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Introduction

It may seem like irony, but at the height of summer vacation time this August issue of New Theology Review contains a series of reflections on the meaning and spirituality of work. Although we all look forward to leisure and extended vacation breaks, the reality is that labor is much more significant for purposes of self-identity, personal meaning, and finding one’s place in the world. As John Paul II has observed in his major statement on human labor, “The Church is convinced that work is a fundamental dimension of human existence on earth” (Laborum exercens, no. 4). According to the Pope, work “is not only good in the sense that it is useful or something to enjoy; it is also good as being something worthy, that is to say, something that corresponds to human dignity, that expresses this dignity and increases it. . . . Work is a good thing . . . because through work a person not only transforms nature, adapting it to human needs, but also achieves fulfillment as a human being and indeed in a sense becomes ‘more a human being’” (no. 9).

Despite the conviction that work is central to our human existence the Church has not always devoted enough attention to the phenomenon of labor. The amount of literature on a theology and spirituality of work is not nearly as extensive as one might think for an activity which takes up more time in the life of a person than just about anything else. In pastoral practice it is rare to hear a Sunday homily on work or see an adult education program focused on the topic.

Three articles in this issue take up the issue of work. We are pleased to present the noted authors Evelyn and James Whitehead who provide a reflection on ways of considering the spirituality of work. Robert Kinast, one of the foremost authors in the field of theological reflection, suggests some ideas for how to engage in that process on the topic of work. Finally, Capuchin scholar David Couturier draws upon his research to describe the changing experience of work in the lives of male religious. Readers will find each of the individual essays stimulating and also see a variety of ways in which the authors find common ground on a Christian understanding of human work.

Three other essays offer insight on diverse topics. Ilia Delio, a scholar with doctorates in both neuro-pharmacology and theology, takes up the fascinating question of how we can think about the mystery of God in the context of modern scientific understandings of the cosmos. Howland Sanks provides a helpful sketch of what is meant by the term “postmodernity” and what are some of the implications of this outlook for the life of the Church. Richard Marzheuser offers a thoughtful essay on the Holy Spirit and the meaning of catholicity.
Our usual array of columns and book reviews are also included. As was noted in our last issue, we have revised the “Keeping Current” column to provide our readers with an overview of one of eight fields of theology in each issue. This issue the column surveys significant work in mission and cross-cultural studies.

An additional bonus to be found on several pages of this issue are lists of Internet Web sites which may be of interest to our readers. The editors are grateful to Bob Benko, O.F.M. Conv., an M.Div. candidate at the Washington Theological Union, for providing this service to our readers.

We would like to draw our readers’ attention to an error found on pages 18 and 19 of the February issue of the journal. A statistical table was incorrectly labeled. The fourth column of the table should have been Post-Vatican II, not the third column, which should have been entitled, Vatican II. Our apologies to the author, Prof. James Davidson, and also to our readers for this mistake.

Finally, we would like to pass along a suggestion. A number of readers have said they find the column “Getting Down to Cases” a useful tool for adult education or as a piece which stimulates shared reflection among members of a pastoral staff. We offer our subscribers permission to reproduce this column for such purposes and encourage our readers to let us know how the journal is helpful to them. The editors welcome your comments.
Evelyn Eaton Whitehead and James D. Whitehead

Making a Living, Making a Life: Toward a Spirituality of Work

“Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life . . . by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread” (Gen 3:17, 19). For many Christians, this biblical image dominates a spirituality of work. We see Adam and Eve standing forlorn outside paradise, exiled for an act of willful disobedience. Now bereft of God’s shining presence, they carry with them a life sentence of hard work, sweat and pain. In this biblical memory, human work is one of the wages of sin.

For most of human history, this somber forecast has been well proved. In much of the world even today—including countries sustained by “advanced” economies—work often takes the form of demanding, dangerous, and sometimes degrading physical labor. A spirituality of work developed within the Christian tradition must be accountable to these stark realities.

During this century the Catholic Church has addressed these inhumane conditions of work in its social encyclicals and through a range of innovative and sometimes controversial ministries, such as the worker-priest movement in France, Young Catholic Workers and similar associations in many countries. An essential thrust in a Christian spirituality of work has been and must continue to be this intent to promote economic justice and to protect the dignity of workers worldwide. But our brief discussion here moves in a complementary direction. We will examine the experience of work as a potential opening to life in the Spirit.

Work reveals us to ourselves—our talents and limits and ambitions. In our first jobs we begin to discover who we are. Even when we enter the employment scene haphazardly—stumbling into our first job or taking the only work available—over time the work that we do helps us craft a durable identity. To the question “who are you?” we answer “I am a nurse” or teacher or manager or electrician. But caught in the vortex of today’s market forces, more and more of us find our work lives recast by false starts, disappointed dreams, and the necessity to start over again. These dynamics challenge earlier self-definitions and raise new questions of meaning.
SPIRITUAL DIMENSIONS OF WORK

Why do we work? Our initial response comes quickly: to make a living. Paid employment provides the financial resources we need to sustain ourselves, provide for our families, share with others in need, and save for the future. But beyond the promise of a paycheck, does our work have any value in itself? Is there any significance or delight in what we actually do on the job? Work may be how we make a living, but how does it help us make a life?

Working people today—Christians and others—ask these questions of identity and meaning, often as part of an explicit spiritual search. Tracing their response can help us sketch a contemporary spirituality of work. Our discussion will begin by exploring three spiritual dimensions of work: work as calling, as creativity, as contribution. We will close with a consideration of how the dual economies of gift and marketplace shape the spirituality of our working lives.

Work as Calling

For many of us, work connects with the spiritual journey through an awareness of personal call. In U.S. culture, where people are likely to use psychological rather than religious language to describe their inner life, this awareness is often expressed as a harmony or “fit” between work and one’s sense of self: “This is what I have always wanted to do with my life!” Other convictions about work echo this sense of congruence: “My job brings out the best in me” and “I love my work; it gives me a chance to do who I really am.”

For other people, the sense of call comes as an explicit awareness that their worklife connects with values of larger significance. A wide range of issues can support this richer sense of participation: a union steward committed to advancing racial harmony on his shift, a para-legal who values her research tasks as part of the firm’s efforts to monitor integrity in political life, the manager at a local supermarket who establishes an in-store recycling program out of concern to heal the planet. However different the focus, the dynamic is the same: people report that their principled action at work is prompted by a sense of being part of something larger than themselves. For many, this participation is personalized. More than simply something they have decided to do, their commitment is experienced as a response; they know themselves called to this work. And people of strong biblical faith—whether Jewish or Christian or Muslim—identify the source of this invitation as God. For them, the call they experience in their work is a religious vocation.

Conventionally in Catholic tradition, the language of vocation was reserved for only certain careers. Priests and vowed religious were understood as called by God to genuine vocations. Lay Catholics had
important work to do in their families and jobs and civic communities, but they did not have “vocations.” Devout laity might also pursue an apostolate of religiously-inspired service, but this was almost always understood as a commitment to good deeds apart from and in addition to their secular work. Following the reforms of Vatican II, Catholics have begun to reclaim an older and richer meaning of vocation. God’s call does not divide the faith community into “first class” (priests and vowed religious) and “second class” (lay) members. Rather the Christian vocation—to attend to the action of God’s Spirit in God’s world—is shared by all the baptized. Expressed in our communal actions of worship and justice, this call is also registered in personal commitments of love and work. Whatever our lifestyle, the context of daily work provides repeated opportunity to act on our deepest values and express our faith experience.

“Ministry in the Marketplace” initiatives in many Protestant congregations today are encouraging local faith communities to recognize the ordinary work of their members as their essential ministry and to support individuals in developing a lively awareness of personal vocation. Like Catholics, Protestants must struggle against their heritage of a world divided between sacred activities which take place in the church and are led by formally designated ministers and secular work which lay members pursue in their daily lives.

Work as Creativity

Good work expresses and expands our life; it nourishes the human spirit. Psychologists point to the fruit of positive work experiences. A creative work setting supports the development of competence—a consistent readiness to do one’s best, according to standards that have been personally validated, even in the face of obstacles. The feeling of accomplishment that comes in work well done can mature into an abiding sense of confidence—“my inner resources are trustworthy.”

The worksite is also the place where our creativity has a chance to develop. We are challenged to devise a better product, to control costs, to protect the environment against the hazards of our culture’s technological advances. Creativity at work gives our labor a personal stamp, leaving on the product the mark of our own vision and talent and desire. And creative work, with its challenges that test our resources, also nourishes us. In the U.S. today personal free time seems very limited, and much of it is spent in activities intended to distract us from physical and psychological stresses associated with our work. But, paradoxically, most Americans report being happier at their work than when they are involved in their usual leisure activities—watching television, “taking it easy,” and shopping. These activities we turn to for relief seldom seem to satisfy. Instead, distraction dissolves into dissipation.
Sensing we are “on hold” during that time rather than really living, we quickly become bored.

Psychologists studying creativity have identified the psychological experience of flow, in which we are completely absorbed in something outside ourselves that engages the full range of our resources—thinking and feeling, skills and values—and stretches us just a bit beyond our current comfort level (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). In moments of flow, when they are successfully dealing with real challenges, people report they feel most alive. And it is in these moments of minimal self-consciousness, which are closely associated with creative work, that people report themselves happiest. Although these experiences of creativity are enjoyable, we do not seek them out primarily because they are pleasurable, but because they are worthwhile.

When we feel creative at work, we know what we are doing and why it is important. We cherish our work “for itself,” not just for its extrinsic payoffs in salary considerations, career advancement or prestige. Many businesses today are abandoning “incentive plans” as they realize that such pay-for-performance programs end by being manipulative and distracting people from the worth of their work.

Carrying us beyond productivity and responsibility—simply doing what needs to be done—creativity brings us to delight. People on the journey of faith sometimes hear, in these resonances of their own creativity, the echo of God’s own delight in creation. We turn again to the book of Genesis, but now to different memories. We recall a Potter God entranced by the clay as it takes shape in God’s hands; we remember Adam and Eve’s initial God-given “work” was to name the animals. These images remind us that creation continues as we name the world and shape its future through our daily work (John Paul II, 1981).

Work as Contribution

The longing to give something back to life marks a significant threshold of spiritual growth, beckoning us beyond the cramped confines of self-concern toward a wider engagement in the world. Many adults see their work as the most immediate and practical means they have for making a difference in the world. By providing products that people need, by distributing goods that bring comfort and convenience, by offering services to help society thrive, they try to make their contribution.

Psychologists have tracked this longing as it matures into the midlife strength of generativity, a commitment to use one’s resources responsibly in the service of interests that go beyond oneself. Generative adults embrace the world, not just to prove themselves or to defend the narrow boundaries of self-interest. Their commitment is to
“leave an afterwards,” to give birth to something that will outlast their own lives and make the next generation fuller.

In midlife, the future makes new claims. For some people this leads to a re-orientation of personal responsibility at work. Larger moral concerns—ethical norms in the workplace, fair access to employment and career advancement, the regulation and reform of larger economic structures—now take on added significance. Resolution of these complex issues is unlikely in our lifetime. But this sober realization does not exempt us from the effort. These complicated questions will shape the world we leave to our children’s children. Aware of this legacy, we recommit ourselves to the patient work of crafting a world worthy of the future, a world worthy of God’s hope for humankind.

Often, of course, work provides a setting for neither creativity nor contribution. Many Americans feel stuck in dead-end jobs, with hope for a pension being the only lever that lifts them out of bed in the morning. Other workers spend their shifts on mindlessly repetitive tasks that seem to contribute little to life beyond a paycheck. Philosopher Paul Ricoeur has observed that when public life sours, people turn to private domains for compensation and revenge. If our jobs and careers are meaningless, we will demand that our private lives furnish the consolation we so sorely miss. Leisure time then carries the full burden of providing meaning and delight. This is, as Ricoeur described more than thirty years ago, a formula for addiction. And the prevalence of alcoholism, pornography, and eating disorders in our culture today seems to attest to the accuracy of his insight.

AT WORK IN TWO ECONOMIES

Experiences of calling, creativity, and contribution help us hold our work in a more relaxed grasp. This new embrace acknowledges that “the work of our hands” is not just ours. We are neither its sole authors nor its only beneficiaries. Our work initiates us into a more mysterious dynamic that ultimately escapes our control—the reign of God being made real among us.

We witness this worldly realization in the interplay of two complementary economies, that of the marketplace and the gift. The market economy envelopes us in our work. This is the world of buying and selling, of supply and demand, of concern for the bottom line. The gift economy encircles us, too, even if its functions seem less obvious and less urgent. The exchange of resources here is more subtle but equally real: we volunteer our time in the parish program of religious education or social outreach; we serve on a citizen’s committee promoting the arts or work pro bono for a person or group in need.

These complementary economies fuel the creativity of a culture. Each is a necessary and valued element of social life, though the
current preoccupation with “market forces” threatens to absorb our culture’s attention to the neglect of the more delicate economy of the gift. The health and vitality of a society depend on its honoring the economies of both the market and the gift.

The Market Economy

This economy—the most obvious dynamic in our working lives—exists to create abundance: business is about growing and distributing a fuller harvest, providing better medicine and health care, making more cars and computers. Productivity is the watchword here. This economy alerts us to limited resources. We have only so much time and energy in a day. If we take a half day away from our work to care for a sick child, we may well lose a half day’s pay. If we donate funds to this worthy cause, we will have less to give to another. An exhausting week on the job may so deplete us that we have little energy left for our family.

This lesson of the market economy—that needed resources are in short supply—warns us to save our money and conserve our energy. It counsels us to accumulate savings against a time of illness or other emergency. The market economy also teaches us the lesson of quid pro quo: “you get what you pay for.” We purchase the cheapest toaster on sale at the discount store, and it breaks a month later: we got what we paid for. This homey lesson of investment and return finds echo in the biblical admonition: “As you sow, so shall you reap” (Gal 6:7).

The logic of the market economy supports another expectation: that life should be fair. Many of us function under the assumption that if we work hard, we will be justly rewarded. Or if we exercise, eat well and do not smoke, we will not get sick. Then, of course, we learn with Job a more complicated truth: life is not “fair.” Good health and good fortune are not assured according to some clear calculus of personal merit.

The Economy of the Gift

As we learn the lessons of the market economy, we are also recruited into the more mysterious dynamic of the gift exchange. Like the marketplace, the gift economy pursues abundance, but its abundance accrues according to different rules. In our families and friendships, in public service and generative care, we experience an exchange in which giving is not losing.

As parents and teachers and caregivers, we spend ourselves—but the donation does more than deplete us. Sharing knowledge and concern is not like a bank transaction, leaving our account void. Instead what is shared is multiplied. What is given enriches both the giver and those who receive.
In the gift economy, unlike the marketplace, we learn that not every interaction is a zero-sum game. Visiting a sick friend—or struggling with others to solve a complex issue of the common good—is an effort that takes considerable time and energy. But most often we come away not only exhausted, but enriched. Where we had expected only to give, we experience our life enlarged.

Another lesson of the gift exchange is that we do not always get what we deserve. We do not merit, in advance, our life or love or health. No financial payment to our parents can adequately square that account. No well-negotiated contract will insure that we will never be sick. When we are forgiven a serious offense, we know we have not earned this reconciliation; rather it arrives as gift.

The gift economy teaches that what we are given is not just for our own benefit. The benefits we have received—from a nurturing upbringing or a good education or other fortunate opportunities—are not to be accumulated or hoarded. As Lewis Hyde reminds us in his evocative essay *The Gift* (1979), gifts are not meant to be taken out of circulation. They must be handed on.

A spirituality of work flourishes when we learn to respect both economies. Christians do not inhabit some separate domain, a cozy world that operates only on the gift economy. We, like everyone else, have to earn our keep and join in the labor that builds a better society. But, like many others of good will, we are blessed with the conviction that human life is about more than cut-throat competition and blind market forces. We work, but not just to accumulate wealth and protect our own. For we have experienced the invitation to share in God’s economy of the gift.

The parable of the talents in Matthew’s Gospel (ch. 25) brings together these two economies in human life. A master commits different sums of money to the care of each of his servants while he is away. On his return, several show him the increase they have generated through shrewd investment. One of the servants, fearful of losing his already small deposit, has buried the coins in order to preserve their full value. We read that the master was displeased with this cautious strategy; this servant has misplayed the market economy. But underlying the story of investment return is the generosity of the initial donation: all these servants—whether market-savvy or fearful—have received their initial talents as gift.

In Christian life today these two economies continue to intersect and overlap. Singing a hymn at the Sunday liturgy (a song, perhaps, of thanksgiving for the many gifts God has freely bestowed upon us), we look more closely at the songbook to notice the copyright notification at the bottom of the page. The songwriter who reminds us of God’s unending generosity has, nevertheless, a right to make a living from her creative work. The two economies touch.
The parish itself is a curious meeting place of the two economies. On the one hand, we have priest and vowed religious spending themselves in generous service in this community of faith. Their work, flowing from dedicated lives, appears to be a rather pure example of the gift economy. But looking more closely we recognize that their unselfish service is possible in part because other members of the community have contributed some of their hard-earned money to support this communal generosity. Both economies are necessary dynamics in every human community.

In American life, where the market has become so dominant, we must work hard to keep alive a recognition of the significance of the gift economy. Dedicated to productivity and consumption, the market economy constantly focuses on quantity; thus the priority given to productivity and the job-related stress of trying to get more done. To this dynamic, the gift economy contributes a corrective emphasis on quality: does high productivity make human life better? Are our cultural patterns of consumption actually nourishing us? Is the wealth generated by productivity gains being hoarded by a few—“taken out of circulation”—or is the common-wealth benefitting? A society that does not face these questions puts itself at risk.

Two economies—the gift and the marketplace—create the context for every work that we undertake. At work we raise one of the important considerations of the market economy: am I being paid what I am worth? But we also ask: is this work worth doing? Behind this question, the haunting gospel query: “what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their very life?” (Matt 16:26).

CONCLUSION

So we end where we began. Open to the Spirit, many people today long to “make a life” in the midst of “making a living.” Immersed in dual economies of marketplace and gift, they strive to honor daily work as a career and a calling, both a job to be done and a personal vocation shaped by skills developed and gifts received. Knowing that gifts are to be shared and handed on, they embrace the labor of gratitude. In this fruitful embrace, a spirituality of work is born.

REFERENCES


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**http://www.mcgill.pvt.k12.al.us/jerryd/cathmob.htm**

This address is a great help to people serious about Catholic theology. Known as “Catholic Mobile,” the site has over 4,600 links and 111 pages of information pertaining to Catholicism and the study of theology. This Catholic megasite will lead to pages containing contemporary authors and their essays and articles on numerous topics of theology.

**http://bible.gospelcom.net/bible?**

This link will take you to the “Bible Gateway.” The Bible Gateway will let you search six different biblical translations at the same time or individually. You can perform searches by word, phrase, or topic. Using this link will prevent having to spend lots of money on expensive Bible software.

**http://www.catholic.net/**

This is the “Catholic Information Center on the Internet.” This supersite will lead you through pages upon pages of links where you can find answers to almost any question about things Catholic. For the novice or the novice master you will find a wealth of information available.
Robert L. Kinast

Getting the Most Out of Work

When Jesus told the parable of the sower, or made references to vineyard workers and shepherds, or drew upon the experience of merchants and toll collectors to speak of God, did the people in those occupations come away with a better sense of how God was present in their work? It is hard to tell but that seems to be what the gospel writers (and no doubt Jesus himself) hoped for. At least, that is the implication of the recurring phrase: “Let those who have ears to hear, listen.”

This idiom is a summons to pay attention to the deeper meaning of Jesus’ teaching, a meaning imbedded in stories and parables about ordinary, everyday events. Then, as now, people’s work occupied a large part of their everyday experience. And today, if not then, a large number of working people seem to want to find a deeper, spiritual meaning in their work. They want to discover how God is present in their work and how they should respond to the divine presence they feel. They want to get the most out of their work.

This desire is different from classic inquiries into business ethics, economic justice, or problem-solving in the workplace. It is a spiritual search for the presence of God in the experience of work, an interpretation of the meaning of work from the perspective of faith. It is variously called a spirituality of work, the integration of faith and work, or theological reflection on the experience of work.

Pope John Paul II gave a significant impetus to this search when he outlined in the last section of his encyclical on work (1981) “Elements for a Spirituality of Work.” The pope mentioned three such elements: participation in the creative work of God; identification with Christ, the man of work; and collaboration with Christ the redeemer, overcoming the toil of work and all it symbolizes.

The National Center for the Laity, which had come into existence a few years before the pope’s encyclical as a corrective to an overemphasis on lay ministry in the Church, has focused its efforts on promoting a spirituality of work through its newsletter Initiatives, periodic retreats for working people, and a series of booklets on the spirituality of work based on the reflections of nurses, teachers, lawyers, homemakers, business people, unemployed workers, and visual artists.

A steadily growing literature explores these and other themes relating Christian belief and the experience of work. Among the most recent titles are The Reflective Executive by Emilie Griffin, The Reinvention

In this article I would like to describe three ways of reflecting theologically on the meaning of one’s work, and thereby getting the most out of it.

REFLECTING ON THE LANGUAGE OF WORK

One way to reflect theologically on work is to pay attention to the terminology, slogans, and definitions used in the workplace. All of these can be a source of deeper meaning for those who have ears to hear. For example, listen to the ways we use the simple term “work.”

