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EDITORIAL

The editorial board of *Touchstone* meets once a year to review past numbers of the journal and to choose the themes for future numbers. A brief report of the most recent meeting and on the decisions made about future themes is contained in our Insert pages. Our theme in this number is vocation, and we have an impressive lineup of writers and articles.

Sandra Beardsall leads off this number with a discussion of the re-conception of vocation in the Reformation era. She begins by whimsically contemplating the murder of George Herbert, and goes on to observe that "A Funny Thing Happened . . ." when Luther proclaimed the priesthood of all believers.

For biblical input on the theme of vocation, we turned to Bill Richards, who deftly draws us into a tale of missing donkeys, surprising us with the fresh relevance of the ancient stories that we call sacred. From Saul to Paul, he maintains that "call" is a way of responding to the question, "What is to be done?"

The vocational focus then shifts to personal testimony as Ted Harrison, who is both an ordained minister and a rock musician, offers insight into how these two worlds coalesce in his calling. He makes the provocative claim that Christian ministry is a form of entertainment, and that we should be intentional about *entertaining* in our ministries.

Speaking of music, our next testimony comes from Linnea Good, one of the most expressive and itinerant of United Church musicians. She uses the account of a long-planned music ministry at the Christian Medical College of Vellore, India, to speak about discovering and living true voice as her vocation.

Ted Dodd then tells of his journey to becoming a diaconal minister. He clarifies the identity of the diaconal vocation, lifting up five aspects of that identity as articulated by Louise Williams. He calls us to recognize that, as well as there being a "priesthood of all believers," there is a "diakonia of all believers."

Today vocation is a challenging reality for young people when so many do not know what it is they want or are called to be and to do. Josephine Braun tackles this reality in her article on the critical task of helping emerging adults discern their vocations.

On the little acreage that we set aside for speaking "From the Heart," we have placed a reflection on the vocation of mentoring by Peter Short. It is no secret that Peter, a former moderator, is in demand as a Barnabas (Acts 4:36) in our church, and we are privileged to have his encouraging voice in these pages.

In this number Harold Wells gives us a profile of John Wesley, focused on the call to a holy life. With regard to profiles, our vocation at *Touchstone* is first of all to highlight the witness of unsung saints in our

own context, saints whose stories might not be told elsewhere. But we also need to make room for stories of some of the saints whose witness has been globally compelling—lest we forget their shaping influence.

The number is rounded out by our usual reviews, including one on a book by Pope Francis. It is my hope, and that of the editorial board, that this number on vocation may stimulate reflection on the vocations that are ours, and may even be instrumental in assisting some readers in identifying and moving more intentionally toward new callings.

A Reflection on Vocation and the Order of Ministry

When I think of vocation, it is hard not to think of a warm evening in late May, 1969, when I was among thirteen candidates ordained by Hamilton Conference of the United Church. The setting was the large and elegant sanctuary of Trinity Church in Kitchener, packed with the families and friends of the ordinands, as well as with the Conference delegates. The Trinity choir sang the *Veni Creator* ("Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire") as we knelt at the Communion rail. As one by one we were called to the pre-dieu for the laying-on-of-hands and prayer, the rest of us remained kneeling in prayer. I recall the moment as one of consecration to my calling, and to Christ whom I sought to serve.

Impressive as the service was, it may also have been one of the last high moments of a church comfortable in the context of Christendom. I was aware that evening that only a few elements in the service spoke clearly about the challenges of ministering in a surrounding culture, one largely uninterested in maintaining the quasi-establishment of Christianity. Indeed, my theological studies had led me to resolve not to wear clerical garb mid-week or at Sunday services. So I had come to the ordination service that evening without a Geneva gown, or black shirt and collar. Whoever was in charge of the young ordinands quickly equipped me and one other outlier with surplus black choir gowns so that everything would be seen to be done "decently and in good order."

The culture around us was changing, effecting changes in the church also. Sunday school and worship attendance already had started to fall; the lure of television was undercutting Sunday evening services; the death-of-God theologians had been having their say. And, while the ascendancy of rock music and the appearance of the contraceptive pill were not in themselves anti-religious phenomena, they opened up ways of celebrating life in which there was no apparent place for the church and its well-wrought services. Still, I was confident that the tide that had started to run against "organized religion" in the sixties could be turned.

In pastorates during the seventies and early eighties, my confidence remained strong. It seemed that dedicated pastoral care and biblically based worship and study programs could result in modestly growing congregations, and even have some impact in the civic community. Many aspects of a Christendom culture remained in place, but more cracks were beginning to show, and here and there a ledge or a cornice would fall. Sunday morning boys' hockey began, strippers came to the local beverage room, and General Council statements on abortion, sexuality, and children at Communion set long-accustomed patterns into question within the Church. Some wondered what was happening.

That service in 1969 also might have been one of the last moments when the identity and role of ordained ministers in the United Church seemed clear and unquestioned. Since then, varied study processes and reports on ministry have been presented to the General Council. About once a decade a new assessment of the mandate of ministry was undertaken as the United Church sought to address new developments in both the household of faith and the surrounding culture. These developments included the emerging role of women in leadership, the recognition of the ministry of the whole people of God, and the transition from a deaconess order to the inclusion of diaconal ministers, along with the ordained, in a single order of ministry.

The reports presented to the General Council would broaden our understanding of what ministry is, add to the repertoire of recognized ministry roles, and frequently bring about a change in some role names. One of the unintended results of these ongoing changes in understanding and nomenclature has been some confusion, especially for the great majority of lay people who are not engaged in the work of presbyteries or conferences. Another is the sense among some ordained ministers that their calling and identity as ministers of Word, sacrament, and pastoral care was under critical review and being fragmented.

Now the proposal to include designated lay ministers (DLMs), along with current ordained and diaconal ministers, in a single order of ministry—into which all three current streams would be "ordained"—is before the presbyteries and pastoral charges of the Church. Many DLMs believe that the ministries they exercise are functionally the same as those carried out by ordained ministers, and that they have waited long enough to receive appropriate recognition for this comparable service. Because there are not enough ordained ministers for the pastoral vacancies in the United Church, or not enough who are prepared to go where the vacancies are, these trained lay leaders have stepped into the breach with courage and commitment. The Church should be grateful to

them, especially to those serving in more isolated settings.

Yet support for a single order of ordained ministry may fall prey to the misunderstanding that there is a hierarchy in ministry rather than diversities of service whose distinguishing charisms should be recognized. Indeed, many diaconal ministers have been responding to the One Order proposal by making it clear that they do not want their particular identity and calling to be submerged in a clergy monoculture.

If the One Order proposal prevails, one thing that will be at risk is the unique contribution to ministry leadership offered by leaders who have undertaken a rigorous theological education. Currently the academic preparation required for ordination is a baccalaureate degree followed by the Master of Divinity degree. To be sure, while few designated lay ministers have such an academic foundation, they are as likely to have gifts for ministry as those who have a theological education. Neither a theological education nor a theological training program will guarantee that gifts for ministry are shaped into effective ministry leadership and practice. Yet a theological education that works symbiotically with gifts and training for ministry can enlarge the possibilities for effective leadership. It also can make for deepened thought and wise initiatives in keeping faith with our Reformed and Wesleyan heritages, and for interacting in a theologically effective way with changing cultural contexts.

While a theological education is not a sinecure for effective ministry, it does ground a minister in biblical, historical, and theological knowledge, knowledge that enables one to teach and preach in awareness of the universal tradition of the church—and even in harmony with it! One of the mandates of the ordained minister is to carry and to interpret the catholic tradition, the faith of the ecumenical church. Church historian Cyril Richardson of New York's Union Theological Seminary used to tell his classes that "Tradition is not something dead handed down, but something living handed over." No doubt serious theological learning can take place in other forms than that of a degree-based education at universities. Yet much will be lost if the passion for a "learned ministry" is not recognized and supported among those called to teach and preach the faith in our midst.

As presbyteries and pastoral charges study and engage in deliberation on the question of "One Order of Ministry," the discussion currently underway on the *Touchstone* website may be a helpful resource. I encourage you to read it, and to join the discussion.

Peter Wyatt

A FUNNY THING HAPPENED . . .
"VOCATION" IN THE REFORMATION ERA
by Sandra Beardsall

Introduction

If You Meet George Herbert on the Road, Kill Him.[1] It is an audacious title for a book on contemporary pastoral ministry. Not only does it suggest murder as a viable option, but it also presumes that its twenty-first century readers know something about George Herbert. Herbert (1593-1633) was a Welsh/English poet (see *Voices United*, #628), public orator, and rural pastor. He wrote a manual, *The Country Parson*,[2] on how to undertake an effective ministry. This work offers one of our earliest glimpses into what was meant by "vocation" and the practice of ministry after the upheavals of the sixteenth century. It describes parish ministry as an intense and all-consuming life of self-giving and introspection.

So why "kill" George Herbert? The book title is based on a Buddhist saying: "If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him." If "the Buddha" represents enlightenment, then meeting him on the road means that you may not have reached enlightenment, but only a "projection of your own fantasy" of enlightenment. Kill that illusion, and keep meditating. In the same way, George Herbert's vision of parish ministry—as the church has preserved it—should be purged, says author Justin Lewis-Anthony, from our notions of what contemporary ministry is and should be.[3]

It seems that a funny thing happened on the road to a reformed understanding of "vocation." When Martin Luther boldly proclaimed the "priesthood of all believers" in 1520,[4] he understood that the call of every Christian, lay and ordered alike, would flow from this priestly estate. When United Church worship bulletins list their ministers as "the whole congregation," they are echoing this deeply imprinted theology. But did that "royal priesthood" actually materialize? If so, why does the concept of "ministry" often seem so tangled that some see fit to kill it off and start afresh? I propose that it is useful for us to examine the ways that notions

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[1] Justin Lewis-Anthony, *If You Meet George Herbert on the Road, Kill Him: Radically Rethinking Priestly Ministry* (London: Continuum Books, 2009).

[2] George Herbert, *A Priest to the Temple, or The Country Parson: his Character and Rule of Holy Life* (London, 1652).

[3] Ibid., 5-6.

[4] Martin Luther, "Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation" (1520), in *Readings in European History*, ed. J.H. Robinson (Boston: Ginn, 1906). Accessed at *http://history.hanover.edu/texts/luthad.html*, 17 Feb. 2016.

of "vocation" developed theologically and unfolded practically during the sixteenth-century European reformations.

In this overview, we will first step back to the late medieval world of vocation—lay and ordered—to make sense of the reaction that exploded in the sixteenth century. Then we will look at the reformers' theologies of vocation and how the reformation churches acted on them. Finally, I will suggest a few things we can learn on the road to deepening "vocation" in the church today—perhaps without murdering anyone!

Medieval Vocations

Protestants tend to write off the medieval church as an institution rife with inflated clerical privilege. The laity had no role except to observe passively while a priest with his back to them murmured the potent but unintelligible phrases of the mass. Society was tightly organized into a divine hierarchy: at the pinnacle was the Trinity, followed by angels and saints, then the spiritual estates (bishops, clergy, monks), and then the temporal estates (everyone else). "Vocation" only applied to those in the spiritual estates. A closer examination, however, reveals a more complex medieval experience.

Vocation and the Medieval Laity—Medieval Europeans inhabited a world permeated with reminders of divinity. Churches, wayside shrines, and sanctified wells surrounded their daily lives. Those who could read carried "Books of Hours" (prayer books) with them daily.[5] Lay people faithfully tended many of the sacred places they frequented; they took pride in, and funded, their parish churches. Their supplications were not just for themselves, but often for the protection of the whole community. They contextualized clerical rituals to suit their specific situations. Historian Derek Rivard describes the complex world of medieval piety as "contractual." Lay folk offered their sincerity and devotion on the assumption that God would enter as a partner into the contract and provide divine assistance.[6]

Medieval lay people also connected their faith and their secular work. The medieval craft guilds had special prayers for their trades.[7]

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[5] Eamon Duffy, *Marking the Hours: English People and their Prayers, 1240-1570* (New Haven: Yale U. Press, 2006), 23.

[6] Derek A. Rivard, *Blessing the World: Ritual and Lay Piety in Medieval Religion* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 275-77.

[7] Ibid., 276.

When communities performed "Mystery Play" cycles—a series of short plays dramatizing biblical narratives—the guilds often took on parts that reflected their craft: the cloth-weavers performing the scene of the soldiers rolling dice for Jesus' tunic, for example. Even in this tightly structured world the lay/ordered distinction could be blurry: by the fifteenth century, for example, much of the work of the civil service, previously done by clerics ("clerks") was taken up by university-educated laymen.[8] Many medieval lay people, with their faith-infused daily rounds of work and worship, responded to a vocation in all but name.

Medieval Religious Vocations—Meanwhile, medieval religious vocations were also not of a piece. There were the ordained priests and monks, but there were also the non-ordained monks (usually from lower social ranks) and communities of religious sisters. Men and women responded to a religious vocation as a result of spiritual experience and family encouragement. Some entered the monastery as children or youth, and a vocation was assumed. Some laymen of privilege sought ordination not because they wanted to serve as priests, but simply to obtain the mystical power of transubstantiation. Since a benefice (parish position) could be owned by an individual, some inherited their vocations from relatives (including the sons of allegedly celibate priests!), as one might inherit a piece of property.[9] Such dubious practices helped to inspire the sixteenth-century cry for reform.

Vocation and the Reformers

Martin Luther overthrew medieval notions of "vocation" with his 1520 "Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation." He named the careful ranking of the spiritual and temporal estates as "an artful lie and hypocritical device." In fact, he stated, "we are all consecrated as priests by baptism . . . The only real difference is one of office and function, and not of estate."[10] Luther's intent was not to make all people "clergy"—he described distinctions of "office and function"—but to overturn the whole notion of a spiritual hierarchy, with prelates near the top and peasants at the bottom. Luther's assertion of the priesthood of all

[8] See Cecil H. Clough, *Profession, Vocation and Culture in Later Medieval England* (Liverpool U. Press, 1983).
[9] Ibid., 66, 74.
[10] Luther, "Address to the Christian Nobility."

believers was, says one historian, an "ecclesiopolitical weapon."[11]

The weapon hit its mark. Luther's critics were astonished. If all Christians were *literally* part of the "royal priesthood" of 1 Peter 2:9, they replied, then all Christians would literally be kings, as well as priests. What truly puzzled and enraged them, though, was that Luther had toppled the divinely mandated structure of the medieval universe. They could tolerate some leniency in practice (such as laypersons administering emergency baptisms), but they could not comprehend the dismantling of the divinely ordained social order. As one critic put it, "What will become of the beauty and ornament of the Church?"[12] How did this disruption play out in practice? Both lay and religious vocations changed dramatically.

Reformed Lay Vocations—As we have seen, for Martin Luther, "vocation" came to each person as the outcome of their baptism. Quoting 1 Corinthians 12, he asserted that "we are all one body, though each member does its own work, to serve the others."[13] He believed that Christians had been set free, by grace, to "love our neighbours through our station in life"; that is, through "the inherited social classes, professions and immutable forms of the orders of creation into which we are born." In other words, one's vocation, whatever it was, was divinely appointed, and one kept one's occupation for life.[14]

John Calvin took a similar approach. He also believed that God has "appointed duties for every man in his particular way of life." These, he said, are "callings," assigned "by the Lord as a sort of sentry post" so that persons might not "wander heedlessly throughout life."[15] Like Luther, he believed that vocation was determined by God, but he also believed that persons needed to be sure that they were fit to undertake a

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[11] David Bagchi, "*Ein Mercklich Underscheyd*": Catholic Reactions to Luther's Doctrine of the Priesthood of All Believers, 1520-25," in *The Ministry: Clerical and Lay,* ed. W.J. Sheils and Diana Wood (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 155.

[12] Ibid., 161-62.

[13] Luther, "Address to the Christian Nobility."

[14] Joan M. Martin, "Between Vocation and Work: A Womanist Notion of a Work Ethic," in *Feminist and Womanist Essays in Reformed Dogmatics,* ed. Amy Plantinga Pauw and Serene Jones (Louisville, KY: Westminster-John Knox Press, 2006), 178.

[15] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, LCC (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 3.10.6, in Martin, "Between Vocation and Work," 178.

particular occupation, for we all will be "required to render account of our stewardship."[16] This sounds like "law," but Calvin understood it to be a gift. He believed that one's labour is both God's work and, as one theologian describes it, "the expression in humanity of the restlessness of the entire creation."[17]

The fresh language of "vocation" for lay people was a mixed blessing. No longer simply temporal sojourners hoping for heaven, they could claim a spiritual source for their earthly calling, and a place in the building up of the body of Christ. Christians could come to know themselves, and deepen their connection to all created things, through the offering of their work. However, the reformers had not thought through the consequences of a "high theology" of labour. Because all work was "vocation," and therefore a Godly enterprise, Calvin believed that "any attempt to alter one's social position, and therefore one's calling, was sinful."[18] Neither Luther nor Calvin took account of the crushing effect of unjust economies, gendered and exploited labour, and unemployment. "Vocation," says ethicist Joan Martin, "remained abstracted from the material conditions of life and systems of exploitation." She identifies the "incipient danger of theologizing, mystifying and romanticizing all forms of work as theologically and morally 'good.'" [19] Looming in the future was the problematic "Protestant work ethic," to which this high theology of vocation would help to give birth.

