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Editorial

TEARS OF REPENTANCE: SEEDS OF HOPE?

High above the B.C. interior, enroute to Winnipeg and this year's gathering of the *Touchstone* Editorial Board, I toyed with the idea of refusing the head-phones a flight attendant ritually offered me as she made her rounds. For reasons I still don't fully understand I stifled my initial impulse, smiled politely, and dutifully received her offering.

I'm glad I did. As our flight was comparatively short, the showing of a full-length film was not possible. Instead, an episode of "Friends", along with an in-flight version of the CBC news were offered for our viewing pleasure. It was the second of the three stories Peter Mansbridge and company chose to feature this day, that not only made me grateful that I had accepted the head-phones, but served to make my day.

It was a peculiar story, really: not the sort of thing one expects to see figuring prominently in the nightly-news. Two old men were conversing, one dressed entirely in black, the other entirely in white: the one in black clearly the more vigorous, the one in white shaking visibly, the ravages of age and disease taking their toll. But though his limbs shook and his lips trembled, the apology offered by this man in white (on behalf of his church and, in a very real sense, on behalf of all Western Christianity) was offered with clarity and conviction. While an evaluation of the long-term ecumenical significance of that apology is premature, it is not inappropriate, even at this juncture, to reflect upon the implications of that apology for the on-going vitality and credibility of the Christian movement.

I realise, of course, that some readers of this journal will be far more wary than I of the apology John Paul offered to the Christians of the Orthodox churches. Their wariness may stem from uneasiness with the papal office as such, as well as the specific leadership-style of the present holder of that office. (I recall one speaker, at the meeting of the Fredericton General Council in 1992,

warning commissioners against the dangers of “creeping John Paul the Secondism”, in the same breath with which he warned of “creeping Margaret Thatcherism”!) While sharing some of that uneasiness, I am not prepared to dismiss either the office of the Pope or that office’s present occupant.

Admittedly, I cannot deny the concerns Wolfhart Pannenberg has expressed regarding the current state of the Vatican: his apprehension that the church of Rome “has begun increasingly to present again” the “centralised image that Rome presented up to Vatican II”. On the other hand, I share the cautious affirmation Pannenberg (a Lutheran) offers when he yearns for a “ministry of an individual who can be active as a spokesperson for Christianity as a whole.” For all of my caution, I agree with Pannenberg when he affirms that: “If any Christian bishop can speak for the whole church in situations when this may be needed, it will be primarily the bishop of Rome.”

That having been said, a further cause for caution will have to do with the nature of the televised action John Paul undertook during his meeting with the Orthodox bishops. Over the past 20 years, there have been no shortage of apologies offered by the Christian community, with our own United Church of Canada surely ranking at the top of any list of those churches ready, willing and able to offer an apology, seemingly at the drop of a hat. At the same meeting of the General Council at which we were warned about John Paul, I found myself quietly suggesting to a friend (only partly in jest) that we issue a blanket apology for everything wrong with the world, so that future General Councils could begin tackling other business! As readers can well imagine, there are conservative Roman Catholics even more troubled by what they regard as John Paul’s excessive willingness to offer words of apology, words which they fear will come back to haunt Roman Catholicism by negatively impacting the esteem in which Catholics hold their own church.

Such concerns cannot lightly be dismissed, any more than we can ignore the difficult philosophical issues raised by apologies like the one John Paul offered to Orthodox Christians. (To men-

tion two of the most pressing: on what basis does *this* generation apologise for the actions of forebears who have been dead and buried for hundreds of years?; to whom in this generation shall such apologies *be offered*, given that the first-hand victims have also been dead and buried for hundreds of years?). As well, there is the very real possibility that enemies of the Gospel will seize upon ecclesial apologies as a convenient instrument in their polemics against the Christian movement. The dangers are real, and ought not simply to be swept under the rug.

And yet, as I watched John Paul offering his emotional apology to the Christians of the East, I could not help but share in his emotion. It seems to me that he, whatever his frailties, is striving and (I think) largely succeeding in his attempt at holding in tension two attitudes that are not always found together: the desire for the church to be accountable for its mistakes, along with an equally lively desire to rekindle within the church a contagious love for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Without that passion for the Gospel, a willingness to apologise may well represent nothing more than a loss of faith; without that willingness to be held accountable for the church's failures, advocacy of the Gospel may well represent nothing more than arrogance and institutional self-serving.

Is it far-fetched to suggest that the United Church's unwillingness to abandon enthusiasm for the Gospel *and* its willingness to be held accountable to the high standards of the Gospel, could prove to be the most basic ingredient in any renewal our church experiences at the start of a new millennium? Long after we have forgotten the specific techniques and renovations with which we are *rightly* experimenting at the present time, there will remain the question of our basic stance vis à vis the Gospel. By which I mean not only our readiness to be examined *by* the Gospel, but also our willingness to bear enthusiastic witness *to* that same Gospel. Tears of repentance, yes. But tears which, *when shed in devotion to Christ*, promise an abundance of moist and fertile human soil in which to grow God's always potent seeds of hope.

May they yield their fruit in God's good time!

- F.F.

THE ROLE OF TRADITION IN THE FORMATION OF CHURCH LEADERSHIP

by Marguerite Van Die

In the year 2001 is there a role for tradition in a denomination which originated in the optimism of early twentieth-century evangelical liberalism, and which today, having long discarded even that heritage, prides itself on being “cutting edge” and iconoclastic? Needless to say, no self-respecting church historian, when asked to address such a topic, is going to answer in the negative. My response is, therefore, a resounding, unequivocal affirmative. I go further, however, and insist that not only is tradition important in the formation of the leadership of the church, but precisely in such a denomination as ours, and at this time in its history, tradition is its very lifeblood. In a society which we all know to be irrevocably post-Christian, the United Church of Canada must have leaders who have an appreciation of the Christian tradition which is informed, articulate, and practical. I will elaborate these assertions, first by trying to define the term “tradition” — what it is not, and what it is; secondly by exploring in general terms some of its practical possibilities, and finally by examining the relationship between tradition and contemporary Christian identity.

The word “tradition” as is clear from its Latin root *tradere* — to hand on — calls for a transmission from one generation to the next of beliefs, customs, or in the case of theology, doctrines “claimed to have divine authority” (Canadian Oxford Dictionary). Such a process can be benign, as for example, an extended family’s decision to institute a tradition to meet every five years in order to maintain a sense of community and identity. Tradition can also, however, be experienced as oppressive when there is a perceived imbalance of power, when for example, the older generation insists that its ways and beliefs must also be those of the younger: “This is the way we have always done it, and that’s why you too must do this, whether it makes sense to you or not.” Such

an imposition of tradition generally goes by the name of “traditionalism”. Applying this distinction to religion, Jaroslav Pelikan, pithily observes: “Tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionalism is the dead faith of the living.”¹ And, of course, it is traditionalism that gives tradition such a bad name. Throughout every age of the Christian church’s history, there have been reformers who protested against the tyranny of the dead and have called for innovation and insight to replace tradition. One has only to think of Wycliffe, Hus, Luther, Wesley, Mary Baker Eddy, Catherine and William Booth, to name just a few of the most prominent critics.

And one doesn’t have to go outside the immediate traditions of the United Church of Canada. Church union emerged as an ideal in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and it is worth pausing for a moment to look at the attitude held towards tradition by its proponents. These were people steeped in the post-millennial optimism of liberal evangelicalism, which also fueled the social gospel movement that flourished in the 1920s, the decade when church union was implemented. Many of the men and women of the three uniting denominations held the conviction that in matters of religion, the present was a distinct improvement upon the past, and the future promised to be even more glorious. Not only would the twentieth century belong to Canada, in Wilfrid Laurier’s memorable words, but the entire world would be Christianized, thanks to the combined forces of missionaries and a scientific spirit which would bring to an end earlier doctrinal divisions between the various branches of Protestantism (a term taken to be equivalent to “Christianity”!).

To Nathanael Burwash — chancellor of the Methodist Victoria University from 1887 to 1913, and chair of the subcommittee which already by 1908 had completed the doctrinal statement of the Basis of Union — recent advances in biblical criticism had resulted in a purer simpler expression of Christian doctrine. Rather

¹Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984) p. 65.

than clinging to the often divisive beliefs which had arisen in an earlier era of theological warfare, church union could now be within reach. Thanks to a new scientific, as opposed to “dogmatic”, approach to biblical studies, there had emerged a simpler, purer biblical theology, which brought out “the essentials” of the Christian faith shared by all the major evangelical denominations. His Presbyterian counterpart, George Munro Grant, Principal of Queen’s University (1875-1902), and also an ardent supporter of church union, was no less dismissive of the benighted theological past. As one who regularly fumed about “the weakness, the unbelief of mere traditionalism”, Grant saw the task of theological education in the late nineteenth century to be the “cleaving away from the fair face of truth, the dust and grime of centuries.”²

Now as every ardent house cleaner knows, when you have embarked with gusto on the task of divesting a household of decades of accumulated dust and grime, you naturally move on to get rid of the clutter which once represented the treasures of an earlier period. But in this great housecleaning how do you know when and where to stop? To late nineteenth-century evangelical proponents of church union like Burwash and Grant, the answer seemed simple: the purpose of cleaning away “the dust and grime of centuries” of theological accretion was to uncover in all their beauty and saving grace, as Grant put it, “the great truths of Revelation”. Grant did not live to see the formal beginning of church union negotiations, but Nathanael Burwash who played a leading role in drawing up the proposed denomination’s statement of belief, the Twenty Articles of the Basis of Union, considered these to be a distinct improvement upon the older credal statements of the three uniting denominations. Where the latter had been encumbered with the “grime” or accumulated “speculative theory” of earlier ages, the new statement was a short, clear and “reasonable statement of Scriptural saving truth”.³ Traditionalism had been vanquished, and

²Marguerite Van Die, *An Evangelical Mind: Nathanael Burwash and the Methodist Tradition in Canada, 1839-1918* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1989) ch. 4.

³Ibid., ch. 6.

tradition had been restated in a clearer, more accurate form.

Close to a century later, when we no longer hold to the historicism and the optimism of the framers of union, we need to ask ourselves, in this process of getting rid of traditionalism, had tradition really been vindicated or had it too come under the sweep of the broom? Rather than answering that question through an examination of the Twenty Articles, whose authority has in more recent years become highly contested ground, let's look for a moment at the preamble:

We, the representatives of the Presbyterian, Methodist, and Congregational branches of the Church of Christ in Canada, do hereby set forth the substance of the Christian faith, as commonly held among us....We acknowledge the teaching of the great creeds of the ancient Church. We further maintain our allegiance to the evangelical doctrines of the Reformation, as set forth in the doctrinal standards adopted by the Presbyterian Church in Canada, by the Congregational Union of Ontario and Quebec, and by the Methodist Church. We present the accompanying statement as a brief summary of our common faith and commend it to the studious attention of the members and adherents of the negotiating Churches, as in substance agreeable to the teaching of the Holy Scriptures.

Yes, doctrinal tradition is certainly acknowledged, but it is also clearly subordinate to what was perceived to be an updated, simplified, and implicitly more accurate doctrinal summary of the "substance of the Christian faith". It will not come as a surprise that this summary happened to consist of the doctrines of the liberal evangelicalism which dominated Canadian Protestantism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The doctrinal statement was completed by 1908, and as I have pointed out elsewhere, by an aging committee, 21 of whose 28 members did not live to see the consummation of union in 1925.⁴ Nor should it be a surprise that as early as 1923, two years before church union, one of the younger members was already publicly arguing that the statement of faith "was not at all a vital organic expression of the real living church of today. It is 20 years old, and is no more vital than

⁴Ibid., p. 167.

the Westminster Confession nor the Twenty-five Articles of Methodism.”⁵

Tradition, it would seem, had already become in the eyes of some a temporary way station even before the United Church of Canada was formally instituted. This is all too clear in the thought of the social gospel, whose proponents shared with the older generation of evangelicals an enthusiasm for church union. Richard Allen, historian of the social gospel in Canada, has pointed out that this movement “in its orientation to the future, and its emphasis on life rather than form...looked upon creeds and institutions as temporary habitations.”⁶ Working with all their energy to usher in the Kingdom of God, the framers and supporters of church union were in actual fact assuming the end of history, when time and tradition would be no more.

I have dwelt on this at some length because we cannot discuss the role of tradition in the formation of our leadership without taking into account the profound reality that our denomination was shaped by ideals of a distinct period in time, most specifically historicism and post-millennial optimism. Both these perspectives were characterized by an upwardly pointing, linear view of history. Not only did such a linear view dominate the turn of the century, but thanks largely to advances of technology it has lingered on, especially in popular perception, until our own time. In this kind of linear view of history, the past is important not for its own sake, but in helping us understand how we got to be where we are now. In this view, tradition has no intrinsic value, and indeed in the current post-modern intellectual climate, the whole idea that there exists an intricate relationship between cause and effect has come under attack. What continues to prevail, however, is the belief that somehow the present is an improvement upon the past, or more accurately, needs to eradicate the errors of the past. Thus feminists decry a church tradition seen to be patriarchal and oppressive to

⁵Ibid., p. 175.