“Let’s get to work,” snaps the crew chief.
“If you’re going to win first prize, you have to work at it,” urges the coach.
“This pen isn’t working,” complains the student.
“I’m sorry. This just doesn’t work,” replies the editor to the freelance writer.
“Now remember. Don’t work too hard,” counsels the doctor to the heart patient.
“If you don’t work, you don’t eat,” quotes a prison warden.
“You think you’re too good for this kind of work?” asks a maintenance worker of a resistant newcomer.
“I’ve worked my fingers to the bone for you,” shouts a parent to an ungrateful child.
“Well, I do have my work to keep me occupied,” admits a widower who is fighting depression.
“Let’s see if we can work through this together,” says the counselor to the family.
“Everything will work out fine,” the wife assures her husband who has just been laid off from his job.

In each of these statements work has a different connotation, conveys a different feeling, and suggests a different spiritual implication. The meanings range from getting a job done (the first quote) to having a positive outlook on the future (the last quote), and all of them invite further theological commentary. The same is true for many of the specific terms used in the world of work.

Sometimes the deeper, spiritual meaning of work terminology is spelled out by those who use it. For example, Sam Walton, the founder of Wal-Mart, once said: “Employees are your biggest capital investment, so it makes sense to maintain them—their morale, their skills, and their participation.”
Ordinarily, terms like capital investment, capital improvement, and capital expenditure refer to material things like buildings and equipment. Walton gave the word a different, human meaning—one constantly reiterated in Catholic social teaching, namely, the priority of persons over things and wealth. The Second Vatican Council stated it unequivocally: “[P]eople are the source, the focus and the aim of all economic and social life” (*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, no. 63).

Does the business word “capital” properly have the human meaning Sam Walton gave it or was he forcing this meaning on it? Human language is remarkably flexible and terms defined in one context can have analogous meanings when used in another context. In fact, much of our theological vocabulary arose in just this way—by giving religious meaning to terms from government (minister, laity), law (sacrament), medicine (cure/care of souls), philosophy (transcendence, transubstantiation), and business (redemption).

Business slogans are another form of language that can have explicit theological meaning. Jack Welch, the CEO of GTE, likes to say that “people don’t care what you know until they know that you care.” In the emerging Information Age this saying has special significance. It is a reminder that human, relational values are more important than impersonal facts and expertise. It is also a reminder that knowledge should not be used to manipulate people or make them feel inferior—a tactic of the religious leaders of Jesus’ time which he harshly condemned (Matt 23).

Most often, of course, the language of work is used without any explicit theological reference. In this case believing people can still supply their own spiritual meanings. A good example is the phrase, “the bottom line.” In a business context this ordinarily refers to financial profit or loss. However, the same term is widely used to mean: what really counts, what is really important, what an activity is ultimately all about.

When the phrase “bottom line” is used in a company’s financial report or in conversation among workers, a Christian might hear it as an invitation to recall what the work of a company at its deepest level is all about: developing God’s creation, producing goods and services to improve people’s lives, providing for the needs of oneself and one’s family. Making a financial profit is certainly implicated in these meanings, but that is not the only meaning associated with the bottom line, and for those who have ears to hear, it is not the most important meaning.

Similarly, the word “competition” ordinarily implies rivals in the marketplace fighting for market shares and profits. But competition does not have to imply winners and losers. The word literally means seeking-with, even petitioning together, for a goal or prize. This sug-
gests a more cooperative, mutual effort, as in the concept of benchmarking or comparative practices which enable companies to learn from and stimulate one another toward continuous improvement.

This understanding of competition is much more compatible with Christian values. It recalls St. Paul prodding his communities toward full maturity in Christ (1 Cor 13) or Vatican II invoking the “friendly rivalry” of ecumenical cooperation (Decree on Ecumenism, no. 13). Interpreting the word in this way when a company speaks of “our competitors” or needing a “competitive edge” can help workers see their competitors not as enemies or threats but as protagonists, challenging them to new levels of achievement, much as individuals and groups currently stimulate one another to explore and utilize the common resources of the Internet.

Reflecting theologically on the language of work not only brings spiritual meaning to familiar terms, it can also expose misleading or deceitful meanings. When a company speaks of downsizing, it is not talking about occupying less space. It is talking about unemployment and all the disruption, anxiety, and stress that it may cause workers and their families. A company should not be allowed to avoid these painful realities by hiding behind a euphemism.

Similarly, supervisors and executives can invoke the image of a team when they really want workers to do what they are told rather than make innovative contributions to the company. To accuse a hard-working, creative person of not being a team player may be just a ploy to achieve conformity and make life easier for the one in charge.

The purpose of reflecting on the language of work is not to play a word game. It is to listen for a deeper, spiritual meaning in the language of work, relate this meaning to the tradition of faith, and keep this spiritual meaning in mind when the terms are used in the workplace. This does not mean artificially or self-righteously imposing religious language on the business world. It means translating and interpreting the language of work from a perspective of faith.

REFLECTION ON WORK EXPERIENCE

A second way of reflecting theologically on work is to concentrate on specific events which occur in the workplace. Suppose the CEO of a manufacturing firm announces that a Total Quality Management (TQM) system is to be implemented in the company. TQM is a growing trend in business management which aims at the continuous improvement of one’s work processes in order to meet or exceed customer expectations. In this approach employees are empowered to act without waiting for approval from superiors.

As these principles are explained in more detail, a number of employees sense that there is a close connection between TQM and their
faith values. They see a new possibility for affirming their faith through their work and of experiencing a deeper level of meaning in the work itself. They want to explore this possibility more fully, but they are not sure how to do it.

One option would be to follow a basic model of theological reflection. This is the approach used in supervised ministry programs to help students relate their hands-on practical experience to their classroom learning. It is also the approach used in a number of adult education programs (such as RENEW and Vatican II—Act II), which draw upon the experience of the participants as an integral part of the learning methodology. For veterans of Catholic Action, and especially the Christian Family Movement, it is the same approach neatly summarized in the phrase, see-judge-act.

Essentially theological reflection begins with a specific situation, examines it in light of Christian belief, and determines what the practical outcomes should be. The employees who want to see how TQM principles relate to their faith are already in a specific situation. They are not discussing this topic hypothetically or as an academic exercise. They are trying to determine what their actual work experience will mean spiritually in light of the announced change in management style.

The heart of the theological reflection is bringing the resources of faith to bear on the situation. In this case it means examining how TQM principles may express Christian values in business terms. As just indicated, one of the primary goals of TQM is to meet, or exceed, the customer’s expectations. This begins by surveying customers to determine what they want from the company and then analyzing the company’s work processes to assure that the customer will be truly “astonished.”

While it is true that there is a profit motive behind this strategy, it is also true that this approach affirms central Christian values. According to Dr. Judith Schloegel, vice-president of Quality Systems for PRIDE of Florida (a company that operates prison industries in that state), TQM coincides with three Christian values.

First of all, it is other (customer) oriented. TQM’s emphasis on satisfying customers harmonizes with Christianity’s orientation to the needs of others rather than gratifying oneself or using others for selfish purposes. Similarly, TQM presupposes that customers know what they want (rather than being told what they will get) and will be fair in their demands. In effect this means that customers are treated with respect and valued for who they are—principles which Christians are taught to practice, stemming from the belief that each person is made in the image of God.

A second theological implication of TQM’s customer focus is that it fosters the attitude and practice of service. This is not only a rich bib-
lical theme but the primary characteristic of Jesus’ life. As Dr. Schloegel sees it, if TQM enables workers to become genuine servants of others, it is helping them be better Christians and implicitly promoting gospel values.

The third benefit of TQM’s customer focus that Dr. Schloegel promotes is helping employees see their co-workers as internal customers. This means they give one another the same preference, the same respect, and the same service which they offer their external customers. This can make quite a difference in the way a supervisor treats an administrative assistant or the way the marketing department relates to the industry managers. It can also lessen the artificial importance of titles, status, and executive perks—all of which concretize the ideals of equality and mutual cooperation which Christianity proclaims.

These theological/spiritual meanings have direct implications for action. Employees who see the connection between TQM principles and their Christian beliefs have an added incentive to put them into practice, especially when dealing with disgruntled or lost customers. One of the plant managers in Dr. Schloegel’s company drove fifty miles to demonstrate personally the quality of their paint products to a former customer because she did not want even one person to drift away and feel they were not missed. Parallels with the image of the Good Shepherd are not inappropriate in this case.

Of course, there is also the “Dilbert” factor: inconsistent, pointless, or absurd company practices; moody, incompetent, or insulting co-workers; arbitrary discrepancies in pay scales and recognition; favoritism, lack of career opportunities, and mindless commuting. Dilbert may be a cartoon character but he is not a figment of imagination. These types of situations also call for theological reflection, not so much to solve a problem or to change a situation but to reaffirm that God is still present, to clarify how God is present, and to respond in faithful ways.

REFLECTING ON TYPES OF WORK

A third approach to reflecting theologically on work comes from Thomas Smith and his book *God on the Job*. Smith uses the term “faithwork” to describe the integration of a faith perspective with work experience. This is done primarily by pairing the type of work a person does with a corresponding work of God or theme from Christian tradition.

Smith identifies two basic kinds of work: production and service. Production corresponds to the work of God the creator; service corresponds to the work of God the redeemer (echoing though not quoting the same distinction made by John Paul II in his encyclical on work). Smith pushes this parallel further, examining five examples of each
type of work and spelling out in more detail how each one reveals the God waiting at work.

For example, workers in a soft drink factory make a product to relieve people’s thirst. This in itself is one way of exercising a corporal work of mercy: to give drink to the thirsty. Most people would not make this association when they think of standing at a conveyor belt for eight hours a day bottling a soft drink, which is why Smith encourages this kind of theological reflection. It offsets the false dichotomy between the spiritual and material life and enables people to experience the intimate connection between the two.

Among those in the realm of service, there are electricians who install or repair electrical systems, thereby using productively the laws and power of nature. Contemporary life has become dependent on electricity even though most people don’t understand how electricity works and probably have a fear of it. When electrical service is interrupted, people’s lives are disrupted; they can become disoriented and even feel endangered—none of which God wants. On the other hand, electricity helps to bring people together (through communication, lighting, warmth or cooling) and thereby foster community—something which God does want.

Naming the theological character of various occupations constitutes a kind of “Yellow Pages” theology. Are these parallels just a pious flight of spiritual fantasy? It all depends on how one understands God and God’s presence. If God continues to create and care for the world, and if God does so through the work of human agents, then human work is a share in the creative, caring work of God. If the spiritual and material worlds are really interrelated, then it should be meaningful and practical to correlate the type of work a person does with the type of work God does and to claim the spiritual value of the experience which results.

The Hilton Hotel in Ocala, Florida, demonstrates this by placing the following message on each person’s pillow: “To Our Guests: In ancient times there was a prayer for ‘The Stranger within Our Gates.’ Because this hotel is a human institution to serve people, and not solely a money-making organization, we hope that God will grant you peace and rest while you are under our roof. May this room and hotel be your ‘second’ home. May those you love be near you in thoughts and dreams. Even though we may not get to know you, we hope that you will be as comfortable and happy as if you were in your own home.”

CONCLUSION

Work is a rich resource for theological reflection, and theological reflection can deepen and enrich the spiritual meaning of work. This may be done by redefining familiar work terms to express the spiritual
meaning hidden within them. It may be done by reflecting on specific incidents to discover how God is present in them and how to respond faithfully to that divine presence. It may be done by pairing the type of work with a type of divine activity or theological meaning. None of these techniques is difficult, but all of them require a little time, a few companions, and ears that are willing to hear.

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Robert L. Kinast, a priest of the Archdiocese of Atlanta, directs The Center for Theological Reflection at Indian Rocks Beach, Florida, and has just published *Let Ministry Teach: A Guide to Theological Reflection* (The Liturgical Press).
The Re-Invention of Work in Religious Communities of Men

The history of religious institutes of men demonstrates an amazing array of pastoral services. We have built universities and orphanages, leper colonies and AIDS hospices. We have founded monasteries and hermitages, built roads for the pilgrims and bridges for the exiled. We have cooked jellies in our vats and made wines from our vineyards. We have been preachers and beggars, astronomers and geneticists, contemplatives and lawyers. We are bishops and mechanics, pastors and poets. And through it all, we are the passionate prophets of a kingdom already here but not yet fully realized in its gospel of love.

But, this panoply of pastoral services is severely threatened. Religious life is dying (Wittberg, 1991:82). Unable to stall losses in membership now in the range of 40 to 60 percent (and growing) and facing the real possibility of irreversible institutional decline, religious orders of men have been searching for a rationale and a strategy to reverse this catastrophic attrition (Nygren and Ukeritis, 1993). Researchers have studied the internal dynamics of this decline. Gerald Arbuckle investigates the distortion of founding identity mythologies in the cultures of religious provinces (Arbuckle, 1988). W. Gordon Lawrence points to the confusion, denial, anger, and fear that have gripped religious communities and formed political, psychological, and spiritual splits that endure to this day (Lawrence, 1994). Patricia Wittberg looks at the competing forms of commitment in religious communities and how these influence communication, lifestyle, and decision-making patterns (Wittberg, 1991).

These studies build on the premise that religious congregations are experiencing the effects of a chronic identity confusion that shows little sign of amelioration. However, there is another line of research slowly emerging—one that investigates what religious do and how they work. It is one that scrutinizes the changing social patterns of work in religious congregations. For example, Paul Hennessy recently explored the “parochialization” of all church life and its impact on religious life. This recent pull toward reorganizing religious communities around parish life as the nearly exclusive center of worship and ministry, he says, has contributed to the confusion about identity and the reduction of internal solidarity in local religious communities (Hennessy, 1997).
This article builds on this new line of research by investigating how work is being reinvented in religious communities of men. I will expose their new structures of service as well as the terminological drift that dogs this renewal. Finally, I will study the psychological dynamics attending this reorganization. I will suggest ways that provinces that have relied too heavily on identity analysis for their strategic planning efforts can now refocus on task without losing important insights about their “founding” myths.

WORK IN AMERICAN SOCIETY

Religious men are working differently because American society is reorganizing its cultural and economic contracts (Drucker, 1993). The old order of employment is quickly coming to an end. A culture that once promised its workers security, stability, and continuity for their obedience, diligence, and loyalty is now demanding increasing self-reliance, creativity, risk, and uncertainty. The hierarchical relationship of superiors and subordinates is giving way to new horizontal configurations of authority that rely less on status and more on expertise and influence.

In this move from a “relational culture” to a global “work culture,” the factory is giving way to the information superhighway. Ideas have become our product and knowledge workers our most important corporate and cultural resource. Ours is a global world where we learn about economic, religious, cultural, gender and sexual differences first hand for the first time. We confront daily not only the reality but also the immediacy of differences. Unparalleled visual and technical mobility affords us opportunities to access worlds of unfathomable diversity. And in this multi-centered world, our mediators are no longer hierarchical figures who stand with an unambiguous tradition as gatekeepers between us and the foreign. We desperately (and sometimes dangerously) search for metaphors and images that might help us make sense of these differences. We struggle to keep our social boundaries thick enough to protect the cohesion of our communities but thin enough to allow a generous response to new worlds of service.

We work in situations that would have been unthinkable a generation or two ago. Doing “what’s best for the organization” has been replaced by customer service. The top-down pyramid of responsibilities on the old organizational chart has given way to cross-functional teams, partnerships, joint ventures, and strategic alliances. The employee culture of entitlement, where workers believed they were due benefits, promotion, status, and respect in return for their unswerving loyalty to company policy, is dead in the water. Loyalty now rests with oneself. Companies no longer guarantee their workers protection, only
opportunities. It is up to the individual worker to learn for herself what she is to make of herself. It is a new world of temporary services, outsourcing, and consultancy. This is a time of exacting creativity and perilous organizational ethics and the situation into which religious communities of men are thrust.

THE REINVENTION OF WORK IN RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

Few communities of men now work according to the pre-industrial rhythms of just a generation ago. Gone is the choreographed precision of our semi-monastic existence with assigned tasks, precise hierarchical divisions, and rituals where processions and posture were liturgically regulated (Couturier, 1997). Work regulated by sacred, not secular, time and moving according to liturgical and sacramental energies is no longer the norm. Instead, ours is a faster paced world of computers and fax machines, cell phones, and modems. In fact, we hardly speak of labor at all. Ours has become the world of “ministry.” And while the range of our service continues to be as generous and courageous as that of any generation preceding us, we conduct and interpret our ministries largely in the modern context of competitive capitalism that puts a priority on interiority, innovation, influence, expertise, and the disposability of resources (Cousins, 1992, 1–14). Religious communities of men are now in the process of reinventing our work in several ways.

From Institutions of Single Interest to Institutions of Multiple Interests

From the 1850s until the 1950s, the Church in America was organized around the concerns of an immigrant population. Catholics who came to these shores faced incredible poverty and severe discrimination. They came with a powerful will to prosper but were often met with religious hostility. The response of Catholic religious communities was an astoundingly clear strategy to provide institutions that would ensure a defense of the faith and the means by which Catholics could move up and out of disadvantage. And so we built and staffed, with amazing speed, resolve, and ingenuity, the largest and most successful private-school and health-care systems the world has ever known.

These religious institutions were clearly focused. They were “single interest” operations, mobilized around a limited set of priorities. With some notable exceptions, congregations made their reputations on particular corporate works whether it be teaching schools, staffing hospitals, conducting retreats, working with minority groups, or preaching missions. Resources were limited but easily dispersed since members shared an understanding of their particular service to the Church. In these institutions of single or nearly-single interest, religious superiors had a relatively easy time making corporate decisions.
Because the priorities of the province were clear and commonly held, the task of provincials was to survey the relatively stable landscape of pastoral service and assign the appropriate people to the tasks at hand. They were like generals in a war room with battle plan in hand, ready to assign their men in the defense of the faith (Couturier, 1997b).

The situation in provinces is vastly different today. Communities have multiple interests. It is not uncommon for congregations once composed almost exclusively of educators now to have large numbers working as pastoral associates in parishes. Neat divisions between clerics who served in parishes and lay members who worked in the fields or mechanic shops have broken down. More and more brothers in mixed congregations serve in parish and diocesan centers. It is not uncommon for priests in religious congregations to binate between sacramental ministries on the weekend and social (or other kind of) work during the week.

Provinces have recognized that there is a difference between its ministries and its mission. A mission can be served by various forms of religious work. And so, many communities have hammered out mission statements that take stock of multiple ministries but also recognize the underlying vision that motivates members to serve. However, one wonders whether we are at a point where it would be more accurate to say that some congregations have more than one mission.

More provinces could now be considered “institutions of multiple interests.” Diverse missions, varied systems of ministries, and competing cultures of service indicate a fundamental shift in the kind of work that religious now provide. In this environment, setting priorities and managing limited resources become infinitely more complex as a shared agreement about our complicated work lives diminishes. Competition inevitably increases at all levels of community life. It is not just that religious work in different ministries but that they work in vastly different organizational cultures.

We have known for some time that all institutions have particular and complex cultures (Dubinskas, 1992). These different work cultures regulate the beliefs, emotions, rituals, and tools of our service. Each particular “culture of service” has its own unique complex of formal and informal roles, as well as distinct overt and covert rules of behavior. Provinces can have a single organizational culture (education) with numerous ministries clustered within it. Beyond that, they can have members working in vastly different organizational cultures (medical, parochial, educational) within the very same province or house. It is helpful to know that organizational cultures are powerful and enduring, extremely subtle and resistant to change. A province composed of competing cultures of service will find attempts at structural renewal very difficult to manage.
To complicate matters further, individual religious may find themselves expected to move from one organizational culture (educational) to another (parochial) and to do so expertly and gracefully. Provincials, for their part, must be adept at understanding the different kinds of work their members are engaged in. They must also now be fluent in the multiple languages, customs, and rituals of these varied organizational worlds. Personnel assignments, interventions, and supervision can no longer be conducted using only one ministerial frame of reference.

Religious communities experience this clash of cultures whenever they hold general assemblies, open chapters or convocations. The timing of these events becomes an immediate problem. Ordained religious who minister from their parochial culture want meetings held Monday through Friday so as not to interrupt the sacramental schedule of the weekend. Religious in non-parochial settings (e.g., universities) would prefer meetings on weekends. And those working (in shifts) in the medical field complain that community meetings require that they forfeit valuable vacation time to attend, a condition of membership that parochial ministers are often unwilling to absorb.

Assigning religious is made more difficult as these work cultures become part of our complex system of labor. Skills developed in one pastoral culture are not easily transferred to another. Systems of supervision, accountability, and continuing education can be radically different from one culture of service to the next. How a province manages its resources depends upon its understanding of these structural differentiations.

Religious leaders are regularly called upon to referee the competing interests for resources. And yet, strategic planning can no longer be realistically conducted as if all work in a province were on a level playing field. Even the process of negotiating provincial priorities becomes difficult as members uncritically apply the principles of decision-making that they acquire in their work culture, inattentive to alternative ways of approaching these concerns. For example, a diocesan model of accountability with its view of the laity as non-deliberative “advisors” to the priest may strike religious men engaged in an academic or medical culture as procedurally and systemically unjust. We have not yet acquired a basic agreement about the principles of organizational justice that apply across the striated arenas of our service.

