

From a Pastor's Heart

Writings about issues
that are important to me



Millard C. Reed

Significant dates in the ministry of Millard C. Reed

June 16, 1951

Saved and acknowledged call

June 17, 1951

Sanctified wholly

June 26, 1951

Preached his first sermon. In that service Barbara Cunningham was converted. She later became his wife.

September 1951 - May 1955

Trained at Olivet Nazarene College

September 1955 - May 1956

Took first pastorate in Oregon, Missouri (part time)

September 1955 - May 1957

Trained at Nazarene Theological Seminary

July 1957 - July 1961

Served as pastor of the Page-Warson Church of the Nazarene, St. Louis, Missouri

August 7, 1958

Ordained at Pine Crest Camp in Fredericktown, Missouri

September 1959 - June 1961

Earned a master's of divinity at Eden Seminary

August 1961 - April 1966

Served as pastor of the Church of the Nazarene in Kenosha, Wisconsin

Continued on back panel

Millard
Reed



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*From a
Pastor's Heart*

Millard C. Reed

Trevecca Press
Nashville, Tennessee
2005

From a Pastor's Heart

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333 Murfreesboro Road
Nashville, TN 37210-2877

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Printed in the United States of America.

ISBN: 0-9657278-6-6

Dedication

to Harold Walker

Let me tell you about Harold Walker and why this book is dedicated to him.

One afternoon during my years as Harold Walker's pastor, I was severely discouraged. I was reading about the man who had "sowed good seed" in his field when an enemy "came and sowed weeds among the wheat" (Matthew 13:ff). In that passage our Lord instructs that the weeds should remain and not be yanked up, an action which would uproot the "wheat."

Pausing in my reading, I said out loud, "Lord, all I see is weeds. I think it is about time to start pulling weeds. You are going to have to show me the wheat." Instantly the voice of the Lord said, "Harold Walker is wheat." My argument and my discouragement ended. I knew that Harold was *wheat* and that his life was lived in unmixed integrity.

I have been fortunate to serve alongside many Harold Walkers in my forty-nine years of ministry. I cannot list the names of all such faithful women and men who have been *God's wheat* in a local congregation, but if you are a "Harold Walker," please know that a grateful pastor dedicates this book to you.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION7

ABOUT THE PASTOR

Chapter 1. A Pastor Seeks to Look at Things as God Does ..9
Chapter 2. A Pastor Is a Person17
Chapter 3. A Pastor Has a Distinctive Purpose33
Chapter 4. A Pastor Affirms Meaning in the Midst
of the Local Congregation37

ABOUT THE JOURNEY

Chapter 5 Jesus Is Lord47
Chapter 6. Your New Life in Christ Produces Hope57
Chapter 7. Spilled Soup and a Redirected Path69
Chapter 8. This I Have Experienced! This I Believe!71
Chapter 9. Preaching Holiness Sermon Series85
 Sermon One: Jesus Christ Is Lord89
 Sermon Two: Why Two Works of Grace? ...94
Chapter 10. The Glory of His Presence in Advent101

ABOUT MY CHURCH

Chapter 11. How Pastors and Professors Need
Each Other145
Chapter 12. Passion vs. Organization157
Chapter 13. Your Church Can Grow161
Chapter 14. Embrace the Heritage183

CONCLUSION205

Introduction

By my calculations, during forty-nine years of pastoral and administrative ministry, I produced approximately two thousand sermons for local congregations. I do not claim that any one of them was a *great* sermon. I remember some as poorly delivered, but each one was sincere and gracious in its intent.

An encounter with a fine layman after one of my very first sermons taught me never to judge my own efforts. When the incident occurred, I was a youngster just out of seminary, and I thought I knew when I did well and when I did poorly in the pulpit. It was one of those mornings when I did so poorly that I was embarrassed to greet the people at the door, but one of the first to extend a hand of greeting was the layman who said, “Oh, brother pastor, that message was just for me. It spoke to my heart.” I actually said in response, “You have got to be kidding.” But as I did, the look in his eyes told me that I had misjudged the sincerity of his words.

His response communicated with such dramatic clarity to me that the memory is vivid five decades later. God had taken my feeble effort and fixed a note of grace and mercy for this brother through my stumbling tongue. I promised God I would never judge my own sermons.