⁶Richard Allen, *The Social Passion: Religion and Reform in Canada, 1914-1929* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971) p. 253.

women, while supporters of native rights urge apologies and compensation for the cultural insensitivity of those who organized and staffed church-run residential schools. Where once traditionalism was the culprit, tradition has now become its accomplice.

Now tradition is at the very heart of Christianity, but the term “tradition” in the Christian context needs to be re-defined in a way that does not simply reflect the spirit of a particular age. The kind of linear view I have been discussing goes against the very nature of the Christian tradition. “Tradition”, we recall, was defined by Pelikan as “the living faith of the dead”. From its earliest days the Christian tradition assumed a partnership between the living and the dead. Time had a communal dimension which transcended the boundaries of a person’s brief life span. Those who had died in the faith formed the church triumphant; those now living in the faith formed the church militant and would one day themselves become part of the church triumphant. “As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end”, is the way the liturgy expresses the Christian understanding of time. Such a view assumes neither a static nor a dead tradition. On the contrary, as the faith of those who have gone before us informs the life of the present, it takes on a dynamic quality, which in Christian theology we describe as the work of the Spirit.

Again, Pelikan is helpful. Citing the late eighteenth-century English political theorist, Edmund Burke, he defines a living tradition as “a partnership not only between those who are living — but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born.”⁷ In a world as presentist as our own, such a definition of tradition calls for a leap of faith, a faith that connects the known with the unknown. In such a definition we are getting close to the very essence of Christian identity. Here an older understanding of tradition, the Orthodox icon, offers insight into how our knowledge of the material world (including the past) can guide us into an understanding that transcends the known. Tradition, in short, in the Christian understanding, like an icon, is to be a “window” or

⁷Pelikan, *Vindication*, p. 20

“threshold” into another reality than the mundane. Hence tradition is not valued only for itself, but as a means to point us to God. We need to recall that in the Orthodox Church of the eighth and ninth centuries there occurred a battle over the distinction between an icon and an idol. The clarification, offered by such eminent theologians as John of Damascus was that while an idol directs us to itself, an icon does more. To a generation familiar with the icon as a symbol on the computer screen, this concept is not as esoteric as it once was to the western mind. The icon is indeed an authentic image in what it represents but it is more than that. The icon of the internet on my computer screen is an image of a globe, and it bids me to look at it and through it — to “open it” — in order to see the teeming worldwide web of which it is the sign.

So it is with tradition. We can, if we wish, stop at the symbol, and go no further than study the often embarrassing and shameful events of church history. I recall a first year theology student, who early in the term, in tears rushed out of a class on the crusades, convinced that if this was Christianity, she wanted to have nothing to do with it. Of course, we do need to study that history if only to understand that the mistakes of one era are often simply exchanged for the different errors of another, and that faith has always been contextualized. Basic to the understanding of tradition is some understanding of what we call “church history”: the people, places and events that for better or worse have had some impact on shaping the church in its many forms and contexts.

When we go further, however, and see tradition as icon, then we see that that history can also serve to point beyond its own time and experience to something transcendent and universal, to questions and concerns which continue to re-surface, but which the culture ignores or addresses only in a limited way. Tradition in such a definition has the potential to become countercultural, to offer a new and a different understanding of what it means to be human in this time and in this place. Let me illustrate by drawing from the writing of one of the early theologians, Athanasius, writing on what became the central doctrine of the Christian tradition,

the Incarnation. Under Athanasius' deft hand, the Incarnation, the Word made flesh, becomes a symbol of what humankind in God's goodness can become. The fall into sin had resulted in the loss of one's true humanity; people forgot that they had been shaped in the divine image: "They fashioned idols for themselves in place of the truth and revered things that are not, rather than God Who is, as St. Paul says, 'worshipping the creature rather than the Creator.'" "What, then was God to do?" Athanasius asked, and immediately answers, "What else could He possibly do, being God, but renew His Image in mankind, so that through it men might once more come to know Him? And how could this be done save by the coming of the very Image Himself, our Saviour Jesus Christ?"⁸ Thus humanity was to be re-created in the image of God, and this entailed that Christ first had to overcome death and corruption.

You cannot, of course, read this central writing of the Christian tradition, whose affirmations continue to be stated daily today whenever the Nicene Creed is recited, without in the process learning something about the Greek thought of the period, the formation of the ecumenical church creeds, and the theological battles of the time. At the same time, when tradition is defined as icon, Athanasius' treatise on the Incarnation opens up profound insights into what it means to be human, into why Christians affirm both the humanity and the divinity of Christ, into belief in the resurrection of the body, into the value Christians are to place on the material and on the human body — compared, for example to "gnostic" or "New Age" attempts today to spiritualize reality. In this way, by examining the tradition to see what light it sheds on universal questions, the reader of Athanasius' text enters into a partnership with those who have gone before and those will come later.

As one whose vocation is to train people for church leadership, I keep asking how this translates itself in the concrete reality of the seminary classroom? In the first place, there are elements of the curriculum which are "givens", over which the theological edu-

⁸St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, 1953, reprint 1982) pp. 38, 41.

cator “in the trenches” has little or no control. One of these is that increasingly many who seek a theological education have little or no Christian memory, and will upon the completion of their studies enter into a social world equally barren. Their concerns tend to focus on the immediate present and especially on their own identity as a person rather than on the experience of the past. Where their predecessors had at least an interest in the past as a means of underscoring the possibilities of the present, many of the current generation come with the view that only the present matters. The danger then is that if theological education focuses primarily on the actual “practice” of ministry, and seeks only to be relevant to current issues and in step with new developments, it can lose sight of what precisely it is that has to be relevant and in step. In the words of one of our current theological students, “We put so much emphasis on ‘new ways’ and so little on what it means to be a Christian. We are called to focus on how to be the most open person on the pulpit but without having to tie this to the historical and the divine Christ.”

Notwithstanding this particular student’s insight about the importance of Christian identity, too many students come with a bias against the self-conscious use of the term “Christian”, as well as against the traditional language of Christian doctrine, which they identify as appropriate only to conservative Christians. What does it mean to a liberal Protestant, for example, to say that “Christ died for my sins?” And if it has no meaning, then why say it? Thus much of the Christian theological tradition — think of Athanasius, Augustine, Luther, Wesley, not to mention a host of nineteenth-century evangelical men and women — is seen to be problematic and even just simply irrelevant.

None of this is totally new. Each age has been confronted with the challenge of appropriating Christian tradition in such a way as to make it open to the present and to enable life to be meaningful and good. What is new, however, is that Canadians, like others in western society today, live in a culture increasingly unfamiliar with the language and the beliefs of Christianity. What theologically trained people are now called to do is “to sing the Lord’s

Song in a new land". Much of what a theological educator must do, therefore, is help to "uncode" the language of the tradition. Its words and beliefs have to be studied first on their own terms: what we believe they meant to people at the time of their formulation, and the context in which they appeared. Were they part of a movement of renewal, a reaction against what had come to be perceived as traditionalism, "the dead faith of the living"? But how do they then become for us part of the tradition, "the living faith of the dead"? Not unlike the icon, they also have to be shown to open up new and fresh understandings of what it means to be human and to live in "God's world" (as the UCC 1940 creedal statement puts it). Indicative of the current interest on the part of the public to "uncode" traditional Christianity is the emergence of such best-selling books as Jean Vanier's *Becoming Human* and Kathleen Norris's *Amazing Grace: A Vocabulary of Faith*. While both these writers are intimately familiar with the language and concepts of the tradition, they are able to draw on these in terms that require little or no prior exposure to Christianity on the part of their readers.

Given the facts of little readily available historical memory and sense of Christian identity, and little time in the curriculum to cultivate such, the options are limited, but there are nevertheless possibilities. Tradition, the living faith of the dead, is not only found in theological treatises, but also in the customs and practices of existing congregations. Simply to observe that the latter continue to celebrate the Eucharist, to sing hymns, to listen to the reading and exposition of Scripture, is to be reminded of the enduring presence of tradition. For example, students at Queen's, where I teach, in a course called "The Christian Life", are placed in their first year within a local congregation to discuss just such observations. At the same time it is good that they also connect in a conscious and personal way with congregational life in their own immediate past. This can be begun by something as simple as a historical autobiography where they briefly explore what is known of the faith of their ancestors, how they were socialized and nurtured in the faith, where they worshiped, and in what concrete ways they expressed their faith in everyday life. If such information is una-

vailable, or the person has no identifiable Christian ancestors, an analogous brief study can be done of the history of a familiar faith community such as the individual's home church.

This personal understanding can, in turn, become the building block of a more sustained, theological approach to the nature of the tradition where, given time constraints, much of the focus will be on Christian identity. At Queen's these past few years, we have tried to do this by offering first year students, in addition to a semester survey of church history, a course "Jesus Through the Centuries", which chronologically and thematically follows the pattern of Jaroslav Pelikan's book of the same title. By structuring the course around the central figure of the Christian faith, and by reading selected historical texts on the many ways, like facets of a cut stone, in which individuals have interpreted the life and work of Jesus, it is possible to gain an appreciation of the communal as opposed to linear nature of tradition. That course is then concluded with an assignment in which students examine a few of the representations which have spoken most to them and deepened or informed their own understanding of Jesus. In the process, hopefully, such doctrines as the Incarnation and the Trinity have come to be appropriated in contemporary personal terms. Those who have studied theology then in turn will have to translate their insights into terms meaningful to their particular audiences and congregation. In this way they become part of the endless link through which the tradition has and continues to remain an authentic living faith. When this happens, Christian tradition becomes what Kathleen Norris has so evocatively called "a kind of living poem. A poem of Words-made flesh, as it were....A poem still in the making, in what the Christian creeds call the communion of saints, ancient words rendered new each day, among the quick and the dead."⁹

⁹Kathleen Norris, *Amazing Grace; A Vocabulary of Faith* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998) p. 210.

DIETRICH BONHÖFFER: A Spirituality For Today

by Douglas Crichton

Two marks of a vital and viable spirituality are its combined breadth and depth, and its ability to address questions people are asking, such as: Is everything that happens the will of God? What is the nature of responsible action and true freedom? Who is Jesus Christ for us today? What does it mean to tell the truth? What is prayer, and how does God answer prayer?

Dietrich Bonhöffer, the martyred German theologian, reflected helpfully on all these questions. One of his greatest concerns while in prison was how the coming generation would be able to live meaningfully and authentically. His writings, which are an on-going spiritual odyssey, are perhaps a partial answer. Bonhöffer's many-faceted perspective is the result of numerous factors, among the more important being the love and loyalty of his family and friends, and their deep appreciation of music, art and great literature.

Bonhöffer was a pupil of Adolph von Harnack and the best of the liberal school, but he was also very indebted to the Word of God Theology of Luther and Barth. He possessed a remarkably detailed knowledge of the Bible, which he called the book of the church. His love of the church and search for true community kept his faith from becoming too individualistic and self-centered. His deeply developed prayer life was balanced by an informed political astuteness evidenced by his pacifist call to dare for peace before the war broke out, and his work in the resistance movement during the war.

What then, is the nature of Bonhöffer's spirituality?

One of his favourite literary works, which he recommended to his students at the seminary in Finkenwalde, was Georges Bernanos' novel, *The Diary of a Country Priest*. It is the story of a young priest's seemingly ineffective ministry in a parish eaten up

by boredom and consumed by greed and lust. The novel ends with the priest, who dies of cancer, uttering the words, "Grace is everywhere". Bonhöffer's attempt to live out of this truth, and his passion to work out its implication in the face of the seeming absence of God, constitutes the heart of his faith.

It is pre-eminently a spirituality of grace. Everything else flows from this primal focus. Spirituality, for Bonhöffer, essentially means a life of continuous openness to the costly grace and gracious will of God. It also means a life guided and sustained by the spirit and word of God. In its concrete expression in the world, it is characterized by an ongoing life of faith, prayer, and responsible action, of love in the service of justice and truth.

For Bonhöffer grace means "God's unmerited mercy", but not in any narrow or exclusively salvation-oriented sense. He basically views grace as God's costly, creative, redemptive and liberating love in action within history and nature.

For Bonhöffer's Christ-centered spirituality, this grace is present and active in a supreme and unique degree in Jesus Christ. It is, however, not an "exclusive" grace. Bonhöffer repeatedly acknowledged the grace of God present in the life of people like Gandhi; in the Islamic unity of sacred and secular; in the inspiration that creates beautiful music, art, and poetry; in joyful and responsible sexuality; and in the illumination of the psalms.