The New Boundaries of Religious Communities

A generation ago, the primary ministerial partners of religious were other religious. A young religious, just out of initial formation, could expect to work alongside other religious of the same order and, of course, the same gender. That is highly unlikely today. A religious
priest’s primary partner in ministry, for example, is more than likely to be a lay woman (LaCugna, 1992). We have new partners in ministry with sets of interest and needs different from our own. Our partners are husbands with wives and children. They are women who act in the world with a different epistemology of knowledge and cooperation that we only partially recognize and appreciate (Goldberger et. al., 1996). And if gender is a dimly appreciated aspect in the work lives of religious men, it is eclipsed by our racial confusion and ignorance. Racial conflict remains a largely untreated, because unrecognized, dimension of our changing religious work context (Massingale, 1996). Studies by the National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice show how pervasive the problem of “white invisibility” is in Catholic ministerial settings. In one study of employment practices at the highest levels of the Church, the NCCIJ found that blacks and Hispanics remain largely underrepresented and underemployed at our diocesan centers (NCCIJ, 1992). In this atmosphere, the increasing trend toward the “diocesanization” of church service could affect the positive strides that some of our own institutions have made toward racial integrity.

Religious communities of men are beginning to think of themselves outside the traditional categories of “provincial structures.” The notion of a province with clear geographical parameters, a single ministerial focus, and members in relative proximity to other members is being challenged by a boundary-less notion of religious institution. As a network of interdependent communities, religious men are moving from structural expressions of ethnicity to those of multi-cultural diversity and from a commitment to a single province vision to a corporate worldwide vision.

Religious provinces within the same congregation are working to construct collaborative alliances among themselves for either short-term or long-term initiatives. Provinces, once strongly independent entities, now regularly consult, cooperate, and collaborate with each other around specific concerns. These relationships cross once impermeable provincial boundaries. Communities share the gifts of their members, whatever their provincial loyalties. These initiatives, while recognizing critical issues of authority, are opening the way for further and more complex collaborative ventures on shared concerns. These efforts are beginning to recognize not only a diversity of concerns within a set relationship but the possibility that we can develop different structural relationships around a single concern.

Another powerful example of the new boundary-less religious institution is the experience of congregational mergers. In these situations, provinces and congregations are pooling their histories and resources by forming a new religious entity. Rituals are used to help
members with the transitional dynamics in moving from one congregational culture to another.

These structural realignments are not contained within the parameters of the Church alone. Some religious orders are developing new partnerships with non-Catholic, private, and sometimes for-profit institutions. They are creating these structural relationships to sustain (in a new form) the mission of the congregation during a time of severe vocational shortage. Discussions about ministry and work are no longer private conversations among vowed members who share a charism and a religious bond. Partners participate in the conversation who may not share even a common faith. Clearly, religious orders of men are at the cusp of a new mutation in spiritual consciousness. There is a shift underway from an individual, self-reflective, inward, critical, and technical consciousness to one that is global, outward, and complex (Cousins, 1992). Religious men engage in structural relationships that are no longer enclosed within provincial boundaries but which are openly diversified by gender, culture, orientation, class, and religious expression.

THREE WORLDS OF SERVICE

As many readers may have already suspected, I have been trying to dance gingerly through a theological minefield of pastoral terminology. Do religious men work or do they have ministries? What is the proper category for a consecrated religious: a theology of work or a theology of ministry? The history of this theological debate is as voluminous as it is contentious (Collins, 1990). It is a debate I cannot resolve here. I can only hope to demonstrate the confusion, outline the organizational dynamics involved, and suggest questions for further research.

The root of the debate lies in contradictory analyses of scriptural and patristic sources around the term, \textit{diakonia} (Collins, 1990). These have yet to find a convergence of opinion among theologians. Recent attempts to clarify the proper distinctions between ordained and lay ministry have been met with increased confusion and little forward movement. What remains clear amid this terminological drift is that religious men inhabit three distinct worlds of pastoral service: the world of priesthood, ministry, and work. While these worlds overlap at the edges, they provide religious communities with three distinct experiences of task, role, and authority.

In the \textit{world of priesthood}, the primary service analogue is ordination. A man is called forth from the people of God to imitate Christ the high priest and lead the community in worship and service. He serves because he has been chosen from the people to stand \textit{in persona Christi}. His service is different in kind and degree from the love, worship, and
justice expected of all Christians (including himself). He is brother, friend, counselor, judge, servant, and pastor in the sacramental world of signs and grace. Ordained into a college of presbyters, he leads and teaches under the direction of his bishop and his religious ordinary, if he is a religious. Ecclesial authority is located exclusively in the sphere of the ordained who have jurisdiction over the faithful. While all Christians are called to service, the clerical role is defined as ontologically distinct from the service roles of other Christians.

While pastoral responsibility can be shared through councils, these bodies must be advisory not deliberative, if they are to function according to the logic of supernatural signs. The organizational dynamics of priesthood require all Christians to play their proper role in the hierarchy of service. Efforts are made to expand the competency of the laity in their proper spheres of influence, i.e., the sanctification of the world. But, their service in the Church is of a different order. The organizational dynamics of priesthood demand vigilance against an improper intrusion into the rights and responsibilities of those called to judge matters of the faith. According to these dynamics, democracy is an impossible goal for evangelical discernment in matters of the Church. But, religious men have another perspective.

In the world of ministry, the central theological concept is baptism. All Christians are baptized to evangelize. Some minister as ordained members; others as lay men and women. The ministries are as diverse as the needs for evangelization. Some teach and others heal. Some preach and others baptize. The roster of church ministries is expansive: eucharistic ministers, religious education teachers, ministers of hospitality, and parish counselors. Ministry is understood as any Christian service commissioned by proper authority for the building up of the Body.

In this world all Christians (properly commissioned) share equal, if distinct, responsibility for the good of the whole. The ordained minister is one of many ministers needed for the oversight of evangelization. As such, the organizational dynamics of ministry require a discernment process and principles that enhance the shared insights, perspectives, and contributions of all who have roles of service. Because a ministry team shares in the development of the works of the Church, the organization of those works calls for consistent collaboration, cooperation, and mutual accountability.

I have worked with several pastoral teams who have found themselves caught on the horns of the dilemma between the organizational dynamics that favor priesthood and those that enhance ministry. These teams publicly proclaimed values of collaboration only to find some of their members bargaining for clerical privilege when it served their individual purpose. Recently, a likeable and quite competent religious
pastor, one of the most vocal and successful advocates of collaborative ministry, suddenly resigned. When asked at several staff meetings to describe the climate of work on his team, he responded that he was genuinely happy to be part of a productive and hardworking team of committed ministers. His resignation shocked the parish and, even more so, his own staff. He resigned without consulting or even alerting his colleagues of his ministerial intentions. He negotiated his transfer with his religious superior, announcing it only after receiving permission to move. He was confronted at the last staff meeting by his colleagues who complained that the principles of collaboration were followed only up until the point that they started to interfere with the political, psychological, or social prerogatives of the clerical members of the team. The dynamics of ministry and priesthood were on a collision course. Within a year, four of the six members of this team would be replaced.

Some prefer that the term “ministry” refer only to those roles which directly coordinate the services of Christians within the church itself, e.g., eucharistic ministers and lectors. The issue becomes murkier when the term is applied to any service that religiously-motivated individuals conduct. A religious sister’s work as a data-entry specialist in a Catholic hospital, for example, is considered by her community to be her ministry, whereas the work of the Catholic mother of two beside her would be considered her “job.” Some might suggest that the difference is that a religious is doing her service under vow and by designation from a legitimate religious authority. And yet, if religious consecration is an intensification of the baptism we share with other Christians, by what logic do we call what we as religious do a ministry and what other Christians do as their work? Once again, is a Franciscan who practices law for the poor doing ministry or working?

Some have suggested alternative possibilities. First, all Christians who consciously designate their work for the sake of the kingdom can rightly claim that they are doing ministry. The critical issue is intentionality. Others have suggested that religious men and women minister because their service emerges out of their approved consecration. Here the critical issue is one of commissioning. However, if that is what qualifies a service as ministry, is the profession of vows an automatic commissioning service? Or is the assignment process a de facto commission to ministry as well? Do all activities approved by a superior qualify for the designation of ministry? Is the brother who plows the fields or the religious priest who finds teenage runaways a permanent home doing ministry or working for the kingdom of God? Is the Catholic neurosurgeon who refers to her baptismal commitment while at work ministering while the unintentioned but skilled Catholic doctor beside her only doing his job?
In a world of work, all Christians share as co-creators with the Father, co-redeemers with the Son, and co-sanctifiers with the Spirit in the labor they perform. This is the positive dignity of work that John Paul II spells out in his social encyclicals (Vacek, 1987). According to this logic, Christians do not need to perform ministries in order to live out their baptismal call. Work, although always influenced by the long history of sin, is the arena in which Christians fulfill their lives and bring the creative and saving work of God to fruition. A Capuchin who practices law or the Jesuit who practices medicine does not need the category of ministry to explain or justify his service. His work already illuminates the gracious outpouring of spiritual gifts in the Church.

While religious communities can ask religious men to shape their work according to the charism of the community, this does not change the fact these men are indeed working for the kingdom. According to this model, all religious work for the kingdom; some have ministries and still others have ordained ministries. All are expressions of the fundamental charism of the community.

We have religious who labor in three distinct worlds of service: priesthood, ministry, and work. Each has an internal organizational logic unto itself. While we wait for greater theological clarity, perhaps we can become more sensitive to the contrasting and competing organizational dynamics of these different worlds.

The Dismantling of the Corporate Work

Communities have found it increasingly difficult to hold onto a system of corporate works. Provinces have put members on notice that they will no longer accept corporate commitments because leadership can no longer promise a steady supply of qualified or energetic ministers. This dismantling of the corporate work has been met with a mixture of regret and relief. Some point to an increased freedom from institutions. Some apostolic congregations now claim “community” as their charism. However, one must quickly point out that the dismantling of the corporate work has not meant the deinstitutionalization of religious work. In some cases, religious have simply replaced commitment to their own institutions with an uncritical loyalty to diocesan or parochial institutions. This diocesan conformity has the potential of distorting the unique tradition of religious life and replacing it, uncritically, with a dominant diocesan model of church life. This reversion of religious life to diocesan structures, clearly a safe and convenient haven for increasing numbers of elderly religious, could in the long run make religious life even more invisible and thereby institutionally irrelevant in the Church.

One factor feeding this trend is the severe economic vulnerability of religious communities. More and more religious are finding it difficult
to gain employment. With expectations that they earn income well into their seventies, they are one of the most vulnerable and frightened segments of the Church. With worse than zero-growth, exorbitant health care liabilities, and unable to convince members to retrain themselves to compete effectively in a precarious ministerial/work world, some religious provinces are taking the short road to diocesan service.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF WORK IN RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

The new psychology of religious communities must revolve around the work of the community and not just its identity. All organizations have difficult work to do and religious institutions in the next century will face some of the most difficult. New structural relationships, diverse ministerial partnerships, multiple missions and varied cultures of service necessitate a more robust understanding of the psychodynamics of religious institutions. Some of the elements are reviewed here.

First, the work of religious communities is difficult to accomplish, with tasks that are increasingly complex and with results that are unsure. Inevitably this work causes anxiety in the group as a whole. This anxiety is often the root of distorted relationships and miscommunication in a religious group because it is a shared but never fully conscious dynamic of the group.

Second, every religious community must manage this task-related anxiety. They do this by developing various “social defenses”—group-sanctioned behaviors and rituals that help religious groups avoid their primary task and mission. These unconscious social defenses help the province develop unrealistic pictures of its situation as well as sanction procedures that protect the status quo. There are usually three types of social defenses that communities use to avoid facing the painful challenges of mission: dependency, fight/flight, and organizational rituals.

The dependency social defense emerges when the group suddenly and mysteriously becomes incapable of focusing its attention, understanding its challenges and coming to a successful resolution of its issues. The group is “dumbing downwards” as intelligent men act as if their problems should be solved by some miraculous intervention or outside agent. They stare blankly at one another or at the flip chart as if hoping to be led without effort into the future.

The fight/flight social defense is used by groups when they begin to flee from the task at hand or engage in unproductive arguments that repeat but do not advance discussion. When in defensive flight, the assembly calls for more meetings, another study, or engages an abstract discussion of high theory instead of solid action. When in a defensive fight, the group uses its disagreements as a cover for the hard work facing them. The arguments appear designed to distract or entertain.
members while the issue sits motionless on the table. What is fascinating about these defenses is how willing every member of the group is to collude with them.

Organizational rituals are a third social defense. These are policies and procedures that are adopted to keep the group from facing its fear of new challenges. Recently I heard of a community that had a formation advisory council made up of twenty-five members. This group meets several times a year across the country for days on end. Their agenda is packed and their projects complex. Curiously, there are more members on the advisory board of directors than there are members in formation. Their strict procedures, voluminous handbooks, and exhausting preparations for complicated meetings serve to assuage the group’s fear and guilt that their programs (and their jobs) are becoming increasingly irrelevant.

Social defenses usually serve to relieve the group of its anxiety about having to get difficult tasks done with limited resources. Groups will sometimes use rather primitive processes of scapegoating and projection in order to contain their anxiety. For example, a group of educators gathered recently to set a direction for the future. The meeting stalled as they crafted directional statements that appeared to the consultants to be idealistic but unreal given the circumstances of the community. Arguments and boredom set in as they went through the ritual of creating a text which they joked would soon be shelved alongside others like it. The group seemed on automatic pilot. The consultants applied a challenge: asking them to describe their students.

A flood of dismissive and painful characterization of students emerged. They were described as inferior students, irreverent, unmotivated, and undisciplined, unlike those of a generation ago. Apparently, they were not the kind of students these religious wanted to teach. What was going on? These were some of the most prayerful, generous, and loving religious I had met. They seemed, however, for the moment frightened by their own situation. It became clear to the consultants that the scapegoating of their students was a projection of their own insecurity in teaching students who were indeed very different from themselves—culturally, religiously, and ethnically.

The boredom and anger were ritualized behaviors the religious used as a social defense against the underlying challenge that overwhelmed them—coming face to face with their feelings of powerlessness and revulsion. They had to swallow their pride and disgust in order to make any headway toward their vision. They had to face up to the regressive pull inside the group to avoid their mission. They had to come to an agreement that it was their (not the students’) primary task to evangelize youth. Over time they had avoided their primary task and placed the responsibility for education on their students—as
if it were the students’ character and ethnicity and not the skilled relationship between teacher and student that made education possible. They had to first engage their own feelings of minority and powerlessness (with all its anger) if they were to recommit to their primary task of education and evangelization. This group not only did reengage their mission but also invited the laity to help in the task.

**CONCLUSION**

Religious men are working differently because they are responding to social and ecclesial forces that are challenging traditional boundaries of task, role, and authority. They are recreating the structures of religious service by developing partnerships that transcend traditional provincial beliefs, emotions, rituals, and procedures. The situation is complicated by the diversity and ambiguity of these new structures of service and the confusing language we use to define religious work.

The work of religious is difficult and should always be a “dangerous memory” in the Church. Because their service is changing so dramatically and rapidly, religious men must pay attention to the organizational dynamics of their work. The real development of a religious group happens when, in faith and with prayer, members face their work, refuse to use others to manage their anxiety, meet their challenges, and serve with all the love that motivates their call.

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The Humility of God in a Scientific World

Revolutionary scientific discoveries in this century, particularly in the area of cosmology, have made the question of divine action in the created world a controversial one. While conservative theologians hold on to a medieval world view in which God acts in and guides a closed universe that comfortably fits “in the palm of God’s hand,” others have abandoned the medieval view to confront the challenges posed by the new cosmology. A universe in which chance, chaos, and complex interactions comprise the physical fabric compels theologians to interpret divine action in radically new ways. The myriad of books and articles on this subject within the last ten years is an indication that the new cosmology is calling for a new theology.

While the efforts of scholars to discern the role of God in creation are commendable, they are, at the same time, circumscribed by the notion of God as unified being. The Christian version of Aristotle’s unmoved mover, thanks to the genius of Thomas Aquinas, has compelled scholars to speak of God as a single agent acting in the world. While the notion of God as absolute being is not disputed, it tends to obscure the fact that the Christian God is a trinity of persons and acts in the world as trinity.

In this paper I will explore God’s action in the world not as being but as absolute and self-diffusive good, an idea based on the theology of the Franciscan theologian, Bonaventure. For Bonaventure, God is trinity precisely because God is by nature a self-diffusive good. My thesis is that God acts in the world as the good and this good is the love of the triune God. Since the good is hidden in the ordinary events of the universe, I propose that divine love is a humble love that undergirds the creativity of the physical world and allows the goodness of the world to unfold, revealing the universe as the heart of God.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF GOD AND CREATION

With the explosion of science in the twentieth century and the revelation of the physical world as a complex interaction of particles and molecules, there is perhaps no more urgent question than how God acts in an evolutionary and unpredictable universe. The question of divine action has, since the enlightenment, been pushed further to the
The Humility of God in a Scientific World

edge only to become obsolete for some scholars in the face of science as the answer to religious questions.

Beginning with the enlightenment, the God of “traditional theism” came to appear hopelessly irrelevant and out of place. The God of the enlightenment deists was one who created the universe at some definite point in the past to be governed solely according to the immutable laws of nature. Newton’s mechanistic view of the universe held up a causally closed universe with little room for God’s special action in specific events—and then only as the “God of the gaps.” A century later the French scientist Pierre Simon de LaPlace reduced all of nature to an impersonal mechanism. The interiorization of religion, initiated by Immanuel Kant and confirmed by Frederick Schleiermacher, left the “starry heavens” and the clockwork of nature abandoned in the universe, resulting in a collapse of distinction between creation and providence. The physical world was seen as causally closed, deterministic and reducible to that of its physical parts: the action of a free agent (human or divine) entailed a violation of natural processes (Russell, 1997: 50). Special divine intervention could only mean that God violated or at least suspended the laws of nature. The legacy of the enlightenment world view informed by Newtonian physics gave rise to the natural universe as a given datum whose secrets could be discovered by only the competent expert.

During the first decades of the twentieth century, classical physics was replaced by two new theories which revolutionized scientific thinking of the physical world: special relativity and quantum mechanics. No longer was the universe considered a brute, indifferent, mechanism which operates according to unchanging laws. Rather, the static cosmology of Newton was replaced by the big bang universe of Einstein. Randomness, chance, and unpredictability became the essential elements that made the universe essentially what it is. As Michael Drummy states: “From the study of the smallest sub-atomic particle to the discovery by Edwin Hubble that the universe is expanding, our collective view of the universe has, in the incredibly short space of about fifty years, been irreversibly and abruptly altered” (Drummy, 1996: 256). Because of the advances made by science since the enlightenment, particularly in the areas of theoretical physics and evolutionary biology, many scientists are now willing to consider new features involving dynamism, change, and movement in their efforts to apprehend how the universe operates. Rather than viewing the universe as a closed causal mechanism, it is seen to be more like an open, temporal process with an ontology in which the genuine, material effects of human and even divine agency are at least conceivable (Russell: 51).

For many scientists, the fact that the universe exists in the form it does constitutes nothing less than a mystery, given the forces and the
possibilities that have opposed it and continue to do so. The more scientists penetrate the secrets of the physical universe, the more some scientists come away with a sense of awe and majesty. Even Stephen Hawking, an avowed agnostic, is compelled to ask:

What is it that breathes fire into the equations and makes a universe for them to describe? . . . Why does the universe go to all the bother of existing? Is the unified theory so compelling that it brings about its own existence? Or does it need a creator, and, if so, does he have any other effect on the universe? And who created him? (Hawking, 1988: 174).

Hawking’s question echoes the famous question posed by the German philosopher and mathematician Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz: “Why something and not nothing?” Drummond states that if Hawking’s musings on God’s role as Creator of the universe are any indication at all, science may indeed have arrived at the point where the question of “something-not-nothing” is one that it wishes to ponder. What science delivers to us about the natural universe can, and should, become material for philosophical and theological reflection (258). Yet, theology lags far behind the explosion of scientific knowledge. For the most part the theological community of the twentieth century has doggedly pursued strategies designed to cope with a mechanistic physics now long abandoned, and in the process, it has largely failed to recognize these changes and their significance (Russell: 51). Only at the end of this century is theology waking up to the discoveries of science and beginning to ask, where is God in this vast universe and how is God acting?

THE QUESTION OF DIVINE ACTION

The question of divine action is a complex one made by the world of science itself in which chance, chaos, and complex interactions at the subatomic and molecular levels play a significant role in the evolution of life processes. One of the striking developments in science in recent years has been the increasing recognition that many dynamical systems—physical, chemical and biological—can become unpredictable in their observable behavior by unknown means. This type of unpredictable behavior due to indeterminate variables is referred to as chaos. Chaos means that “a system can have complicated behavior that emerges as a consequence of simple, nonlinear interaction of only a few components . . . Through amplification of small fluctuations it can provide natural systems with access to novelty” (Peacocke, 1993: 53). Changes in weather patterns, for example, can arise from a butterfly disturbing the air; changes in the turbulent flow of a river can result from the effects of a pebble. Ilya Prigogine identifies these unpredictable changes in patterns due to arbitrary variables as “order
through fluctuations,” since arbitrary fluctuations can ultimately transform a whole system (Prigogine, 1984).

Although chaos plays a significant role in the functional pattern of physical systems, chance too plays a significant role and poses a challenge to the place of divine action in the world. Chance is described as “the unanticipated juxtaposition of two unrelated causal trajectories such as the casting of dice, fluctuations in chaotic systems, changes in weather, and so on” (Russell: 53). Science employs two categories of chance: (1) chance in the classical domain, where chance is epistemological, that is, the result of our ignorance of the presumably underlying deterministic processes in physical, chemical, and biological systems, and therefore suggestive of an underlying metaphysical determinism in the macroscopic domain, and (2) chance in the quantum domain where chance is ontological, since the theory of quantum underscores the inability to measure simultaneously the position and velocity of a particle. Chance, therefore, indicates an underlying metaphysical indeterminism in the atomic and subatomic domain (Russell: 55).

