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Editorials

ORDERED MINISTRY

One of the deepest delights in ministry is the collegiality of the order of ministry. For many of us the friendships and associations of colleagues from seminary onwards serve to enrich and sustain us throughout the years of joy, disappointment and challenge in pastoral life. This ebb and flow is recognized in our presbyterial structure, and in the annual Conference gatherings that include the ordination and commissioning of new members of the order of ministry. The structure and cycle of our denominational life recognizes that the order of ministry is the backbone of our United Church. Where the order of ministry has been strong the Church has exhibited unity and character even in serious conflict. Where it is weak, and the fellowship of ordered ministers frayed, then even the simplest of disputes is beyond common sense and good judgment. It is not so much our diversity, as our collegiality, that has sustained us as a visible community of Christ.

In recent decades we have emphasized the ministry of all the people of God. It is ironic that this development has coincided with an eclipse of the traditional lay office of Elder. Without a particular lay office of vocation and call, the notion that all the people of God are ministers has gained currency, but the sense of lay or ordered vocation has lost meaning. Ordered ministers are then seen as personnel and staff rather than vocationally set apart. Lay and ordered are distinctive in task not in discipline and vocation.

In an age of suspicion of institutional and ordered authority many ministry personnel have actually distanced themselves from ordered status, specifically because it carries more baggage than one wants. In fact to be theologically trained may be cool, but to be ordained is not. Moreover, ordered ministry is seen to be too hierarchical, too institutional, not personal enough, and not flexible enough for one's personal ministry. United Church culture tends

to undersell the order and oversell the academic, intellectual and/or charismatic authority. This is a sign of the cultural captivity of our church and church community, for the authority of ministerial leadership and service is rooted in the ordered-ness of its discipleship, rather than its academic credentials or charismatic power.

There is an important dignity, vulnerability and humility in wearing the mantle of ordination and orders, with its checkered history, visible leadership, discipline and service. We are accountable for who we are, who we are becoming, and how we live, not just what we do. Not that all Christians do not live under one Word and one Lord, but not all are called to this form of accountable and transparent leadership and service. I am increasingly conscious that it is my colleagues who give me a sense of the depth and continuity of my vocation — ministers, servants and leaders who speak and live from the heart of grace for a world in which grace is in short supply.

If we are to shape a strong witness for a new century we will honour and value the vocational, disciplined and called nature of the ordered ministry. The church will respect those who have undertaken vows of discipline to our community, our Lord and our mission.

Presbyteries should pay the full tuition costs of theological education for all who accept settlement and serve five years, and should become more engaged with their students as a result of a deeper financial and personal commitment to their vocational formation. Remuneration should be structured for mission; our national pay scales should include an incentive for folk to serve in rural areas by setting aside a small amount annually for housing so those who live in manses for 10 or 20 years can enter the housing market without penalty. Time spent in building up the associations and loyalty of our order of ministry is time well spent. Moreover, going to Presbytery is important; without ministers present and engaged, Presbyteries will never be effective in their ministry to clergy and congregations. Theological education with depth is

education and formation and we are formed by service, and perhaps most keenly when service involves sacrifice. Our education and formation is not really completed until we have served where we are needed, not just where our needs can be met.

It would be ironic if our litigious environment, with its liability and insurance concerns, drives us back to the importance of call, vocation and discipline even as a culture of individuality, autonomy, equality and secularity has tended to downplay the role and place of the order of ministry in church and society. We should embrace the opportunity to recover a language of call, vocation and accountability. It is the language that makes sense of our life, of our ordered ministry of word and sacrament, of pastoral leadership and service.

– J.H.

GORDON HARLAND

On December 8, Gordon Harland, one of the founding members of *Touchstone*, died suddenly at the age of 82.

Gordon had a remarkable career as a teacher of theology and church history, beginning in 1945 and continuing to the time of his death. His time as a teacher was so long partly because he began so young, and partly because he remained so intellectually vigorous into a time of life when most people are leading a more passive existence.

When Gordon was a student in the Faculty of Theology of United College (now the University of Winnipeg) the teaching staff were so taken with his brilliance that they drafted him on graduation to take the place of the professor of church history, who was retiring. Thus with no post-graduate work to his credit Gordon was immediately propelled into the task of preparing lectures for classes in all the three years of the curriculum. It took no time at all for

him to become the most influential teacher in the Faculty, for whatever he touched came alive for his students. It was his dream, however, to go off somewhere to do a Ph.D. But how could he do that, with three small children and no savings?

His opportunity came in 1954, when Bernhard Anderson, the Old Testament professor at Drew Theological Seminary in New Jersey, came to give some lectures at United College. While in Winnipeg Anderson had a number of conversations with Gordon, and was impressed with the breadth of his knowledge and the quality of his insights. He asked Gordon where he did his Ph.D., and Gordon admitted that he hadn't one — though he said it was his great desire to achieve that. Anderson promised that he would set up something at Drew, and true to his word arranged for support for Gordon and the family while he worked on his Ph.D. Accordingly Gordon, Ruth, and the children went to Drew in the summer of 1955 and he plunged into graduate work. Achieving his Ph.D. in record time, the faculty of Drew recognized Gordon's qualities and held on to him; he became a permanent staff member in the seminary. There he remained until 1968, when the University of Manitoba established a Department of Religion and invited Gordon to be its first head.

He continued at the University of Manitoba until well after normal retirement age, but on being made emeritus professor he finally withdrew from teaching responsibilities there. That, however, was just the beginning of a further teaching stint, which he undertook at William and Catherine Booth College in Winnipeg, remaining there in spite of failing eyesight until the time of his death.

All over this continent there are people in pulpits, or in university or seminary professorships, whose chief inspiration came from Gordon Harland. Their minds were set on fire by him like no other of their teachers. He had the wonderful capacity not only to recognize talent but to encourage it, and he took special pains to open doors for his students in seminaries and graduate schools.

I am one of those who had the great good fortune to have Gordon as my teacher at United College. The whole direction of

my life was changed because of knowing him, and I cannot imagine what would have come of me had I not had three years of amazing class room experience with him, along with the significant out-of-class conversations.

And then there was the comradeship of working with him on the establishing of *Touchstone*. Gordon was a critical participant in the deliberations that brought that to fruition, and it was he who wrote the Editorial in the very first number of the journal. The words on our masthead come from that Editorial: "The purpose of *Touchstone* is to bring the United Church of Canada's heritage of theology and faith to bear on its own present life and witness, and to engage the issues of our day in the light of the biblical message and the Christian tradition." In the twenty some years of the journal's life we could always count on Gordon to offer vital insights about the direction we ought to take, about the subjects of articles we should offer, and who it was we should seek out to contribute material.

He was a remarkable man, and we will all miss him enormously.

— Mac Watts

FUNERALS AS COUNTER-CULTURAL PRACTICE

by Edwin Searcy

The early morning phone call caught me off guard. It brought news of the death of a beloved elder of the congregation. It was not the news of her death after a lingering illness that surprised me. Instead it was her son's casual mention that the family would — at their mother's request — be holding no funeral or memorial service. Even on the west coast of Canada, where traditional practices of marking death are in rapid retreat, this confounded me. She had been active in the congregation for nearly half a century. She was a long time member of the Worship Committee, and an honorary elder of the Board. Her own husband's memorial service had been of great concern to her just three years previous. I found myself pressing the conversation, wondering how this could be her desire. Her son said that in the time following her husband's death she had been depressed and had written a short note in her "Funeral file" requesting "No service be held for me". He noted in passing that, just below she had added, "But if you do have a service please be sure to use my favorite hymns".

Since I was just heading off to a weekly Bible study in which she had been an active participant for three decades, I wondered aloud at the group's reaction to the news that there would be no service. The son offered up the possibility of a social gathering, with drinks and sandwiches, in her memory. Then he asked me to discuss the matter with the study group and to call him back. Later that morning I told the group of the news of her death and of her request that there be no service. "Oh, that wasn't her" was their immediate response. They agreed that a service must be held (and it was). Then this aging group engaged in a lively conversation about the changing social patterns in marking death. They spoke of how empty it feels when there is no opportunity to gather to grieve and remember together. They reflected on the informal

gatherings for drinks instead of for a funeral, gatherings that left everyone unsure of what to say or do. At the same time, they spoke of ambiguous feelings about the place of funerals. One said "I don't want to have a service held for me — it would be too much of a burden on everyone, especially on my children". Another commented: "I don't know why a service would be held for me, I have no family. Who would come?". It was unanimously agreed that none in the group would want to have their body present at the service. But, when pressed, no one in the group could articulate why this practice was so easily discarded as a possibility. It was evident to all of us that the conversation needed to continue.

Dying to the glory of God

The more I mentioned the conversation that had erupted in our study group the more I heard from the congregation that this was of interest to many. Soon the Adult Faith Formation committee had proposed that our Lenten / Easter focus for adult study be a series of evening gatherings entitled "Dying Faithfully". A group of some twenty-five folk, ranging in age, participated in the discussions. More than that, news of the conversation spread throughout the congregation. In fact, the impact of the discussion continues to be felt and to grow now two years later.

The material for our sessions was home grown. We invited the questions of those who gathered (and discovered many more than we could possibly engage in six weeks). We shared in the discipline of reading selected scriptures each week, in preparation for our sessions (such as Romans 6:3-11; I Corinthians

5). We read the order for a Funeral or Memorial Service that is provided in the United Church of Canada's newest service book — *Celebrate God's Presence* (pp. 441-471). We structured simple sessions, that provided time for input and conversation as it became clear that just speaking about death together in this way was a new experience in the congregation.

It soon became clear that the conversation we had opened was much bigger than we had imagined. There were, in fact, really

two main conversations. One was an important discussion about how the final days of our life may be the climactic moments in our journey as disciples of Jesus. We are so accustomed to imagining discipleship as productive activity that we forget the critical place of witnessing to gospel in the midst of sufferings and endings. Here, in acts of reconciliation and in words of encouragement as well as in unabashed lament and in courageous final days, we live the faith in the midst of death to the glory of God. As we opened our conversations it was immediately evident that the concept of the end of life as the culmination of a lifetime of discipleship had barely surfaced in the mind of the congregation. Yet, as important as this discussion surely is for us, a second one dominated our time together. What really captured the interest of the gathered group were questions of how we as a congregation will deal with death when it occurs. It was as if we recognized intuitively that in the marking of death we are confronted with powers that seek to erase the church's memory and entice it to abandon its daring witness.

Communal property

The first sign of this amnesia overtaking the church appeared as we pondered the way we have come to consider the rites that mark our death to be our personal property. We speak about what "I wish for my service" or "what the family wishes". This, of course, is a natural desire to respect the unique gifts and character of the deceased. But in a culture where the acids of modernity have reduced everything to individual choice this becomes a "trump card" that denies the possibility of an alternate communal witness. If the wish of the deceased is for there to be no funeral, no memorial, no act of worship in gratitude and grief then the church finds itself living a lie. For the church exists as a living witness to God's steadfast love for each and every one. If it is no great loss when one dies, if it is possible to die and make no noticeable impact on the fabric of the church and of the community, then the claims made at baptism are false. It is critical to the church that every death of one of its number be grieved. To forget this is to forget

that at baptism the church becomes the adoptive family of each disciple.