An Invitation To Partnership

Bonhöffer came to see that the supreme paradox of the Christian life is that we are called to prepare the way for grace, even though "grace must in the end itself prepare and make level its own way and grace alone must ever anew render possible the impossible."¹ Only grace can enable us to be participants in preparing the way through a life of faith, hope, and love — the three theological virtues so central to Bonhöffer's spirituality.

Bonhöffer always viewed God's providence as an invitation to partnership. God's guidance and nurturing care of creation is

¹ *Ethics*, (London: S.C.M. Press, 1955) p.113

also a call to humankind to co-operate with the grace of God in working out God's will for the world. Our calling is to help remove, by God's grace, everything that hinders God's effective and redemptive action in the world. "To provide the hungry man with bread is to prepare the way for the coming of grace."² One of Bonhöffer's greatest concerns was with the problem of unappropriated grace.

The God of grace, for Bonhöffer is, above all, a God of holiness and suffering, of vicarious love. The importance of the trinity for Bonhöffer's spirituality is apparent in the way he structures his "Prayers For Fellow Prisoners", in *Letters and Papers From Prison*. God, as a God of love, is a God who bears our sins, our sorrows, and our nature, in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. As Bonhöffer remarks in a reference to God as Mother, "God verily bore the burden of men in the body of Jesus Christ. But he bore them as a mother carries her child."³ The ministry of bearing, of being there for others, is the soul of Bonhoeffer's spirituality. It is also the key to understanding what it means to live a fully this-worldly life in a world come of age.

One of the most helpful aspects of Bonhöffer's theology is his cogent reflections on suffering. He refused to believe that everything that happens is the result of the direct and pre-determined will of God. God does not send suffering; God permits it. God does not, however, permit it as a passive observer, but as one who is ceaselessly and actively present to comfort and sustain us in the face of suffering. "Not everything that happens is simply 'God's will'; yet in the last resort nothing happens 'without God's will' (Matt. 10.29), i.e. through every event, however untoward, there is access to God."⁴ Bonhöffer's overarching focus on grace enabled him to see our suffering as a sharing in God's own suffering in the world and also to see suffering as something more than simply an enemy.

² Ibid., p.114

³ *Life Together*, (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1954) p.100.

⁴ *Letters and Papers from Prison*, (London: S.C.M. Press, 1971) p. 167

Removing Obstacles to Grace

Just how primary grace is for Bonhöffer is evident from a consideration of four of the main media for removing obstacles to grace and preparing the way for grace. The central focus is on what God gives and what God invites us to share. The practical and pastoral components of Bonhöffer's spirituality flow from the gift of grace.

1. The pre-eminent medium for preparing the way for grace is the Word of God. The Word of God is the address of God and the revealed will of God which speaks to us, encounters us, judges us, and above all, forgives us. The Bible, as the Word of God, is a supreme means of grace, as are the sacraments, which Bonhöffer regarded as the embodied Word. Jesus Christ is the Word of God in a special way as the incarnated love and truth of God. In a magnificent meditation entitled "Music", Bonhöffer suggests that "Man's soul is the harp and the Word that touches this soul is the harpist."⁵

The essence of the Word of God is love. It is a Word filled with promise even when uttered in judgment and the call to repentance. It is the free Word of the costly grace of God who longs for genuine freedom and true liberation for all of creation. It is the Word of the unchanging faithfulness and truth of God.

The Word of God, for Bonhöffer, is inseparable from truth and is the source of all truth. Truth, he contends, both in his *Ethics* and in his sermons, is not simply what one says but what one does, and how one lives in response to the Word of God. Since the essence of the Word of God is love, truth without love, Bonhöffer maintains, is not truth but cynicism. In a brilliant insight on truth in a sermon on 1 Cor. 13:1-3, Bonhöffer contends, "Truth is the clarity of love, nothing else."⁶ Truth, as love's clarity, enables us to discern more clearly what is genuinely real and in accord with God's will.

⁵ *Gesammelte Schriften*, 5, (Munich: Chr-Kaiser Verlag, 1972) p.512

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 540.

2. One of Bonhöffer's greatest concerns was to try to discern where Christ is taking form in the world. His whole spirituality is a call to conformation with Christ, to conformation with the incarnate Christ who lived such a rich, vital, and fully human life. It is a call to conformation with the crucified Christ whose suffering love heals and redeems, and to conformation with the risen Christ, the fount of joy, hope and the promise of eternal life.

But, as always, the emphasis falls on the initiating and enabling grace of God. Conformation with Christ is not the result of our efforts to be Christ-like, but the result of allowing ourselves to be recipients of a gift. Conformation with Christ happens only when we allow ourselves to be drawn by the grace of God into the form and likeness of Jesus Christ. This is a tremendously liberating thing, since results are no longer dependent upon our gifts or our efforts, but upon God's faithfulness and God's grace, a grace which invites us to share in the faithfulness and love of God.

Conformation with Christ is impossible apart from regular confession and the acceptance of guilt. Bonhöffer regarded conformation with Christ as the true basis and ultimate motivation for confessing our sins. "Not the individual misdeeds but the form of Christ is the origin of the confession of guilt."⁷ This removes any legalistic or moralistic approach to confession and places the emphasis on the call to conformation with Christ who, though without sin, bore the guilt and sin of the world. Bonhöffer recognized that confession is not a duty, but a supreme gift of grace that leads to joy and wholeness, and to the overcoming of the most lacerating loneliness and sense of isolation.

Confession of sin and acceptance of guilt, which are the heart of Bonhöffer's spirituality, prepare the way for the grace of forgiveness, God's ultimate gift to a fallen world. This is God's costly forgiveness, exemplified by the cross of Christ, which accepts us, renews us. It also bestows the freedom to act responsibly out of the promise of forgiveness, rather than from our own limited knowledge of good and evil. Forgiveness is not just God's ultimate word

⁷ *Ethics*, p. 90.

of pardon. It is also God's word of freedom and liberation. Freedom, as Bonhöffer envisaged it, is not an individual possession, it is a relationship. It is a relationship that becomes possible only through grace and through being there for others; co-operating with God in preparing the way for grace through acts of love and goodness.

3. Conformation with Christ is a call to a life of responsible action. Bonhöffer understood responsibility in terms of response. True responsible action is the response of the total person to the grace and will of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. Responsible action is founded on faith and is expressed as love, faith active in love. The primacy of faith in all of Bonhöffer's writings is apparent in a Christmas letter to his friend, Eberhard Bethge, which he concludes with the words, "May God keep us in faith".⁸ Faith, which is a decisive act of loyal trust in the faithfulness of God, sets life on a new foundation. It is a new foundation of reconciliation with God and the empowerment to live a life of responsible action in genuine love towards our neighbour. Faith alone enables the disciple to live fully in the world, sharing in the messianic suffering of God in the world and watching with Christ in Gethsemane.

The essence of responsible action is deputyship: acting on behalf of others, for the sake of others, acting out of love for others, and acting in the place of others. Bonhöffer's entire spirituality is one of deputyship centered on God's work of grace in Jesus Christ, whose life was a life of deputyship.

The focus on deputyship also enables Bonhöffer to develop a cosmic, holistic spirituality. He personally possessed a passionate love of nature. He regarded the bread and wine not only as symbols of the broken body and shed blood of Christ, but also as symbols of the new creation that comes through the presence of the crucified and risen Christ.

Bonhöffer recognized that we are called not only to reverence and preserve nature, and act responsibly towards nature, but also to realize the ways nature cares for us and acts as a deputy towards us. In an insight in 1932, that is so relevant for our present environ-

⁸*Letters and Papers from Prison*, p. 175.

mental concerns, Bonhöffer wrote, "In my total being, in my creatureliness, I belong to this world completely. It bears me, nourishes me, and holds me."⁹

4. Responsible action and faith active in love are only possible when evoked by grace and undergirded by prayer. The correlates of Bonhöffer's spirituality, as it is lived out in the world, are prayer and responsible action. The centrality of prayer for Bonhöffer's spirituality is evident in a section in *Ethics* on proving the will of God, "Intelligence, discernment, attentive observation of the given facts, all these come into lively operation, all will be embraced and pervaded by prayer."¹⁰ In his lectures on *Spiritual Care*, Bonhöffer repeatedly emphasizes that no responsible or effective pastoral care is possible apart from continuous prayer.

God's Grace Initiates Our Prayers

The essence of prayer is that it is always the prayer of a child to a loving and faithful father or mother. This child-like trust in the faithfulness and love of God means that prayer is never begging, since God knows our needs and God's grace initiates our prayers. Prayer is, therefore, both a human act and the divine will; God's will for communion, reconciliation, liberation, and truth. Prayer is thus, primarily, our attentive and creative openness to the Word and will of God. It is the openness to be addressed, moved, directed, and sustained by the Word of God and the spirit of God on the basis of the promises of God. Prayer, in a remarkable way, prepares the way for grace.

One of the greatest mediums for preparing the way for grace is the prayer of silence; silence under the Word. Bonhöffer found a much more central place for the use of silence in prayer than many of us do. "There is a wonderful power of clarification, purification, and concentration upon the essential thing in being quiet...silence before the Word leads to right hearing and thus also to right speaking of the Word of God at the right time."¹¹ This is an

⁹ *Creation and Fall/Temptation*, (London: S.C.M. Press, 1959) p. 39

¹⁰ *Ethics*, p. 24.

¹¹ *Life Together*, p. 80.

important key to understanding Bonhoeffer's allusion to an arcane or secret discipline in *Letters and Papers From Prison*.

Bonhöffer's holistic spirituality and rich personal prayer life also enabled him to have an openness to faith healing that most theologians of his day did not possess. In a section on faith healing and the laying-on of hands in his lectures on *Spiritual Care*, Bonhöffer writes "Healing of the sick in the form of laying-on of hands must be briefly mentioned. That it should be made available goes without saying. No pastor should glory in it, however."¹² If the way is to be prepared for grace, and if true healing is to take place it must be the result of grace, not our own unique gifts of the spirit. This is a timely reminder!

Like his Roman Catholic contemporaries, Bonhöffer sought for a unity of prayer and work, and prayer and responsible action in his spirituality. One work that proved particularly helpful in this search was Martin Buber's influential book, *I And Thou*. Bonhöffer came to see that one of the supreme challenges in life is to seek and to find the presence and the grace of the "Thou" behind the impersonal realm of the "It", the realm of things, and the realm of work. Like Brother Lawrence, Bonhöffer envisaged every labour and every task as a potentially prayerful act when done in communion with God and for the glory of God.

Prayer, as an expression of gratitude, is also central to Bonhöffer's faith. The entire volume of *Letters And Papers From Prison* could rightly be termed a spirituality of gratitude. In a touching letter, written out of the mixed emotions of abject loneliness and deep gratitude, Bonhöffer writes, "It is only with gratitude that life becomes rich."¹³ In the harrowing and frightful experiences of a Gestapo prison, gratitude prepared the way for grace in a unique and remarkable way.

Intercession Has a Sacramental Dimension

The most extensive, and in some ways, the most perceptive reflections on prayer in Bonhöffer's writings are his references to

¹² *Spiritual Care*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985) p. 59

¹³ *Letters and Papers from Prison*, p. 109

intercessory prayer. As one of the supreme gifts of God's providential care, intercession is the heart of all vibrant life within the friendship of God. Bonhöffer viewed intercession as a communion of loyal love originating in, and sustained by, the faithfulness and grace of God.

To intercede is to bring to mind. Intercession is an act of love and focused concern. To intercede, whether for a loved one, a country torn by poverty, or war, or for a polluted and dying environment, is to prepare the way for the coming of grace; the grace to reconcile, to heal and make new. For Bonhöffer, intercession possessed an almost sacramental dimension. In a striking metaphor Bonhöffer suggests that, "intercessory prayer is the purifying bath into which the individual and the fellowship must enter every day."¹⁴

In a moving letter to his fiancée, Maria Von Wedemeyer, Bonhöffer gives us a final insight into the depth, the richness and the authenticity of his spirituality. It is a candid letter, written at Whitsuntide, 1944. "What shall I wish for you and me? The word seldom escapes my lips, but I can't put it any other way: I hope this Whitsun proves to be a *blessed* one for both of us. A blessing is the visible, perceptible, effective proximity of God. That someone should be a blessing to others is the greatest thing of all, isn't it?"¹⁵

For Bonhöffer, the supreme challenge in life is to be a channel of the grace of God, the grace of God which is everywhere. The supreme privilege in life is to allow our lives to be a blessing to others and thus to prepare the way for grace, God's costly, creative, redemptive liberating love in action within the world. One can only begin to imagine the ways in which Bonhöffer's family, fiancée, and friends proved to be such an incredible blessing to him during the limited and lonely life he led in that prison cell. Yes, grace is everywhere. Only our sin obscures it, and only our lack of faith active in love keeps us from sharing it.