The significant role of chance in the evolution of life processes has led some scholars to suggest that God has a self-limited omnipotence and omniscience which God imposes upon himself in creation. Einstein’s famous statement, “God does not play dice,” has led some to speculate that God acts through chance by allowing creation to explore its own possibilities (Peacocke: 120–21). In this respect, God imposes a self-limitation with regard to divine action so that chance may freely operate according to its own internal laws. Chance, as Arthur Peacocke points out, creatively interacts with law to allow new life forms to emerge and evolve (118). Peacocke is one who supports the notion of limited divine action in creation in favor of chance:

For, in order to achieve his purposes, he [God] has allowed his inherent omnipotence and omniscience to be modified, restricted and curtailed by the very open-endedness that he has bestowed upon creation . . . The attribution of “self-limitation” to God with respect to his omnipotence is meant to indicate that God has so made the world that there are certain areas over which he has chosen not to have power (121–22).

God, according to Peacocke, feigns ignorance in order to yield to creation’s inherent creativity. Rather than ordering the universe with divine precision, God “chooses” to create a world in which God does not know the outcome of non-linear systems or the unpredictable character of subatomic constituents (122). Peacocke claims that God’s self-limited omniscience and omnipotence is the self-emptying (*kenosis*) and self-giving of God in creation. This “costly becoming” of the world
is what he identifies as God’s love, since God allows creation the freedom to follow its own laws and designs (123). While God guides physical processes through a type of gentle persuasion “from above” (top-down causation), God does not interfere on the local level of events. Rather, God allows nature to “play” according to its own rules and in this way to be creative. The notion of creative play in nature at the cost of divine action, however, places the whole design and order of the universe in doubt. If chance has the lead role in the cosmic drama, one must ask: what does God do while creation is at play?

Nancy Murphy states that any acceptable theory of divine action must “explain how God and natural causes conspire to bring about the world as we know it via our scientific picture of law-like regularity and the genuine randomness of quantum events, as well as our experience of free will” (Murphy, 1995: 325–57). In Murphy’s view, all quantum events involve a combination of natural and divine causality; they are determined, though only in part and not solely, by God. God’s role is in activating or actualizing one or another of the quantum entity’s innate powers at particular instants, and these events are not possible without God’s action. God sustains the world, she claims, by acting at both the macro level and quantum level not only as a guiding influence but also as a causal joint, ensuring an orderly creative series of processes that give rise to life forms. “The laws that describe the behavior of the macro-level entities . . . are indirect though intended consequences of God’s direct acts at the quantum level” (346). She further states, “I am proposing that the uniformity of nature is a divine artifact” (348). While Murphy grants a greater role to divine action in creative processes, indicating that no quantum event is possible without God’s action, she is unclear with regard to exactly how God acts. Although she does not attribute any limitation to God, divine action is nevertheless circumscribed by the creative processes themselves. Rather than describing a divine contraction in order to create, Murphy assigns God the role of the “articulating joint,” ensuring proper causal connections which make the universe what it is and the human person as the optimum viewer. How this “joint” actually operates in the created world, however, is nothing less than a mystery.

THE GOD WHO ACTS IS TRINITY

One of the problems of divine action in creation is the language about the nature of God who is involved in creation. Owen Thomas’ remark is noted: “Theologians continue to talk a great deal about God’s activity in the world, and there continue to be only a very few who pause to consider some of the many problems involved in such talk” (Thomas, 1990: 35). Language about God’s action in the scientific world is compounded by a lack of clarity with respect to the nature of
God. By describing God as one who operates at both the macro level and quantum level, for example, God is imaged as a singular being who acts as a singular agent. The God-language of the religion-science dialogue tends to be monistic: God is, on one hand, the unmoved mover of Aristotle, and on the other, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Yet, in terms of a Christian dialogue between religion and science, the term God presupposes trinity. God is not one spirit acting as an agent in the world; God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit acting as trinity in the world. The God who acts is the triune God and any discussion on the relation of religion and science must take note of the Trinity (Thomas, 1997: 71). However, the western doctrine of trinity with its emphasis on the divine unity tends to obscure the work of the Trinity in creation and needs correction by the eastern doctrine, with its emphasis on the distinctions of the persons. Denis Edwards rejects the idea of a “causal joint” between divine action and created causality as if God intervenes as a single agent to bring about events. Rather, he draws on Richard of St. Victor and St. Bonaventure to describe a relational-communal model of trinity, in which the Trinity interacts with both chance and lawfulness in the world (Thomas: 71).

Edwards, I believe, is on the right track. Western theology, particularly in this century, has relied heavily on the theology of Thomas Aquinas for whom God is a unity of substance in a trinity of persons—pure being and pure act. Thomas’s God is essentially Aristotle’s unmoved mover, and the question of God’s action is the question of how pure absolute being “acts” in a world of becoming. It is because Thomas’s God of absolute being underscores the unity of God rather than a trinity of persons that Edwards looks to other models of the Trinity. One model that he highlights is the doctrine of the Trinity described by the Franciscan theologian St. Bonaventure. With its emphasis on relationship and love, Bonaventure’s doctrine of the Trinity is one that is especially relevant to the scientific world because of its dynamic nature. I would like to examine Bonaventure’s doctrine more closely to show that the triune God of love is one that does not pose any self-limitation with regard to knowledge or power, unlike Peacocke, but rather manifests these divine attributes through divine humility which corresponds to the nature of God as good. Divine love does not mean that God “withdraws” so that creation may act; rather, divine love communicates itself entirely and freely as the good and this good underscores the dynamism of creative events which give rise to forms of life.

BONAVENTURE’S DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

The most outstanding characteristic of Bonaventure’s trinity is its relational nature which arises from the fact that God is essentially
good. While Bonaventure concedes that God is absolute being he goes one step further to say that God is absolute good. God’s being is God’s goodness. Bonaventure borrows the idea of God as the self-diffusive good from the Pseudo-Dionysius, a sixth-century monk, whose Neoplatonism led him to describe God as a self-diffusive good (bonum diffusivum sui), which gives rise to being (Pseudo-Dionysius, 1987: 156). In his work the Divine Names, the Pseudo-Dionysius indicates that the good precedes being and, indeed, gives rise to being. Nothing that exists and is of life exists apart from the good. He writes:

Given that the good transcends everything, as indeed it does, its nature, unconfined by form, is the creator of all form. In it is non-being really an excess of being. It is not a life, but is, rather, super-abundant life. It is not a mind, but is superabundant wisdom. Whatever partakes of the good partakes of what preeminently gives form to the formless. And one might even say that nonbeing itself longs for the good which is above being (73).

For the Pseudo-Dionysius, the world is a theophany, a manifestation of God, because it flows out of the self-diffusive goodness of God. This idea is highly influential on Bonaventure’s view of the created world which he describes as a mirror reflecting the goodness of God (Bonaventure, 1982: 76–77).

Bonaventure’s view of creation as reflecting the good corresponds to the fact that creation is integrally linked to the Trinity whose persons are distinguished by the good. The Father is the fountain source of the good since the Father is first and without origin. As the fountain fullness (fontalis plenitudo), the Father gives himself totally by producing another. The Father gives rise to the Son who is generated by the very nature of the Father as good. This dynamic union between the Father and Son is bonded in the love of the Spirit (Hayes, 1974: 33–47). Following Richard of St. Victor, Bonaventure identifies the highest good as love and states that the perfection of love requires a trinity of persons, the lover, the beloved and the fruit of love expressed in a third person. He unites Richard’s notion of God as a community of love with the Pseudo-Dionysius’s self-diffusive good to describe the persons of the Trinity as a dynamic relationship of self-diffusive love (Cousins, 1978: 106). God is outward moving dynamic trinity whose essential life is marked by personal gift. For Bonaventure, this is the basic and normative reality of the universe. Given that reality at its deepest levels is a dynamic diffusion of the good, he sees creation as a limited actualization of the infinite and dynamic good that marks the divine order. The created universe is grounded in the relationships of God who is love. Because of this integral link between God and the created world, God is not the “unmoved mover” of Aristotle but the
“moved lover” who freely creates precisely because God is love and this love is manifested in the eternal self-diffusion of the good.

Bonaventure affirms that the act of creation arises from the eternal fecundity of the Father and is an overflow of that fecundity. The fountain fullness of the Father within the Trinity is recapitulated in creation and the Trinity itself becomes a fountain fullness expressing itself outward and into the world. The creative trinity becomes for the created universe the emanating fountain fullness of the good and does not merely provide a base for creation but imparts its dynamism to creation. Creation, therefore, is not a mere external act of God, a making of an object on the fringe of divine power. Rather, it shares in and expresses the unfathomable mystery of the eternal generation of the Son from the Father, the dynamism of eternal divine love (Cousins: 57).

Creation is linked to the triune God through the Son, the Word of God. It is through the Word that God and the universe interpenetrate. For Bonaventure, the Word expresses God as trinity since the Word is uniquely united to the Father and Spirit. To say that God acts in the world is to say that God acts through the Word who is at the center of the creation process. It is through the Word that everything comes into being, a divine act characterized by the self-diffusion of the good between the Father and Son, that is, a divine act of love. The contemporary theologian Jurgen Moltmann states that the logic of creation is the logic of love. Examining the question of creation’s contingency on the divine, Moltmann indicates that raising the question of whether or not it was necessary for God to create the world is to preempt the nature of divine love which creates both freely and by the very nature of itself as love. As Moltmann writes:

When we say that God created the world “out of freedom,” we must immediately add “out of love.” God’s freedom is not the almighty power for which everything is possible. It is love, which means the self-communication of the good. If God creates the world out of freedom, then he creates it out of love. Creation is not a demonstration of his boundless power; it is the communication of his love, which knows neither premises nor preconditions . . . God therefore does what for him is axiomatic—what is divine. In doing this he is entirely free, and in this freedom he is entirely himself (Moltmann, 1985: 75–6).

Moltmann highlights two aspects which are essential to God’s action: creativity and freedom. God freely creates because God is essentially love and “love cannot be anything else but creative.” This corresponds to Bonaventure’s notion of the Trinity as the self-diffusive good which by its very nature is totally communicative. He writes: “The purity of goodness is the pure act of a principle loving in charity with a love that
is both free and due and a mixture of both, which is the fullest diffusion by way of nature and will, which is a diffusion by way of the Word, in which all things are said, and by way of the Gift, in which other gifts are given” (Bonaventure, 1982: 104). The goodness of creation, therefore, is characterized by its creative freedom and is good precisely because of its relational nature which corresponds to fact that creation is grounded in the trinity of love.

THE ACTION OF GOD MANIFESTED IN JESUS CHRIST

Although Bonaventure did not describe God’s actions in a scientific world he would agree that if we want to know how God acts in the world then we must take note of the person of Jesus Christ, the eternal Word who is historicized in space and time. The incarnation of the Word is the great mystery of God’s action in the world. In the incarnation, God is not only most high (altissime) but God is intimately related to us (piissime) and through us to the whole physical world (Bonaventure, 1963: 35). Bonaventure states that Christ is the most noble perfection of the universe because he combines in his person material, spiritual, and divine natures (Bonaventure, 1996: 55) and, as such, is the center of the universe (Bonaventure, 1969: 8).

As a Franciscan theologian, Bonaventure emphasized the fact that the Word took on human nature in poverty and humility. In his sermon on the nativity, he states that God humbly bent down to lift the dust of our nature into unity with his own person (Bonaventure, 1989: 57). For Bonaventure the incarnation of the Word characterizes the divine poverty and humility and is a manifestation of God as the self-diffusive good. God gives himself totally to the other both in the inner life of the Trinity (Father-Son relation) and in creation, and in doing so, turns totally toward the other to give all that he has and all that he is. In other words, God acts in total love. The incarnation is not due primarily to sin, according to Bonaventure, but to the completion of the world in love. In Christ the whole cosmos is lifted up and imbued with the diffusive love of God.

While the historical life of Christ reveals the poverty and humility of God, Bonaventure perceived that the fullest manifestation of divine love is shown in the cross of Jesus Christ. The cross not only reveals divine love but it is mysterium, an overflowing of divine love in the uni-

1 Although Bonaventure does not hold strictly to a doctrine of absolute primacy, he nevertheless indicates that sin is not the first reason for the incarnation but rather the last reason. The primary reason for the incarnation is to manifest the power, wisdom, and goodness of God, a reason that corresponds to the fact that God’s love is fully manifested in Jesus Christ. See Francis Xavier Pancheri, The Universal Primacy of Christ, Juniper B. Carol, trans. (Front Royal, Va.: Christendom Publications, 1984) 19–20.
verse. Christ Crucified discloses the heart of God in the heart of the universe. If you are amazed, he states, at this self-diffusing good which gives rise to the Trinity of persons distinguished by their personal properties yet one in substance, you will be further amazed to discover that the highest good which gives itself totally is the mystery of the Crucified Christ (Bonaventure, 1982: 107). For in him is joined the first principle with the last, God with humanity, eternal with temporal, most simple with the most composite, the most perfect and immense with the most lowly. Bonaventure, therefore, links the self-diffusive good to the mystery of Christ Crucified. He indicates that it is precisely because God is good (love) that Christ Crucified expresses the mystery of God who is love in the created world. The humility of the cross reflects the eternal humility of God. In light of the Crucified, Bonaventure indicates that being is embodied love—an agapic love which possesses nothing for itself but rather gives itself entirely and completely to the other, just as the Father eternally diffuses his entire good to the Son and Spirit. Since being itself is constituted by goodness, the very existence of life in the universe means that God’s action in the world is manifested in the good. To be is to be good and to be good is to be in relationship. Zachary Hayes states that in the physical world “isolated, independent existence must be given up in order to enter into broader and potentially deeper levels of existence” (Hayes, 1997: 91). In this respect, the physical world reflects the model of Christ, the embodied goodness of God, whose suffering and death on the cross in obedience to the Father brings about the fullness of life for humanity and the entire cosmos.

DIVINE ACTION

The revelation of divine love in the poverty and humility of Jesus Christ indicates to us how God acts in the world. God is not merely an external agent who pushes quarks and gluons around to produce the elements of life. God is the self-diffusing good whose goodness gives rise to being through the Word. That is, the very existence of every thing that is “spoken” through the Word manifests the goodness of God. To say that God acts in the world is to say that the good begets the good—and this divine good begets created good precisely through creativity and freedom. Karl Rahner suggests that evolutionary change occurs because of a power that comes from within—a power not due to the nature of creature but understood as the “pressure” of the divine being acting within. God is at the heart of the evolutionary process, empowering it from within and moving it toward active self-transcendence (Rahner, 1984: 479). We can identify Rahner’s “power” as Bonaventure’s self-diffusing good manifested in the cosmos as the humble love of God, a love which gives rise to
being, sustains creativity, and draws the universe ever closer to the
divine heart.

The notion that the humble love of God comprises the inner force of
the created universe underscores the notion of a self-organizing uni-
verse, one that can entertain chance, randomness, complexity, and
chaos, and give rise to beauty and order that can be intelligibly per-
ceived. As John Haught states:

The universe of complexity and chaos suggests an understanding
of God's power as gentle and persuasive rather than coercive. A
world which, as a whole, is so sensitive to the initial conditions
from which it has evolved is one that seems to be guided more by
tenderness than by brute force . . . God does not force the world
into some final shape in an instantaneous display of magic . . .
but . . . allows it to proliferate into an amazingly creative diver-
sity of adaptive systems (Haught, 1995: 156).

This divine self-restraining character is fully compatible with God's
love which, rather than being rigidly deterministic, is total self-giving
in freedom and creativity for the sake of the good, which both gives
rise to created being and characterizes being.

While the appearance of an autonomous, self-organizing universe
may not seem to need God at all, it is precisely the action of divine love
as a humble love hidden in the world that allows the universe to un-
fold as we know it (anthropic principle). Haught claims that if God is
to create a world truly distinct from the divine self, such a world
would have to have an internal "self-coherence" or autonomy. In order
for the world of creation to be distinct from the Creator, God "lets be"
by freely "withdrawing" the exercise of divine power and expansive
presence (160). While this idea is also noted in the works of Moltmann
and Peacocke, it reflects the Thomistic notion of God as absolute being.
When we consider the same idea in terms of the self-diffusive good,
we see that there is no sense for divine "withdrawing" to allow for crea-
tion, for the very self-diffusion of the good is itself creative. The notion
of the good preempts any need to speak of a "divine self-contraction"
in order to create. As we have noted, this divine diffusive good is the
humble love of God, a love that shows its "power" by hiding itself in
the universe in the form of the good. God's omnipotence is the humble
trinity of love sustaining the world in created goodness. God's love is
a love that imparts freedom to creation, allowing creation to act in ac-
cordance with its own internal laws and nature. And yet, it is precisely
because divine love is other-centered, interacting with the other for the
sake of the good, that creation is never abandoned by God. Rather,
God's humble love hides itself in the ordinary structures of the physical
universe in a manner comparable to the presence of God hidden in
the Eucharist in the form of ordinary bread.² As Haught writes: “It is only because we have not thought extensively about divine love as a self-emptying that we find ourselves surprised that a divinely created universe is a self-organizing one” (161).

Just as God does not force humans into submission nor exercise control over human life through force or domination, so too, in the natural world God infinitely loves and this love is the divine humility which is not opposite to divine power but itself is the “all-mighty” power of God. Haught states that God’s “power” is more effectively manifested in a humble “letting be” of a self-organizing universe (161). I would prefer to say that God’s power manifests itself in a self-organizing universe through diffusion of the good. The transformation of elements into life forms and processes is, as Haught suggests, the self-outpouring of divine love that both invites the world into being and continually challenges it to raise itself ever further above indefiniteness and nothingness (161).

THE UNIVERSE, THE HEART OF GOD

Although the humility of God’s love in the physical universe may seem to enclose God within the confines of the universe, Bonaventure clearly states that creation is no more than a point in time compared to the immensity of the divine good. God “is an intelligible sphere whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere” (Bonaventure, 1982: 103). God is a coincidence of opposites (coincidentia oppositorum) manifested in the mystery of Christ and this nature of God as a coincidence of opposites corresponds to the fact that God is absolute and self-diffusive goodness. Because God is a coincidence of opposites, God’s transcendent nature as absolute good is God’s immanence as self-giving love. Bonaventure indicates that “God’s power is his humility; God’s strength is his weakness; God’s greatness is his lowliness. God is first and last, eternal and present, simple and great, everywhere present and nowhere contained” (107). Because God is “within all things but not enclosed; outside all things but not excluded, above all things but not aloof, below all things, but not debased, God is supremely one and all-inclusive and is, therefore, all in all” (100–1).

The absolute inclusiveness of God means that there is nothing apart from God nor does God ever withdraw from creation for the sake of

²The notion that God hides himself in the form of bread in the Eucharist is declared by none other than Francis of Assisi who, in his own expressive manner, exhorted the faithful to take note of the humility of God. Referring to the Eucharist in his Letter to the Order (27) he states: “That the Lord of the universe, God and Son of God, so humbles himself that for our salvation he hides himself under the little form of bread! Look brothers at the humility of God.” English trans. Regis J. Armstrong and Ignatius C. Brady, Francis and Clare: The Complete Works (New York: Paulist Press, 1982) 58.
creativity. The notion of “divine contraction” contradicts the nature of God as good for the good naturally communicates itself by giving itself to another. To say that God allows nature to “play” does not mean that God hides or withdraws his presence. Rather, it means that God’s love diffuses itself creatively and freely. God does not assume ignorance so that creation may follow its own design and laws. Rather, God humbly lowers himself in the universe, as revealed in the incarnation, and hides himself in the form of the good. In this way, the order of the universe unfolds not according to intelligence but according to love. Order is the perfection of love, and this love is the goodness of the evolutionary, albeit unpredictable, world, a goodness that is dynamic, relational, and oriented to the fullness of life.

Perhaps it is time to stop talking about the universe as the mind of God and to start talking about the universe as the heart of God. Bonaventure indicates that in the journey to God knowledge and love form a dialectic. Ultimately, however, love transcends knowledge (110–16). It is not surprising that the highest form of life in the universe, the human person, has the capacity to love to such a degree that the human person can be transformed into the likeness of God. In light of humanity, Bonaventure indicates that God’s creative love freely calls forth within the world a created love that can freely respond to God’s creative call (Hayes, 1997: 91). It is when the human person participates in the humble love of God that the universe becomes truly personal. Humanity, however, recapitulates the entire created order, indicating that life processes are not the result of blind chance but the dynamism of divine love hidden in the universe, drawing it ever closer into the heart of God, that is, into the life of the Trinity. Through the diffusion of divine love, the trinity imparts a dynamic and creative presence that allows humanity and the physical universe itself to be creative and transcendent.

To speak of the universe in terms of divine love is to speak of an ecstatic universe. As the Pseudo-Dionysius indicates, the universe longs for fulfillment and is drawn to the essential Good (God) who yearns for its creation and whose yearning has the power to move all things as final cause. Love, as the highest form of the good, has the power to transform because of its nature to unite. Divine love, therefore, undergirds an evolutionary universe precisely because it is relational and self-giving. The inherent movement towards more complex life forms is a movement towards the fullness of love. As Zachary Hayes states, God creates towards an end and that end embodied in Christ points to a Christified world (90). What appears to the sciences as a process of cosmogenesis is seen from the perspective of faith to be a process of Christogenesis. The universe is bound in a mystery of love, the perfec-
tion of which is found in Christ in whom the heart of God is disclosed as the pulse of the universe.