In the midst of our discussions another of our beloved elders died. She left a single daughter. The daughter had no desire for a funeral but she allowed that the congregation could do as it wished in that regard (although she made the decision that the body would not be present). This presented us with an unusual opportunity. There were no instructions from the deceased or from the family. Yet our beloved elder had been with us for fifty years. What would we do? It was agreed by the elders that we would worship God in the best way that we know. Our regular pattern would shape the service. A lector would carry in the Bible and light the candles. A worship elder would prepare and lead the prayers for the day. One of our number would offer carefully crafted remembrances of our beloved elder. We would sing hymns of praise and lament. A sermon proclaiming the gospel would be preached. We all knew what to do. We do it every Sunday. The Chapel was full with folk from the congregation as well as with people from the neighbourhood and from other congregations. Later, over coffee, a guest from a neighbouring church was heard to say: "Now that is interesting. When you have a funeral here, you worship." Her comment was a revealing commentary on the way in which funerals have become sentimental rehearsals of a person's life, with little reference to the transcendent power of God or the grand narrative that holds each of our stories.

Our study group was enhanced by the presence of a university student on exchange from India. He was fascinated by the difference between the Canadian church and his church at home. In particular, he noted that at home it was the congregation that was responsible for all the funeral arrangements. There it was assumed that the family had simply to grieve and be cared for. It was the elders who were expected to gather at the family home and to stay there, twenty-four hours a day, singing hymns and preparing for the funeral. All costs of preparing the body, holding the funeral and providing the burial were shared by the congregation. It was, like the early church,

a memorial society in which the members shared the costs of death as a sign of their familial bonds. This testimony caught the ear of the Canadians in the group. We could not help but long for the kind of Christian community that he was describing. In listening to him we began to see how much we have become accommodated to a culture that breaks us down into household units. Why is it, we asked, that we simply assume that the costs of the funeral — the music, the reception, the plot or the cremation — are up to the family and are not to be included the budget of the congregation?

This conversation led to another, to one that has begun a significant change in our congregational practices. A voice in the group questioned the way in which we decide whose funeral to attend. We simply take it for granted — in urban, western Canada — that our obligations to attend a funeral or memorial service extend to those who we know as friends or as colleagues or as acquaintances. But the congregation includes people that we do not know well or even at all. Yet each member of the body is crucial to its life, and each death brings pain to the whole (I Cor. 12). Death is not a private matter that affects only those who are friends and family. It is a public event that affects the whole church and calls the whole congregation together to grieve and to witness to the good news of God in the face of death. Each death is now an occasion to practice what we preach as a people. With each funeral or memorial we call upon the whole congregation to gather — as it is able — with family and friends as a sign of the gathered saints in the kingdom of God.

Bodily Care

It was in the midst of a conversation about an impending funeral that I was confronted with the observation: "I know that there must be a theological reason for it, perhaps you can help me with it. I go to quite a few funerals and what I have noticed is that Catholics have the body present and Protestants don't. Right?" This was John's way of asking if there was any possibility of having his mother's body in a casket at the funeral to be held in our

congregation. For a moment I wondered what theological argument in the Reformation I had missed. But it quickly became apparent that the difference he noticed had to do with the willingness of Protestant pastors to accede to the wishes of the family when it comes to the presence or absence of a body at the funeral. These days, in British Columbia at least, common sense and custom leads nearly everyone to avoid the presence of a dead body at the service that marks death.

Our study group engaged this question repeatedly. It quickly became clear that this is a crucial issue in the formation of the identity of the church within a post-Christian culture. The group included a Swedish pastor, on sabbatical in Vancouver for a year with her husband. Following one session she stopped me in the hallway and quietly asked if she had made a mistake in understanding our conversation. She inquired if it is true that there are some funeral services in Canada at which there is no body present. I told her the truth — that I rarely conduct a service with a dead body present. Hearing this, she looked visibly shaken, her breath obviously taken away. The next week she described for the group her experience of the crucial importance of having the evidence of death present at every funeral. It was as if we were hearing again for the first time what it is to look death in the eye in order to proclaim the power of God at the grave.

But we soon realized that there is more to caskets than this. Caring for the dying and for the dead is a practice that disciplines the church to wash the feet of the poorest of the poor. In this way, Mother Theresa's witness among the dying of Calcutta convicts Canadians who cannot even face the death of their own friends and family, but soon shun their bodies as if they were garbage. The unity of body and soul is crucial for Christians. It is what links our funeral practices with our concern for social justice. If we cannot carry the burden of each other's bodies in death then surely we will find it even more difficult to carry the burden of others, beyond our circle in life. Here we must struggle to overcome our inability to be burdens. We imagine that "the gods help those who help

themselves”, forgetting that this is the faith of Aesop’s Fables, not of the Bible. A biblical people know, instead, that the God of Abraham and Sarah helps those who cannot help themselves. In order to believe this our congregations need practice in carrying each other’s burdens. Our elders need to unlearn their fear of becoming a burden, so that the whole congregation has the opportunity to respond to the call to serve and to carry our cross (Mk 8:34).

Lament, Longing & Laughter

In opening this pastoral conversation we discovered the powerful way in which our practices at the time of death both reveal and shape our life together as a community. We noticed that by ignoring and silencing conversations about death we had unwittingly simply absorbed the assumptions of the larger culture that we inhabit. If the sub-culture of the church is to be a creative witness to an alternate way of living and believing then the mind of the community must be transformed (Rom. 12:2). Yet that transformation in ways of thinking is directly related to changed patterns and practices of living.¹

As a pastor engaged in the re-formation of the mind of a culturally accommodated people (including the mind of the pastor) I have come to realize that these alternate patterns are learned slowly and patiently through diligent practice. I assume now that the congregation is like a student learning to play an instrument or to dance or to figure skate. Learning to live as a Christian people requires practicing certain patterns of life and faith over and over again. It involves shaping not only the way we live but also the way we think. We are like a figure skater practicing the same figure until we embody this pattern without even thinking about it. This is the nature of “figural” logic. It is the basic pattern we use to “figure things out”. Our study group discovered that we have simply adopted the ways in which our culture figures death out. We easily

¹ See “Dying Well” by Amy Plantinga Pauw in *Practicing Our Faith*, ed. Dorothy Bass, (Jossey-Bass, 1997), pp. 163-177.

acquiesce to the families' wishes. We treat death as an individual matter. We remove the body at first opportunity. We do not have the capacity to hold deep grief and rich joy together. Our practices reveal that we have forgotten the cruciform logic of the gospel.

At the time of death the Christian community rehearses the death that birthed its life. Gathered at the grave we live through the three day figure of Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday. The gospel is not simply the joy of Easter. It is not simply announcing that death is over, as if it is not real. Rather, the gospel is a narrative of a death that we live within.² We are living in the gospel if we are face to face with a terrible ending that devastates all of our hopes and dreams. The gospel begins always on this awful Friday. A gospel people necessarily makes room for the loud lament of people who are at the foot of the cross. And then the gospel endures a long Saturday of longing in which there is nothing but the absence of the evidence of God. We have often forgotten to practice this part of the cruciform figure, imagining that absence is outside of the gospel, that it equates with disbelief. But a people well practiced in the gospel host longing and absence in their midst because they know that it is not the completion of the gospel. For finally the gospel lands on Easter Sunday. The blues of Friday and Saturday are sung in preparation for Sunday's impossible news of God's power to overcome and to make new beyond all expectation. A people who know this figure in their bones are able to lament, to long and to laugh as if at the same time. This becomes the work of the life of the church. All of its worship and education, its service and communal life is a rehearsal of the threefold cruciform logic of Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday. Then, when death breaks in upon the life of the community, the church instinctively knows what to do and what to say as a people shaped by the story of God made known in Christ.

² See "A Death in the Family" by Stanley Saunders in *The Word on the Street* by Stanley Saunders and Charles Campbell, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 41-47.

Cultivating a Prophetic People

Not long ago a young couple in the congregation experienced the still birth of their first child at the midpoint in their pregnancy. They were far from home and parents, deep in grief. They called from the hospital, asking me to come. There I found them, cradling their tiny infant, wondering how to mark this death of one who had never taken breath. Our conversation led to discussions about the congregation's changing practices. We agreed to hold a memorial service on Sunday following morning worship and to invite the congregation. The service was extraordinarily powerful. The figure of Friday, Saturday and Sunday was the shape of our service. At the suggestion of the baby's mother, she lit a candle in memory of the child and then left candles for others who had ever experienced a similar loss. The line was long that led to the candles as women and men of all ages remembered losses of other infants — losses often unacknowledged in the church. Friends and neighbours in attendance wondered at the shape of such a service and such a congregation. I could not help but notice that we are beginning to understand that we are a peculiar people who have different ways of doing things and that these peculiarities and differences are crucial to our identity.

We too easily imagine that prophetic speech and action is synonymous with "social action". As Walter Brueggemann has pointed out, social action is properly understood in biblical terms as a covenantal matter rather than a prophetic one.³ Prophetic speech and life is marked by its counter-voice to prevailing social patterns. A prophetic people re-perceives their life in the world in terms contrary to the dominant assumptions of the surrounding culture. To my surprise, what seemed an interesting, even important, pastoral and liturgical conversation about our practices at the time of death has emerged into a promising opening into prophetic ministry.

³ *Reverberations of Faith*, by Walter Brueggemann, (Westminster: John Knox, 2002), p. 161.

Learning how to be a Christian community in the face of death is crucial to re-discovering our identity as a gospel people in the face of the powers and principalities that seem so overwhelming in life. This is not an innocent or trivial matter. Reconfiguring the mind of the church is a subversive move to prepare the baptized community for other Good Fridays and Holy Saturdays and Easter Sundays. I do not know what awful endings are yet to come upon us, but I suspect that we and our children and grandchildren will yet stand at the foot of the cross, sure that all is lost. Then I pray that we will have learned the cruciform figure that begins at the end and carries us through a long season of absence because of the deep hope that keeps us anticipating Easter, and Christ's promised return.

GOOD GRIEF: An Undertaker's Reflections

by Thomas Lynch¹

It's sunny and 70 at Chapel Hill. I'm speaking to Project Compassion, an advocacy group for end-of-life issues, on an unlikely trinity of oxymorons — the *good* death, *good* grief and the *good* funeral. "What", most people reasonably ask, "can ever be good about death or grief or funerals?" The 150 people in the room understand. They are mostly women — clergy, hospice and social workers, doctors, nurses and funeral directors — and they work, so to speak, in the deep end of the pool, with the dying, the dead and the bereaved.

We begin by agreeing that the good death is the one that happens when we are among our own, surrounded not by beeping meters and blinking monitors but by the faces of family and people who care. It is the death of a whole person, not an ailing part. It is neither a failure nor an anomaly; it is less science and more serenity. The good death, like the good life, does not happen in isolation. It is not only or entirely a medical event, not only or entirely a social or spiritual or retail one. The good death engages our entire humanity — both what is permanent and what is passing. So I am thanking these women for the power of their presence — as nurses and doctors and hospice volunteers, as pastors and rabbis, priests and imams, as mothers and daughters, sisters and wives — for their willingness to stand in the room where someone is dying, without an easy answer, without a cure or false hopes, with only their own humanity, to bear witness and to be present. The power of being there is that it emboldens others — family and friends —

¹ Copyright 2003 *Christian Century*. Reprinted by permission from the July 26, 2003, issue of the *Christian Century*. Subscriptions: \$49/yr from P.O. Box 378, Mt. Morris, IL, 61054. 1-800-208-4097.

to be present too to the glorious and sorrowful mysteries.

And grief, *good* grief, we further concur, is something about which we have little choice. It is the tax we pay on the loves of our lives, our habits and attachments. And like every other tax there is this dull math to it — if you love, you grieve. So the question is not so much whether or not, but rather how well, how completely, how meaningfully we mourn. And though we do not grieve as those who have no faith grieve, as people of faith we grieve nonetheless. We talk about the deeper meanings we sometimes find in the contemplation of these things and how we sometimes feel God's presence there, and sometimes God's absence.