¹⁴ *Life Together*, p. 86.

¹⁵ *Love Letter From Cell 92*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995) p. 240

**THE ROAD BEHIND AND BEFORE:
The Unity We Seek**

by Richard Allen¹

Tomorrow, November 13, will be the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Melrose congregation. In the intervening years — slightly less since this beautiful sanctuary was built — this place has rung with the sounds of prayer and praise, the proclamation of the word, the joys of birth and baptism, the celebrations of young men and women consecrating their lives to each other, and it has echoed with the sighs and sorrows, as loved ones were grieved and laid to rest. Many in leadership positions, and countless members offering their service and mutual support, have come and gone, giving their best, lifting up this community as it grew into the mind of Jesus, who came that all might have life, and that more abundantly.

I am not one who can recite that great Melrose story, so I will not try. But Melrose is part of the bigger story of the United Church of Canada, both past and present. Last June 18, your minister preached on the question, “Can the United Church be born again?” It may help us think further down that road, to look more carefully than we usually do at our first birth as a church, take a measure of it in the light of the prayer for unity that John puts in the mouth of Jesus, and reflect briefly on our present situation.

The United Church of Canada, the product of the first cross-denominational union after four hundred years of division, has prided itself on being the forerunner of the reunion of the Christian church. It was also a clear response to the question of the na-

¹ Editor’s Note: This was a sermon delivered on November 12, 2000, in Melrose United Church, Hamilton. The congregation was founded the same year as the union that formed the United Church of Canada. *Touchstone* has already had articles commemorating the anniversary of church union, but this sermon of Dr. Allen’s gathers up issues not already noted in previous articles, so it seemed appropriate for us to publish it even though the anniversary is past.

ture of the unity of the church. The union movement took at face value Jesus' prayer on the eve of Gethsemane, that his disciples and those who would follow them would be one, even as he and God the Father were one. Surely nothing less than organic union would honour that urgent plea.

Not everyone saw it that way, as we all know, and union was also an occasion of division. Dissident Presbyterians argued that there was no warrant in Jesus' prayer for the concept of one single unified church. Principal William MacLaren of Knox College went so far as to charge that unionists were "lapsing into a Romish view of the church". J.A. MacDonald, the Presbyterian minister/editor of *The Globe* responded that "I do not undertake to say just what the Saviour had in view in that prayer for unity, but I do know that he did not pray for the wasteful competition and petty denominational bickering and strife which are seen in many a Canadian town and village today."

Indeed, on the interpretive question, the *Interpreter's Bible* sides with the dissidents, and the subsequent history of ecumenism, with the notable exception of the Church of South India, has not followed our path but has evolved structures that enable the co-operation, not the melding, of denominations. Keith Clifford, in his admirable book on *The Resistance to Church Union* credits the continuing Presbyterians with anticipating the future shape of ecumenism. But, while we must accept the division which ruptured the Canadian Presbyterian Church as a judgment upon the union movement, I think Clifford makes the serious error of confusing consequences with intentions.

The impetus to union, however, was far more than an academic exercise in the application of a biblical text. History is a messy affair, and people and institutions live out their faithfulness (or their apostasy) amid a daunting confusion of voices and events. From the 1880s to the 1920s Canada was undergoing a momentous period of changes in every department of life, and those who were content to live in tabernacles of the past, could hardly claim to represent the creative energy of God in a new time.

The proponents of union were the inheritors of a long, peculiarly Canadian history of church unions. In the course of the 19th century there had been no fewer than 21 unions — nine Presbyterian (which united two dozen different groups), eight Methodist (uniting some sixteen bodies), and four among the Congregationalists. These had culminated in the final unions of Presbyterian in 1875 and Methodists in 1884. The unionists of the 20th century saw themselves as extending this tradition of union, but what they were proposing was a merging of the different traditions — and that was a much more challenging exercise, since it entailed, if not the exactly the death of long standing names and traditions, at least their visible disappearance.

But there were substantial reasons — political, economic, social, religious, and intellectual — that led them to embark on that cross-denominational challenge and enabled them to succeed.

First, political. It was a heady time of political consolidation. Confederation and its aftermath had created an enormous challenge in establishing a huge nation geography. The British Empire was at its height, and a new Canadian nationalism merged insensibly with imperial designs. An international missionary movement, following the march of the empire, had grown inexorably in the previous century, dedicated to winning the world for Christ in that generation. It was a time for big thinking.

So, second reason, intellectual, part one. Among the big thoughts were the ideas of evolution and development, welling up in the wake of Darwin and others. The story here is not the usual one of the conflict of religion and science, but the ready absorption by leading clergy and religious scholars in Canada of the idea of evolution and application, not just to biology, but to the development of societies and political structures, to the history of ideas and even to religion itself. From the amoeba to humans, from tribal organization to empire, the story was one of increasing specialization within every larger and more sophisticated forms of organization. In the eyes of unionists, church union was on track within the universe unfolding as it should — under the guidance of a gracious and providential God!

And there was more! Reason number three. Biblical studies and the study of church history, under the impress of evolution, archaeology, and textual analysis, were yielding a harvest of insights. In particular, the monumental work on the historical Jesus and his times led church leaders and informed laypersons to believe that they stood closer to New Testament times than any intervening generation. The inevitable effect was to downplay the significance of accumulated doctrines and practices of the past.

If all the foregoing were not sufficient to prompt many mainline Protestants to “think outside the box”, as we would say today, there was a fourth reason: the social problem. From the 1880s, large-scale industrialization was reshaping working life, undermining smaller towns and businesses, spawning large, all-consuming urban centres, and creating numerous social ills. Compounding those issues after the turn of the century was the task of incorporating into Canadian public life a tidal wave of immigration that derived, largely, from the excess population of British cities, and from central, eastern, and southern Europe. Unionists and Presbyterian dissidents alike were anxious about their impact. But there was a notable difference between them. Leading dissidents, like Hamilton minister Banks Nelson and layman J.B. McQuesten, declared that “the mixture of an inferior race produces nothing but degeneration.” Nothing, they said, would overcome the heredity determined by the immigrants’ genes. Unionists, like historian A.S. Morton and J.S. Woodsworth (the latter wrote the pioneering work *Strangers Within our Gates*) thought otherwise. “Spiritual forces are bound to prevail”, Woodsworth wrote. “Example, training, higher motives, religious impulses are more potent than race characteristics and will determine the future of our people.”

Environment, in short, would win out over heredity. On that more optimistic basis, Protestant churches set out on an ambitious program of social reform that went far beyond the moral concerns of earlier years. By 1913 they had created the Social Service Council of Canada, a national organization with provincial units, incorporating labour, agricultural and social work groups, interdenominational organizations and occasional government representatives.

A year later, a first national Social Service Congress was held, canvassing every imaginable social problem and aiming at creating minimum conditions of life and labour for all Canadians.

The more inclusive spirit of the church unionists clearly won out, but the larger point is that, in yet another department of life, the challenges of an urban industrial order were bringing Protestant denominations together and submerging traditional differences. Animating that development, reason number five, was a powerful new religious conception, the social gospel, which nurtured a new social consciousness. Everyone, it said, in their consumption of food, clothing and shelter was complicit in the conditions of labour, the low wages, the substandard housing, of those who produced such elementary goods. Only by throwing oneself into the struggle to change such conditions could one assuage the guilt such a view entailed. The Kingdom of God could not longer be seen simply as the reign of Christ in the believer's heart, let alone as a haven for saved souls, but as a society where God's will, God's justice, God's jubilee, prevailed. That was also the tenor of the church unionists' hope for Canada as they launched their ambitious undertakings to take possession of a now rapidly developing Canadian West, where over a thousand union churches would be formed prior to, though in anticipation of, the ultimate uniting of the three denominations, and where the great grain growers' associations would be imbued with the social gospel.

At the heart of the social gospel were the canons of idealist philosophy, reason number six, and intellectual part two. The philosophical idealism of the day was largely the preserve of the unionists. I'm not saying the dissidents didn't have ideals, but they were often older clergy and laymen who had not been exposed to the great Canadian idealist teachers, like John Watson at Queens, or George Paxton Young at Toronto. Idealism taught that because human intelligence found its world to be intelligible, the world was the product of a greater intelligence. Science was therefore a high endeavour of grappling with the intricate, ages-long, outworking of the supreme intelligence of God in creation. And

just as an overflowing generosity in creation was the hallmark of God's spirit, so the human mind, made in the image of God, could only realize its own good by an outward giving of itself. That might take one form in science, and another in morality, but it was equally the origin of art, the foundation of culture, and the core of any valid social ethic. This idealist world view was a powerful force in overcoming the historic separation of Methodists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists, and is an important key to understanding their mindset as they worked out the details of union.

Now let us shift gears, and turn to John, writing in Ephesus in Asia Minor near the end of the first century, and we may understand better why the unionists seized upon John's Gospel, and his rendition of Jesus' prayer in particular. First of all, the times had much in common: the Roman empire was reaching its peak, political unification was in the air; and there was a great mixing of peoples. New philosophies and older cults were competing for people's minds, and various renditions of early Christianity were rivals for converts. Sound familiar? There was a desperate need and opportunity for what we would today call a "global vision". That was what John provided in his time, and what the Canadian Protestant churches needed and most wanted at the turn of the century.

But beyond similar circumstances and need, the very content of John's message resonated powerfully with the high idealism of the unionists. Paul, already at mid-first century, responding to early church divisions, and competing cults had recast Jesus, not as Jewish Messiah but as the embodiment of the co-ordinating principle of all life. John, a generation later, borrowing the universalization language of the Stoic philosophers, called this co-ordinating principle the "Logos", or the "Word". By it the Stoics meant the divine reason which was manifest in nature and in humankind. John personalized the "Logos" by applying it to the power or spirit that animated Jesus, the supreme embodiment of the eternal reason of God. Thus, nothing that was created was created without him; all that was alive was alive with his life. This life was the "Word" made flesh. Those who became one with him would be engrafted

into the kingdom of truth, offspring of God himself, ever seeking the good of the other and the fulfilment of God's justice. John's whole message, poured into John 17:11-21, reverberated with the idealism the unionists already shared, and merged with other forces propelling them to put aside their differences and dream high dreams for their church, for their country, and to strike out for the very realization of the Kingdom of God.

And here we are, 75 years later, children of that great vision. What of us? Like them, like John, we live in another time of political and economic consolidation — it's called "globalization". The world is pouring in on us, inexorably. We are far more diverse ethnically and religiously than we were at the time of union. Our numbers, perhaps artificially inflated by the post-war suburban expansion and baby boom, have been declining for a generation. The church that set as its high goal the fashioning of a nation in the spirit of Christ has led an adventurous life in the vanguard of many good causes. Gone is the old style moralism — thanks be to God! — but our church's voice is one among many. And it has lived to see the recurrence of old economic nostrums, one of whose principal effects is an enlarging gap between rich and poor. Today, along with sister churches, it is going through a purifying humiliation for its complicity in a disastrous and inhumane strategy of the forced acculturation of native peoples. And our children, often as not, have either adopted secular lifestyles, alternative faiths, or substitute spiritualities.

We are being taught that our ways are not necessarily God's ways, that *we* do not hold the keys to the kingdom. Neither Paul nor John, in fashioning their universalizing message, could have imagined how far the Christian church would accommodate itself to the designs of empires in the West. And we must confess that in the church union mix there were strong elements of imperial design. The heady phrase, a "Dominion of the Lord", spoke volumes of the Christendom idea we inherited. It was not without reason that some, at the time, feared that the creation of the United Church of Canada would inaugurate a repressive "reign of the saints".

We cannot wish for ourselves, or our children, the big church models developing to the south of us, and their imitations in this country, with their homogenized piety; their sanitized slogans, their evangelical Caribbean cruises, and the rest. Douglas Hall in his many books has warned us well about such “Christendom thinking”, and points us to a quite different road ahead.

