

# *Touchstone*

Volume 33

October 2015

Number 3

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## EDITORIALS

### Worship and the Sacramental Life

For what purpose does the church exist? It is *de rigueur* to say that the church exists for mission, or, more accurately, for the service of God's mission. Certainly that it is the spirit of "Mending the World," a key document of The United Church of Canada and of other statements regularly made by the United Church. The World Council of Churches has lifted up the triadic mandate, "justice, peace and the integrity of creation," as vital to its understanding of mission. Hymns old ("Where cross the crowded ways of life") and new ("As a fire is meant for burning") move Christians to take up discipleship as integral to the life of faith and to serve the neighbor in Christ's name. Mission has a pre-eminent role in calling Christians to self-critical awareness that the church can never become so focused on its interior life that the needs of the world, and God's love and care for the world, are forgotten.

Yet, to play with Vince Lombardi's famous statement, could we really say, "mission isn't everything; it's the only thing"? The church exists for mission, but the service of mission requires the motivation, education, and care of its members. Without such vital functions, few would be equipped to be engaged in mission. Above all, this means recognizing that the church also exists to serve God's praise, and in its worship life to offer an invitation to Communion with God in Christ. So too, it exists to educate its members—about the nature of faith, the meaning of Scripture, and the shape of Christian faithfulness in the church and in the world. Moreover, it exists to support and encourage its members as they pass through pivotal passages in human existence.

The risk is always present for an activist church to focus on what practically-minded Christians can do in God's name. But it is God who has the initiative in mission. God's mission to the world includes the offer of mercy to the world in Jesus Christ and also the calling into being of the church as a people of God who are given abundant life in Christ. The pre-eminent command of the One who is in mission is that believers should "love the Lord your God with all your heart, and strength, and soul." From one end of the Bible to the other, it is clear that the primary place appointed for the expression of this love is in worship.

Early in the Second World War, Archbishop of Canterbury William Temple said: "This world can be saved from political chaos and collapse by one thing only, and that is worship. For to worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with

truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God." Perhaps we might think that Temple overstated the positive impact of worship on individuals and their culture. But today we are not in danger of overstating the importance of worship. Indeed, the great challenge for us is that we may expect too little of worship. One result is that congregations may tolerate much that is trivial in our services. Surely there is something of moment at stake when we gather before the Maker of heaven and earth. Whether it is the great narratives of Scripture illuminating the meaning of our own days, the naming of the realities of sin and suffering, the good news of the reach of God's mercy, the challenge of discipleship, or the lifting up of prayer that is passionate, if such matters are not at stake, then it is no wonder if a worship service generates only boredom.

The theme of this number of *Touchstone* is worship, and, in particular, the sacramental life. The worship life of many of our congregations has profited from the liturgical renewal that began with reforms of the Second Vatican Council. It became a moment of ecumenical convergence: as the Catholic Church turned to greater emphasis on the place of Scripture in its liturgy and life ("The treasures of the Bible are to be opened up more lavishly"), many Protestant churches adopted a revision of the Catholic three-year lectionary and began to give more attention to the central role of Baptism and the Lord's Supper in worship. We were learning the importance of the non-verbal aspects of worship, making more expressive use of symbols and actions, particularly in the sacramental use of water, bread and wine. The eye was to prove an effective ally in worship, and we began to open ourselves more intentionally to the God who is Holy Mystery. Still, many of our churches continue with more prosaic observance of the sacraments, apparently happy to get through them as expeditiously as possible.

To speak of a sacramental life is to emphasize that the sacraments and other rituals of worship point us to a more integrated understanding of worship. As important as the reading of Scripture and the preaching of the Word continue to be, other aspects of Christian worship, such as intercessory prayer, the offertory, the use of silence, and the imaginative and generous use of symbols, enrich the breadth of our experience of God's presence in worship. Alongside the observance of the dominical commands to baptize and to remember the living Lord in breaking the bread and sharing the cup, the sacramental life may be seen to include all ritual actions that, through appeal to the senses, bring the whole person

into relationship with God. Even the silence of meditation and the singing of Taize choruses can have a sacramental quality as we become more aware of our own breath and of the breathing of the Holy Spirit and the harmonies of shared song. Whatever becomes a means of grace for us thus has sacramental value. Moreover, such ritual observances teach us “to be alert to the sacred in the midst of life” (A Song of Faith”). The daily bread of our tables, the lifting of a glass with friends, the flow of water in a stream, and the awed beholding of the starry sky can speak to us of the goodness of God in creation and of the engagement of Jesus in it as the incarnate One.

In our first article, Bill Kervin, who served for many years as a member of the *Touchstone* editorial board, draws on his long experience in both teaching and practising the art of worship. Bill’s decalogue for worship leaders provides an invaluable check-list by which we can begin to measure our practices today. In his turn, Ed Searcy reflects with love on his relationship with the campus-based, Vancouver congregation from which he has just retired. He offers an account of growing with its members into a ministry centred on the sacraments and other rituals, liturgical acts that have bound people more deeply to one another and to God in Christ. Then military chaplain Mike Gibbons tells of the shape of a sacramental life as he has experienced it in a battle theatre in Afghanistan and on board a ship on fire in the Pacific.

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to experience Holy Communion every Sunday in a United Church? Aaron Miller reports on the bold willingness of the village congregation in Ontario that he serves to undertake the adventure. Is the “specialness” of the sacrament lost? Read on to find out. In New Brunswick, Andrew O’Neill explores the possible broad meaning of “sacramental” in the life of a suburban congregation. In doing so he invokes his past experience at St. Giles’ Cathedral in Edinburgh and the correlative theology of Paul Tillich. Michael Brooks takes up the question of whether confirmation is a *de facto* third Protestant sacrament, and examines the state of health, or lack of it, of this rite. In the course of his discussion he presents an effective model for contemporary confirmation classes, as lived out in a suburban Ontario congregation.

In our “Heart” column, John McTavish reflects on his years in ministry, and the importance of theatre and novels as vehicles of Christian witness. He concludes with a poem written by his daughter that captures some of the true-to-life challenges he has faced in his ministry. The second part of our profile on J.S. Woodsworth, ably presented by Harold Wells, describes Woodsworth’s transition from embattled church

ministry to notable political career. He thus concludes this iconic story about where a man formed by Canadian Methodism was carried by his convictions about social righteousness. The usual five reviews round out the number.

### **Perspective on the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Council**

I was one among the three hundred and fifty delegates, or “commissioners,” of the 42<sup>nd</sup> General Council of the United Church, meeting this past August in Corner Brook, Newfoundland. I confess that I went with some trepidation, for, along with a proposal to restructure the governance of the Church, there seemed to be a series of church-altering transitions coming before this senior “court” of the Church. Indeed, it seemed possible that the United Church I knew was going to be, not so much restructured, as dismantled. While at Council, as I felt such concern, I kept interrogating myself: “Do your concerns arise from prudent reflection, or are they evidence of mere reaction?”

Several dynamics gave the Council a positive and encouraging spirit. First, Moderator Gary Paterson was exemplary in carrying out the prime responsibility of a moderator, presiding at Council. He led us through the complexities of procedure and debate with unfailing good cheer and resolve. Second, voices speaking in French were heard in notable ways, and there was fluidity, naturalness, and much good humour in them, allowing hearers to relax—and enjoy. Third, major time was given to presentations by TRC Commissioner Marie Wilson (a United Church member) and National Chief Perry Bellegarde. In an electronic survey taken at the end of Council, commissioners adjudged that the theme of moving forward with reconciliation between Indigenous people and other Canadians was the most significant matter presented at Council.

The music for singing and worship was also a positive for many, as it was provided by a worship band with a propensity to rock the house. The band indeed was effective, but its emphasis on contemporary song and a rock beat made me feel sometimes very alien. As some danced to the beat as they sang, a more seasoned soul observed, “I think they mistake these gyrations for the presence of the Holy Spirit.” One has to admit that, from one perspective, the music fit well with the overall theme of Council, God’s biblical word, “Behold I make all things new.” Most of the addresses (sermons and theological reflections), as well as comments from the podium, kept reminding us that we were there to discern and enact “God’s new thing.” Expressed another way, there was,

in the introductions to reports and accompanying stage directions, the insistent beat, *Change we must*. “Be brave,” we heard speakers say; “leap into the future.” I did wonder whether the eschatological drama of God’s consummating action in Revelation 21 actually was a good peg on which to hang our restructuring deliberations.

The Council had controversial matters from the public arena before it—like divestment of Church funds from fossil fuel companies and maintaining balance in addressing the Israel-Palestine deadlock. However, the main agendum clearly was receiving and acting on “United in God’s Work,” the report of the Comprehensive Review Task Group. The challenge of diminished financial and human resources, a result of a steady decline in membership and in (inflation-adjusted) giving over the last several decades, had led to the commissioning of such a task group. As presented, its report called for the end of the existing four-court structure formed at the time of union (pastoral charge—presbytery—conference—general council), and the establishment of a three-council model.

An earlier draft of the report of the Task Group (“Fishing on the Other Side”) had proposed only two levels of church government, that of a general council and of congregations. This proposal would have leaned very far in the direction of adopting a congregationalist polity. However, negative feedback from presbyteries and conferences led the task group to amend its original proposal, inserting an intermediate regional council between the general council and congregations. Even so, there was significant debate at Council about whether the regional council in a three-council model should have the responsibility of oversight, as well as support, for pastoral charges/congregations. Apparently unnoticed in the debate, and certainly unnamed, was the fact that without lodging such a responsibility of oversight in a regional body, the United Church would be stepping away from its historic understanding of polity, namely, that essential to a conciliar and connexional church is the function of *episkope*. Without oversight of congregations by a regional body the United Church would be abandoning its claim to possess a ministry of oversight equivalent to the exercise of *espikope* by bishops in other ecumenical churches.

### **Theological Education and “Competency”**

Two other important proposals before Council seemed to carry potential to alter significantly our understanding of the Church, in particular, its ordered ministry. One concerned moving to a competency-based model of theological education. This sounds as if it might be a good idea if the

current model were in fact “incompetency-based.” But the current model isn’t. Currently theological colleges and centres provide degree- and diploma-based education, teaching various competencies based on their curricula, curricula that include field education and practica. Since a teaching faculty has a close relationship with students in the educational venture, the faculties of our schools regularly communicate about the progress of candidates to their presbyteries and conferences. Ultimately the schools grant a *testamur* to graduating candidates, attesting their readiness to undertake ordered ministry. Thanks to the insistence of the pan-denominational Association of Theological Schools, degree-based programs already are focused on achieving practical outcomes, including competencies.

In contrast to the present model, the proposed “competency-based” model would bring the assessment of readiness for ministry completely within the structures of the Church. Instead of presbytery and conference Education and Student Committees receiving an arms-length report from the schools, now it would be one more church committee, likely of the General Council, making the “testamur” decision. Presumably candidates would be submitting a portfolio recording their achievement of various defined competencies to the new body. Some candidates might well attend a theological college to gain such competencies and a transcript record of them—but not necessarily a United Church one.

It is difficult to see how this proposed change would benefit the Church generally. It certainly will not benefit United Church theological colleges and schools: if candidates are free to prepare for ordered ministry in any setting, this will undercut the capacity of colleges to draw students from their customary United Church constituency. The chief reason for the proposed change seems to be the desire to accommodate exceptional cases, among them immigrant ministers, who have not had the opportunity to have a typical Canadian theological education. But there are other ways of solving this challenge than establishing a new rule based on exceptions.

Another call for change affecting ordered ministers is the proposal that the United Church should have a single order of ministry, an order including not only ordained and diaconal ministers, but also lay designated ministers. Such a change would mean *ordaining* diaconal ministers and designated lay ministers, as well as ministers of Word, sacrament, and pastoral care. Previously, United Church studies and statements on ministry have maintained that there are distinctive gifts and callings associated with the several forms of “paid, accountable

ministry.” Moreover, different forms of education, recognition, and authorization were thought to be appropriate to each of the distinctive forms. In particular, those serving in designated lay ministry and its earlier incarnations made the point that they wished to serve precisely as *lay ministers*. Has this conviction changed? What will the inclusion of lay designated ministers in the order of ministry mean for educational standards among all the “ordained”? Does it, in fact, make sense, without confusion in our own house or with our ecumenical partners, to include all under the designation “ordained”? Will one size fit all? Readers may be interested to learn that the new *Touchstone* website will host a discussion on this critical matter before the Church; perhaps the *Touchstone* discussion may help to clarify terminology and what is at stake for the Church. (See inside pages of the insert.)

### **Remits, Blessed Remits**

My chief concern with the restructuring proposal adopted by the Council, and with the other proposals that seem to be altering the shape of the church and its ministry, is that we will find ourselves preoccupied with restructuring and other changes for the next two triennia. First, all the changes endorsed by the General Council will have to be approved by a majority of the presbyteries of the Church, and, in some cases, by a majority of pastoral charges. The process for this approval is the sending down of “remit,” statements based on the decisions of Council calling for approval or disapproval by the lower courts. Supposing the remits are approved, only the meeting of the next General Council can enact them. And then it will take two or three years to implement the approved decisions. One wonders whether undertaking the changes will be worth it, and whether the changes will bring greater health or growing distress to the Church. At least three of the Conferences already have set in place major changes that are models of how we might learn to live within our means *within* the existing four-court system.

Not only will we have to deliberate in every presbytery and pastoral charge about several major changes to our institutional life in the next three years, but there is no guarantee that, after all the deliberation, the remits will pass. Moreover, we also will be focusing our attention on altering church structures rather than addressing what truly needs our attention and resolve. In a statistically declining church, we say (rightly) that we can no longer afford the financial and human resources to continue as we have in the past. But what is the reason for the decline, and why aren’t we focusing our energy on addressing the reason or reasons? Are we not making the classic mistake of addressing the

symptoms of a malaise without tackling the central cause?

Perhaps the remits will be defeated. Indeed, it has proved difficult over the decades for church-changing remits to pass both presbyteries and pastoral charges. We owe the system of remits, or necessary approvals from the lower courts, to the Barrier Act of the Church of Scotland, passed in 1697. The Barrier Act states that, before any decision of the General Assembly regarding an innovation may be enacted, it first must gain the approval of the presbyteries of the Church. Our remit system is a direct descendent of the Barrier Act, and was viewed as integral to the vision for the new United Church of Canada.

It is interesting to note that one of the proposals before the Council was moving the legal home of the United Church from The United Church of Canada Act (Parliament of Canada) to that of a non-profit corporation. The vote on this proposal, which required a two-thirds majority, was negative. Had the proposal passed, then a remit would have been required to make the shift, and ultimately the remit system and its safeguard against imprudent innovation would have been discarded. This would have led to a situation in which any General Council could vote successfully to change church doctrine or polity in the course of its meeting. In effect, we would no longer have a constitution—only easily changeable by-laws. Feel like becoming a congregationalist church today? Or would you like to try being a unitarian church for a few years? Meanwhile, in case it is misunderstood, nothing in The United Church of Canada Act gives the Parliament of Canada authority over the doctrine and polity of the United Church, or its decisions. Only the Church itself can make changes to its doctrine and polity, as declared in the Act and the Basis of Union, and according to its constitutionally-grounded remit system.

*Peter Wyatt*

# A LITURGICAL DECALOGUE: TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR WORSHIP LEADERS TODAY

by William S. Kervin

## 1. Thou shalt worship.

This may seem obvious, but it needs to be emphasized. Worship *leaders* need to be *worshippers*. Contrary to the Cartesian epistemological presupposition of modernity—Descartes’ “I think; therefore I am”<sup>1</sup>—we *worship*; therefore we are. We are not so much *homo sapiens* (“knowing beings” as *homo adorans*, worshipping beings. As Orthodox liturgical theologian Alexander Schmemann puts it, “in the Bible to bless God is not a ‘religious’ or ‘cultic’ act, but the very *way of life*.<sup>2</sup> In a similar spirit, the first commandment in the biblical Decalogue grounds all faith and ethics in this first principle—“have no other gods before me” (Ex 20:3; Deut. 5:7)—then everything else follows from there.