Reformed Religious Vocations —On January 1, 1519, Huldrych Zwingli "began to expound the Gospel of Matthew verse by verse" at a mass in Zurich, thus inaugurating "preaching in the Reformed tradition."[20] Close exposition of Scripture in preaching would become a hallmark of the European Reformations. The minister or pastor, replacing the medieval priest, would need a new set of skills, including biblical literacy, doctrinal knowledge, and rhetorical ability. At the same time, the place of clergy in European society was undergoing a dramatic social transformation, from

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[16] Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.7.5.

[17] Iain G. Nicol, "Vocation and the People of God," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 33 (1980), 361.

[18] Martin, "Between Vocation and Work," 179.

[19] Ibid., 181-2.

[20] James Thomas Ford, "Preaching in the Reformed Tradition," in *Preachers and People in the Reformations and Early Modern Period*, ed. Lasrissa Taylor (Boston: Brill, 2001), 65.

"estate" to "occupation."[21]

However, the sixteenth century reformers did not fully flesh out this new "occupation" in their writings. They agreed that the pastor was charged with enabling believers to take up their royal role as priests, through teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments, and they asserted that no one should publicly perform these roles "unless he be regularly called."[22] (They berated the Anabaptists for allowing congregations to choose their own pastors.[23]) Calvin hesitated to take a ministry position at all. When he finally agreed to do so, his call was profound and dramatic: "Finally I was seized in Geneva . . . in a manner the very same as if the Lord had violently laid his mighty hands on me from heaven." However, it is unclear whether Calvin was ordained, or simply appointed to minister.[24]

Calvin was in awe of this ministerial vocation: he saw himself, like David, having been "taken from the sheepfold and elevated" to the "honourable office of a preacher and minister of the Gospel."[25] Within the universal priesthood, then, the role of the preacher/minister still carried a certain prestige for Calvin. And while he suggested that there were two, then four "orders" of ministry (pastors, teachers, elders, deacons), he was indifferent as to whether deacons and elders should be ordained.[26] Further, the suppression of the monasteries—collateral damage in the war against the feudal world order—left women in particular with a devastating loss of religious vocational opportunity. Becoming a pastor's wife hardly compensated!

Thus, when George Herbert and other post-Reformation clergy sought to prepare handbooks for parish ministry, they were attempting to invent a map for a newly emerging middle-class profession that had been only partially defined. The medieval responsibilities were largely intact: live a godly life, lead the services and administer the sacraments, and tend to the sick and dying. But there were additional requirements: a high degree of formal education, clear knowledge of the doctrine of one's

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[21] Ronald W. Cooley, *"Full of All Knowledg": George Herbert's Country Parson and Early Modern Discourse* (Toronto: U of Toronto Press, 2004), 5.

[22] See the Augsburg Confession, Articles V and XIV.

[23] Karin Maag, "Called to be a Pastor: Issues of Vocation in the Early Modern Period," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 35, no.1 (2004), 76.

[24] Frans P. van Stam, "Calvin's Conversion as his First Step towards the Ministry," *Reformation and Renaissance Review* 12, no.1 (2010), 59.

[25] Ibid., 58.

[26] George Yule, "Calvin's View of the Ministry of the Church," in *The Ministry: Clerical and Lay*, 173, 175.

confession, the ability to preach, and, it was hoped, a wife and children who modeled exemplary piety.[27] "Vocation" was two-pronged: the inner call and the outward ratification of one's pastoral preparation.[28] The inner call could be thwarted by lack of means to gain the necessary education; so candidates were rarely of the lower classes, and often were sons of the clergy.[29] The outer call could be compromised by the lack of resources for training and oversight, and the dismissal of anyone who did not preach with rigid doctrinal authority.

Another challenge for the Reformed ministerial vocation was a lack of assurance that one had received the Holy Spirit. John Calvin rejected any transmission of special "ministerial" grace at ordination. Even an Anglican cleric received only qualified assurance at ordination: he would receive the assistance of the Holy Spirit only "if he labour in the same accordingly."[30] Eschewing or downplaying the "ontological" understanding of ministry in favour of a "functional" one heightened the pressure on the pastor to be competent and disciplined.

Can We Learn Anything from the Sixteenth Century?

A funny thing happened on the way to a reformed understanding of vocation. It began strongly. Once the "priesthood of all believers" genie had escaped the feudal bottle, there was no going back. Any reformed attempt to describe vocation, then or now, begins with the universality of the Christian call. Within this royal priesthood, the reformers saw pastoral ministry as a particular gift, provided by God "to stand guard for the people."[31] However, in practice there was little to help Christians to navigate "vocation." If all are "priests," what is the role of ordination? Categories of ministry emerged, but there was ambiguity about how they fit into the caste of those "regularly called." Access to one's true call, lay or ordered, was still at the mercy of social norms, gendered assumptions, and economic realities. The reformers did not "solve" questions of vocation. Still, we might take note of the challenges we inherit from

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[27] William Pauck, "The Ministry in the Time of the Continental Reformation," in *The Ministry in Historical Perspectives*, ed. H. Richard Niebuhr and Daniel D. Williams (New York: Harper & Row, 1956), 146-47.

[28] Maag, "Called to be a Pastor," 75.

[29] Ibid., 73.

[30] Alexander Faludy, "Fastening on Aaron's Breastplate: Formation, Grace and Ministry in Post-Reformation England," *Journal of Adult Theological Education* 4, no. 1 (2007), 20.

[31] John Webster Grant, *Divided Heritage: The Presbyterian Contribution to the United Church of Canada* (Yorkton, SK: Laverdure & Associates), 113.

them, and take heart in knowing that such issues have ever confounded the body of Christ!

We might also attend to the theology at the heart of the Reformed message. For Calvin, the vocation of the church and its members was intended to be a collective enterprise, and entirely focused on the praise of God "on behalf of all humanity."[32] Contemporary North American Christianity tends to understand vocation as fulfilling the "birthright gift of self."[33] What would happen if we occasionally removed "self" from the vocation lexicon, and asked, "In what ways can we praise God on creation's behalf?"

Finally, we can learn from something the reformers both did and overdid. They sought to banish superstition, and with it the ways that priests, with their supposed mystical power, could manipulate and control others. In this age of tweets and spin, it is worth recalling the sixteenth-century struggle to plant reason and learning at the heart of ministry. At the same time, we might also want to recognize that it is possible, with our medieval forebears, to glimpse a creation shot-through with sacramental grace, and to find our vocations—lay and ordered—nestled in the bosom of *both* reason and mystery. George Herbert wrestled imaginatively and poetically with the strange mixture of head and heart, knowing and unknowing, that is Christian vocation. In a sonnet he penned in 1610 he wrote: "Lord, in thee, the beauty lies in the discovery."[34] Rather than killing him on the road, then, perhaps we could walk with him with curiosity and awe.

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[32] Yule, "Calvin's View," 172.

[33] Parker J. Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 10.

[34] George Herbert, Sonnet II (1610). Accessed at *www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/herbert/sonnet2.htm,* 20 Feb. 2016.

“WHAT’S TO BE DONE?” — “VOCATION” IN THE BIBLE
by Bill Richards

Three thousand years ago, give or take a century or two, some livestock went missing from the home quarter. The rancher sent his oldest son out with “one of the boys” to track down the strays. For the better part of a week the two travelled through hill country and across plain, but found no sign of the lost animals. Early Iron Age Palestine was not the safest place to wander in—as one witness to the time put it, “Each person did what was right in their own eyes.” So, with their luck seeming to fail them, their back-packs empty, and unsure of where to find hospitality, the son suggested that they turn back. “By now Dad will be more worried about us than about the lost livestock,” he told the hired man.

His father’s hand, however, had some important local knowledge. “There’s a fore-teller in this part of the country,” he began, “a ‘seer’ some people call him. Maybe he’s ‘seen’ where the donkeys have gone.” The hired man also knew that at the beginning of the first millennium BCE you don’t just turn up at a godly man’s door empty-handed. The son had nothing left in his own bags, but the hand still had some silver in his wallet, so, quarter-shekel in hand, off they went to consult the seer in his own home-town.

As it turned out, the two arrived at a rather awkward time in the community’s life, for the fore-teller was in the midst of trying to negotiate a leadership crisis that the local elders had called on him to settle—someone had to be found to deal with the protection rackets operating in the neighbourhood, and the seer’s own sons weren’t exactly up to the task of dealing with the extortion. The godly man had just set the table with the sacrifices prepared for the meal where he and the elders would try to discern a direction out of the crisis—not the best time to interrupt the proceedings with a question about lost livestock.

Fortunately, the two young men got some timely advice from the young women they met by the well on the way into town. “Hurry up,” they advised, “they haven’t started the meal yet. The seer has only just gotten here.” So, with the young women’s encouragement, the two headed on into town, almost immediately running into the seer himself.

And at that point, the encounter between the seer and the two young men suddenly resolves a number of the questions the story has been turning around—of where missing donkeys might be found, and of how a people might find the leadership they think they need.

This ancient story of two young men in search of lost livestock (1 Samuel 9) is, I think, a suitable place to start exploring the question of “vocation” in the Bible because it usefully complicates what deserves to

be a complicated question, the question of the various "roles" a society may call on its members to play, and of the way a society assembles itself around those various roles, in the midst of socio-historical circumstances, "calling" for specific actions from all the participants involved.

For a start, the story reminds us that there are several actors and agents in this tale of discernment—the aged seer, Samuel, whose sons are "not the men their father was"; the young man, Saul, whose father has pressed him into taking greater interest in the family farm; the unnamed hired hand who knows more than a thing or two about where to go for insight when you need it; the unnamed young women at the well who also know a thing or two about timing; not to mention the similarly unnamed town elders who have raised the question of leadership with the aged seer for some resolution. The story "calls" out for something from each of these actors toward an end that, we might anticipate, is bigger than any one of them.

There are both some nice ironies and also some awkward hesitations about "call" in this story. The elders have asked for a kind of leadership new to their community—kingship—a political option that the seer, given the talents for insight that he has, anticipates can only spell bad news for all of them down the road. More personally troubling, the seer unhappily realizes that he himself has been caught in precisely the same sort of bad family dynamic with his own two sons, that his mentor had been with his, a generation earlier—which was how he had gotten drawn into this "fore-telling" business in the first place. As for the young man, Saul, it's his father's hired hand, not he himself, who has the necessary cash-in-hand to take to the seer with the question of the moment ("Where are the donkeys?"). And, when they come to the town gate, it's the young women, not either of the young men, who best read the situation. Finally, there is the irony of a rancher who sends his son out to find donkeys, but receives him back bringing an anointing to leadership.

A third complication about what this story "calls" for is that, while there is an immediate crisis that the young Saul will shortly have to deal with—the latest extortionate demand from the Ammonite gang operating east of the Jordan (the right-eye of every person in the town of Jabesh)—Saul's term as prince of the Hebrew tribal confederacy will actually be quite short: though it will take twenty-three more chapters to tell the tale, Saul will only lead his confederacy for two more years, before he himself is killed in battle (1 Sam. 13:1). The "call" of this story curiously seems to be a stop-gap measure—a temporary solution that the seer Samuel later, and reluctantly, realizes as he watches the brief reign of

the one he "called" unfold—reluctantly, because from the beginning he did love the young man who, with his friend, had come to him simply in search of lost donkeys.

What is usefully complicated about this "call-narrative" in 1 Samuel 9 is that it is less an answer to some single heroic individual's question—"Who am I?" and "Where am I going?" and "Who am I meant to be?"—and more an exploration of the much more complex, intricate, context-specific, collective question, "What's to be done?" "Vocation," according to this text, is necessarily a question posed in a grammatical "stative"—"there is a calling"—because the interest of this text is in the variety of actors and agents involved in the doing and being-done-to that are part of any real moment in human history, and what is required from any and all of them, as they turn over their options in circumstances not of their own choosing. Furthermore, out of a plot that wavers over hesitation, irony, and paradox, this more complicated question—"What's to be done?"—challenges the reader to keep reading beyond whatever natural "resolution"—success or failure—that some particular "I" or "we" may come to—to keep reading beyond Saul's two brief years, beyond his successor David's forty, beyond the four centuries or so that follow before the people of this land are swept off, up, and away into one new imperial order after another. The question of "vocation" in this story of kingship in a time of lost donkeys never quite seems to resolve.

Such are some of what strike me as the "useful" complications around "vocation" from the episode set in early Iron Age Palestine, and portrayed in 1 Samuel—"useful" because I think we can extend them on beyond this particular section to inform what might be available for the hearing in other perhaps more obvious "call-narratives" from the Bible.

As it happens there is a lot of "calling" in the Bible—the root word *qara'* (call, proclaim, read, recite, cry, summon, invite, appoint, endow, name; meet, encounter) occurs well over one thousand times in Hebrew Scripture, even before we come to noting the frequency of *kalein* (call, summon, invite, invoke, name) and its cognates in Christian writings—the Greek word that Hellenistic Jews used to translate the Hebrew root.

But, to start with, let's pick up on a particularly well-known episode from earlier in our seer Samuel's life, from his boyhood days. "Speak, Lord, for your servant heareth" were the lines his aged mentor Eli had coached him in, as a suitable initial response to the Voice that kept waking the young Samuel up in the middle of the night (1 Sam. 3). Attention to narrative context reminds us, first of all, that the Voice that this younger Samuel is hearing in the night is calling out to him in the

midst of one of the grimmest periods in the tribal confederacy's history. As a people they have just taken themselves through the self-inflicted wounds of a ferocious civil war—a war in which one of the twelve tribes (Saul's, as it happens) has nearly been wiped out by the other eleven (Judges 19-21). Government by the most recent "judges"—Eli and his two sons—has clearly come to a sorry state: there is no longer any justice in this world of "judges."

The women of the confederacy, in particular, have suffered during this long dark night of the Hebrew soul in horrible ways. One woman, however, is determined to break out for something better, better than the dysfunction of her own household, better than the corruption of her own nation. She calls out, in song, for a time when YHWH will act again, when YHWH will "break the bows of the mighty, and gird with strength those who falter" (1 Sam. 2:4). The woman is Hannah, Samuel's mother, who sings this song to her God, just as she entrusts her newly weaned first son, ironically, to the care of the old priest incapable of administering the justice of which she sings. Within a chapter the child she has placed in the old priest's care will hear the Voice that itself has heard her song. From the old priest himself the boy learns to respond, when he hears the Voice in the night, not just to a vocation for himself, but to a vocation for his people.

The "calling" in which Samuel participates, first as a boy, then in later years as an aged seer, is, of course, neither the beginning nor the end of the question, "What's to be done?" that Scripture wrestles with as it follows the fortunes of the Hebrew people—through the end of the time of judges, through the rise and fall of a united monarchy, a divided monarchy, an exiled monarchy; and on through the succession of imperial powers to which they will indenture themselves. It's important to remember how complicated this people's history was—to eschew the romance of "good old days," and to remember instead that there never was a time or community circumstance when things were "simpler," when social roles were more readily defined for the individuals living through those times or circumstances. Or when what they were "called" to be part of together was somehow more easily available to those living then.

Three hundred years or so after the episode of the lost donkeys, for example, King Hezekiah and his prophetic advisor Isaiah have to wrestle with what it might be to speak the truth of their desperate situation vis-a-vis the Assyrian war machine to their own fellow citizens ("a people of unclean lips"), who seem incapable either of telling truth to one another, or of understanding it, should truth be told, about the

injustices they tolerate among themselves—never mind whatever the Assyrians might inflict (Isaiah 6:1ff). Or, another hundred years on, when, with Babylonian forces besieging the capital city, another king, Zedekiah, and another prophet at court, Jeremiah, surrounded by all the false hope other prophetic advisors are offering, must sort out the hard question of whether this king can be anything other than the puppet their new imperial masters have set him up to be (Jer. 38).

Another six hundred years on and it's a different era again, the first decades of the new Roman imperial federation, when another woman takes up a song very similar to the one Hannah sang centuries before—a song of "the mighty pulled from their thrones . . . the humiliated and powerless exalted"—the song Mary and her cousin Elizabeth sing each other through their respective pregnancies (Lk. 1:46ff). Like Hannah's, this song too is a cry to which the Voice eventually responds, this time down by the riverside where their two sons, now themselves adults, have met around a call for a rule "from heaven," a rule different from the oppressive burden that even tax-collectors and mercenary soldiers themselves feel in being part of the Roman economic order (Lk. 3). Here it will take a book, or two, or four, to spell out the "calling" that is at work by the river Jordan, a call that will gather an ever wider circle of people into the story of Hebrew hopefulness.