Nothing can be guaranteed about the future, about our personal futures, and the future of our country, or about the future of the Church and of religion within our country. The future is, as always, a matter of hope and of trust. But if those amongst us who are Christians desire for our community of faith a truly *faithful* witness to the God to whom we trust both ourselves and our nation, then, I believe, nothing is more important than that we should begin earnestly to explore the calling of the church as diaspora. There is no need to criticize the past. No doubt many good things have been accomplished by Christian efforts to make, of Canada, a Christian country. But that, I think, is not the direction in which we should move today, even if we could. Nor should we mourn the passing of that dream! For what really matters today in Canada, as in the First World at large, is that there should be found in the midst of a civilization whose foundations are shaking a prophetic minority — a little salt, a little yeast, a little light — to keep alive the vision of a good and beloved earth, a creation whose destiny transcends that of nations, and for whose *universal shalom* the nations, being repentant, may yet strive.²

As a “diaspora” — mixed up in the world, as a prophetic minority, we do not have to be afraid to doubt, or of our children’s doubting, for our very doubting can be an openness to others also seeking the things that are true, an openness to where, if we understand Paul and John aright, the “Logos”, the “Word” already is. Justin Martyr of the second century had it right: “Wherever people are groping after God... their efforts are God inspired and dear to him.”

Our task today, once we understand ourselves aright, is to be there in the midst of our pluralistic society, standing — or rather walking — with all those of whatever faith or inclination who are also seeking what is true, beautiful, good and just. Again, as Hall

² “The Future of Religion in Canada.” The 1988 Ebbutt Lecture, Sackville, pp. 21-22.

reminds us, our role is to be a hospitable people, and our goal, as parents, is not to raise up young religious zealots, but to help our children become genuinely human. Becoming human is no easy task; it is what John and Jesus' prayer is all about; it is at the centre of that unity we seek. If at time, in our humiliation, or in our faithfulness, we are called to walk the *via dolorosa* that leads to a cross, we must beware of the temptation to turn the cross to the morbid uses of self-pity and self-flagellation. We must never forget where, for us, it all began, with a poor, unexpectedly pregnant peasant girl singing about God coming to fill the hungry with good things and sending the rich empty away.

So we conclude with Isaiah and the rest of the prophets, who remind us that God has no great need of our religiosity, but that we will find our true meaning swimming in the mighty river of his justice. And with the psalmist whose cautioning is also a great assurance: "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain who build it; except the Lord keep the city, the watchman awakes but in vain." Thanks be to God. Amen.

ORIGINAL SIN: WHAT IS THAT?

by Don Schweitzer

The doctrine of original sin is central to the Christian faith, but it is a problematic and disturbing part of the Christian tradition for many — though being disturbing and problematic are not necessarily the same thing. The doctrine is meant to disturb even those who accept it. Its disturbing nature is not problematic, but rather essential to people entering into their divine destiny. To show why this is so and why this doctrine is central to Christian faith, let us begin by tracing in broad strokes the way it has been read out of the account of the “Fall” in Genesis.

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

This text is part of a very complex account stretching from Genesis 2:4b-3:24, which has been subject to numerous interpretations, some of which have been woven into the text itself over the course of time. In one sense this account of the “Fall” or of “original sin” is a marginal text in the biblical tradition. There is no mention of Adam in the Bible again until the writings of Paul. But in another sense this passage is “in some way basic to the Bible” as a whole.¹ Its portrayal of Adam and Eve helped it become a peg on which interpreters have hung misogynist readings that have been damaging to women (and men).² Thus this passage itself has been touched by and contributed to the condition of sin of which it speaks. Yet its message of sin, human responsibility and the human need for God, is capable of subverting its patriarchal overtones.³

¹ David Jobling, *The Sense of Biblical Narrative. II. Structural Analyses in the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986) p.17.

² Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978) pp.134, 73.

³ Interpreted in terms of original sin, patriarchal oppressions are seen to be inherited but not intrinsic to women’s or men’s humanity, and thus something that can and should be contested; Serene Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000) p.119.

The larger passage of Genesis 2:4b-3:24 of which this text is a part seeks to explain the human condition by showing how it is to be understood. It speaks of different aspects of human life and their inter-relatedness in a compressed way. One of the central messages of this passage, Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7 is that people are prone to sin and subject to hardships and frustrations, communal divisions, suffering and death because a) they are separated from God and b) the world is not as it was meant to be. But the passage really offers no explanation as to why this is so, which is in keeping with what it seeks to describe. Sin has no explanation, because there is no reason or justification for it. It is by nature irrational, something that shouldn't be, yet something that is there. In every experience of sin there is the awareness that things could have and should have been different.

The doctrine of original sin grew in part out of this passage in three main stages. The first, that of this passage itself, taught that people are separated from God and thus prone to sin.⁴ In the second stage, Paul radicalized this by teaching that sin becomes a power over a person, a bondage from which one cannot escape on one's own. Once one sins one no longer has the power not to sin. One has become a "sinner", alienated from God, self and others, and one cannot undo this on one's own. In the third stage, Augustine (among others) radicalized Paul's teaching further in two ways. First, he taught that we do not become sinners. We are born that way, and our condition of sin becomes actualized or lived out in our sinful acts which begin while we are just infants. Second, we remain sinners even after we come to have faith in Christ. Though there can be a movement in life towards greater spiritual maturity, community with others and a closer walk with God, sin remains a permanent aspect of the Christian's condition.

Christians and non-Christians have rebelled against the Augustinian understanding, and often rightly so; for its portrayal of

⁴ Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984) p.277.

sex as inherently sinful, for its pessimism about what people can do in history, and for its sweeping condemnation of humanity as deserving punishment. But these were not the central teachings of this doctrine, even for Augustine. What is central is the idea that there is a perversity in the human condition that can realize itself in any action. It may occur through a prideful desire to exceed one's limits, or through covetousness. It can also occur through conformity, through failing to go one's own way or assert one's self against custom or the crowd.⁵ Despite knowing what is good people still choose what is evil. This condition of separation from God means that all human patterns of behavior and institutions are open to distortion. All moral codes and wisdom harbour false teaching that can become dangerous and subject to misuse. There are no fail-safe techniques that can raise one above the ambiguity of the human condition. Even a Bible study can become a den of iniquity. Yet this notion that people have an inherent tendency to sin is not a call to pessimism or quietism. Human potentialities are capabilities for good as well as evil. It is instead a call to vigilance, openness to criticism and self-reflection. The doctrine of original sin teaches that we "are born in ambiguity and we never totally escape it".⁶ Even our best intentions may be tainted by self-interest and imperialistic tendencies. The history of residential schools in Canada is a poignant reminder of this.

A Disturbing Teaching

"To be contrite at our failures is holier than to be complacent in perfection."⁷

The doctrine of original sin, this teaching that we are born in ambiguity and that we never totally escape it, is meant to disturb

⁵ Ibid., p.250.

⁶ Gregory Baum, "We are born in ambiguity and we never totally escape it," in *Sexuality on the Island Earth* ed. John Kirvan (New York: Paulist Press, 1970) p.42.

⁷ Abraham Heschel, "A Hebrew Evaluation of Reinhold Niebuhr," in *Reinhold Niebuhr: His Religious, Social, and Political Thought* ed. by Charles Kegley and Robert Bretall (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1956) p.404.

us. It is intended to arouse us out of complacency over ourselves, out of any sense that we have arrived at our spiritual destination or that we know our course and can firmly chart it, once and for all. It is disturbing in several ways.

First, it complicates our notion of truth. The doctrine of original sin states that the truth is that people are prone to sin. This is the way people are. But it also states that this is not the way people should be. This "should" includes not only responsibility, but also touches God. The world is not as God created and destined it to be. This creates a critical distance on ourselves and the world around us, so that we cannot accept the way things are as fixed and final. One cannot say, "I am a sinner and that is that", or one cannot say "that is the way the world is and it can't be changed". The way things should be always impinges upon the way things are. While we are born in ambiguity and never escape it, still there is always room for the possibility of change. The doctrine of original sin is ultimately eschatological. It looks toward a future in which the way things should be will become the way things are.

As a result, the doctrine of original sin is demanding, for it calls upon us to recognize both truths at once. The way we are and the way we should be are different, yet both are true. The evil and sin that surround us and that exist within our own hearts must be recognized. But so must the possibility of change. This demands both vigilance and openness in respect to ourselves and others. At any moment we may move from one state to the other. The notorious sinner may suddenly do the right thing. The drunk may sober up. Conversely, the revered saint may commit a grievous sin. As a result, people cannot be type-cast as good or written off as evil. The complex notion of truth involved in the doctrine of original sin requires that we be critically attentive to people, practices and institutions that we esteem and revere, and critically open to people we judge to be sinful. One cannot become complacent about one's self or others. People can change.

The doctrine of original sin also complicates our understanding in that it requires a "double analysis"⁸ of sin and evil. As we

⁸ Gregory Baum, *Religion and Alienation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1975) p.205.

seek to understand sin and evil it directs our attention toward both the individual and surrounding society. Looking at a vigorously nursing infant, Augustine saw an example of self-centred greed. On the other hand, when Serene Jones' daughter was first handed to her to hold immediately after being born, she was already fitted with a bright pink warming cap on which was written "It's a girl". Commenting on this, Jones observed that "[I]n the first ten seconds of her life," her daughter was already "marked by cultural inscriptions of 'pinkishness' and 'girl' and all the potentially restrictive, sexist assumptions that go with them."⁹ Here was a fairly innocuous but nonetheless real sign of how children are born into societies rife with injustices, prejudices and distorted values that impact upon them in ways that affect their character and behaviour from the moment of birth. At the same time, as Augustine observed, we are born with tendencies that lead to sin.

There is a tendency in society to simplify the complexity of the human condition by assigning the blame for sin and evil in a one-sided way, either to society or the individual. The doctrine of original sin states that the truth is more complex than this. It demands that we keep both in view. People are always responsible for their behaviour to some degree. But if we want to understand peoples' actions, we must view them in relation to their social setting; the communities to which they belong, the social pressures that bear upon them. As society holds criminals accountable and condemns them, it must also ask about its own responsibility for their crimes.

This complicates the task of Christian and social formation and touches upon an issue in a debate that has been raging for twenty years in Anglo-American moral and political philosophy between "liberals" and "communitarians". Liberals argue that one should not presuppose any one moral code or notion of what is good as normative for society. Rather, society is best structured by a set of procedures through which decisions about public morality, the law and the good are decided by society's members.

⁹ Serene Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology*, p.117.

Democracy is about people making their own decisions. The communitarians argue that on the contrary, democracy requires that certain virtues and habits be instilled into its members. Society must be structured so that people are brought up to have a sense of civic virtue and a commitment to a notion of the common good.

The doctrine of original sin affirms and yet relativizes both positions. It agrees with the liberal insistence that communal notions of the good are frequently exclusive and distorted, yet it also agrees with the communitarian emphasis on the need for formation of the self. It criticizes the liberal notion of the autonomous self, yet it also criticizes the communitarian trust in social structures and instilled virtues. The doctrine teaches that the ambiguity of the human condition touches both. Communal norms and notions of the common good must be subject to scrutiny, open to question and changed when they prove to be destructive. At the same time, individuals need to be equipped for life through nurture and practice. As there are no communities, notions of the common good, or moral codes free of the ambiguity of the human condition, so there can be no one-track solutions to sin and evil.

As the doctrine of original sin complicates our understanding of truth, it also has the potential to enrich our experience. The notion that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God creates an underlying community in a world of differences. As we accept ourselves as fallen, we learn to look differently on others that we judge to be sinful, and to take a second glance at our own dearly held truths and convictions and to be open to the virtues and changes in those we condemn. Strangely enough, the notion of original sin can be a source of tolerance, mercy and forgiveness. It can also open us to the multivalence of life, the way a person, institution, tradition or teaching can have many different sides and aspects. Who would want to live without modern technology in some form? Yet look at the damage it has helped cause to the environment. We need the doctrine of original sin in order to understand ourselves and our society in a realistic way.

The doctrine of original sin is not free of ambiguity itself. It can also mislead. It does not help to discern the relative degrees of

injustice and truth in situations of conflict. It says the same thing about everyone in a world where differences often abound. Subsequent biblical traditions like the book of Job explored the relationship of suffering and death with sin and concluded that they are not always as causally linked as Genesis 3 suggests. There is innocent suffering, suffering that arises from no fault of the person afflicted. Also, there are victims and there are oppressors in life. The doctrine of original sin does not help us to discern these differences. It can be used to buttress injustice, if it is invoked to direct the victims of oppression away from the injustice from which they suffer and towards their own personal failings, or if it is used to suggest that change for the better is not possible or worth struggling for. The prophets did not invoke the doctrine of original sin when they addressed issues of injustice. This doctrine says something important about every person and every society, but it doesn't say everything or the essential thing about every situation. It speaks of a universal condition, but this is not necessarily the most pressing issue at every moment. For instance, child poverty and hunger in Canada in many cases results from specific policies of government, which have created a situation where no amount of diligence or virtue on the part of poor parents can prevent their children from going hungry.¹⁰ The sin here is not original, but rather specific to particular people in office and those who elected them.