Worship leaders need to be engaged in the nurture of their own lives through intentional personal spiritual practices of worship. Over the years my own efforts at worship leadership have been enriched variously by such practices as following the “Rule” of the Iona Community,<sup>3</sup> reading the “Spirited Reflections” of KAIROS Canada,<sup>4</sup> listening to Taizé prayer podcasts on the subway each day,<sup>5</sup> sitting in silence with sighs “too deep for words” before a burning candle (Rom .8:26). As worship leaders, we often lament that it is hard for us to worship without being a liturgical critic, or harder still to worship when one is leading. Actors tell us that preparation and practice is key, and can deepen one’s capacity for engagement and enjoyment (see #8, below), but having a worship life beyond one’s own liturgical leadership is still a must. You’d be surprised by what your own worship life can do for your worship leadership.

Similarly, not only are we called to see ourselves as worshipping beings individually, but also as a part of worshipping communities,

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<sup>1</sup> René Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1998), 18-19.

<sup>2</sup> Alexander Schmemann, *For the Life of the World*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press), 15. For more on *homo adorans* see also 16, 118-19.

<sup>3</sup> “The Rule,” Iona Community, accessed 31 August 2015, <http://iona.org.uk/movement/the-rule>.

<sup>4</sup> “Spirited Reflections,” KAIROS Canada, accessed 31 August 2015, <http://www.kairoscanada.org/reflections-worship/spiritied-reflections>.

<sup>5</sup> “Podcasts,” Taizé, accessed 31 August 2015, [http://www.taize.fr/en\\_article681.html](http://www.taize.fr/en_article681.html).

collectively. A corollary could be added: Thou shalt be a worshipping *community*. As in real estate—“location, location, location!”—the three most important things in liturgical leadership are worship, worship, worship. Make worship a part of every gathering, committee meeting, pastoral visit, and political protest. Sing, pray, read Scripture, or pause in silence wherever “two or three are gathered” in order to remember the deepest purpose of our being here (Matt.18:20). This is a matter of spiritual life and death: our individual lives and collective life depend upon the God we worship. So, worship, worship, worship, and watch for the new life that God will raise up in us and among us.

## 2. Thou shalt let the symbols speak.

Christian worship, being a particular kind of human ritual activity, is symbolic activity. It stands for something else, pointing beyond itself to larger dimensions and deeper meanings. Seeking relationship with the God who is both Holy Trinity and Holy Mystery forces us to resort to metaphor and ritual, symbol and sacrament, to express the inexpressible. We turn to symbol and sacrament because we are embodied creatures, because God’s creation is all we have to image the unimaginable and because God has become incarnate “in Jesus, the Word made flesh.”<sup>6</sup>

In worship, all this adds up to the principle of sacramentality, our means of encountering the Holy One through the mysterious materiality of God’s good creation. One liturgical theologian has gone so far as to argue that anti-sacramentalism in the church is misguided.<sup>7</sup> I often wonder why every Christian is not an environmental activist. In the meantime, in worship let’s start by letting the symbols speak. If we have to work too hard to explain the meaning of a symbol, chances are it is either not a very good symbol, or the liturgy is not doing it justice. Try to get out of the way and let the symbols do their work. Light the candles and open the Book. Let smoke rise like incense from burning palm branches. Pour the water and listen to its abundant grace. Bring the stuff of God’s good earth to the table. Break the bread and give it all away. And pray that we will be poured out for the sake of the world.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> “A New Creed,” The United Church of Canada, accessed 31 August 2015, <http://www.united-church.ca/beliefs/creed>; John 1:14.

<sup>7</sup> Laurence Hull Stookey, *Eucharist: Christ’s Feast with the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993); see also William S. Kervin, *Gathered for Worship: A Sourcebook for Worship Committees, Leaders, and Teams* (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 2010), 82-83.

<sup>8</sup> See the epiclesis in “Prayer F,” *Celebrate God’s Presence: A Book of Services*

### 3. Thou shalt sing!

If, as Augustine suggested, “singing is praying twice,”<sup>9</sup> then it’s certainly a good liturgical investment. It’s noteworthy that for most of Christian history virtually the whole liturgy was sung. That chant and song typically carry better in spaces constructed with hard surfaces suggests that our diaphragm, rib cage, and larger skeletal structure is the original God-given amplifier, complete with its own resonating cabinet and stand. Singing engages body and mind, breath and spirit, and singing together can create a degree of relational communality few other experiences can match. Communal song has empowered prophetic movements, offered healing, and changed the world.

Research into the neuro-physiology of our experience of music shows that more parts of the brain light up when making music than when doing anything else.<sup>10</sup> We are hard-wired to experience music as a full-body experience. One thing the Praise and Worship movement in “contemporary” worship got right was to recognize anew the potential power of music in worship. CCM<sup>11</sup> has become its *de facto* sacrament, its primary “means of grace,” often supplanting the role of the traditional sacraments. That music can mediate such an embodied experience of the presence of God warrants careful consideration. The psalmist’s question has returned: How shall we sing the Lord’s song in this strange land of our post-Christendom exile?

Scholars of the renewal of congregational song tend to emphasize two themes: context and content.<sup>12</sup> How shall we sing? A re-examined context of worship locates the congregation as the primary

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for *The United Church of Canada* (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 2000), 257.

<sup>9</sup> Various forms of the saying are attributed to Augustine. See, for example, Brian Wren, *Praying Twice: The Music and Words of Congregational Song* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 1.

<sup>10</sup> Daniel J. Levitin, *This Is Your Brain on Music: The Science of a Human Obsession* (New York: Plume, 2006), 83-85.

<sup>11</sup> CCM is the popular and industry acronym for Contemporary Christian Music.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, John L. Bell, *The Singing Thing: A Case for Congregational Song* (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 2000); C. Michael Hawn, *Gather into One: Praying and Singing Globally* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); Michelle Robinson, “Music in Worship: Supporting Orientation, Disorientation and Reorientation” in *Touchstone* 33, no. 1 (February 2015): 40-45; Becca Whitla, “From the Heart of Song to the Heart of Singing” *Touchstone* 33, no. 1 (February 2015): 53-58.

choir, breaking down the passivity of audience versus performers or congregation versus choir found in both “contemporary” and “traditional” worship settings. Freeing human voices to sing together can harness the potential sacramentality of congregational song for deeper faith formation. (See also #2, above.) However, critically engaged participation is necessary in order to resist the consumerist commodification of so much of the popular culture that shapes our values. Liturgical and musical context also has to do with the social location of the church.

What songs shall we sing? The content of our music and song needs also to reflect more contemporary global and liberative concerns in relation to the witness of the gospel, rather than merely reinforce Victorian colonial piety or North American bourgeois individualism. The paradox of music today is evident in the simultaneous loss of communal singing and the ubiquity of earbuds, each person listening to his or her own playlist. Singing the Lord’s song in such a strange land will require that church musicians be trained, valued, and supported as the liturgical leaders that they are, and that we begin by singing together, attentive to the context and content of our songs.

#### **4. Thou shalt worship biblically.**

We search Scripture in vain for the definitive order of service. The Bible is not a manual for liturgy *per se*, though there is an important sense in which it is a product of worship. To worship biblically is not about saying “The Bible says . . .” throughout the service, but engaging Scripture *liturgically* as the liturgy’s primary resource.

The phenomenon of Scripture itself is the result of the historic process of gathering to hear about, and respond to, the experience of God’s presence. As a result, there’s lots of evidence of worship and liturgy in Scripture. The Psalms—“the prayerbook of the Bible”<sup>13</sup>—includes prayers of praise, blessing, thanksgiving, confession, lament, intercession, and supplication, as well as portions of actual liturgies. Other biblical books contain fragments of hymns, poetry, stories, sermons, proverbs, benedictions, and commissions. To worship biblically is to avail oneself of this treasure of liturgical forms.

For communities that follow the Revised Common Lectionary, not only is lectionary-based worship planning a good way to cover a lot of the biblical landscape in preaching, it is also an ideal way to include a

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<sup>13</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Psalms: The Prayerbook of the Bible*, trans. Daniel W. Bloesch, James H. Burtress (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996).

wide range of biblical content in other parts of the liturgy. Look for the liturgical dimension in the text—the Old Testament reading that evokes a hymn or song; the Psalm that can form the basis of a prayer of confession or lament; the Epistle that includes a blessing; the Gospel reading that can shape words for sending forth.

Biblical worship will also be diverse and inclusive, for Scripture contains a diversity of images, metaphors, and theological perspectives. Ruth Duck speaks of “expansive” language to make the point that inclusive language is about expanding the biblical range of our liturgical language and theology. It’s about being more biblical, not less.<sup>14</sup> The challenge of biblical illiteracy is unfairly left to preachers and Christian educators alone. Liturgists, musicians, artists, and poets offer rich gifts to our efforts to worship biblically.

## 5. Thou shalt cherish silence.

After a week of worship with the Taizé Community in France, where the liturgy consists largely of chant-like prayer and ample silence, the group of theological students returned to their congregations to find themselves noticing, as if for the first time, how much talk there is in our worship. “So much liturgical blah, blah, blah,” was how one put it. While there is profound gift and grace in being a people of the Book and witnesses to the Word, it often seems that we have lost much of the silent counterpoint which can give a well-chosen word added power. In our age of hyper-connectivity silence is suppressed by the constant presence of potentially everything, everywhere. Michael Harris calls it “the end of absence” and the death of daydreaming.<sup>15</sup> For people of faith, the risk is the demise of any sense of sabbath in our spiritual lives.

Just as a non-anxious presence is a vital aspect of pastoral care, so a less talkative leader can be a breath of fresh air in worship. A presider is not a talk show host. Resist the temptation to fill up all the available air with commentary, lest the congregation suffocate from liturgical asphyxiation. In worship, silence is not “dead air”; it is alive with the Holy Spirit and succour for souls weary from the wordiness and overstimulation of the world. Congregations may have to learn how to be silent together, starting with brief pauses and progressing to more

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<sup>14</sup> Ruth C. Duck, “Expansive Language in the Baptized Community,” in *Primary Sources of Liturgical Theology: A Reader*, ed. Dwight W. Vogel (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 286-294.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Harris, *The End of Absence: Reclaiming What We’ve Lost in a World of Constant Connection* (Toronto: HarperCollins Canada, 2014).

generous ones. A simple rubric in the bulletin or on the screen—*silence*—can help reduce confusion or anxiety. Silence can also help us in our efforts to resist putting inappropriate words in people’s mouths for prayer. Confessions and intercessions can be deepened by intentionally introduced periods of silent prayer. And carefully craft and minimize verbal instructions for liturgical participation—such as for receiving Communion—or put them in the bulletin, on screen, or simply allow others to visually model how it’s done. Avoid imitating the instructions of flight attendants. Efforts at hospitality are often ironically thwarted by too much information. Worship that values the simple gift of silence has a life-giving role to play in our life together and perhaps even a countercultural and prophetic role in our world.

## **6. Thou shalt worship ecumenically.**

Having been conceived in a spirit of ecumenical desire, The United Church of Canada has ecumenism bred deeply into its DNA. At its inaugural service in 1925 the liturgy included cherished hymns, prayers, and practices drawn from the founding traditions.<sup>16</sup> Subsequent generations of “authorized” (though optional) worship resources have always been marked by carefully considered ecumenical awareness and influence. In spite of the demise of a founding dream to become *the* national Protestant church and the shifting emphases in ecumenical endeavour, important work continues. Don’t believe the rhetoric of an “ecumenical winter.”<sup>17</sup> Ecumenical opportunities are not so much dying as evolving. In this context, ecumenism in congregational worship has a vital role to play. Gather locally, worship globally.

A plethora of liturgical practices can nurture an ecumenical ethos in our worship, among them: the Revised Common Lectionary and Christian calendar continue to be rich expressions of ecumenical gathering around the Word in worship, tailor-made for shared seasonal rhythms, joint Bible study, and common worship practices; join our ecumenical and global partners in prayer by using resources such as The Ecumenical Prayer Cycle of the World Council of Churches;<sup>18</sup> include

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<sup>16</sup> See the original document at “Archival Documents,” The United Church of Canada, accessed 31 August 2015, <http://www.united-church.ca/history/overview/archival#inaugural>.

<sup>17</sup> See Sandra Beardsall, “The Case of the Missing Ecumenical Spirit: Pulp Fiction for Delicate Sensibilities,” in *Touchstone* 32, no. 2 (June 2014): 18–27; and the other articles in the same number.

<sup>18</sup> “In God’s Hands: The Ecumenical Prayer Cycle,” World Council of Churches,

words, music and art from other denominations, traditions and cultures, taking care to learn about and respect the integrity of their origins, meanings, and performance practices; expand the intercultural diversity of participation in worship planning and leadership; explore opportunities for Ecumenical Shared Ministries;<sup>19</sup> observe the mutual recognition of Baptism in our PLURA agreement.<sup>20</sup> Interculturality, reconciliation with First Nations peoples, and interfaith relations can also each be seen as consequences of a renewed ecumenical vision, which is actually a recovery of the old, the Greek *oikoumene*, meaning “the whole inhabited earth.”<sup>21</sup> Commitment to ecumenism needs to be embodied in our local liturgical practices, lest our ethos devolve into a kind of denominational individualism precisely at a time when our world needs a robust communal witness to “abundant life” (John 10:10).

## 7. Thou shalt educate.

While there are many forms of education, good worship leadership especially values *liturgical* education, education for and about worship. The best Christian educational curricula appreciate both the educational dimensions of liturgy and the liturgical dimensions of education.<sup>22</sup>

In the early church the newly baptized often underwent a period of “mystagogical catechesis,” a time of instruction and reflection on the multi-layered meanings of the richly symbolic baptismal rites they had just experienced. In our time, we do well to learn about not only the doctrinal dimensions of our Baptism, but also the connections between

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accessed 31 August 2015, <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/prayer-cycle>.

<sup>19</sup> See “Ecumenical Shared Ministries,” The United Church of Canada, accessed 31 August 2015, <http://www.unitedchurch.ca/partners/relations/ecumenical>.

<sup>20</sup> “The Covenant of Baptism” in *Celebrate God’s Presence*, 322-323; Committee on Inter-Church and Inter-Faith Relations, *In Whose Name? The Baptismal Formula in Contemporary Culture* (Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 2001), 4, 40.

<sup>21</sup> Committee on Inter-Church and Inter-Faith Relations, *Mending the World: An Ecumenical Vision for Healing and Reconciliation* (Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 1997), 1, 5.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, “Theological and Education Foundation,” Seasons of the Spirit, accessed 31 August 2015, <http://www.seasonsonline.ca>; “About the Project,” Feasting on the Word, accessed 31 August 2015, <http://www.feastingontheword.net/Pages/Item/1443/About-the-Project.aspx>; “About Godly Play,” Godly Play, accessed 31 August 2015, <http://godlyplay.ca/about-godly-play>.

the water in the font and the water we daily pollute or commodify. Or, in Communion, the relationship between the bread we break and the brokenness of our world.

Every sermon, bulletin, newsletter, blog, meeting, or set of slides for worship is an opportunity for education for worship. Every season of the liturgical calendar is a new lens through which to view what God is doing. And every church budget bears witness to the support (or lack thereof) for lay and clergy education. I know of one congregation that includes an “Education for Worship” column in its bulletin every week, providing a short explanation of a liturgical term relevant to that day’s worship—e.g., Epiphany, lectionary, sanctus. Liturgical literacy is as helpful for deepening our faith as biblical literacy. If, as Anselm suggested, theology is “faith seeking understanding,”<sup>23</sup> good liturgical leadership will make the most of every opportunity for praise seeking understanding.

## 8. Thou shalt rehearse.

Liturgy is a performative art form. While the notion of a “performance” can evoke pejorative connotations for worship—as when a presider, preacher, or soloist seems insincere, inauthentic, or draws inappropriate attention to himself or herself—these are the exceptions that prove the rule. Worship is something that is done: it is an action that is performed, and it is in the performance of that action that we judge its efficacy. For example, in a service of marriage the minister does not marry the couple. Each one of the couple marries the other by the exchange of vows in the presence of God and the company of witnesses. The presider officiates at the marriage of the couple. Were it not a “performance,” the couple could simply mail it in. Similarly, it is one thing to read a eucharistic prayer silently at your computer, but it’s quite another to celebrate the sacrament of Communion.