And everything is going very well. We are all nodding in warm consensus. It's like preaching to the choir — until I come to the part where I talk about a *good* funeral.

A good funeral, I tell them, serves the living by caring for the dead. It tends to both — the living and the dead — because a death in the family happens to both. A good funeral transports the newly deceased and the newly bereaved to the borders of a changed reality. The dead are disposed of in a way that says they mattered to us, and the living are brought to the edge of a life they will lead without the one who has died. We deal with death by dealing with the dead, not just the idea but also the sad and actual fact of the matter — the dead body.

Here is where some of the audience stop nodding. Brows furrow, eyes narrow into squints, as if something doesn't exactly compute. The idea of death is one thing. A dead body is quite another. An Episcopal priest in the third row raises her hand to ask, "Why do we need the body there? Isn't it, after all, just a shell?" She is speaking, she tells me, from a Christian perspective.

The Math of Caskets

This "just a shell" theory is a favourite among clergy of my generation. Their pastoral education on death and bereavement began and, for many of them, ended with *The American Way of*

Death — Jessica Mitford's 1963 best-selling lampoon of funerals and funeral directors. It was an easy and often hilarious read. Mitford made much of the math of caskets — how much they cost, how profitable they were, how devious or obsequious the sales pitch was. She disliked the boxes for their expense. And she disliked the bodies in the boxes for the untidy and unpredictable feelings that surrounded them. She recommended getting rid of both caskets and corpses, and letting convenience and cost efficiency replace what she regarded as pricey and barbaric display.

The bodies of Mitford's first husband, who died in the war; her first daughter, who died in infancy; and her first son, who was killed by a bus in Berkeley, California, all "disappeared" — dispatched without witness or rubric and never mentioned in *The American Way of Death* nor in two volumes of autobiography. Their names were erased from the books of her life for fear of the feeling that might linger there. Fearful that the sight of a dead body might trigger overwhelming emotions, she downsized it to "just a shell" to be burned or buried without attendant bother or much expense.

This was a welcome notion among many of the clergy coming of age in the latter decades of the last century. It aligned nicely with their sense that, just as merchants were removing Christ from Christmas, morticians were removing faith from funerals. What need have Christians of all this bother — caskets, flowers, wakes and processions? Aren't the sureties of heaven enough? The "just a shell" theory furthermore articulated the differences between the earthly and heavenly, the corruptible and incorruptible, the base and blessed, sacred and profane, sinful natures and holy spirits.

Human beings are bodies and souls. And souls, made in the image and likeness of God, are eternal and essential, whereas bodies are mortal and impermanent. "There is", the scripture holds, "a natural body and a spiritual body." In life, we are regarded as one — a whole being, body and soul, flesh and blood and spirit. And we are charged with the care and maintenance of both. We feed the flesh and the essence. We pamper the wounds and strive to improve the condition of both body and soul. We read and run wind sprints,

we fast and pray, confide in our pastors and medicos, and seek communion, spiritual and physical, with other members of our species. "Know ye not", Paul asks the Corinthians, "that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?"

But in death, the good priest in the third row seemed to be saying, the temple becomes suddenly devalued, suddenly irrelevant, suddenly negligible and disposable — "just a shell" from which we ought to seek a hurried and most often unseen riddance.

Like many of her fellow clergy, she finds the spiritual bodies more agreeable than the natural ones. The spirits are well intentioned and faultless; the bodies are hungry, lustful, greedy and weak. The soul is the sanctuary of faith, the body full of doubts and despairs. The soul sees the straight and narrow path, whereas the body wants the easier, softer way. The corruptible bleeds and belches and dies, and the incorruptible is perfect and perpetual. Souls are just easier all around. Which is why for years she's been officiating at memorial services instead of funerals. They are easier, more convenient and more cost-efficient. They are notable for their user-friendliness. They can be scheduled around the churches' priorities — the day care and Stephen Ministries, the Bible studies and rummage sales — and around a pastor's all-too-busy schedule. A quick and private disposal of the dead removes the sense of emergency and immediacy from a death in the family. No need, as W.H. Auden wrote, to:

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.
(from "Funeral Blues")

There is no bother with coffins at all. The dead are secreted off to the crematory or grave while the living go about their business. Where a dead body requires more or less immediate attention, riddance of "just the shell" can hold grief off for a few days, or a week, or a season. Not cutting short the pastor's too brief vacation,

no rushing home from a ministerial conference to deal with a death in the parish family. The eventual "celebration" will be a lovely and, needless to say, "life-affirming" event to which everyone is invited — except, of course, the one who has died. The talk is determinedly uplifting, the finger food and memorabilia are all in good taste, the music more purposefully cheering than poignant, the bereaved most likely on their best behaviour, less likely to "break down", "fall apart" or "go to pieces" — they will be brave and faithful. And "closure", if not achieved, is nonetheless proclaimed, often just before the Merlot runs out.

Calvary Without A Cross

The memorial service makes much of dealing with memories of the dead by steadfastly refusing to deal with the dead themselves. It is the emotional and commemorative equivalent of a baptism without the baby or a wedding without the blushing bride or a graduation without the graduates. A funeral without the dead body has the religious significance of the Book of Job without the sores and boils, Exodus without the stench of frogs, Calvary without a cross, or the cross without the broken, breathless, precious body hanging there, all suffering and salvation. It is Easter without the resurrected body.

So I asked her reverence: What if her congregation, instead of showing up to worship, left "just their shells" in bed on Sunday mornings? Or what if, instead of dressing up the children's "shells" and driving them across town to church, they assure their pastor that they were "with her in spirit"? Might she think there was something missing from the morning services? At this she looked at me, perplexed. Or what if Jesus had not raised his "just a shell" from the dead? What if he'd resurrected the "idea" of himself, say, or his personality? Would we all be Christians these centuries since?

The clergywoman was not amused.

When Joseph of Arimathea, in league with Nicodemus, pleaded with Pilate for "just" the body of Christ, he was acting out a signature duty of our species. And when the Marys came bearing

spices and ointments to anoint the corpse, they too were acting out longstanding obsequies “in keeping with the customs of the Jews”. It is the custom of humankind to deal with death by dealing with the dead.

The defining truth of our Christianity — an empty tomb — proceeds from the defining truth of our humanity: we fill tombs. The mystery of the resurrection to eternal life is bound inextricably to the experience of suffering and death. Indeed, the effort to make sense of life — the religious impulse — owes much to our primeval questions about the nature of death.

Is that all there is? Can it happen to me? Why is it cold? What comes next?

The funeral — that ritual wheel that works the space between the living and the dead — must deal with our humanity and our Christianity, our spiritual and natural realities, our flesh, our fears, our faith and hopes, our bodies and our souls.

Lately it seems the wheel is broken, or has gone off the track, or must be reinvented every day. Nowadays news of a death is often attended by a gathering ambiguity about what we ought to do about it. We have more choices and fewer certainties, more options and fewer customs. The culture — that combination of religious, ethnic, social and market dynamics — seems to have failed us. We are drawn, it seems, toward two extremes — to do anything and everything or to do nothing, nothing at all.

Visitation Vignettes

To be sure, funerals and funeral directors can disappoint us, confusing, as they often do, the fashions with the fundamentals, the accessories with the essentials, the accoutrements with the enduring truths. The clergy and faithful have good reason to be wary. The merger and acquisition frenzy of the past two decades has had the same effect on funeral homes that it had on pharmacies and hardware, restaurants and medical care. Personal, compassionate, professional service is often lost to the “Have a Nice Day” speak of corporate cover. The sales-pitch, bottom-line,

every-sadness-a-sales-op mentality that Mitford wrote about 40 years ago has not disappeared, especially among the three large mortuary conglomerates — Service International, Alderwoods and Stewart Enterprises — that own nearly 20 percent of the funeral homes and cemeteries around the country.²

The largest manufacturers of caskets in the country markets “visitation vignettes” — a kind of theater of the absurd where the dead are laid out in “life-style” caskets among emblems not of their faith or family but of their hobbies. There is the “sports dad” vignette, heavy on beer and sports paraphernalia, and one for gardeners, and the much publicized “Big Mama’s Kitchen” with its faux stove, kitchen table and apple pie for the mourners to share with those who call. And while most families want to personalize a funeral, the market almost always errs on the side of excess, too often tendering the ridiculous instead of the sublime. We would not mistake a good diamond for a good marriage, or stained glass for true faith, but we are always mistaking a good box for a good funeral. It is the triumph of accessory over essentials.

These funerary fashion blunders make most people more than a little wary. Too often, however, to avoid the fashions, the fundamental obligations are neglected — to bear witness to the life that was lived and the death that has occurred. Too often the body is dispatched by cell phone and gold card to the grave unaccompanied by clergy, family or the company of those who care. It is a function performed by functionaries — quick, clean, cheap, convenient and ultimately meaningless.

A good funeral is not about how much we spend or how much we save. Rather it is about what we do — to act out our faith, our hopes, our loves and losses. Pastoral care is not about making death easier, or grief less keenly felt or funerals cheaper or more convenient. It is about bringing the power of faith to bear on the human experience of dying, death and bereavement. And our faith

² Editor’s Note: Thomas Lynch is referring to the situation in the United States. If things are a little different in Canada, we can still identify with his analysis.

is not for getting around grief or past it, but for getting through it. It is not for denying death, but confronting it. It is not for dodging our dead, but for bearing us up as we bear them to the grave or tomb or fire at the edge of which we give them back to God.

Among the several blessings of my work as a funeral director is that I have seen the power of such faith in the face of death. I remember the churchman at the deathbed of a neighbour — it was four in the morning in the middle of winter — who gathered the family around to pray, then helped me guide the stretcher through the snow out to where our hearse was parked. Three days later, after the services at church, he rode with me in the hearse to the grave, committed the body with a handful of earth and then stood with the family and friends as the grave was filled, reading from the psalms — the calm in his voice and the assurance of the word making the sad and honorable duties bearable.

I remember the priest I called to bury one of our town's indigents — a man without family or friends or finances. He, the grave diggers and I carried the casket to the grave. The priest incensed the body, blessed it with holy water and read from the liturgy for 20 minutes, then sang *In paradisum* — that gorgeous Latin for "May the angels lead you into Paradise" — as we lowered the body into the ground. When I asked him why he'd gone to such trouble he said these are the most important funerals — even if only God is watching — because it affirms the agreement between "all God's children" that we will witness and remember and take care of each other.

And I remember the Presbyterian pastor, a woman of strength and compassion who assisted a young mother whose baby had died in placing the infant's body into a tiny casket. She held the young woman as she placed a cross in the baby's hands and a teddy bear at the baby's side and then, because the mother couldn't, the pastor carefully closed the casket lid. They stood and prayed together — "God grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change" — then drove with me to the crematory.

Or the Baptist preacher called to preach the funeral of one of

our famously imperfect citizens who drank and smoked and ran a little wild, contrary to how his born-again parents had raised him. Instead of damnation and altar calls, the pastor turned the service into a lesson in God's love and mercy and forgiveness. After speaking about the man's Christian youth, he allowed as how he had "gone astray" after he'd left home and joined the army. "It seems he couldn't keep his body and his soul aligned", the young pastor said, and seemed a little lost for words until he left the pulpit, walked over and opened the casket, took out a harmonica and began to play "Just As I Am" while everyone in the congregation nodded and wept and smiled, some of them mouthing the words of promise and comfort to themselves.

In each case these holy people treated the bodies of the dead neither as a bother or embarrassment, nor an idol or icon, nor just a shell. They treated the dead like one of our own, precious to the people who loved them, temples of the Holy Spirit, neighbours, family, fellow pilgrims. They stand — these local heroes, these saints and sinners, these men and women of God — in that difficult space between the living and the dead, between faith and fear, between humanity and Christianity and say out loud, "Behold, I show you a mystery."