Many people inside and outside of the church find the doctrine of original sin problematic in that it seems to denigrate humanity. But the account of the Fall closes with an affirmation of humanity, as God provides the first couple with more adequate clothing. The doctrine is not meant to devalue, but rather to disturb and challenge. It works against the tendency of people to become self-enclosed in their own blinkered world-view. Reinhold Niebuhr invoked it against the optimism of Western liberalism, not to denigrate concern for humanity, but to open peoples' eyes to the reality of their condition, so that they might seek more adequate means of

¹⁰ Mel Hurtig, *Pay the Rent or Feed the Kids: The Tragedy and Disgrace of Poverty in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1999) pp.56-79, 114-141

alleviating human suffering. The doctrine of original sin does not say that people are not worthy of love. Rather, it says we are in need of it. What is the nature of this need?

The Human Condition – A Rabbinic Tale

To describe the human condition, Rabbi Nahman of Kossov once told the following parable:

A stork fell into the mud and was unable to pull out his legs until an idea occurred to him. Does he not have a long beak? So he stuck his beak into the mud, leaned upon it, and pulled out his legs. But what was the use? His legs were out, but his beak was stuck. So another idea occurred to him. He stuck his legs into the mud and pulled out his beak. But what was the use? The legs were stuck in the mud....¹¹

The doctrine of original sin teaches that individually and collectively, we are the stork. We are stuck in the mud and we need help. We can't get out on our own. We need God. It's not that we can't do anything. We are capable of pulling a leg or two or our beak out of the mud on our own. But still we remain stuck. We can free a limb or two, but we can't get our whole selves out of the mud on our own. The mud is the injustices and prejudices of society that we are stuck in, but it is also in our own heart. We can wash some away, we can free a limb or too, but we can't get out of it. For that we need help beyond ourselves. We need God.

This is another side to the doctrine of original sin. It not only disturbs our complacency towards society and ourselves, it also points us toward God. We are separated from God, others and ourselves and we can't overcome our separation by ourselves. We need God to overcome it for us. Here we touch upon the centrality of the doctrine of original sin to Christian faith. It teaches that we need help beyond that which we can give to ourselves or receive from others. We need God to overcome our separation from ourselves, from the one we should be. We need to be reconciled to God, and we cannot do that for ourselves.

¹¹ Heschel, "A Hebrew Evaluation of Reinhold Niebuhr," p.404.

In teaching this, the doctrine of original sin is central to the Christian faith, but not the center of it. That center is Jesus Christ. The doctrine of original sin points us to Christ. It speaks of a need, a need that every person has regardless of how it is manifest, a need that is met by Christ. We need more than a better teacher or a clearer example, for sin is more than a moral failing. It is a broken relationship. Like the stork, we are unable to free ourselves or to reconcile ourselves to God. Our need is radical. We cannot meet it ourselves. A radical need requires a radical solution. We need to be moved out of the mud. Better still, we need to be changed, by being reconciled to God. In Christ God comes to us to do that.

Just hearing this can be a great comfort. Once we realize our condition, we can stop trying like the stork to free ourselves. As people say in Alcoholics Anonymous, "We can let go and let God". Even after we do that, we still need to struggle with the mud of our own perversions, the injustices of society and the meaningless suffering that mars nature. These struggles are never won once and for all, for we remain in ambiguity all of our days. But these struggles are important, for the gains that can be made are worth pursuing.

Original sin speaks of a fault or perversion in the human condition, and of a need. The fault is that we are separated from God, by our own sin. The need is for God to set us right. In Christianity, this need is met by justification by grace, which enables us to confront our sin and the sins of others, and to accept ourselves, even as we are, while we struggle together for a deeper justice and peace. It is a disturbing teaching, in that it shatters our complacency and suggests that we all are in need of redemption. As long as we live we are pilgrims. But this disturbing news is only problematic to those who wish to be self-sufficient in their living, self-reliant in their efforts, and self-satisfied in their judgments. The doctrine of original sin prevents us from being self-satisfied. But it can open us to knowing that we are accepted by God, even as we are, and to accepting ourselves in light of that.

EULOGY FOR AN OLD FRIEND

by William A. Cross

Today I am in mourning. Today I am chanting a solemn requiem. One of the earliest, liveliest and loveliest symbols of the church has died in my community of faith. Maybe some day it will come to life again. But today it is gone. And so I sing my mournful dirge.

I think I understand a little its demise. It is old. It goes back at least to the fifth century, and perhaps earlier. It is troublesome in its concepts. "Conceived by the Holy Spirit", and "born of the Virgin Mary", don't fit into the understandings of our modernist era. And "Father Almighty", and "only Son our Lord", bristle with problems for our enlightened age.

I appreciate all of these concerns, these stumbling blocks to faith. Ours is a time for breaking away from the old and making way for the new: new structures, new understandings of the church, new songs, new expressions of worship, new insights into faith in this pluralistic age.

I understand this. I too am caught up in the revolutionary changes of our time. "Behold I am doing a new thing" has been the theme for many a sermon as I have tried to help people move into a new and exciting age. I also appreciate the difficulty we all have with the traditional language of the faith. "He descended to the dead", and "ascended into heaven", and "is seated at the right hand of the Father"; all these expressions are simply not the language of everyday speech. Often when I have recited this creed I have felt rather keenly the strangeness of it all, seemingly so out of touch with my Monday life.

And I think I understand how offensive and exclusive the words "Father" and "Son" sound to those so badly hurt and minimized by a male-dominated church and society. I have some understanding of all these things.

But to kill the creed, to treat it as a museum document, to put it on the shelf, to consign it to oblivion, surely that is going too far. And so today, as I have said, I am in mourning. I find myself singing a solemn song of lamentation.

But even as I sing this solemn song, I am at the same time moved to break into praise. For this creed has served the people of God so well. It has been recited, chanted, and sung by so many people, in so many languages, through the centuries. It has been a link between the generations of Christians going back nearly to apostolic times. This symbol has had the power to unite our disparate communities, and makes us truly one. It has had the power not only to express our common faith but also to strengthen us in faith.

I think of Heidi, a young Lutheran woman serving an internship in El Salvador, where she was arrested and tortured, though finally allowed to return to her home in California. And what sustained her during her time of imprisonment? Of course the singing of "A mighty fortress is our God", but also the repetition of the twenty-third psalm, the Lord's Prayer, and the Apostles' Creed. That creed has been one of the truly great and empowering symbols of the faith.

Today in my time of mourning I offer my praise, my deep appreciation for this symbol of the apostolic faith. I offer a heartfelt eulogy. Yet I also see in my future a silence of resignation over the loss of this confession in my faith community. Before such a lapse, however, let me say some words in defense of this beloved friend. If it is claimed that it is too old, that we need something new for today, well of course! The creative spirit is evidenced everywhere today, particularly in new understandings of the Gospel. And these have found expression in so many different ways, not least of which in new hymns and spirit-filled songs, and even in contemporary creeds. But must we throw away this old friend, like children who toss away last year's toys?

If it is said that the very form in which faith is expressed in this symbol is offensive to many people today, here I must pause. I can only begin to understand the hurt that a male-dominated theol-

ogy and church have caused so many people. Yet surely the heart of the apostolic faith is expressed in this ancient confession: "I believe in Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born... and suffered... and on the third day he rose again... and is seated at the right hand of the Father." That is its beauty: it is so Christ-centred. And the phrases that follow: "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting", surely these phrases are good news for all of us, male and female alike.

So now I am finished. I am reluctant to say good-bye. I find it so hard to let go. Indeed I harbour in my heart the secret thought that some day, when we are less feverish and more settled, this old friend will be raised to life again, and find its place in the life and praise even of my part of the people of God.

Profile**MORE THAN THEY BARGAINED FOR:
PRINCIPAL WILLIAMS S. (BILL) TAYLOR****by Reginald Wilson**

Bill and Mary Taylor were on furlough in Canada, faced with crucial decisions about their future. India has just gained its independence from Britain. For seventeen years Bill Taylor had been a teacher in Indore Christian College, one of the colleges associated with the University of Agra. Indian colleagues at his college wanted him to return as their new principal but he was convinced that an Indian should hold the post. It wasn't clear

what place there was in the new India for foreign missionaries like themselves. Would they be more of a hindrance than a help to the Indian Christian community?

Two other possibilities presented themselves. Bill had been invited to head up the psychology department in a new Canadian university. About the same time he was invited to become the principal of the United Church's Union College in Vancouver. Attractive as the university position was, it was really no contest. Bill and Mary were committed to the mission of the church; they went to Union College.

William Stevens Taylor, born in 1905, was one of four children born to John and Harriet Taylor in India. His parents had gone to that country in 1898 as missionaries of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. Two of their children later returned to India as mission

aries, Bill, as a college teacher, and his older brother, Andrew, as a doctor.

In spite of being sent away to school in India as a youngster and later being left in Canada at the age of ten for the remainder of his education, Bill wrote positively about his childhood. He made an early decision to become a minister. That led him naturally to the Presbyterian college at the University of Toronto, Knox College. By 1929 he had completed his arts degree and his theological studies at the newly formed United Church seminary in Toronto, Emmanuel College. Scholarships on graduation allowed him to complete a B.D. in theology and an M.A. in psychology before sailing for India in 1930. There he was appointed to the staff of Indore Christian College in Central India.

In his second year in India, while attending a short, intensive language course at Landore in the foothills of the Himalayas, he met Mary Frackelton, a missionary from the Irish Presbyterian Church. Although it was clear that their attraction was mutual they returned to their mission stations, finding themselves separated by 300 difficult miles. The courtship continued, however, and they were married in 1933, spending their honeymoon hiking in the Himalayas. On their first furlough in 1938 Bill studied at the University of London. Mary introduced her husband and recently born son, James, to her Irish family. They spent the balance of the furlough in Canada where Bill successfully defended a cross-cultural thesis he had been working on for the psychology department at the University of Toronto. He received his Ph.D. in 1940.

The war years in India were demanding for the Taylors. Bill's work in the college was increased due to staff shortages. Mary opened her home to both students and servicemen on leave. She was tirelessly busy with refugee care and Red Cross work. In recognition of her exemplary service she received the Kaiser-i-Hind silver medal from the Viceroy of India in 1945.

When the Taylor family finally reached Union College at the end of June 1948, they must have wondered if they had made a serious mistake. The College was located on a five-acre site on the

campus of the University of British Columbia. The building, consisting of a west wing finished in granite and a partially completed concrete tower, was almost lost in a forest of second growth alder. That first impression was not improved on closer inspection. There was great need of repair. Much of the building had been occupied by the military during the war. The dining hall of the residence was closed. When he had a chance to study the finances it was clear to Taylor that there was no money for any of the things that obviously needed to be done. There were only three faculty members, including the principal, while support staff consisted of an elderly couple and a secretary.

Impending Closure Motion

Hanging over the college was the threat of closure, not just because of an immediate shortage of money but because motions to close one or other of the United Church theological colleges across the country were perennial. Many felt that the United Church at church union had inherited an over-supply of colleges. That very year, 1948, there was a motion to be presented to the General Council to close Union College, with the meeting to be held right in Vancouver! Bill Taylor's response to the situation must have been reassuring to those who had appointed him. The alder-covered oval in front of the college was university property, with nothing in the university budget for clearing it. At his own initiative, Bill arranged for the alders' removal, which improved appearances a little. Then, when the Council met, he invited commissioners to visit the college on an afternoon when the Council was not in session. He not only invited them but offered them supper as well. With the dining room closed this involved a good deal of improvisation. Fortunately, from early times theological education in B.C. has had the support of a fine women's auxiliary. They came through splendidly and the dinner was a great success. Nothing more was heard of the closure motion!

Taylor's initiatives that summer gave promise of the leadership he was to give over the next twenty-four years. In some way

he was just the opposite of a stereotypical persuasive, self-assured executive officer. He was modest to a fault. He seldom talked about himself. Words like “quiet,” “reserved,” and “competent” are the ones that come naturally to mind when one thinks of him. But he inspired confidence and won the trust and co-operation of those who worked with him. While the problems the college faced must have seemed formidable, he patiently set to work and did whatever needed to be done. In the early years that could include (and did include!) propping a wind-damaged window in the tower or shoveling snow off the roof. The college became the focus of his life. Who he was can best be understood by what he did. Other aspects of his character will be explored later but, first, an outline of some of his major accomplishments as an institution builder.

The post-war period was a time of revitalized life in the church. Increasing enrollment and the needs of the curriculum called for an increase in the number of faculty. Taylor was able to arrange a larger grant from the national church and received funding from a local industrialist in 1951. That allowed him to add two new members to the faculty, bringing the total to five. All were young, shared his deep commitment to the life of the church, and were expected to participate in the normal duties of Presbytery and Conference. The increase in faculty, along with an agreement to share teachers with the neighboring Anglican college, allowed a degree of specialization that was impossible with a smaller faculty.