Everyone benefits from liturgical rehearsal—from testing the microphones and running the slideshow, to walking through the service with all those giving leadership, and teaching a new song to the congregation. It’s not that we’re obsessed with perfection, it’s that we care about what we’re doing, and such care is best understood as an expression of hospitality to the congregation. Note also the significance of rehearsing in the worship space. How often have we discovered in the performance of a liturgical action that we have forgotten something?

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<sup>23</sup> Daniel L. Migliori, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 2-7.

(“Where are those matches!”) Remember: we don’t just have bodies, we are embodied, and worship is an embodied, incarnational act. (See also #2, above.) Any liturgy worth its worship is worth a rehearsal.

### **9. Thou shalt keep holy the principle of the trial period.**

In homage to the original commandment which also has to do with the rhythms of time, this one is about liturgical change. Change is hard, and change to our beloved rituals is perhaps the hardest. But “worship wars” have always been with us. Otherwise, why would we have needed a commandment against idolatry in the first place?

While change theorists will have more sophisticated advice to offer, one simple principle is worth keeping in mind: don’t do it only once. Liturgical change takes time. Don’t expect to be able to judge the value of a liturgical practice by experiencing it only once. Because of the repeated nature of ritual activity, we must experience it several times in order to begin to assess fully its meaning and value. Put in place a trial period in which any proposal for liturgical change is: 1) introduced (with background information, theological rationale, and educational resources); 2) practised (over a specific period of time such as six weeks or several months); 3) modified (with adjustments learned from actual practice); 4) evaluated (with feedback from the congregation to the appropriate group or committee); 5) resolved (with a decision and policy for future practice). Ritual activity is more a process than an isolated occurrence. Take the long view. Model patience. Delight in learning from collective experience. Have faith that the Spirit will move at her own pace.

### **10. Thou shalt not lose thy sense of humour.**

Finally, let’s not neglect our need for humour, which has something to do with both joy and humility in the face of the awesome task of worship leadership. Perhaps it’s something like: humour = joy + humility. Or perhaps “Thou shall not take thyself too seriously.” (It’s not about thou!) Consider the Advent wreath I once set on fire. Or the wedding ring I dropped down the heat vent grille. Or the frozen water in the Baptismal font. We each have our own stories of “amusing grace, tales of worship gone awry.”<sup>24</sup> After all our efforts at liturgical wisdom are said and done, we are still “fools for Christ” (1 Cor. 3:18-19a; 4:10). Enough said.

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<sup>24</sup> “Amusing Grace: Tales of Worship Gone Awry.” *The United Church Observer*, July 2015, cover story.

## **TRANSFORMED BY FONT AND TABLE: THE SACRAMENTAL LIFE OF THE PASTOR**

**by Edwin Searcy**

This is the story of one pastor's sacramental life. It is the testimony of the thirty-five year journey of one called and ordained to preside at the font and table. To my surprise it tells of the way in which hosting the congregation's celebration of the sacraments became central to my ministry and my life.

It is a surprise to discover that my sacramental life as a minister in The United Church of Canada transformed my life. At the time of my ordination I felt ill at ease when presiding at services of Baptism and Holy Communion. Raised in a minister's family I had regularly witnessed Baptisms and participated in the Lord's Supper. Baptisms were always of infants. Baptism was experienced and spoken of as a birth ritual. Communion was celebrated quarterly. My confirmation as a teenager marked my inclusion in the community that gathered to share the bread and wine. It meant that by the time of my ordination I had been to the table in my home congregation for just over a decade—perhaps on fifty occasions.

It is little wonder, then, that at the age of twenty-six, when I began to preside at the font and table, I felt ill at ease. Outwardly I tried to project confidence, but inwardly I felt uncertain, uncomfortable, and awkward. The sacraments were not in my bones. Nor were they in the bones of the congregations I served. It was hard to talk about this. After all, I was an ordained minister, set apart to preside at the sacraments. Of all people I should be at home at the font and table. Now, at the age of sixty-one, there are few times I feel more at home than when presiding at the font and table. Now the sacraments have become part of me; they are in my bones. They have become the interpretative centre of my preaching and teaching, of my ministry and of my life. How did this come to be?

### **An Ecumenical Formation**

Raised in congregations of the United Church, I received my education for ministry in ecumenical settings. First, at the Pacific School of Religion and the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California, and then at the Vancouver School of Theology. In both locations I was introduced to faculty and students from a variety of traditions, many of whom celebrated the sacraments with greater frequency than did the United Church. Weekly services of community worship almost always included celebration of the Eucharist. It was in this setting that I began to

question the infrequent celebration of Communion in my own tradition.

Upon ordination I did not look forward to Sundays when the Lord's Supper was to be celebrated. Then I discovered the book, *Strong, Loving and Wise: Presiding in Liturgy*, by Robert Hovda.<sup>1</sup> Hovda taught me how to preside not only at the table but also throughout the liturgy. I recall studying the photographs of liturgical gestures and carefully practising my own embodiment of the liturgy. Slowly but surely I became comfortable and at home at the table, serving the community by submersing myself in the role of presider.

It was at this time that the World Council of Churches published *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*,<sup>2</sup> otherwise known as the Lima document. This document signalled a growing convergence on the Eucharist as a sign of Christian unity. It encouraged a recovery and rediscovery of the ecumenical tradition of more regular celebration of the Lord's Supper, patterned on the shape of the sacrament inherited from the early church. When the 6th Assembly of the World Council met in Vancouver in 1983, those of us who lived in proximity to the gathering were privileged to witness the first celebration of the Lima liturgy with the Archbishop of Canterbury presiding. My desire to grow as a presider and to encourage my congregation to celebrate the Eucharist with greater regularity was an outgrowth of the movement of the Holy Spirit throughout the ecumenical church in the twentieth century.

### **Welcoming Children at the Table**

In those same early years of ministry the most heated debate about the sacrament of Communion was not about how often it should be celebrated but about who was welcome at the table. A growing movement urging the inclusion of children in the worshipping life of the congregation led to the proposal that the Eucharist should not be restricted to adults. Teen-age confirmation had been the traditional point of entry to the table in the United Church. It was now proposed that Baptism, as the rite of entry into membership in the church—administered at any age—therefore granted access to the table.

This was cause for significant disagreement in the congregation I served. Concerns were raised that children would not understand, would not take the sacrament seriously, and that their participation would

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Hovda, *Strong, Loving and Wise: Presiding in Liturgy* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1981).

<sup>2</sup> *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper No. 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982).

diminish the sacredness of the celebration of Communion. At the same time it became clear that we were confused about the sacrament of Baptism, having relegated it to a ritual of dedication rather than of membership in the ecumenical church.

I recall a turning point in the lively debate among the congregation's elders when one asked, "Will the children understand what Communion is all about?" In reply another elder said, "Let's go around the table and share our understanding of the sacrament." There was silence as the elders struggled to articulate their understanding of Communion. Then she said, "I believe that our children will learn by experiencing the sacrament as will we." This was also how I was to grow in my understanding of the sacraments—by experiencing them as presider in the midst of the worshipping congregation.

### **An Oath of Allegiance**

I had always imagined that the word "sacrament" had to do with a sacred ritual. I thought of the sacraments as embodied expressions of the gospel, as living parables of the kingdom. But it was in reading Hans-Reudi Weber's little book, *Salty Christians*,<sup>3</sup> that I first learned why Christians had adopted the term *sacramentum* ("sacred oath") to describe their central ritual. Sacraments were legally binding; Roman soldiers swore a *sacramentum* to the emperor in which they pledged to give their life on behalf of the empire. So it is that the church came to call Baptism the sacrament of entry in which the candidate pledges allegiance, not to the emperor or to other gods, but to Jesus as Servant Lord. Similarly, the Eucharist came to be seen as a regular renewal of the sacramental oath of allegiance in which Christians are joined with one another and with Christ in Communion (are "made one").

I noticed that the risky drama of participating in the sacraments is easily forgotten. Baptism becomes a domesticated photo-op with newborn infants. In a consumer culture Communion can be reduced to a meal for the spiritually hungry. It is spiritual food, surely. But it is much more. Every time we step forward to receive the bread and wine we are participating in an oath of allegiance to Jesus that trumps all other allegiances in heaven and on earth.

Now the sacraments became for me a crucial lens through which to view the life of discipleship. Over the years the number of infants being brought for Baptism decreased as the remnants of Christendom faded. Increasingly, those coming for Baptism were adults who sought to

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<sup>3</sup> Hans-Reudi Weber, *Salty Christians* (New York: Seabury Press, 1963).

commit themselves as followers of Jesus. I came to think of every sermon as a baptismal sermon—either a sermon preparing congregants for their Baptism, or reminding congregants of their calling as one of the baptized. Baptism was no longer an infant ritual of dedication but, instead, the moment of entry into the community of those bound by their sacred oath to serve Jesus Christ as Lord.

### **Ministry in a Missional Location**

Arriving at University Hill Congregation in Vancouver in 1995, I soon discovered the importance of the sacraments in a church without a building. Access to a rented chapel on the campus of the Vancouver School of Theology provided a worshipping home on Sundays. But unlike any other congregation I had served, there was no location called “University Hill United Church.” The congregation was not tied together by its connection with a building. Instead, it was connected by a common commitment.

University Hill was a congregation in the process of discovering a missional identity. No longer was mission something to be carried out in other locations by missionaries of one sort or another. Missions were no longer projects to be undertaken. Now mission was the very essence of what God was up to here and now, among us. We were caught up in God’s mission of redeeming and reconciling us and our neighbours. We were those being co-missioned to participate in God’s missionary endeavour. The call of Jesus to be salt and light (Matt. 5:13-16) meant being prepared to live the peculiar life of discipleship that sets one apart.

At University Hill this was highlighted each year by the annual congregational service of baptismal renewal and covenant renewal. Each year, on the last Sunday in Lent, those who have been baptized are invited to come to the font and to be marked with the sign of the cross with the words: “Remember your Baptism and be thankful. Walk with Christ in newness of life” (Romans 6:4). Once marked, the baptized member remains at the font to mark the person who comes next to the font. Following the individual renewals of Baptism, the congregation is invited to participate in the service of covenant renewal inherited from our Methodist forbears. This was all new to me. It was as close as I had come to presiding at an altar call in worship. At first it felt awkward. Yet over the twenty years of ministry at University Hill that were to follow, I came to cherish and look forward to this annual renewal of the ties that bind us to Jesus Christ and to one another.

## The Sacred Geography of Architecture

For thirty-five years University Hill Congregation has worshipped in the Chapel of the Epiphany at the Vancouver School of Theology. This simple chapel has functioned like an incubator, fostering Christian community that is rooted in a rich worship life. It turns out that the architecture of a sanctuary, like that of a home, can foster or hinder communal life. In the case of University Hill the simplicity and beauty of its worship home have informed the liturgical imagination of the congregation powerfully.

Seated in chairs that form a semi-circle the congregation gathers around the table. In front of the table stands a large wooden font. Behind the table stands a lectern. At the beginning of each service the presider steps to the table and announces that in this community Jesus is at once host at the table and also the unseen guest in our midst as the presider invites the community to pass the peace of Christ. Then the church bell is rung and a processional brings the large pulpit Bible to the lectern, water to the font, and a flame to light the candles that stand on either side of the table. The congregation is reminded each week that the font provides entry to the table at which the community is addressed by the Word.

When there is no church building in which to gather throughout the week, the congregation soon becomes creative in finding locations to gather. Meetings that otherwise would be held “at the church” now take place in homes, offices, and restaurants. Invariably these gatherings involve food shared around a table and take on a different tone than they would if held in a church building. They are hosted meals. They are not so much meetings as they are opportunities to gather in Christian community. And they are informed by our gathering around the table on Sunday. These gatherings become, in their own way, sacramental.

## The Power of Frequent Celebration

When I began in ordained ministry, quarterly celebration of Communion was the norm. Soon the congregation I served doubled its celebration to eight times in a year. Upon arriving at University Hill Congregation I found a community that celebrated the Eucharist monthly (on the first Sunday of each month except when that month included a major festival day in the Christian Year). Over the years at University Hill we increased our celebration of the sacrament of Communion by moving to weekly Eucharist in Lent and then in Advent. Normally we would celebrate at the table on some two dozen occasions in the year.

When celebrating the sacrament of Communion weekly we chose to maintain a common pattern and eucharistic prayer. The congregation

was invited to make its way forward to the table to receive the elements. Children were welcomed back from their classes to join in as participants. Songs were sung as the people came forward, one by one, to receive the bread and wine even as they gave their lives once more in service to the God made known in Jesus Christ. Over the years I have realized what a privilege it is to place the bread into the hands, and look into the eyes, of those who reach out to receive. I know so many of their stories, their hopes, and their heartaches. I am awestruck at their willingness to take up the cross of Christ.

By chance, early in my ministry, I experienced a deaf presider who led a powerful, silent Eucharist. Following that experience I experimented with including a silent fraction of the bread and pouring of the wine in which I held the bread and wine aloft, pointing to the cross behind me as if to say “This is the body of Christ; the blood of Christ,” and then gesturing to the congregation as if to say, “For you.” The response of congregations to these silent powerful gestures has been strong. Adults notice that children who are present are rapt as they watch. The whole community is focused on the bread and the wine, on the cross, and on the gift that is being offered. And I realize that the sacrament of Communion is now in my bones as a presider. It has become a part of me and of my reason for being.

### **The Clarity of Invitation**

Located on the campus of the University of British Columbia, one thing that can be counted on at University Hill Congregation is that there will be visitors present when the sacraments are celebrated. Some will be from various Christian denominations. Others will come with no Christian background. It means that the invitation to Communion needs to be clearly stated so that each person knows what is involved in stepping forward to the table.

I notice that, in an attempt to be sure to include all in a generous welcome, many United Church invitations to the table seem to be “All are welcome . . . Come and eat for your spiritual strengthening.” While this inclusive impulse is certainly gracious, it undercuts and ignores the importance of the sacraments as decisions to serve Jesus Christ. Yes, all are welcome to become disciples of Jesus, but not all choose such a life.

Over the years I developed an invitation to the table in which I noted that all who have been baptized, no matter whether as an infant or an adult, or as a Catholic or Protestant, are welcome at the table as members of the body of Christ. And if one is not baptized, but desires to be a follower of Jesus, they too are welcome to receive the bread and

wine as a sign of their desire to be among the baptized. At the same time, those who choose not to come forward need not feel unwelcome, but rather are welcome witnesses to what we do and promise here. In clarifying the invitation to the table I hope as presider to offer an inclusive welcome even as I maintain the significance of what it means to offer one's life to Jesus Christ.

### **A Sacramental Heart**

Frequent celebration of the sacraments has led the congregation to have a sacramental heart. The community is increasingly comfortable with embodied ritual acts. A rite of healing is held twice each year. On the fourth Sunday of Lent and on All Saints Sunday there is an opportunity following Communion to step around the table and come to one of three stations to sit, stand, or kneel, and receive a prayer for healing along with an anointing of oil. Over the years the number of those who participate has increased, with lines of congregants waiting to receive the anointing. It is a sign for everyone that there is much ache and pain in need of healing within the community.

When members of the congregation move away, they are invited to come to the font at the conclusion of their last service where they offer a testimony about their time in the congregation. Then they kneel and receive a laying-on of hands, a commissioning, and a blessing. Congregants are invited to come forward and to participate in the laying on of hands. This regularly sees a large gathering around the font.

In 2011 when I was diagnosed with multiple myeloma, and was to be away from the congregation for five months in order to have a stem cell transplant, we knew what to do. We gathered at the font on my final Sunday where I kneeled and received the laying-on of hands by the elders who commissioned and blessed me on my way. It was the same sacramental act that occurred upon my retirement this year. There, kneeling at the font, on my last Sunday as presider, I knew that the sacramental life that once felt so foreign to me had become precious to me. I had been transformed by my life at the font and the table. For that I will always be most grateful.