* * * * *

The following letter appeared in the September 6, 2003, issue of the Christian Century, and it, with Thomas Lynch's reply, are reprinted with permission.

My son died just a few days short of his 18th birthday this past June, after eight years of fighting brain cancer, the debilitating side effects of its various treatments, and leukemia. His mother and I walked alongside him every step of the way, and when the time came to say goodbye, we waited with him at a cancer hospital far from home until he took his last breath.

Before they took his body for autopsy and later cremation, my wife, my daughter and I spent time anointing his body —

cleaning it, clipping his nails, stroking his head, covering his smooth skin with lotion, praying over him. I thought of the women coming to the tomb on Easter morning to anoint Jesus' body with precious spices.

Ten days later, back at our home church, we gathered as a community of the faithful, without his body, to sing the hymns of faith, to pray, cry, laugh, and affirm the promise of resurrection.

How dare Thomas Lynch call our memorial service something akin to "Calvary without the cross"! My son's body was not dispatched to the hospital morgue for the sake of convenience or cost-effectiveness. We chose this manner of disposition because, as a minister, my calling leads me many places. We have no permanent burial place, no family cemetery. We wanted to have the physical remains with us so that when the time came to put him to final rest, we would have a meaningful, sacred, tangible symbol of his life.

Dan Jones
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Garland, Tex.

Thomas Lynch replies

I'm grateful for Dan Jones' thoughtful letter. May God bless and keep him and his people through these sad times. As a fellow pilgrim I have faith that God takes care of our children, living and dead.

When my father died in Florida years ago, my brother and I flew from Michigan to Ft. Myers to bring him home. Like Jones, we found the time spent with his body nearly sacramental. Like the Joneses, we washed his body, clipped his nails, stroked his head, massaged his skin with lotion, and we prayed.

Like Jones, we looked the fact of his death in the face and took leave of his body only after we had readied it, as if for a journey. The point of my essay was to embolden more folks to do the same — *to deal with death by dealing with the dead*. This is

where funerals differ from memorial services: the latter deal with the idea of the thing, the former with the thing itself.

Which is why we brought our father's body home to Michigan for his other children and their children, his extended family and lifelong friends to take their leave of his body too—to weep, laugh, pray, touch, see and believe the sad truth of the matter.

My question is this: what if Dan Jones had brought his son's body home for the service he describes — “to sing the hymns of faith, to pray, cry, laugh, and affirm the promise of the resurrection”? Might others who held him near and dear have had the same meaningful opportunity that Jones and his wife and daughter shared at the cancer hospital far from home?

We do not disagree on the “manner of disposition”. Cremation, like burial, is an ancient and honorable way of disposing of our dead, rich with metaphors of release, return and purification. There is nothing in my essay that suggests otherwise. It's sad that in our culture cremation is done in private, out of sight, with all the light and warmth unwitnessed.

What if some of his son's friends had had the chance to bear his son's body from his “home” church to the crematory? What if they'd been assigned that sad and honorable duty? Might going that difficult distance with their friend have had meaning for them? For Jones?

I haven't the answer to these questions. But my sense is that the odds are better all around when the rubrics of our faith include the rubrics of our humanity — when our immortality and mortality occupy the same sacred and psychic space.

FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE AND THE INCULTURATION OF THE GOSPEL

by Terence R. Anderson

I. INTRODUCTION

As First Nations in Canada move from “colonies within” towards genuine interdependence, what is now happening in their churches, and what form is the Christian faith taking there?

There are a great variety of Native peoples or tribes across North America, and it's rather artificial to separate them according to the US-Canadian border. The way Native statistics are formulated is different between the two countries, but we gain a sense of the variety from noting that in the United States there are 562 tribes (officially recognized) including at least 200 languages. In Canada, there are 57 First Nations which, together with the Inuit, include eleven main language groups. Most of these nations or tribes have been living the gospel, and making it their own in widely varying and changing social conditions, for 50 to 500 years. It is not possible, therefore, even to survey this scene in a brief essay, nor am I competent to do so.

Instead, I simply offer a few reflections on “inculturating” the gospel, drawing on my involvement with First Nations' peoples over the last thirty years, and on Native mentors, especially the late Robert K. Thomas. Bob was a Cherokee elder, practitioner of the Cherokee traditional religion, anthropologist, and mentor to a wide variety of younger Indian leaders. Likewise illuminating are the writings of missiologists and theologians from different parts of the globe, who have reflected in a range of different contexts on the inculturation of the gospel. Following two reminders, I shall identify and comment on four factors affecting the process of gospel “inculturation” in which, as we shall see, we are all involved.

II. REMINDERS

(a) The first reminder is that all Christians face the question of how the Christian faith should take root and form in their particular culture. Not long ago I was privileged to baptize an eleven-year-old Kwakiulth girl. I can still see her standing beside the baptismal font in the church in her small fishing village, her face reflecting nervous anxiety mixed with a glow of anticipation. Behind her was a semi-circle of relatives, all beaming. This familiar baptismal scene prompted memories of other young persons — a girl of Korean heritage, or in another place a boy with a background similar to my own. They too made the stirring profession of faith in God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, followed by the moving pledge, “I will, God being my helper”, in reply to the other familiar but important questions. Then came the sacred moment, water from the font — dying to the old life, rising in Christ to the new life. Praise be to God! In each case, I had a sense of Christ present at the font.

Yes, the same baptism, and all received into the same holy, catholic church, and yet from very different cultures. Have these affected their respective understandings of what it means to believe in Jesus Christ? What shape will and should that new life in Christ take in the context of their respective peoples and cultures? How should this young Kwakiulth Christian relate her faith to the long history of her people and village, as reflected in the petroglyphs along the shore, in the sacred stories that have told them who they are, in the traditional ceremonies and art displayed in the village museum? Does dying to the old life mean trying to put all the ways of her ancestors behind her, as one of her older relatives had been taught in residential school? Or does the new life in Christ entail joining the struggles of her people to preserve the language and a way of life related to their land in the face of enormous pressures to assimilate? The Korean-Canadian girl faces her mother’s self-professed struggle to sort out which of the ways of her Korean heritage, and which of her new Canadian home, are in accord with or contrary to the Way of Christ. But also — take note because

here is where we Euro-Canadians have in the past tended to miss it — the Anglo-Canadian boy faces the same questions in regard to his culture. He must decide with his church whether the new life in Jesus Christ entails simply adapting to or challenging in some ways the dynamic, postmodern, individuated culture of consumer capitalism.

When we ask about the inculturation of the gospel in First Nations, then, we inquire not from the perspective of those who have completed this ourselves, but as fellow travelers wrestling with the same matter in our own cultures. What can we learn from each other?

(b) The second reminder is of the shift that has taken place in most Christian circles concerning this perennial “Christ and culture” matter. Over the last fifty years the fresh scrutiny of this by Western, Asian, and African theologians, and in missiology circles, has resulted in widespread recognition and acknowledgment of at least two things.

One is that Jesus himself, his life, teachings, death and resurrection, as well as the perception and understanding of him and response to him, have always been embedded in one or another particular culture. As Lesslie Newbigin puts it, “the idea that one could at any time separate out by some process of distillation a pure gospel unadulterated by any cultural accretions is an illusion.”¹

Another is that this multiform witness to the gospel is integral to the gospel itself and not some unavoidable but lamentable reality. Justo L. Gonzalez, following the insights of the early church theologian Ireneaus, writes, that all four Gospels “are there precisely to keep us from the easy assumption that we can somehow create or we have inherited a theology that encompasses all truth. . . . It is a reminder of the absolute catholicity or universality of the gospel, which cannot be encompassed by any one perspective, any one theology, or any one language or culture.”²

¹ Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1986) p. 14.

² Justo L. Gonzalez, *Out of Every Tribe and Nation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992) p. 26.

"Inculturation" is the term most commonly now used to describe this reality that "the Christian faith must be rethought, reformulated and lived anew in each human culture."³ One writer aptly describes this process of inculturation as having two principles. "Indigenizing" is one. As the Word was incarnated in Jesus (John 17:18, 20-21; Philippians 2), so the gospel is en-fleshed, em-bodied in a people and their culture as a "kind of *ongoing* incarnation". Thus, the church is not so much expanded as born anew, "the flowering of a seed implanted in the soil of a particular culture".⁴ It means a people's experience of Christ leads to the start of a distinctive history of their own and "to bring forth from their own living tradition original expressions of Christian life, celebration and thought."⁵

But the second principle of authentic inculturation is the "pilgrim principle" which reminds us that while the Spirit of the living Christ always takes form in particular persons and their culture, the two are never simply co-terminus. There is always a tension between the Way of Christ and the ways of any culture, since all of them manifest both finitude and sin. Thus, the gospel will always put us out of step with society at some point or another. Put differently, Christian believers belong to two cultures, the current one in which we have been shaped and nourished but also another one, the traditions which we share with all Christian believers. "In Pauline language, while living as the people of Philippi or Corinth or Rome, they have a citizenship in heaven."⁶

An ongoing challenge of inculturation is discerning in any particular time and culture the right relationship between the two cultures or between the two principles.

We turn now to look at some of the factors entailed in such an inculturation process.

³ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996) p. 452.

⁴ Bosch, 454.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989) p. 194.

III. FACTORS ENTAILED IN INCULTURATION

A. Control and Time

Inculturation of the gospel into a culture must be done by those inside it. The power and authority to conduct the process of inculturation over an extended period of time is central, says Bob Thomas. Of course, language is an essential dimension of this power, and to their credit many missionaries were diligent not only in learning and using a Native language but also in aiding the translation of the Bible. For genuine inculturation to go forward the primary agents must be "the Holy Spirit and the local community, particularly the laity".⁷

The Easter ceremonies of the Yaquis (Yoeme) people of Mexico and southern Arizona illustrate well how a people of a particular culture can blend and weave their own sacred and mundane stories into the great, sacred Christian story. Throughout Lent, masked dancers representing various spirits of chaos and death show up at every community event slowly taking over the village. On Good Friday they join with the soldiers of Rome and before the whole village they bring forth Jesus (in effigy) and crucify him. However, by Easter Sunday these forces are finally overcome by the redemptive power of Christ working through the deer and other good animal spirits represented by various dancers. These dancers, together with the women and children, vanquish the forces of death and chaos by showering them with rose petals, which symbolize Christ's blood. Jesus is risen, born anew. The world is safe for another year!

The Yaquis have had both control and time. They invited Jesuit missionaries into their community in the 17th century and 100 years later asked them to leave. Since then, over a period of 200 years they have carefully worked out in terms of their own worldview and traditions a way of comprehending and expressing the gospel, all the while seeing themselves very much as faithful Catholics.

⁷ L.J. Luzbetak, cited in Bosch, 453.

"Culture is not a mere refinement that is added onto one's being. . . . It is rather an entire pattern or design for life in which the identity of each of its members is at stake."⁸ In the case of traditional Native societies, the whole of culture is an interaction with the sacred universe, which is alive with beings and fraught with supernatural meaning. Religion thus permeates all of life. As a Kickapoo elder put it, life is like a person's hand. "The fingers are like different parts of Kickapoo life": working, governing, educating, and the like. But the palm of the hand is religion and "all the fingers are attached to that palm and dependent on the centering function of the palm". Religion, then, is not simply one segment or unit of life and culture as it tends to be viewed in modern societies. Rather, changing the palm — the understanding of and relation to the sacred — has implications for every area of life. Only cultural insiders can work all this out, and it takes time.