The song with which Mary and Elizabeth sang their sons into the "calling" that runs through Hebrew Scripture also drew another Saul into its wider circle of hopefulness, a thousand years after his namesake headed off with the hired hand in search of missing donkeys. Here too a variety of actors have their part to play in this tale of call and discernment—the unnamed high priest who authorizes this later Saul to round up *his* strays; Ananias, who subsequently explains to the blinded Saul who it was that he suddenly saw before he lost his sight; Barnabas, who willingly takes the new "brother" in hand as his partner; Agabus, the "fore-teller" who will not only alert this circle of friends to the impending famine that will test their hopefulness, but who will also inspire the act of solidarity (the collection effort) that they undertake to strengthen their confidence in the road they are on together (Acts 11:27ff).

Because the canon of Scripture collects texts from across a thousand years of literary activity, it necessarily reflects a wide range of social, economic, and political systems, and within those systems a range of the social roles available to the characters in its narratives—seers and singers, prophets, princes, and priests, ranch-hands, hewers of wood, drawers of water. The "calling" that takes place again and again across

this corpus of text is more complicated than simply who will play what role in their society and circumstance, who will mind the religious shop in temple, for example, or staff its counters at court, when young men come calling with questions about where to find missing donkeys, or older ones come calling with questions about where to find missing leadership. The "calling" that goes on here and there throughout Scripture is not content with settling issues of individual self-identity; its interest always is on the broader question demanding collective reflection—"What's to be done?"

What might Scripture's broader question mean for us, we who re-read these texts carrying similar questions, borne of our own systems and circumstances, and within the range of the (limited) social roles available to us? To go back to the story around the first Saul and his strays, I would suggest it first of all calls us to take stock of the various actors and agents in our own time participating in, or resisting, the question "What's to be done?"—to listen carefully to those players who, perhaps unexpectedly, know a thing or two about where to find insight, or who know a thing or two about timing, as well as the ones who, when a voice from somewhere whispers in their ear, suddenly recognize precisely who or what their community has been looking for.

The ancient story of the missing donkeys/missing leaders also calls for a polite patience with the hesitations and ironies of our own time—there may be more behind the twists and turns on the way to the doing of "What's to be done?" than meets the eye. A social movement we were caught up in may be a failure, yet a failure from which we learn something important about where and how else the change that brings justice may come.

Conversely, and finally, the story of donkeys and their leaders also calls for a patience with one another in the doing of the mercy and justice that can be done here and now, as together we travel down the much longer road on which the "What's to be done?" question is leading us.

“KILLING ME SOFTLY WITH HIS SONG”: CHRISTIAN MINISTRY AS *ENTERTAINMENT*

by Ted Harrison

“For Those about to Rock”

I am a minister of worship and pastoral care at a sizeable downtown United Church in North Bay, Ontario, with multiple staff. I'm also a part of a church-based rock and roll band, in which I'm a primary vocalist and an occasional instrumentalist.[1] Entertaining with “The Hosts” band has been a tremendous boon to ministry at Trinity, and an engrossing distraction from the work of ministry—but increasingly I am coming to understand it in itself *as ministry*. And—more to the point—I am coming to see *ministry itself as entertainment*. Not just that it is entertain*ing*, but that it is an *offering of entertainment* in the classic sense of that word. I offer this lens—*ministry as entertainment*—with sincerity, and with what I hope will prove to be compelling theological rationale. The metaphor has implications for many aspects of ministry, including how we might approach worship, preaching, pastoral care, evangelism, and dialogues with other faiths and world-views.

“Band on the Run”

“The Hosts” band began as a live Christmas quartet freezing on the back of an 18-wheeler some years back when Trinity Church entered a float in the North Bay Santa Claus parade. From our thin Christmas repertoire, I think we performed the seasonal Hawaiian-themed chestnut, “Mele Kalikimaka,” about thirty times! After that experience, the band backed a now-annual winter coffeehouse as “The Heavenly Hosts.” To the chagrin of some of its members, that name stuck. “The Hosts” have gone on to play many church and community events, charity gigs, and celebrations. The band has a core membership of seven people. Occasionally we take paying jobs in order to fund new equipment, but most of our work is in aid of others’ fundraising.

It may not come as a surprise to music-lovers how seriously and whole-heartedly our members and our audiences engage with our music and its performance. We play a lot of classic and contemporary rock, as well as country, blues, folk, and the occasional gospel piece. To be sure, most of the music is not commonly regarded as “spiritual.” And yet it evidences the capacity to rouse enthusiasm, to salve the soul, to engage the imagination, and to give expression to the heart's yearnings. Again

[1] I would characterize my cowbell, go-go bell, and harmonica playing as *verging on capable*.

and again I realize that a good song well-performed easily equals the impact of a fine sermon. And if we believe Augustine's dictum that homiletics ought to offer "education, inspiration, and delight," isn't an emphasis on those latter ingredients just about due?

"Only Rock and Roll"

All musicians have their own tastes, tending towards certain styles of music, often involving specific eras, artists, and genres. These preferences reflect the potent authority of music: singers and songs that are deeply woven into every music lover's own life narrative. When "The Hosts" add a song to our repertoire, it's often because that song has particular gravity for one or more of our members. There is a sense both of ownership, and of stewardship. With a sacramental quality, each song is a bearer of meaning or history beyond the more obvious content of music and lyrics.

It is this story-bearing sacramental quality that makes otherwise secular songs vehicles of an often otherwise unarticulated spirituality. I've put this to the test in Sunday worship services. For instance, in recent years I've often used the season of Lent as an opportunity to bring secular music into conversation with Scripture and tradition. Approaching musicians who are often wary of organized religion to play for us on a Sunday morning has opened up many rich conversations—but the invitation has been guided by the intuition that music that speaks deeply *to* a musician can speak deeply *through* that same musician.

I'm reminded of an article from the *United Church Observer* in which some jazz musicians were hesitant to play a vespers service, explaining that they weren't particularly spiritual people. The Reverend Gordon Turner then responded dismissively, "Well, then, you must play lousy jazz."[2] The implication, of course, is that good music well-performed is somehow inherently spiritual. Furthermore, in our often anemic and superficial culture, popular music is often the only spiritual language we have in common to express our deepest humanity!

My own favourite secular songs are often the ones that explore biblical concepts. When I ask musicians which songs they keep coming back to—the songs that move them or bring them to tears—they are invariably songs with powerful correlations in Christian living. Think of the last song on the radio that touched you—what was its theological core? In recent days of musical attentiveness, I've heard themes of pilgrimage, lament, transcendence, kenosis, protest, yearning,

[2] "Vespers in Swing-Time," *The Observer* (October 1997), 34-35.

embodiment, theodicy, providence, and absolution—all on typical FM radio.

"Here We Are Now, Entertain Us"

I understand that framing ministry as entertainment is provocative. But my intent is neither to belittle the exercise of ministry, nor to valorize a particular brand of music. But like most entertainers and most ministers, I am serious about what I love. First of all, "entertainment" is not of itself a derogatory or dismissive term. While "entertainment" is occasionally understood as a synonym for "diversion" or "distraction," it has its biblical use that suggests *hospitably providing for the needs and the tastes of guests*, with consideration and respect, attentiveness and accommodation. Such a definition makes us think of Abraham graciously receiving his trinity of divine guests (Gen. 18), or of the New Testament injunction to show that kind of hospitality whereby we sometimes "*entertain* angels unawares" (Heb. 13:2 KJV). This implies real discipline: If we are to take our entertainment seriously, we need to allow the possibility that *it is angels* to whom we are offering our best beloved songs and stories!

The kind of hospitality that this understanding of *entertainment* involves is necessarily humble, and dignifies the music and the spirituality of those to whom it ministers. While it offers the richness of the Christian story, it does not attempt a "bait-and-switch." This is to say, there is no clumsy evangelical effort to get people in the door with familiar music, and then sneakily substituting a full diet of Christian platitudes. We've all encountered embarrassing ham-fisted proselytizing, but here I am offering an alternative. Our tradition should not "insist on its own way" (1 Cor. 13:5), but genuinely accommodate and nourish "the other" with our best. And so the Christian story is offered in an accessible idiom: a hospitable invitation to deeper investigation, companionship, and even discipleship.

More than anyone else, I owe this paradigm to Alan Watts. Watts, who was for a time an Episcopal priest, is best known for popularizing Zen amongst a Western audience in the sixties. Witness the authenticity, humility, and the openness of his approach—an approach that loves his own school seriously, shares enthusiasm effectively, but is undistracted by proselytizing:

> I want to make one thing absolutely clear. I am not a Zen Buddhist, I am not advocating Zen Buddhism, I am not trying to convert anyone to it. I have *nothing* to sell. I'm an *entertainer*. That is to say, in the same sense, that,

> when you go to a concert and you listen to someone play Mozart, he has nothing to sell except the sound of the music. He doesn't want to convert you to anything. He doesn't want you to join an organization in favour of Mozart's music as opposed to, say, Beethoven's. And I approach you in the same spirit as a musician with his piano or a violinist with his violin. I just want you to enjoy a point of view that I enjoy.[3]

While *conversion* was certainly the outcome for many of Watts' hearers, he privileges only their *enjoyment.* He wants them to be *touched*, to be appreciatively *moved*. What do we lose by adopting a similar entertainer's attitude to Christian ministry? I think we lose little, and gain much. We discard unbecoming assumptions of our own superiority. We don't abrogate the authority of our Christian calling, but we don't impose it on others, either. We allow others their own *authority*, and, furthermore, we affirm in them their *authorship*, the authorship of their own spiritual path. Enjoying the experience of Christian *entertainment*— becomes a means of trying it on: "Taste and see that God is good" (Ps. 34:8).

"Take Me to Church"

Over recent years at Trinity, we've experimented with ways to bring contemporary popular music into Christian worship. In some simple cases, the lyrical content of the music has correspondence to a scriptural text.[4] The parallels between the music and the text are enriching or edifying, each enlivening the other. In other cases, I've found that a secular song can fulfill a particular function of traditional worship, and effectively substitute for otherwise spoken elements of morning worship.

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[3] From a recording by Watts included in an animated tribute to Watts by "South Park" creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone. The italics are mine. Accessed at *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=82OpDZ9tAho*, 13 November 2015.

[4] A couple of simple examples: While Bob Dylan's "Shelter from the Storm" is filled with mixed scriptural references, I consider it a sustained reflection on the figure of "Lady Wisdom" from Proverbs 8, a reading assigned to "Trinity Sunday." Solomon Burke's "None of Us Are Free" draws on Paul's image of the interdependence of the Body of Christ (e.g. 1 Cor. 12). More playfully, Tom Petty's "Won't Back Down" refers to "the Gates of Hell" and could be used to refer to the church against which the gates of hell cannot stand (Matt. 16:18). There are many books that explore the use of specific biblical texts and concepts in modern music— particularly the music of U2, Bob Dylan, Bob Marley, and Leonard Cohen.

There are songs that are confessional by nature, songs that invite, songs that call for commitment, songs that bless. Perennial Christian themes are often deeply explored in modern music—themes such as creation, healing, wonder, righteousness, imprecation, incarnation, forgiveness, fallenness, searching, spiritual nurture, or the apocalyptic.[5]

Increasingly a number of local musicians have approached me about maybe sharing a popular song in worship, intuitively sensing that song's spiritual core. I get the impression that although these musicians are deeply touched by the music they hear and perform, those songs had never before been seen as legitimate expressions of spirituality—a possibility about which they have now become quite excited! My own modest facility with Scripture enables me to demonstrate how many songs find their parallels, for instance, with the Psalms. One year I encouraged musicians from in and beyond the congregation to bring their favourite blues tunes into worship, and used those heartbreaking musical explorations as a doorway to understanding the book of Ecclesiastes.[6] Lent of 2016 was occupied with modern songs that use the imagery of the journey. That perennial Lenten metaphor enabled us to delve into life and faith as a journey, with parallels to the Jerusalem-bound journey of Jesus and the disciples.

Songs that are a true "fit" with the season, the theme, or the Scriptures can be carefully fitted into the service so that they become a familiar (or a surprising![7]) touchstone in the service. In this way the song sometimes proves our already-existing relationship to the mood, the theme, the doctrine, or the story that is that service's centre-piece. Sometimes it functions to provide an emotional connection for an otherwise "heady" topic.

I often ask musicians to share something about their relationship to the song—something that explains why the song is meaningful to them, or to our shared spiritual walk. Sometimes they point to a salient lyric, or a moment in their own lives. Often this kind of testimony has

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[5] "The Hosts" band had great fun providing contemporary musical accompaniment to a Conference event on the book of Revelation. The weekend theme was "It's the End of the World as We Know It (And I Feel Fine)."

[6] This began with the insight that the central concept of Ecclesiastes—vanity—can be explored with reference to Robert Johnson's signature song, "Love In Vain."

[7] E.g., Bruce Springsteen's rollicking 9/11 anthem, "The Rising," opened our Easter worship in 2014.

been breathtaking in its depth of vulnerability. I've shared the musician's insights in the bulletin, in the sermon, or in a brief "on-stage" dialogue with the singer. Honestly, I marvel at the courage it often takes for our musicians to share from their story how a particular song speaks truth, grace, and mystery.

"I Really Like That Song"

A view of Christianity and the church as entertainment asks that people allow themselves to play the guest, to be hosted by a story and a community that meets them where they are, and responds to their experience of living. The primary role of contemporary music in this is as a *lingua franca* that goes to deep places, often enabling meaningful and cathartic conversation. When we share secular music in the context of worship, and take its subjects and its lyrics seriously, people often respond with surprise that the music that has so long expressed and assuaged their hearts can be regarded as much more than some guilty pleasure. They are surprised and often powerfully affirmed in their own path, even as we openly offer the Christian meta-narrative as one tried-and-tested means of making sense of human journey.

We do not hear our music in a vacuum. Instead, modern music is shaped in so many ways by the language, the traditions, and the attitudes of the formerly ubiquitous Christian sphere. We've long understood how modern pop music has a pedigree reaching back to its baptism as responsive Psalm and gospel praise. I sense that there are ways in which that history comes full-circle: given birth in many ways from the world of faith, the music often directs us back to that realm. When I hear popular radio, I often recognize the arc, the idiom, and the assumptions of the Christian worldview: *God's word has gone out and assumed new guises*. The Church's ministries can welcome it back, recognizing that *God's word has not returned empty*.

Even your most tone-deaf friend probably hums along with a particular song while pushing his grocery cart, perhaps unaware of how that song resonates spiritually for her. But so often it does! Those who love that music and can help demonstrate its power and worth find a calling commensurate with Fredrick Buechner's dictum about the place where a personal deep gladness meets the world's spiritual hunger.[8] And so Karl Barth's image of the preacher holding the Bible in one hand and

[8] "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking* (HarperOne: San Francisco, 1993), 38.

the newspaper in the other finds yet another novel iteration—the Bible in one hand, an electric guitar (or perhaps a loaded IPod!) in the other. Because thereby the preacher can offer real entertainment: a hospitality whereby the guest's own music finds edifying new depth in the light of God's story. Both are worth sharing.

To the names John Wesley, Charles Wesley, William Booth, and Martin Luther are variously and apocryphally attributed the salient complaint, "Why should the devil get all the good tunes?"[9] I suggest that those "good tunes" exist to meet and explore the "good news."[10] Instead of the church needing to furnish the content and the language of everything that provides meaning, comfort, and direction—we can hear the music and stories that already nurture and guide, and offer them the further enrichment of our cherished narrative. This requires only that we live up to virtues that have long been enshrined in our philosophy—if not our practice—amongst them: humility, hospitality, conversation, inspiration, and delight. In a single word: *entertainment*. In offering the sanctuary of entertainment, we enable spiritual connection, more articulate spirituality, a bridge to established theology, and the potential for each of us to transcend our jealous, uncongenial, and un-Christlike smallness.[11]

[9] For example, *http://musicgarenlwolf.blogspot.ca/2016/01/quoting-luther-without-documentation.html*, accessed 1 February 2016.

[10] Being ultimately a creation of God in Christ "for whom and through whom all things exist" (Heb. 2:10).

[11] The title of this essay (like all the sub-titles) is borrowed from a popular song. It's intended to point to the potential of "dying to self" in light of the story and presence of "the Great Entertainer" revealed through Jesus Christ.

VOCATION IN MUSIC: A TRUE VOICE
by Linnea Good

It is raining in Tamil Nadu. The grass, the trees, the ground, everything about the campus of the Christian Medical College Hospital of South India is soaked in moisture and mildew. Sheet music sitting on the piano swoons and curls onto the keyboard. Mould grows up the hanging clothes and suitcases in our rooms. Today new potholes have dropped down on the roads of Vellore, with puddles the colour of rich chai. David and I and our three teens are here to sing with the staff, students, and children, lead devotions in chapels, hold musical Bible study in meeting halls, give testimony in student groups, perform on stages of the campus, and bring new music to a very musical place. We have been feeling our way into a shared experience of Jesus. And the rain is coming down in drapes.

