new insights, appealing to the senses and imagination, as well as suggesting meaning through an association of ideas.¹⁹ Thomas Troeger offers fresh understanding of our preparation for worship through the use of compelling metaphor:

As a chalice cast of gold, burnished bright, and brimmed with wine,
make me, God, as fit to hold grace and truth and love divine.

Let my praise and worship start with the cleansing of my heart.²⁰

We not only look forward to taking the cup at the Table; we have the possibility of becoming the cup, brimming with potential and filled with God’s grace and love. The chalice is transformed into a personal vessel containing possibilities for encounter with God’s mystery and resulting discipleship. Wine, a symbol of the earth, “brims” the chalice and promises new life in Christ. Liturgical theologian Gail Ramshaw suggests that metaphorical language creates a new reality: “by seeing something old or new in terms of something else, metaphor changes everyone’s perception from that time forward.”²¹

What is also important in the process of transformation is the use of language that is both inclusive and expansive. Language matters, and the use of both metaphor and symbol can change the way we speak and sing

¹⁷ Ibid., 133.

¹⁸ “Silence, Frenzied Unclean Spirit,” *Voices United* # 620. Text: Thomas Troeger; Tune: Carol Doran.

¹⁹ Janet MacDonald, “Music as a Legitimate Metaphorical Theological Language” (BA thesis: Canterbury Christ Church University College, Department of Theology and Religious Studies, 2003), 7.

²⁰ *Voices United* #505. Text: Thomas Troeger.

²¹ Gail Ramshaw, “The Paradox of Sacred Speech,” in Dwight W. Vogel, ed., *Primary Sources of Liturgical Theology* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 172.

about God, how we think about and pray to God. Liturgical scholar and hymn-writer Ruth Duck finds it helpful to use “expansive language, [which] seeks not so much to eliminate traditional masculine imagery as to place it among a broad range of other metaphors from Scripture, tradition, and faith experience.”²²

Are you a shepherd, good shepherd who leads us
safely through danger while calming our fears?

Are you a father who shelters and feeds us,
shares in our laughter and wipes away tears . . .

Are you a mother, good mother who hears us,
comforts, protects us and helps us to rest?²³

Expansive language, whether spoken or sung, can be transformative in its attempt to include everyone equally, and in its ability to broaden our theological references. It not only expands our understanding of God but also reflects the inclusive nature of the gospel.

Singing Matters

A conversation about the power of hymn-singing ended abruptly when a friend of mine said “Well, I don’t sing, but I appreciate the poetry of the hymn texts.” I’m glad he can engage a hymn on a devotional or theological level, but I doubt whether he would find it transformative. Singing matters, and singing together matters even more. When it comes to espousing such values as peace and justice, or encouraging and motivating people to care about the world God loves, it is the communal singing that counts as much as the text, tune, or rhythm of a song.

Singing together can promote affiliation and bonding. For people of faith, “singing and praying together helps [them] become an inclusive sign of God’s purpose for creation.”²⁴ It enables people to celebrate, to give praise and thanks and to protest against injustice in safety.

Singing also may have the ability to promote God’s intentions for us as part of creation because it engages every part of us. “When we sing, and enliven the text through music, and enter into that music not just with our mouth and ears, but with our whole being, then we are doing

²² Ruth C. Duck, “Expansive Language in the Baptized Community,” in *Primary Sources*, ed.

Dwight W. Vogel (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 292.

²³ “Are You a Shepherd?” *More Voices* #126, vv.1,2. Text: Ruth Duck.

²⁴ C. Michael Hawn, *Gather into One: Praying and Singing Globally* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 6.

something which is both personal and holistic.”²⁵ By its very nature, singing is incarnational. Somehow, when we sing, we’re able to articulate our beliefs and the deep longings of our souls. And when we sing together, the Spirit can move us to become part of a greater whole. The effect of singing on behaviour is demonstrable. In the southern United States, the protest marchers of the 1960s found courage in the songs of African-Americans who, in their slavery, had already found a liberating God in the gospel and had turned those lessons into music. The freedom songs of South Africa similarly united and galvanized forces in the fight against apartheid. In 1978, Anders Nyberg of Sweden took a choir of young people to South Africa to sing and learn songs from black South Africans. They experienced apartheid, learned freedom songs from the anti-apartheid movement, and returning to Sweden, sang the songs in Swedish churches.²⁶ “The South African Freedom Songs were sung at the meeting of the Lutheran World Federation in 1984, spread rapidly around the world and were significant in anti-apartheid awareness.”²⁷

As well, the hymn “Bless and Keep Us, God”²⁸ and others like it, played a large part in bringing down the Berlin wall, as East German Christians gathered to demonstrate for peace and freedom with their candles, prayers, and hymns. “It was perhaps most significantly used in 1989 by East German congregations in Leipzig just before they went into the streets to march for peace and freedom.”²⁹

I can’t help wondering if the bright vision of equality for the 99% presented by today’s “Occupy Movement” might be helped if the occupiers and demonstrators found a song that encapsulates their longings and connects their singing and doing. It just might be transformative.

²⁵ John Bell, *The Singing Thing* (Chicago: GIA Publications, 2000), 78.

²⁶ Selections were published in the United States in 1984 as *Freedom is Coming* (Chapel Hill, NC: Walton Music).

²⁷ C. Michael Hawn, “Global Hymnody: An Overview,” in *Mission & Music: Toward a Theology and Practice of Global Song*, ed. S.T. Kimbrough (New York: General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church, 2006), 33.

²⁸ “Bless and Keep Us God,” *Songs for a Gospel People* #132. Text: Dieter Trautwein, trans. Fred Kaan.

²⁹ Leonard Lythgoe, commentary on #596, *Voices United Music Leaders’ Edition* (Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 1997).

GOD OR MAMMON, STUFF OR SPIRITUAL FULFILLMENT: REVISITING JOHN WESLEY'S "THE USE OF MONEY"

by Christine Smaller

I am loath to admit it, but I recently watched a show addressing the phenomenon of hoarding. This episode profiled a nice young family—mother, father and two children under ten—who lived in a nice house in a pleasant neighbourhood. As the camera panned over their property, the viewer could see a carefully manicured lawn and a front door freshly painted a classic blue. As the door opened, however, a different picture emerged: complete and utter chaos. Clothing obstructed the front hallway, and, beyond that, were furniture and various other items stacked precariously throughout the living and dining room. There was a very narrow path through these rooms into the kitchen, where dishes, pots, pet paraphernalia and even children's toys covered every square centimeter of surface space. It was a surprise to learn that much of this "stuff" was brand new, some of it still in its packaging. This was a storehouse of things that would never be used for their intended purpose, things that would only separate this family from living the life that God created them to live. The family complained of depression, unhappiness and a feeling of "emptiness" in their lives. No matter how much stuff they brought into their house, they could not fill the gaping hole in their lives.

The counsellor brought in to treat the family for their addictive and compulsive behaviours stated the goal was to help them clear out enough of their possessions so that they could enjoy the ones they loved best. The unstated message was that the cure for "emptiness" is not realigning one's priorities and nurturing connectedness with something deeply meaningful, but an improved relationship with material things. No talk about where God might fit in amongst the mountain of belongings.

The presented "cure" brought to mind Dorothee Sölle's observation from the early 1980s: "What comes between Christ and the middle-classes of the first world is not material poverty but spiritual emptiness."¹ Sölle lamented that many of us are seeking spiritual fulfillment *in addition* to our material possessions and privileges. "But Jesus rebuffs this pious middle-class hope. Fullness of life does not come when you already have everything. We first have to empty ourselves to receive

¹ Dorothee Sölle, "Life in its fullness," *Ecumenical Review*, 35: 378.

God's fullness. Give away what you have, give it to the poor, then you will have found what you are looking for.”²

Hundreds of years earlier, John Wesley preached on the very same concern and cautioned his flocks against “gratifying the desire of the eye by superfluous or expensive apparel, or by needless ornaments,” and told them to “[w]aste no part of [their money] in curiously adorning your houses, superfluous or expensive furniture, in costly pictures . . .” Wesley saw money, along with the distractions it could purchase, as a dangerous impediment to holiness; but if we could give everything to God, we would be freed for the life God would have us live. Wesley’s theological justification for a life freed from “things” offers an important supplement to the more contemporary emphasis on social justice, equity and right relations as the rationale for living frugally and sharing generously.

Spiritual Discipline of Money

In his Sermon 50, “The Use of Money,” Wesley uses the Parable of the Unjust Steward to argue that if we give God all we have, as well as all we are, we will be “laying up in store for ourselves a good foundation against the time to come.” A key problem Wesley identifies is that we perpetually forget that we are stewards, not owners. We cannot own anything because everything belongs to God. Wesley wrote and preached about money throughout his life and encouraged his preachers to do the same. There is no doubt he was concerned about poverty and its effects on the physical, moral and religious aspects of the lives affected by it. But Wesley’s focus is not on the positive outcome of equitable distribution of resources, but on the spiritual growth and reward for the giver. The notion that our relationship to money is essential to our lives as faithful Christians is certainly not a new one. A study conducted in the early 1990s found that most “Americans do believe their faith is relevant to their finances.”³ But the concept must be dormant as “the evidence suggests that faith makes little difference to the ways in which people actually conduct their financial affairs.”⁴ Perhaps it is the contemporary focus on the scriptural imperatives of seeking social justice and equity

² Ibid., 380.