Are we non-First Nation Christians aware of our own inculturation of the gospel, and are we consciously attending to it and its implications for every area of life?

B. The Way in Which the Gospel Is Delivered

"Gone to Metlakatla." This stark message is carved on a rock on a tiny island off the west coast of BC, still visible at low tide. It is all that remains of a once flourishing, but hastily abandoned Tsimshian fishing outpost. The inhabitants left it in the 1870s to live in the new model Victorian village established by William Duncan, designed to facilitate their civilizing and Christianizing.

The significant factor here affecting inculturation of the gospel by Native people is not that the gospel came in a European cultural form, but rather that it was delivered with the underlying assumption that European theology was supracultural and universally valid. In this regard, Duncan, like most missionaries from earlier centuries, reflected the Constantinian assumption that the church is the bearer of culture and that "its missionary outreach thus meant a movement

⁸ Gonzalez, 34.

from the civilized to 'savaged' and from a 'superior' culture to 'inferior' cultures"⁹

But in the 19th century the rebirth of missionary zeal, of which Duncan was a part, was marked by additional features that affected Native inculturation of the gospel. One was the general agreement that "a lower culture coming into contact with a higher one was doomed to extinction. Aborigines could hope to survive only by becoming like Europeans, and it was the responsibility of missionaries and administrators to give them all possible help."¹⁰

Not surprisingly, many Native converts tended to assume that dying to the old life and rising to the new in Christ meant leaving their culture and entering into the emerging Canadian mainstream version of European cultures. At the very least, this slowed the process of inculturation. Some First Nations people still see Christianity as a "white man's religion". When I recently asked a well respected elder why so many Native communities in a particular nation still preferred white clergy to one of their own, he replied, "if you became a Buddhist which would you trust most, a Chinese Buddhist spiritual guide or a California convert?" Another 19th and early 20th century feature was that the culture to which the gospel was unquestionably connected was post-enlightenment modernity — secular social reforms, utopian ideals, and the underlying worldview of modernity, which included scepticism about vital parts of the Bible. This worldview is much further removed from, and alien to, traditional Native cultures than the one underlying pre-enlightenment European cultures. It made mutual understanding between Natives and European missionaries, and Native inculturation of the gospel, even more difficult. There are many points of resonance between the world of the Bible and pre-enlightenment Christian traditions on the one hand, and on the other, the sacred universe of Native peoples with living spirits, learning from animals, vision quests, holy places, the laws for

⁹ Bosch, 448. .

¹⁰ J.W. Grant, *Moon of Winter* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984) p. 75

relating rightly to the Creator and the land, human violation of those laws and the need for reconciliation, and the like.

A working hypothesis of mine is that the more Christianity has been captured by the culture of modernity and become a carrier of it, the more difficult it makes it for Native people to inculturate the gospel, the more destructive it is of their cultures and the more antagonistic it is towards their religions. Many of the stumbling blocks in relating the gospel to Native traditions and cultures has not to do with difference between them and the Bible, or much of the Christian tradition, but rather with the thought and sensibilities of modernism.

C. Social Context in Which Inculturation is Taking Place

Of course, social conditions affect both the way the gospel is delivered, and also how it is heard and inculturated. The Nez Perce were a flourishing people when they hosted the Lewis and Clark expedition and first heard the scripture. They later sent a party to St. Louis in search of the "Book of Heaven", saying that they had long expected someone like Jesus Christ. In contrast some Ojibwa areas by the late 1800s were rife with bad medicine practices (the use of spiritual healing power for revenge or other personal agendas). The gospel of salvation in Christ came as good news, indeed. At the same time, Tsimshian and other west coast peoples, including the Haida, were largely decimated by disease, and their cultures eroded, by intense participation in trade with the strangers, when they heard the gospel from Thomas Crosby, or left for the village of Duncan. Under these circumstances, were they perhaps as much interested in acculturation into western Christianity as in inculturation of the gospel?

First Nations have encountered the Christian gospel under many different social conditions — partners with the strangers in trade, allies with them in war, enemies suppressed and colonized, devastated by disease, pressured by a range of policies to assimilate, shredded cultures mired in poverty, urbanization. It is remarkable

that none of these has completely stopped inculturation of the gospel, though it clearly affected the rate and shape of it.

Today, First Nations still find themselves in quite varied social conditions. But all are impacted by the global phenomenon of decolonization since the Second World War. By way of illustration, I point to two pertinent features of this decolonization.

(a) The first is cultural recovery and revival. With it has come a new confidence and vigour by First Nations Christians in pursuing inculturations of the gospel. But Justo Gonzales warns there is a danger for those representing non-dominant cultures that "we may fall into the trap of romanticizing culture." This commonly takes two forms. "One is to idealize one's culture, as if it were perfect and did not stand in need of correction from the gospel."¹¹ As one traditional elder has said, some Native young people seem to think their ancestors never went to war, or scalped (saying this was a white man's invention), or committed atrocities, and were the perfect ecologists. "Every culture, though a God-given gift, has also been tainted by sin."

The second form of romanticizing is "to fall into a static understanding of culture. . . Indigenization shades into antiquarianism."¹² Cultures change, if slowly, to relate to new situations. But to what direction, kind and rate of change does Christ call *us*?

In short, both these forms of romanticizing can aid the indigenization principle but at the same time tend to obscure or make more difficult the pilgrim principle of inculturation. Unfortunately the romanticizing is aided and abetted by the non-Native New Age "Indian fad", and even some non-Native recent converts to inculturation! A team from the Vancouver School of Theology, visiting the Lakota community of Pine Ridge, enthusiastically recounted how our Native Ministries program fostered indigenization. The young Lakotas present were

¹¹ Gonzalez, 33.

¹² Gonzalez, 35.

enthusiastic. But finally a woman elder rose and said, "My grandmother was a medicine woman. She told me about both the goods and dangers of our medicine ways. But one day she had me watch while she buried her medicine bundle and said, 'We do not need this now. We have Jesus Christ'." I spoke with this elder after the meeting. Clearly she favoured indigenizing the gospel and reflected that in her own life. But in her own way, she was warning us all, particularly her young people, that inculturation also has a pilgrim principle.

(b) A second feature of decolonization is the continuing pressure, now more subtle, to adopt the ways of the dominant society. The problem has become not so much coercion but seduction. This has been a much discussed feature of globalization. However, it is especially potent for the "Fourth World" of indigenous minorities for they have been overwhelmed in their own country by a majority population. In that setting, decolonization brings no possibility of that population leaving and returning to the empire's home country.

The seductive secularizing ethos of the dominant society is identified by Bob Thomas as bringing "the most frightening change in Indian life in recent years". By secularizing he meant the understanding and establishment of all things as simply *things*, lifeless and without inner meanings of any kind except that of use for some project or human purpose. It is spread by the "new missionaries" — social workers, teachers, therapists, government workers of various kinds. Combating it is like trying to stop an incoming fog.

One way in which secularizing manifests itself is in the efforts of younger, urban Indians to recover their traditional religion/culture by adopting religious practices from various tribes, and inventing new religious rituals and ceremonies, generating a kind of "pan-Indian spirituality". Only truly secular people, Thomas claimed, think they can invent such things. These "neo-traditionalists" as they are sometimes named, tend to be very anti-Christian and charge Christian Natives with selling out to the dominate society.

Christianity, like Native cultures and traditional religions, for centuries operated in a sacred universe in which relationships, and attending to the sacred, are central. Now the culture of the dominant society is marked by ever-increasing individuation and secularization. What in these conditions should inculturation of the gospel entail? Christian responses to this have varied from Amish ("pilgrim principle") resistance and withdrawal to form an alterNative culture, to different kinds and degrees of incorporating or even total sanctioning of these features ("indigenization principle"). Can Native Christians learn from the mistakes and successes of these varied responses? Perhaps some forms of Native Christianity like Yaqui Catholics, Cherokee Baptists, Nis'ga and James Bay Anglicans, provide alternatives, as do some forms of African and Asian Christianity.

The Tataskweyak Cree on the Nelson River in Manitoba have recently illustrated this. Facing the possibility of further Manitoba Hydro expansion through the building of another dam that would flood more of their traditional territory, the Tataskweyak have had, for the first time, to write down their "theology and ethics" of the land. Their worldview and values are clearly grounded in Cree traditional culture and religion, and yet at the same time, reflect and illuminate biblical views of creation and land. In an interesting missionary reversal, they invited me to "translate" this material, under the guidance of the elders and community, into ethical terms that non-Native churches, as well as corporations and governments, might be able to understand, since all of these latter groups for different reasons oppose their position on the building of the dam.

I was doubtful that the churches would need such a "translation" until some Tataskweyak Anglican priests and elders presented their views to a group of Christian professional ethicists. One scholar asked, "you refer to god and the sacred a lot, what god are you speaking about?" The Tataskweyak presenters were amazed, shocked, insulted even. "Why the God of Jesus Christ, who else?" they replied, obviously surprised that the questioner could not recognize this.

What are the social conditions non-Native Christians now face in Canadian society, and how are they affecting inculturation of the gospel?

D. Member of the Ecumene

A fourth factor affecting inculturation of the gospel is access to and participation in the *ecumene*, the supranational, multicultural family of churches. It is not easy, given both our finiteness and sin, to discern when and in what respects the gospel enriches and fulfills our particular culture, strengthens and deepens it, challenges and changes it. How can we gain the perspective needed? Of course, constant return to the life, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as recorded in the Bible is vital. But as Newbigin rightly asks, "where do we find the stance from which we can look at ourselves and our community of faith from the point of view of the Bible when our reading of the Bible is itself so much shaped by the persons we are, formed by our culture?"¹³

The Christian *ecumene* with all its cultural diversity can be a "kind of universal hermeneutical community in which Christians and theologians from different lands check one another's cultural biases".¹⁴ Theologies and perceptions about practices can be exchanged to provide assistance in perceiving accurately what is not only according to a cultural perspective but "according to the whole".¹⁵ In some situations, the "only way the gospel can challenge our culturally conditioned interpretations is through the witness of those who read the Bible with minds shaped by other cultures."¹⁶ In my view, the Christian Tradition and traditions are a key part of this ecumenical resource for they reflect this kind of testing across both many cultures and time.

But sharing in such ecumenical conversation raises the important matter of respecting various cultural modes for expressing

¹³ Newbigin, 196.

¹⁴ P. Hiebert cited in Bosch, 457.

¹⁵ Gonzalez, 23.

¹⁶ Newbigin, 197.

Christian faith and “doing theology”. For Native Christians, as for many other oral cultures, this is done primarily in the form of narrative, testimony, dance, liturgy, feasts, ceremonies and art, rather than in analytical theological discourse.

With this sense of the role of the wider church and the comparing, supporting and correcting of each other, some now prefer to speak of “*intercultur~~ation~~*” rather than simply inculturation. Are non-First Nations Christians seeking and really open to hearing the challenges from other Christians in the *ecumene* regarding the faithfulness of our inculturation?

III CONCLUSION

These beginning reflections on inculturation of the gospel will, I hope, foster further conversations on this complex challenge which faces all Christians. Native Christians continue to bring new insights into the biblical roots of the faith and the renewal of the Spirit in Christ. My wife and I have benefitted greatly from these.

The rich cultural variety of perspectives on what God has done and is doing in Jesus Christ for the salvation of the world help us to lay a hold of that truth more fully. Of course, it transcends each of those perspectives and all of them collectively. We continue to see through a glass darkly. But in spite of our partial vision, distortions, violations and corruptions of this truth, somehow, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the gospel is still proclaimed to the nations, is heard, judges, redeems, and changes lives and peoples. Praise be to God!