I have been admitted to the hospital with dengue fever. I am utterly miserable—achy, nauseated, exhausted, and missing everything. The three weeks of work I have prepared throughout a full year to offer while here has ground to a halt; instead of being a contributor, for five days I will be a guest. I have lost my voice.

We church musicians are ministers of the Word—but the Word with melody woven through. The Latin verb *vocare* [to call] means to us not only that we have heard the Voice of the Holy directing us toward our reason for being on this earth, but also speaks of our mission to help others find their own "true voice." Voice *is* our vocation.

I have been living out a vocation of helping groups express themselves through music for forty of my fifty-four years. I am a songwriter, performer, Christian educator, and group singing leader, and, depending on the day, one of those job descriptions will take precedence over the others. I am entirely comfortable on the stage, and yet my first joy has been to create a musical environment in which people are drawn to sing together—indeed, don't even know that they *are* singing—until it is too late, and beyond their defences.

Musicians—and members of the Arts in general in the West—suffer from a certain cultural distrust. Seen as celebrities or anomalies, performers are often viewed as self-involved. In the church, the disjuncture between the performer and audience can create confusion between the congregation and its artists, whose motives they might not entirely trust.

However I have experienced that, when we invite people into our own creative zone, we are doing more than just putting on a show—what I call "small-p performance" in which one person expresses herself while a group witnesses her do it. Rather, we become a "large-P performance,"

in which we all take part in a group event. We become more than the sum of our parts. This is especially true in worship, but also in public performance. As one youth said on leaving a recent concert, "I'll never get to sleep after this!"

We are also modelling how we ourselves gain access to the inner reaches of our own souls. We are most fully alive in these moments, in mid-arc of poetry and note, and, like Moses coming down the mountain, it didn't kill us. So we are helping to fire up a part of others that might have been a bit asleep—a part of them that might sustain them through their own hard times. I believe that, this synaptic shot fired, the current that becomes the chill down the spine, and the moment when tears are let loose, is God's Spirit being allowed access to our very being.

It was this conviction that music can be literally life-giving that caused us to offer ourselves to this Christian hospital in India three years ago, and now. Founded 116 years ago by a woman whose vocation was to train women to give health care to women, the CMC has blossomed into a hospital and college with a staff of 8600 caring for 25,000 outpatients of all kinds each day. We wanted to learn about this significant Indian Christian ministry. And I wanted to know if, and how, music could enhance their Christian service of health care.

I began active music ministry in my twenties with an intense desire to right the scales of justice, to offer up in music the unique experiences of women in a way that might be sung by all. We wanted to know two things: if we explored a feminine name of God, how might that affect the way we honoured women's lives and ways of thinking? *And*, what more could we learn about God if we spoke to God as female? At the time I entered The United Church of Canada scene, our denomination was more forthright about changing our language about the "people of God" (away from "men") and about the names of God, than almost any other denomination in the world. Yet, the kind of hymnody that was being published largely described God in terms of blood, sweat, and tears. It was as if our own imagination of women's lives had been narrowed to bodily functions. Even *we* seemed to believe that women were simply men who could give birth. I wanted to see if I could offer a different kind of day in the life of a God who was female:

> When God unwound the planets and bathed the land with seas,
> She sculpted little children, painted birds, embroidered trees;
> She soaked her toes in riverbeds along the deep green wood,
> And cast her eyes to the jeweled skies, and God said it was good.

She said that it was good.[1]

Alongside this, I have written for the spiritual needs of children, and with an effort to craft music that could be sung by children and adults together with integrity. I have felt passionately that children are not the future of the church, but the lifeblood of its present. In our time, albeit with a reduced reach, the church remains one of the sole places where adults and children interact with a common meaning. I have been exploring what it really means to write in a language meaningful to children—and asking whether that was indeed the language of children or simply rather more "sensate" and less "abstract." My wish has been to write in such a way that it could be appreciated by both intelligences at the same time.

Jesus, I'll stay awake with you,
Pray and stay awake with you
On this darkest night of the year;
I'll stay awake with you.[2]

Over the past ten years, I have been able to explore my lifelong passion: discernment. I am fascinated by the many ways in which people know they have been spoken to by God; how they feel guided along the path of their daily lives. When people of faith live with a radical trust in the mystical dimension of their lives, they notice God in everything—magnificent and minute. In this wide-open posture of receptivity to God, the question of "vocation" becomes less a big title given to some who have the holiest jobs, and more a collection of a thousand whispers of guidance each one of us receives along the way toward a wider (and perhaps clearer) path of discipleship. When Nancy Reeves and I co-wrote "The Adventures of the God Detectives" (Wood Lake) for children, our research led us to conclude that ours was literally the only book in the world that tackled the question of spiritual discernment at the level of the child.

What I have never understood is how we in the Christian church have managed to so entirely polarize over whether we are pray-ers or social activists. It is as if the charisms of the Spirit had been divided up in

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[1] Good, Linnea, "Unfolding Creation," *A Word to Begin With*, Borealis Music. CD. 1988.

[2] Good, "Jesus, I'll Stay Awake," *Swimmin' Like a Bird*, Borealis Music. CD. 2003.

a bankruptcy sale and some took the life in the Spirit and half the Bible and ran, and others marched away with the newspaper and the other half of the Bible—never to be in the same room again. Why can social activism and mystic devotion not co-exist? If we saw God as active in the world—not just a spiritual presence of Love and Hope, but actively guiding, strengthening, healing and providing opportunities—what would happen to us? In our United Church efforts to be theologically consistent—yea, rational—have we lost the conversation with our Maker?

> You can't pray for the rain to fall;
> You can't pray for the rain.
> Surely the Almighty doesn't play a numbers game.
> If fifty vote for sunshine and fifty-one complain,
> Where is the cosmic justice?
> You can't pray for the rain.[3]

It appears that we still see the church as a place to perfect ourselves. I know I have—even though I have occasional stark glimpses of how the very attitude of aiming for perfection in community can render me perfectionist, petty, and unwittingly judgmental. What might change if we saw prayer as a time for listening, rather than talking? How might we grow if our liturgy lost the formality in favour of moveable seating, the scripted speeches *about* God gave way to prayers that really were *to* and *with* God, and our music began and ended with more spirit?

> O God, we call.
> O God, we call.
> From deep inside we yearn;
> From deep inside we yearn;
> From deep inside we yearn
> for you.[4]

Our denomination's loss of a sense of God's active presence in the world and the over-emphasis on our own power to fix God's world is why I am not "doing justice" anymore. I want a five-year moratorium on the very word. As long as our outlook on the world is as a problem to be solved, a mess to be cleaned up, a series of wrongs to be righted, we will

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[3] Good, "Can't Pray for the Rain," *Crazy Faith*, Borealis Music. CD. 1998.
[4] Good, "O God We Call," The *Sunday Sessions*, Borealis Music. CD. 2005.

never receive the gift that has been given us: the gift of being alive, ourselves, today. We will travel to foreign lands only to see injustice and poverty. We will divide up the world into For and Against. We will talk and God will never get a Word in edgewise. Our true vocation will be lost.

I have stopped giving at the CMC Hospital and have been receiving for five days. One nurse takes my temperature; she reminds me that God is with me. Another comes to change my IV drip bag; her eye contact is complete while she listens and shares confidently that "God is the only Healer." Our chaplain and my choir co-conductor come in to visit, concerned, hurry-less, closing with "a word of prayer." Imagine the healing that is possible when every person who speaks to the patient expresses confidence that God is powerfully present; that the healing belongs to God who loves us.

It is in this enforced time of voicelessness that I receive what I asked God for a long time ago. I see how the kind of care that is given at this hospital flows directly out of the practitioners' prayerful reliance on the Spirit and the institution's nurture of its members' faith. I see how a Christian musician family from a faraway country can come and share their faith through music and have an impact on the spiritual depth of the institution. I see how a musician's vocation can have an impact on a nurse's vocation. I see how Healing can be the Vocation that is shared among us all.

> Peace to those who suffer;
> Hope to those who weep;
> Grace to those who struggle;
> Joy to those who seek.
> Jesus Christ has come,
> Jesus Christ has come,
> Jesus Christ has come into the world.[5]

[5] Good, "A Vellore Blessing," 2015.

DIACONAL VOCATION AND IDENTITY
by Ted Dodd

Several of the biblical stories of call evoke larger than life theophany. Isaiah's vision includes smoke and seraphim. Mary is visited by Gabriel. Paul is blinded on his way to Damascus. My call to diaconal ministry was not that dramatic. It was a quieter nudging toward integrity; a call does not have to be Cecille B. DeMille theatrics and instantaneous flashiness to be valid or authentic.

Numerous scriptural stories of call include patterns of denial and resistance. Sarah laughs in disbelief. Moses fears public speaking. Jeremiah feels he is too young. Jonah runs from Nineveh. In some ways my call to diaconal ministry reflects that pattern of denial and resistance. For 23 years, I was ordained to Word, Sacrament and Pastoral Care. In 2003, I was commissioned to diaconal ministry of Education, Service and Pastoral Care. I avoided this switch for a number of years.

At seminary in the 70s, I was aware of the option for what was then called commissioned ministry. However, I chose ordained ministry without questioning, largely because it was the norm. In the late 80s, I was in a Conference staff position doing work mostly focused on education and justice. At a national gathering, I was in conversation with one of my diaconal friends. She was sharing her passion for diaconal ministry. I don't remember the exact course of the conversation, but at some point I erupted defensively and said, "So should I give up my ordination and become diaconal because the kind of work I am doing is more diaconal than ordained?" She looked back at me, shrugged and said, splitting the syllables, "May . . . be."

At the time it seemed an absurd suggestion: complicated, unnecessary, outrageous, and even a bit scary. Now, with the benefit of hindsight, the move carries a sense of faithful inevitability. I do not regret, in any way, the blessing of my years as an ordained person. The church offered me opportunities for growth that honoured my gifts and enhanced my skills. I do not suggest that this move is right for anyone else. It was, and is, right for me; not to make this change would have been dishonest and cowardly.

In 1998, I had been hired to teach at the Centre for Christian Studies. That fall, the (now defunct) National Committee on Diaconal Ministry met in Winnipeg. There was a time of connection with committee and staff. At a break, one of the questions directed toward me was, "So you're ordained; how does that influence your work with diaconal students?" Not wanting to be apologetic or defensive, I explained that most of my ministry had been diaconal in function and I

hoped in style. It was a nudge.

In the fall of 1999, while facilitating a session on diaconal formation, a student started venting, "It kind of bugs me when some non-diaconal folk say 'I work in a diaconal style,' when they don't have to walk the diaconal walk." I didn't want to be in that position. It felt hypocritical, even dishonest.

In May 2000, the Diakonia of The United Church of Canada gathered for their biennial meeting. For the first time, I was a part of this national community. We discussed diaconal history, perspective, advocacy, and international organizations. I was welcomed and included. I considered this community of acceptance, accountability, and advocacy to be "my people"—and I wanted to make a deeper commitment. I didn't want to just claim "adherent" status.

The United Church defines diaconal ministry in terms of *function*. We commission diaconal ministers to Education, Service and Pastoral Care. Many diaconal ministers do work in community ministries, lead congregational youth and family efforts, and serve in chaplaincies. However, many diaconal ministers function in so-called "solo" ministries where a heavy emphasis is placed on Sunday morning worship and sacramental leadership. A certain level of tension surrounds this deployment of diaconal ministers into what is/was traditionally ordained territory. Personally, I find much of the discussion is layered with a competitive spirit that is less than a gracious ideal. I believe the functional way of defining ministry reduces vocation to a job description. And it does not adequately address any sense of confusion or misunderstanding amongst the various streams of ministry.

Sometimes diaconal ministers describe their vocation in terms of *style*. Commitment to accompaniment, empowerment, and mutuality are articulated faith values of the diaconal community.[1] These values are not, of course, unique to the diaconal community. Obviously, many in all streams of ministry operate with a sense of humble servanthood, pay attention to power and privilege, and employ facilitative practices.

For me, *style* as a way of understanding diaconal ministry holds limited appeal. For one reason, *style* projects a sense of fleeting fashion and trendy superficiality. Diakonia is not a flash in the pan; its history is profound and rich. The United Church did not invent diaconal ministry in some 60s experimental fad. The gospel message indicates that Jesus saw his ministry in terms of diakonia: "I am among you as one who serves

[1] Diakonia of The United Church of Canada, "Statement of Vision." Accessed at *ww.ducc.ca*, 28 April 2016.

(diakoneo)" (Lk. 22:27). "[I] came not to be served but to serve (*diakoneo*)" (Mk. 10:45a). And, in turn, all the baptized are called to embody that call. The Reformation adage, "the priesthood of all believers," needs to be expanded to remind the church to be the "diakonia of all believers." Enabling and respectful approaches to ministry remain important to diaconal ministers. However, we cannot (and I would say do not) claim any special claim on these approaches. In my mind, "style" does not provide enough substance or content to capture the depth of our call.

Many of us, more and more, understand diaconal ministry in terms of *identity*. We are privileged in our position within the order of ministry in The United Church of Canada. Yet, diaconal ministry is not the norm and, largely because of that, a certain degree of marginalization exists. Diaconal ministers are constantly asked to justify and explain their designation. The preparation for diaconal ministry is considered, by some, to be inferior. A repeated question to diaconal folks is, "When are you going to become a 'real' minister?"

However, diaconal ministers continue to embrace the positive aspects of our identity. Our history starts from the very beginning of the early church. In Acts 6, the seven chosen for a ministry of food security and care of the vulnerable are traditionally described as deacons. Phoebe is named a deacon in Romans 16:1. First Timothy outlines the desired qualities in a deacon. Even when the church relegated the diaconate to a "stepping stone" phase on the way to priesthood, diaconal ministries emerged through creative work among the Beguines and the Franciscans. Remarkably, in the nineteenth century the diaconate was imaginatively restored through the deaconess movement.

Much of our present international and ecumenical diaconal impetus emerged as a result of that history. I have been blessed to attend diaconal conferences and assemblies on three continents. I have been hosted in diaconal motherhouses in Germany and Brazil. I have danced, partied, and stayed up late to sing beside African, Pakistani, Scandinavian, Caribbean and Filipino diaconal brothers and sisters. I have worshipped and studied with Lutheran, Methodist, Anglican, and Presbyterian expressions of *diakonia*. The rich and diverse mix of languages, cultures, theologies, and liturgical practices are undergirded by an abiding sense of connection as diaconal people. This global and interdenominational diaconal community shapes and informs our identity.

Images of *diakonia* influence our sense of identity. In 2002 Louise Williams shared five images with the assembly of Diakonia of

The Americas and Caribbean (DOTAC).[2]

Servant. This traditional image, associated with the towel and basin of foot washing, has been cherished, in diaconal circles, for its reversal of privilege and balancing of power. The gospels are full of reversals—the least are first, a Samaritan is good, children are blessed, a Syro-Phoenician woman changes the rabbi's mind. In a world and church that orders life and ministry hierarchically and competitively, diaconal ministers appreciate this more egalitarian emphasis. However, we caution and ask that the image of servant not be used to re-victimize those who have no choice about their servanthood. Instead of servanthood, many are adopting language of allies and friendship as models of solidarity and partnership.

Table server. Traditionally, the Greek word *diakonia*, was said to be associated with the one who serves at table. Some controversy exists about the legitimacy of this etymology.[3] Notwithstanding those debates, the image carries importance for diaconal ministers because it highlights our call toward hospitality and welcome.

Story teller. Williams states, "From the fourth century, reading the gospel was seen as a diaconal task."[4] The deacons in the early church had a teaching and catechetical role in preparing people for baptism. Diaconal ministers see themselves as empowering educators who equip folk to reflect on the scriptural story but also to ponder their own stories as holy text.

Door keeper. When the early church was under persecution, it was the deacons' role to safeguard the assembly by standing at the entrance and monitoring those who passed through. For today's diaconal ministers, this threshold image helpfully indicates the work of standing between church and world. Other images—of bridge, go-between, or ambassador—point to the diaconal role in attempting to connect sacred and secular, worship and work, prayer and action.

Light bearer. In the Easter Vigil, it is the liturgical role, in some traditions, for the deacon to light the Paschal candle. This image of bearing the light highlights the diaconal role in keeping hope alive in a suffering world. It also challenges us to shed light in the areas of darkness.

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[2] Louise Williams, *http://ducc.ca/wp-content/uploads/Claiming-Authority-Address-to-2002-DOTAC-meeting-Louise-Williams.pdf.*

[3] John N. Collins, *Diakonia—Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources* (Oxford University Press, 1990).

[4] Williams, 6.

Many images attempt to encapsulate diaconal ministry. None of them perfectly encapsulates the challenge and delight of this vocation. However, these rich symbols, and the discussion that surrounds them, guide and shape our diaconal identity.

Several years ago, I was in Chicago attending a conference. One evening, worship was offered from an Afro-American community. The sermon was delivered in the amazing "call-response" format. An astounding energy emerged from the congregation as participants encouraged their preacher to "tell it," "come on," "amen, amen."