## **FIRE, DARKNESS, AND HOPE: A FIGHT FOR LIFE AND MEANING**

**by Major the Rev. Mike Gibbons**

It was supposed to be an easy introduction to life at sea: a short two-month sail with the Royal Canadian Navy's west coast supply ship working with the United States Navy off the coast of Hawaii. Having been posted to Canadian Forces Base Esquimalt only a few months before, our departure on 6 January 2014, Epiphany, seemed a good way for an army chaplain to get his sea legs. The initial transit from Victoria, BC to Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, took a week, and during that time I discovered that sailing on a Royal Canadian Navy warship is an entirely different experience from childhood ferry trips taken from Prince Edward Island to the mainland. I was never once sea sick on the ferry—something I cannot say about having sailed in HMCS Protecteur, a notably stable platform compared to other ships in the fleet.

HMCS Protecteur's task was to participate in MIDPAC OILER, an opportunity for the supply ship to act as the duty tanker re-fuelling United States Navy ships involved in exercises. The Royal Canadian Navy participates in international events like this in order to train sailors and test equipment, as well as develop and maintain working relationships with international partners. Over the course of almost two months I was impressed with the capacity of both the crew and the ship to provide services to ships on exercise, and perform well during mock battle situations.

With duties and exercises complete by the last week of February, we began the week-long transit home to Victoria. Royal Canadian Navy ships have a complex series of safety drills and exercises that have to be completed on varying timetables, from weeks to months, in order to ensure that the ship's company is able to handle both mechanical emergencies and damage control (fire and flood) emergencies. This means that on a frequent basis the ship is mobilized to action stations for training purposes. It's probably for this reason that on the evening of 27 February, a couple of days out of Pearl Harbor, we had a power outage on the ship. I had just finished helping to serve the evening meal in the main galley and was making my way through the ship when the lights went out. Initially we assumed that this was part of a regular training exercise, and that key players would respond, and the lights would soon be restored. Within a few minutes, however, the ship's fire alarm sounded, and in an instant the mood and energy changed. The *bong-bongs*, as they're less than affectionately known, immediately bring the ship's

company to action stations, and the entire ship's company is mobilized. During action stations sailors don their flash gear (flame retardant hoods and gloves) and proceed to their posts. I made my way quickly to sick bay, the usual place for the chaplain during action stations, and, with the medical staff, waited for word from command. Quickly a message came over the intercom from the ship's executive officer announcing that there was a confirmed fire in the engine room. For people used to drills and exercises this news could not have been more shocking. Most of us were expecting the usual announcement that this was part of a drill and that we should await further instruction. With this announcement, however, it became clear that the ship's company was fighting a real threat. We were without power, fighting a growing fire in the dark, more than 600 kms. off the coast of Hawaii, with no help within easy reach. As was later stated by the Commander Canadian Fleet Pacific, Commodore Bob Auchterlonie, the fire location could be likened to the three-story interior of a school gymnasium, entirely engulfed in flames. In addition to this, all were well aware that in the belly of the ship were several million litres of fuel, and above that a significant supply of munitions—this being a supply ship, after all.

Attack team after attack team went into the engine room to fight the fire. The temperature rose to such an extent that even with firefighting gear, including helmets, the lenses melted in their eyeglasses. This was the worst ship fire since the HMCS Kootenay had a devastating fire in 1969. Attack teams fought the fire for eleven straight hours before bringing it under control and overhauling it. The fire was a test not only of the crew's training, but of its character. There were several times when it appeared that no ground was being gained in the fight, and that we might very well lose the ship and our lives as there was no help within range. During these hours I circulated in the dispersal area that was being used for the staging of attack teams. As members came out of the engine room I assisted by handing out water or food—the chaplain looks for ways to be involved in supporting members when they are engaged in their work; this helps to further develop pastoral relationships. What quickly became evident was that the crew members didn't need me to be handing them food; they wanted to talk to me about the seriousness of the situation they were facing, and the very real possibility that none of us was going to see our families again.

For the next several hours I took up a position on a low wooden bench and sat with sailor after sailor, each of whom discussed their fears and sought hope. Many asked direct questions such as: "Padre, what happens when I die?" and "I don't know if I've led a good life; what

happens if I never get to make things right with my family?" For those who were willing to dive deep into their own lives there was a desire to know if there was hope beyond this life. Others wanted to speak aloud of a heart burdened with guilt—in other words, to confess and seek wholeness.

I hadn't experienced this hunger for experience of God since I was in Afghanistan, where I travelled weekly from camp to camp by road or air in order to visit, and lead worship, with the soldiers. As the only soldier who did not carry a weapon, I was often asked why I risked my life to visit them. I always explained that it was worth the risk of my life in order to celebrate Communion with them, and, for some among the Canadian and coalition soldiers to whom I ministered, the bread and the wine were the last meal they ever shared on earth. I was often travelling several days a week in order to offer Communion, as for many soldiers this was the central expression of their faith, even if they did not come from a particularly sacramental tradition. It is a deeply moving experience to offer the body and the blood of Christ to soldiers; something entirely self-emptying occurs at a depth beyond words.

It would require technical expertise in order to describe the ingenious ways the crew overcame the challenges of fighting that ship-board fire. Bravery, courage, and hope overcame darkness, smoke, and fire. When the sun rose on 28 February it illuminated a dead ship with a live crew: not one member of the crew had died or suffered serious injuries; this was no less than a miracle. For the next week HMCS Protecteur, with the enormous assistance of the United States Navy, made its slow transit under tow back to Pearl Harbor. During those seven days the crew came together in ways I had seen before only in Afghanistan; they had faced danger and their own mortality—including a second fire which flashed up days after the first one had been extinguished. Each one of the 279 member crew was a hero.

Every Sunday while we were at sea I had led a worship service, as is the custom aboard ship. On Sunday, 2 March, a larger than usual group gathered in the wardroom in order to worship and give thanks. For some this was the first time they had attended a worship service on ship; for others this was the first time they had ever been to worship anywhere. We sang "Eternal Father, Strong to Save," known as the Navy Hymn. The familiar refrain took on new meaning for those gathered: "O hear us when we cry to thee for those in peril on the sea." We joined also in the words of Psalm 107:23-32:

Some went down to the sea in ships,  
doing business on the mighty waters;

<sup>24</sup> they saw the deeds of the LORD,  
his wondrous works in the deep.

<sup>25</sup> For he commanded and raised the stormy wind,  
which lifted up the waves of the sea.

<sup>26</sup> They mounted up to heaven, they went down to the depths;  
their courage melted away in their calamity;

<sup>27</sup> they reeled and staggered like drunkards,  
and were at their wits' end.

<sup>28</sup> Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,  
and he brought them out from their distress;

<sup>29</sup> he made the storm be still,  
and the waves of the sea were hushed.

<sup>30</sup> Then they were glad because they had quiet,  
and he brought them to their desired haven.

<sup>31</sup> Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,  
for his wonderful works to humankind.

<sup>32</sup> Let them extol him in the congregation of the people,  
and praise him in the assembly of the elders.

Ash Wednesday fell on 5 March, the day before we finally arrived in Pearl Harbor after a week under tow. We relied on the United States Navy for our drinking water, and finally for our food. The oppressive heat finally abated at sundown, and it was at this time that a group of us gathered on the starboard waste deck for worship. The irony was lost on no one as ashes were imposed on the foreheads of sailors who hadn't been able to shower for a week, and all of whom were covered in soot and dirt. We celebrated Communion and offered thanks, and we were profoundly aware of having faced challenge in the desert.

As the cliché goes, there are no atheists in foxholes. I think it might be more appropriate to say that, in the face of extreme danger and threat, we turn from the smaller stories of our individual lives to those questions of the meta-narrative of which we are each a part. In the weeks that followed in Pearl Harbor we faced other challenges of uncertainty, with the largest question being when we would return home to our families. Fellow crew members and the chain of command remained their own strongest support. A number of the crew had significant difficulties following our arrival in Pearl Harbor; some had family problems at home that needed their immediate attention; others had difficulty coping with what had happened to them. What became evident is that those who were

able to cope well were those who were grounded somewhere in their lives; whether through supportive friends and family, or a deep and profound sense of duty and service, or a religious faith. It was those who were grounded who were best equipped to deal with, and integrate, not only the events of the fire and deprivation on the ship, but also the ensuing weeks of uncertainty in Pearl Harbor.

Once adequate preparations had been made, the ship was returned to her home port at Canadian Forces Base Esquimalt, a slow 4300 km un-crewed tow by a United States Navy Service deep-sea tug boat. HMCS Protecteur finally arrived back in Victoria on Saturday, 31 May. The crew had been flown home in various stages and re-united with their families.

In the military we speak of resilience as an integral part of mental and emotional health for soldiers, sailors, and air personnel. We look at ways of strengthening resilience for members of the Canadian Armed Forces so that they are able not only to carry out their duties in the face of adversity, but also to return to their families whole and healthy. My experience with the crew of HMCS Protecteur was a profound confirmation that religious faith is a powerful support to those who experience trauma. Faith is not an inoculation against the effects of trauma, but it provides a framework through which we integrate the experience into our lives. Individual prayer and corporate worship are a means of focusing our thoughts and energy on that to which we belong that is bigger than our individual selves. Many of the crew with whom I sailed have developed a hunger for worship and the sacraments as a means of expressing that connection with God in Christ. To be able to look to a loving God in the face of death is a powerful experience for any individual.

In the time that has followed since the return home of the crew and the ship, I've had the honour of continuing to journey with those who saved their ship and their crewmates. Many who were resilient have been strengthened, and some who were without much resilience have been challenged to find ways in which they can be grounded. An understanding of our experience is offered in the Epistle reading for the Third Sunday of Lent, which many of the crew have found meaningful, and it is one to which I hold on as we move forward: *Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope* (Romans 5:3b-4).

## THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF WEEKLY COMMUNION

by Aaron Miller

I am not an expert liturgist. I am not much more than passingly familiar with the historical debates concerning the meaning and practice of Holy Communion. I am the pastor of a small, rural United Church. As such, I am concerned with growing up in Christ and helping my congregation to do likewise.<sup>1</sup> One of the ways in which I and the leadership in my congregation have sought to do that is by celebrating Communion together every Sunday.

This, I know, is unusual in The United Church of Canada. None of the United Church congregations that I grew up in had weekly Communion. In fact, as a child, I could not discern any rhyme or reason as to when, why, and how we celebrated the Eucharist. However, I do remember that Communion was a special occasion. I remember being excited, every couple of months, when the Communion table was stacked neatly with trays of juice and plates of bread, the chalice, and loaf. It was a sign that something special, even sacred, was happening that Sunday morning.

As well as regularly attending a United Church congregation, several times a year I went to Christos Metropolitan Community Church in Toronto. There Communion was celebrated weekly, and most often when I visited I was asked to be a server, holding the bread and juice while worshippers came forward to receive the elements by intinction. Again, something special; something sacred.

The experience that something was special about church because of Communion must have been formative for me. Because of that, I am always surprised when that is the primary reason people tend to give for opposition to receiving the Lord's Supper weekly, namely, that the specialness will be lost. There are often other reasons—logistics, the sanctity of hour-long worship, the extra preparation required. I have had many UCC pastors tell me that they could never get away with weekly Communion because of such perceived conflicts and burdens. There are, of course, historical and theological reasons why our tradition guides us to celebrate the Eucharist at appointed seasons. But anecdotal evidence suggests that there is not much awareness, generally speaking, of what those reasons might be. The resistance that I have most often encountered has to do with the sense that, “if we do it every week, it won’t be special

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<sup>1</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *Practice Resurrection: A Conversation on Growing up in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

anymore.” That was certainly the biggest concern in my congregation when I proposed weekly Communion.

It should go without saying that I have no interest in undermining that sense of specialness, that persistent inkling that there is something particularly sacred about Holy Communion. But I am anxious to re-frame it. I fear that by making the Lord’s table a place that we come to only occasionally and with uncommon reverence, we lose what actually makes it sacred: the unexpected, insistent, willing call and presence of Jesus in our lives. It concerns me that the invitation to meet Jesus at the table, to eat with him as sinners and friends, to encounter him in the broken-body bread and poured-out-blood cup might be treated as something to be done only on special occasions—lest we get bored.

### A Common Sacredness

When it comes to growing up in Christ, “[coming] to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ” (Eph. 4:13), it seems to me that we are up against quite a lot. The conditions that most of us inhabit most of the time are not conducive to gospel maturity. We are not often encouraged towards “a long obedience in the same direction.”<sup>2</sup> We are more often urged, in one way or another, to spend our time “in nothing but telling or hearing something new” (Acts 17:21).

One of the ways that the church responds to such unfavourable conditions is to establish alternative conditions: the rhythms of the Christian calendar, the familiar flow of our liturgies, reciting the Creeds, praying the Lord’s Prayer, are all tools we use to shape time and space in which women and men might grow into gospel maturity. Of course, we do this not just to provide another option among many, but because we have an alternative commitment—faithfulness to Jesus, crucified, risen, and reigning. We are called to be resurrection people, committed to the covenant of grace, wrought by the death and resurrection of Christ; witnesses to God’s kingdom of hope, peace, joy, and love in the world.

The testimony of the Book of Acts suggests that, from the beginning, those committed to Jesus recognized the importance of attending to the conditions in which that commitment was nurtured. “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42), and they did so not in fits

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<sup>2</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society—20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

and starts, but “day by day” (2:46). The earliest Christians were evidently aware that the wonder they had experienced at Easter and Pentecost, and what they were called to do and be as a result, was so remarkable, so contrary to anything else that they knew, that learning to do it required regular immersion in these alternative conditions. The sacredness and power of their work and worship was not in its novelty, but in its “day-by-day-ness”; the persistent reminder of the resurrection conditions in which they were called to live and move and have their being.

### Active Memory

The same is true now as then. And although there is no particular reason to be nostalgic about the early church—there is plenty in the New Testament to make us wary of that—it seems to me that, when it comes to nurturing Christian discipleship, the pattern of teaching, fellowship, bread-breaking, and prayer has not been improved upon in the centuries since. We may not gather as congregations every day, but most Christian communities do begin each week by coming together in worship, to declare the alternative commitment and conditions in which our lives are lived. In the drama of worship we maintain a connection to the great cloud of witnesses that has gone before. As we attend to the Scriptures, in “the unity of the faith,” break bread, and pray, we participate in the steady and wondrous means by which the church, from the beginning, has helped us grow up in Christ.

I contend that we lose something when we remove the bread-breaking from our regular worship. To be sure, we are not less the church if we do not celebrate Communion weekly. And there is debate about how and to what extent the practice of breaking bread that Luke describes in Acts 2 is related to our present eucharistic practices.<sup>3</sup> Still, regardless of specific comparisons between what the first Christian community did and what we do in our worship, there is a relationship of strong continuity. Sharing in the loaf and cup reminds us that we share in the same faith and discipleship as every Christian ever. We are reminded as we gather that we do not—cannot—do this alone.

Most important, we remember that we have this faith, we have this work, not by our merits, but by God’s grace. I remember, as a child, being quite confounded by the archaic, “This do in remembrance of me,” that was carved into the front of the Communion Table at my church. Yet, that is the primary instruction of our brother, Paul: “‘Do this, as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.’ For as often as you eat this bread

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<sup>3</sup> William H. Willimon, *Acts* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1988), 41.

and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11:25b-26). Regardless of our liturgical preferences, or our sacramental theologies, the one thing that is unavoidable is that we preside at the Lord's Table, we come to the Lord's Table, only in the name of the Lord, the name of Jesus. We are gathered—tax-collector and zealot, sinner and saint, traitor and disciple—in the name and presence of Jesus. We are gathered in remembrance of him.