Profile

GEORGE FLETT (1817-1897): Presbyterian Missionary to the Ojibwa at Keeseekoowenin Reserve near Elphinstone, Manitoba

by Alvina Block



My interest in George Flett began in the fall of 1995 when I took a course with Professor Jennifer Brown called "Reading Native History: Issues and Problems". The class met in the United Church Archives at the University of Winnipeg. Brown asked her students to write a paper based on records located at UCA. I perused the voluminous papers of Andrew Baird, who was the joint convener and secretary of the Foreign Mission Committee (Western Division) for the Synod of Manitoba and the Northwest Territories of the Presbyterian Church, between 1887 and 1899. George Flett's name kept appearing. Correspondence between Baird and Flett looked fascinating, and I was quickly drawn into research on Flett's life. My short paper for Brown eventually evolved into a Master of Arts thesis.

Although I found little information about Flett in secondary sources, his life story was easy to piece together from archival materials. Research led me to Elphinstone, where I met Osborne Lauder, great grandson to George and Mary Ross Flett. Lauder turned out to be an eighty-year-old man, driving a red Mazda truck, energetic and loquacious. He informed us that he was part Indian, although he was quite fair with a ruddy complexion. He took us to

Elphinstone's Indian cemetery, just off the reserve, where George and Mary Flett are buried. In 1996, their gravestones were inside a square iron railing fence, and were overgrown with weeds and shrubs. George Flett's tall tombstone read:

In loving memory of Rev. George Flett
Founder of Okanase Mission, Riding Mountain
October 28 1897, aged 81 years
And when on joyful wing
Clearing the sky
Sun moon and stars forgot
Upwards we fly
Still all our song shall be
Nearer my God to thee
Nearer to thee.

A suitable epitaph for a Presbyterian minister. The Foreign Mission Committee would have been happy with it; perhaps they helped Mary choose the verse from the song, "Nearer my God to Thee", for Flett's tombstone.

Chief Keeseekoowenin (Sky Man), also known as Moses Burns, was buried near George and Mary, as was Baptiste Bone, his brother. From a Keeseekoowenin elder, Old Baldy (Walter Scott), I learned that Flett was a first cousin to Keeseekoowenin and Baptiste, since their mothers were sisters. Flett's mother was Margaret (Peggy) Whitford of English and Cree ancestry; Keeseekoowenin and Baptiste's mother was Sara Whitford, one of the three wives of Okanase, the founding figure of the Ojibwa band in the Elphinstone area. I met Old Baldy, a ninety-three year old Ojibwa elder, and his wife of sixty-seven years, in June of 2000, at their apartment in Minnedosa. Old Baldy was a treasure store of information, as was the thick binder he had of the history of the Keeseekoowenin reserve. He is the grandson to Chief Keeseekoowenin, and thus he is related to Flett as well.

I observed that Presbyterianism seemed to have become extinct in Elphinstone and on the reserve. Yet in 1886, the FMC reported to the annual Presbyterian Assembly that

when Mr. Flett entered on his labours the Indians were pagan and uncivilized, and now they are a Christian community, living in comparative comfort, and, in the regularity and interest of their Church attendance, giving a good example to their white neighbours.¹

In 1895 Baird wrote for the benefit of the constituency that it must be a comfort for Flett, who was approaching retirement, to be "surrounded by a body of Christian Indians".² Baird wrote that the whole band had become Christian by 1895, Chief Keeseekoowenin being the last to take this step.³ In 1996, the existing churches were Roman Catholic, Ukrainian, and Calvary Gospel. Lauder told me that the Presbyterian church building on the reserve had burned down twice and had not been rebuilt. Old Baldy explained that the successor to George Flett had not cared for the people, had not bothered to learn the Ojibwa language, and had not visited.⁴ Thus interest in the Presbyterian Church had dropped. Old Baldy himself said that he had no use for religion; he said that the only hope for the world was in Jesus Christ.

George Flett was born in 1817 at Moose Lake, where his father, George Flett Senior, originally from the Orkneys, worked first as an assistant trader and then as a postmaster for the Hudson's Bay Company. George Flett Senior was one of the many employees who was retired by George Simpson soon after the merger of the Hudson's Bay and the North West Companies in 1821.⁵ In late

¹Acts and Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada 1886, Appendix xci.

²Andrew Browning Baird, *The Indians of Western Canada* (Toronto: Press of the Canada Presbyterians, 1895), 17-18.

³Presumably Christian meant Presbyterian to the Foreign Mission Committee. Baird wrote: "The old chief, the father of a grown up family of twelve children, saw them all, with his wife, become Christians and still remained [pagan], but a few years ago, after listening to Mr. Flett's pleas for fourteen years, his heart yielded and the whole family is now united in the Lord's service." Andrew Browning Baird, *The Indians of Western Canada* (Toronto: Press of the Canada Presbyterians, 1895), 18.

⁴Yet there have been caring Presbyterian ministers after Flett, such as J.A. Donaghy, James Marnoch and others.

⁵See E.E. Rich, ed., *Minutes of Council Northern Department of Rupert's Land 1821-1831* (London: Champlain Society for the Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1939), Appendix A, 213.

1823, the Flett family moved to Red River where George Flett Senior and Peggy Whitford were officially married by the Church of England minister, David Jones. On the same day Jones baptized their five sons, George (aged six) was the third oldest.⁶

Flett must have received some schooling at Red River, since he could read and write. As a result of his exposure to many peoples, Flett was fluent in Cree, Ojibwa, French, and English.⁷ Yet at times he felt his lack of education. In 1854, he closed a letter to his brother-in-law, James Ross, with these words: "I have wrot nothing but nonsense; what else could you get from Jordy."⁸ In a letter to Baird he wrote: "I hope you well make out my bad writing I have not Mr. Lauder to writ for me now and if I wrot you in my own tounge you could not read it neither all your Greek & Latin."⁹

He may have had a meagre education, but he did have exposure to a wider world than Red River. In 1835, Flett Senior thought he might make more of a fortune for his family if he moved east "where dangers from grasshoppers and floods were not to be reckoned with; where the market for farm produce was larger and more lucrative; where more of the benefits of civilization might be had, and with greater ease and certainty."¹⁰

In 1887, Flett told the story of the family's journey (in retrospect) to William Coldwell, his brother-in-law, and the editor of the Winnipeg Free Press. The whole Flett family journeyed to the Sioux Ste. Marie region, but did not find what they were looking for. They returned to Red River in 1836 because they strongly preferred the buffalo hunt to ice fishing. However, during their winter in the East, young George was influenced by a great council

⁶ Rich, Appendix A, 213.

⁷ Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Ross Family Collection, MGs C14, Letter No. 68, George Flett to James Ross, 26 January 1854.

⁸ Ross Family Collection, Letter No. 68, George Flett to James Ross, 29 June 1854. Jordy was the Ross family's affectionate nick-name for Flett.

⁹ United Church of Canada: Archives of the Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario (UCA), Baird Collection E358-360, Flett to Baird, 28 March 1890.

¹⁰ William Coldwell, "Fifty-one Years Ago," Winnipeg Free Press, 12 March 1887.

of Indians with Baptist, Methodist, Roman Catholic, and Episcopal missionaries, which he apparently attended. According to Flett's recollections, one old chief told the missionaries:

It is the wish of this council...that you ministers go back to where you got those religions from,—that the Englishman go to our Great Father (William IV)—and that those who are Americans go and see our great grandfather, the President (Andrew Jackson)—and that you all confer with them and settle with them and among yourselves, which is the true religion. When you have done that, come back here and [then] will we listen to you. There is no use listening to you now, for you all disagree as to your religion, while we are all agreed as to ours!¹¹

In 1840, Flett married Mary Ross, daughter to Alexander Ross, the Red River sheriff, trader, and historian. Mary's mother was Sara Timentwa, whose father was an Okanagan chief, whom Ross met when he worked for the North West Company on the Pacific Coast. William Cockran solemnized George and Mary's marriage and witnesses were Cuthbert Grant, Francis M. Dease, and John Dease, all of whom had old North West Company connections.¹² The young Flett couple settled on the White Horse Plains.

Apparently Flett was a free trader who had connections with Norman Kittson at St. Joseph. In 1854, Flett wrote a letter to James Ross describing a trip he made to St. Joseph where he was "geatheren up some debts." There he met a group of Presbyterian missionaries to the Indians who tried to persuade him to join their mission because his knowledge of languages would be useful to them. Flett knew that the Catholics and the Baptists were already active at St. Joseph so he made the excuse that he was not a scholar, but the missionaries replied that he was "good a nough for indiens." Flett's final answer demonstrated how much the Sault Ste. Marie conference had influenced him as a child. He wrote to Ross that he had replied:

Now you are here...3 diferent denominitions for a few half breeds what will Mr. Belcurt say of you he will say that you are intoders and you will say no.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Provincial Archives of Manitoba, M30 St. John's Baptisms and Marriages, #351.

tanner will say that there is none like him...now the poor indian and half Breed will say how is it that this ministers differ so much, is each one got a God for himself and if not whom shall we believe. I told him what I heard the Indians and Half Breeds said to me that all of the ministers of the Gospel ought to gather and find out which is the true Religion and then come and tell us. then would we be willing to be Christians but the way that this ministers tell us we do not know whom to believe one tell us our religion is the true one and on others will come and take us what the man said is not true and a 3 and 4th will come and tell us so we do not know the truth as yet. so we will keep our own religion we Indians do not differ we all hold to the same Great Spirit.¹³

In June of 1862, George Flett went, with a group of would-be prospectors, to look for gold in the Rocky Mountains.¹⁴ From there he wrote that the Assiniboines who had been “enlightened by Mr. Randall” [Rundle] were becoming Catholics because of Father Lacombe’s work on the Saskatchewan River. Others were “crying out for a minister to come among them.” Flett praised Father Lacombe and the “Sisters of Charity” for their good works among the Indians. Flett continued (and this is obviously an edited version, since it greatly differs from Flett’s letters):

I know that some will say Flett is lost to the Protestant faith and has taken the Mother Church by the right hand of fellowship. Friends I have not done so, nor will I do so. But, give every one their due. I cannot but admire their industry, and think that religious privileges are very unevenly divided: that rotten valley of Red River, with a fine church and a Minister on every fourth point; and here is a fine country, with no Protestant Minister nearer than 200 miles. The Indians are all, I believe, inclined for religion....Why cannot a Minister live with them?¹⁵

From 1864 to 1866, Flett established an outpost for the Hudson’s Bay Company at Victoria, in the Edmonton District and worked there as postmaster. Meanwhile, the Methodist George McDougall had come into the area. McDougall said of Catholicism

¹³ Ross Family Collection, Letter No. 68, George Flett to James Ross, 26 January 1854.

¹⁴ The Nor-Wester, 11 June 1862.

¹⁵ The Nor-Wester, 18 April 1863.

that it was “only less pestiferous and Godless than Paganism itself”¹⁶ and he called Flett “a warm friend” of the Methodist mission.¹⁷

In 1866, at the age of forty-nine, Flett was convinced that his services as a missionary were needed on the Saskatchewan, in spite of his earlier reluctance to become a part of a competitive denominational mission. He joined James Nisbet in the first Presbyterian mission expedition to the Cree — a mission that came to be called Prince Albert. As a result of helping McDougall, Flett thought it would be a pleasure to preach and teach the Indians instead of trading with them.¹⁸ But his hopes were soon dashed when he realized that Nisbet wanted him mostly to do menial labor. He was unwilling to be Nisbet’s drudge, so his dream of being a preacher and teacher at Prince Albert was short-lived.¹⁹

Flett, his wife Mary, and their adopted daughter Annie, returned to Red River in 1867 where, in January 1870, Flett was an English delegate in Riel’s provisional government.²⁰ The Flett family left Red River in 1873. The Presbyterian Foreign Mission Board had assigned Flett to the area around Fort Pelly as a missionary to the Saulteaux in the Riding Mountain area. At first he worked as an itinerant, but by 1876 he had made the Okanase reserve (Keeseekoowenin) his headquarters. From there he visited other reserves such as Rossburn (Waywayseecappo) and Rolling River. Flett related to the Saulteaux as an equal and a listener. When he first came into the Fort Pelly area, all the Indians who traded at the Fort came to Flett’s place for a “great Council.” At the end of

¹⁶ James G. MacGregor, *Father Lacombe* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1975), 210. This quotation comes from a Catholic biographer and needs to be seen as such.