The text was Samuel waking up Eli in the middle of the night. The preacher said, "God was calling Samuel." The congregation responded, "Oh yes." The preacher continued, "God was calling Samuel and God is calling you." The congregation replied, "Yes, sir." The preacher was revved up (pun intended): "God is calling you. God is calling on a direct line." Then the preacher reached a rhetorical peak, "God is calling on a direct line," and he lowered his voice and leaned into the microphone, ". . . but it is a collect call." And the congregation applauded with a mix of amusement and recognition and conviction.

A call insists that we respond. In responding to the diaconal call I have been blessed over and over again.

DISCERNING VOCATION TODAY: THE CRITICAL TASK OF EMERGING ADULTS

by Josephine Braun

Recently my call led me to withdraw my candidacy for ordered ministry in the United Church.[1] I am an unrelenting discerner and steadfastly committed to my vocation, which is currently being lived out through Water Gate Community Enablement, a registered non-profit agency. I am also, by certain definitions, an older emerging adult. Thus it seemed prudent to me to offer reflection on this important topic.

During the past decades of western civilization, young adulthood has emerged as a significant stage in the human lifespan. This "new" development is partly the result of people living longer, and partly the result of their taking longer to accomplish the many tasks of early adult life. Questions around family and children, where one lives, and work choices were once the territory of adolescence. Today these decisions are being made increasingly, and in an ongoing way, by people in their twenties, thirties, and sometimes early forties.[2]

Sociologist Robert Wuthnow employs the language of tinkering. Young adults make a life for themselves, including tinkering with choices about career or vocation, by pulling together whatever ideas, skills, connections, and resources they have at their disposal.[3] The current cultural milieu and corresponding expectations add to the complexity of the task. While liberating for the creative and resourceful, this process is daunting for others. This is particularly true for decisions of vocation. Not only must young adults secure stable employment, they feel compelled to find something that will contribute to a meaningful life.

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[1] I completed all the steps and was recommended for ordination by Hamilton Conference and Halton Presbytery in 2013. My Education and Students Committee has been graciously supportive of my journey, ongoing ministry, and recent decision.

[2] Robert Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), xvi. While Wuthnow applies a liberal age parameter in his discussion of young adult decision-making, others choose the *twenty-somethings*—typically the range of 18 to 32 (Sharon Daloz Parks) or 34 (Richard Settersten and Barbara E. Ray).

[3] Ibid., 13.

And, as Wuthnow points out, emerging adults are left largely to do this on their own.[4]

What is at stake here is the formation of healthy adults, citizens, leaders, and ultimately society as a whole. To be healthy and whole is to find one's niche, to construct one's identity, and to construe a sense of meaning. The searching out and naming of a vocation, what Sharon Daloz Parks calls a "worthy dream,"[5] is essential to human flourishing. To discern one's vocation is the critical task of young adult life. It is, in its deepest sense, a spiritual undertaking and thus the domain of faith traditions. Young adults today, who are in search of a dream worthy of their lives, would benefit from the support and resources of the church.

In this essay I briefly consider a theological framework for vocation, and whether, in fact, every young adult is called to a worthy dream. I then reflect on the endemic challenges of discerning or tinkering with that dream today. I conclude with suggestions for how the Christian church might support the vocational path of emerging adulthood.

Vocation as Life Orientation

Vocation, as will undoubtedly be delineated by others in this volume, has roots in the Christian tradition. It has been used to connote both the call by God to an individual for religious service, as well as a call to a secular occupation. It is not my intent to explore the biblical underpinnings of the concept of "call";[6] however, I acknowledge two possible questions and convictions I bring.

Are all persons called? Our culture surely dramatizes the mark that one individual can make. Yet Scripture does affirm the importance of personhood in the context of community. In Paul's metaphor of the body of Christ, each member is gifted and called to participate in the health of the whole body. I share the inclusive perspective of Benedictine nun and writer, Joan Chittister:

We take Paul seriously now. *We are all called, we know now, to do our part in the ongoing creation of the world*. In this age, both

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[4] Wuthnow, 12.

[5] Sharon Daloz Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Emerging Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2011).

[6] Various points of view are offered in the anthology, *Leading Lives That Matter: What We Should Do and Who We Should Be*, ed. Mark R. Schwehn and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006).

theology and psychology concur on the uniqueness of the individual and the notion that different individuals have different gifts for the sake of the upbuilding of the whole human enterprise.[7]

Extending the body metaphor, I would suggest that in some ways God depends on our co-action in bringing about God's mission. Vocation can be viewed as the means through which the members of the Body contribute their gifts; each person has a unique part to play.

Might all occupations be considered as vocations? Vocation is framed by several theologians and thoughtful people as something more than one's career or occupation. In the articulate words of Frederick Buechner, "the place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."[8] Daloz Parks similarly develops the sense of dream as "arising from a deepening understanding of the suffering and wonder of both self and world."[9] Parker Palmer writes about letting your life speak.[10] What these examples share is a sense of working on behalf of the common life.[11] Perhaps being grounded in one's inner life and at the same time orienting one's outer life toward the common good—regardless of how one organizes one's profession, house work, volunteering, and relationships—is closer to the essence of vocation.

The most important question then, which can be asked of all who seek true vocation is, to what will I give my life? Emerging adulthood is a critical life stage in which to ask it.

Critical Years

If a young person identifies as Christian, a significant part of his or her faith journey is to search out the calling or faithful contribution of his/her life. If a young person does not profess faith, it is equally important to

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[7] Joan Chittister, *Following the Path: The Search for a Life of Passion, Purpose, and Joy* (New York, NY: Random House, 2012), 25–26.

[8] Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1973), 95, in *Leading Lives That Matter: What We Should Do and Who We Should Be*, 111.

[9] Sharon Daloz Parks, *Big Questions*, 192.

[10] Parker Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000). It is interesting that in his theological tome, Stanley Grenz patterns the section on Jesus' vocation around roles such as prophet or "suffering servant," neither of which suggests a named occupation as such. See Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 326–38.

[11] Sharon Daloz Parks, *Big Questions*, 244–45.

engage in this process of discernment. Both persons must come to terms with an increasingly complex society in which to craft a life. To thrive in this world, both must learn to make meaning and construct an identity, of which one's work is a significant part.

Today's economic climate is a source of stress for young adults looking not only to find a career, but to secure something meaningful. Employment relationships are increasingly precarious, causing a strain on the health of individuals and social structures.[12] Long periods of unemployment have a negative impact on mental health.[13] Among people who hold full-time jobs, fifty per cent are not engaged in their work and twenty per cent are actively disengaged.[14] In this environment, it may be no coincidence that suicide rates are increasing among 18–29 year olds,[15] or that increasing numbers of people are being radicalized.[16] One can imagine that being a minority in terms of economic status, physical ability, race, gender, or gender orientation only compounds the sources of stress.

According to Richard Settersten and Barbara Ray, what is most differentiating today from previous generations, which also faced difficult economic challenges, is that the stakes on all fronts are much higher. Poor judgments and small mistakes have bigger ramifications and

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[12] Around one-quarter of all Canadian workers are in less than permanent employment. Wayne Lewchuk, Marlea Clarke, and Alice de Wolff, *Working without Commitments: The Health Effects of Precarious Employment* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 2011), 4–5, 27–9.

[13] Andrew Oswald, economist at the University of Warwick in the U.K., quoted in Don Peck, "How a New Jobless Era Will Transform America," *The Atlantic* (March 2010). *http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2010/03/how-a-new-jobless-era-will-transform-america/307919*, accessed 2 March 2016.

[14] GALLUP, "State of the American Workplace: Employee Engagement Insights for U.S. Business Leaders" (2013), 4.

[15] The Toronto Star, "230 000 Ontario adults considered suicide in 2013: CAMH" (4 December 2014). *http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2014/12/04/230000_ontario_considered_suicide_in_2013_camh.html*, accessed 2 March 2016.

[16] Research shows that a "quest for significance" is a key factor among young people who become radicalized. The Toronto Star, "'Soft security' measures also needed to battle home-grown radicalism, experts say" (27 February 2015). *http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2015/02/27/soft-security-measures-also-needed-to-battle-home-grown-radicalism-experts-say.html*, accessed 2 March 2016.

hold substantial potential to divide those who succeed from those who flounder. Elevated expectations and a heightened sense of self-esteem, born unwittingly of parents, teachers, and other adults, can cripple the young person.[17]

However, it is not only material success that is at issue. I am convinced, along with Mark Schwehn and Dorothy Bass, that the rising number of mental health-related maladies afflicting young people are linked to an underlying loss of meaning and purpose.[18] In the 2013 volume of *Touchstone*, Douglas Hall summarizes and reflects on Paul Tillich's three types of human anxieties, of which the contemporary anxiety of meaninglessness is arguably the most pernicious.[19] Meaninglessness, whether acknowledged or not, affects even the privileged ones who have been lured into productive careers.[20]

Significance, purpose, and meaning are at stake in a society that is increasingly complex. Emerging adults learn to navigate the challenges of living in the twenty-first century largely on their own. Some fare better than others. On the positive side, there are an unprecedented number of options and creative ways to piece together a career and one's life. Because the emerging adult will not stay in the same job for the duration of her life,[21] she has an opportunity, and indeed a necessity, to construct a sense of meaning that will transcend the particular choices of particular periods of time.[22] Here the resources of faith are fruitful, especially for those who struggle most.

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[17] Richard Settersten and Barbara E. Ray, *Not Quite Adults: Why 20-Somethings Are Choosing a Slower Path to Adulthood, and Why It's Good for Everyone* (New York, NY: Random House, 2010), xxi–xxii.

[18] Schwehn and Bass mention depression, eating disorders, and alcoholism as symptoms. *Leading Lives That Matter*, 6–7. Equally, Wuthnow suggests debt, divorce, and child abuse as outcomes from the lack of support for emerging adult decision-making. Robert Wuthnow, *After The Baby Boomers*, 13.

[19] Douglas John Hall, "'We Are Not Alone': Reflections on 'Atonement,'" *Touchstone* 31, no. 2 (2013), 18–30.

[20] Sharon Daloz Parks, *Big Questions*, 4.

[21] If the current trend continues, Canadians can expect to hold roughly 15 jobs in their careers. Workopolis, "How many jobs do Canadians hold in a lifetime?" (4 December 2014). *http://careers.workopolis.com/advice/how-many-jobs-do-canadians-hold-in-a-lifetime/*, accessed 2 March 2016.

[22] Entrepreneur Aaron Hurst has written on the emergence of the purpose economy. He writes, "Value lies in establishing purpose for employees and customers—through serving needs greater than their own, enabling personal growth, and building community." Aaron Hurst, *The Purpose Economy: How*

The Resources of Faith

For the church and for the one seeking vocation, there is a favourable convergence in our time: among a gift-dependent missional ecclesiology, a cultural malaise around meaninglessness, and a secular openness to the spirituality of meaning-making. The vocational pathway of the emerging adult matters a great deal. I believe the church, as the body of Christ in the world, is called to respond. After all, vocation is an important vehicle through which to transform our world.

In order to navigate successfully the pathway toward a worthwhile dream, the emerging adult needs to make choices from a central place of knowing who he is. Chittister writes, "Choice is the holy-making stuff of life . . . a spiritual skill of great import."[23] Helping a young adult navigate his journey of choices ideally depends on the person's having a deep sense of himself and his gifts, as well as the economic system providing appropriate opportunities and support. The latter requirement is clearly the more challenging. In addition to a well-functioning economy, a cultural consciousness around leadership is required: both the employment systems, and those who hold positions within those systems, must take seriously the task of providing engaging work and nurturing the path of the young adult.[24]

Strides on both fronts are being made in the work environment towards the integration of meaning, purpose, and calling.[25] Post-secondary education is also picking up the topic in a significant way.[26] Still others are hosting conversations about what it means to build a life vision around character, rather than material success.[27] Water Gate

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Your Desire for Impact, Personal Growth and Community Is Changing the World (Boise, ID: Elevate, 2014), 22.

[23] Joan Chittister, *Following the Path*, 112.

[24] David Miller cautions that an overemphasis on stimulating and rewarding work can put those who have limited career choices at a disadvantage. David Miller, *God at Work: The History and Promise of the Faith at Work Movement* (New York, NY: Oxford University, 2007), 136.

[25] In *God at Work*, David Miller collects and organizes the many initiatives being made by professing Christians and others within the workplace. Interestingly, the faith and work movement has emerged outside of congregational life.

[26] Sharon Daloz Parks, *Big Questions*, 220. Examples include: the Network for Vocation in Undergraduate Education and the McMaster University Alumni mentoring program.

[27] David Brooks, *The Road to Character* (New York, NY: Penguin Random House, 2015).

Community Enablement (where I live out my vocation) is also looking into the heart of the matter around meaning-making and vocation. We have spent more than a year reviewing and trying to understand the issues presented in this paper in a coherent way. We are now grappling with how best to contribute to effecting cultural and cross-sector change.

Although commendable, these efforts are insufficient to address the wide area of need around nurturing emerging adults into the soul-forming choices they must make which will define their lives. Thus the church as the body of Christ has an opportunity, not least through the strategic placement of its many members in the world of work and in other key positions of cultural authority, to help nurture the young person along. This requires efforts in both the transformation of the economic system as well as the encouragement and challenge of the discerning person.

How might congregations provide support? Sharon Daloz Parks illustrates the potential of congregations which might be summarized as follows: congregations

1) can serve as mentoring communities;
2) can provide belonging, comfort, and challenge;
3) can entertain and help address big questions;
4) have access to stories and spiritual practices;
5) and can recognize and affirm the emerging adult gifts.[28]

More than anything, emerging adults need mentors who will see their worth, help them know their dreams, and embrace their deepest potential. They need people who will hold them when they are most vulnerable. They need people to encourage them when the stakes and pressures are highest. They need the wisdom and resources of the church, however they might be packaged, in order to make the vocational choices they must make, to face the challenges they must face, and to become grounded and outwardly-oriented partners, parents, and citizens. The future of our culture depends on no less than the flourishing of our young adults.

[28] Sharon Daloz Parks, *Big Questions*, 267–279.

FROM THE HEART

TO OPEN A WINDOW: ONE MENTOR'S REFLECTION

by Peter Short

You can't take back a word once it is spoken.
You can't make somebody love you.
You can't protect your children from life.
I wanted to be a professional athlete or a rock star or a member of parliament, but I was not suited to any of these things.
You can't be anybody except yourself.
You can't make the world conform.
You can't know about tomorrow.
I wanted to fix things for people, but what is to be done about the things that can't be fixed?
You can't change your childhood.
You can't be defined by achievement.
You can't know what you are doing until it is behind you.

My contribution to mentoring work is about freedom in the presence of things that can't be fixed; freedom from helplessness and freedom to act. Not that I am a dispenser of freedoms. These freedoms are not something I can give; they are something that people already have. The mentoring work is toward releasing what is there. I don't understand it in all its ways but I think I have sighted along some of its headings. The headings are not a curriculum, not stages in a process; they are happenings in a story. I name only some of them here.

When we risk stepping into the unfixable, we encounter the other, we encounter ourselves, and we encounter a third presence. This opens us to courage, awareness, fear, and faith.
When we acknowledge life's limitations, we take into ourselves the mystery of things. This opens us to temperance, wonder, sadness, and hope.
When we find our place in community we tune our brief lives to the long arc of the human adventure in God's world. This opens us to justice, perspective, comfort, and love.
When we experience the path of victory, though we may not win, we find our strength is in the witness of our life. This opens us to grace, embodiment, clarity, and destiny.

There was a time when I thought mentoring was about helping others. It meant listening to dilemmas and sharing insights gained from my experience. Now I know that along with these things mentoring is animated by my own quest; my sadness, my learning, my feeling a way along, and my hope. When I get close enough to the humanity of it, I find myself on common ground and in good company with other pilgrims. I call it the mentoring ground. I'll tell you about some of the things I have encountered there.

I worked for a time as an apprentice in a bakery in the east end of Montreal. The baker's name was René, a kind man, trained in France, dedicated to his craft. His modest bakery felt more like a crowded art studio than a manufacturing operation. One night as I was working with a batch of dough I asked him, "René, does this dough have enough moisture in it?" I didn't want to make a mistake. His response startled me. He said, "Peter, the dough is living. Stick your hand in; it will tell you what it needs."

It is not the mentor who must stick a hand in, feeling for life, listening for its voice. It is not the mentor who must discern a course of action even in the haunting presence of uncertainty. Such brave work falls to the one being mentored, the one I would call the *actor*.[1] The art of mentoring begins for me where any good spiritual path begins—with respect.

And it moves through mystery.

On my first day in the General Council Office as a newly elected moderator, I am wondering where in the world to start. In the hallway I meet a man named John Seabrook. He asks, "What will be your focus during your term?" I tell him I have three, maybe four priorities. John says, "Do one thing." This strikes me as excellent strategic advice but his brief counsel turns out to be like an iceberg; most of its weight is under the surface. Beneath the sounds of our conversation my mind is travelling to Kierkegaard's phrase: "*Purity of heart is to will one thing.*"[2]

The interior world shifts. A word of strategy has just made a surprise visit to the soul. Strategy, here is your soul. Soul, here is your strategy. Years later I still ponder it. *Will one thing.*

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[1] The word mentee is meaningless except in subordinate relation to the mentor. This will not do.