This is holy memory—not mere historical fact, not starry-eyed nostalgia, but memory that looks backward in order to move forward in faith and hope.<sup>4</sup> We proclaim Christ's death until he comes. We participate in his death, that we might participate in his life (2 Cor. 4:10). At the Lord's table, in the Lord's presence, we are, as Walter Brueggemann prays, "[caught up] this day into the reality of your good purpose, that by the time we leave each other we will know, yet again, that your mercy and justice and compassion outrun all the needs of the world."<sup>5</sup> Fed by the Bread of Life, sated by the Cup of Salvation, we are nourished to live as beacons of the mercy, justice, and compassion of God, for this world God so loves. We are reminded that our faith and our action are inseparable.<sup>6</sup>

### What Pastoral Difference Does it Make?

At Faith Centennial United Church, in Selkirk, Ontario, we have been celebrating weekly Communion since Easter Sunday, 2013. Our liturgies are simple, mostly memorized by regular attenders. We alternate saying either *The Apostle's Creed* or *A New Creed* at the beginning of the liturgy. Each week I try to suggest how what has been heard and said up to that point comes to life as we receive the elements.<sup>7</sup> Sometimes we pass the plates of bread and trays of miniature juice cups; often we receive by intinction. We use a yeast-less honey bread, made faithfully each week by a member of the congregation. The congregation is small; so the whole event takes about ten minutes. I expect that an outside observer would find this part of our worship rather unremarkable.

It is possible—perhaps, probable—that there are some insiders

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<sup>4</sup> N. T. Wright, *For All God's Worth: True Worship and the Calling of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 70.

<sup>5</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Prayers for a Privileged People* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 97.

<sup>6</sup> William H. Willimon, *Thank God It's Thursday: Encountering Jesus at the Lord's Table as if for the Last Time* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013), 90.

<sup>7</sup> Willimon, *Thank God It's Thursday*, 9.

who find it unremarkable. But for others it is a weekly reminder of who and whose they are, of the grace in which they stand (Romans 5:2), and by which they are sustained. It is a moment in our worship service when we try to encourage some holy imagination, alongside holy memory. It is the space in which the hearing and study of the Word of God, the fellowship of believers, and the focus of our prayers come together in the unavoidable name and presence of Jesus. When we receive the elements by intinction, more often than not, I serve on my own, and people come forward in such a way that anyone paying attention cannot help but notice what a mish-mash of people has been called together to be this little part of Christ's body—the slightly sheepish and the very earnest, elderly and young, life-long Christians and new believers, the old woman who positively beams with joy, the man who simply says "Thank-you," the former Lutheran who crosses herself as she's done all her life. And, on most Sundays, I am able to call each person by name as I offer the Body of Christ, broken, the Blood of Christ, poured out for them.

That is the point that I think makes the most difference. I am not sure that we are any holier than we might otherwise have been, or that our worship is any more faithful, just because we do this peculiar thing every time we meet. But, I do know that no matter what else happens—no matter if the hymns are played too slowly, or if the sermon is a dud, or if there is little indication that the Holy Spirit has come to move among us that day—each person who receives the bread and cup hears, at the very least, that Christ died for them and the world, that they might receive newness of life in him, and that by sheer and wondrous grace they have been made sons and daughters of God, co-heirs of heaven, here and now.

As a pastor, it is quite a relief to have that assurance in the service. I know that whatever failures in preparation, whatever skewed opinions, and theological missteps find their way into my sermon or prayers, regardless of all of the things that I fret and stew over, whenever we gather to worship together, there will be at least one moment when we hear and proclaim together the unmistakably good news of Jesus Christ, crucified, risen, and reigning. There will be at least one moment when we can hear and know that ours is not a God who stays at a safe and heavenly distance,<sup>8</sup> but the God who comes to us, who is with us and for us, who welcomes us, who nurtures and satisfies us, and sends us out, that we might become what we have received—God's reckless, tireless, incarnated love for the world.

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<sup>8</sup> Willimon, *Thank God*, 85.

## THE SACRAMENTAL LIFE

by Andrew O'Neill

As we walked toward his office, following the Sunday morning Communion service, I asked the senior minister why we continued to use the King James' Version of Scripture in worship. He stopped and, with good humour and patience toward his young Canadian assistant, pointed up to one of the ancient stone arches that holds St. Giles' Cathedral up to the Edinburgh sky, and said, "Do you see the royal seal there? That's the seal of King James. He was a member of the congregation."

It happens in every church: preferences settle into traditions and traditions become sacrosanct. Within worship, hymnody is usually the most firmly entrenched tradition, each congregation having its own "canon within the canon" of familiar hymns. Outside of worship, traditions of the calendar—like a ham and bean supper, or a fall fair—become inviolable. During one of my settlement charge's summer suppers (which were famous for the seemingly miraculous multiplicity of pies), an elder member of the congregation remarked, "*This is Communion for me.*" Never before had the church basement been so elevated.

Within that statement I heard that communal life was central to that person's faith (Amen to that), and that the activity of breaking bread with friends was, for that person, reminiscent of the Lord's Supper and its celebration within worship (again, Amen). Yet, I was also struck by the idea that something could be sacramental "for me." The implication of such a statement is that the meaning of sacramentality, or the meaning and authority of a particular action or event, is assigned by the individual. This is nothing new under the post-modern sun, but my intuitive response, lodged somewhere between head and heart, was that the sacraments have a meaning and authority that transcends subjectivity, and that what is *sacramental* should as well.

We are not well served by a false dichotomy of "sacred and secular," nor by a rigid theological understanding of the sacraments. The poet who asks rhetorically, "Where does the temple begin, where does it end?" celebrates with us the release of sacramental life from the captivity of an inflexible orthodoxy.<sup>1</sup> However, even widely held opinions and long-standing traditions within a community of faith should be open to theological reflection, if for no other reason than that they may be recognized as well-founded.

My question here is: what makes something sacramental? In

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Oliver, *Why I Wake Early* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), 8.

sum, something is sacramental insofar as it reveals Christ and the kingdom he proclaims. This basic claim, however, comes as the result of asking three more challenging questions: what is a sacrament, how is it related to Christ and the kingdom he proclaims, and what claims does that make on the community of faith? Answering these questions not only clarifies the role of the sacraments in the life of faith, but also clarifies the relationship between the claims we make about what is sacramental and how sacraments make claims on us as a community.

First, I look briefly at the meaning and authority of the sacraments in Protestant practice. Second, I consider the sacraments as symbols of the relationship between the original revelation of Jesus Christ and the continued revelation of God's love. Third, I suggest that, as unique symbols of revelation, the sacraments shape the transformation of the faith community and its participation in Christ's ministry and unfolding kingdom, and that something is sacramental to the extent that it does the same.

## The Sacraments

In our faith tradition, we have two sacraments only: Baptism and Eucharist (or “Holy Communion” or “the Lord’s Supper”)—because our forebears believed that only the command of Jesus to observe them makes them an essential part of Christian worship and a sure means of grace. Though the rituals and frequency of their celebration vary considerably, these are the two liturgical celebrations common to most of Protestant Christianity and that traditionally have been the steady beat at the heart of worship, pastoral care, and the spiritual life. Baptism is the rite by which a child is named and spiritually born, grafted into the body of Christ. The Eucharist is *anamnesis*, or “living memory,” of Christ’s death and resurrection at the heart of Christian identity and community.

Historically, however, the sacraments have also been at the heart of struggles to define the work of the church in relation to the agency of God.<sup>2</sup> For the first eight hundred years of Christianity there was no systematic treatise on what “happens” during the Eucharist, and for the first twelve hundred years there was no consensus on how many

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<sup>2</sup> The very brief historical sketch contained in the following section is indebted to the excellent work of historian James F. White and his two volumes, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), and *The Sacraments in Protestant Practice and Faith* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999).

sacraments there were.<sup>3</sup> Eventually, the Council of Trent agreed on seven: Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Holy Orders, and Marriage.<sup>4</sup> What went largely unquestioned for the first fourteen hundred years, however, was the belief that God acted through the sacraments—that the sacraments themselves, in the act of celebration, were vehicles of God's grace.

Contrary to popular belief, criticism of the inherent efficacy of the sacraments, and the associated abuse of authority this could permit, did not begin with Martin Luther. The pre-Reformation *devotio moderna* movement emphasized inward piety over sacramental practice, and the church itself was also wary of superstitious or magical understandings of the Mass.<sup>5</sup> The Swiss reformer Ulrich Zwingli responded to these concerns by asserting that the sacraments were only memorial events, or signs of a person's devotion to God and church. Luther, however, sought to retain a sense of God's grace as operative within the sacraments. He offered a definition of the sacraments that was to be foundational for Protestant theology: the sacraments are scriptural promises attached to visible signs.<sup>6</sup>

The challenge for inheritors of both Reformation theology and Enlightenment critical thought, however, is how to understand what a "sign of grace" is and what it does. To the medieval mind, there was no distinction between the elements of the Eucharist and the salvific power of God. Within the Mass, the former *became* the latter. To the post-Cartesian mind, however, the Eucharist is mediated through our perception and experience of it. This permitted the celebration and function of the sign to become more idiosyncratic, and the meaning of it more democratic. The question which arises, however, is: in an increasingly "un-enchanted world," what meaning and authority do the sacraments retain?<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> White, *The Sacraments*, 15.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Lombard, *The Four Books of Sentences*, Book 4, trans. Owen R. Orr, in *A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham*, ed. Eugene R. Fairweather, *Library of Christian Classics*, Vol. 10 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), 344.

<sup>5</sup> White, *The Sacraments*, 15.

<sup>6</sup> White, *The Sacraments*, 18.

<sup>7</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 25.

## Sacraments as Revelation, Transformation, Participation

When my sister and I were young, we adopted a grey cat and named her Sydney. She was named for the place in Cape Breton where our beloved grandparents lived, a town (dis)coloured by emissions from the steel plant where our grandfather worked. Because we also loved our cat, we felt she should be baptized. There were no theological hesitations for us: Sydney was a member of our family, and in our family, you got baptized. The bath tub was filled, the triune God was invoked, and the cat scratched my wrist so deeply I can still see the scar today.

I'm not sure if Sydney was grafted into the body of Christ that day—her name was not recorded in the church register. For us as children, however, Sydney's "Baptism" was an imitation of what we had seen done many times, with babies and adults, in our congregation. Although an amusing memory now, clearly the sacraments were a vital expression of our faith, even as children.

In what follows, I consider the sacraments as unique symbols of revelation, transformation, and participation, and I contend that something is sacramental to the extent that it reflects these characteristics. I make use of Paul Tillich's concept of the symbol and his two-fold typology of revelation, because they are helpful in describing the relationship between the historical revelation of God in Jesus the Christ and its eternal meaning, and, consequently, how the sacraments might be understood as more than signs, events, or actions, and instead be understood as mandating participation in the transcendent reality that they represent.

### *Revelation*

For Tillich, the *kerygma* of God is always being revealed within the human situation. God is free to reveal Godself because God is the "ground of being," the source of life itself. Yet, all revelation necessarily happens under the conditions of existence: the finitude of life and history. These conditions can do nothing to confine God within Godself, but they do affect human understanding of revelation. The only time when this is not the case, the only occasion during which existence is unconditionally united with the depth of being, is in Jesus the Christ.

God as manifest in Jesus who became the Christ is, for Tillich, "original revelation."<sup>8</sup> The Christ is nothing less than the reunion of human existence with divine essence—the goal of all life and history.

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<sup>8</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 126-128.

However, God is not limited to first century Palestine, nor to the person of Jesus. The “ground of being” can be revealed, or glimpsed, or felt at other times and in other places, but these moments Tillich calls “dependent revelation.” An event or experience is revelatory to the extent that it points to, or is consonant with, the original revelation of Jesus the Christ. “There is continuous revelation in the history of the church, but it is dependent revelation.”<sup>9</sup>

This distinction is not meant to diminish God’s continued revelation to the church; quite the opposite, it is meant to strengthen our perception of it within existence. The original miracle, together with its original reception, is the permanent point of reference. But the act of referring is never the same, since new generations with new potentialities of reception enter the correlation and transform it. A dependent revelatory situation exists in every moment in which the divine Spirit grasps, shakes, and moves the human spirit.<sup>10</sup> In a relationship similar to that of original and dependent revelation, the sacraments are dependent upon the original revelation of Christ for their meaning and authority.

As instituted practices with scriptural warrant, the sacraments are also unique gifts to the church, functioning as symbols of Christ’s ministry, life, death, and resurrection. A symbol is not just an image, which has an acquired meaning like a flag or a stop sign. A symbol comprises both an immanent meaning that grounds the symbol in history and experience, and a transcendent or transcending meaning that resists finitude and idolatry.<sup>11</sup>

As dependent symbols of revelation, the sacraments refer persistently and unfailingly not only to the historical events of the Gospels, but also to the eternal *kerygma* of God’s promise revealed in Cross and Resurrection. As symbols practised in worship, they comprehend not only the believer’s story of faith, but also the narrative of the community, and the community’s membership within the body of Christ. Something can be said to be “sacramental,” then, to the extent that it reflects the revelation of Jesus Christ and the kingdom-promise he proclaims within both personal discipleship and the living hope of the community.

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<sup>9</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, 126.

<sup>10</sup> Tillich, *ST I*, 126-127.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 359. For Tillich, religious language is “symbolic” and, like religious practice, runs the risk of succumbing to idolatry.

### *Transformation*

“God is the event of the world’s transformation by Jesus’ love, the same love to which the world owes its existence.”<sup>12</sup> In the sacraments we “enact” God’s revelation: through the bread and the cup, suffering and brokenness become healing and resurrection; through the water we pass to freedom, are cleansed of old ways, die to self, and rise to community. Through the sacraments, the other-oriented Christ shifts our default perspective from ourselves to our neighbours, and from what is immediate, to what is lasting. Not only are our personal spiritual experiences of God incorporated within the weekly worship of our faith communities, but also we are drawn beyond our own finitude and offered a transcending experience of the body of Christ.

For example, Sunday morning Communion at St. Giles is served in the round, with worshippers circling the table at the centre of the cathedral. Each member of the circle serves the bread and wine to the next. The route from pew to table is well-worn by the weekly tread of thousands of members and tourists, and also addicted, homeless, and troubled people. All are invited to stand in the circle, to serve and be served. It is a powerful symbol of what God intends our life together to look like, and invites a shift in perspective from self to others, even others whom I do not yet know.

The sacraments continually orient and re-orient us to our mission and ministry as disciples of Jesus, by locating the church’s authority to proclaim the gospel within practices of self-giving humility. “If our acts with one another speak of mutual gift and givenness, they are signs of the radical self-gift which initiates the church.”<sup>13</sup> The life of the community itself becomes an enactment of God’s revealed love not merely by the practice of the sacraments themselves, but by allowing the sacraments to shape the community according to the contours of Christ’s proclaimed kingdom of peace, justice, hospitality, mercy, and compassion. Something is sacramental, then, to the extent that it contributes not only to the transformation of individuals, but also to the shaping of relationships and communities in the image of Christ.

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<sup>12</sup> Robert W. Jensen, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 221. Jensen helpfully deals with the relationship between timeless revelation and time-bound history and life through the categories of God as event, person, decision, and conversation.

<sup>13</sup> Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 204.

### *Participation*

Being shaped by the revealed and transforming love of God can sound passive at first, but in fact it makes a bold claim on us. This love invites us not just to share the sacraments, but to embody the humility, hospitality, and mercy they symbolize—and not just within our faith community, but within the world. In fact, our purposeful engagement with the sacraments may very well lead us to change the way we celebrate them, or conduct worship, and may even change the mission and ministry of our communities. The participation the sacraments invite is not participation in a kingdom made in our image, but in God's kingdom. Something takes on a sacramental quality, then, to the extent that it involves communities in restoring the forgotten to the centre of community and in working for a living peace and justice.

It is clear from stories of Jesus' healing and feeding ministry that he had faith not in his power to do good, but in God's power to reveal our true nature through loving relationship. Our identity rests not only in what is, but in "what should be" and "what will be." Faith *in* Christ compels us to undertake acts of hospitality and mercy, and the faith *of* Christ teaches us that God will provide, will reveal, will fulfill. A sacramental faith is "not so much about holding religious opinions . . . or entry into a special and 'religious' world, but . . . setting daily life in a great context of trust and hope."<sup>14</sup>

### **Context of Trust**

One morning, over bacon butties between services, the senior minister of St. Giles and I were talking about Communion, and I was moved to ask him about the continued use of the Apostles' Creed during worship. I felt that the weekly confession of a virginal conception and a physically up there/out there heaven were, for example, difficult to maintain in our time. He didn't disagree, though he did suggest that broadening interpretation is preferable to abandonment. He also said that when we profess the Creed, we are not each asked to believe every part of it. One part might be particularly important to you, and another part to me. That is why we profess it together—because faith is communal.