³ Robert Wuthnow, “Pious materialism: How Americans view faith and money,” *Christian Century*, 110: 239.

⁴ Ibid.

that has muted the call to see “that money is rather like prayer: it requires discipline and right relationship.”⁵

Money, Money, Money

There are no two ways about it. Wesley thought money was a gift from God: “Indeed it is unspeakably precious.” While he concedes that heaven has no need of it, and that, if humanity behaved as the early Christians did, where “distribution was made to everyone as he had need” (Acts 2:45), we too would have no need of it. Money is “a most compendious instrument of transacting all manner of business, and (if we use it according to Christian wisdom) of doing all manner of good.” Money can be a “husband to the widow, and a father to the fatherless . . . a defence for the oppressed, a means of health to the sick.”⁶ If we use our money to this end, we will be making friends who greet us when we arrive in heaven (Luke 16.9).

In Sermon 50, Wesley first provides clear and persuasive evidence for his interpretation and application of the Parable of the Unjust Steward. Klyne Snodgrass echoes Wesley’s thoughts on this text: “Jesus’ point is that people in this world know how their economy and its culture of reciprocity work, and, therefore, they are wiser than the sons of light, his disciples, who do not understand satisfactorily the economy and culture of the kingdom. Using language from the parable, Jesus directs his disciples to use worldly money for eternal consequences.”⁷ For his part, Wesley offers a detailed and comprehensive plan for the Christian’s relationship to money which “may be reduced to three plain rules, by the exact observance whereof we may approve ourselves faithful stewards of ‘the mammon of unrighteousness’: Gain All you Can, Save All you Can, and Give All you Can.” (Of course it is Wesley, so there are a few sub-rules, as well as some special guidance on prayerful discernment, when the rules don’t provide the promised clear direction.)

⁵ Alison Swinfen, “On Money,” *Coracle: The Magazine of the Iona Community*, (Autumn 2011) 4/49: 1. http://www.iona.org.uk/media/autumn_2011_coracle_copy.pdf. Accessed March 15, 2012.

⁶ Sermon 51: The Good Steward, May 14, 1768.

⁷ Klyne Snodgrass, “Jesus and money: no place to hide and no easy answers,” *Word & World*, 30: 140.

Gain All You Can

According to Wesley, “it is the bounden duty of all who are engaged in worldly business to observe that first and great rule of Christian wisdom with respect to money, ‘Gain all you can.’” We are all required to employ our God given faculties and gifts with “all possible diligence” and prayerfully avoid “leisure for silly, unprofitable diversions.” Wesley was a product of a time when industry and industriousness were viewed with great optimism. This was an “England when per capita or per person income was beginning to increase for the first time. Agrarian productivity had allowed a smaller percentage of the population to produce more than enough food for the nation, which enabled workers to flow to other industries.”⁸ There was the feeling that expansion could be and should be infinite, and would create a more prosperous world for all. However, Wesley did not endorse unbridled or unrestricted methods for earning money, and most thinkers of the day tempered their enthusiasm for industry within a religious framework. Even “Adam Smith argued . . . that empathy for others was a necessary component of a well-functioning market system.”⁹ Wesley’s rules governing “gaining” might sound strangely familiar to the contemporary ear, as they contain our own concerns about work practices:

(a) Gain not through “expense of life” or anything that harms the constitution of either our own body or soul, or that of our neighbours. As if anticipating our contemporary understanding of the ethics of diversity, Wesley explains that different people will have different thresholds of harm. Dealing with arsenic, for example, is harmful to everyone—but a vocation of writing would harm only “those persons of a weak constitution.” Wesley further insists: “for to gain money we must not lose our souls.” This seems a modern understanding of employer obligations: all work places must be safe, and particularly vulnerable employees must be accommodated.

(b) A good Christian cannot sell below the market price; to do so at the expense of another’s going concern, or to make or sell anything harmful, would hurt “our neighbour in his body.” One can easily conjure up contemporary examples of these: “social” couponing practices that have

⁸ Jeanne M. Boeh, “Everyday Economics and Why It Matters,” *Word & World*, 30: 146.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 155.

put companies out of business, the seemingly rampant and often hostile mergers and acquisitions which have decimated much of the West's employment opportunities, and toxic, poisonous or unhealthy foods that have been sold in recent years.

(c) Wesley also singles out physicians and druggists, along with employers, as having special obligations to the world at large: Those "who play with the lives of men . . . who purposely lengthen the pain or disease" for gain cannot be "clear before God." The current discussion about providing inexpensive drugs to third-world countries and the health care debate in the United States seem to come under this rule.

Save All You Can

In contemporary parlance we think of saving as "putting aside for a rainy day," but Wesley has a different understanding. He says a person cannot be "properly said to save anything, if he only lays it up. You may as well throw your money into the sea, as bury it in the earth." His rule about saving is actually about spending money frugally and honourably: "Expend no part of it merely to gratify the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eye, or the pride of life." With his anti-tithing stance and his strong message that we are not proprietors, but stewards, Wesley preached that spending money on our own and our family's needs is part of the 100% we give God and so all expenditures must be carefully discerned. While he sets out the specific rules and tests in the "Give All You Can" section of his sermon, here Wesley explores the temptations and pitfalls that may distract holy giving. He might well have been thinking of the myriad food and dining shows conquering television networks when he warned that while gluttony and drunkenness might not ensnare the Good Christian, "there is a regular, reputable kind of sensuality, an elegant epicurism, which does not immediately disorder the stomach . . ." but "cannot be maintained without considerable expense. Cut off all this expense!"

Most interesting in this area of Wesley's sermon is how he addresses what we might now term "addiction." The core goals in frugal living are to gain honour from God, live a holy life and avoid distractions posed by vanity and pride: to indulge these latter vices is entangling, because "the more they are indulged they increase the more." He is warning against becoming trapped in the cycle of craving more and more of what money

buys, because in contrast to God's love, its effects fade quickly. While true "hoarding" is a complex psychological syndrome, one cannot help but think about the "everyday" compulsive, such as spending relating to collecting, dining and entertaining that is not only acceptable, but celebrated. One can never buy enough designer clothes, consume enough spectacular meals, be seen at enough "it" bars, if you believe the preponderance of media in the West.

Wesley was very public about how he spent his own money, and suggested that openness about our spending practices would be helpful in adhering to a holy life. In mainline Protestant congregations it is difficult to imagine people chatting at coffee hour about how much was spent on various shopping excursions the previous week. Or, more significantly, on how much is spent maintaining lifestyles that include houses, cars, vacations, entertainment, and investments while neighbours near and far go without. One wonders if our church folk would agree with the "75% of Americans surveyed in 1993 that rejected the view that it is morally wrong to have a lot of nice things when others are starving."¹⁰

Contemporary Christian groups, such as the Iona Community and the Lazarus at the Gate movement, hold one another accountable for their financial choices and spend regular time in prayerful discussion about how money is spent collectively and individually: "The second aspect of our Rule of life as members of the Iona Community calls us to account to one another for our use of money and resources and this includes a calculation, together, of our baseline commitments and a discussion, in our local Family Groups, about the decisions we have made."¹¹ While we may experience intimate sharing in the small groups in United Church congregations, few go so far as to probe spending practices. This "special kind of discipleship" is rare because it entails true vulnerability . . ."¹²

Give All You Can

Gaining and saving are meaningless concepts without pointing to "a farther end . . . [to] give all you can." Because we are stewards, and not proprietors, everything we have belongs to God. Wesley abhorred the

¹⁰ Wuthnow, "Pious materialism," 240.

¹¹ Alison Swinfen, "On Money," 1.

¹² G. Jeffrey MacDonald, "Christians shatter taboos on talking about money," *The Christian Century*, 128: 18.

concept of tithing as he discerned that we cannot keep back from God what is God's own: "Render unto God, not a tenth, not a third, but all that is God's." Each expenditure we make should be for the glory of God, including what we spend on ourselves and our families. Wesley gave specific instructions on how one must do this: (1) Provide needful things for yourself; (2) provide needful things for your wife, children, servants and any other members of your household; (3) "If there is overplus left," then give to those in need in the household of faith; and (4) "If there is overplus still," then "do good to all men."

Perhaps sensing that such rules might be open to self-serving interpretation, Wesley also offers a four way test to help discern how to live out these precepts faithfully. One should ask oneself the following questions before spending any of God's money: (1) Am I acting like a Steward or an Owner? (2) Am I acting in accordance with obedience to God as known through Scripture? (3) By spending money this way, am I using it as an offering to God through Jesus? (4) By this action, will I be rewarded in heaven?

Sölle stated that while "Christ came that we might have fullness of life, capitalism came to turn everything into money. That is the long death that looks out at us from so many empty faces."¹³ Wesley addresses this emptiness directly, and suggests that even if we cannot get rid of the need for money, we can choose to employ it in ways that honour God and all God's people.