When Reverend James Mahan, vice president for church relations at Trevecca, suggested a collection of selected published works for general distribution, I was complimented, and the re-reading of sermon manuscripts, lecture notes, published magazine articles, and conference speeches has been a labor of love. I hope the words will encourage pastors and laymen alike. If any of this material can be used by any pastor, I would be pleased. If it resonates with any layperson, I am grateful.

The three sections of this book address three areas of passionate interest for me—the pastor, the journey, and my church. The first section of the material is about the pastor as a person and draws on my lecture notes from my years teaching Pastoral Theology. The second section has to do with holiness and speaks in terms of “Lordship terminology.” My own healing serves as an illustration. An Advent celebration series rounds out this segment. Section three focuses on coordinated roles in collaborative ministries in the local church as well as intra-

church ministries. The final entry is a presentation that I made on February 13, 2005, to the Nazarene Leadership Conference in Orlando, Florida.

I pray that this material, which was used of God in some distant place for a given time, will be animated and activated by God to your heart so that resurrected concepts will live and animate again.

Millard C. Reed

2005

Editor's note

Previously published writings included in this volume have been updated according to current rules of usage.

In chapter ten all scripture quotations are from the King James Version except as noted in the text. All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

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CHAPTER ONE

A Pastor Seeks to Look at Things as God Does

Simon Peter probably held no pleasant memories of Caesarea Philippi. It was there that he made his famous confession and received the blessing of the Lord as the one who spoke forth the truth revealed by the Father himself. There he was told that he held the keys of the kingdom of heaven so that whatever he bound on earth will be bound in heaven. All that is pretty heady stuff—enough to attach a positive recollection in Peter's mind forever, one would think.

On the other hand, there was another conversation that, in my opinion, was so negative, so traumatic in Peter's memory that it neutralized all the positive recollection of the place. In it Jesus had shouted, "You Satan!" Even a tough-skinned person like Peter would have felt the sting of such a phrase, especially coming from Jesus. Maybe the conniving slyster salesmen in the temple court deserved the wrath of the cords, but Peter is in the inner circle. He and the members of that select group are on retreat; it is time for familiar songs, warm words.

What could Peter have done or said to create such an obvious overreaction from the mild-mannered Nazarene? The conversation is so simple. Peter said only two things. He said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," and immediately Jesus blessed him for that. That statement is not the offense. Peter's second comment was a response to Jesus' word that he (Jesus) would suffer, be killed, and be raised to life. To that Peter said, "Never Lord! This shall never happen to you!" That is all that Peter said. It sounds innocent enough, but it really upset Jesus. It so disturbed him that he called Peter "Satan." Hearing that response from Jesus would be enough to ruin the day for the most pious saint.

Jesus is clearly upset with Peter's remark, and he does not leave him in the dark long. He immediately identifies what it was about Peter's comment to which he objected, vehemently: "For you look at things not as God does but as Man does" (Matthew 16:23 *Twentieth-Century New Testament*). The lamb-like Jesus, who quietly responded to the true Satan's temptation with

a calm word of Scripture, who evaded confrontation with the angry mob at his hometown, who brought tranquility to the Gadarene demoniac, and who would eventually refuse to raise a word of retort to those who crucified him, is deeply distressed when one who holds the keys of the kingdom does not look at things as God does. It is as though Jesus is saying, “As orthodox as your confession is, you have only demonic potential if your perspective is wrong—even though that way of looking at things is normal for humanity. People of the kingdom and the keeper of the keys must not look at things as man does. The keeper of the keys must look at things as God does.”

To look at things as God does requires much of the person who would try to do it. One of my graduate school professors explained those requirements with a quotation which he ascribed to Krister Stendahl, a Lutheran scholar and the former dean of Harvard Divinity School and retired bishop of the Church of Sweden: “To do theology is to see things as God sees them. That task is so obviously arrogant and oversized that we can only do it playfully—as children. But to children, play is serious and creative, and it does something for their growth.”*

As pastors engage in the lifelong conversation about the nature of the pastoral ministry, they must bear in mind that the task they are discussing and proposing to carry out is preposterous. The task of pastors is to find the eyes of God and make them their own. Pastors might reflect upon a great deal of confessional material that is as orthodox as the confession of Peter in Caesarea, but if they look at things as man does, they will have to share the title that Jesus gave Peter—Satan.