[2] Kierkegaard's sermon on holiness, "*Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing,*" is based on James 4:8 and is intended to accompany the office of confession.

You know this. You know this moment when a simple word or phrase in all its innocence has dropped like a pebble into the dark water of your well. You remember it as long as you live.

It may be true that mentoring in its official capacity happens through organized arrangement: supervisor and intern, master and apprentice, pipe carrier and helper, spiritual director and pilgrim, teacher and learner. But it happens in the wild too. There is undomesticated, feral mentoring going on out there. A mentor can be a casual acquaintance or even a perfect stranger. I can be mentored by a few words exchanged in a hallway or a glance through a screen door. I think we experience mentoring in the wild before we ever enter its official precincts.

There is mystery in the timing too. A day earlier or a year later and *do one thing* would have bounced off my noggin. I wonder how often I have heard a word of priceless treasure and have turned an indifferent ear as if to say, my time has not yet come. Mentoring may be arranged on a schedule, but it can't be scheduled.

Nor does mentoring confine itself to the mind and its ideas. Suppose for example we were to ascend to the top of the mental mountain: let's say, Albert Einstein. Who could mentor that incomparable mind?

Actually there were several mentors. Einstein said of his teacher, Konstantinos Karathodoris, *We owe him everything*. But before the great teacher there was Max Talmey, a young medical student and family friend, who lent the ten-year old Einstein science books and ushered him into endless fascinations. Einstein's father, Hermann, famously showed his four year old son a compass. The boy was captivated by the unknown power moving the needle, yet who knows what opened his window onto the universe: was it the father's compass or was it the violin his mother, Pauline, required Einstein to take up when he was five and which animated his soul for a lifetime? And wasn't it Uncle Jakob who inspired him to love algebra?

The Einstein intellect may have been beyond rare but he was mentored the way we all are. Someone noticed him, treated him with dignity and took time for him as he was growing. Another showed him a thing of beauty and delight; another, a challenge to his developing mind. Yet another helped him to survive in his institutional environment. None of them installed so much as a synapse in his brain.

It is life that nurtures the mind. The young Northrop Frye didn't come up to the University of Toronto from his home in Moncton because he was a great literary critic; he came because he was in a typing contest. Life opens the window. The woman who gave birth to me understood

perfectly well how to mentor her offspring in ministry. “Peter,” she said, “We come to church for help with our lives. So don't you and your minister friends get too fancy with your brains.” (Thanks, Mom.)

We who are called mentors are a drop in a vast sea of mentoring. It can be said of us, and not uncharitably, they know not what they do. Does a droplet know the ocean?

Every mentor has a point of view. Before I confess mine let me caution myself in the words of Flannery O'Connor: *“Your beliefs will be the light by which you see, but they will not be what you see and they will not be a substitute for seeing.*”[3]

So I say to myself, Mr. Mentor, respect what you see, not what you want to see, or think you should see, or intend to fix up. Respect the struggle for life and the soul at work—what is actually there. This is why one of the lovelier blessings one human may pronounce upon another is, “May you have someone in your life who sees you.”

I believe that I have been saved. I am grateful to have been given a place and a purpose in the church and its mission. It isn't the church that saves; it's the living mystery to which the church is attempting to witness. When I say “saved,” I don't mean that I have joined an elite company on the way to heaven. I mean that had I not been beckoned by the Spirit and had I not been given a place in the church, well, let me just say my life and my circumstance did not project great cause for hope. To be saved in this sense is not to find, it is to be found.

I believe that beneath every human countenance there is a struggle for life. Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe some people are fine, don't have that struggle, and don't need to be saved. But we who do ought to look after one another. When I am working with ministers on all kinds of “issues” I am passing on what I have received—not to propagate my story as some sort of norm—but to witness to the presence that moves and saves in the human struggle for life. I believe that passing on this news alive from life to life and from age to age is the work of ministry and of mentoring. I believe this is where freedom comes from; freedom from helplessness and freedom to act.

In spite of whatever beliefs one might hold, mentoring requires unselfing. It is near in spirit to Erik Erikson's theme of generativity which means, more or less, the work of planting trees under the shade of which you can never hope to sit. It's about things that lie beyond the mentor's

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[3] *Flannery O'Connor, Mystery and Manners, Occasional Prose*, ed. Sally and Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1980), 91.

knowledge and influence. The mentor's purpose is not to transfer her or his mind to the mind of another. In order to be a faithful mentor you have to be able to do what Mordecai Richler said is necessary to good writing: you have to lose interest in your own opinions. What matters is not that the mentor's ideas and strategies live on. What matters is that the living presence finds embodiment in the world as it is. A mentor's opinions may be well informed and cogent, but they can get in the way. Here's a story about that.

Once upon a time a small community of people was making pilgrimage to a new homeland. They came to the edge of a river. Discouragement took hold of them when they saw there was no way to cross the swift flowing water. Then the leader of the community conceived and organized a project to build a raft. When the raft was ready, the community ferried itself across the river. On the other side they built a fire and had a party to celebrate their success. The next morning they set out from the river, heading over the hills on their way to their new home. When they looked back, they saw that the leader, who had been instrumental in their deliverance, had tied a rope to the raft and was attempting to drag it over the hill and on to their destination. They tried to convince him to let go of the raft that had been so brilliant at the river. He refused. Sadly they left him to his struggle and moved on.

All our talk of the Living God is metaphor. That's all our talk about God can be. The metaphors are ever rising and dying in us and around us. They have their day and then they die. New metaphors rise and live. We cannot stop this dying and rising. We go safely through the world by learning to accept that there is a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing, a time to gather in and a time to cast away. Literalized metaphor may at first be a comfort, something you can hold on to, but it always ends up as a pathology, a cancer of the religious imagination, another raft.[4] The practice of mentoring must be able to discern between the convention that saved us at the river and the living tradition that calls us to remember and to move on.

Here's another aspect of point of view. Mentoring is modelled, not invented out of one's own entelechy.[5] When I needed a guide I went

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[4] Sandra Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 30.

[5] About that word *entelechy*: I place it here in honour of Douglas John Hall in whose work it appears, and who, thirty-five years ago, took the train from Montreal down to the Gaspe Coast to visit with a few young ministers. It was a

to see Phyllis Smyth. Every time I went to see her, my dilemmas and faint hopes would bring her to tears. She would sit quietly with the tears, not distraught but serene. At first I thought she wept because my situation was so compelling. After a time I came to see that the tears were her work. I remember nothing about what we said to one another, but I still see the tears in the sunlight on her face. Whenever I come upon those two words that compose the shortest verse of the gospel, "Jesus wept," I remember how tradition is embodied and living.

The way I'm going on you'd think the mentoring spirit is confined to a binary relationship. Far from it. Along with many others in the church, I am awakening to a growing appreciation of mentoring through community. The Talking/ Listening Circle of Indigenous tradition is rooted in the acknowledgement that truth is not a limited commodity. The truth resides more fully in all of us than it does in each of us. The Clearness Committee of Quaker Tradition is rooted in the acknowledgement that every person has an inner wisdom. In a small community setting of safety and discernment, that wisdom may be heard to speak.

But now I have consumed my ration of words. I hope I have said something useful to your imagination. I never intended to be a mentor. I had other, more exciting and preposterous things in mind. It was life that said No to those things, and life that opened a window.

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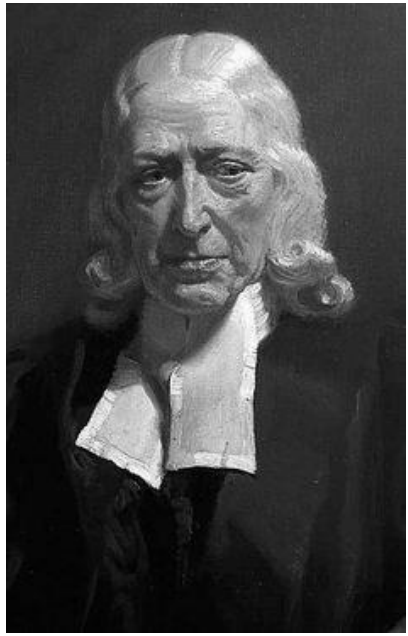
generous mentoring gift, still strong in memory and working its encouragement even today.

PROFILE

JOHN WESLEY (1703-1791) AND THE CALL TO A HOLY LIFE

by Harold Wells



I daresay, very few Methodist or United Church people today would name "the holy life" as their goal or calling. But our great, founding Methodist patriarch dedicated his life to calling people of his time to a "true holiness of heart and life." His own vocation was, above all, that of a preaching evangelist whose ministry gave rise to the worldwide Methodist movement, which now numbers some eighty million people. Though the Methodist and United Churches today are far removed in many ways from Wesley, we cannot understand the distinctive character of our churches today apart from him. Wesley's story is remarkably rich. Our purpose here is a modest one: to understand his notion of the call of God to all people, especially the call to a holy life.

His Context and Family Origins

Wesley's life spanned almost the whole of the eighteenth century—truly a revolutionary era. The vestiges of medieval England were rapidly fading as the Industrial Revolution took hold. He was contemporary with several "Enlightenment" philosophers, and his closing years saw the French and American revolutions. Had he lived a few more years, he would have seen the end of the slave trade in the British Empire.

Wesley's family origins were strongly Puritan. That movement sought a form of Protestantism more disciplined than the Elizabethan *via media* of the established Church of England. Puritans distrusted bishops, valued clean and honest living, formed "religious societies" for small group fellowship, and sought assurance of forgiveness through the inward witness of the Holy Spirit. Elements of Puritanism were inculcated in John especially by his mother Susanna, daughter of a prominent Puritan preacher (though early on she had opted for the

Church of England). Highly intelligent, she raised nine children on a steady diet of Scripture, prayer, and keeping of the commandments. In the absence of her husband, the parish rector, Susanna stepped beyond the accepted role of a woman when she led evening services for large crowds crushed into her kitchen.[1] John's father, Samuel, also came of Puritan stock, though he, like Susanna, had rejected his father's dissenting convictions and opted for the established church. He too embraced aspects of Puritanism, notably in the formation of a religious society at his parish of Epworth, calling his parishioners to greater holiness through study of the Bible, clean living, and face to face accountability.

His Early Life

The rescue of "Jacky" at the age of five from the burning rectory moved Susanna to be "more particularly careful of the soul of this child that Thou hast so mercifully provided for."[2] John grew up thinking of himself as a "brand plucked from the burning" (Zech. 3:2), chosen for some special divine vocation.

In his *Journal* Wesley depicts himself at boarding school as a typical playful child, who nevertheless read Scriptures and said his prayers morning and evening. He tells us that by the age of ten he had "sinned away the washing of the Holy Ghost," which he had received in baptism.[3] Later, as a student at Christ Church, Oxford, he frequented coffeehouses and the theatre, and only gradually became intensely concerned about "inward holiness." His mother frequently wrote to him at Oxford, warning him of his need for repentance, and encouraging him to seek holy orders.[4]

We have no account from Wesley of any dramatic call to ordination. If he was so called by God, the call came through the urging of his parents; he was ordained deacon in 1725, and priest of the Church of England in 1728. But 1725 was an important turning point in his life, when he read the mystic Thomas à Kempis, who persuaded him that vital

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[1] John A. Newton, *Susanna Wesley and the Puritan Tradition in Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 2002).

[2] Cited by Kenneth J. Collins, *John Wesley: A Theological Journey* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 19.

[3] *The Works of John Wesley* (Bicentennial Edition), ed. Frank Baker, vol. 18, *Journals and Diaries*, ed. W. R. Ward and R. P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988), 242-243.

[4] *Works*, vol. 25, *Letters I* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980).

religion begins with the transformation of the heart. Further, John read Anglican theologian Jeremy Taylor's *Rules and Exercises of Holy Living and Holy Dying.* He was so deeply moved, that "I resolved to dedicate all my life to God, all my thoughts, and words, and actions."[5] Later he read an Anglican contemporary, William Law, who had written *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life.* Innocent enjoyments and the ordinary delights of life, and even academic learning, according to Law, were a waste of time. Through the writings of Taylor and Law, Wesley experienced a "serious call" to holiness that stayed with him throughout his life. Having become a teaching fellow at Oxford, Wesley engaged with like-minded friends to form the "Holy Club"—a little religious society which met regularly to read Scripture and pray; they practised fasting, visited prisoners, and brought material aid to the poor. They lived simply, allowing themselves only the basic necessities in order to give generously to the needy. For their rigours in holy living their detractors derisively called them "Methodists," as methodical practitioners of strict rules—a label which they decided to embrace.[6]

From Georgia to Aldersgate

Wesley the young priest proved to be rather strict and formal; his preaching was morally demanding, and his severity alienated his listeners. He felt that his ministry produced little fruit. Persuaded to undertake missionary work, he journeyed to Georgia in 1735 with the hope of preaching to the Indians. Terrified by tumultuous storms during the months it took to cross the Atlantic, he realized that he was afraid to die, fearful especially of the judgment of God. He knew that he lacked assurance of the salvation of his soul. What amazed him was the confident faith of certain German Moravians onboard the ship, since, while others screamed in terror, they calmly sang hymns and prayed. Total confidence in their salvation rendered them serene in the face of mortal danger.[7] The Moravians were part of that broader European tradition of Pietism, which emphasized spiritual affections, small group fellowship, and assurance of faith.

On arrival in Savannah, Wesley was disappointed to be assigned as parish priest of a congregation of settlers. During two years or so in

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[5] *Works*, vol. 18, 242-243.

[6] Collins, *op. cit.*, 43-44.

[7] Collins, "John Wesley and the Fear of Death as a Standard of Conversion," in *Conversion in the Wesleyan Tradition,* ed. Kenneth Collins and John H. Tyson (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 6-68.

Georgia, he would encounter August Spangenberg, a pietist, who challenged him about the genuineness of his faith, causing him to doubt whether he actually possessed the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. A brief dalliance with the young woman Sophia Hopkey, with whom he had enjoyed at most a few kisses, precipitated a personal crisis. Did he equate erotic attraction with the sin of lust? He was dismayed by his own "inordinate affection" and of the danger that he might love the creature more than the Creator.[8] When he hesitated to propose marriage to this woman, she quickly married another. Angry and hurt, he refused her Holy Communion, and this punitive pettiness brought a swift end to his ministry in Georgia.

Wesley returned to England a humbled man, anxious about his spiritual condition: "I who went to America to convert others, was never myself converted to God."[9] In London he encountered the Moravian, Peter Bohler, who spoke of living not under law but under grace, of personal holiness as freedom from sin, and of the peace that derives from the sure confidence that one's sins are forgiven.[10] Yet Wesley was not convinced that he himself was truly a child of God until the evening of May 24, 1738, when he attended a religious society meeting at Aldersgate Street. There someone read from Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. In Wesley's own words, inscribed in his Journal:

> About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death.[11]

Much ink has been devoted to the discussion of whether Aldersgate was Wesley's true "conversion." Surely he had been a Christian since early childhood. And had he not been "converted" in 1725

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[8] *Works*, vol. 18, 486. A similar circumstance occurred years later when Wesley hesitated in a romantic relationship with a Methodist colleague, Grace Murray. To his dismay, she also married another. In 1750, age 47, he married a middle-aged widow, but he neglected her and she left him in 1758. (Collins, *John Wesley,* 166-169.)

[9] *Works*, vol. 18, 214.

[10] W. P. Stephens, "Wesley and the Moravians," in *John Wesley: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. John Stacey (London: Epworth Press, 1988), 23-36.

[11] *Works*, vol. 18 (24 May 1738), 249-50.

when he devoted himself wholeheartedly to God? Yet something important happened to him on May 24 that released him from anxiety about his own spiritual condition, turning his concern away from himself to others. He reports in his *Journal* that, immediately following this heartwarming experience, "I began to pray with all my might for those who had in an especial manner despitefully used me and persecuted me." It was only after this heartwarming that remarkable fruits ensued through his ministry. He became, as Frances Young comments, no longer the "prickly Pelagian, over-moral and over-religious," but a warm and gracious human being, passionate about the gospel of love, peace, and joy. Aldersgate was, in her opinion, less his "conversion" and more his "call,"—away from obsession with his own salvation, and to his particular calling to be a joyful proclaimer of God's grace.[12]

Theology of a Successful Evangelist

The decisive factor that turned Wesley around, empowering him for the remarkable ministry that followed, was not only experiential, but also theological. With the help of the Moravians, and Luther's teaching on Romans, he saw clearly that it was sinners, not the righteous, who were saved by grace alone. Salvation could not be founded upon holy living. It is God's prevenient grace that first calls us to repentance. Justification, that is, receiving God's grace through faith, is accompanied by rebirth (regeneration), which is the beginning of a lifelong growth in holiness (sanctification), leading to eternal life (glorification).[13]

Persuaded by his younger contemporary George Whitefield, himself already a successful preacher in the open air, that he could save more souls preaching in the fields than in a church, Wesley, for the first time in April 1739, "proclaimed in the highways the glad tidings of salvation."[14] Thus began a long ministry of outdoor preaching, lasting more than fifty years. Typically rising about five in the morning to pray, he travelled tirelessly by horse all over England, and to Wales, Scotland and Ireland, preaching on average 800 times, and covering about 5,000 miles each year. He soon became famous, attracting huge crowds, sometimes (allegedly) 10,000, even 20,000 people.[15] Eventually these

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[12] Frances Young, "The Significance of John Wesley's Conversion Experience," in Stacey, 41-42.