Give All You Have and All You Are

John Wesley offers fresh insight into how important it is for faithful Christians to reflect on spiritual practices connected to money. He asks us: Are we spinning our spiritual wheels by trying to feel good about giving enough? How can any amount be enough when we are stewards called to give everything we have to the glory of God? Is tithing what Christ calls us to? If we consider some money God's and the rest ours to spend as we please, are we building a wall of junk that separates us from a deep connection to God?

In an affluent United Church congregation, the fact of a hungry and penniless fellow congregant was brought to the attention of three of the

¹³ Dorothee Sölle, "Life in Its Fullness," 379.

governing bodies, including pastoral care and outreach. No offer of help was made, but instead a number of observations, such as “We know she doesn’t have much, because she can never afford to participate in church activities” and “She just needs to work harder.” She was eventually helped by a much less affluent church a few kilometres away. It is remarkably sad when self-identified Christians don’t share with those in evident need because, of course, it means that people live in need when there is plenty to be had. But what Wesley invites us to consider is how keeping back God’s resources for oneself has an impact on the individual, and, perhaps more importantly, on the church itself. His main question to us is clear: Can we be Christians if we take more than we need?

At the end of the hoarders show the family members were presented as completely transformed by the two days of counseling and dumpster filling. Their home was now much more livable, their nice things now accessible, and they conformed more perfectly to the image of “typical” North American Family. There was much clapping and weeping in appreciation of the positive change; much celebration for the end to the feeling of emptiness. What would Wesley make of this? He would likely ask us church folk why we are not the ones offering to help those who are separated from God by things and distractions; and why we are not preaching and teaching that “[t]here is no place to hide from the strength and confrontation of Jesus’ words on money.”¹⁴ “The stakes are high. But in facing up to our material obsessions, we should expect more from churches than silence.”¹⁵ There is a persuasive public discourse in our culture on money and how to use it to achieve happiness. From his eternal rest with all the friends he made with his own money, Wesley exhorts us to start participating in that conversation and to encourage people to include their use of money in their intentional spiritual practices: “No more covetousness! But employ whatever God has entrusted you with, in doing good, all possible good, in every possible kind and degree to the household of faith, to all men!”

¹⁴ Klyne Snodgrass, “Jesus and Money,” 139.

¹⁵ Wuthnow, “Pious materialism,” 242.

“NOTHING PREPARED ME”: REFLECTIONS ON THE ROLE OF THE THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL IN PASTORAL FORMATION

by Sandra Beardsall

“Curiously Special”: Studying Ministry Formation

“The minister was curiously special,” Sara Jeannette Duncan writes in her 1904 novel of life in small-town Ontario. “He was supposed to be a person of undetermined leisure—what was writing two sermons a week to make your living by?—and was probably the more reverend, or the more revered, from the fact that he was in the house all day . . . He was a person whose life answered different springs, and was quite sustained on a principle other than supply and demand.”¹ The minister’s role in this turn of the century community was clear: to embody the enlightened voice that rose above the clamour of the world. More pertinently for the study of “pastoral formation,” the minister’s theological education had been designed to train him for this role of intellectual and moral leadership. Both college and congregation expected that he would practice daily the rigorous study of Bible, ancient languages, and systematic theology, that he had begun at his Scottish university, gather up his insights, and preach them with power and persuasion on Sunday. In that regard, the minister’s academic life apparently flowed naturally into his parish life, even across continents and cultures.

I enjoy sharing this fictional slice of parish life with ministry interns as they ponder the identities and expectations they are encountering in pastoral ministry. Although Duncan’s book describes a world long gone, wisps of that ethos linger in both college and congregation. Both still carry assumptions about academic preparation and moral leadership. But a century of shifting sands in church and community has also complicated the picture enormously. Today, few congregations want their minister to study “in the house all day.” Church members and leaders raise pointed questions about not only the theological school’s syllabus, but about the relevance of *any* academic education for ministry personnel, or the need for an order of ministry at all. The issue of “pastoral formation” is contested ground, and perhaps only a fool would rush in. Yet it is also

¹ Sara Jeannette Duncan, *The Imperialist* [1904]. Accessed at <http://www.manybooks.net>, 31.

holy, and therefore appropriate, ground, I would argue, for theological educators—fools or otherwise—to dare to tread.

The role of theological schools in pastoral formation has intrigued me since the United Church undertook the task of pastorally forming *me* for ordination in the early 1980s. While in the pastorate I was a ministry internship supervisor, and for the past fifteen years, I have served on the faculty of St. Andrew's College, a theological school that has particularly occupied itself with the relationship between college and ordination-stream ministry internship for nearly four decades. I believe St. Andrew's journey can offer a positive example of the theological school's role in helping women and men prepare themselves for the "curiously special" work of pastoral leadership. That narrative takes us through a brief history of the question of "formation" in mainstream theological education in Canada, to the model that St. Andrew's has employed for just over a decade. I will suggest some of the elements that appear to have made that model successful. Finally, I will pose some personal questions about the United Church's directions in formation for pastoral ministry.

"Some Practical Acquaintance with Parochial Duties": A Brief History of Pastoral Formation in Protestant Canada

While education for ministry began in the earliest days of European settlement in what would become the nation of Canada, from the start there were competing visions of pastoral formation. In 1852, for example, the Anglican Bishop John Strachan founded Trinity College, an imposing gothic structure set at the bucolic edge of the city of Toronto, for both undergraduate and divinity training. He intended to form young men for leadership among the social and economic elite of Canada West, untainted by the secularity of the University of Toronto. The divinity students would, Strachan promised, study the scriptures in their original languages, the thirty-nine articles, the *Book of Common Prayer*, and the early Ecclesiastical writers. It was "hoped" that an arrangement would be made for giving them "some practical acquaintance with parochial duties."²

Strachan's vision did not gain the day, however. The late-nineteenth century witnessed a surge among the Protestant churches toward linking

² Henry Melville, *The Rise and Progress of Trinity College, Toronto: with a Sketch of the Life of the Lord Bishop of Toronto, As Connected with Church Education in Canada* (Toronto: Henry Rowsell, 1852), 165-7.

theological training to secular universities. Presbyterians and Congregationalists had always prized a thorough academic education, and Methodists in the late 1800s increasingly shared that commitment to residential degree programs, thus shifting away from a field-based ministry training model, with the trainees (called probationers) practising in congregations while reading prescribed texts on the side. The fledgling Dominion of Canada needed educated moral leadership, the argument ran, so an academically trained clergy was essential to the building of a Christian nation. The three-year academic curriculum included courses in worship and preaching, but practical training happened in “summer mission fields” quite distinct from academic study. There were few attempts to bridge the formation of the academy and the “field.”

In the late 1960s, the rise of adult education and self-awareness movements in North America nudged theological educators into reflection on their task. Courses in pastoral theology emerged. In the 1970s St. Andrew’s College faculty pondered the role of practical ministry experience in the college’s ordination degree program. While summer mission field opportunities abounded, these were often trials by fire—or dust storm—with minimal oversight. This “practical acquaintance with parochial duties” did not mesh with the college’s growing interest in “praxis”—the reflexive relationship between theory and action, study and practice. In an effort to engage that relationship, the college piloted an 8-month internship, to occur from September to April between the second and third years of the divinity degree.

The new program was rigorous for intern, internship site, and college faculty. Faculty members read monthly journals and visited the internship site at evaluation times. To further the goals of collaborative and integrative learning the college created a compulsory course that would run throughout the final year: the “Post Internship Learning Cooperative,” (PILC). In PILC, the returning interns, facilitated by one faculty member, worked on debriefing their internships and engaging through individual and group projects the theological and pastoral issues that had emerged during their year. All other faculty members also participated in portions of PILC by rotation.

St. Andrew's College and the Sixteen Month Internship

By the time I arrived as a faculty member at St. Andrew's College in 1997, the internship program had been in effect for two decades. An eight-month internship had become the norm across the United Church, but St. Andrew's faculty were again evaluating their curriculum. The post-internship mega-course, PILC, had not met with uniform success, occasionally becoming a battleground for competing student needs and visions. (Graduates of some of the particularly contentious PILC cohorts might describe it using more colourful language!) Students returned to the college restless and resentful. Recalling my own return to Emmanuel College from my year-long internship, I empathized with their frustrations. Just as I had finally gained some competence and confidence in the practice of ministry, I had been whisked back to the classroom. And in an era when so many ministry candidates were middle-aged, all theological schools faced the challenge that the move to the college for education, to an internship site, and back to the college for a final year represented an unbearable disruption.

As well as responding to the students' articulated concerns, the faculty also hoped for a deeper and more consistent integration of ministry practice and academic work than was occurring in the current program. Both the college and some hosting congregations wanted the interns to have more time to learn and grow in supervised ministry, time that would include the full sweep of the church year. St. Andrew's had participated in the In-Community Program for Ordination, and had seen the valuable elements of that experience, the community-based programs at the Centre for Christian Studies and the First Nations training centres. In 2001, after several years of planning, the national Committee on Ministry Vocations granted approval for St. Andrew's to "pilot" a three-phase program.