As he had in India, Bill Taylor recognized the need of ministers for continuing education. During the fifties that need was partially met by bringing outstanding theologians to the campus for short-term courses and conferences. Earlier in the college's history a number of ministers had been enrolled in graduate degree programs and it was not easy to do justice to their expectations. Taylor decided to launch a full-scale summer session in 1960. That first session was modeled on the pattern current in the university at the time, lasting a total of seven weeks, with four courses offered. The session proved popular and attracted ministers from a variety of denominations, states and provinces. With modifications and

much expansion the summer session became an important, lasting part of the college's program.

In 1955 the college launched an appeal for funds and asked the Principal to lead it. Half the money raised was set aside for endowments; the other half was used for buildings. The existing structure was renovated, a fifteen-suite residence was built for married students, and a residence erected for the Principal. Nothing succeeds like success. The Principal's reward was election as the President of Conference, with more work for an overworked man.

Early in the 1950s Bill Taylor and the chair of the college board toured the province presenting the claims of the college to leading citizens. At least one call had lasting results. Mr. W.J. Van Dusen expressed an interest in becoming more involved in the college. He joined the Board in 1952 and became its chair in 1958. He took a very personal interest in the college, providing funds for the completion of the tower and the construction of the east wing. He took Jesus' words seriously about not making a display of one's gifts so it was with reluctance that he agreed to a small plaque being mounted on the wall of the rotunda mentioning the generosity of his wife and himself.

Two developments involving the college's relationship to other institutions gave Principal Taylor special satisfaction. One was the establishment of the religious studies department in the University of British Columbia. The other was the development of clinical pastoral training for ministers.

Concern for the unity of the church was a matter of principle for Bill Taylor. An event in India had left an indelible impression on him. Fifty million Harijans had asked to take instruction and become Christians but then withdrew their request when they learned that they would be separated into a number of denominations. Bill mused that Christ might say the disunity of the churches had caused "fifty million little ones in the faith to stumble." That concern was then tested in a personal way following Church Union in 1925 when he and other students had to move from Knox

College to the newly-established Emmanuel College when the court awarded Knox to the continuing Presbyterian Church.

The Joining of Two Colleges

Bill Taylor's ecumenical concerns took very explicit shape in the relationship of Union College to its neighbour, the Anglican Theological College. The two colleges shared some classes for years but generally had gone their separate ways. In the ferment of ideas that came with the 1960s, however, it was felt that theological education called for something more. Beginning in 1965 the two institutions operated the summer session jointly; faculty members began meeting informally. One thing that stimulated discussion was the gift of a million dollars to each of the colleges by the forestry industrialist, H.R. MacMillan. Union College used this stimulus to initiate a province-wide consultation with the Presbyteries regarding the direction theological education should take. It gradually became clear that what was needed was the establishment of an ecumenical institution that was answerable to the churches and related to, but independent of, the university. Principal Taylor's vision, reasonableness, and unfailing courtesy were a great help in these discussions. What was designed in the constitution was a structure in which other churches, in addition to the Anglican and United, might become full participants.

To start the new institution the two colleges, in an act of faith, pooled their assets. With the concurrence of the parent denominations, the final draft of the constitution was approved by both Boards of Governors on November 20, 1970. It was decided — with some controversy — to call the new institution the Vancouver School of Theology. At the same meeting the new board was appointed and Dr. Taylor was asked to be the first principal — no controversy there! Happily, since that time the Presbyterian Church, through St. Andrew's Hall, has become an associate member of the institution.

1971 should have been a year of great satisfaction for Bill Taylor; a much-desired goal had been reached. Instead, everything

was overshadowed by the doctor's report that Mary had inoperable cancer. She spent that year receiving X-ray and chemotherapy treatment. Family came from Ireland and there were some good times. Bill spent as much time with her as he could but the challenge of work in connection with the new institution was great. There were a multitude of questions that needed to be dealt with, as well as difficult decisions about future faculty. His installation as Principal was scheduled for February 2, 1972, but by that time Mary was back in hospital. Somehow he got through the ceremony before rushing back to the hospital to be with her again. She died at 2 a.m. February 3. He retired at the end of June.

Following that difficult year Bill Taylor was asked to become the minister of University Hill United Church on a half-time basis. The arrangement may have been good therapy for him; it was certainly a help to the congregation. For him it was the resumption of a relationship that lasted for his first six years at Union College when the congregation met in the college. He served as minister in his retirement for two years. He then resumed his role as a member of the congregation and continued in that active position for the rest of his life.

Space does not allow a full description of his interesting retirement but it does permit mention of three activities, each of which was a kind of ministry. The first is the publication of a book. Students knew him as a well-organized teacher and a thoroughly rational person. In spite of the title of his book, *The Far Side of Reason*, they would not need to revise their estimate. The book is a study of the role and meaning of faith in science and theology. In paragraphs as lucid as the subject matters allows he showed how modern physics had become more self-critical about its methods and more aware of assumptions that underlie its conclusions. After a review of the meaning of faith in theological thought, the book provides a rational justification of faith that is at the same time a confession of Taylor's own Christian faith.

In his early years as a student Bill Taylor had been introduced to painting; that interest continued during his years in India. In his

retirement he renewed this artistic interest by collecting representations of Christ and reducing the pictures to coloured slides. Over the years the collection grew to the 3,500 slides that are now in the VST library. What fascinated him was the power of painting to express something beyond everyday reality. This interest found expression in another beautiful book, *Seeing the Mystery*.

When an anonymous gift of \$20,000 was received by the school in honour of Bill's 90th birthday it became the stimulus for a fund to establish a state-of-the-art, online computer lab in the school. It was characteristic of his ever-youthful spirit that he should let his name be used as the focus of an appeal for such a purpose.

Bill Taylor lived for another three years, passing away on August 16, 1998.

Bill was a master of analogy so it seems fitting to end this profile with one of them. He told about hiking in the Himalayas when the ground was baked hard as concrete. In the night there was a torrential rain. When he stepped out of the hut in the morning a wild coreopsis plant had pushed its way through the earth. That, he said, was how God worked. That was also how Bill Taylor worked, with steady faithfulness in little things so bigger things could flower. He quoted with approval Evelyn Underhill's lines:

I come in little things,
Saith the Lord.
Not borne on morning wings
of Majesty,
But I have set my feet
Amidst the delicate and bladed wheat
That springs triumphant from the furrowed sod.

Reviews

**Celebrate God's Presence:
A Book of Services for The
United Church of Canada.
The United Church Publish-
ing House. 2000. 766 pp.
\$79.00**

So you thought *Voices United* was too big and heavy! At seven hundred and sixty-six pages, *Celebrate God's Presence* is shorter than *Voices United* but the paper is of heavier stock. The loose-leaf cover is truly huge. The result is a book much heavier and thicker than anyone imagined. The size, though, allows *Celebrate God's Presence* to be remarkably thorough. It covers every possibility. It is that very thoroughness which is both its genius and its drawback.

The Preface begins with poetry:

We need words
whose power in the throat
rises like the welling of ancient
water
from the roots of the earth,
wise with the secrets of fire and
stone;
words for what lives
in the eyes of the newborn
or the dying or the mad;
words for the breaking open,

for the glancing merciless
terror
and the unrelenting glory
words for the lightning of love.

The need is met. On page after page this book offers us such wondrous words. We find here the timeless words of John Wesley, St. Augustine, and St. Patrick. They stand side by side with contemporary poets like Ruth Duck, Keri Wehlander, and Malcolm Sinclair. There is also a wealth of previously published material that appeared across the ecumenical community and in previous United Church of Canada resources. There is no lack of material in *Celebrate God's Presence*. In fact, there is a glut of material. The problem will not be paucity. The problem will be selecting and culling.

Culling will be necessary because *Celebrate God's Presence* is of uneven substance. There are many prayers, liturgies, and poems that are of fine quality and belong in a service book. There are other things which may be of good quality but which only achieve the standard of a Sunday bulletin. Although there are wonderful words in this book, ready to be the vehicles for the prayers of our hearts and the longings of our souls, there are many that cannot fulfill that function. There are words that come close and others that seem to speak

a foreign tongue. It looks and feels like a work that still needs editing.

I also have some questions about specific parts of the resource. Take, for instance, the section on the Sacraments. Why is Baptism called a "Covenant" and not a "Sacrament"? It appears in the book between the Sacrament of Communion and the Covenant of Marriage and Life Partnership. The impression given by the table of contents is that baptism is more like marriage than the Eucharist. [As well, why is the Baptism service printed page for page with the French? The result is double the number of pages to control along with a wriggling baby and an unstable body of water, whichever language you choose. These are the pages most likely to be destroyed by repeated drenching. A more compact form would seem a good idea.]

I am sorry that the selection of baptismal preamble statements includes one about Jesus and the children. The gospel story does not suggest that the event had anything to do with baptism. Christian doctrine does not suggest that baptism has to do with children. To emphasize the age of the candidate for baptism is no more pertinent than to emphasize the candidate's gender.

There is probably no section in the book that reflects our commitment to breadth so strongly as

the one containing the Great Thanksgiving. There are twelve such prayers, including a French translation of Prayer C. Here there are some wonderful examples of the compilers' commitment to provide words for the deepest truths lodged in the heart. Prayer F by itself justifies the whole book.

I wonder, though, what we are to do with the new versions of the Great Thanksgiving for which we have no music. If a congregation has learned the service music in *Songs for a Gospel People* or *Voices United*, they are now faced with prayers of different words. In most of the prayers, the Greeting and the Sursum Corda have been reworked, often successfully. It does make things difficult, however, for children and adults who do not read.

Prayer H in the Great Thanksgivings is confusing. At first reading I wondered if there was a misprint that made Mary a Gentile. It turns out that the "Gentile mother" is the Syro-Phoenician woman. Even with this knowledge, though, it still sounds as if we think Mary was Gentile, a potentially damaging confusion in a time when the Jewish roots of our faith are being increasingly honoured.

There are many new resources in the sections concerned with pastoral occasions. Any pastor would do well to read these until they are ingrained. Familiarity

with the content of this section will remove much of the element of surprise from the work of offering pastoral care.

Throughout *Celebrate God's Presence* the compilers have tackled the important issue of masculine language for God. I am not persuaded, however, that "Lord" falls into that category. In addition, although "Father" is a masculine word, reserving it for the baptismal formula and the old version of Jesus' prayer seems to be a workable compromise. In choosing to use the word "God" for the first person of the Trinity, however, the compilers have confused Trinitarian thinking in a disconcerting way.

Finally, it is too bad that this resource does not come with an additional, small binder that could contain resources which need to be portable. A Great Thanksgiving for use at the bedside, the anointing of the sick, the service of death and burial, the blessing of a home, are useful only when portable. Gathered in one moveable place, they would be more available and less vulnerable than being removed from the binder for each use.

Whatever criticisms I have made, buy the book. The price will scare you. Be strong. There are several things in *Celebrate God's Presence* which alone are worth its price. It will prove sufficient. It is broad enough to enhance and enlarge ministry. It rises to sufficient height

to spark and surpass the personal creativity of most. Buy the book but use it with discernment.

— Lynette Miller

SAINT SAUL: A SKELETON KEY TO THE HISTORICAL JESUS

by Donald Harman Akenson.
Oxford and Kingston: Oxford University Press and Queen's/McGill University Press, 2000, 346 pp. \$40.00.

The quest for the historical Jesus occupies much of the energy of biblical scholarship, most of it focused on what can be learned from the gospel accounts. Donald Akenson has entered the fray through the back door — the writings of the apostle Paul. In his view, Paul or, as Akenson prefers, Saul, has much to say about the historical Jesus but has been constantly overlooked by those involved in the quest.

Akenson sets the stage by providing a map of the religious world of Paul and Jesus that draws upon archaeological and, especially, literary evidence of the time. Much of this material is a summary of Akenson's earlier work *Surpassing Wonder* (1998). Akenson then reviews and critiques current thinking on the compositional relationship of the gospel texts and the relevance of non-canonical documents

to the historical process. He eschews non-canonical texts such as the Gospels of Thomas, Peter, and Secret Mark, and reconstructed texts such as the Sayings Gospel (Q) and the Johannine Signs Gospel. For Akenson, “the most likely way to gain access to the historical Yeshua — to the limited extent this is possible — is through the canonical New Testament” (p. 116), although he distrusts all four Gospels since he dates them after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE.

Paul remains as the earliest evidence for Christian reflection on the life of Jesus. Thus, Akenson turns his full attention to the seven authentic letters of Paul. Although Akenson makes a number of assertions about Paul’s activities, many of the positions he advocates have been challenged recently (e.g., the existence of Jewish “missionary” efforts; the authenticity of 1 Cor 14:34-35). Nevertheless, through his reconstruction he finds in Paul evidence for six “direct” references to the life of the historical Jesus:

- he was born of human parents;
- he was concerned about divorce; he ate a last meal with his disciples (not at Passover);
- he was crucified and buried; his “mission” was to Jews not Gentiles; he believed that followers should financially support their leaders.