What initiated my consideration of the sacramental life was a faithful person confessing that breaking bread with his friends, in the church basement, was sacramental. I have suggested that something is sacramental if it reveals something of the ministry, life, death, and

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<sup>14</sup> Gilleasbuig Macmillan, *A Workable Belief: Thoughts on the Apostles' Creed*, ed. Duncan B Forrester (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1993), 4.

resurrection of Jesus Christ; if it models personal and communal transformation according to that revelation; and if it makes a claim on the person and community to participate in the unfolding kingdom-vision of God.

That's a tall order, and surely not every coffee hour will be Communion, nor will every bath time be Baptism. There will, of course, be moments when they are. I think it's fair to maintain that parts of life are sacramental because they reveal *something* about Christ and his proclaimed kingdom, even if they don't reveal *everything* about them. However, I think it's also fair to say that, without the sacraments at the heart of the life of faith, our capacity for recognizing sacramental potential in other things is severely impaired.

The sacraments remain the heartbeat of life together, not just because they are preferred, or traditional, or even sacrosanct, but because they reunite us as sensate creatures with our created purpose and with God's promise, and because they call us to participate in the fulfillment of both, not only for ourselves, but for others. So, as long as the price is occasionally taken off the church supper ticket, and the people who feel comfortable in that place invite and include those who have no place, then moments like these are not just sacramental *for me*, but *for all*.

## FROM THE HEART

by John McTavish

In the summer of 1958 at age sixteen, I was a junior counsellor at Pioneer Camp in Muskoka. I almost didn't go back that summer as the camp was a tad too religious for my liking. But my new sectional director turned out to be warm and friendly and enthusiastic about the gospel in a thoroughly natural and appealing way. Something or Someone rubbed off, and before I knew it I had resolved to become, of all things, a minister.

When I got home and broke the news to my parents, they were surprised, even, in my father's case, a touch angry. But that was all right. I was surprised myself. Still, I stuck by my decision. After completing high school, I enrolled in an Arts program at Victoria College, majoring in psychology with the thought that a better understanding of human nature would help prepare me for a vocation that involved working with people.

That first year psychology class attracted so many students that we had to meet in an off-campus auditorium. Yet the lectures themselves proved rather disappointing, as a great deal of empirical fuss was made over what seemed like fairly self-evident behavioural observations. I remember leaving the jam-packed auditorium and heading off to my Hebrew class where a handful of us geeky pre-theologs huddled in a small windowless basement room with an old, elfin-like, pipe-smoking professor.

Yet it was here that my mind ended up getting stretched. Our Hebrew professor, William Staples, in addition to language lessons, gave us his thoughts about the Hebrew people and their religious writings. I remember Staples pouring particular scorn on the historicity of the story of the Exodus. The thought that "600,000 men, plus children," according to Exodus 12:37, would have enough time to pack everything up in their homes so they could escape from the country the next day, moved him to exclaim, "Good heavens, it takes your mother longer to pack everything up for a family picnic at the lake!"

On and on Staples went in this vein. I finally shared my concerns with my minister. He didn't think I needed to worry too much about all the dirty bathwater escaping from the bathtub as long as I was able to hang on to the baby. But how was I to do that? Then I discovered the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson. The nineteenth century philosopher/preacher gladly dumped the dirty bathwater of the old creeds out of the tub, and salvaged the baby while claiming that the child was essentially no different than the rest of us. Yes, Jesus is divine, said

Emerson. But so are we all. I liked that! The idea struck me as somehow radical and exciting and modern, and thus I began my theological studies at Emmanuel College as an Emersonian Idealist.

Those first days at Emmanuel were exhilarating. The explosive little book, *Honest to God*, had just been published, and everybody was talking about how its author, a British bishop no less, had dared to replace the fusty old supernatural deity of the church's traditional teaching with a thoroughly contemporary God, understood as the mysterious depth dimension of human existence. The book's thesis had the added advantage, as I saw it, of agreeing with Emerson's more explicit pantheistic perspective.

But then I came up against Bill Fennell, who was teaching the pivotal subject of systematic theology. Fennell, it turned out, had little respect for Robinson and the theologians whose thought Robinson was popularizing, with the exception of Bonhoeffer whom, Fennell claimed, the Bishop had wildly twisted out of shape. Instead, Fennell directed us to thinkers like Kierkegaard and Karl Barth who spoke about the infinite qualitative difference between God and humanity as seen in the light of God's self-revelation in the people of Israel and Jesus Christ, and warned against the temptation of speaking about God by speaking about ourselves in a loud voice.

All this was painful to my ears, and I became increasingly disgruntled but too timid to speak out. However, I did argue the point after class with Fennell's assistant, David Demson. I remember trading verbal blows with Demson one afternoon in the basement of the college while classmates played ping pong a few feet away. I gave Demson my best pantheistic pitch (or panentheistic pitch as the neo-pans like to say today), and he came back with the traditional understanding of the otherness of God. On and on we tussled until suddenly it hit me: I'm not divine, however deep down one goes. I'm just—me. Get over it, and get on with the job of learning what these people are calling “the strange new world of the Bible.” From that moment on I have lived more or less in the spirit of the waggish theological commandment: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy Barth and thy Niebuhr as thyself.”

A few years later I made an important literary discovery that confirmed my theological leanings. John Updike's novel *Rabbit, Run* had knocked me over in college, and *Couples* proved an even more stimulating read. *Time* magazine now ran a cover story on the author and I learned that, while Updike had been writing *Rabbit, Run* in 1959, he was also undergoing a long and painful emotional crisis triggered by the fear of death. The crisis was finally resolved, *Time* quoted Updike as

saying, “only by clinging to the stern, neo-orthodox theology of Switzerland’s Karl Barth.”

I read these words again and blinked, amazed that a writer of Updike’s worldly brilliance would be so open to Barth’s rigorous Christ-centred theology. Later that year Karl Barth died and I found myself writing Updike a fan letter, and asking about his relationship with the great theologian. In reply, Updike stated that he had begun reading Barth ten years earlier and still had a copy of his commentary on Romans beside his bed “to read a few pages at a time.” The novelist also mentioned that he had written Barth the previous year to express how much his books had meant to him, and Barth’s secretary had written back a charming letter saying that Mr. Barth was “astonished” that this was the case. “The world seems emptier,” Updike concluded, “now that he is gone.” John Updike’s fiction has continued to confirm my understanding of the gospel. He doesn’t give us religious novels (thank God), but there’s religion in almost everything he writes, illuminating the world with subtle but powerful motions of judgment and grace.

My ministry began in a two-point charge in northern Ontario and included pastorates in small towns (which worked out well) and one city church (which didn’t work out so well). Early on I began producing short biblically-based chancel dramas as a way of involving members of the congregation in the proclamation of the gospel. I eventually branched out to full-length plays and musicals, involving people in the community as well as the church, anyone in fact open to the adventure. We staged productions of musicals like *Godspell* and *Anne of Green Gables*, comedies like Alan Ayckbourn’s *The Norman Conquests* trilogy, and psychological thrillers like Reginald Rose’s *Twelve Angry Men*, as well as our beloved chancel dramas. Friendships formed, skills developed, and seeds of faith were planted. But the local pharisees did not always approve. In fact, the first time we produced *Godspell* in the United Church in Bracebridge, Ontario, we were picketed by two young fundamentalists who marched up and down the sidewalk in front of the church carrying placards that read: “Jesus Christ, Saviour, Lord, King, but not Clown.”

And now suddenly the party is over, or at least nearly over. Where did the years go and what have I learned, especially during these last few years in retirement? One thing I have learned from my successor here in Huntsville is that choruses can be extremely effective in worship services, especially if the same choruses are used over a long period of time, giving them a chance to sink into people’s minds and hearts. If I were starting my ministry over again, I would begin every worship

service with the first stanza of *Voices United* Hymn # 402, “We are one as we come, joyful to be here . . .” And I would follow the benediction of every service with the first stanza of Hymn # 182, “Stay with us through the night. Stay with us through the pain. Stay with us, blessed stranger till the morning breaks again.”

I would also include more poems and special readings during services. Few of us are literary stylists. So why not take advantage, at least occasionally, of the great stylists who have given us powerful worship material? For example, the liturgical poems of Ann Weems (“The church of Jesus Christ is where people go when they skin their knees or their hearts . . .”), the devotional poetry of E. E. Cummings (“I thank you God for most this amazing day: for the leaping greenly spirits of trees and a blue true dream of sky; for everything which is natural which is infinite which is yes . . .”), and the theological poetry of John Updike (“Make no mistake: if he rose at all it was as His body; if the cell’s dissolution did not reverse, the molecules reknit, the amino acids rekindle, the church will fall . . .”).

Speaking of poetry, I’ll close with a cheeky little effort on my daughter’s part that well captures the texture of my days as I remember them.

### **The Minister’s Day**

Slouched behind his Underwood,  
Beginning the daunting task  
Of writing the Sunday sermon,  
Only to be interrupted by Mrs. Bell,  
Who wants to request  
That grape juice be used for communion  
Instead of that tang stuff they used last month.

An hour of marriage counselling with a couple  
Who just returned from their honeymoon.

Off to tea

With septuagenarian Mrs. Lewis.  
Hopefully she won’t mix up the salt and sugar this time.

Lunch of little liverwurst sandwiches and lemonade with The Ladies' Auxiliary.

Small talk about

Knitting

Quilting

Baking

And

How do you plan to get more young people into the church, Reverend?

Back to the sermon —

Interrupted this time by a phone call from Miss Templeton:

“Could you please turn down your microphone during the hymns,

It's not that we don't appreciate your baritone-sometimes-tenor voice,

It's just that . . . you know.”

A hospital visit to see Mr. Delgado, who after smoking three packages of cigarettes a day for 32 years can't figure out why he's dying.

The sermon again . . .

A dramatic visit from Mrs. Plume

Who a year ago convinced

The police to track down

The Reverend

While holidaying with his family

In the mountains of British Columbia

In order that he might rush home

And bury her dear Barry:

“He only wanted you to do it, Reverend.”

This time she's threatening to leave the church

Because he forgot to mention

Her sick Daphne

In last week's

Prayer.

A brief prayer with Mrs. Plume.

Thank goodness the secretary has him proof-read the Sunday bulletin.

There's a fatal spelling error in the sermon title that without the error should read:

“Our best shot for Jesus,”

Which if not caught and changed

May have caused Mrs. Plume

To threaten to leave the church again.

Dashing home for dinner  
Before attending the board meeting  
Where millionaire Michael MacKenzie III  
Determines how to get school bus driver Harold Henderson (and others)  
To drop a few more coins into the offering plate.

Getting ready for bed.... yawn

But . . .  
Just a minute dear. I'll be right there . . . yawn . . .  
I've got a brainwave for the Sunday sermon . . . yawn . . .  
Let me just jot it down . . . yawn . . . and I'll . . . zzzzzzzzzzzzz.

—Sandra McTavish

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*Touchstone* welcomes submissions from new authors. Articles should be approximately 3000 words in length and should be submitted at least three months before the publication date of a given theme. The themes of the upcoming numbers are:

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A profile of important United Church figures, or of figures influencing United Church people and ministries, is included in each number. Profiles also usually are approximately 3000 words in length. The profile editor is Prof. Sandra Beardsall, who can be reached at [sandra.beardsall@usask.ca](mailto:sandra.beardsall@usask.ca). Each number also contains book reviews, normally no more than 750 words each. The book review editor is Prof. Donald Schweitzer, who can be reached at [don.schweitzer@usask.ca](mailto:don.schweitzer@usask.ca).

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## PROFILE

### J. S. WOODSWORTH: CHRISTIAN SOCIALIST AND PEACEMONGER (Part II)

by Harold Wells



In this second part profile of James Shaver Woodsworth (1874-1942) we consider his transition from Methodist ministry into politics, his achievements as a Member of Parliament, and eventual leadership of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation. We note the influence of socialist ideas in The United Church of Canada which closely paralleled Woodsworth's political philosophy. Again, as we shall see, he paid a high price for his anti-war stance at the opening of World War II.

#### From Jail House to the House of Commons

We take up the story at the end of the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919 with Woodsworth in jail, charged with seditious libel. Rev. William Ivens and other colleagues were sentenced to one year in prison. F. J. Dixon waged a major court battle in defence of the freedom of the press and was finally acquitted. The charge against Woodsworth was then dropped. His accusers were embarrassed that much of the content of his "libel" consisted of quotes from the prophet Isaiah, who, it was said, was "lucky to be dead." In the Manitoba election of 1920 three strike leaders, including Ivens, were elected while still in prison!<sup>1</sup>

Lucy Woodsworth and their children were still back in Gibson's Landing, B.C. James did a national speaking tour for the Labour Defence League; this produced nothing more than dribbles of income to support the family. They moved to Vancouver in 1920 where he devoted his time to labour education, but under financial stress he again left his family, for employment in Winnipeg as secretary of the Labour Church. Though he had left the Methodist ministry in 1918, published comments are evidence of his continuing devotion to Jesus: "While the Labour Church refuses to be bound by dogmas, we believe that it is essentially in line with the teachings and spirit of Jesus of Nazareth. Most of us gladly, if

<sup>1</sup> Kenneth McNaught, *A Prophet in Politics: A Biography of J. S. Woodsworth* (University of Toronto Press, 1959), 132-140.

humbly, acknowledge his leadership and inspiration . . .” Rejecting “worship of an external deity,” he spoke of the modern worker’s idea of God: “This great new Life Force that is pulsating in his own veins and through society—is this not his idea of God?”<sup>2</sup> The Labour Church soon began to decline in numbers. It was in part the disaster of the First World War that broke the modern optimism of the social gospel. We have seen (in Part I) that in 1918 much of the Methodist leadership had already moved toward a leftist social ethic. But post-World War I “neo-orthodox” theologies (Barth, Niebuhr, Tillich—all of them politically to the left), with their strong sense of radical evil, human sin, and the need of transcendent salvation and hope, grew in influence. The Labour Church was hindered by religious division, some affirming an orthodox Christianity together with socialism, others wanting a “Marxian scientific socialism.”<sup>3</sup> The Labour Church was dead by 1924. Richard Allen opines that it was “probably not a viable institution in Canada,” since its “religious and theological resources were limited.”<sup>4</sup> It had, however, helped to raise the class consciousness of working people, and served those who were alienated from the main denominations.

Woodsworth joined the Independent Labour Party, one of numerous parties of the left flourishing in Winnipeg after the strike. He ran for Parliament with the slogan “Human Needs Before Property Rights.” His platform included “expansion of public ownership in transportation, public utilities, finance and industry.”<sup>5</sup> In the federal election of 1921 Woodsworth was elected in Winnipeg and the Rev. William Irvine was elected as the Labour member from Calgary. Irvine stated in Parliament that “the honourable member from Centre Winnipeg is the leader of the labour group—and I am the group.”<sup>6</sup> With an MP’s salary, the family was finally able to live together in Ottawa.

A journalist described Woodsworth at this time as “a small sized man of forty-eight, with a short-cropped tapering beard streaked with grey. He is thin and pale and ascetic, a little bit bald, built generally in delicate lines . . . His countenance, while not dour, is rarely illumined with a smile . . . He speaks splendidly, his voice of the staccato pitch, not

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<sup>2</sup> Woodsworth, cited by McNaught, 138.

<sup>3</sup> Ben Smillie, *Beyond the Social Gospel: Church Protest on the Prairies* (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 1991), 98-99.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Allen, *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada 1914-1918* (University of Toronto Press, 1971), 173.