This program allows students to take the equivalent of their first year either on site, by distance learning, or a combination of both, and their second year on campus, where the formation focus is on participation in the academic learning community. "Phase Three" features a sixteen-month half-time internship, interspersed with four ten-day "learning circles," with no residential "move" back to the college required. The first and last circles focus on issues and identity in pastoral

ministry. Learning Circle Two studies the history and theology of The United Church of Canada. Learning Circle Three is a cross-cultural experience in a First Nations community and at a First Nations training centre, usually the Jessie Saulteaux Resource Centre at Beausejour, Manitoba. By careful calculation we constructed a program with exactly the same number of credit units and expected hours of work as the previous internship/final year M.Div. model.

By 2009 we were ready for a thorough evaluation of “Phase Three.” I was part of the small committee of stakeholders who polled graduates, faculty, internship site personnel, presbytery and conference persons who had related to the program, and the settlement charges of the graduating ordinands. Faculty members were particularly curious about the success of our attempts to increase the students’ integration of theory and practice. With all the usual caveats about the validity of evaluation tools, the review indicated that the program has worked well.³ Perhaps the best indicator is the stability of St. Andrew’s graduates in pastoral ministry. After six cohorts and thirty-one graduates, all had been ordained or approved for ordination. All but one was still in full-time congregational ministry. Most had been settled in rural or small-town pastoral charges, and most were still on their settlement charges.

Comments from the ordinands’ settlement congregations generally affirmed the effectiveness of their ministries. The Phase Three graduates were variously described as: “a gem,” “our spiritual leader,” “completely dedicated to her faith and her congregation,” “a wonderful minister,” and “more than our minister . . . our dear friend, without compromising all she offers as our spiritual guide.” Almost all of the settlement pastoral charges indicated they would welcome another St. Andrew’s College graduate.

The graduates themselves mostly applauded the program’s intended integrative nature. “The integration of theory and practice was greatly facilitated by the fact that I was engaged with both simultaneously,” said another. Many learning site participants (supervisors, lay team members, consultants) echoed this affirmation. One wrote: “The time of going back to the college and reflecting on their experience is invaluable, and

³ For the full report see: “You Will Know Them by Their Fruits:” A Report on the Evaluation of “Phase Three” of the St. Andrew’s College Master of Divinity Program St. Andrew’s College Academic Committee, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, September 2010. It is available at <http://www.usask.ca/stu/standrews>.

increases their confidence level." Another said, "I think this program is a near perfect mix of academic rigour and practical training."

Some Elements of Successful Pastoral Formation

It is one thing to design a program that appears successful, another to articulate the reasons for that success. Three elements stand out from my years of participation and observation.

Habit Formation: Recently a United Church minister described, in a secular newspaper column, an unexpected conflict she faced in her rural community. Nothing in her theological school training, she claimed, had prepared her to face this challenge.⁴ It is not an unusual comment to hear from clergy, and although it is often spoken lightly, it reifies the understanding of the academy as a bank where students collect and save information for later withdrawal (or not!). The author of this column was not a St. Andrew's grad, but neither would St. Andrew's have "prepared" her for this specific incident, for theological schools offer, I believe, not solutions but tools. Some of these tools are "technical": conflict management strategies, a workshop on media relations, how to facilitate a meeting. But something more fundamental occurs in the academy: it helps students develop habits of the mind and heart.

These habits emerge as students engage in their pastoral settings the tools they have collected in the "traditional" disciplines. Returning to school several times during the course of the internship strengthens the notion that the academy and the parish are interwoven aspects of one's pastoral identity. Ministry students are not simply *applying* academic knowledge in their field placements, they are also *producing* knowledge, for use by themselves and by others. In my experience, learning these habits does not lead our students to intellectual elitism, but rather to deepened personal awareness—of the power they exercise in ministry, and of the language they need to help Christian communities describe and sustain themselves. In a way, they are "prepared" for nothing, but they are "formed" for everything, or at least for the wide range of surprising situations that pastoral life will inevitably throw at them.

⁴ Anne Hines, "It Takes a Holiday Village to Raise a Ruckus," *The Toronto Star*, Dec. 11, 2011, IN2.

Faculty Formation: More than “formation,” the word “integration” peppers any discussion of the St. Andrew’s program. By the time they graduate, students are expected to have demonstrated integration both within themselves (faith, intellect, emotions, actions) and in relation to the academy, society, and church. It can only happen if the faculty members are themselves committed to this integrative task. Each of us on the St. Andrew’s faculty has been the primary instructor in a learning circle; all of us participate in learning circles instructed by others. We all act as faculty advisors to interns, receiving and responding to their journals and contributing to their internship evaluation processes.

This faculty integration helps the students to deepen their own work of pastoral formation. Instructors of every academic discipline contribute to reflection on the students’ internship experiences and emerging pastoral identities. The interns also see the faculty working together to grasp each other’s critical methods and tools. So, we as faculty are also continually subject to “formation.” We hope that this attention to integration models a pattern that graduates can take into ministry, situating them in ongoing dialogue between the scholarly and the pastoral.

De/Re/Formation: Internship is a profoundly formative experience. It is about shaping an identity, and that often involves a painful moment of “unmaking.” Such a moment occurs for some of our interns in the learning circle that involves a short “plunge” into a First Nations community, hosted by its resident pastoral minister, and then a week at a church aboriginal training centre. The Jessie Saulteaux Centre has a rule that no more than two St. Andrew’s students may attend any one of their learning circles, so our students find themselves as minorities in a culture that is probably unfamiliar to them, with persons who will be their colleagues in ministry, and yet whose lives differ markedly.

Our interns write a reflective paper on the experience for their St. Andrew’s faculty advisors, and these are among the most significant papers they submit during the internship. They write of the shock of confronting their own racism, of the economic poverty of their fellow students and the communities they serve, and of the challenge of coming to terms with a spirituality that, while sometimes earth-centred, can also be much more theologically conservative than their own. In this, as in other challenging times on internship, the interns need to lose themselves

to find themselves again. When the theological school journeys with students through these experiences, it helps them to recognize that they are joining their personal struggle to a wider one: the *via negativa*, or perhaps the *semper reformanda*—time-honoured processes of personal and ecclesial de/re/formation.

The Future of Pastoral Formation and the Academy

Of course no ministry training model can guarantee that every graduate it produces will thrive. No model will “rescue” an anxious denomination. Still, I cherish St. Andrew’s College’s long-standing vision of ministry practice and theological scholarship as inseparable aspects of Christian praxis. The institutional United Church, however, appears less certain about ministry formation. The national church has granted St. Andrew’s permission to pilot an even more integrated final year/internship model. Yet the church is also piloting in other conferences a model that places the internship *after* the completion of the academic degree. It seems to me that this latter pattern risks further alienating the academy from pastoral formation. Not only will students lose that integrative moment that the college can help to foster, but also the theological school will appear even less necessary than it already does in the minds of many church persons.

Which seems like loss. Despite—or maybe because of—the challenges of church decline and expediency-oriented late capitalism, I would argue that a vocational ministry that “answers different springs . . . on a principle other than supply and demand” is vital to a faithful church. Such a life responds to pastoral situations with an intelligent love that has been forged in the best that both church and academy can offer. In the words of theological educator, Ched Myers:

We cannot save a place we do not love.

We cannot love a place we do not know.

We cannot know a place we have not learned.⁵

As we cultivate leaders for the terrifying and exhilarating salvation project into which we have been invited, do we not need to muster all the ways of “learning” that past and present wise ones have crafted for us?

⁵ Ched Myers, notes for “The Bartimaeus Institute: Reading the Gospel ‘Politically’: Socio-Literary Studies in Mark 1-12,” presented Feb. 20, 2012 at Oak View, California, USA.

FROM THE HEART—ABOUT THE HEART OF THE MATTER

Swimming the Tiber

by David Bruce

Someday when I write my life's story to bore my grandchildren, I will write it as the commentary on various dreams and visions I've had. Despite my reputation as a cerebral type—my teenage nickname was “Spock,” after the logic-driven Vulcan on Star Trek—my life has been pulled forward by mystical moments that defy rational explanation. My son has a poster in his bedroom that features a smiling Albert Einstein and his famous quote, “Gravity never caused anyone to fall in love.” I can relate.

I grew up in a nominally Anglican household, but by the time confirmation age had arrived for the youngest of our family (me), we had long stopped attending. Looking for some depth of meaning to my tender little existence, I found that Bible-pounding fundamentalists were only too happy to supply me with their bite-sized answers. I spent six years—my teen years, dagnabbit!—*not* going to school dances, not watching much television, *not* enjoying the popular culture around me. Leaving home and going to the big, bad city of Toronto for school, I found that my classmates, with none of the baggage of knowing me previously, smiled at my quaint religious views and chose simply to *like* me for who I was, rather than the rightness or wrongness of my beliefs.