¹⁷ John McDougall, *Saddle, Sled, and Snowshoe: Pioneering on the Saskatchewan in the Sixties* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1896), 217.

¹⁸ United Church of Canada/Victoria University Archives, North West Correspondence 116/2/2, Flett to Nisbet, 22 July 1867.

¹⁹ Victoria University Archives, Flett to Nisbet, 22 July 1867, quoted in Nisbet to Reid 23 August 1867. Nisbet edited Flett’s letter since he wrote: “The following is a true copy of Mr. F’s letter with only the orthographical errors corrected.”

²⁰ Alexander Begg, *Alexander Begg’s Red River Journal & Other Papers*, ed. W.L. Morton (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1956), 285, 429.

the discussion, the assembled Indians said they would gladly let Flett read to them when he came to visit in their homes.²¹

The Presbyterian Foreign Mission Committee was pleased with Flett's work among the Saulteaux. He was "licensed and ordained missionary to the Indians" by the Presbytery of Manitoba on 18 August 1875 and received as a member of the Presbytery.²² Flett was fifty-seven years old when he was ordained; his formative years were behind him. His outlook on life and peoples was surely already well developed.

What was Flett's view of the Saulteaux at Okanase? He did not see them only as souls to be won; rather he ministered to body and soul. In the 1880s, during hard times when the buffalo hunt ended and crops failed, Flett helped the Indians with food, clothes, and money. He constantly pleaded with the FMC conveners to reimburse him. In his 1890 report to Baird, when economic conditions had improved a little, he opened a window through which we can glimpse how he related to the Saulteaux. He wrote:

The Indian men on this reserve can work as well as most of your Comon Whit folk. my Church and manse was built by the Indians of Okanase. make Thier bob sleighs and do all kind of work yes and some of them can drink whiskey Too - learn -by whit folk The women or wives ar very Clever most of them is very clean and tidy Hal hay and Clain out stables Buck saw wood yoke up there duble team drve to Church. this They do when the men arr off hunting - old and young make or nit mittens and socks as well as any old scotch Ladie.²³

Andrew Baird's view of Indians was at variance with Flett's perspective. In 1895, Baird published a brochure titled "The Indians of Western Canada." In it he wrote:

Our young and growing nation cannot harbor within its borders solid masses of heathenism...Possibly we affect to despise their barbarism and their dirt,

²¹ Victoria University Archives, fonds 116/2/1, Box 1 File 7, Flett to John Black, 19 October 1873.

²² Acts and Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada 1876, Appendix 72.

²³ United Church Archives, Baird Collection, E358-360, Flett to Baird, 28 March 1890.

but we are influenced by it none the less....It is therefore incumbent upon us as citizens, no less than as Christians, to save and build up this people. It is our only safety, no less than our plain duty.²⁴

Obviously, there was some difference in the way these two men thought of the Saulteaux. Yet, they worked well together until the 1890s, when the Board began to side with the English speaking teachers against whom Flett made complaints.

Flett resigned in 1895, not because he was seventy-eight years old but because he was frustrated with the FMC. He and his wife remained near Elphinstone, where their daughter and her husband, Annie and John Lauder, managed the store. The new Presbyterian missionary was Robert C. McPherson. The transition was not smooth. John Lauder wrote to William Coldwell, Flett's brother-in-law, that the "old man" was "very angry" because McPherson preached in English with no interpreter, held no Bible classes or prayer meetings, did not visit the Indians in their homes, built a new school to which almost no students came, and built a new mission house. From Flett's perspective he was doing little, other than drawing his pay.²⁵

Flett died in 1897. When Keeseekoowenin and Baptiste Bone died, they were buried near Flett's grave. Mary Ross Flett lived for fifteen more years. When she died in 1912, she was buried in the Indian cemetery beside her husband. The last part of the inscription on her tombstone reads:

The hours I spent with thee dear friend
Are as a string of pearls to me
I count them over every one apart
My rosary, my rosary.

An inscription such as this on the marker of a Presbyterian missionary's wife is a mystery. Mary must have had good Catholic friends. Did she make these friends after her husband died or did

²⁴ Baird 6.

²⁵ Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Coldwell Papers, Box 7, Lauder to Coldwell, 20 August 1897.

George Flett cooperate more closely with Catholics than he let the FMC know? The FMC reported in 1879 that Flett brought the "Gospel of Christ" to many "heathen Indians." Some of the "heathen" whom Flett had won for the Presbyterians had previously been "baptized into the Romish Church."²⁶ In his 1893 correspondence with Baird, Flett wrote about competing for souls with the priest at Rossburn. He requested more clothes "in order to have a better hold on the people."²⁷ Yet, Catholicism could have been quite a problem to Flett, if he opposed it. Okanase (also called Michael Cardinal), the "patriarch" of the band and Keeseekoowenin's father, had Catholic ancestors. One group of Saulteaux, belonging to the Okanase band, lived north of the reserve where they hunted and fished. Members of this group were Roman Catholic.

Further, Flett's reminiscences, as told to Coldwell with great relish in 1887, emphasized cooperation among denominations rather than competition. This while Flett was supposedly winning souls for the Presbyterians from the Roman Catholics. Perhaps without the Presbyterian Foreign Mission Committee's knowledge, George Flett remained true to the lesson he learned in Sault Ste. Marie. Perhaps he went to the Cree on the Saskatchewan and to the Saulteaux around Fort Pelly with his view intact that when all ministers of the gospel could agree upon one God, then the Indians would be willing to listen. Perhaps only on that premise was George Flett agreeable to becoming a Presbyterian missionary to the Indians of western Canada.

²⁶ Acts and Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada 1879, Appendix lxxxiii.

²⁷ UCA, Baird Collection, F396-397, Flett to Baird, 7 September 1893.

Reviews

GROWING UP PROTESTANT: Parents, Children, and Mainline Churches by Margaret Lamberts Bendroth New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002. \$30.00

Mainline churches, the United Church of Canada among them, are often assumed to be less interested in "Christian family values" than their evangelical counterparts. The irony of this supposition is not lost in Margaret Bendroth's excellent book on Christian child rearing practices. In this volume Bendroth notes that in fact there is a higher percentage of intact marriages and nuclear families in American mainline churches than in evangelical ones. It was liberals under the influence of Horace Bushnell who urged parents (and mothers in particular) to give the home a "redemptive" purpose; it was conservatives who decried their efforts as theologically suspect. How these religious ideals were challenged and changed by the encounter with modernity is the subject of this lively study of Protestant domestic piety.

Despite its assumed influence, mainline Protestantism has drawn

surprisingly little scholarly attention over the years. Bendroth attributes this neglect in part to its social invisibility: it is "the neutral backing to the ethnic crazy quilt of American diversity, the mythical standard by which everyone else becomes an 'other'" (p.1). She sets out to fill the lacuna with a presentation of the changing theological and scientific underpinnings of child rearing: the nineteenth century's growing unease with the traditional view of original sin that condemned even children who died at birth to divine judgment, revivalism's call for personal conversion once a person reached the "age of accountability," Bushnell's Christian nurture, and the burdens placed on the parents who attempted to meet the expectations of both scientific experts and church leaders — not always in agreement on the best child rearing practices. While the book deals primarily with mainline Protestant churches, other Christian variants are presented for comparison. My one small quibble is with the final chapter on "Alternative and Possibilities," which attempts to "decenter" the mainline focus with an account of a Roman Catholic movement (the postwar Christian Family Movement) and the story of the upbringing of an Afro-American civil rights leader (Martin Luther

King, Jr.). The purpose is clear but the result reads like an afterthought. On the other hand, analysis of evangelical approaches to family life are woven more seamlessly into the narrative line of other chapters.

Bendroth sketches quickly the new responsibilities of Victorian motherhood and the enhanced role of mothers in the progressive era as they set out to create a better world for raising children through their reform and mission activities. Although the difficulties of putting such ideals into practice had become clear by the 1930s, the Second World War renewed optimism about the redemptive potential of home life. The reader sympathizes as Bendroth describes the demands placed on parents who may well have wondered about the lasting damage of inept spiritual guidance inflicted on an innocent child. Little wonder religious education sparked a debate within liberalism, with some (notably Reinhold Niebuhr and H. Sheldon Smith) warning that the new methods were marred by weak doctrine and a problematic ecclesiology. The short-lived reassertion of the ideals of domestic Christianity in the 1950s soon gave way to the rejection of the family as a means of grace in the 1960s. A pattern emerges as we see the old emphasis on the Christian home as an *institution* with a redemptive role

in raising children giving way to a focus on the *relationships* within the family between parents and children, and later to concentration on *personal fulfillment* in sexual expression. This process gradually shifted attention from children to adults.

Thus has the stage been set for the current cultural clash over "family values", with evangelicals allied with Catholics stepping in to save the family from those who had exalted it for over a century. Bendroth explains how pro-family conservatives have taken over the family agenda and placed it on a different theological foundation, seemingly with no reluctance to speak unequivocally on issues that now divide or puzzle their mainline counterparts: child discipline, adolescent sexuality, abortion, and differences of gender and sexual orientation. But she cautions that evangelicals, who have tended to lodge their concerns about the family with parachurch organizations (lobby groups, social service organizations and therapeutic agencies), may soon find themselves faced with the same question liberals struggled to answer: what's the church for?

While Bendroth looks only at mainline Protestantism in the United States, readers will find the situation of the United Church of Canada and its antecedent

denominations mirrored in many of its pages. The shift from home to family relationships to personal fulfillment that she describes is evident in the United Church as well, although developments in Canada sometimes lagged by a few years. For example, the United Church's New Curriculum, launched in the 1960s, paralleled earlier Presbyterian efforts in the United States; the limitations of the family-centred approach which she identifies (pp. 112-15) were evident by the time Canadian materials were coming off the press.

Bendroth has produced an excellent study of mainline Protestant approaches to child rearing, rendering extensive research in polished prose that will inform, delight and at times even amuse the reader.

– Phyllis D. Airhart

**FEMINIST
THEOLOGIES FOR A
POSTMODERN
CHURCH: Diversity,
Community and Scripture
By Loraine MacKenzie
Shepherd
New York: Peter Lang
Publishing 245 pp. \$53.25**

Loraine MacKenzie Shepherd takes her readers on an inviting tour of the writings of four different but

contemporary feminist theologians – Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, Mary McClintock Fulkerson, Kwok Pui-lan and Kathryn Tanner – in order to draw out from them insights on theological method. In particular, she has focused on the development of a theological method that seriously considers the use of scripture and understandings of authority and biblical interpretation. She does so in order to provide a window on the experiences of those who are marginalized and to challenge Protestant faith communities in and beyond North America to right relations and unity in the midst of diversity.