<sup>5</sup> McNaught, 151.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 167.

unpleasant, accompanied with energetic gestures.”<sup>7</sup>

In the election of 1921 the Conservative Prime Minister Arthur Meighen was soundly defeated. The Liberal leader, Mackenzie King, became Prime Minister, but no party held a majority. The Progressives, mainly a farmers’ party, with major rural support in the West and Ontario, held sixty-five seats. Woodsworth and Irvine worked closely with Progressive MPs, who, with the two socialists, held the balance of power. The Progressives, however, were not a cohesive group, their members often co-opted by the Liberals.<sup>8</sup>

### Working-Class Crusader in Parliament

Newly elected to Parliament, Woodsworth’s first concern was unemployment, insisting that this was no mere misfortune, but a problem inherent in an economic system that put profits ahead of people. He demanded an unemployment insurance scheme as the first charge on the resources of the country. He called for inclusion of all railways in the public Canadian National Railway system, and the breaking up of the private monopoly on banking and credit. He loudly protested the anti-labour activities of the national police force (now the Royal Canadian Mounted Police), objecting to its espionage activities within the labour movement: “I should not like to suggest how many thousands of dollars I have cost Canada in having the police trail me around . . .”<sup>9</sup> He campaigned (successfully) for the establishment of divorce courts. He protested the Immigration Act of 1919 which denied jury trial to immigrants charged with sedition. Because of this passion for civil liberties he was heckled as a “red revolutionary,” and described as one who “desired to see a Soviet form of government.”<sup>10</sup>

Notably, Woodsworth and Irvine gave voice to the cause of the steel workers of Cape Breton in the 1920s, where several companies had amalgamated, reducing workers’ wages by 37½ percent. Suffering semi-famine conditions, the men “struck on the job,” cutting production to equal the pay cut. Woodsworth strongly defended the workers’ action, with the support of many Progressive MPs, including the Ontario Progressive member, Agnes McPhail (the first female elected to Parliament). The Liberal government insisted that the strike was a matter

<sup>7</sup> *Montreal Standard*, 15 April 1922, in McNaught, 158.

<sup>8</sup> Walter Stewart, *The Life and Political Times of Tommy Douglas* (Toronto: McArthur & Co., 2003), 59.

<sup>9</sup> McNaught, 169.

<sup>10</sup> *Saturday Night*, 24 March 1923, in McNaught, 168.

of provincial jurisdiction, but in 1924 sent in militia to quell the unrest in Nova Scotia mining towns. In Parliament Woodsworth highlighted “wretched housing and sanitary conditions . . . low wages, irregular work, and in the case of the steel workers, long working days of 11- and 13-hour shifts . . .”<sup>11</sup> Unsatisfactory compromises were reached, and Woodsworth constantly called for an eight hour working day, minimum wage laws, and unemployment insurance. He wanted a government-owned central bank, which would democratically control credit and the national currency, rather than have the economic life of the nation controlled by corporations. Many of the “radical” measures he called for were eventually adopted, sometimes many years later.

By 1924 twelve or fifteen of the Progressives worked together with the two Labour members to form what came to be called the “Ginger Group,” while many other Progressives were absorbed by the Liberals. Another minority government resulted from the election of 1925, with Woodsworth re-elected in Winnipeg with a large majority. While Irvine lost in Calgary, another Labour member, A. A. Heaps, was elected from Winnipeg. King could hold on to power only with the support of the Progressives, and the votes of the two Labour members who held the balance of power.

Woodsworth and Heaps negotiated with both Conservative and Liberal leaders on behalf of the unemployed and for old age pensions, and for amendments to the Immigration Act and the criminal code.<sup>12</sup> While Meighen offered no encouragement, King agreed in writing to immediate old age pension legislation, with promises of other things later. King also offered Woodsworth the post of Minister of Labour, which he promptly refused. But they accepted King’s promise of pension legislation, which was passed by the House in May 1926, and King’s government was saved. The legislation, however, was rejected by the Conservative-dominated Senate. King’s government was soon defeated in the House (on charges of corruption) and Governor General Lord Byng appointed Meighen as Prime Minister. After the 1926 election (following the “constitutional crisis”) the Liberals were returned to government, and the pension legislation passed both the House and the Senate in 1927.<sup>13</sup> It provided for the federal government to pay half, up to a maximum of \$240 per pensioner, to any cooperating province. It was a grudging first step toward a more caring and cooperative society, but a major

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<sup>11</sup> McNaught, 176.

<sup>12</sup> See the letter of Woodsworth and Heaps, cited by McNaught, 218.

<sup>13</sup> McNaught, 217-220.

achievement through the political skill of Woodsworth and Heaps.

When the depression struck in 1929, Woodsworth crusaded across the country, and in Parliament, demanding that the government act nationally on behalf of working and unemployed people, calling repeatedly for unemployment insurance (which the Liberals finally introduced, but not until 1940). In the election of 1930 Woodsworth was re-elected in Winnipeg, while King's government was defeated and replaced by the Conservatives under R. B. Bennett. Woodsworth continued to plead for federal action for the unemployed, citing St. Augustine, that "they who possess superfluity possess the goods of others."<sup>14</sup> As the nation sank further into unemployment and misery, Bennett did little more than King, with paltry relief and public works programs. It was during these years of great economic distress that the popularity of labour politics grew rapidly across the country, in every jurisdiction. As a national figure, Woodsworth had been raising the people's expectations of their governments. He would now lead his colleagues to the formation of a new party.

### **Leader of the CCF**

In 1932 there appeared the League for Social Reconstruction (LSR), an organization of academics and intellectuals led by Professor Frank Underhill of the University of Toronto. Woodsworth greatly valued the support of this group through its pamphlets, study groups, and its major volume, *Social Planning for Canada* (1935). The Ginger Group, meeting with some members of the LSR, planned a national convention at Calgary to form a new party. There the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation was born, as a federation of several existing socialist and labour parties and farmer organizations. In 1933 at Regina the party's basic philosophy was debated and adopted. The "Regina Manifesto"—the first draft written by Underhill—became the official policy of the party. Faithfully reflecting the democratic socialist outlook long promoted by Woodsworth, it promised a planned economy, which meant social ownership of major industries and utilities, but not the total public ownership of all businesses. It clearly distinguished itself from Russian communism. The manifesto stated that "We do not believe in change by violence," but only through constitutional methods. It called for a full system of insurances—illness, accident, old age, unemployment, public health, and hospital services. It called for constitutional change, allowing for national economic planning, the abolition of the Senate, guaranteed

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<sup>14</sup> McNaught, 246.

“security of tenure for the farmer upon his farm,” and a system of crop insurance. The manifesto supported the League of Nations, embracing Woodsworth’s persistent opposition to war: “We stand resolutely against all participation in imperialist wars.” The final, ringing words of the manifesto would long fuel the rhetoric of the party’s enemies: “No C.C.F. government will rest content until it has eradicated capitalism and put into operation the full programme of socialized planning which will lead to the establishment in Canada of the Cooperative Commonwealth.”<sup>15</sup>

### A Socialist Church?

In the 1930s, responding to the dreadful suffering of the depression years, various Christian organizations, whose goals aligned closely with those of Woodsworth and the CCF, were formed by church members, especially of the newly formed United Church of Canada. For example, in Toronto in 1931, the Movement for a Christian Social Order, largely under the leadership of Professor John Line of Emmanuel College, contended that the teachings of Jesus meant, in practical terms, Christian socialism. Line wanted a society based on friendship, “transformed according to the radical maxims of Jesus.” Pious generalities about “brotherhood” would not be enough. In view of the palpable failure of capitalism, the movement called for the “social ownership and control of the means of production and distribution of wealth.”<sup>16</sup> At Toronto Conference in 1933, in the darkest days of the depression, a resolution drafted by Line was adopted by majority vote, calling for the socialization of banks, natural resources, transportation, and other services. A similar resolution passed that year at the Montreal and Ottawa Conference.<sup>17</sup> These resolutions were by no means unopposed by prominent church leaders, such as the first moderator, George Pidgeon, and some lay business leaders, who objected to the alignment of the church with the agenda of any political party.<sup>18</sup> In 1934 the General Council received the report of its Commission on Christianizing the

<sup>15</sup> See the full text, McNaught, 321-330.

<sup>16</sup> Roger Hutchinson, “Introduction,” in *Towards the Christian Revolution*, ed. R.B.Y. Scott and Gregory Vlastos [1936] (Kingston: Ronald P. Frye, 1989), xii-xiii.

<sup>17</sup> Hutchinson, “The Fellowship for a Christian Social Order, 1934-1945,” in *A Long and Faithful March: Towards the Christian Revolution, 1930s/1980s*, ed. Harold Wells and Roger Hutchinson (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 1989), 20.

<sup>18</sup> Hutchinson, “Introduction,” xxv.

Social Order, which acknowledged “the right of the community, acting through the State, to revise its definition of property.” It affirmed that “Christianity has never recognized any absolute or unconditional private ownership . . . Common welfare must be the supreme concern.”<sup>19</sup> The Council referred the report to the Board of Evangelism and Social Service. The Board was to make favourable comment on the report, but ultimately no further action on it was taken.

In 1934 Line and others, together with academics from Montreal and Kingston (such as Professors King Gordon, R.B.Y. Scott, Eugene Forsey, and Gregory Vlastos) formed the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order, “an association of Christians whose religious convictions led them to the belief that the capitalist economic system is fundamentally at variance with Christian principles, and who regard the creation of a new social order to be essential to the realization of the Kingdom of God.”<sup>20</sup> The FCSO became a national non-denominational fellowship, organized according to the presbytery structure of the United Church; it published pamphlets, sponsored local study groups, and engaged in advocacy for policies very like those of the CCF. This group of theologians and church leaders strongly supported a social gospel ethic and socialist political program. However, the influence of neo-orthodox theology was evident in some of their writings. Line, for example, had parted with Woodsworth’s very liberal theological stance. In *Towards the Christian Revolution* (1936) he wrote that “adherence to the humanitarian or non-theological Jesus of Religious Liberalism is no substitute for surrender to the authority of Jesus as the embodiment of love’s graciousness and of love’s sovereignty. It is in this form that the church needs a revival of faith in the deity of Jesus . . .”<sup>21</sup>

In sum, it would be wildly inaccurate to describe the United Church of this time as a “socialist church.” Despite the socialist ethic of some of its theologians (supported by clergy and laity in the Conferences) it is obvious that church members did not vote massively for the CCF in the election of 1935. It was an uphill battle for Woodsworth and his new party. Ranged against him were the dominant powers of the world of business and capital, the press, and even of religion. In its first national election the CCF received an impressive 400,000 votes, but won only

<sup>19</sup> General Council of The United Church of Canada, *Record of Proceedings, 1934*, 237-243.

<sup>20</sup> Hutchinson, “The Fellowship for a Christian Social Order,” 23.

<sup>21</sup> John Line, “The Theological Principles,” in *Towards the Christian Revolution*, 49.

seven seats. Ironically, with about half that number of votes, the newly formed Social Credit party won seventeen seats, and the Liberal Party, with far less than half the votes, won a huge majority.<sup>22</sup> King reigned until 1948, and the Liberals would remain in power until 1957. Many of Woodsworth's social goals were eventually realized in part through the influence of the CCF and its successor, the New Democratic Party. Canada, however, has never become a "socialist" nation, nor the United Church a "socialist church."

### **Paying the Price, Once Again**

In the lead-up to World War II the CCF found itself divided over Canada's participation in the war. Woodsworth himself was adamant that all warfare, even against Hitler, was an imperialist struggle. Most of the younger generation of CCF leaders, and many of Woodsworth's own contemporaries in the party, could not agree. Tommy Douglas declared, "I lost my pacifism in 1936 and I lost it in Europe. I saw a group of people living under the Swastika . . . I saw what happened to people who tried to meet force with reason."<sup>23</sup> The CCF, concerned for its credibility with the population during and after the war, moved gradually to full endorsement of Canada's engagement in military action. Woodsworth, heartbroken over his failure to persuade his party to follow his pacifist commitment, offered his resignation as leader. Out of loyalty and love, his party refused to accept his resignation. When it came to the final vote in Parliament, Woodsworth was allowed to speak first. In an eloquent statement of conviction, he declared, "I still believe in some of the principles underlying the teachings of Jesus . . . War is an absolute negation of anything Christian." Citing the poet J. R. Lowell, his words reflected his own personal struggle: "Truth forever on the scaffold/Wrong forever on the throne/Yet that scaffold sways the future/And, behind the dim unknown/Standeth God within the shadow/Keeping watch above his own."<sup>24</sup> Woodsworth having had his say, M. J. Coldwell, now the chair of the National Council of the CCF and the effective leader, assured the government of the party's support of the war. The majority machine rolled on with one dissenting vote, that of James Shaver Woodsworth.

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<sup>22</sup> McNaught, 275-277.

<sup>23</sup> Douglas, cited by David Lewis, *The Good Fight: Political Memoirs, 1909-1958*, 170.

<sup>24</sup> Hansard, quoted in McNaught, 311. The full text of "Once to Every Man and Nation" appears in all three United Church hymn books, though in altered form in *Voices United*, # 694.

Having again won his seat in 1940, but having suffered a stroke, Woodsworth appeared in Parliament for the last time in October, 1941, where he was welcomed with thunderous applause from all sides. After suffering another stroke, he died in March, 1942.

Perhaps the measure of the man is best taken from those who disagreed with him. His arch political opponent, Mackenzie King declared, “I admire him in my heart.”<sup>25</sup> David Lewis, who was instrumental in deposing him as leader, wrote eloquently of him: “He sometimes spoke soothingly like Isaiah, sometimes accusingly like Amos, but always in the most arresting style. No matter what the occasion or gathering, his attendance affected the level of discussion, and one invariably felt the presence of greatness.”<sup>26</sup>

With hindsight it is easy to see that Woodsworth was a man of his own time, exhibiting some of its limitations. Yet he was the cutting edge of his time, pushing and pulling his country forward to better places of cooperation and compassion. Even if we do not share his unbending pacifism, his critique of war is worth hearing again today. He and his colleagues clearly failed to “eradicate capitalism,” which had so evidently failed the great majority of people in the early twentieth century. Tragically, the violence and oppression of state monopoly communism in the Soviet Union did much to undermine every other brand of “socialism.” Ironically, the CCF’s constant (and successful) prodding to move toward democratic socialist measures—some of them implemented by governments led by other parties—may be said to have done much to *save* capitalism! Again, we may see, with hindsight, that his ultra-liberal, social gospel theology was not sufficient in itself to sustain the whole life of a Christian church. The social gospel heritage, however, is very much alive in the United Church in the liberationist, feminist, and ecological theologies of our own time. But the gains for social cooperation and compassion, for which Woodsworth and his movement fought, are vulnerable again in the twenty-first century. For this reason, we do well to remember him and to listen to him, to be inspired by his courage, and to celebrate his achievements.

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<sup>25</sup> Hansard, quoted in McNaught, 309.

<sup>26</sup> Lewis, 28.

## BOOK REVIEWS

### *The Encounters: Retelling the Bible from Migration and Intercultural Perspectives*

**HyeRan Kim-Cragg and EunYoung Choi.** Translated by Lark Kim. Daejang, South Korea: Daejanggan Publishers, 2013. Pp. 158.

The result of a felicitous collaboration between a Korean biblical scholar and a Korean-Canadian practical theologian, this volume is an intercultural encounter intellectually and linguistically. Originally written in Korean, its publication is to be celebrated not only for itself, but also as an incentive to similar cross-disciplinary, cross-language scholarly endeavours in other theological fields.

The volume is also a welcome addition to the attempt, begun by feminist biblical interpreters in the West, to redress the woeful lack of attention given to the voice and experiences of women and girls in the Bible. Such attempts, as quoted in the references, range from Phyllis Trible and Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza through *The Women's Bible Commentary* to the United Church's own Lois Miriam Wilson (*Miriam, Mary and Me, Stories Seldom Told*). Similar attempts have been paralleled in Asia by the work of the Korean Association of Women Theologians, Korean women biblical scholars, and the publications in English of the Asian Women's Resource Centre for Culture and Theology, both in its journal, *In God's Image*, and in specific studies of how Asian women have come to read the Bible.