One night, in a fevered session of prayer, I had what I guess the mystics refer to as a vision. I saw the sun, shining brightly, as a mustard-coloured disc in the sky. And then, as I watched, it exploded—not with violence but with a silent gentleness—and its light filled the sky. Almost as had Peter at Cornelius' house, I heard the echo of a voice that asked me, “Am I the god of a few or the God of all?” I realized that I had been calling God's children unclean, just because they didn't join me in my world-denying asceticism. I left the movement I was part of and, after a few months of “drying out,” I began again to engage the question of religious community.

The United Church was a natural fit. Open-minded, progressive, everything I needed. I visited several United Church congregations to scope out the landscape. My second-hand clothes failed to impress, however, and I stood alone, ignored, at the coffee hours of several

downtown congregations. I had just about given up when I began to date a woman, whom I later married, who was raised in the United Church and wanted to get back into attending. We found a congregation that welcomed us—easier as a couple, I suppose—and settled in. Before too long, people were asking me if I had considered going into the ministry, and seminary seemed the next logical step. I learned some very liberal theology alongside of my Calvin and Barth, ran the gauntlet of interviews, and was ordained.

Throughout my years of ministry, I made many good friends and, being a strong personality, a few enemies as well. The one thing I could never quite understand about the United Church—and here I grossly exaggerate to make a point—was the overarching attitude that it didn't really matter what you believed, or how you behaved; so long as your politics tilted to the left, you were “one of us.” Now I'm not politically well-defined: I have voted for at least five parties in my lifetime. However, I couldn't shake the conviction that the Church had to add something distinctive to the drive for social reform, not just baptize it, and I am well aware that I wasn't alone in thinking that. I soldiered on, knowing that the ministries in which I was involved were making a difference in people's lives, and that I was providing for my family.

But the kids grew up. My wife began to make more than I did. Without the pressure of being the breadwinner on me anymore, my spiritual longings wouldn't be denied. And because I am so very, very defensive when it comes to hearing God's voice, God had to interrupt in the only way I left open, with another mystical moment. About seven years ago, visiting my local Catholic parish, and at that point quite ignorant of ecclesiastical niceties that would exclude me, I paraded up with everyone else to receive Communion at the mass. I cannot explain with mere words the experience of believing for the first time that I had received the Body of Christ. You can think of other memorable “firsts” in your life, if you like; for me there was no turning back.

Since I had finished my DMin (the end result was the beginning of the *Jesus 24/7* series for The United Church Publishing House), I started a PhD in theology at Emmanuel. I began to read Lonergan, Thomas (again), and Balthasar, but I was also reading top-notch Protestant theologians such as Barth, Moltmann, Pannenberg, and N.T. Wright. None of these

great minds, however, moved me as much as the practice of prayer. Wanting to further explore the mystery I had encountered in the Eucharist, I began studying with a Jesuit priest in one-on-one “catechism.” A Franciscan friar that I had come to know told me about the Liturgy of the Hours, and I quickly learned the truth of *lex orandi, lex credendi*: as one prays, one believes. Quietly, alone, so as not to be noticed, I began praying the psalms as prescribed in the LOTH, and marveled at how I was *praying myself into being a Catholic*.

With my nervous United Church-born-and-bred wife of twenty years looking on, I began to open my mind to what the pre-Reformation Church had to say about the development, or “unfolding,” of doctrine, something that the United Church had prepared me for with its developing understanding of inclusiveness. Somehow, all of the talk of “community” that I had absorbed in my quarter century of United Church life and ministry became concrete—oh, far from perfect, but concrete before my very eyes. I wanted to own its imperfections and misdeeds as well as its triumphs, and what’s more I wanted it to own me.

About five years ago I thought I was ready to make the move. I was under spiritual direction from one of the most highly-regarded spiritual directors in Toronto. I was stopped dead in my tracks by a dream about having climbed a summit, but getting stuck in a snowdrift on the way down. When I told my spiritual director about the dream, we both laughed out loud, because the meaning was so clear: *not yet, David, not yet*. Reflecting on the dream in subsequent weeks, I decided to obey the dream. I would finish my PhD, I would run out the *Jesus 24/7* series, and I would concentrate on shorter-term pastorates to give me more flexibility. When an organization at which I was volunteering, a downtown centre for homeless men, asked me to consider a full-time vacancy, I knew this was God’s invitation.

Last July, I was received into the Catholic Church in a private pre-Mass ceremony, quietly, because my local parish is also in the neighbourhood where I live and had served as a United Church minister. The priest who oversaw my reception said it was wonderful to receive a member of the clergy who wasn’t homophobic or misogynistic! My Christian baptism was respected, and I was confirmed with two Catholic friends—a friar and a lay-person—acting as my sponsors. The ceremony

was attended by more Protestants than Catholics, including United and Presbyterian clergy. I opted to let word of my “big move” trickle out slowly, rather than be splashed in a public announcement, out of respect for the denomination I called home for so many years.

The work here at The Good Neighbours’ Club is harder than I experienced in parish work, and because it is all so new to me, I don’t even have the satisfaction of doing a really great job. It is a daily struggle, but for a very good cause. One (coincidental?) fringe benefit is that I now work two blocks from St. Michael’s Cathedral, and I often slip away for half an hour to go to mass. If I didn’t have my faith to nurture me and sustain me, I know I wouldn’t be able to do it.

I didn’t make this move to be happier, but my family members—who remained in the United Church, by the way—say that they haven’t seen me this happy in years. I still think I’m a grump, but my wife says she has a better husband, and my children say they have a better father. They might join me someday, and swim the Tiber themselves, but they are finding the shock of no longer being a minister’s family to be far greater than any of us anticipated, and that’s quite enough shock for now.

I do miss pastoral ministry being my “day job.” Little changes such as praying the rosary every day or venerating the host with a bow before receiving or even crossing myself as I say my prayers on the daily commute is hardly worth mentioning alongside the change to taking off my collar and joining the laity. I do volunteer, of course: I’m a lector, a group leader in two different programs, a coach in the parish baseball league, and this year I am in the Palm Sunday drama—playing Jesus. What God has for me in the years ahead, only God knows, and that’s all right with me.

PROFILE



Photo by Susan Sorenson

SHELLEY DAVIS FINSON, 1936- 2008 **by Joan Wyatt**

My own life story is one of being marginalized. I'm sort of working class; my education was disrupted because of the war. I didn't really go to school until after the war, so all of my academic life I have been trying to catch up . . . I never wanted to be part of the church institution. I couldn't identify with what it meant to be Christian. I came into the church because of a conversion experience. A woman by the name of Betty Scott, a deaconess, just a very ordinary woman, influenced me. I went to Lake Scugog Camp and worked with her. I couldn't get over how very ordinary she was, and yet she was a Christian.¹

So began a fascinating interview with Shelley Finson, at her home in Halifax in 2002. That same year, Lois Wilson, elected in 1980 as the first woman moderator in the United Church, named Shelley as one of the two women who had awakened her feminist consciousness. Speaking to an audience at Harvard University, Lois recalled preaching what she regarded as a "stunning sermon" at Timothy Eaton Church in Toronto in 1976. Shelley came up to her after the service and pointed out that her

¹ This and all other direct quotes from Shelley are from an interview by the author, 15 November, 2002, Halifax, Nova Scotia, tape recording.

language was exclusively male and that she preached like a male. Shelley's influence as a leader, Lois said, was not just through this incident, but also through the Friends of Hagar (FH), a feminist support group that Shelley helped to initiate in 1972, and later in her role as the staff person (1974-1978) for the Movement for Christian Feminism (MCF), an ecumenical group that she also helped to found.²

Early Years

Born in England, Shelley was raised there by her Great Aunt Thirza. At the tender age of six, she and her brother Brian both were evacuated because of the war and sent to live for three years in South Wales. Three of her teen years were spent in Jamaica with her father and step-mother. Here she developed life-long bonds with her three Jamaican step-siblings. Shelley returned to England at age sixteen to work as an office girl and the following year joined the Air Force as a radar operator. Her loyalty and love for family and friends was evident early in her life when, two years later, she took compassionate discharge from the Air Force to look after her brother who had contracted tuberculosis. This also gave Shelley hands-on experience of women's domestic life of cooking, mending, washing and ironing for a household of dependents. When her brother recovered, in 1956, twenty year-old Shelley moved to Canada where she worked in a variety of jobs, including the Lake Scugog Camp located northeast of Toronto.

Middle Years

Following her conversion experience, the Five Oaks Christian Workers Centre near Paris, Ontario, became an important part of Shelley's formation. It also influenced her decision to complete a B.A. in 1962 from the University of Waterloo and then, in 1964, a Master of Religious Education degree from Emmanuel College, conferred together with a Diploma in Christian Education from Covenant College (now the Centre for Christian Studies). In 1963 Shelley was designated a deaconess by

² Ann Braude, *Transforming the faith of our fathers: women who changed American religion* (Palgrave MacMillen, 2004), 18.

Hamilton Conference of the United Church. Throughout this time Shelley's focus on ministry was with youth. In the context of the turbulent hippie era between 1964 and 1971, Shelley served various ecumenical outreach programs designed for youth alienated from church and family. Shelley finished this phase of her career as Director of the North Toronto Youth Project that, during her tenure, opened a halfway house for kids on the street.