The humility of divine love that imparts freedom and creativity to the universe allows chance, chaos, and complexity to operate freely, reflecting a God who is neither the “God of gaps” nor the “God of causal connections.” To try to identify God’s action on the subatomic and molecular levels is to undermine the mystery of divine love. The fact that God’s love is humble means that it is hidden and it is discovered only in light of the good. The rational mind cannot comprehend the mystery of divine love—only the heart can penetrate this mystery that sustains the universe. That is why scholars, both scientists and theologians, will struggle to climb the mountain of knowledge in their pursuit of answers pertaining to God and God’s action in the world only to find that the mystics arrived long before the discovery of the evolutionary universe. For as Bonaventure states: Love goes further than knowledge.3

3 II Sent. d. 23, a. 2, q. 3, ad 4 (II, 545b–546b).

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Postmodernism and the Church

Since the Second Vatican Council we have taken for granted the necessity of “reading the signs of the times.” We understand this to be an on-going task, one that is never done once and for all. I understand postmodernism as a way of doing just that—reading the signs of the times from the late 1960s or early 1970s to the present, pointing to a slowly emerging cultural transformation in Western societies. The term itself is ambiguous and amorphous and has meant different things at different times, in different disciplines, and in different geographical contexts. It describes shifts in sensibilities, in literary theory, philosophy, architecture, politics, economics, the media, science, religion, and in general worldview. Postmodernism has “touched every field, it permeated cultural analysis as a whole, it had emerged as a ‘condition’ to be celebrated or suffered, a world view and set of paradigms, and like anything so all-encompassing it had positive, negative, and ambiguous aspects—all three” (Jencks, 1992: 31).

In this article I will first summarize the main characteristics of postmodernism insofar as some convergence and consensus from these various disciplines can be discerned; second, summarize the main critiques of it; and third, indicate some implications for the Church and Christian spirituality in a postmodern world.

POSTMODERNISM

Charles Jencks summarizes the postmodern project as: “the attempt to go beyond the materialist paradigm which characterizes modernism; an intense concern for pluralism and a desire to cut across the different taste cultures that now fracture society; an obligation to bring back selected traditional values, but in a new key that fully recognizes the ruptures caused by modernity; an acknowledgment of difference and otherness, the keynote of the feminist movement; indeed the re-emergence of the feminine into all discourse; the re-enchantment of nature, which stems from new developments in science and A. N. Whitehead’s philosophy of organicism; and the commitment to an ecological and ecumenical world view that now characterizes post-modern theology” (Jencks, 1992: 7). Permit me to elaborate on some of these points.

1) Pluralism. If there is one characteristic of the various versions of postmodernism on which there is consensus it is pluralism. Jean-Francois
Lyotard expresses it as an “incredulity toward metanarratives,” meaning that there is no one worldview, no single explanation. There is a suspicion of totalizing institutions and of their legitimization by an overarching story, whether in the realm of politics (communism or capitalism), or of culture (worldwide westernization and the dominance of science and technology), or of style or taste in art or architecture (modernism). There is a great fear of anything leading to totalitarianism or universalizing control.

2) Radical eclecticism. Consonant with this radical pluralism is a willingness to assemble and combine elements from various traditions, including modernity, in a pastiche or bricolage (a favorite term), without seeking a synthesis or harmony, as manifested especially in architecture. Thus, there is the rediscovery and reincorporation of elements of tradition that have led some critics to see it as neocconservative. But postmodernism respects (and criticizes) tradition as well as looks to the future. Charles Jencks refers to this as “double voiced discourse.” Neither is it anti-modern; rather it sublates the modern. Lyotard says that postmodernism does not indicate the end of modernism but a new relationship to it. Postmodernism means the continuation of modernism and its transcendence. It can be understood as an intensification of the critical self-consciousness of early modernity—“Both the postmodern and the modern share a common cause in reaction to the grip of an uncritical premodern tradition” (*The Postmodern Bible*, 1995: 13).

3) Difference and otherness. This is another consequence as well as cause of radical pluralism. An acknowledgment of difference and otherness, of other voices, other styles, other experiences, other cultures is characteristic of postmodernism. We are now much more conscious of the fact that the experience of others is truly different from our own. Women’s experience is different from men’s (e.g., Carol Gilligan’s *In a Different Voice*), African-American and Latino from Anglo, northern European from Latin American. Anthropologists, for example, are acutely aware of how much their representations of other cultures are seen through their own cultural experiences and of the need to allow the other culture to speak in its own voice. Modernity was inclined to see itself as normative for all other premodern or less modern cultures and judge them accordingly. Postmodernism is willing to accept the other as other and recognize the value of different traditions. With postmodernism, the different ways of life can be confronted, enjoyed, juxtaposed, represented, and dramatized, so that different cultures acknowledge each other’s legitimacy.

4) Particular, regional, local. In its recognition of otherness and its resistance to totalizing metanarratives, postmodernism emphasizes the
particular, the local, and the regional. There are only “local determinisms,” particular language games, particular “interpretative communities’ made up of both producers and consumers of particular kinds of knowledge, of texts, often operating within a particular institutional context (such as the university, the legal system, religious groupings), within particular divisions of cultural labor . . . or within particular places . . .” (Harvey, 1992: 306). Thus, there are multiple institutions, multiple social groupings (“clouds of sociality” as Lyotard calls them), multiple sources of oppression and multiple resistances; not just one oppressive structure or system, such as communism or capitalism.

5) Indeterminacy, Ambiguity, and Chaos. Postmodernism accepts that there is a certain indeterminacy, randomness, even chaos at the heart of reality. The more we know on both the micro- and the macro-levels, the clearer it becomes that even the material world cannot be fully pinned down, fully described, much less fully comprehended. As J.B.S. Haldane once said, “Not only is the universe mysterious, it is more mysterious than we could possibly imagine.” The idea that modern science will, sooner or later, with ever improving technology, be able to give a full explanation of everything is no longer acceptable. In literary theory, indeterminacy as applied to texts leaves us without the signified or determined referents, but only “signs referring to other signs in an endless play of signifiers” which are ultimately only self-referential.

6) Democratizing movements. Another key movement associated with a postmodern worldview has been the progressive democratization of countries and empires since the mid 1970s. Again Jencks: “One might say, without exaggerating, that the most significant post-modern movement of all is electronic democracy, information-age pluralism, and the emergent self-organizational movements of the last fifteen years, whether these are national, ethnic, regional or transnational” (Jencks, 1992: 15). This can be understood as a manifestation in the political realm of the postmodern resistance to totalizing institutions and the urge for wider participation versus domination and control by an elite. The implosion of the Soviet Empire and the collapse of authoritarian regimes within it are the most obvious examples, but one could also mention the, at least formal, democracies which have replaced a variety of authoritarian governments in Latin America.

7) Participation and dialogue. Characteristic of the postmodern is the awareness of and desire for participation by all, not just an elite, in realms other than the political, such as including aspects of popular culture in art, architecture (e.g., Robert Venturi, Learning from Las Vegas) and literature. The ability of all to participate in the free flow of
information through computers, the Internet, etc., has made this possible and realistic. Again, it is a form of resistance to elitism.

Before turning to the major critiques of postmodernism, I should point out that, despite the convergences just listed, two distinct but overlapping strands of postmodernism can be distinguished. The strand, perhaps familiar to most readers, is that associated with such French intellectuals as Lyotard, Baudrillard, Derrida, Foucault (though there are significant differences among them), and others that is sometimes referred to as *deconstructive* or *eliminative* postmodernism which tends toward relativism and nihilism. It has a generally gloomy view of the postmodern condition, leading to resignation or cynicism. The other strand, called by contrast *constructive* or *revisionary*, is associated with American thinkers such as David Ray Griffin, John Cobb, Joe Holland, Matthew Fox, William A. Beardslee and others, in a series of publications from SUNY Press in New York. This is much more optimistic and suggests a new vision for the world which would incorporate the characteristics above. It is already being realized to some extent in the feminist and ecological movements, and in some theological and ecumenical thinkers such as Harvey Cox and Hans Küng. It is heavily influenced by the process philosophy of A. N. Whitehead.

**CRITIQUES**

With these two strands in mind, let me repeat that postmodernism is ambiguous, frustrating to try to comprehend, and deliberately eclectic. Some criticisms, therefore, apply to some versions and not to others. Most have been directed at the French strand.

Some critics have said that postmodernism is just a fad or an ideology of the Right, or of Neo-conservatives. But it does seem to pick up some cultural currents, and it has evoked resonances in a wide variety of areas for the last twenty to thirty years. While it may turn out to be a fad in one discipline or another, there do seem to be enough common characteristics to suggest that the culture of modernity, if it is not ending, is at least in the process of a major transformation.

Still others, Gregory Baum for example, have said that “postmodern theory may simply be the language game for a network of intellectuals and artists who, deeply disappointed by the failure of the left, create for themselves a non-political world of plural meaning where there is room for their wishes, thoughts and inspirations” (Baum, 1994: 91). Baum’s main concern is that postmodernism is socially irresponsible, even though he acknowledges that Lyotard and Baudrillard are against totalitarianism and defend personal freedom and collective self-determination. Similarly, David Harvey suggests that postmodernism lacks “revolutionary impulse” and can lead to a simple and direct surrender to commodification, commercialization, and the market.
Critics also reject the postmodern theory of language and communication, suggesting that it reduces cultural life to “a series of texts intersecting with other texts, producing more texts” (Harvey, 1992: 312). Baum is even harsher, saying that the notion that the discourse of particular communities is only self-referential may be valid for some discourses such as poetry, literature, art, and music, but “becomes absurd when we apply it to the many dangers which threaten human-kind at this time. Here our speech is tested and judged by that to which it refers. Hunger, we note, is a discourse-transcending reality, so is AIDS, so is torture and assassination by death squads” (Baum, 1994: 89).

This leads directly to what Harvey calls “the most problematic facet of postmodernism, its psychological pre-suppositions with respect to personality, motivation, and behavior. Preoccupation with the fragmentation and instability of language and discourses carries over directly, for example, into a certain conception of personality” (Harvey, 1992: 309). The series of discreet signifiers becomes a “series of pure and unrelated presents in time,” making it impossible to unify the past, present, and future over time and thereby forging a personal identity. Rather than alienation or paranoia, we have schizophrenia, broadly understood. This is another way of postmodernism talking about the loss of the subject.

Finally, as Harvey also points out, postmodernism as a cultural movement has not occurred in a social, economic, or political vacuum. Preoccupied as they are with the relationship of knowledge and power, one has to ask whose interest does postmodernism itself serve? What are its social, political, and economic bases?

The American strand has met with less response. Some have also regarded certain manifestations of it as a fad, for example, creation spirituality or the marriage of theology and ecology. Since some of the main authors are rooted in process philosophy and theology, it has been subject to the same criticisms as those systems are. On the whole, however, the American strand preserves some of the most important concerns of the Enlightenment, such as emancipation, social transformation, and solidarity. It also fosters ecumenical and interreligious dialogue and therefore demonstrates a quite different view of language and discourse than the French version.

With these general criticisms in mind, let us turn to the implications of postmodernism for the Church and Christian life.

IMPLICATIONS

The characteristics of postmodernism listed above have definite implications for us as Christians and for how we organize the community we call Church, some of which are positive and some negative.
The characteristic postmodern emphasis on pluralism, difference and otherness, and the particular, regional and local could and should lead to a postmodern Church that is more pluralistic, less uniform, less centralized, giving greater place to the views and experiences of others—of women, minorities, non-western cultures—a Church that allows and encourages greater autonomy and authority in the particular, regional, and local churches.

In recent years, we have seen the growth of the base ecclesial community movement, the growing importance of national and regional episcopal conferences, the beginnings of contextualized indigenous theologies, all of which can be interpreted as expressions of the postmodern within the Church. These tendencies were initiated and encouraged by Vatican II when it recognized diversity in liturgical and theological traditions, pluralism in theological formulations, and cultural pluralism. Such plural traditions were seen by the council as complementary and enriching, rather than as contradictory and divisive (cf. Lumen gentium, Gaudium et spes, Ad gentes, and Unitatis redintegratio, passim).

Vatican II also encouraged dialogue among the different traditions within Christianity and with the other great non-Christian religions—Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc. This new openness to “the other” was, as many have noted, in stark contrast to the monocultural, closed, uniform, and centralized character of post-Tridentine Catholicism. Yet that tendency to uniformity and centralized control still exists within the Church, as exemplified in such things as the 1983 Code of Canon Law and the “universal” Catechism of the Catholic Church (English version, 1994). The dialogue within the Church is only just beginning to include the voices of women. The feminist critique of the patriarchal power structures will have to be listened to; it is not just an issue of the ordination of women, but of including all voices in the dialogue.

Something similar can be said of the progressive democratizing movement associated with postmodernism. While not exactly “democratizing,” the greater importance assigned to the local and regional churches initiated at Vatican II, the regular meetings of the Synod of Bishops representing episcopal conferences from around the world, and local diocesan and parish councils are movements encouraging the greater participation of the whole People of God. The ecclesiology of communio, which provides the theological underpinning for the equal participation of all local and regional churches, is interpreted by some to stress communion with the center, the Vatican, rather than the communion of particular but equal churches. The hierarchical nature of the Church has been stressed repeatedly in recent statements coming from Rome. While Western forms of democratic governance should not be absolutized, it does seem that peoples around the world
do seek freedom, equality, and the recognition of basic human rights—the positive legacy of modernity. If the Church is to be credible in a postmodern world, it will have to model in its own institutional structures the demands for freedom, equality, and justice it advocates in the social, political, and economic realms.

The postmodern themes of radical eclecticism, indeterminacy, ambiguity, and chaos do not seem, prima facie, to be very compatible with Christianity’s (especially Roman Catholicism’s) belief in God’s providence, God’s overarching care and plan for all creation, and that all will ultimately be united in and with God. For Christianity is itself a metanarrative interpreting all history, proto-history, and eschatology through the hermeneutic key of the Christ event. Christianity believes that God’s plan, hidden until now, is revealed in Jesus as the Christ. Things, events, and persons may be indeterminate, ambiguous, and even chaotic from our intrahistorical perspective, but ultimately all will be clarified and reconciled in the “kingdom of God.”

But Christians may have something to learn from these themes of postmodernity. Perhaps because of the Christian belief that though sin abounds, grace abounds even more, we sometimes gloss over too easily the radical disruptions and discontinuities in history. As the horrors of our century make plain, there is more indeterminacy, ambiguity, and chaos than we like to admit. It is perhaps too glib to say that “grace abounds even more” in the face of two world wars, the Holocaust, the Gulag, ethnic cleansing, the AIDS epidemic, massive poverty and hunger, and the other “forces of diminishment” experienced in the twentieth century.

The postmodern awareness of the collapse of the secular metanarratives of Marxism and consumer capitalism allows for, as Jencks said, “an attempt to go beyond the materialist paradigm” which both of them presupposed. In turn, we have seen a remarkable resurgence of all spiritual traditions and a quest for new forms of spirituality. The American strand of postmodernism incorporates this in a way that the French version does not. The republication of major spiritual texts of the Western tradition has made the creative retrieval of these great traditions possible for a broad variety of people. There is a new openness to the very notion of “tradition” that the Enlightenment and modernity had repudiated. In postmodernism this is coupled with the recognition and respect for many spiritual traditions, especially those of the East, and to this extent postmodern spirituality is eclectic. At least since the time of Thomas Merton, some Christians have attempted to draw upon the spiritual traditions of Zen Buddhism and others. Holistic and creation spiritualities also appeal to several traditions.

How can we live as Christians in this postmodern condition? What Christian virtues do we need to cultivate in the postmodern world?
First, it seems to me that we need to live with a lot more humility, more modesty, about our take on reality. The Christian metanarrative is truly that, but it is not the only one. We may have to learn to live with a “relative relativism,” to seek to relate our story to other stories without co-opting them, but respecting them precisely as other.

Second, modesty and humility entail listening more than talking. The postmodern condition of our culture poses not only threats but also new possibilities. Listening to other voices, voices previously ignored or excluded from Christian discourse—those of women, indigenous peoples, the poor and oppressed, can only enable us to deepen our understanding of the gospel, enable us to see aspects to which we have previously been blind, as the various liberation theologies are currently doing.

Third, the appropriate Christian virtues for the postmodern condition, I think, are hope and courage. In the face of the collapse of secular metanarratives, Christians will respond not with cynicism or nihilism, but with a return to our spiritual traditions, rich as they are, to retrieve creatively the best elements. David Tracy has argued that two of the most basic biblical forms for Christian spirituality and theology—the prophetic and the meditative or wisdom form—are the most appropriate for the postmodern condition. The prophetic tradition spoke not only to the other, but for the other, especially the poor, marginalized, and the oppressed. Tracy says, “One or another version of this prophetic move determines the new kind of Christian theological ethics in many postmodern political, feminist, womanist, and liberation theologies across the Christian world” (Tracy, 1994: 112). Christianity in this form is certainly at home in the postmodern world. In its meditative or wisdom form, Tracy says, Job and Lamentations, and the Gospel of John “will always speak their meditative, penetrating truth to anyone capable of facing the tragedy that is human existence.” These two biblical traditions—prophecy and wisdom—are, I think, expressions of the Christian virtues of courage and hope.

Can the Church be and can Christians live in a postmodern world? Clearly, the answer is yes. But we will need to cultivate modesty, humility, openness to the voices of others, as well as courage, and hope. As a reading of the signs of the times, it may also be that the postmodern condition is revealing the movement of the Spirit among us.

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http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/christian-history.html

If church history is your interest then this site will be useful. A “Guide to Early Church Documents” is a church history buff’s dream tool. You can read through the Didache or search Augustine’s Confessions. There is a great amount of primary sources for study of the early centuries of church life.

http://www.digiserve.com/mystic/Christian/

This page simply titled “Christian Mystics” is a gold mine. Look up and read the works of Thomas à Kempis (Imitation of Christ) or search the writings of John of the Cross. There are many figures whose work is available. Upon entering the site you can search the authors by topic or by comparison to other faith traditions.

http://www.ovnet.com/~mandrson/xcreeds.htm

If ecumenism is an interest then this site is for you. Called the “Creeds of Christendom” this site will guide you through the credal confessions of many Christian communities. Read what the Reformed and Union churches teach or the Free and evangelical churches as well as the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches. You may even find a creed for those denominations that do not believe in having a creed.
The Holy Spirit and the Church:
a truly catholic communio

“The Church cannot prepare for the new millennium in any other way than in the Holy Spirit” (John Paul II, 1994:44).

Pope John Paul II has invited the Church to rededicate itself to the Holy Spirit in this second year of the Jubilee celebration. For those responsible for catechesis, education, preaching, and evangelization, reflection on the Holy Spirit will challenge some of our operative assumptions about the Church. This is especially true of the Church of the West.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR THE CHURCH OF THE WEST

Pope John Paul is well aware that for most of the last millennium Western theology has not been “in the Holy Spirit,” especially in its theology of the Church. He wants the next millennium to be different. The contemporary resurgence of the Holy Spirit in the Church’s theology and spirituality was sanctioned at Vatican II. In fact, all that came out of Vatican II can be summed up as the Church’s rediscovery of the Holy Spirit. The renewal of the liturgy, the empowering of the laity, episcopal collegiality, a more “spiritual” understanding of holiness, biblical study, ecumenism, etc., can all be traced to giving a rightful place to the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church. Pope John Paul II wants to make sure, not only that the Church remains “in the Holy Spirit” but that it continues to sink its roots ever more deeply so that we enter into the third millennium as we embarked in the first: full of the Holy Spirit—the mark of the Annunciation and of Pentecost.

The Church is truly a triune reality. It was conceived in Christ and born of the Holy Spirit in order to reconcile all humanity to the Father who is in heaven, our origin and destiny. It is Christ incarnate who gives the Church its body; it is the Spirit who breathes life into that body. The Church has tended to its body for most of the last millennium. It is time now to tend to its Spirit again.

PENTECOST IS THE CHURCH’S MISSION

In this article I will concentrate on only one aspect of the Spirit, the event of Pentecost. It is important to recognize that the Church did not “begin” on Pentecost. It began in Christ. It already existed in the first
chapter of Acts. On Pentecost (Acts 2), what was already conceived, was “born” into the world—pushed out of the womb of the upper room into the larger world where it was destined to live and grow until the end of time. On that day the Church was full of the Holy Spirit (as was Mary at the annunciation). Thus, what it means for the Church to live in the Holy Spirit, is forever embedded in the events of Pentecost. 

As Luke reports the story, it is clear that the increase of the Church is a matter of divine origin. The sudden transformation that made skillful apostles out of Jesus’ disciples cannot be explained by mere human means. It is due to the “tongues as of fire” that came to rest on them as each one was “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:4) which put their own tongues on fire with the good news of Jesus. Not only did they make bold proclamations, but they were understood by tongues other than their own.

In this, the very nature of the Church is revealed. The good news of Jesus, and the body of believers formed by it, knows no bounds. “There were devout Jews from every nation under heaven in Jerusalem” (Acts 2:5) at the time. And all of them heard the apostles speaking in their own language. (Three times this is mentioned in just five verses.) The whole world of Judaism is represented and the Word is for all of them to hear, none excluded.

The Catholicity of Pentecost

But the Word did not stop there. Eight chapters later in Caesarea, Peter meets a man named Cornelius, a centurion. Those “with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles” (Acts 10:45). Peter baptized this first family in what amounted to the Pentecost of the Gentiles. The redeeming power of Christ, pushed by the Spirit, had crossed over the barrier that had previously divided humanity. 