At the outset, Shepherd provides a helpful definition of the term “feminist” – attending to “multiplicative sources of domination within church and society, only one of which concerns gender.” This signals to readers her primary assertion that the liberation of the oppressed and respect of diversity are essential features of a liberative theological method. Also of help is the detailed glossary she has included at the back of the book. This assists first-time readers traveling through the territory of feminist writings and analysis by clarifying frequently used terms and philosophies. For example, her definition of “liberal” goes beyond emphasis upon human rights, equality, individual freedom and

democracy to include emphasis upon the inclusion and equality of voices with their diverse identities and theological perspectives.

Shepherd considers four theological methods reflected by four feminist theologians, each of which addresses the crisis of authority and biblical interpretation. These four are: critical modern (Fiorenza), poststructural (Fulkerson), postcolonial (Pui-lan) and postliberal (Tanner). By categorizing each of these four feminist theologians, Shepherd admits that she runs the risk of oversimplifying and denying the transitory and developmental nature of methodologies.

Speaking from her experience as both a minister and theological educator within the United Church of Canada, Shepherd intimately knows that scripture is integral to theology and ministry within this Protestant denomination. She has observed first-hand the inadequacy of modern, liberal theological approaches to address the ways traditional doctrine and scripture can be used for oppressive ends. This is particularly the case for those who have a minority sexual orientation and find themselves further alienated by liberal attempts to become more inclusive. For this reason, the questions that focus her analysis are: Do we need to move beyond a liberal model of inclusion

in order to allow all voices to be heard? How can multiplicative oppressions be addressed?

Shepherd takes 163 pages (well over two-thirds of the book) to outline the four feminist theological methods. Graduate students and academic researchers will appreciate Shepherd's detailed summary of each writer's evolutionary theological methodology, as well as her critical, thorough and illuminating examination of the similarities and differences between them. However, laity and clergy responsible for policy making in denominational contexts may find Shepherd's secondary presentations of each theologian and method somewhat plodding and seemingly better suited to the format of a doctoral dissertation than as a resource for congregations or denominations.

The relevance of her investigation becomes clear in the final third of the book when she examines "the usefulness of a braided combination of these four methods" within the United Church of Canada as it struggles with issues of diversity and marginalization relating to sexuality. Shepherd asserts that gaps in each method "may not necessarily be a weakness but may simply affirm a need for a variety of methodologies to work together and complement one another."

Using sexuality as the lens for exploring a fresh, complementary feminist theological method is very timely for the United Church. Since the appointment of a minister for Racial Justice and the formation of a Racial Justice Advisory Committee, matters of equity and unity amidst diversity will be addressed in anticipation of the next General Council meeting in Thunder Bay. While Shepherd's application of a braided feminist theological method emphasizes scriptural authority in relation to gender and sexual orientation (and examines in particular the church's sexuality documents from the 1960's to 1980's), her conclusions are transferable to all expressions of human diversity.

Perhaps her most striking conclusion is that "a liberal focus upon the inclusion of marginalized people into the existing structures of church and society also ignores questions about the oppressive nature of the structures themselves, which may have contributed to the exclusion of marginalized people in the first place." This statement coupled with Shepherd's assertion that "it would be helpful for the United Church to begin the identification of its multiple faith traditions within its own diverse communities" challenges us to better understand, appreciate and engage our multiple, sometimes

contradictory, theological identities. Drawing upon the strengths of our traditions may help us to recognize both their oppressive and liberative aspects.

It is clear that Shepherd privileges those who are faced with multiplicative oppressions and that a liberative theological method that seeks to address such oppressions must necessarily establish emancipatory criteria from within each community of faith. Regarding the United Church, Shepherd appropriately suggests that such criteria could emerge from the UCC's social gospel tradition and the resisting regimes of those marginalized both from church structures and society at large.

— Jean Stairs

THE EARLY STORIES

1953 - 1975

by John Updike

New York: Random House, 2003.

833 pages \$50.00

"I'm not trying to force a message upon the reader," John Updike once told an interviewer, "but I am trying to give human behaviour theological scrutiny as it's seen from above." That scrutiny is sharpest and purest in Updike's short stories which lend themselves

to little but unmistakable explosions of judgment and grace.

This sumptuous collection of 103 of those early stories includes the classic "Pigeon Feathers", a story resurrecting the often debunked but still intuitively powerful argument from design. Only Updike gives it a christological flavour. Young David, disillusioned by his platonistic mother and reductionistic minister ("David, you might think of Heaven this way: as the way in which the goodness Abraham Lincoln did lives after him.") hears the voice of the risen Christ speaking to him out of the midst of death. Pigeons are killed, birds as plentiful and valueless as any fallen sparrow. But still, God's creatures, God's handiwork:

"As he fitted the last two, still pliant, on the top, and stood up, crusty coverings were lifted from him, and with a feminine, slipping sensation along his nerves that seemed to give the air hands, he was robed in this certainty: that the God who had lavished such craft upon these worthless birds would not destroy His whole Creation by refusing to let David live forever."

"Separating," another classic, offers a horror story for anybody contemplating divorce. Richard is given the unenviable task of breaking the news to each of his four children. Dickie, the eldest son and

"closest to his conscience", is the last to be told. The kid takes it well. But then Richard makes the mistake of returning to the boy's bedroom to turn off the radio. Father and son indulge in small talk, Richard professes his undying love to the boy, and then it happens:

"Richard bent to kiss an averted face but his son, sinewy, turned and with wet cheeks embraced him and gave him a kiss, on the lips, passionate as a woman's. In his father's ear he moaned one word, the crucial, intelligent word: 'WHY?'"

"WHY. It was a whistle of wind in the crack, a knife thrust, a window thrown open on emptiness. The white face was gone, the darkness was featureless. Richard had forgotten why."

So many stories here are bursting with literary glory and theological power. "The Deacon" displays the magnificence of the church in the face of its not infrequent shabbiness and even emptiness. "The Christian Roommates" dresses up the prodigal son and his stodgy brother in the casual togs of Harvard undergraduates. "Should Wizard Hit Mommy?" transposes St. Paul's swimming-against-the stream ethic into a charming bedtime story. "The Carol Sing" captures our wistful longing for immortality in the midst of Christmas celebrations.

"Minutes of the Last Meeting" offers a fresh description of Hell in terms of endless committee work. And "Lifeguard" offers a Kierkegaardian parable urging us to swim out to the deep where we can drown but also experience the rescuing arms of the saviour. The lifeguard is a divinity student who lustfully beholds "the dimpled blonde in the bib and diapers of her bikini," and then — a line that, I must say, has comforted me greatly over the years — comments, "You are offended that a divinity student lusts? What prigs the unchurched are. Are not our assaults on the supernatural lascivious, a kind of indecency? If only you knew what de Sadian degradations, what frightful psychological spelunking, our gentle transcendentalist professors set us to, as preparation for our work, which is to shine in the darkness." The lifeguard's final observations could serve as a text for all of Updike's kerygmatically packed stories:

"So: be joyful. BE JOYFUL is my commandment. It is the message I read in your jiggle. Stretch your skins like pegged hides curing in the miracle of the sun's moment. Exult in your legs' scissoring, your waist's swivel. Romp; eat the froth; be children. I am here above you; I have given my youth that you may do this. I wait. The tides of time have treacherous undercurrents.

You are borne continually toward the horizon. I have prepared myself; my muscles are instilled with everything that must be done. Some day my alertness will bear fruit; from near the horizon there will arise, delicious, translucent, like a green bell above the water, the call for help, the call, a call, it saddens me to confess, that I have yet to hear."

Kierkegaard once threatened to "stir up the entire church from custodian to consistory" if it refused to recognise the absolute greatness of Mozart. And Updike has been called -- need I say anything more? -- "the Mozart of our technological age."

— John McTavish

GOD'S SECRETARIES:
The Making of the King
James Bible
by Adam Nicolson
New York: HarperCollins
2003, 260 pp. \$38.95

St. Jerome possesses the record. His Latin translation of the Bible, known as the Vulgate, held the field in the western church for over a thousand years, and in the Catholic Church for an additional three and a half centuries. But by more recent standards the King James version did very well: it was *the* Bible in the English-speaking world for 350

years; the rhythms and cadences of that rendition affect our conversations to the present day; and it's still a good seller.

There were fifty translators involved in the project that produced the King James Bible. By contrast, William Tyndale, in the 1520s and early 30s, worked by himself on rendering the Bible into English, with some help from Miles Coverdale. Then following Tyndale's execution in 1534, Coverdale, depending greatly on what Tyndale had done, laboured on his own to produce, in 1535, the first full Bible published in English that was based on the original languages. And then there were several small team translation efforts later in the century that put out their own versions. But it was a fifty-strong band of scholars, divided into six "companies", which produced the King James Bible that appeared in 1611.

Adam Nicolson tells us how it came about. He could have done so easily in less than half the space, but I'm glad he didn't. It's a book about the age, running from the last years of Elizabeth through the first half of the reign of James I. Nicolson gives us a feel for the personalities involved who functioned around the court, and who held positions of importance in the church and in the two universities. He provides an

engaging description of the Hampton Court conference in 1604, which was where James was persuaded to authorize the preparation of a new translation of the Scriptures. At the time several of the 16th century versions were in use throughout England — by far the most popular being the "Geneva" Bible, which had been prepared in Geneva by English refugees in the mid 1550s. Now the suggestion was put forward that a new translation be done which would supersede all the others. James gave his consent, but ordered that it must contain no marginal notes — a swipe at the Geneva Bible, which was full of highly partisan comments in the margins, some of which the king considered to be seditious.

The new version was, of course, to be based on the Hebrew and Greek texts, but in the rules sent out by the Archbishop of Canterbury it was mandated that careful comparisons be made with the six translations that had appeared in the previous century. The team was to pay particular attention to the so-called Bishop's Bible of 1580, which, though unpopular, was the official Bible of the English church.

The result was wondrous. Nicolson comments that for the modern frame of mind, committees do not produce works of art; only individuals do that. But out of this

fifty-member team, with its multiple comparisons and revisions, came a translation of outstanding quality. "It both makes an exact and almost literal translation of the original and infuses that translation with a sense of beauty and ceremony" (p. 196). This is all the more remarkable, considering that the Greek of the New Testament is often coarse and clumsy. "Endless conversation and consultation flowed across the final judging committee, testing the translation *not by sight but by ear*" (p. 223, italics mine). And we should add that, unlike some 20th century versions that render the Bible into common speech, this team didn't have such a goal. Even to the people of the time, the King James Bible sounded distinctly mannered; the translators "were not pulling the language of the scriptures into the English they knew and used at home" (p. 211). Surprisingly Nicolson never draws the comparison, but clearly the King James Bible was like the *Book of Common Prayer*, in that the latter contained a stylized prose no contemporary would ever have employed in the market or the pub. And isn't that partly why both endured the way they have? We shouldn't assume, though, that the new version immediately took its place as the sole choice for English-speaking Christians. The Geneva

Bible, for instance, was still the favourite for many, and continued to be published for a time. But eventually the King James version displaced all the others.

Some readers of this book will be surprised to learn that the King James team didn't confine their efforts to the Old and New Testaments; they also translated the Apocrypha. I allude to surprise since for generations the King James Bible has been published solely with the two Testaments. The Apocrypha was included in the early editions, but with the passing of time, pressure from the Puritan wing of the church that didn't consider the Apocrypha to be truly Scripture, led to the Bible being printed without it.

By modern standards, England was sparsely populated in the early 17th century. Yet out of a very limited pool they found fifty people who were capable of taking part in such a specialized project. It indicates how much emphasis existed at the time on a command of the ancient tongues. Nicolson claims that Lancelot Andrewes, the head of the company that translated Genesis - II Kings, could speak fifteen contemporary languages and six ancient!

Readers will find this a rewarding book to explore.

— Mac Watts