In 1973 Shelley completed a Master of Social Work degree at the University of Toronto with a thesis entitled "Attitudes on Abortion." She then took a position at Toronto Conference where her responsibilities included animating social action within the Conference. Here she was frustrated working under a very "inefficient man . . . with no hold on what needed doing." It made her feel that she "was dying on the vine." Her own life experience, plus an awareness of the frustration of several other women working as diaconal ministers, provided the motivation, along with her friend and Anglican deaconess, Edith Shore, to invite women serving in church work to gather to study feminist theology and offer one another support.

The Friends of Hagar met every three weeks over dinner. Word of mouth quickly expanded the group to include women from different churches and even a synagogue. Shelley remembered Kay Hockin, a retired missionary, sitting quietly and knitting while "we each took our turn to tell our stories . . . It was the beginning of recognizing the depth of pain that was inflicted by the Church on women."³

In addition to their regular gatherings, by 1974 the Friends had organized events for national United Church staff, women leaders of Toronto Conference, women related to theological education, and women from Roman Catholic and Protestant congregational settings. As well, they sponsored an ongoing Bible study from a feminist perspective through the Student Christian Movement. At this point, several of the women in the circle, Shelley and Edith among them, decided it was time to organize a more focused group to offer education not only for women but also for the churches. They wanted to support not only women in

³ Letter from Shelley to select women friends on the occasion of being granted an honorary Doctorate of Divinity degree from United Theological College in Montreal (2001). Shelley also arranged for the names of women who had been co-leaders with her in MCF to be published in the convocation bulletin.

ordered ministry, but also women in all forms of work and ministry in the churches. Upon the formation of the Movement for Christian Feminism, Shelley became its sole staff person, accountable to a board made up primarily of former Friends of Hagar. The Friends continued as a separate but related organization, meeting for several more years in the Toronto area. The scope of the MCF was national, seeking to empower women in churches across Canada to bring changes to church and society consistent with a feminist agenda.

Throughout this time, the written works of feminist theologians encouraged Shelley's own passion, and shaped the analytical and theoretical framework of her ongoing work and teaching. She read voraciously and, in retrospect, reflected that likely there was nothing published in English on Christian feminism that she had not read.⁴

Neither Shelley's nor MCF's feminist interactions were confined to the churches. The feminist movement was intentionally eclectic, and aspired to include women across social, cultural, racial and religious boundaries. Shelley had become involved as "a naive but curious social work student" in the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC).⁵ She remembered her first encounter with a group called the Velvet Fist in Toronto. Going up a dark staircase to the meeting she "felt terrified." Once there she found that "they were so hostile . . . such angry women." While she felt out of her depth, nevertheless she believed, as she had earlier in her career working with youth, that she "needed to move in and understand what these women were saying and try to be present." Shelley found that in both secular and church settings women wanted to talk to her about their own questions of faith and about how she was able to be both Christian and feminist.

⁴ This formative reading provided the background to Shelley's later publications, *Women and Religion: a Bibliographic Guide to Christian Feminist Liberation Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991) and *A Historical Review of the Development of Feminist Liberation Theology*, No. 34, Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (Ottawa: CRIAW Publications, 1995).

⁵ The National Action Committee on the Status of Women was founded in 1971 to advocate for implementation of the 167 recommendations of the Government of Canada's Royal Commission on the Status of Women; NAC remains today an ongoing umbrella group that continues to seek justice for women in Canada. During the Mulroney years NAC's government funding was cut. Today it is financed through individual memberships and donations.

Where once, as “part of the hippie generation,” Shelley had assumed that her ministry was with youth, she saw now that women were as abandoned, as cut off from the church, as were the kids with whom she had worked on the streets of Toronto. She began to see that work with women was her ministry, a ministry that served what she believed to be, as she stated in one of her regular reports to the board of MCF, “one of the most far reaching social movements of this century.”

Shelley’s work with MCF included speaking, preaching, leading workshops on the connections between the Women’s Movement and Christianity, providing written and practical resource kits for women’s groups, both in churches and related secular educational institutions, as well as appearing as a guest on television and radio programs. In addition, Shelley gave leadership in events to raise feminist consciousness at the Vancouver School of Theology, the Atlantic School of Theology, Queen’s Theological College and two different women’s organizations in Newfoundland. She initiated gatherings for women employees of the General Council offices of the United Church and for senior administrators of the Anglican and United Churches. She also served on, and later chaired, the UCC’s Task Force on Women and Partnership between Men and Women in Church and Society (PMW).⁶

By 1978 MCF was out of money and the women who had worked so hard to make it all happen were exhausted from six years of non-stop passionate engagement. Shelley had served as the sole staff person on a very minimal salary, with Edith Shore’s 82 year-old mother as her part-time, unpaid administrative staff. Board members decided that the time had come to pass their work over to the Canadian Council of Churches for a new phase. This same year, Shelley took a job at the Centre for Christian Studies, her own alma mater, as director of field education.

The Institutional Teaching Years

In 1978, at the age of forty two, Shelley began a formal teaching career in an educational institution. At the Centre, her passion for justice for women and her passion for the practice of ministry of the whole people of

⁶ For a more detailed treatment of FH, MCF and PMW see my article “We Have Feminists like You to Blame for this Mess,” *Touchstone* 24, no. 2 (May 2006), 6-16.

God had a chance to thrive. Yet her work there was not without its struggles. In 1985 lesbian feminist theologian Carter Heyward came to lead a continuing education event at the Centre. Shelley staffed the event and the planning team had declared that it would be for women only. The local rector of St. Clement's Anglican Church, Terry Finlay, later Archbishop of Toronto, expressed concern as a member of the Centre's Continuing Study and Action Committee. He turned to Shelley and said, "But Shelley, what about the men?" Shelley "looked over her reading glasses and replied, 'Yes, Terry, what about the men?'" Clearly her message was taken seriously as, after the meeting, several men decided to "form a men's group to support one another and deal with their responses to feminism."⁷

Reflecting back on the Centre's adjustment to the inclusion of men during the 1980s in a program that historically had been for women only, Shelley observed that there was no intentional naming and language developed to deal with the differences that this brought. So too, as lesbian women increasingly came out, there was no sustained reflection about how this shifted the dynamics within community.⁸ By the mid-1980s and 1990s many feminist theologians were addressing the challenges of differences, but this discourse did affect the Centre's intentional practices at the time.

During her time teaching at the Centre, Shelley was ordained by Toronto Conference (1979) and completed a D. Min. at Boston University (1985) with a thesis entitled "On the Other Side of Silence: Patriarchy, Consciousness and Spirituality . . . Some Women's Experience of Theological Education." Ann Naylor, who studied with Shelley and later worked with her as a colleague, observed "a remarkable consistency in the words and images used to describe Shelley during her time on staff, which she thought could be summed up in Mary Hunt's phrase '*fierce tenderness.*'" "Shelley could be a formidable presence, a force with which to be reckoned . . . yet Shelley's capacity to be uncompromising did not mask the depth of her care."⁹

⁷ Gywn Griffith, *Weaving a Changing Tapestry: The Story of the Centre for Christian Studies and its Predecessors, 1892-2005* (ArtBookBindery.com, 2009), 136-7.

⁸ Ibid, 39.

⁹ Ann Naylor, speaking at Shelley's memorial service at Bedford United Church, Halifax, 9 February 2008.

Shelley moved to the Atlantic School of Theology in 1985. Here she loved her teaching and her home overlooking the water. Yet, again there were challenges and disappointments. She discovered that there were students who had been advised by clergy, and sometimes by their United Church presbytery committees—who were disturbed by Shelley’s reputation as a radical lesbian feminist—not to take courses with her if they could avoid it. While Shelley was a person of definite convictions, she was also someone who found disrupted relationships painful. She experienced the disruptions in the Maritimes to be baffling and dehumanizing. She felt that she was judged without any opportunity to present herself or her positions. Yet this did not stop her from teaching and encouraging transformation. Pam Brown, a colleague and friend at Atlantic School of Theology observed that:

The 80s and 90s were turbulent times in the Churches. Issues of Inclusive Language, Women's Ministries, Domestic Violence, Sexual Harassment, Sexual Orientation and Order of Ministry, all swirled around those newly placed in congregational settings, some of which were challenging, even hostile. Shelley's commitment to preparing, strengthening and supporting those entering ministries or struggling in unfriendly places, called forth energy from her, and many were sustained by her wisdom and continued care.¹⁰

Bill Kervin, now Associate Professor of Public Worship at Emmanuel College, relates the story of how Shelley was mentor to a group of younger members of the Maritime Conference in the mid-80s:

In my first years of ministry . . . I and my friend and colleague, Steve Lisson, became active on the on the Church and Society Committee of Conference. There, in the face of the economic stresses of our congregations and communities, and the lack of involvement of the church on such issues, we became convinced of the merits of creating a Conference Staff position on economic justice. After pitching the idea at a Conference Executive meeting, they were summarily dismissed as “angry young men.” One of them suggested going to Shelley for advice.