[13] Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), chapter 2.

[14] *Works,* vol. 19, 46.

[15] Joe Hale, "Wesley the Evangelist," in Stacey, 214.

great open air events were accompanied by singing, often the fine, stirring hymns of his brother Charles, and some by John himself. He attracted mainly farm workers, miners, and urban labourers. He attracted enemies too, who heckled or threw food or rocks to harm him. He always faced the crowd resolutely, though he sometimes had to be rescued from those who would attack him bodily.

Wesley describes his own preaching by saying: "I cried out with all the authority of love, 'Why will ye die, O house of Israel?' My heart was filled with love, my eyes with tears, and my mouth with arguments. They were amazed, they were ashamed, they were melted down, they devoured every word . . ."[16] He records the following incident in his *Journal*:

> While I was preaching at Newgate on these words, "He that believeth hath everlasting life," I was sensibly led, without any previous design, to declare strongly and explicitly that God "willeth all men to be saved". . . Immediately one and another and another sunk to the earth: they dropped on every side as thunderstruck. One of them cried aloud. We besought God on her behalf and he turned her heaviness to joy . . ."[17]

One of his hearers describes Wesley's impact:

> As soon as he got up upon the stand, he stroked back his hair and turned his face towards where I stood, and I thought he fixed his eyes on me. His countenance struck such an awful dread upon me before I heard him speak, that it made my heart beat like the pendulum of a clock, and when he did speak, I thought his whole discourse was aimed at me. When he had done, I said: "This man can tell the secrets of my heart."[18]

It is worth considering, from the perspective of our own time, that Wesley could count on an audience that doubted neither the existence of God, nor their own guilt. The crowds assumed that heaven and hell were real. Not so, today. Donald Soper, himself a Methodist who preached outdoors in London in the twentieth century, comments that "the preacher today can only, initially at least, count on a sense of doubt."[19]

But "success" for Wesley was not merely large numbers of "converts" sitting in pews. He was not satisfied merely to move people to

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[16] Cited by Hale, 220.
[17] *Works*, vol. 19, 51.
[18] Cited by Donald Soper, "Wesley the Outdoor Preacher," in Stacey, 184.
[19] Soper, 187-188.

that first moment of salvation, for "in the moment we are justified by the grace of God . . . we are also 'born of the Spirit.'" The new birth is "that great change which God works in the soul when . . . it is 'created anew in Christ Jesus,' when it is 'renewed after the image of God,' 'in righteousness and true holiness.'"[20] Those who are born anew of the Spirit enter upon a lifelong journey of sanctification. Salvation is not only *freedom from* the guilt of past sins, through Christ's atoning blood, but *power over* sin here and now. Increasing holiness meant not a burdensome obligation, but the gradual restoration of our true humanity, through a relationship of love with God and neighbours.

Wesley even preached that "a Christian is so far perfect as not to commit sin."[21] Here he referred to such texts as I John 3:9: "Those who have been born of God do not sin . . .; they cannot sin because they have been born of God." Also Hebrews 6:1: "Let us go on to perfection . . ." Yet Wesley became aware of continuing sin in his own life, and that of others whom he considered true Christians. Over time, he distinguished between sins and mistakes; also of outward and inward sins, voluntary and involuntary sins; it was only the former of these from which Christians are freed.[22] He believed (contrary to the Calvinist doctrine of election) that Christians could backslide and lose salvation, though repentance was always possible. He did insist, however, that "perfection" was the essential goal and a real possibility for the Christian, who must never be complacent, but always "press on" and go forward to "entire sanctification." In his tract, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection,* he explained that such perfection includes the displacement of "unholy tempers," and the "death of carnal nature." It is essentially the inculcation of holy love. Indeed, for Wesley, "love is the end, the sole end, of every dispensation of God from the beginning of the world to the consummation of all things."[23] We should always be striving for, and expecting this gift of God's grace.[24] Wesley never claimed, himself, to be "entirely sanctified," but believed he knew many Methodists who had.[25]

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[20] Sermon, "The New Birth," in *Works,* vol. 2 (1985), 187, 194.
[21] Sermon, "Christian Perfection," in *Works,* vol. 2, 116.
[22] Sermon, "On Sin in Believers," in *Works,* vol. 1, 317-334.
[23] Sermon, "The Law Established Through Faith," in *Works,* vol. 2, 38.
[24] "Thoughts on Christian Perfection," in *Works,* vol. 13, ed. Paul W. Chilcote and K. J. Collins, 57-80.
[25] Collins, *John Wesley,* 201-203.

The Strategy: Class Meetings, Lay Preachers

Wesley's evangelistic success involved a twofold strategy: class meetings, and lay preachers. The typical Wesleyan preaching event was followed not with an altar call, but with an invitation to a "class meeting." He found it natural to expand upon the methods of the Puritan and Pietist religious societies. They were organized into districts, and districts into provinces or nations, with Wesley as the supervisor of the whole structure. The heart of it was the intimate class meeting, consisting of five to twelve members, gathering weekly, both men and women (though some small groupings called "bands" were divided by gender) under the supervision of class leaders, chosen and nurtured by Wesley for their task. These leaders included many women. All Methodists were expected to engage with a class meeting, which consisted of basic instruction in Scripture, together with singing and prayer. The purpose was also discipline and accountability. People were encouraged to pour out their hearts, share their temptations and struggles, and confess their sins. The classes also engaged in practical outreach to the poor. Strict honesty and sobriety were insisted upon, and those who offended against these standards were expelled.[26] Evidently, these gatherings, springing up all over Britain, met an intensely felt need for community and for spiritual sustenance.

Moreover, the meetings spilled over into the practice of lay preaching, which at first happened spontaneously, as enthusiastic converts gave their public witness. Around 1739 the testimony of Thomas Maxwell of Bristol clearly had become a form of preaching, and Wesley at first forbade it. But his mother admonished him: "Be careful what you do with that young man, for he is as surely called of God as you are. Examine what have been the fruits of his preaching, and hear him also yourself."[27] Persuaded, Wesley defended the practice against many clergy who resented lay preachers invading their parishes. In defence of his own practice of preaching in others' parishes, he had already developed a theology of "extraordinary call." "My ordinary call is my ordination by the bishop: 'Take thou authority to preach the Word of God.' My extraordinary call is witnessed by the works God doth by my ministry, which prove that he is with me of a truth in the exercise of my office."[28]

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[26] "The Nature, Design and General Rules of the United Societies" (Newcastle on Tyne, 1743), in David Lowes Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1981), 203-206.

[27] Susanna Wesley, cited by Collins, *John Wesley*, 109.

[28] *Works*, vol. 25, *Letters I*, ed. Frank Baker, 660.

He now extended this concept to lay preachers. Their "extraordinary call"' was authenticated by the work of the Spirit through their preaching. The Anglican theology of apostolic succession, which Wesley affirmed, was complemented with a theology of charisms, whereby a Christian's call is discerned through the exercise of gifts. Wesley took care to instruct his preachers carefully, even providing a volume of Standard Sermons, which served as measuring stick for sound doctrine. By the 1750s there were three dozen lay preachers in nine circuits, serving about one hundred Methodist societies in England, Wales, and Ireland.[29]

Remarkably, Wesley encouraged women, not only as class leaders, but eventually also as lay preachers. Women, we should note, outnumbered men in the Methodist societies by a ratio of 2:1.[30] At first he frowned upon the practice of "female preaching," as something allowed by Quakers and other dissenting groups. But the preaching of lay women also sprang up spontaneously—at first in the leading of public prayer, sometimes in class meetings, or while visiting prisoners. This was often done with such power and eloquence that folk were inspired and even converted by it. Women gave public testimony in the open air, and this too proved fruitful for the saving of souls. It was Sarah Crosby who first received Wesley's approval as a preacher. A class leader, and active worker with other women among the poor, she was eager to exhort them to repentance and faith. Soon hundreds of people were gathering to hear her. A letter from Mary Bosanquet in 1771, presenting a lengthy biblical argument for the preaching of women, convinced him. Thereafter, Wesley allowed his women preachers to "take a text." Numerous women now added mightily to the outreach of the movement. While still affirming the rules against women's preaching (as in 1 Tim. 2 and 1 Cor. 14), and certainly not contemplating their ordination, he defended their "extraordinary call" as God's special providence at work in the Methodist movement.[31]

The Fruits: Personal and Social

For Wesley, the most important fruit of his ministry was that countless souls had been "saved from the wrath to come." But this-worldly signs of sanctification in the lives of Methodists were abundant as well, and in the

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[29] Collins, *John Wesley,* 165.

[30] Paul W. Chilcote, *She Offered Them Christ: The Legacy of Women Preachers in Early Methodism* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 26.

[31] Chilcote, chapters 4-5.

nation as a whole. The historian E. G. Rupp speaks of the transformation of the nation, of the decline of crime, violence, and drunkenness in England: ". . . that the whole manner of existence of individuals and the character of local communities were changed is beyond dispute. Without exaggeration of the number of converted boozers, men and women were turned from disordered characters into sober, decent people into whose homes there came new stabilities and joys."[32] The class meetings also enabled many humble people to find their voices, to develop a sense of their own purpose and power. Some historians have viewed the Methodist societies as a training ground for working class consciousness, angry protest, and the development of leaders for working class movements.[33]

Wesley was intimately connected with destitute folk, often begging in the streets on behalf of the poor, even in extreme old age. He himself eschewed luxury of any kind. He vehemently denied that the poor were poor because of laziness or their sins. He was able to see the world through the eyes of the poor, since he was so often in their homes. He records in his Journal in 1753: "I visited more of the poor sick. The industry of many of them surprised me. Several of them who were ill able to walk, were nevertheless at work; some without any fire (bitterly cold as it was), and some, I doubt, without any food."[34]

Wesley used the network of class meetings for the distribution of fuel, clothing, and medicine. He consulted pharmacists and physicians, and offered elementary medical advice and treatment to those suffering illnesses, and even established a free medical dispensary in London. But he did not stop with "charity." Though obviously pre-Marxian and pre-socialist, Wesley articulated what we would today call a "systemic critique," or what Theodore Jennings calls an "evangelical economics."[35] He publicly denounced the exploitation of the poor by grasping doctors, lawyers, merchants, and distillers, calling upon them to exercise their occupations in genuine service to God and others. He refused to accept that competition for profit justified economic harm to one's neighbour. Though Wesley remained a Tory and a monarchist, he defended poor people who engaged in outbursts of rebellion and rioting. Because "the

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[32] Ernest Gordon Rupp, *Religion in England 1688-1791* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 357-358.

[33] J. H. Plumb, *England in the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1950), 97.

[34] *Works*, vol. 20, 447.

[35] Theodore W. Jennings Jr., *Good News to the Poor: John Wesley's Evangelical Economics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990).

earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof," the place of private property was relativized, and he asserted that "luxury is theft." He disapproved of luxurious houses and costly apparel, food, and entertainment.[36]

Notably, as he became a prominent public figure in the 1770s, Wesley attacked the very heart of mercantile capitalism, denouncing both colonialism and slavery as plain manifestations of the sin of greed. He publicly bemoaned the plight of the people of India: "How many hundred thousands of the poor, quiet people, have been destroyed, and their carcasses left as the dung of the earth." He cries out, "what consummate villains, what devils incarnate" the English had been as they "plundered the desolated provinces of Indostan."[37]

He knew that lust for profit lay behind the institution of slavery, though he came rather late to abolitionism under the influence of the Quakers. In *Thoughts upon Slavery,* a substantial tract published in 1774, he described the outrages of the slave ships, the humiliations of the auction block, and the miseries of enslaved life on the plantations. He reported that, of perhaps 100,000 slaves captured in a year, one third died en route to America. He cried: "O Earth! O Sea! Cover not their blood!"[38] He disagreed indignantly with those who defended slavery from Scripture (Eph. 6:5-6), confronted the slave traders themselves in Bristol, and supported the abolitionist political campaign of William Wilberforce. In another tract, *Serious Address to the People of England,* Wesley thundered: "I would to God . . . that we may never more steal and sell our brethren like beasts; never murder them by thousands and tens of thousands!"[39] Even after his death, his was one of the important voices that brought an end to the slave trade in 1807.[40]

Legacies

Chief among Wesley's legacies, then, are a sturdy catholic faith and a major distinctive theology; also a two-pronged mission of passionate evangelism and social justice. We see in him a remarkable ability to hold these elements in creative tension. For this reason he is a forerunner of contemporary evangelicalism and even Pentecostalism, but also a

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[36] Sermon, "The Use of Money," in *Works,* vol. 2.

[37] Sermon, "The Imperfection of Human Knowledge," in *Works,* vol. 2, 579.

[38] *Thoughts upon Slavery,* in *The Works of Rev. John Wesley,* ed. Thomas Jackson (Grand Rapids: 1978), Vol. XI, 59-79.

[39] Ibid., 145.

[40] Irv A. Bredlinger, *Social Justice through the Eyes of Wesley: John Wesley's Theological Challenge to Slavery* (Ontario: Joshua Press, 2006).

precursor of the social gospel and of various liberationist theologies around the world.[41]

We also find in Wesley a powerful intellect and a deep respect for learning, evident for example in his fifty volume *Christian Library* (published between 1749 and 1755), which included the works of a wide variety of theologians, mystics, and philosophers. He also attempted to engage the philosophers of the Enlightenment in his *Appeals to Men of Reason and Religion*.[42] We should notice his remarkable ecumenical openness: his admiration for the piety of Catholics whom he encountered, especially in Ireland. While rejecting a Calvinist doctrine of predestination, he welcomed Calvinists within his movement, and others with whom he disagreed: Quakers, Baptists, and dissenters of all kinds. He would not countenance any departure of Methodism from the Church of England (and exhorted Methodists to receive the sacraments in their local parish), but the many dissenting participants perhaps helped to move Methodism out of the Church of England shortly after his death.[43]

We may note a prescience in Wesley's thought on environmental stewardship. He was cognizant of the science of his day. Because he questioned any absolute right of private property, he denied that humans have the right to do whatever they like with elements of nature, including especially animals. His defence of the dignity of animals (with a certain affectionate regard for the horse) is particularly poignant.[44]

His legacies are plainly visible in our United Church of Canada and every Methodist denomination. In the twenty-first century we cannot, of course, adopt his theology uncritically, nor merely imitate his practice of ministry. For example, we cannot do evangelism as he did, but we really have not discovered how to share faith effectively in our time. Nor can many of us match his passionate commitment to the poor and to social justice. But we are poorer if we forget him, or if we do not hear God's call, as he did, to "a true holiness of heart and life."

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[41] Theodore Runyon, ed., *Sanctification and Liberation: Liberation Theologies in the Light of the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981).

[42] *Appeals to Men of Reason and Religion,* in *Works,* ed. G. R. Cragg (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975).

[43] Runyon, *The New Creation*, 207-221.

[44] *Survey of the Wisdom of God in Creation,* cited by Runyon, 200-207; Sermon, "The Good Steward," in *Works,* vol. 2, 282-298.

BOOK REVIEWS

The Church of Mercy: A Vision for the Church
Pope Francis. Chicago: Loyola Press, 2014. Pp.150.

Since becoming Pope Francis on March 13, 2013, Jorge Borgolio has been active in a transformation and reinvigoration of the Roman Catholic Church. This collection of sermons, addresses, and speeches represents an overview of Francis' vision for this transformation and reinvigoration.

It centres on a model of the Church focused on "Mercy," Pope Francis having recently declared a year, beginning December 8, 2015, in which the Church is orientated primarily by Mercy. It may seem curious that a Church would decide to focus on mercy, as if such a focus represented a break with an ongoing commitment to merciless severity. The Church Francis inherited, however, had, under John Paul II and Benedict XVI been focused on opposing a "culture of death" marked by what was seen as relativism, consumerism, and the commodification of personhood. The self understanding of this approach was to critique and offer an alternative to this culture, to refuse to accommodate to it, and to call Catholics to a heroic radicalism at odds with their secular context. Against such a backdrop, "Mercy" represents a considerable shift in approach, stressing God's forgiveness and compassion rather than offering critique.