Paul and his companions furthered the evangelization of the Gentiles and ultimately transformed this Church of Christ into what it was destined to be: the Church of all races and cultures. At the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) it stepped beyond the confines of an exclusively Jewish matrix once and for all and officially sanctioned its immersion in the immense Greco-Roman world. 

This “break toward the universality of the faith” (John Paul II, 1996:338), rooted in Christ, became the mission of the Church at Pentecost. It remains the mission of the Church through all time. Vatican II pointed out that “[Pentecost] foreshadowed the union of all peoples in the catholicity of the faith by means of the Church of the New Covenant, a Church which speaks every language, understands and embraces all tongues in charity and thus overcomes the dispersion of Babel” (Decree on Missionary Activity, 4).
The Triumph of Pentecost is the Dispersion of Babel

For Luke the catholicity of Pentecost had a very specific context. He listed fifteen different nationalities and languages who were present for the first public proclamation of the good news by Peter (Acts 2:9-10). They represented “every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:2). This world of converts to Christ, drawn into one body by a common Spirit, was in stark contrast to the babble of languages and peoples (Gen 11:1-9) so dominant in human experience. The Spirit of Pentecost aims to overcome Babel.

In Acts the divisiveness and alienation of Babel disappeared when peoples who heard “the good news” were able to communicate with one another in the same Spirit. This gave human history a new direction, which will only be complete when the “great multitude . . . from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” will finally be “standing before the throne and before the Lamb” (Rev 7:9). The dispersion of Babel is a reason for the Church’s existence and a significant part of its mission in the world.

In Acts “the dispersion of Babel” has a very specific meaning with significant implications for us today. It was the “alienation” of peoples that was overcome on that first day of Pentecost in the gift of tongues. The different languages did not disappear. Luke repeated three times: “How is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?” (Acts 2:8). In the triumph of Pentecost the Spirit became a point of unity and communication for all peoples in Christ, no matter what their language happened to be.

There are two important truths here which are often pitted against each other in our own time. On the one hand, the unity of Pentecost in Acts was not achieved by making everyone the same. Yves Congar pointed out: “The Church overcame Babel not by a return to a uniformity that existed before Babel, but by proclaiming an implantation of the same gospel and the same faith in varied and diverse cultural soils and human spaces” (Congar, 1983: 26). (There was a time when we believed that what made the Church “catholic” was that it was exactly the same everywhere, in language and practice. But Vatican II called us back to the catholicity of Pentecost of which Congar speaks, which is more patristic.)

On the other hand, in the triumph of Pentecost the Church acquired more than just the diversity of languages. The world already had that. Rather, the Spirit in Christ brought those many languages into a newfound unity. (Inculturation is necessary to proclaim the gospel. But sometimes inculturation is spoken of in such a way that the point of unity is lost or not even envisioned. This will surely breed further nationalism and ethnic divisiveness, which returns us to the alienation of Babel we are to overcome.)
These two truths (the diversity and the unity of Pentecost) belong together. Whenever we separated them in the past, it has always gotten us into trouble. Both extremes—a uniformity that suppressed other cultures, or a relativity that makes each culture an island unto itself—are a loss of catholicity. The triumph of Pentecost and the reversal of Babel is the reconciliation of diverse languages into “one spirit in Christ.” Therein is the heart of the Church’s mission.

PENTECOST ECCLESIOLOGY: “COMMUNIO” THAT IS FULLY CATHOLIC

The Church is a triune reality. We are forever constituted in Christ. Out of his incarnation—his life, teaching, death and resurrection—comes the Church. But we are also forever constituted in the Holy Spirit. An ecclesiology that is equally attentive to the Spirit will treat communio (the Church as communion) as a fact of revelation to the same extent as the incarnation. In other words, the Church’s gospel, doctrine, sacraments, and structure—which come from Christ—are fully grasped only when they are also appreciated as gifts of communion “in the Holy Spirit.”

What does “Pentecost ecclesiology” mean for the Church at the close of its second millennium? The communio of the Church exists only in real congregations where it is practiced and in concrete decisions which Christians make “in the Holy Spirit.” It does not exist in the abstract. The fact is, the genesis of the Church is always a local reality. This is the level of the Church that John Paul II is trying to affect by the Jubilee. The challenge of Pentecost is intrinsic to every ecclesial community: diocesan, religious, parochial, domestic, etc.

What does it mean for a local church to live in the communio of Pentecost? It is tempting to think of this communio as simply a “good feeling (or sense) of community” among the congregation. And obviously that is a sign of the Spirit’s presence. But the sum total of the Church’s mission cannot be reduced to that, especially if it is achieved by gathering only like people together. That is not the essence of Pentecost. The triumph of Pentecost is the dispersion of Babel. And most importantly, the reversal of Babel needs to happen in every community which calls itself the Church.

A parish that is truly catholic, welcomes all Catholics, for instance, regardless of their nation, people, tribe, or language. That is what Pentecost is truly about. But we all know that is not the general reality. However, there are numerous parishes who do realize that this is their vocation and are known precisely for this. In the triumph of Pentecost “there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all in all” (Col 3:11). But obviously the forces of Babel were not magically eliminated on
that first night of Pentecost. The defeat of Babel must be realized locally and concretely, where the barriers of alienation are removed one instance at a time, one person at a time. This is where the mission of the Church is lived.

_Pentecost Ecclesiology: Concrete Implications_

Several challenges follow from this mission.

1) Racism remains the greatest sin against Pentecost. The divisiveness and alienation of Babel reign supreme all over again when one race of people acts against another, whether it be blatant or subtle. Much of this country’s history has been tarnished by animosity toward blacks by whites, which has triggered animosity in reverse. It is a cancer on this nation and on the Church. The time to embrace the Spirit of Pentecost is long overdue. A parish that is truly catholic welcomes all Catholics, regardless of their race or color.

2) The Bishops’ Conference predicts that by 2010 the majority of Catholics in the United States will be of Hispanic descent. If we want to see this as part of the triumph of Pentecost, we need to begin preparing our people now. If the forces of Babel get the upper hand, this will be turned into a racist struggle instead.

When a parish tends to be of one race because it reflects the make-up of the neighborhood, that is one thing. But when the neighborhood is racially mixed and the parish is not, that is quite another. I suspect that far more white parishes are artificially segregated than are black or Hispanic parishes. To not evangelize, to not welcome others different from ourselves who live around us, is racism. It is time to turn this around; it is time to unleash the Spirit of Pentecost; it is time to dismantle the power of Babel. It is time that we begin to look, act, and be more catholic.

No doubt, getting ecclesial communities of diverse racial backgrounds to respect each other and to work together on equal footing will require skills that are still new to the Church, even though they came with Pentecost. This will mean that we will be challenged to re-think everything from liturgy, to leadership, organization, and communication styles, to architecture, to evangelization, to involvement in the neighborhood.

But this is not the first time that the Church has had to face this; nor will it be the last. Honoring both the unity and the diversity of Pentecost is no easy task, but it is a necessary one. The dispersion of Babel will make the Church more catholic. It will also contribute to the “renewal of the temporal order” which is at the heart of the salvation Jesus has won for us, as Vatican II clearly stated (Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People, 5–7).
3) “Intentional parochial communities” must face up to the challenge of Pentecost. If the “intention” is to gather faithful of like minds, values or attitudes from a very narrow range of the Catholic spectrum, that does not seem to be consistent with the mission of the Church. It might be easier to develop a sense of community that way, but that is not a communio that is fully catholic. Creating communio out of homogeneity is not faithful to Pentecost.

4) A particular type of intentional parish requires special attention: those based on language and nationality. The triumph of Pentecost as the defeat of Babel raises a new challenge to this ecclesial arrangement. Even if they were necessary at the height of immigration, that does not necessarily justify them as permanent structures.

People have a right to societies and organizations which foster and preserve cultural heritages. But national, ethnic, and linguistic principles of organization are not equal to the faith. The Church must be more than just one of these societies. The failure to realize this reinforces ethnic and nationalist tensions, which have exploded into the atrocities so prevalent throughout the globe this century. The Church has to make a conscious effort at this point in history to put itself on the side of Pentecost and not Babel.

Pentecost did not ignore race or nationality, but it did transcend them. The gift of the Spirit transformed those who heard into a new reality that was truly catholic. Pentecost did more than just honor the diversity of languages; it reconciled them in the Word of God. We bring our race, nationality, culture, and language to the Church and they become something more, without being lost. When all of that variety is brought into a harmony by the Spirit, we have the fullness of catholicity and the richness of Pentecost.

But this issue is not unique to our own time. The patristic era faced the same identical problem, even though they did not use the modern concepts of nationalism or ethnicity. In antiquity Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem were cosmopolitan cities, with multiple languages, representing antagonistic cultures and ethnic rivalries: Copts and Greeks in Egypt, Syrians and Greeks in Antioch and Palestine, and Romans everywhere. But the Church refused to parcel out the Christian assemblies according to this diversity of cultures. Instead, they created Christian communities territorially precisely because they wanted to assemble the Church as the new Pentecost (Legrand, 1970:331). The mission of the Church was to refashion the world, not to duplicate its divisions.

5) This last point connects with another challenge. Reversing Babel is not restricted to the religious domain alone. The Church also has a vocation to the reconciliation of peoples and the redemption of divi-
sion and hatred in the civic realm. Since Pentecost, Christian faith refuses to be confined to the private sphere. The Spirit still pushes the Church out into the world with the good news. Whenever there is violence (whether in former Yugoslavia, Israel and the Middle East, Northern Ireland, Rwanda, Algeria—or wherever there is tension between peoples closer to home) the Church has an opportunity to confront the spiral of hatred by being itself a sign of Pentecost. It is precisely this mission that brought John Paul II to both Sarajevo and Lebanon in 1997.

CONCLUSION

It is the Spirit who makes the Church one and holy; it is the Spirit who keeps the Church apostolic and catholic. Each one of these describes the Church. But the one attribute that is most naturally used to identify who we are is: “the catholic Church.” This is no accident; it happens to be the one that is most closely identified with Pentecost.

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A previous contributor to this journal, Richard Marzheuser, S.T.D., is a priest of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. He also serves as academic dean of Mount St. Mary’s Seminary in Cincinnati.
On March 12, 1998, the Commission for Religious Relations With the Jews released the document “We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah.” This document calls upon us to remember and to reflect upon the times when we as a Church have been a “counterwitness and scandal” (Commission, 1998, 671). The Commission expresses “deep sorrow for the failures of her sons and daughters in every age . . . since as members of the church we are linked to the sins as well as the merits of her children” (Ibid., 674). We are also challenged to make this awareness of past sins into a firm resolve that the “spoiled seeds of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism must never again be allowed to take root in any human heart” (Ibid., 674).

This document presents a clear moral challenge to all of us as teachers and preachers to reexamine the way that we interpret the Scripture and the way we preach. In this column I would like to examine the interpretation of a problematic text in the Gospel of Matthew (27:25) that has been used to foster anti-Jewish hatred. I would also like to expose the perhaps unconscious negative portrayal of Jews in much contemporary preaching.

Matthew’s Gospel is both the most Jewish and the most anti-Jewish Gospel (Harrington, 1991, 20–22). In chapter 23, Jesus pronounces seven woes against the scribes and the Pharisees for their hypocrisy. This passage has contributed directly to the modern understanding of a pharisaic person as one who is a hypocritical, hair-splitting legalist. Four chapters later there is an even more problematic passage:

So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, “I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves.” Then the people as a whole answered, “His blood be on us and on our children!” (Matt 27:24-25).

Some have interpreted this passage to mean that the Jewish people as a whole bear the responsibility and the guilt for Jesus’ crucifixion and indeed have called down a curse upon themselves. So-called Christians throughout the ages have been all too willing to exact blood vengeance on the Jews citing this passage as the justification for their
atrocities (Brown, 1994:383–97). This wrong interpretation has allowed the “spoiled seed of anti-Judaism” to take root.

To interpret this text correctly we need to place it within its historical and literary context. The historical context for Matthew’s Gospel is after the destruction of Jerusalem in the 70s. The Gospel, written in the 80s, is addressed to a largely Jewish Christian community recently separated from the synagogue. As a result of this separation, the Church (Matt 16:18; 18:17) of Matthew’s community is in direct confrontation with the synagogue, led by the Pharisees, now called rabbis (Matt 23:8). This “parting of the ways” led to the vitriolic comments that we find in Matthew 23 and elsewhere in this Gospel. When we are preaching from this text, we need to present this polemical context to counter stereotyping of the Jews and the Pharisees.

Moving to a literary analysis, we see that in chapter 27 the evangelist has set up two contrasting judgment scenes: Pilate declares Jesus innocent and the Jewish people declare Jesus guilty (27:24-25). The hypocrisy in this scene, however, is not on the part of the Jews who view Jesus as a blasphemer but on the part of Pilate who condemns an innocent man. The phrase of the Jewish people, “His blood be on us and on our children,” is a stereotyped biblical phrase accepting responsibility for judgment (Lev 20:9, 11, 12, 13, 16, 27; Brown, 1994: 837–39). One should note, first, that this responsibility is limited to at most one generation. But it is even more limited than this since Matthew’s Gospel is addressed to a largely Jewish Christian community. Matthew certainly is not cursing the Jewish members of that community. In preaching and teaching this text in the aftermath of the Shoah we have a moral duty to make people aware of this historical background and the limited notion of responsibility. But beyond making people aware of these historical limitations we need also to sound forth clearly the counter-testimony in Luke’s Gospel: “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing” (23:34-35).

Beyond the issue of the interpretation of problematic texts is the issue of the portrayal of the Jews in much contemporary preaching. Think of the number of times that you have heard preachers portray Jews, and specifically the Pharisees, as hard-hearted, hair-splitting legalists, concerned more with the letter than the spirit of law. Paul before his conversion is pictured as a self-righteous wretch (Rom 7:24) unable to find a merciful and loving God. This preaching forms people’s images of Jews and their religion. Historically, however, these portrayals are wrong. Paul before his conversion was righteous not self-righteous: “. . . as to righteousness under the law, blameless” (Phil 3:6). Modern scholars do not see Rom 7:14-25 as autobiographical but as a description of the plight of all humanity (Fitzmyer, 1993: 472–73; Stendahl, 1963). Scholars who have searched for the historical
Pharisees would caution us against using the polemical twenty-third chapter of Matthew as an accurate description of the Pharisees (Saldarini, 1988). The Pharisees were a zealous reform movement within Judaism, very much concerned with the things of God. Certainly there were hypocritical Jews and Pharisees in Jesus’ time just as there are and have been hypocritical Christians throughout history. Nevertheless, it is both historically inaccurate and morally irresponsible to tar one religion or even one sect within Judaism, the Pharisees, as particularly prone to hypocrisy and/or legalism. All too often, the Jews in general or the Pharisees in particular become the negative example or the foil in preaching. This creates a negative image of the Jews and allows us to escape judging the hypocrisy and hard-heartedness in our own lives. The reflections on the Shoah by the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews calls each of us to repentance and a deeper understanding of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. It also calls us to exercise great caution in the words and the images that we use to portray the Jews and their religious tradition in our preaching.

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**Anatomy of a Homily**

For over twenty-five years I have been teaching homiletics to ministerial students and also conducting preaching workshops for many dioceses and religious orders in the United States. A key segment of both enterprises involves critiquing. Both positive reinforcement and helpful challenges encourage preachers to keep improving. There are some weekends when I hear and help critique thirty homilies. A woman religious friend of mine once told me that because of hearing so many homilies, I have been spared the possibility of purgatory.

Many of the homilies I hear are excellent. I am especially impressed with many of our younger preachers who have been exposed to quality homiletic and biblical courses. There are many who ask, “Who are the great preachers of our time?” It is a worthy question. Certain individuals have always stood out as model preachers in every period of the Church’s history. But a far more important question is, “Where are the good and faithful preachers in our time?” I use “good” here in the Ciceronian sense of the “good person speaking well.” My reading of the homiletic signs of the times has taught me there are many good and faithful preachers in our time who take their preaching seriously but are never acknowledged in the press. I am also aware that many preachers have a long way to go. What follows are six areas that I believe need serious attention. These areas are not listed in order of importance but as they come to mind from my homiletic critiques.

1) **Focus.** After viewing a homily, the first question I ask the participants in the group is, “What do you believe the homily was about?” In other words, what was the focus of the homily? I ask them to state the focus in one pithy sentence. If homilists, in their preparation, had come up with a clear, unified, and simple focus statement for the homily, chances are that the listeners will offer a similar focus statement when they are asked, “What was the homily about?” There are times when the homilist has not even thought about a focus. Some have told me, “I just get up there and speak.” Others seem to have two or three focus statements embodied in their homilies. That is simply too much for listeners to grasp in a seven-to-ten minute homily.

Ask any listener after Mass, “What were the three points of the homily?” Nobody will remember the three points. I sometimes tell preachers at workshops that a commercial has one focus: “The best
part of waking up is Folger’s in your cup.” Some respond, “But we’re not selling coffee, we’re selling the gospel.” To which I reply, “But they’re selling a lot more coffee than we are the gospel!” There is another group of preachers who have a clear focus statement in their head but never actually say it in their homilies. They place a heavy burden on the listener who is left to decipher exactly what this homily is all about. I wish Catholics had the tradition of some Protestants who have a sign outside their churches with the title of next Sunday’s sermon. Especially helpful are those pithy, creative titles that give you a clue that the preacher has not only prepared a homily but has done so with a clear focus statement in mind.

(2) Method. John Allyn Melloh, S.M., professor of homiletics at the University of Notre Dame, tells his students: “Method is your friend. It’s a help, not a straitjacket.” He offers the example of having surgery: “I would want to go to a surgeon who has a ‘method’ rather than to someone who says, ‘Well, what shall we try today?’”

Eventually, many preachers find a method that works for them. But they also could benefit from authors who have provided wise counsel on the matter of homily preparation. For example, it would be most helpful if preachers would pay attention to the method offered in the NCCB document *Fulfilled In Your Hearing: The Homily in The Sunday Assembly* (1982:29–39, hereafter FIYH). It is a method that works for most of the students I have taught.

Because of limited space, let me focus on one significant aspect of homiletic method: writing. After listening to a homily, I can always tell if the homilist has or has not written the homily. The homily that makes my teeth itch is the one that is composed at the ambo and not the desk. It rambles. It lacks precision. The listener wonders how the preacher goes from here to there because transitions are lacking. Transitions are needed because they are the bridges that help the listener in the journey. A homily not carefully written often lacks a solid ending. It is as if the preacher is a pilot who doesn’t know how to come in for a sure landing. This leads listeners to confusion and distraction.

I am not suggesting that the homilist takes a carefully written manuscript to the pulpit and reads it with exactness. That homiletic style gives the impression that the manuscript is more important than the listeners. Fulton Sheen once told the story of an elderly woman who chastised a young priest after Mass because he had read his entire sermon. She told him, “If you can’t remember it, how am I supposed to remember it?” What I am suggesting is that writing helps give the homily clarity, direction, and precise language.

(3) Poetic Language. Andrew Greeley believes that ministerial students should be required to write poetry, plays, and short stories
before ordination. I agree because the language of the homily is not the language of the philosopher or the theologian. Homiletic insights emerge from the philosopher and the theologian but the language must be that of the poet. Preaching is a theological event but the language of preaching must not only instruct but delight, inspire, and move listeners to faith. Karl Rahner described the priest as a poet. He chided his fellow theologians because they had lost the imagination of the poet and had become hopelessly prosaic: “Where are those ages when the great theologians wrote hymns as well?” (1964:24).

I am not suggesting that preachers quote poetry or construct their homilies in rhyme. I am suggesting that we take seriously the advice of FVH and “turn to the picture language of the poet and storyteller” (25). Many of the homilies I hear use abstract nouns that end in -ion. They are filled with “church chat” that might be the language of theologians and clerics but not the language of most people. Robert Frost once said that “every poem begins with a lump in the throat.” Preachers must ask themselves, “What moved me as I prepared this homily? Have I captured that passion and concreteness in my words?” Preaching is a heart-to-heart talk. If a homily lacks heart, it probably won’t move others.

(4) Use of the biblical texts. Vatican II’s renewal of the homily signaled a return to biblical preaching: “All the preaching of the Church . . . should be nourished and ruled by Sacred Scripture” (Dei Verbum, 21). Thirty plus years after this advice, many preachers are still not certain about what to do with the biblical readings found in the Lectionary. Some simply avoid any reference to the Scripture readings. A colleague of mine told me that she heard a homily preached on Holy Thursday in which the preacher talked about the bunions on his feet and the stress of Holy Week on the priests of the parish. My friend was waiting for at least a simple transition from bunions to the washing of feet by Jesus in John’s Gospel but no reference was ever made to Scripture. Could it be that such preachers are frightened by biblical scholarship and avoid going into the Scripture readings with depth for fear of contradicting biblical scholars?

Catholic Theological Union’s Leslie J. Hoppe, O.F.M., and Barbara E. Reid, O.P., recently conducted a study in which a representative sample of homilies by priests whose seminary education took place after Vatican II were assessed on how they used the Bible in their preaching. One of their conclusions is that many of the preachers they observed used the biblical “text as an illustration or as a point of departure from which to move into a pre-conceived notion or theme on which to preach” (Hoppe-Reid, 1998, 37). While biblical courses in Catholic ministerial schools have improved greatly over the last three
decades, I am not convinced that we have always come up with teaching strategies that help construct an appreciation of the Bible as a book of the Academy and also as a book of the Church. Sound exegesis must always be accompanied by a prayerful dwelling with the biblical texts (lectio divina). While homilists should make use of the best of contemporary biblical scholarship, they should also be taught that the homily is not a biblical lecture but a biblical interpretation of life addressed to a particular liturgical assembly in a particular place and time. As FHYH puts it, “the preacher does not so much attempt to explain the Scriptures as to interpret the human situation through the Scriptures” (20).