Amazingly, she gave us a whole Saturday afternoon in her

¹⁰ Pam Brown, speaking at Shelley’s memorial service.

office, taking us through an intense crash-course in popular education, feminist and liberation theology, and pedagogy that forever changed our lives and ministries. The bottom line she impressed upon us was “If you want to transform people, you have to transform the system; if you want to animate church members; you have to animate the church structures too.” That day, she mapped out a strategy that would take at least two years to complete. We followed it religiously . . . When we finally presented the motion for an Economic Animation Staff person for Maritime Conference, it passed unanimously. Shelley was at that meeting, and when we later exclaimed to her, “We can’t believe it worked!” she smiled and said, “Of course it worked; it worked because it happened from the bottom up.”

In short, Shelley taught me in one afternoon everything I know and believe about education and transformation in the life of the Church. To this day I think of that lesson as being about the systemic praxis of resurrection.¹¹

Despite her disappointments in the United Church, Shelley remained faithful and loyal within it. At her memorial service it was noted that she had been an active member in Halifax Presbytery for over twenty years and that her “thoughtful, intelligent and sometimes challenging comments during presbytery discussions” would be missed, as well as her “profound influence on so many during their preparation for ministry.”¹²

Shelley’s understanding of the gospel took her to secular agencies throughout her career. In Halifax it included Stepping Stone, Women’s Employment Outreach, and Services of Support for Women Experiencing Violence.¹³ Here, as in her days with secular women in the 1970s, Shelley was for many the “first ‘church person’ they had ever encountered as an ally. . . and many were able . . . to feel that perhaps the church could be a place of solace and safety for them.”¹⁴

¹¹ Bill Kervin, e-mail communication to author, 6 December 2011.

¹² Joyce Wylie, preaching at Shelley’s memorial service.

¹³ Shelley was interviewed by Scott Neigh for his forthcoming two volume work *Talking Radical* (Nova Scotia: Fernwood Publishing, 2012), a Canadian history “from below” based on the words of long-time activists.

¹⁴ Pam Brown, memorial address.

Final Journey

Shelley was a runner for 33 years. She competed regularly, completing many half marathons. To encounter her was to encounter someone whose physical presence exuded energy and strength, even as she radiated passion, focus, and charisma. For some, this created dissonance and anxiety about who she was and what she represented as a lesbian feminist in the church. In my own interview with Shelley, she spoke not only of feeling baffled by some responses, but also with regret for some occasions where she felt that she had been unnecessarily rude or grumpy. Shelley was aware of her strong presence, she was also able to balance her strength and drive with an ability to let go.

Six months after her diagnosis of pancreatic cancer, as death approached, Shelley's partner, Diane Tingley, said this:

Shelley had a circle of women-friends whom she trusted to be her death-midwives. Her faith throughout life, and in death, was in the power of community to provide courage in the face of fear, companionship in the face of isolation, hope in the face of hopelessness. She had faith in community! In knowing Shelley as well as I did, I believe I can safely say that her spirit was alive and enlivened in community here on earth and that she anticipated it would continue within community in what came next. She had faith that there was more to come.¹⁵

Christian Feminist Theological Leader

Shelley Davis Finson was a Christian feminist theological leader within the Canadian church and the larger communities that she served.¹⁶ Within the United Church, Shelley was seen to be a formidable presence, particularly with regard to her feminist praxis and her lesbian orientation. One of her final research projects was to interview other lesbian women in ministry leadership, assessing the lived realities of the decisions of

¹⁵ Diane Tingley, email communication to author, 5 December, 2011. Shelley "yielded her place in the universe" February 3, 2008, at home in Halifax with Diane holding her hand.

¹⁶ Shelley's leadership was recognized by United Theological College (McGill) in granting her an honorary Doctor of Divinity in 2001 and by the Centre for Christian Studies naming her, posthumously, a Companion of the Centre in 2008.

1988.¹⁷ Shelley's own spiritual practices sustained her in life and in facing death. These practices included voracious reading, hospitality, vigilant attention to, analysis of and active engagement in things that need to change, daily worship rituals spoken in emancipatory language that kept her connected to community and through community in touch with God's spirit. Shelley helped to plant some of her practices within the United Church through her leadership in MCF, her teaching in theological schools and her active involvement within the structures of the UCC.

Well versed in feminist theologies, Shelley's own position might be identified with what the January number of this journal named the post-theism of Carter Heyward. For Carter, and I think, for Shelley, God is that thoroughly immanent transpersonal spirit that is known and experienced within community and within relationships. For Carter and for Shelley, this perspective affirms that all participate in and may incarnate the One in whose image all are made. The ethical demand follows: to remove barriers that impede belonging to this kingdom. For one who did not aspire to leadership in the church, Shelley will be remembered as a fiercely tender teacher, activist, theologian, feminist and, yes, a Christian leader.

¹⁷ In 1988 the General Council of the United Church of Canada made policy decisions that made clear that sexual orientation was no barrier to full membership in the Church, including membership in the Order of Ministry.

BOOK REVIEWS

Review Article

POST-MODERN, NOT POST-THEIST—THE CHURCH AS A CHRIST-CENTRED LOCUS OF CREATIVE EMERGENCE

Emerging Churches, creating christian community in postmodern culture, by Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008.

The Emerging Church: A Model for Change & A Map for Renewal, by Bruce Sanguin. Kelowna, BC.: CopperHouse, 2008.

The dialectical tension between the church and the kingdom cannot be resolved. The church exists between the time of the inauguration and the consummation of the reign of God on earth. Therefore it is always the “pilgrim” or the “becoming” church.¹

Two books have recently been published about “emerging churches.” Neither book is attempting to offer a critique of “emerging church” or even in-depth analysis. However, they both offer descriptions, explanations of language and context, and use metaphors from science or from popular culture to make the ideas more understandable and more engaging.

Perhaps the most engaging aspect of Bruce Sanguin’s *Emerging Church* is a sense of excitement and possibility for the church—for individual congregations, and for the Christian church in general. Sanguin speaks about the struggles of a particular leader, and a particular United Church congregation, to grasp the excitement, the dreams and ideas, and turn them into expressions of Christian community with a different way of doing and being church. His book is particularly useful to us because of its United Church context. Most other books about Emerging churches are embedded in American evangelical or British charismatic culture.

¹ Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 90.

Gibbs' and Bolger's *Emerging Churches* has a broader context. The book sprang from more than 100 in-person interviews with leaders of churches in the U.S. and Britain about the culture in which they operate and how their churches were addressing that culture. The sense of excitement and possibility is also palpable, albeit Gibbs and Bolger offer a more academic and detailed description with some limited analysis.

The similarity of the titles is misleading. Gibbs and Bolger are describing a particular movement, which sprang primarily out of the evangelical or charismatic churches. When I spoke to Bruce Sanguin recently, he said that he had not set out to write a book about "the emerging church." He set out to write a book about "the evolving church." The name of the book was the publisher's choice. However, Sanguin does use the language of Emergent churches, and the books would complement one another on your shelf.

"Emerging churches" are seen by Gibbs and Bolger as those responding to, and operating within, contemporary culture. The language of post-modernism is the language of discussion about the forms it takes. This has resulted in criticism, especially from evangelicals, that Emerging or Emergent church is merely a sop to popular culture, or more interested in culture than Christianity. Discussion of emerging or different forms of ministry can become a victim of "generation wars," and pit so-called "traditionalists" against the emerging culture of younger thinkers.

However, Gibbs and Bolger want to speak about different cultures rather than different generations, saying that "churches in the United Kingdom and the United States seriously underestimate the need for cross-cultural training for those in their respective congregations. Consequently, churches misread the culture, thereby undermining the church's overall mission."²

Many of those quoted in *Emerging Churches* are at pains to point out that Emerging Church isn't about adding a youth program, or a special youth service. This includes Karen Ward of Church of the Apostles (an Episcopal/Lutheran combined program) who

first understood the issue as a generational problem but then realized it was about something much bigger; the shift from modern to postmodern culture. "I realized that the changes were

² Ibid., 15.

much bigger than generational grouping. Regarding postmodernity, the Gen-Xers are the first marines on the beach. Every generation hereafter will be postmodern.”³

Dan Kimball, also author of a book called *The Emerging Church*, agrees that “the young-adult-service approach to church doesn’t really work . . . It lasts about four years and then gets taken over, blows up, or the Emerging pastor gets fired due to conflict in values and philosophy of ministry.”⁴ Emerging Church, then, is about something other than new music, or a young minister with “cool glasses and a tattoo”—the disparaging description given to Emerging Church by one of my colleagues.

In the process of comparing over 100 different churches or ministries that describe themselves as “Emergent,” Gibbs and Bolger are able to identify what they refer to as the nine characteristics of Emerging Church:

- 1) Identifying with Jesus
- 2) Transforming Secular Space
- 3) Living as Community
- 4) Welcoming the Stranger
- 5) Serving with Generosity
- 6) Participating as Producers
- 7) Creating and Created Beings
- 8) Leading as a Body
- 9) Merging Ancient and Contemporary Spiritualities

Over the past weeks I encountered two very different criticisms of the Emerging phenomenon. One person who identified himself as “progressive” wrote it off as “a postmodern excuse for orthodoxy.” Contrast this with the impassioned arguments one can read from evangelicals concerned that Emerging Church pays more attention to the life and work of Jesus, than the person of Christ as Saviour.