For Akenson, these data, along with four “sidebar” references and three “allusive” references, provide the platform upon which to reconstruct the life of the historical Jesus.

Akenson’s book is both brilliant and frustrating at the same time. His acerbic wit is applied to a devastating exposé of the foibles of biblical scholarship. Often he shows the inconsistencies and biases of those claiming to do objective, historical biblical scholarship. He is particularly critical of the Jesus Seminar and takes them to task often, including in an appendix dedicated to showing the flaws of their decision-making process.

At the same time, Akenson does not apply the same rigour to his own historical work that he demands of others. For example, Akenson challenges the prevailing consensus on the use of the mention of Paul before Gallio in Acts 18:12-17. Epigraphic evidence places Gallio in Corinth between 49-52 CE. If Acts can be trusted on this point then we can place Paul in Corinth at this time and work both forwards and backwards to create a relative chronology of his life. Akenson counters, “But remember the rule: because of the demonstrable inaccuracy of Acts on many issues on which it can be checked, the grounds of presumption have to be that this event did not take place” (p. 142). Yet if the same historical

skepticism were applied to his own work Akenson would need to re-name his book. The name "Saul" for the apostle occurs only in Acts! This is true of other aspects of Paul's life upon which Akenson uncritically builds: the name of his hometown (Tarsus), his Roman citizenship, and his "missionary" strategy of going first to the synagogues and then to the Gentiles. None of these features can be confirmed from Paul's letters. While this might seem a minor point, it goes to the heart of Akenson's method. The selectivity with which he uses the available data undermines his challenge to biblical scholarship and mars his overall picture of both Jesus and Paul.

In sum, Akenson has produced a book that is strong in its critique of others but weak in its own reconstructions. There is much to like and much with which to disagree. Yet, despite my quibbles with it, I recommended it to anyone interested in the quest for the historical Jesus. Although ultimately I am not sure we know better the historical Jesus/Yeshua or Paul/Saul, the book is well-written, engaging, and always stimulating.

— Richard S. Ascough

Fishing The 'Net

Increasingly, when busy people look for information or inspiration they turn not to books or journals but to the Internet. Many are predicting, in fact, that "the 'Net" will be a primary community for the new generations of the early 21st century.

Although dwarfed in number by porn, Hollywood star and sports sites, religious sites have been on the Internet from the very beginning. Throughout the church, people are finding the information they need simply by pointing their mouse.

Beginning with this issue, *Touchstone* will host a fairly regular column reviewing religious and church-related sites on the Internet. Written by David Martyn (who collaborated on the Wood Lake book *Get Me To The Church Online* in 1998), the best — and some of the worst — sites will be featured.

The way Jesus told the story in Matthew 13: 47-48, when the fishers let down their nets they hauled up fish of every kind. Then the hard work began of sorting the good from the bad. In "Fishing The 'Net" David will haul the 'Net in and begin sorting the catch. Perhaps his work will help make your next fishing trip a bit more profitable!

Ed. — Doug Goodwin

Worship Resources on the Net

If you are new on the Internet fear not; the worship helps there are not all that different from what you may currently be using. Perhaps you are part of a weekly lectionary group; or perhaps you don't have anyone to talk to, so your worship preparation involves looking at printed worship resource material or collections of sermons. The same resources are on the Internet.

List Serves

The first type of Internet resource resembles a round table discussion group. Imagine instead of a verbal conversation all the material is printed and then circulated. If anyone has an idea they would like to share or comment on they write down their reflection and then make photocopies for everyone else. This is what essentially happens with Internet list serve groups.

One of the best list serve groups is *Midrash* (<http://www.joinhands.com>), run by Wood Lake Books in B.C.

When you subscribe to *Midrash*, you receive brief commentary via email on all four passages each week. Then you will have the opportunity to respond, read others' comments, and share sermon

ideas. David Shearman, a United Church minister in Owen Sound, Ontario, moderates the discussion. Messages others write will be delivered directly to your e-mail inbox. During the week you can expect to receive up to 150 messages.

Now imagine in your nonverbal discussion group there is a desire to save paper. The suggestion is made that all ideas and reflections should be posted on a bulletin board. People would then go to the bulletin board, a new one for each Sunday, and read the material. This is the style exemplified by *The Desperate Preachers Site* (<http://desperatepreacher.com/>).

This site is run by Frank Schaefer, pastor of the Avon Zion United Methodist Church in Lebanon, Pennsylvania. He writes "When I went on the Internet in the summer of 1996, I was looking for some way to exchange thoughts and experiences with fellow 'desperate' preachers. I had just begun my new pastoral appointment in Lebanon, PA. At that point in time, I had not met my colleagues in this area. I was really searching for something like *'The Desperate Preacher's Site'* and, when my search remained futile, I decided to start the kind of ministry I was looking for."

Separate discussions are posted weekly for each of the four Sunday texts. For Epiphany 5 there were 69

messages for the gospel, 9 for the epistle, none for the Psalm and 19 for the text from Isaiah. This site is worth looking at if only for stories told by one of the participants who goes by the pseudonym, Nail Bender. He is actually Steve Taylor, a United Methodist Church and Community Worker serving in North Carolina.

Imagine again your bulletin board for a given Sunday. What happens when a member posts a message that has to do with a personal problem? Suddenly there are a number of 'off topic' messages in response to this concern and the original purpose of the board is compromised. In an ideal church where there is unlimited wall space, an individual could create their own bulletin board with an invitation to others to read and post messages to this new board. This is the idea behind *SermonShop* (<http://www.ecunet.org/sermonshop.html>).

Jack Sharp has moderated this Presbyterian-based resource for over a decade. *SermonShop* uses the unique branching ability of Ecunet to organize each Sunday's texts and commentary into separate electronic meetings. By joining the main *SermonShop* meeting you will be invited to each Sunday discussion, giving you the option of just joining the discussion for Sundays when you will be preaching. For the Epiphany 5 Sunday there were 29 messages on the four texts. The

Ecunet-lite membership is free, but if you would like to start your own discussion groups you will need to pay the full membership fee of \$28.95 annually.

The only problem with *SermonShop* is its slow speed. Even to find it on Ecunet took their server thirteen minutes to show a list of 'meetings' that had the word 'sermonshop' in the title.

Link Pages

A second type of resource are those pages that simply provide links to other resources. This is similar to having a catalogue pointing out where resources can be found.

One of the oldest of these types is *Sermon & Sermons - Lectionary Resources* (<http://www.rockies.net/~spirit/sermon.html>), hosted by Richard Fairchild, a United Church of Canada minister in Golden B.C.

Fairchild's categories for sermon sites are RCL (Revised Common Lectionary) in Advance Sermons, RCL Not In Advance Sermons, Not RCL Sermons. Although this is a very comprehensive list it is inconsistent in its description of the sermon sites. The preacher's name and denomination, and when the sermons are posted, are normally there. A few have Fairchild's personal evaluation.

More helpful types of sites are those that are specific to a Sunday. One of the best is *The Text This*

Week(<http://www.textweek.com>).

This remarkable site is maintained by Jenee Woodard who, although involved with full time child care, has some extra time on her hands. According to her, "this web-project is an attempt to fill some of that void." She spends between 40 and 60 hours a week updating links and finding more resources to link.

Here the focus is not on sermons but on study and liturgical resources, as well as links to art and movies that relate to the week's texts. She also prepares weekly e-mail which summarizes some of the most interesting resources she finds, distributing it four weeks in advance for those who manage to do such long range planning.

Finally, there are numerous web pages available with sermon and liturgical resources. For those that would like full sermons for the specific Sunday, a Catholic site fills this need: *Deacon Sil's Homiletic Resources* web page (<http://deaconsil.com>).

According to the site information, "this began as a place where he [Deacon Sil] could post his own homilies to what he hopes will be a one-stop resource page for preachers of all denominations looking for sermons." Deacon Sil looks at over 250 different web sites and other material received from contributors. The cost for this site is \$29.95 a year, but there is a free trial membership.

Three sites with specific United Church of Canada content are also worth a look.

Gathering (<http://www.uccan.org/gathering>), a worship resource posted on the United Church web page, has lectionary material prepared by a variety of volunteers. The readings for each Sunday are listed along with a one-sentence note about each reading. There are also brief suggestions for talking with children, a suggested homeiletical approach, as well as hymn, choir and organ suggestions.

Weekly Lectionary (<http://www.osiem.org/discussions/lectindex.htm>) is moderated by John Shearman, hosted on David Keeting's more extensive web site called *Osiem - Life and Faith*. Shearman offers a short summary of each text suitable for bulletin use, followed by an in-depth commentary. This site allows people to respond to what Shearman has said or make their own comments. This is an excellent starting point for every week.

Finally, for those who just want to read what other United Church ministers are doing, *United Church Sermons* (<http://members.home.net/sermon/UCSermons.html>) is a list of United Church of Canada congregations that have sermon sites.

- David Martyn

**PRAYING TWICE:
The Music and Words of
Congregational Song**

by **Brian Wren**
**Louisville: Westminster
John Knox Press, 2000**
400 pp. \$34.50

This is a book of considerable length, and of real substance. As the title indicates, it is about both words and music. This might discourage people from picking it up, on the grounds that they are ignorant about music. My advice is, don't be put off. It's true that there are places where those who have little or no knowledge of music will find themselves scrambling, but such pages can be turned fairly quickly until parts of the book are reached where the reader can find bottom again. And I'm talking about parts that are still dealing with music, since not all discussions on that subject in this volume are beyond the general reader. For instance, Wren gives a fairly lengthy consideration of "contemporary" music, and a good deal of it is accessible even to those who don't read a note.

Mind you, some parts may be outside the reader's experience, not because they haven't the proper musical tools, but because Wren is talking about patterns of church life

that aren't common in Canada. In this country we don't have any "mega churches" that belong to the mainline tradition, as they do in the United States. Those churches have developed the custom where the singing of "choruses" replaces in part, and sometimes entirely, standard hymns. Wren offers a significant discussion of this practice, finding some merit in it, if also some dangers.

This is a book full of good sense, and good information. For instance, he offers a helpful discussion on the amount of unfamiliar material a congregation can tolerate in a service, and the way unfamiliar things can be introduced. He provides some profitable advice to people who set out to teach a new hymn, encouraging them to rely on their own voice, however inadequate it might be, rather than on the organ or piano.

But this is also a volume with some genuine challenges for people like me who love classical music, and the classic hymns. Indeed Wren himself is such a person. He wants us, however, to open ourselves to the musical idioms that young people have internalized, and give a place to them in our services. This will mean that the organ and piano must give way, at least in part, to other instruments, including the drum and the electric guitar. Though Wren loves the old hymns he insists

that we also see the dangers in them, where masculine, dominance language is much too common. He focuses particularly on terms like King, Father and Lord, recognizing that the latter is extremely difficult to avoid, since so much of both testaments is built on it. His solution is towards some alteration of the texts of hymns, where this doesn't destroy their artistic and theological integrity. But he is more concerned that the church be hospitable to new texts that do not rely on masculine, dominance language, and he draws attention to some fine lyrics that use alternative imagery.

There is a chapter entitled "Why Do They Keep Changing The Good Old Hymns?" in which Wren makes the point that if a favourite hymn is more than fifty years old it's likely that the version we have known and loved has been altered from the original text; they didn't have the custom in earlier periods of indicating in their collections that a text had been changed. He illustrates the point with Charles Wesley's "Hark! the Herald Angels Sing". For starters, that's not the way Wesley's original began, where the first line was "Hark how all the welkin rings". It was a text of ten four-line stanzas. In various 18th century collections six significant changes in wording were done, (none by Wesley himself) including the fashioning of the first line as we now

know it. In addition, the first six stanzas were re-clustered so that it became a hymn of three six-line verses, with a two-line refrain added to each verse. The final four stanzas of the original dropped out of sight. The publisher of a 19th century book made still another word change. Wren's opinion is (and I share it) that all these changes improved the hymn, making it into the text that people came to love so much. In any case, Wren wants readers to see that the alterations of well-known hymns which are to be found in recent denominational books, arising from a concern for inclusive language, are in most instances not the first to be made in the texts. At the same time he recognizes the hazards involved in editorial work; he spends several pages noting the difficulties in achieving alterations in hymns that are poetically and theologically satisfactory. It's clear that good editors are almost as precious for the church's song as good hymn writers.

This is not a book that one breezes through. Parts of it take some work. But all worship leaders, and many thoughtful occupiers of pews, would find this volume a worthwhile read.

— Mac Watts