(5) Interpretation. Recently I had a lively exchange of ideas with a couple of bishops about what a homily is and what it is supposed to do. At first, the bishops said that people today are spiritually hungry. I have no quarrel with that. That is why many have responded to authors like Kathleen Norris who offers a convincing Christian apologetic not by argument but by her faith-filled interpretation of life as graced. Where I departed from the bishops was their solution to a spiritually hungry people. They were convinced that the homily should be a teaching tool, offering information about what the Church teaches. Certainly teaching is a significant part of preaching, but turning the homily into an information tool is not the answer. Søren Kierkegaard once noted, “there is no lack of information in the Christian land, something else is lacking.” The “something else” that is often lacking in our homilies is an interpretation of our lives in light of the gospel. That is the working definition of the homily found in FHYH. The document retrieves the image of the interpreter, an important image in synagogue preaching, that is missing in conciliar and post-conciliar documents on the nature of the homily. The document takes its title from Luke 4:15-30, Jesus’ sermon in the synagogue at Nazareth. That sermon did not offer information but an interpretation of people’s lives. It spoke to the present by transforming the historical revelation into a contemporaneous, dynamic reality: “Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.” Many of the homilies I hear at workshops are not interpretations of life but explanations of a theme or a teaching. I believe that our preaching would greatly improve if we begin to grasp the significance of the homily as an interpretation of life in light of the Scriptures which leads the assembled to “be able to worship God in spirit and truth, and then go forth to love and serve the Lord” (FHYH, 19).

(6) Length. The Introduction of the 1981 Lectionary for Mass advises: “The homily . . . [should be] neither too long nor too short” (24). Granted that advice is imprecise, but it does recognize the dangers of long-winded homilies which are not appropriate within the parameters
of a eucharistic celebration and also of “homilettes” which short-change the assembly’s need to respond in thanksgiving to God’s word. In a study conducted a number of years ago in the Archdiocese of Seattle, laypersons settled on seven minutes as the average length for a Sunday homily. Perhaps this reflects our USA Today attention span or the fact that seven minutes is the average time between commercials on American television. In my experience of critiquing homilies, I often notice how the long-winded homily is also the one that was never written out as a manuscript. Once again, writing makes for clarity and precision and also for a good sense of timing. Bishop Kenneth Untener of Saginaw, who taught homiletics before becoming a bishop and who meets each week with a group of his priests to critique their homilies, often reminds preachers, “Don’t think they’re enjoying it half as much as you are!”

The preachers I have worked with over the past twenty years who I admire are the ones who are always striving to improve in the central act of ministry, the proclamation of the gospel. They are the ones who are convinced the Spirit of God animates their human words with divine power. They are the ones who take seriously these six areas of preaching that always need to be renewed.

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Undoubtedly one of the most exciting books I have read in the last six months has been Andrew F. Walls’s *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1996). Walls is professor emeritus of the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World at University of Edinburgh and writes out of years of experience as a missionary-teacher in Sierra Leone and Nigeria. The book consists of nineteen essays, most of which have appeared in print before, but since (I would wager) that most Catholics do not know of Walls’s work they appear with an amazing freshness in this collection. Most of the essays revolve around three interlocking theses.

The first thesis is that Christianity is essentially, inevitably, and “infinitely” (25) translatable, and that as missionaries preached the gospel—at Antioch, at Athens, in Ireland, in China and Africa—translation took place, not necessarily by the missionaries but by the people who received the message in the context of their own cultural understanding. In this sense, the great missionary era that began at the end of the fifteenth century has been eminently successful, but is now over.

This leads to a second thesis: that Christianity does not grow cumulatively, but “serially.” It began as a Jewish sect, but beginning with Antioch (Acts 11:19-26) it rooted itself in Hellenistic culture, only to be transformed again as Antiquity crumbled under the vigor of Germanic culture in the Middle Ages. In our day Christianity is being transformed again as Christianity’s center of gravity has shifted to the East and the South. Walls firmly believes that the future of Christianity lies in Africa, and that African theologians of the next century and millennium will translate and transform Christianity in ways as radical as Origen did at Alexandria and Anselm did in the context of feudal Europe.

All this results in a third thesis: full understanding of Christ requires the insights and riches of all peoples, all cultures and all genera-
tions, and missionary activity—the commitment to communicate Christ across cultures—is the catalyst for this knowledge: “. . . what began as a specific act of translation became part of a discovery of Christ. Once again the attempt to transmit faith in Christ across linguistic and cultural frontiers revealed that Christ had meanings and significance never guessed before, and revealed another glimpse of the glory of the completed, redeemed humanity” (xviii). Reading Walls’s elegant prose is an absolute treat, and often an inspiration. Most highly recommended are the first two chapters, “The Gospel as Prisoner and Liberator of Culture” and “Culture and Coherence in Christian History.”

Walls has also published a stunning essay in the October 1997 issue of the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (21.4: 146–53) entitled “Old Athens and New Jerusalem: Some Signposts for Christian Scholarship in the Early History of Mission Studies.” His thesis, present in his book but more explicit here, is that Christianity is about making *converts*, not *proselytes*. As he explains it, this is quite a radical notion: “It is not a matter of substituting something new for something old” (148); that is proselytism. It is “not a change of substance but a change of direction;” it means “to turn what is already there in a new direction” (Ibid.). Walls may use the tamer (and I believe inadequate) terminology of “translation,” but I get the sense nevertheless that he would be rather sympathetic to contemporary efforts which speak more positively about the process of “syncretism.” If I might turn to this discussion, let me point out that one of the most thought-provoking chapters in Robert Schreiter’s *The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997) provides an eloquent summary of the issues surrounding the use of the “S word” in efforts of inculturation. While the message of the gospel remains the same as it moves across cultures, says Schreiter, that message “has an indeterminate character to it” (79). Since each culture contains basic “codes” embedded in it, the gospel message will be transmitted through such codes, each of which will highlight or downplay certain aspects of the one gospel message.

Ramsay MacMullen’s 1997 study, *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to the Eighth Centuries* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press) provides a further example of what Schreiter talks about. Christianity, argues MacMullen, did not replace Roman religion. “The triumph of the church was one not of obliteration but of widening embrace and assimilation” (159). Walls, MacMullen, and Schreiter all are saying, it seems to me, that we have just only begun to understand the dangerous, “wineskin-breaking” implications of inculturation.

William R. Burrows (“A Seventh Paradigm? Catholics and Radical Inculturation”) makes a similar argument in an excellent collection
honoring the late South African missiologist David J. Bosch in Willem Saayman and Klippies Kritzinger, eds., Mission In Bold Humility (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996: 121–38). “The Christian future,” writes Burrows, “will be like the past, we can be sure, in at least one way if in no other. It will surprise us” (138). In the final analysis, these authors imply, the Holy Spirit is not only the “principal agent of mission” (see Redemptoris missio, chap. III); the Spirit is also the “principal agent of inculturation,” injecting “an uncontrollable, effervescent element into the structure of Christian existence” (Burrows, 128).

More needs to be said about Schreiter’s The New Catholicity. Basic to his reflections is the conviction that, ultimately, culture alone is a too narrow—and sometimes a too misleading—context for theology in today’s world. While culture is certainly one aspect of context, much more significant is the wider context of globalization. Unlike many approaches to globalization today which dismiss the phenomenon as only a new form of western colonialism, or demonize it as something totally evil, Schreiter sees globalization, through the eyes of sociology, as much more complex. While globalization definitely has its “shadow side,” it also holds out promises—of progress, inclusion, and equality—that need to be fostered, even if this means living out Christianity in resistance to globalization’s betrayal of the ideals it holds out. Theological responses that espouse liberation, ecology, feminism, and human rights are more adequate in the global context than reactions of fundamentalism, revanchism, and an exclusive ethnicity.

Theology, Schreiter says, needs to be done between the global and the local, and so the notion of catholicity, which he defines with Siegfried Wiedenhofer as “wholeness and fullness through exchange and communication” (128), takes on particular importance as a hallmark of adequate and authentic theologizing. This is a seminal, ground-breaking book, and a “must read” for ministers today, particularly those who work in cross-cultural situations.

I mention with some hesitation a work which I myself have co-edited, Dictionary of Mission: Theology, History, Perspectives (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997). This work was originally published in German in 1987 and co-edited by German missiologists Karl Müller and Theo Sundermeier, and has been re-edited, revised, and updated by Richard H. Bliese and me. The reader will find articles (110 in all) on practically every important issue of mission and cross-cultural studies, and each article is followed by an extensive bibliography. Some articles worth mentioning here might be: “African Theology” (James Okoye), “Anthropology” (Anthony Gittins), “Black Theology” (Simon Maimela), “Culture” (Eugen Nünnenmacher), “EATWOT” (Virginia Fabella), “Ecology and Mission” (Heidi Hadsell), “Inculturation” (Karl Müller), and “Symbol” (Anscar Chupungco).
Let me mention in closing two books of biography which provide valuable entries into cross-cultural studies: Gerald H. Anderson’s (edited) *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions* (New York: Macmillan Reference, 1997) and Robert Ellsberg’s *All Saints* (New York: Crossroad, 1997). Anderson’s massive work (845 folio pages) contains short biographies and bibliographies of some 2,400 women and men who have been involved in the Church’s missionary movement since New Testament times. These have been written by a huge assembly of scholars from all over the world—e.g., Kwame Bediako (Ghana), John de Gruchy (South Africa), Joseph Donders (U.S.A.), Angelyn Dries (U.S.A.), Samuel Escobar (Peru). Articles on “standard” heroes of inculturation are included—like Ricci, de Rhodes, and las Casas—but the reader will discover others less well-known like Ferdinand Verbiest and Candida Xu. Ellsberg’s book might seem neither missionary nor cross-cultural on the surface, but this is a collection of the lives of women and men whom people today would call saints, one for each day of the year, among whom are found the likes of Katherine Drexel, Sor Juana, Martin Luther King, Mother Teresa, Mahatma Gandhi, and Harriet Tubman. Often, I believe, the best way to understand the dynamics of cross-cultural ministry and inculturation is to be drawn into the stories of those who actually did what we aspire to today, at times with less support than we have, and with a lot more opposition. As God’s Spirit beckons us forward into a new century and a new millennium, we can perhaps do no better than to seek the guidance of these holy ancestors as we understand Christ and his mission in ways that even they might not have imagined.

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Ivo Pescatore stood there in the back of the church with the urn of ashes in his hands. His memory took him back to those days in the country where he grew up as the youngest of four older brothers. His good mother taught her brood the value of all living creatures. That spring long ago came to mind when robins built their nest outside the kitchen window. For several weeks Mama watched with her own young the birth, the feeding, the care and growth of that family of robins.

Ivo’s brothers married and settled in northern New Jersey suburbs, not far from New York City, but Ivo and his wife dared to make the westward move early in their marriage. Five children and twenty years later, they now call California their home. Several years ago Ivo’s mom and dad decided to leave the familiar northeastern territory and head south for warmer climates. “For the past two winters we’ve experimented as snowbirds and we know it’s the right thing to do,” Papa insisted. “Some of our friends have moved down and love it. Me and your Mama want to go too!”

The children had a grand farewell party for their parents. Visits to the new home on Florida’s East Coast thrilled the children and grandchildren. They were happy to see their parents so happy. For more than five years there was peace and contentment. Then Mama took sick.

First it was the lump on the breast, then the malignancy metastasized to the lungs and brain. The children insisted she come north to better hospitals, but she and Papa felt the southern hospitals were as competent and efficient. “Besides,” Mama said, “we’re happy down here, especially with our parish. Over the years we’ve come to know and love so many good people. You wouldn’t believe the attention and care I’ve gotten in these last few weeks. No, I don’t want to leave. I want to die down here. What a strain it would be on your father! Moving back and forth would be too much!”

Bad turned to worse and Mama diminished quickly. Her entire brood gathered around her as she bid farewell, blessed them and slipped into a coma. She lingered a few days, then passed away peacefully. The children and grandchildren wept. In his weakness Papa was strong for them and held them together as a family.

Ivo and his brothers knew for quite some time that their mother wanted to be buried up north in the family mausoleum. Ivo had the charge of flying north with his weary yet tranquil father. Soon after take-off, Mr. Pescatore began to talk over the roar of jet engines. His son caught the end of a sentence:
"... and your brothers will bring your mother’s ashes with them for interment in our mausoleum." Ivo was horrified. "What! They’re going to burn up Mama’s body?" Papa hesitated and responded slowly: "Well, yes, Ivo. No one told you? Your brothers are at the crematorium right now. A few years ago Mama and I decided it would be easier and less expensive. She’s at peace, Ivo. Relax! She’s not there anymore; she’s somewhere else. Her body isn’t who she was."

Trembling and nauseated Ivo groaned, “This can’t be! She taught us about life and its beauty, how we should respect life and care for it and preserve it. Papa,” Ivo persisted, “we’re Catholics! We’re not supposed to do things like this! Didn’t the priest say something against this! And my own brothers! How could they stand there at that incinerator and watch it happen?

“And what happens when we get back home? We’ve already told friends that we’ll have another funeral Mass before the interment. But now what do we do? What will people think?” Ivo stopped short. The words did not come out of his mouth: “It seems the whole world has gone crazy, even my own family!”

On the evening before the funeral Mass the family gathered at a local restaurant. During the meal Ivo overheard some folks asking what time the viewing was the next morning before Mass. His ears started to ring and he turned away. By the time dessert was served, he knew the word was out about the cremation. As people were preparing to leave, the pastor of St. Rita’s, Father Antonelli, approached Mr. Pescatore and extended his sympathy. After shaking Ivo’s hand, the pastor asked him: “Do you think you can bring up the gifts at Mass tomorrow, Ivo?” Overcome with grief he took the priest outside the restaurant into the parking lot: “...and what will we do tomorrow, Father? How can we have Mass for Mama without her body there? Why am I the only one who’s upset? Mama taught us so much about the beauty of life, how to nourish and care for our children. And now no one seems to care about her! I don’t understand. I feel so isolated, like I’m the one who’s nuts!”

The next morning Ivo stood in the back of the church with the square cookie tin in his hands. The procession was about to begin. He opened the tin and took out the urn containing his mother’s ashes. The grandchildren carried the bread and wine. The music started. He felt the usher’s nudge. Half way down the aisle Ivo thought: “What am I going to do with this urn when I get up front? Where will I put it? Or am I supposed to give it to someone? And after Mass where will it go? O Mama!”

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Ivo’s dilemma is not unfamiliar to ministers who work with grieving families. When the NCCB approved the revised Order of Christian Funerals [OCF] in November 1985, cremation was not addressed in much detail because the practice in the United States was not wide-
spread. During the past ten years, however, statistics indicate a significant increase. Certain states record cremation in over 40 percent of all funerals. In general, it is used in 20 percent of all funerals in this country [See National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB), *Reflections on the Body, Cremation, and Catholic Funeral Rites* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1997).

Cultural shifts not only present a challenge to pastoral caregivers; they also create an opportunity for catechesis and evangelization. Such an occasion to herald the good news of Christ’s saving death demands not only careful pastoral skills but also the appropriation of knowledge based on current teaching including the revised OCF which was approved for use in the United States in 1989. What are the dynamics operative in the case? What does Ivo need to know? What does Father Antonelli need to know?

The dominant dynamic operative in the case is crisis, always a time of great vulnerability and great receptivity. Ivo is overwhelmed by separation anxiety and its effects on family dynamics, particularly the interplay between guilt and blame. He experiences himself as acutely vulnerable and hardly receptive to his father, siblings, or the local pastor. Though wounded by his mother’s death and the apparent secret of her cremation, he may be healed by reassuring contact with his family. He may become fertile ground for insight and receptivity. Key moments of grace are often spawned in great moments of crisis when we are more consciously confronted with infinite aspirations (Mama’s valuing of life and its beauty) and their seeming absurdity in the face of real and drastic limitations (cremation for convenience in transporting Mama’s earthly remains).

What does Ivo need to know? Ivo inherited the popular Catholic culture handed down to him: cremation is something from the devil, a desperate act of final apostasy, even from the other side of the grave. Ivo needs to know that cremation is not a desecration of the human body but an acceleration of the natural process of decomposition, more natural than the culturally accepted embalming procedures which some consider ecologically questionable. Ivo also needs to know that Catholics have only recently found the practice of cremation acceptable. The 1917 Code of Canon Law forbade it (c.1203) until a 1963 instruction from the CDF (*Piam et constantem*) permitted it in cases of necessity as long as the request did not fly in the face of teachings on the resurrection of the dead and the immortality of the soul. The 1969 *Ordo exsequiarum*, the Latin *editio typica* of the revised Catholic funeral ritual, echoed the 1963 concession, and the 1983 Code of Canon Law (c.1176) incorporated it. While the primary manner of final disposition among Christians is still interment or entombment of the body, cremation is not forbidden. In fact, economic, geographical, ecological, or
family factors have made cremation the choice of one-fifth of Americans. Such a cultural shift places demands on ritual practice.

What does Father Antonelli need to know? He and other pastors have lacked direction for funeral rites without the body. Responding to a tenuous pastoral situation, they may have unwittingly let certain unfortunate and infelicitous ritual practices slip into the parish’s liturgical life without considering their formative or deformative powers, such as including the urn in the procession with the bread and wine, and incensing them. Likewise, pastors lacked appropriate texts for the Funeral Liturgy, the Final Commendation, and the Rite of Committal without the body. They stumbled through prayers, changing “body” to “ashes,” while hopelessly mixing metaphors.

On 21 March 1997 Bishop Anthony Pilla of Cleveland received an indult from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments in response to the NCCB’s request to celebrate the funeral Mass in the presence of the cremated remains of the deceased. He quickly informed local churches that permission had been granted [BCL Newsletter 33 (April 1997) 13–14]. The cremated remains of a loved one are finally permitted to be present during the funeral Mass itself, and prayer texts attending to the earthly remains of ashes are now available for use.

The ministry goes to the door of the church in the usual way. A worthy vessel holds the cremated remains. The priest sprinkles it with holy water and says, “I bless the earthly remains of our brother/sister N. As he/she has died with the Lord, so may he/she live with him in glory.” No pall or veil covers the vessel.

A small table or stand may be placed where the coffin usually rests. The Easter candle may stand nearby. The vessel containing the cremated remains may be carried to its place in the entrance procession. If there is no procession from the door, it may be rested on the table or stand before the liturgy begins, but never on the altar. The priest and the assisting ministry reverence the altar. They may incense it, but never the urn of ashes. The Funeral Liturgy proceeds as set out in the OCF.

The presider’s common sense would opt against all prayers which refer to the body of the deceased. Immediately following the Prayer after Communion is the Final Commendation. An alternative form for the dismissal is now provided: “In the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, we commend to Almighty God our brother/sister N., and we commit his/her earthly remains to the ground [or the deep, or their resting place]”[ earth to earth,] ashes to ashes, dust to dust. The Lord bless him/her and keep him/her, the Lord make his face to shine upon him/her and be gracious to him/her, the Lord lift up his countenance upon him/her
and give him/her peace.” These prayers are now available in an OCF insert.

Father Antonelli also needs to know that his helping the family select Scripture passages for the Funeral Liturgy may overcome vulnerability and enable receptivity and healing, not only for Ivo but for the entire family. Initially, families may feel that all Scripture passages sound the same, but it is the pastoral caregiver’s task to help the family hear the Word of God in its grief, and Ivo in his distrust. The wise and perceptive pastor will draw out rich biblical metaphors in the funeral homily to nourish and sustain the family as all its members return to the void of life without Mama, and the fullness of sacred time with each other.

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http://www.agreeley.com/homilies.html

Preaching this weekend? Find out what Andrew Greeley is going to preach about. This Internet site is simply titled “Catholic Homilies.” Fr. Greeley has many of his homilies listed for as far back as 1995. There are also homilies from some other authors. It may be of help to see what others are saying about the scriptures as you prepare your own reflection.

http://www.homiletics.com/TheMall/laugh/index.html

This page rightly called “Laughter and Humor for Worship” is a gem. Even if you do not use humor in your homilies you might want to check this site out when you need a little lift in your spirits. You may find yourself laughing out loud at your computer screen!

http://www.csn.net/advent/

This site bills itself as the “New Advent Catholic Supersite.” You can browse through Aquinas’s Summa Theologica or the Catholic Encyclopedia. The latter is a work in progress; currently it has 4,000 articles and still growing. A useful page to research a theological topic.

Sheeley and Nash, professors of religion at Shorter College in Rome, Georgia, have written a sprightly account of English translations of the Bible. Their aim is to guide the reader in making an informed choice of a Bible for reading, study, and devotion. Their effort is a success. Most readers, including scholars, can profit from this book.

Chapter 1 deals with the making of the English Bible. Despite some oversimplifications (e.g., the stories of the Torah took their “written form about 1000 B.C.E.,” 13), the authors give a generally accurate mini-history of how the Bible came to be and its earliest translations (the LXX and Vulgate; the Syriac Peshitta is not mentioned). They state, correctly, that the Vulgate “served as the official Bible of the church for almost one thousand years” (18). Then they write (46): “. . . the Roman Catholic Church recognized only Jerome’s Vulgate as canonical Scripture. . . .” That statement is misleading, for only the biblical books are canonical, and not any particular form thereof; the MT, a Qumran biblical MS, LXX, Vulgate, or an edition of the Greek New Testament can be considered canonical only insofar as its text represents what textual critics judge to be the best form of the original—a point the authors make on pp. 23–25.