Gibbs and Bolger give each of the characteristics its own chapter—all informative, descriptive and containing ideas and information that would be helpful whether or not you would describe your church as “emerging.”

³ Ibid., 33.

⁴ Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2003), 33.

I was particularly interested in several ideas—for example, “Transforming Secular Space” could be paraphrased as: Emerging Church doesn’t just describe a different style of church for a particular generation. Emerging Church tears down the divides between sacred and secular, and not only reminds us that all life is sacred, but that all those places in culture where we live our lives and what we do there, is also sacred. It challenges the sacred/secular split constructed by modernity.

The chapter, “Participating as Producers,” describes churches affected by a consumerist approach to religion and spirituality. “Spirituality to go” is how Gibbs and Bolger describe it. When church is understood primarily as a place, not a people, then the physical church becomes a place where people receive spiritual products. This chapter includes a discussion of both the importance and the difficulties of full participation. It also notes that there is a generational difference to be found here—the youngest members have become *used* to being able to produce—loading videos to *YouTube*, producing music, uploading art, seeing themselves as capable of “producing” and wanting their ideas to be included.

Gibbs and Bolger also include a terrific chapter that could be described as “We create, for God first created us,” though it is called “Creating as Created Beings.” This chapter is useful not from a philosophical or academic standpoint, but because so many examples are provided from their interviews that can be applied in both large churches and small ministries.

Gibbs and Bolger are upfront about their support for the Emerging Church movement and their book is intended to provide a description, not a critique or deep academic analysis. The biographies of their many interviewees, which form the final third of the book, are interesting in their own right. This book is a primer for the movement—essential reading because it describes not only the common characteristics of Emergent ministries, but also some of the differences in national or local cultures that affect how they operate.

Contrast this with Bruce Sanguin’s approach to a single church, a struggling pastor, a familiar Canadian, United Church context, and his description of a very specific process used to enliven a traditional church environment. Sanguin has written several other books and he lectures extensively in North America on what he calls “Evolutionary

Christianity.” This book is not specifically about that although the use of evolution as a metaphor is woven into the fabric of the book, and the idea of evolution is used extensively in describing changing church processes.

There were several parts I found most helpful as a minister in the midst of the culture wars. While Gibbs and Bolger provide only a brief and generalized discussion of the difference between generational issues and value systems, Sanguin includes description of a theory called “Spiral Dynamics,” developed by psychologist Clair W. Graves. (I found the colour coding by Don Beck more confusing than helpful.) Graves suggests each of us operates primarily from one or the other of the following value systems:

- Beige/Archaic Survivalist
- Purple/Tribal
- Red/Warrior
- Blue/Traditionalist
- Orange/Modernist
- Green/Postmodernist

Each grouping reacts against the previous one. Modernists react against the mythologies and hierarchical belief systems of the Traditionalists and move toward a scientific world view: the human being as achiever emerges. Postmodernists react against the fascination with self and human achievement, against nationalism and rationalism, and the exclusion of other cultural norms of modernism. They are more interested in cultural diversity, more pluralistic and more broadly concerned with the world, and that includes ecological concerns and cultural involvement. Although Sanguin does not stress it in this section, post-modernism also begins to re-establish the importance of many stories rather than a single received truth, and is more comfortable with myth and metaphor.

He notes that congregations based in “Blue and Orange” regularly chew up “Green” ministers without ever realizing there is a clash of cultural values. This isn’t necessarily about generations. Any minister works with a variety of people of the same age who work from different value systems. However, Sanguin suggests that giving a congregation language to speak about these value systems may avoid some of the worst of arguments. It occurs to me, however, that some operating from

Traditionalist or Modernist perspectives may see the discussion of value systems as being a post-modernist concept.

I was also particularly interested in the chapter called “The Heart and Mind of Christ: Discerning your Non-Negotiables.” Because this is a description of a particular congregation’s process, the “non-negotiables” were not someone else’s “characteristics.” I was surprised that Jesus wasn’t on the list. However, that’s not because either Sanguin or the congregation have forgotten him. Rather they assumed Christ. The language of a Christ-centred church is woven through this book, both in specific mention and in the background assumptions. They name the Gospel the good news. They name the whole of Scripture, an open table, and all that it means for sacramentality, and they name discipleship rather than membership, and mission and justice. These days it may be problematic to assume Christ in parts of the United Church. That Sanguin and his congregation do, says a great deal about how they perceive the Christian life.

In another thought-provoking chapter with the unfortunate title, “What Colour is your Christ” (a reference to Beck’s colour coding of value systems), Sanguin describes a lunch he had with a colleague of another denomination who had called him after reading one of Sanguin’s books of sermons. The man told him that “he knew I was a brother in Christ because I used the same words as he did. But a number of the sermons confused him . . . The truth is that his Christ and my Christ were actually different.”⁵ It’s not that Christ is different, of course, but that we perceive Christ differently based on our value systems. We might observe that we create Christ in our own image.

Sanguin’s book outlines a specific process, including some of the issues that arose as a result of using it, in a specific congregation. All this I found interesting and useful. However, I sometimes found that his enthusiasm and hopefulness crossed into a certain tone that we may get when convinced that we have something wonderful and new—a superiority that is sometimes distracting.

On the same note, the scientific metaphors used could be both distracting and questionable. Sanguin and some of his resources fall into a common trap in using evolutionary metaphors. As a process, evolution

⁵ Sanguin, *The Emerging Church*, 20.

increases the likelihood of species adaptation and survival in a particular environment. Using Beck's colour coding we could remind ourselves that there is nothing inherently *better* about a green bird than an orange bird—it's just more adapted to its environment. Language such as "higher," "more evolved," "more progressive" can imply an intrinsic superiority. Using this kind of language in speaking of human efforts can turn into self-righteousness.

And postulating long-term intention in evolution is one of the dangers for theologians. That said, if the "orange" birds try to destroy those who are turning "green," they may doom their species to extinction. If they cast them from the flock—they may end up forcing the creation of a new species, rather than strengthening the ability of the whole to survive in the current environment.

The language of evolution is useful, in my opinion, to remind people fearful of change and the future, that there is precedent for adaptive change both in nature and the church. It engages modernists, because using evolutionary language is an intentional engagement with the most commonly heard criticism of religion today—that it is non-scientific or at odds with science. It resonates for many both inside and outside the church. Post-modernists are both well aware of this irony, and engaged by what it represents for the relationship of Christianity to their concerns for the world.

Likely the most important aspect of both books is their recognition of the need to inspire and promote people's creative impulses in responding to Christ, within culture. The examples demonstrate how such creativity moves well beyond the walls of a church building and takes up residence in the midst of secular culture, not because Christianity needs to be there to counter it, but because that's where people live their lives. Emerging churches, Gibbs and Bolger maintain, emphasize ministry in the community rather than in the church. But they also recognize that this is a multi-faith context. Thus, many Emerging churches are intentionally building inter-faith relationships, so that faith might again be part of public life, and faith communities might work together on the wider world context so important to post-modern life.

Maggie Watts-Hammond

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Announcing . . .

The John Hogman Memorial Fund

Supporting the Enhanced and Continuing Effectiveness of
Touchstone

Gifts in memory of John Hogman already have been received by *Touchstone*. At its annual meeting on May 7th and 8th, the Editorial Board authorized the establishment of a Memorial Fund to support the enhanced and continuing effectiveness of *Touchstone*. We thank those who already have contributed and welcome the contributions of others.

Such gifts may be sent to:

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Touchstone Editorial Board: Digest of Meeting

On May 7 and 8, the Touchstone Editorial Board met at Humber Valley United Church in Etobicoke (Toronto). The absence through death of our founding chair, John Hogman, was deeply felt. Members of the Board shared their memories of his astute and gentle leadership and were encouraged by the presence of Michelle Hogman with us. She has been elected a member of the Board.

Key decisions were taken as we continued to move through this time of transition:

- Prof. Rob Fennell of the Atlantic School of Theology was elected chair.
- Plans were approved for the re-development of our website. Our goals in redevelopment include the capacity for an ongoing, moderated forum and for e-subscription. It is our conviction that, even in the crowded world of social media, a *Touchstone* web conversation will become a compelling locus for respectful theological discourse.
- We will seek grants to assist in the redevelopment of the website.
- The e-posting of past issues now will take place one year after the appearance of the print number.
- A John Hogman Memorial Fund was established.
- The offer of ATLA Serials to digitize all volumes of *Touchstone* was accepted.
- In the future, the months of publication will be: February, May, September.

The revised schedule of themes is as follows:

- **September 2012:** Is it the End? An Eschatology of the Environmental Crisis
- **February 2013:** Does Conciliar Ecclesiology Have a Future?
- **May 2013:** C.S. Lewis (d. 1963) Anniversary
- **September 2013:** Atonement: Preaching and Teaching the Cross of Christ
- **February 2014:** The United Church: Still Ecumenical?
- **May 2014:** The Preaching Ministry Matters More than Ever

The next Board meeting will be held May 22, 23, 2013.

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