Rather than holding out an ideal and calling people to this life, the pastoral situation of Catholics "on the ground" is to be taken more seriously as the Church walks with people in their daily struggles. Francis' model of the Church as a "field hospital" features frequently in these sermons and addresses. This Church offers pastoral care to those suffering in twenty-first century life, rather than railing prophetically against their absorption into the modes and idioms central to contemporary secularism.

To be sure, the ten sections of the book show Francis offering some impassioned critique himself. He is most passionate and uncompromising when assailing careerism and the quest for power inside the Church (part eight). He also gets quite fiery when assailing capitalism (part three). Throughout, we see Francis demand a Church that "goes out" onto the margins of society (part seven) and adopts the "odour of the sheep" (part six). Such calls feature charges that clergy who drive expensive cars give scandal to the gospel and that careerism in the Church is like a disease, specifically leprosy (115).

That he himself embodies union with "the people" is clear from the language in which these sermons and speeches are written. These are

not the writings of a theologian or academic. They are instantly accessible. Broad image is preferred to precise idea. He communicates through story, biblical stories mainly, but also through accounts of people he has met in pastoral situations. Furthermore his theology has the "odour of the flock" in that it is infused with a distinctive piety. For example, his theology is informed more by Marian themes than his predecessors (section 10), and it will be arresting for many readers when they realize that this is a man who takes Satan to be very real. He is not the scholar of Marxist dialectic selflessly seeking to liberate the poor; he is instead one with the people both economically and in theological tone.

In fact, it might be argued that his assumptions about the transformative impact of "mercy," of the message of God's love and forgiveness, rely too heavily on his Latin American context marked by the piety of the poor of Buenos Aires. Whether secular European and North American people find this message as transformative as Francis assumes, remains to be seen.

Throughout his book, personal, transformative relationship with Christ takes precedent over rules, regulations, and even traditions (parts one, three, four and five), and in sermon after sermon Francis encourages all Christians, not just clergy, to witness, proclaim, and live lives less ordinary in the service of the lowly.

Francis is neither a liberal nor a conservative, and both liberals and conservatives will find things to dislike here. Conservatives will lament what they see as a conflation of mercy with affirmations of sinfulness. Capitalists will rail against Francis' understanding that desire for commodities and self assertion are incompatible with the gospel, and so Christianity and capitalism are natural enemies. Liberals will lament the fact that, while Francis advocates transformation, the transformation is tonal rather than substantive or doctrinal. As such, Francis includes nothing about overcoming the all-male clergy in these sermons and addresses. Overcoming the all-male clergy, to many people's dismay, is not part of Francis' model for transformation.

While such elements will shadow this book for many people, it remains primarily a very readable, accessible, and yet comprehensive introduction to Francis' vision for the Roman Catholic Church, which also offers edification and support for all Christians.

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Douglas John Hall: Collected Readings
Edited by David B. Lott. Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2013. Pp. 264.

Most *Touchstone* readers need no introduction to Douglas John Hall. His written works, teaching role at McGill, and frequent public appearances confirm him as a leading theologian. David B. Lott, who edited Hall's works for Fortress Press over a period of twenty-five years, gathered these readings—only from works published by Fortress Press—with appreciation for Hall's contribution to theological discourse in the Canada-USA context.

In the volume's charming foreword, Phyllis Trible expresses gratitude for her one-time classmate at Union Theological Seminary (New York) and his steady sharing "of mystery, meaning, and memories" (viii). The editor provides a complete list of Hall's books—twenty-five titles, starting in 1971 with *Hope against Hope: Towards an Indigenous Theology of the Cross,* and concluding with *What Theology Is Not: An Exercise in 'Negative' Theology* (2013). None of Hall's other published material is listed.

Lott introduces each reading briefly "to put the excerpt in context, both within Hall's thought, and within the plan of the book itself" (7). The general introduction highlights Hall's impact as a *contextual theologian,* provides a brief biographical sketch, and, finally, describes the book's organization.

Lott separates the selected material into three main sections. Context is the guiding thread. The first part introduces the reader to Hall's method of doing theology—a process of thinking and knowing as contextual practice. The second reinforces Hall's reputation as a theologian of the Cross. The third focuses on theological bases for the contextually-driven process of disestablishment transforming the life of North American churches.

All three themes recur frequently and are representative of Hall's writing. They touch on diverse contextual realities which he illuminates by drawing deeply and broadly on the faith heritage. The current ecclesiastical malaise is addressed within the light of an ecclesiology that transcends Christendom's understanding of the *ecclesial* community.

While I appreciate the sample of material Lott has gathered, I am not clear about the reason for its selection. His aim is "to show how contextuality governs Hall's principal concerns, particularly the theology of the cross and church disestablishment" (7). But if the goal is to

familiarize readers with Hall's method and substance, then reading his *Thinking the Faith* would achieve the purpose more effectively. If it is to honour Hall's contribution to the theological enterprise, the volume is certainly not a *Festschrift* marking his retirement or building on his efforts.

Heading his introductory chapter, Lott quotes from Hall's *Bound and Free* (22): "The theologian is charged with the responsibility of interpreting for his or her own time and place the very core of the faith—gospel for the here and now. . ." It is not apparent to me that Lott himself drew on the "here and now"—the contemporary context—to guide his choice of readings.

As I hear it, the "here and now" is screaming for all humans to seek a renewed theological understanding of Creation. Given today's proliferating environmental crises and humanity's abundant capacity for objectifying the earth, our theological task is huge.

My disappointment with Lott's anthology is not caused by an oversight in Hall's theology. A cursory search of several of Hall's works turns up relevant material to engage the Creation crisis. In *Thinking the Faith* (219 ff.), Hall identifies "nature's rebellion" against human "mastery" and "misuse" of the natural order as a critical contextual issue for the faithful to address. As early as 1982 in *The Steward*, Hall draws on the tradition to call humanity to exist not above nature, nor merely in it, but *with it* as God is "with us" in the Incarnation (110).

A Creation theology series responding to our "here and now" and building on Hall's work could deepen our appreciation for the foundational work of this gifted Canadian theologian and might just help save the planet!

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I Want to Be in That Number: Cool Saints I Have Known
Lois M. Wilson. Self-published, 2014. Pp. 190.

It isn't easy to classify this engaging and inspiring book written by Lois Wilson—ordained minister, activist, and ecumenist extraordinaire. It doesn't fit smoothly into any one category of writing in either the theological or secular realm. Rather, it combines biography and autobiography; eulogy is interwoven with political and historical analysis; theological insights are grounded in questions for self and communal reflection; and, throughout its pages, biblical scholarship and

interpretation are inextricably linked to the up-building of the Christian community for mission in the real world.

In the Introduction, Wilson recounts the genesis of the book. A family conversation led her to contemplate how she might go about passing on the rich legacy of peace and justice work bequeathed to the church by various individuals, all of whom she has known personally. Included in this group (who ultimately became the "cool saints" of the book's title) were friends and family members, leaders of the Canadian church as well as heroines and heroes of the global church, such as Dorothee Soelle and Beyers Naude.

As she pondered the challenge of how to both inform and energize the next generation of the faithful, Wilson remembered the notes that she had kept over the years recording the Scripture passages chosen for the funerals of the "cool saints." These passages turned out to be the key to a book that recounts the highlights of the life of these individuals as well as plumbs the meaning of their legacy for the witness of the Christian community today.

I Want to Be in That Number is structured so that each person is the subject of one of the forty entries in the book. Wilson clearly knows her subjects, and the reader is introduced to each saint by means of a personal, authentic, and informative glimpse into the essentials of their life story. Certainly the descriptions of people I knew personally rang true, and I was moved more than once to stop reading and to remember gratefully Rhea Whitehead, Ted Scott, and Mary Lynn Siwallace. At other times, I found myself in awe of the courage displayed by people such as Korean human rights activist Oh Jae Shik, who had to leave an ecumenical meeting and hide in a closet from Korean police authorities. I often found my feminist heart warmed and emboldened by the stories of determined women with a thirst for justice like Ruth Nita Barrow and Alice Boomhour Heap. I was confirmed in my admiration for the Student Christian Movement as its formative role was cited in so many of the biographies.

The entries are not limited to biographical details, fascinating though they are. Anchoring her reflections in the chosen Scripture passages, Wilson has developed each entry into a homily-cum-reflection. Using historical, political, and theological lenses, she connects the experiences, passions, and aspirations of each subject to the challenges and opportunities that face individuals and communities seeking to participate in God's life-giving vision of peace and justice for all. Each entry ends with questions that drive home both the challenge and the opportunity. Recurring themes arising from this process provide the

overall structure of the book, with entries grouped in chapters entitled Justice, Resurrection, Transformation, and Church and the World.

Wilson quotes St. Symeon, tenth century theologian, who wrote that "the saints in each generation, joined to those who have gone before . . . become a golden chain, in which each saint is a separate link, united to the next by faith and works and love" (9). *I Want to Be in That Number* underscores the diversity, strength, and relevance of that chain in a vivid and edifying manner. The book also substantiates the breadth and depth of the life experience and ministry leadership of its author and evidences her own commitment to peace and justice work. Wilson's vital personal connections to, and deep-rooted solidarity with the cool saints, indicate that she is definitely marching in the same parade.

The book could have benefitted from more careful copy-editing. A number of small typos were perhaps only minor diversions, but errors such as confusing Salvador Allende with Augusto Pinochet (39) were more disconcerting. Another challenge for the reader is the sheer volume of contextual information, global church references, biographical detail, analysis, biblical interpretation, theological insights, and reflection questions. This book cannot be read in large chunks because there is simply too much substance to comprehend and absorb. It is very well suited, however, for use as daily reflection material (during Lent, for example), and has much to offer as a group study book.

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No Irrelevant Jesus—On Jesus and the Church Today
Gerhard Lohfink. Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2014. Pp. 330.

No Irrelevant Jesus is a collection of scholarly essays from an exclusively Roman Catholic perspective, but with much theological and exegetical insight for any serious seeker.

In his early career, Gerhard Lohfink was a professor of New Testament exegesis at the University of Tubingen. Since 1986, he has worked as a theologian for the Catholic Integrated Community. He has many theological and exegetical books to his credit (at least eighteen by my count), many of which have been translated into English from their original German.

No Irrelevant Jesus is a collection of 25 lengthy essays on a variety of subjects, some with intriguing titles ("On Not Taming Jesus"

and "Prayer as Access to Reality"), some seemingly linked to current thought ("Jesus Revolutionizes Linear Time" and "The Canon and the Many Confessions"), and some engaging specifically Roman Catholic questions ("Some Irenic Thoughts on the Episcopacy and the Primacy" and "Must the Pope Be Conservative?").

Lohfink has been described well by other reviewers as *wise, scholarly,* and *revelatory*. His deep exploration of biblical texts shows refreshing insight and thorough biblical knowledge. To my delight, the book contains an exhaustive "Index of Biblical Citations and Other Ancient Literature." On the other hand, while there is an "Index of Proper Names," a subject index is conspicuous by its absence.

No Irrelevant Jesus is no light read! Its theses are well written and thoroughly researched, but often very complex. In fact I would suggest that it was not written for the average layperson; and certainly not for the lay Protestant Christian. Having grown up in a strict Roman Catholic household, I sometimes found that reading Lohfink threw me back into a linguistic style I have discarded in recent years as a United Church minister. For example, in the essay entitled "How a Sacrament Works," he exclaims, "Every sacramental encounter takes place on the soil of the church or it does not happen at all" (199). To be fair, he is often very clear about his intended Roman Catholic readership for, earlier in the same essay, he says, "Let me first give a definition of what *Catholic theology* understands a sacrament to be" (189; my emphasis added).

Throughout his essays, he alternately admonishes, cajoles, surprises, and guilt-trips his readers into at least entertaining his opinions. For example: ". . . Jesus is tamed and rendered irrelevant when he is presented only as a sympathetic rabbi, a prophet mighty in word and deed, or a gifted charismatic—or as the first feminist, a radical social revolutionary, or a gregarious social worker . . . In all these categories Jesus is shrunken, distorted, twisted into shape, planed smooth, disempowered and accommodated to our secret desires" (18).

Occasionally I was confronted with a line that pained my Protestant heart. For example, consider this claim: "An official structure that is set up in such a way that the majority can decide the truth by vote is absolutely unbiblical . . . The final assent to or dissent from decisions reached by a synod belongs to the pastor or the bishop or the pope. They are obligated to up-hold the truth of the Gospel, the truth of the tradition, but they must listen with the greatest intensity to the 'counsel' they receive" (135, from his apology on *Episcopacy and Primacy*).

While the book did not always speak to my non-Catholic

theological leanings, I found many a clever and insightful exposition of historical context. In what is arguably the best essay of the collection, "Where Do We Get Our Values?" he examines not only the current meaning of the word "value," but also the practical reasons behind some of the Deuteronomical laws which underpin our concept of it.

Even though I did not always agree with Lohfink's position, I greatly admired his ability to turn a story around and examine it in a larger context. I was especially charmed by his insight into the miracle of the loaves and fishes, and will therefore let him have the last word. "The reign of God must be preached, but people have to eat too . . . The disciples here separate reality into two clear areas: that of the reign of God, and that of the rest of life. Both spheres—we could say both realms—are cleanly separated in the disciples' suggestion, as they would be again and again in the course of the church's history. Basically the modern isolation of faith from life, the separation of reality into autonomous subsections, is already anticipated here."

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Worship in the City: Prayers and Songs for Urban Settings
Nancy Elizabeth Hardy. Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 2015. Pp. 180.

At their best, worship resources recognize the embodied experience of worship and the gathered community. A meaningful resource needs to speak in collective language about the contexts of those worshiping—a balance between specificity and general truths. Nancy Elizabeth Hardy's *Worship in the City* finds a shared context in images and experiences of the city. As Hardy notes in her Introduction, "Canada is one of the most urban countries in the world . . . In The United Church of Canada, my home church, there are more churches in the country than the city, but rural churches tend to be smaller; there are greater numbers of church members who work and worship in cities" (6). Often our worship does not reflect this context: "If we look closely at the hymns we sing and the prayers we utter, we will find that most of the images and references are rural and idyllic. There is little that celebrates the city. Even more than that, there is a suspicion that country is good and city is bad" (6). Rejecting this suspicion, Hardy offers a collection of prayers and songs with images and metaphors steeped in an urban landscape, from parks

and playgrounds to traffic jams and street festivals. They celebrate water and plants, but through fountains and city parks rather than wells and vineyards. Our lives are different in a small town or a big city; it only makes sense that our worship language be different as well.

Hardy draws on her own academic work and years of ministry experience within The United Church of Canada (UCC), and her book contains many of her own prayers and songs while also including the prayers and songs of many others, including David Allan, Shirley Erena Murray, Joan Wyatt, and Ruth Duck.

Worship in the City is divided into 5 main sections: Times and Seasons; Celebration and Thanksgiving; Confession and Lament; Hope and Healing; and, Justice and Service. Each section includes prayers, a communion liturgy, and songs. The range portrays our cities as, in Hardy's words, "places of contradiction and community" (132). Altogether, the book contains 69 prayers, 32 songs and five Communion prayers, with a compelling range of language and imagery, such as these lines from Hardy:

> God of spice and savour,
> like a great chef who prepares
> a banquet for her guests,
> you flavour our lives, and your grace
> permeates our hearts . . . (129)

The section for Times and Seasons contains no more than a couple of prayers for a specific Sunday or season. As a seasonal resource, the book would feel insufficient. Instead, its strength is the prayers most likely to be used in Ordinary Time—prayers of celebration, lament, and justice, such as these lines by Hardy:

> As we gather in city squares to celebrate or demonstrate,
> as we sit on park benches and dream of a world of peace and plenty,
> shake us, enliven us, mould us;
> help us to embody your Spirit. (36)

Hardy includes prayers relating to the Montreal Massacre, gun violence, and murdered and missing Aboriginal Women. The prayers are sometimes more inspiration than resource, a reminder continually to embed our words in our contexts.

In addition to the prayers and songs, Hardy includes a section "Planning for Worship in the City," with thoughts about prayers, symbols, and story, lists of city-related songs found in the UCC hymnbooks *Voices United* and *More Voices*, as well as *Worship in the City*. Hardy also includes two appendices (Cities in the Bible, and

Theological Observations), along with Resources, for further reading. A practical pleasure of Hardy's book is its clear and generous policy on permissions. With acknowledgement, the prayers and some songs can be used in worship, including orders of service and projection. Hymns requiring further copyright permissions are indicated on the same page as the hymn.

One Sunday, we used John Polhill's "Prayer of Franciscan conservation" (136), and as part of the service it appeared on the bulletin board of our busy downtown congregation. A couple of weeks later a member of the community (not the congregation) came by my office. She had seen the prayer earlier on and returned to copy it down, but it was gone—someone else must have been equally moved and simply taken it. This may be unusual praise, but it speaks directly to the value of such a resource: a stranger will walk away with, and a community member will approach a minister for, its prayers.

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Do You Want to Write for *Touchstone*?

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 are approximately 3000 words in length. The profile editor is Prof. Sandra Beardsall, who can be contacted at *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 contacted at *don.schweitzer@usask.ca*.

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