Chapter 2 describes the various types of translation techniques: verbal equivalence (others call this type “formal equivalence”), which attempts “to reproduce the modern English equivalent of the ancient word”; dynamic equivalence, which reproduces “the ancient thoughts and ideas in their modern English equivalence”; and paraphrase, which usually aims at updating the language of a previous English translation (25–26). Often, however, a clear distinction between dynamic equivalence and paraphrase is difficult to make.

In the next two chapters the authors explain the merits and shortcomings of the various translations. Among those listed as verbal translations are the following: KJV (1611), ASV (1901), RSV (1952, but they fail to mention the publication of the RSV deuterocanonical/apocryphal books in 1957), NAB (1970), which on p. 47 they describe erroneously as dynamic equivalence, but on p. 113 correctly as verbal equivalence; NAB Revised New Testament, 1986), NASB (1971; updated in 1995), NIV (1973, depicted, with good reason, as verbal equivalence “with considerable freedom,” p. 112). NKJV (1979), and NRSV (1989; they do not mention the NRSV Catholic Edition, 1993). These are some of the dynamic translations discussed: James Moffatt, A New Translation of the Bible (1928) that “set the standard by which later dynamic versions . . . would be judged” (65), The Complete Bible: An American Translation by J. M. Powis Smith and Edgar J. Goodspeed (1927), the Ronald A. Knox translation from the Vulgate (1955), The New Testament in Modern English by J. B. Phillips (1958;

The authors are frank in their evaluations. They summarize why, e.g., the KJV, despite its continuing popularity, can no longer be considered an adequate (or accurate) translation. The KJV translators lacked, among other things, the critical texts and tools we have available today; moreover, major changes have occurred in the English language, so that many of the old expressions are either obscure or unintelligible. The widely popular NIV “probably owes its conservative reputation more to the massive and pervasive advertising campaign waged on its behalf than to any noticeable characteristics of the version itself” (46). Though claiming to be a verbal translation, the NIV has at least one major weakness: St. Paul’s use of the word “flesh” is rendered by such expressions as “sinful nature,” “human nature,” “human.” But these translations miss the wide range of meanings Paul intended to evoke by the word “flesh.”

The final chapter offers excellent suggestions for choosing and using an English Bible. The authors rightly insist that “no single translation is the best, or even the most correct” (106). They recommend at least three versions: one verbal, two dynamic. My recommendation for those who cannot read the original biblical languages is to acquire as many good modern translations as they can afford.

The appendix contains a valuable annotated bibliography of selected Bibles published in this century and a list of electronic resources for study and research.

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The author is an associate professor of Old Testament at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary and proposes here an interpretation of selected psalms that is at the same time “multicultural.” It is organized into three chapters entitled: “The Confictual Self” (brief impressionistic interpretations of psalms of lament, sickness, etc.); “The Authoritative Self” (this takes the psalms dealing with the kingship of the Lord and also those referring to the earthly king or “Davideic monarch,” e.g., 20, 72, 132); “The Contextual Self” (very brief comments on the Asaph and Korahite psalms). The titles of the first two chapters are reminiscent of W. Brueggemann’s division into psalms of disorientation and orientation, and the author displays a general knowledge of selected studies on the book of Psalms.
Within each chapter there are subsections, all of which begin with “listening in,” as in the title of this work. Twice there is a “listening in to the early church,” each less than a page; twice also there is a “listening in to contemporary culture” which presumably represents the “multicultural reading” of the subtitle of the book.

But the term “multicultural” is puzzling. A multicultural reading is never defined. One is left to infer that the author’s frequent references to literature mainly by African-American writers, e.g., Toni Morrison, represent a multicultural reading. A book by a Latino writer, Rudolfo Anaya, is mentioned three times. But most of such references have little or no connection at all with the psalms that have been chosen for treatment. Hence the reader is left with the question: what is a multicultural reading?

Roland E. Murphy, O. Carm.
Washington Theological Union


Israel’s Wisdom Literature is the first volume to appear in the series A Liberation-Critical Reading of the Old Testament. The book contributes to the current interest in two facets of biblical study, wisdom literature and contextual reading. Regarding the first, wisdom’s search for meaning begins with human experience and finds God in creation. And regarding the second, people who look to the Bible for guidance are increasingly aware of the need to identify the points of view expressed in different biblical books. Once the perspectives regarding race, class, and gender are identified, the Bible can be resignified for today’s world.

The author’s goal, presuppositions, and methodological concerns are carefully articulated, with the happy result that her approach is clear; and the reader is given a responsible model for liberationist reading, not only of the wisdom books, but also of other biblical materials. Her goal, to resignify the biblical material for the contemporary reader, relies for its achievement on four basic premises. First, she works with the Roman Catholic canon: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Wisdom of Solomon, and Sirach. Second, she discusses the final, canonical form of each book. Third, she focuses throughout on the “integrity of creation,” a term she borrows from the World Council of Churches in highlighting the interconnectedness of the world. Fourth, she examines each book through the contextual lens of sensitivity to issues of race, class, and gender, naming this step “Unmasking the Powers.” She then examines each book’s depiction of divine activity from that perspective, and calls it “Into the Looking Glass.” Finally, she proposes a revelatory message for contemporary readers.

In her interpretation Bergant relies on three insights of literary theorists, Gadamer’s “fusion of horizons” and Ricoeur’s “hermeneutics of suspicion” and “surplus of meaning.” She considers the three components of canonical
study: the text itself, the context of the reader, and the resignification that results from bringing together the first two. She highlights four of James Sanders’s principles that inform her work: the ambiguity of reality, which precludes drawing monolithic conclusions; the biblical function as “mirror for identity” rather than “model for morality”; the interpretive focus on divine rather than human action; and the resulting new, transformative “mode-of-being-in-the-world.”

Her analysis of each text and its rhetorical function is admittedly selective, focusing on aspects of the book that highlight its rhetorical function. Her examination of each book’s race, class, and gender perspectives, and her suggestions for resignification of the material are the study’s major innovative contributions. A sampling of these will illustrate.

In terms of class perspective, Job’s relatively comfortable socio-economic point of view was one of outrage at his misfortune. Disadvantaged people would not be indignant, but would understand the irony of Job’s situation and the tenacity of his questioning. The contemporary reader is reminded that God and suffering are beyond human grasp.

From an ethnic point of view, selected wisdom psalms illustrate the ancient Israelite triumphalism and sense of ethnic privilege inherent in their status as God’s chosen people. Today’s reader can see in these psalms reasons for humble gratitude.

And Qoheleth’s fundamental gender bias is evident in its almost exclusively androcentric point of view and in the negative characterization of the few women he mentions. Bergant takes her cues for resignification from the text itself, offering two suggestions. First, just as the divinely-established order of the universe transcends human standards, it also transcends Qoheleth’s gender bias. And second, Qoheleth frequently repeats the phrase “under the sun,” an expression of inclusivity that encompasses all, including women, in its vision of universality.

Each chapter ends with a bibliography of recent works, and a topical index concludes the entire work. Biblical scholars, pastors, and educated non-specialists will find the book a valuable tool for finding meaning in the Bible for today’s world, both in its focus on wisdom literature and in its solid explanation of method. It is hoped that the remaining volumes to appear in the series will make as significant a contribution to contextual reading as this one.

Joan E. Cook, S.C.
Washington Theological Union


A Concert of Charisms is a timely work, one important not only for understanding the contemporary tensions within religious life but also for addressing broader issues of church order and organization. Reflecting a long period
of gestation, the essays culminate a process which began with the study of clericalism by the Conference of Major Superiors of Men in 1985, continued in the scholarly reflections of John O'Malley in *Theological Studies* (49, 1988: 223–58), and culminated in the discussions which surrounded the work of the Task Force on religious priesthood established by CMSM in 1988. A whole host of interrelated issues are addressed: existential questions surrounding the place of priestly identity and ministry within the charism of religious life; the council’s near identification of priestly work with parochial structures; the often strained relationships between the universal mission of religious and local diocesan needs; the role of priests and laics in the governance of mixed institutes; the changes in ordination rites so as to highlight the hierarchical model of the Church; the shortage of diocesan personnel with the consequent tendency to “parochialize” the work of both men and women religious; the subsumption of the religious vocation into clerical identity.

The style and content of the book reflect the academic knowledge of the participants and their sensitivity to important pastoral issues. Sandwiched between the good summary and concluding reflections by Paul Hennessy, C.F.C., are seven fine presentations. John O'Malley, S.J., synthesizes many of his previous essays by analyzing the diocesan ministerial presuppositions of the council documents (ministry to the faithful; ministry in a stable place, usually a parish; focus on the hierarchical union between priests and bishops; ordination as the warrant for ministry) and contrasting this with the missionary dynamic of priesthood within religious orders (9–24). Kevin Seasoltz, O.S.B., contributes two substantial reflections, one being an historical overview of priesthood within a monastic perspective (25–60), and the other an analysis of canonical issues of exemption, autonomy, power, and jurisdiction, and liturgical questions of lay preaching, the installation of religious into the minor ministries, and the vow of obedience to the local ordinary required by 1990 modification in the rite of ordination (139–68). The solid presentation by David Power, O.M.I., on the theology of the priesthood in Augustine, Anselm of Havelburg, Aquinas, Bonaventure, and the French School of spirituality also includes a glance at Hans Urs von Balthasar and concludes with the challenge of developing a new “praxis orientation” among vowed religious (61–103). An autobiographical essay by Roland J. Faley, T.O.R. (124–26) will enable many of the readers to identify with the personal importance of the questions raised in the last thirty years. Doris Gottemoeller, R.S.M., taking a hypothetical position for the sake of the overall argument, holds up a mirror to the whole discussion adroitly and provocatively detailing the impact on the charism of religious women were some of them to be admitted to the ministerial priesthood (127–38). The last reflection by Miriam D. Ukeritis, C.S.J., and David J. Nygren, C.M., draws on their well known FORUS study and provides a fine sociological base to the parochial, ministerial, and ecclesiological issues discussed. Most of the essays conclude with practical and pastoral suggestions for a future course of action. As can be seen, this is a rich and complicated work, whose contents merit discussion on many different levels of the American Church.

In keeping with the papal call for dialogue in *Vita consecrata* (see 149), *A Concert of Charisms* will only fulfill its hopes and possibilities if its challenges are squarely faced by men and women religious and the broader ecclesial com-
munity. Selected essays in the work could provide a substantial base for discussion in religious formation programs, seminaries, and theological centers. A national discussion which would include religious men and women and the episcopacy would be optimal.

Two critical observations remain. First, greater attention to more recent biblical scholarship and the creation/royal inheritance of the Jewish Scriptures would greatly modify the too facile dichotomy drawn between the charismatic and institutional aspects of church life. Second, historical and contemporary questions regarding religious priesthood and broader ecclesial order could be considerably illuminated by discussions of socio-cultural phenomena such as violence, technology, professionalization, the breakdown of urban communities, globalization, and the new multiculturalism. It is precisely these types of issues which will place the priesthood (both lay and ministerial) and religious identity in the context of a broader challenge and create the shared ground which all of humanity faces on the eve of the third millennium.

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This is the fifth of a series which, when finished, will constitute the complete publication of Thomas Merton’s personal journals in seven volumes. Beginning in the late 1930s, while still at Columbia University, Merton kept journals in which he recounted both his daily activities and his reactions to events, materials he read, people he met or with whom he corresponded, and his personal prayers, meditations, and reflections. Out of these raw journals he would craft works for publication. Some of Merton’s finest works, like his early monastic volume The Sign of Jonas (1953) or the later works like Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander (1966) and even the posthumous A Vow of Conversation (1988) and The Asian Journal (1973) had their origins in these working journals.

The close reader of Merton has the opportunity to see how Merton changed the immediate raw data of his notebook journals into works for publication. Those less interested in these transmutations can read the volumes seriatim and have a near total picture of the working and praying life of this singular figure of twentieth-century Catholicism; a figure, as Merton scholar Elena Malits once pointed out, who made the personal pronoun “I” respectable in theology.

This present volume reflects many of the preoccupations of Thomas Merton. We have an account of his (rare) visit outside the monastery for a meeting in New York with the Zen master D. T. Suzuki. He takes up calligraphy and abstract drawing under Suzuki’s influence and with the encouragement of his old Columbia friend, the painter Ad Reinhardt. His increasing preoccupation with issues of war becomes less focused on his earlier horror at the prospect of nuclear war and more concerned with the escalating situation in Vietnam. His
interest in the sessions of the Second Vatican Council occupy his mind especially on issues dealing with peace and, through his contacts with Rabbi Abraham Heschel, on the outcome of the statement on the Jews in particular and Nostra Aetate in general.

In the midst of these momentous events unfolding far from the monastery, Merton kept up a frenetic pace within Gethsemani. He taught the novices, read widely in monastic literature, grumbled about the conditions at Gethsemani, watched with bemused wonder at the liturgical changes ranging from the introduction of the vernacular liturgy to the introduction of concelebration, worried about the planned merge of the lay brothers into the monastic choir, and, most importantly, thought long and hard about the relationship of solitude to community.

It is in this period that Merton first gets permission to sleep over in the newly built hermitage and finally, a red letter day for him, he moved permanently to the hermitage. That move was the culmination of a long struggle to show that there was room for the eremetical life in the fiercely cenobitic tradition of the Cistercians. He notes, with some satisfaction, that the hermit life was not only an exception for him but something which the monastery thought about providing in the future for a few mature monks who felt such a call (including the abbot who, when he resigned his office, also took up life in a hermitage).

In the midst of all of this recorded activity one finds those patches which make Merton so readably influential: the sharp observation of the world of nature; the brilliant meditations on Scripture; the articulate reaction to the moments of grace felt in books, while in choir, in reaction to the letters and writings of friends, his keen intelligence when confronted with new ideas, his capacity to discover the new while holding on to the old. There is, finally, a very human person who can react badly to a superior on one page and reprove with himself for his lack of charity on the next or express enthusiasm for a book which pages later he will see in a more sober light.

Robert E. Daggy, editor of this volume, died of a rare blood disease shortly after this book appeared in print. He had been the director of the Merton Archives at Bellarmine College in Louisville for twenty years. This volume is a fitting tribute to his memory.

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A native of northern Italy, Andrea Grillo studied jurisprudence and philosophy before receiving a doctorate in theology at the Institute of Pastoral Liturgy at the Abbey of Santa Giustina (Padua). This biographical note is important as
it contextualizes this book which is his doctoral thesis in which he continually relates philosophy, fundamental theology, and liturgy. At present he teaches liturgy and fundamental sacramental theology both at the Santa Giustina Institute and at Sant’ Anselmo (Rome). His association with the pastoral liturgy institute of Santa Giustina is significant and needs to be understood by American audiences who commonly understand “pastoral” to mean “practical” in the sense of “hands on” and “how to.” In fact, what is betrayed in some twenty-five books about liturgy published by Santa Giustina since 1982 is that “pastoral” means rigorous theological, anthropological, and spiritual reflection on liturgy as the act of the praying Church.

This important work is divided into seven chapters preceded by an introduction outlining the scope and method of the research, especially its theological and anthropological aspects. The book’s subtitle ably indicates what is at stake here: a significant contribution to method in fundamental theology and liturgy which concerns how theological reflection is based on the experience of God, both what can be termed “immediate” and that which is mediated. Grillo’s concern throughout is to indicate the mutual interdependence of liturgical science, anthropology, fundamental theology, and sacramental theology in general as these interface with the experience of God specifically in cult, in history and through symbol. He thus indicates throughout the extreme importance of liturgy for theology itself and how to go about delineating the theology of liturgy itself. Chapter one reminds those already familiar with the still burgeoning literature on liturgical theology of the seminal contributions of Odo Casel, Salvatore Marsili, and Cipriano Vaggagini. Here Grillo sets up a method and style that will be used throughout, a method that is a model of clarity in structure and content. What is most impressive is his irenic prose and insightful arguing for appreciating not only the liturgy but the experience of liturgy as an essential component of personal religious experience as experience is appreciated as a pivotal factor in delineating the theology of liturgy itself. Chapter one returns throughout the work as an important insight for liturgical theologians: namely that liturgy itself mediates the experience of God and that the helpful distinction of liturgy as theologia prima and theology as theologia secunda needs to be reframed (if not rethought) since one can experience God in numberless ways outside the liturgy, reflection on which leads to rich theological and spiritual insight about the God who is revealed in unique ways in the liturgy. This insight is underscored in Grillo’s discussion of K. Rahner (his transcendental anthropology), Schleiermacher, Otto, Bonhoeffer, Pannenberg and the “Milan school” (its notion of the symbolic) in chapter two. It characterizes his insightful treatment of “sacraments in general” in chapter three. Not unlike the work of L. M. Chauvet (especially in Symbol and Sacrament) Grillo here is concerned to sketch notions of sacramentality on a broad canvass so that the cult of sacraments is seen as derivative of religious experience in general, aspects of which are often summed up in the term sacramentality.

In chapters four and five Grillo reflects his training in philosophy, both of philosophers and of precision in thought. This is precisely why these two chapters especially are recommended for the more liturgically and theologically-trained in order to make discussions about liturgical theology today even
more substantial. Throughout he relies on insights from Feuerbach, Kierkegaard, Pascal, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Rosenzweig, Wittgenstein, Ricoeur and Benjamin. Admittedly Grillo relies on a preponderance of European authors and his copious bibliography includes very few English titles. For Americans, therefore, a distinct contribution of this book is that it offers a complement and supplement to what is familiar to them in English with a judicious exposure and summary of the work of continental authors.

In chapters six and seven Grillo modestly reflects on the research gleaned and offers tentative but very useful insights about the relationship between fundamental theology and liturgical practice. His insights here about how to appreciate one’s religious experience both in human life and in the cult are most helpful as these come to bear on the theological discipline of fundamental theology and for structuring one’s appreciation of what is experienced through the liturgy. For him experience is a pivotal category for interpreting salvation history and liturgical rite, especially because each can be understood in a reified way which diminishes their nature as constitutive of and as fostering religious experience in general. The book’s final “ten theses” (262–66) are helpful summaries of what Grillo has argued throughout. Hence, they might well be read first and referred to as one reads the book, especially when the reader might find some sections stylistically dense.

For a variety of reasons reviewers can sometimes criticize a work because it is not the book they thought should have been written. As I read and studied this significant work (important especially for those engaged in crafting method for liturgical theology) I grew to appreciate the book’s precise scope and nature. It is worth the effort to read and reflect on it. (That it is a demanding read is itself a compliment.) It leaves the engaged reader with a deep appreciation of what experience means for theology and liturgy and for their interrelationship. Like many other volumes in the Santa Giustina series (for example the book on method in general by G. Bonaccorso, Introduzione allo studio della liturgia) Grillo’s work rescues the category of pastoral liturgy from the category of “guides” and hints about celebration to understanding pastoral liturgy to mean the communal, ritual expression of the paschal mystery in the Church that deserves serious theological reflection. It is to be hoped that Santa Giustina will continue to offer this kind of serious contribution to liturgical study for years to come.

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Thomas Shannon has updated and revised his popular introduction to bioethics. The book remains what the author originally intended it to be when first written in the late 1970s: a basic primer on current moral questions in medicine and science. The book reads like a dictionary as Shannon proceeds to
define and clarify medical, ethical, and scientific terms through its sixteen chapters. When he moves into analysis of the issues he is careful to present an objective overview. This approach makes the book a good source for discussion within a classroom or hospital setting. Shannon intrudes very little into the text except in rare instances. One such instance is his personal conclusion on the question of euthanasia. On this question he makes a restrained moral judgment noting that euthanasia has “less to commend it than one might actually think” (109). Certainly, that is not a fierce stand against euthanasia, but such a style of writing is probably the key to the book’s longevity.

In this work, Shannon is more a tour guide than analyst. He is intending to simply take the reader through current cultural trends, medical capabilities, and ethical arguments that have gained consensus in the world of medicine and academic ethics. As a guidebook, its author leaves the reader to discuss and judge the morality of behavior around such issues as genetics, euthanasia, abortion, medical treatments, organ transplantation, reproductive technologies, among others. Like a good tourbook, it gives the traveler just enough direction to avoid getting lost on the journey. Shannon clearly defines the standard ethical principles of bioethics and situates them in examples of current approaches to moral analysis. Equipping readers with exposure to such terms as beneficence, autonomy, justice, and ordinary and extraordinary means, Shannon enables them to discuss the moral issues of health care and science with nascent confidence. The book would seem to work best as a text for undergraduate students in philosophy or religious studies classes under the guidance of a facilitator who can flesh out many of the topics that Shannon can only glance at due to the nature of the book. I have used it with success as ancillary reading for medical students. Since its approach is basically secular, Shannon’s book would not seem to work as successfully in moral theology classes. None of the arguments put forth in Evangelium Vitae or Donum Vitae on assisted suicide or artificial reproduction are explicitly explored. These documents, along with Shannon’s text, as well as one such as Allen Verhey and Stephen Lammers, eds., Theological Voices in Medical Ethics (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) would make a fine theological introduction to medical ethics, however.

The prose is crisp, clean, and very accessible to the adult reader. It continues to be a fine introduction and reference book for defining key themes and terms in bioethics.

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