In one sense, therefore, the twelve stories of the present volume might come across almost as "stories often told/retold." Except for the monologues by young Gershom (son of Moses and Zipporah), by the servant girl instrumental in the healing of Naaman's leprosy, and by a [fictional] elderly resident of Nineveh, the remaining nine stories are now familiar to many—Tamar, Hagar, Rahab, Ruth, Mary, the Syro-Phoenician woman, the Samaritan woman, and early church leaders, Lydia and Priscilla/Prisca.

What is fresh, however, is the perspective they bring. In addition to dealing with gender and class issues when such arise, these biblical characters lift up their identities and experiences as displaced persons thrust into encounters with cultures and religions in locations new and unfamiliar to them, with all the power differentials involved. In most cases they seem to be able to arrive at a workable solution and acceptance of who they are and have become, sojourners no longer. In this process, they share valuable observations on family and societal

relationships, crossing cultural, religious, and social boundaries. The challenge is how to engage in these without making the storytellers sound anachronistically too “modern.”

One might also wonder, given the focus of the volume, if the treasure to be hunted is already predetermined. In other words, how do the authors avoid the temptation of trying to bend every story to fit the Procrustean bed of migration and interculturalism? Take for instance the monologue of Priscilla/Prisca which ingeniously weaves well-known passages from Acts with an incident Paul had to deal with in 1 Corinthians 8:4-13. One wonders whether the single-minded foregrounding of intercultural matters (in this case, engaging in intercultural cuisine) does not risk dismissing, not just overshadowing, Paul’s theological and pastoral struggle around food sacrificed to idols. That the authors have managed, on the whole, not to fall too often into such temptations is a testimony to their sensitivity and skill. At the same time, one suspects they have had to make hard choices, for instance, in keeping the Samaritan woman’s reflections on a level that did not delve into postcolonial layers such as those explored by Musa Dube.

### **Using the Volume**

Each chapter follows a well-defined tripartite pattern. A first section provides solid scholarly background information on the biblical material, plus hints on how each story could relate to contemporary issues surrounding migration and intercultural relations, such as those faced by Filippina migrant workers in South Korea, or the contribution of bi-racial children. In developing their “hermeneutic of interculturalism,” the authors draw most heavily on feminist, literary narrative, and reader-response critical approaches, while making use of historical criticism where necessary. The second and major section is the imaginary monologue spoken by each biblical protagonist in her own voice and words. A third section invites reflection and action by posing two questions for discussion, questions which could be expanded by more specific ones governed by the context and make-up of particular study groups.

### **For Whom?**

Given the authors’ goal of providing imaginative biblical teaching material for teachers/leaders in the churches’ educational ministries for youth and young adults, such leaders constitute the obvious readership. Another group of readers could be comprised of working pastors and theological students in search of fresh material for preaching and for

leading Bible studies, or engaged in endeavours in becoming intercultural faith communities. The volume therefore would be an excellent global and intercultural investment for church and seminary libraries, as well as individuals.

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***An Introduction to The United Church of Canada: Key Texts with Introductions and Commentary***

**HyeRan Kim-Cragg and Don Schweitzer, eds. Daejeon, South Korea: Daejanggan Publisher, 2013. Pp. 91.**

People often ask the Moderator to give an overview and assessment of The United Church of Canada. I always found this request preposterous. A woman from Saskatchewan once said to me, "Nobody could ever travel all the back roads of the United Church." That's right. The church in all its manifestations can never be comprehended in one mind nor captured in the pages of one book.

This little book gives it a mighty try. It is an English translation of a ninety-page booklet written originally in Korean for Korean-speaking members of the church. I think it accomplishes the impossible, not in every detail, but in its purpose of opening the story and the soul of the church.

The idea of the first version of the book was to translate into Korean several key United Church texts, to introduce the texts with contextual information, and to follow them with a critical commentary. It occurred to the translators and editors that a translation back into English might be needed and useful in the wider church. I think they are right about that.

One of the dangers (there are opportunities too) of what Douglas Hall calls, "the humiliation of the church" is the temptation to become trapped in the present. Anxieties rising out of current experience can make the present feel not only oppressive but also permanent. This book is a voice speaking the story, the work, and the dilemmas of a church with big, brave dreams; a church with big, gnarly challenges; and a church with an amazing story to tell and to live. It's hard to see all this if one is trapped in the present. Sometimes a perspective from the outside can help to set us free. That's the power of this little book for those who want to know the church in its larger life.

Here's how the book does it. It begins in the contemporary context with excerpts from "The State of the Church" and "Called to be

Church" (GC 40, 2009). These texts are introduced by a few paragraphs setting them in the church's story. The brief commentary following these texts gives an interpretation of their significance today.

This pattern of introduction, text, and commentary is the format used throughout the book. Texts cited in whole or in part are: Joint Committee on Church Union: Historical Statement and Chown's Statement (ROP, GC 01, 1925); A Song of Faith (ROP, GC37, 2000); Intercultural Ministries: Living Into Transformation (ROP, GC41, 2012). This method can be an effective resource for faith formation and ecclesial awareness at a profound level.

With so many formative texts to choose from ("Mending the World," for example, comes to mind) I can imagine that arriving at these final selections was a challenge. In the conclusion to the book, editors HyeRan Kim-Cragg and Don Schweitzer write, "The documents in this booklet were chosen by us, two faculty members of St. Andrew's College. The students who worked on them with us [that is, translators Tae-il Yang, Kwang-bum Cho, and Pyung-Sik Shin] expressed a desire to do something similar with documents relating to other topics. In the future we hope to produce another booklet, with documents relating to topics and aspects of the United Church's life chosen by the students we worked with and other Korean-speaking members of the United Church."

In my opinion a wise church will welcome such initiative and will put it to use in enlarging our present, which is the function of the Spirit's gift of hope.

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### ***The Empty Church: Theater, Theology, and Bodily Hope***

**Shannon Craigo-Snell. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. Pp. 208.**

There is something intriguing about the inter-disciplinary approach to doing theology. Shannon Craigo-Snell's *The Empty Church* as a dialogue between the disciplines of performance theory and theology is a case in point. Theatre studies are not a typical conversation partner for a systematic theologian whose previous interests were focused on the likes of Karl Rahner. But Craigo-Snell argues that the connection between theatre and Christianity has always existed, although not adequately articulated. In order to make this connection explicit and apparent, Craigo-Snell brings performance theatre studies and theology together.

The main thesis of this book is that the church can be seen as

performance, “a discipline,” embodying the “relationship with God in Jesus Christ, mediated by Scripture, in hope of the Holy Spirit” (5). Craigo-Snell offers a further articulation of church as performance, employing three features of performance as event, interaction, and doubleness. These three elements are examined and applied to the church where Scripture is performed, interpreted, and known.

The book is organized on the basis of the steps required to put on a play: Setting the Stage, Training the Actors, Changing Roles, Changing Scenes, and finally Striking the Set. Each chapter is an intentional dialogue among theories, theologies, and scholars. Chapter 1, Setting the Stage, provides a methodological framework for understanding performance, followed by an informed description of what it means to perform church and perform scripture. Both involve attention to, and interpretation of, the contexts. Chapter 2, Training Actors, discusses the work of Don Saliers, Ignatius of Loyola, and Simon Harak in conversation with theatre director Constantin Stanislavski. It explores the understanding of performance as a holistic activity that requires emotions, intellect, volition, and body. In Chapter 3, Changing Roles, Craigo-Snell poses the question of how a person is shaped and influenced by the liturgical construction in church. She also explores how church and theatre can be used to sustain systems of oppression and domination, or help people to resist such systems. She connects Augusto Boal, a director from Brazil, who wrote *Theatre of the Oppressed*, with Letty Russell, a theologian and Christian educator from the USA, both of whom sought to embody and envision liberation in their work. In this liberative performance, Christian roles have to be changed, and the roles of actors and audiences are switched (78). Chapter 4, Changing Scenes, features two conversation partners, director Bertolt Brecht, and theologian Delores Williams. They pick up the work of Boal and Russell as they warn of the danger of a singular story, containing a singular perspective, promoting a singular role. Both Williams and Brecht seek to disrupt this dominant singular role by siding with the marginalized. The perspectives and roles of the marginalized are multiple. They are the work of “polydoxy” as Catherine Keller and Laurel C. Schneider put it in *Polydoxy: Theology of Multiplicity and Relation*. Having figuratively torn down the old stage of singularity, chapter 5, Striking the Set, speaks about creating the empty space, a new stage upon which to perform. For this task, Craigo-Snell brings theologian Karl Barth into conversation with theatre director Peter Brook. Both Barth and Brook see the need to “discipline the emptiness,” as a way of diligently practising humility. This humility is accompanied with the faithful anticipation of the work of

the Holy Spirit through whom “a disciplined openness” is possible (135). Like the women who had a relationship with Jesus, who witnessed the empty tomb, and who shared the news as the first evangelists, we are inspired to witness to and proclaim the good news.

Along with the interdisciplinary approach to theology, drawing from the wisdom in performance studies, this book makes a valuable contribution to a theological argument that bodies (human, sacramental, ecclesial, and social) are important for doing theology. For anyone who desires to transform worship into a vital, experiential, and theologically meaningful experience, this book offers salient insights.

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### *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*

**James H. Cone.** Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2013.  
Pp. 202

James H. Cone, Charles A. Briggs Distinguished Professor of Systematic Theology at Union Theological Seminary in New York, has been well known in theological circles since the 1969 publication of *Black Theology and Black Power*. The paperback edition of his work published in 2011, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, is now available in Canada from Novalis. In this book the author amplifies the story of African-American faith as he outlines how the images of the cross and the lynching tree have been experienced in Black tradition; and he critiques the majority's faith as he details how the lynching tree and all it represents have been ignored in White tradition. White American acknowledgement and honesty about this particular history, like non-Native acknowledgement of the truth concerning residential schools in Canada, is a necessary step on the road to reconciliation, and the promise and beauty of the cross.

Lynching was condoned by authorities in the United States for eighty years from the removal of federal troops after Reconstruction in the American South—up until the emergence of the civil rights movement. The word “lynching” points to all the executions of African Americans by white mobs, and not just instances of hanging. The intended effect of lynching was to terrorize the Black community into accepting a subservient role in white society. Cone weaves this theme of the cross and the lynching tree through four reflections: on Reinhold Niebuhr, Martin Luther King, African American cultural expression, and

womanist and feminist perspectives.

Cone very much values Niebuhr's insistence on the centrality of the cross in all Christian understanding. Accordingly, the author expresses profound disappointment with Niebuhr's silence about the despair of African Americans even when there is evidence that he was well aware of cases of lynching. The great theologian's failure is named as his lack of empathy, his unwillingness to walk in Black shoes. Niebuhr's doctrine of Christian realism expressed itself in his gradualist attitude to the struggle for racial justice. For Cone, Niebuhr represents both the potential and the limitation of the mainstream theological tradition in the twentieth century.

Martin Luther King was, of course, well aware of the threat represented by the lynching tree. Cone underlines just how seriously MLK took the image of the cross, not only with respect to the upholding of values of love and non-violence, but in terms of his own commitment to risk his life in the struggle for justice. Cone invites his readers to wonder about the cross and question the idea of redemptive suffering. While he leans toward the view of womanist theologian, Shawn Copeland, that the cross expresses divine solidarity with the oppressed, Cone admires MLK's awareness of the cross as revealing the love that alone can heal the wound in humankind. Where Niebuhr analyzed the cross, King lived the cross.

African-American poets, such as Countee Cullen, explored the religious meaning of the lynching tree, including its connection with the cross of Christ, while both Black and White preachers chose not to address this relationship. Cone says that they "either didn't see the parallels between the cross and the lynching tree or else they were too fearful of the dire consequences . . . to make the connection" (p.94). Black poet Langston Hughes caused considerable offence at the University of North Carolina with his allusion to "Nigger Christ on the cross of the South" (p.114).

The resistance to lynching has had effective spokespersons in African-American women. Cone lifts up Ida B. Wells in particular, a militant journalist in the early days of this tragic history, a contemporary of Frederick Douglass. She challenged many constituencies to join the movement to eradicate lynching, and she pointed out the falseness of a faith that refuses to see injustice and speak up. How can a person have faith in the crucified One when that person colludes with the lynching of the innocent? Perhaps the most effective witness against the conspiracy of silence was the song penned by a Jewish writer, "Strange Fruit," and performed by a Black woman, Billie Holliday. With this example Cone

completes a thread he has been following all along, the complementary contributions to Black consciousness of church and nightclub, faith and culture. The author encourages people of faith to develop sufficient imagination to see connected together the cross, the real suffering of contemporary humanity, and God's liberating love, inspiring hope in continuing struggles for justice in history.

Throughout the book Cone upholds paradox without attempting resolution, noting for instance how both spirituals and blues "spoke about the tragic and the comic, sorrow and joy simultaneously" (139). Cone continually alludes to his personal experience, growing up in an AME congregation in Arkansas. His writing speaks to readers personally, challenging us to temper our realism with empathy and our individualism with passionate solidarity. Cone opens for his readers a rich tradition of faith and culture, spiritual resources empowering an oppressed people, not only to survive, but to overcome, and a challenge to the comfortable one in each of us to listen without defensiveness.

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*Invasion of the Dead: Preaching Resurrection*

**Brian K. Blount. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014. Pp. 135.**

"I'm not sure that we really believe in resurrection in this day and age. We talk about it around Easter; we celebrate Jesus and the empty tomb. But still we're uneasy about this business of literal resurrection from the dead, or figurative resurrection from troubled times and circumstances" (78). This statement summarizes the point of the book. Blount is arguing that mainline churches need to take the story of Christ's resurrection and the promise of a corporeal resurrection of the dead far more seriously. While I must confess my own sense of ambivalence on this subject, and know a great many Progressive Christians who would bristle at the suggestion that belief in a physical resurrection is a necessary part of Christian faith, this book prompts an examination of how we approach our faith, the gospel stories, and where we find our hope—and live it out.

Blount is President and Professor of New Testament at Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond, Virginia. His previous books are on Revelation and preaching the Gospel of Mark. This book calls for approaching the story of Christ's resurrection as an apocalyptic moment in which God invades creation to begin a great transformation. This

transformation is necessary in a world and culture increasingly fixated on death and destruction. He views the increasing obsession in popular culture with catastrophes, such as epidemics, environmental disasters, or threats from space, as evidence of a general anxiety. He maintains that the Christian story of resurrection offers a powerful response to this societal angst. It is crucial for us to consider the importance of the hope for renewal and transformation offered through Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. Blount urges his readers to reflect on what it means to believe that Christ rose from the dead; that God defeats death in the aftermath of crucifixion, and, therefore can do so again for all of us.

Blount structures his book into three essays; Preaching the Apocalypse, Preaching Paul, and Preaching Mark. Each of these essays is followed by a sermon which he has preached on each of these topics. Central to Blount's theology in this book is "apocalyptic eschatology." This involves a mythic and symbolic reading of the texts, but also a real belief in a physical resurrection of the dead. As he argues, if we believe Jesus could be raised from the dead, then we must believe God is capable of effecting a corporate resurrection of the dead. Blount contrasts his faith in an eschatological resurrection with an individualistic vision of salvation and the afterlife. He warns that a focus on individual salvation can lead to isolation and minimizing the plight of others and the need for a continued fight for justice. By putting our hope in a transformed world that is offered through corporate resurrection, Blount suggests that we develop a more inclusive sense of justice and become more focused on a societal or corporate vision of salvation.

This book is a compelling resource for encouraging greater discussion of the significance of the resurrection. It encourages questions as to how to preach and proclaim new life and transformation, and how to resist the temptation to give in to anxiety about the loss of that which we hold dear, such as our faith communities and historic traditions. Blount's use of popular shows about zombies or vampires to illustrate his theology of resurrection is not always convincing, and sometimes misses the mark, but it is worth greater reflection. That said, *Invasion of the Dead* encourages us to emphasize God's promise of life and renewal of our world, and motivates us to offer resistance to a culture that seems fixated on death, rapacious consumption and destruction. Even if one doesn't fully agree on how Blount gets to that point, he forces one to reflect on how we read and approach the promise of resurrection.

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