How can pastors begin to do this task? In the context of the pastor's responsibility to see things as God sees them, the question of the wise man who asked, “Who could find the mind of God?” becomes “Who would be so audacious as to assume that he or she might find and take as his or her own the eyes of God?” Herein is the paradox of “the keeper of the keys.” Pastors cannot be satisfied with gaining the eyes of people—even good people and even the collective sight of good people. Pastors must gain the eyes of God, but they are mortal, confined to the insights of mortals. The task is a paradox, but it is a para-

*I was unable to locate the exact location of Stendahl's statement.

dox that must be faced, or else pastors will find themselves as Satan's key keepers.

Some tenuous observations about how it is God sees things are possible and are listed below.

The Eyes of God Are Creative

When Isaiah spoke of the idols of wood and stone that had no mouths to speak and no eyes to see (44:18), he did so in order to strike a sharp contrast with Jehovah God. Jehovah is not blind. His symbol in much of the world for a considerable expanse of time was and is "the all-seeing eye."

As God spoke creation into existence, his first words were "Let there be light" (Genesis 1:3). His seeing and his speaking are inseparable; together they bring into existence that which was not. Seeing as God sees has as its precondition and presupposition the creative activity of God. No light—no seeing. Certainly, no seeing as God sees.

Before creation week was completed, God made a moral assessment of his creative activity, and the report is "And God *saw* that it was good" (Genesis 1:25, 31, emphasis mine). God is seeing and he is assessing. One can conclude that seeing as God sees will acknowledge his creative power and moral judgments as the essentials for the seeing. They provide the only atmosphere in which seeing as God sees can take place. Seeing as God sees takes place only in "the kingdom of light." "The kingdom of darkness" does not know and cannot see as God sees.

Pastoral Ministry Must Be Creative

The good that is done in pastoral ministry rarely follows the predictable pattern of social and psychological caregiving. It is not derivative. Formulae for transforming a particularly chaotic situation into happy reconciliation are almost never available to a pastor. Few (maybe no) universal laws for success in pastoral ministry exist. There is a sense in which no Bible college, university, or seminary can teach one to be a pastor. The work is creative. It is an art rather than a technique, and, like an artist, a pastor is often at a loss to explain or instruct another in just what qualities must be present in order for the creative event to take place. From time to time, however, the artistry is evident, and when it is seen, the power of the creation is quickly ascribed

to the true Creator by the one whom he used and empowered for service.

An incident that took place on a Friday evening after I had taught a Pastoral Theology class at Trevecca illustrates how that artistry can come about. On that night I received a call from a mother who pleaded with me to talk with her son and daughter-in-law. She told me that on the following Monday her son would return to a military assignment overseas, and his wife had refused to go with him. Each had been unfaithful to the other, but he had recently been converted, had repented, and was highly motivated to see the marriage “healed.” His wife, on the other hand, had little knowledge of the gospel and had experienced many unpleasant moments with him.

After explaining to the mother that I was not a miracle worker, I agreed to see the couple. Our session together was candid but offered little hope for reconciliation, and I concluded it in prayer.

I had little faith for any positive results. In fact, on Monday I mentioned the incident to my class as an example of how people expect the impossible from a pastor. While that very class was meeting and while I was pointing out this case as an example of unrealistic expectation, the husband’s sister got lost in a part of town with which she was not familiar. To her surprise she came upon her brother’s wife and their two children at a phone booth, where the wife was saying a last “good-bye” to her husband of several years who was already at the airport and scheduled to leave within the hour. The sister asked her brother’s wife if she would like to accompany [the sister] to the airport. The wife agreed. The parents had taken documentation with them to the airport “just in case a miracle happens.” As the first passengers were boarding the plane, the wife, deeply moved by several events that had transpired in the previous thirty-six hours, decided that she would go with her husband—with only the clothes on their backs and a key to their house in hand. Required documentation was there and in place.

When they arrived at their overseas destination, believers who had been influential in leading the husband to the Lord had already arranged to have his assignment changed so that he could remain at home for the following ninety days. Marital counseling was arranged. The counselor just happened to be a

Christian psychologist, and the chaplain just happened to be part of the family's denomination and the former college roommate of the husband's sister-in-law.

I received a Christmas card from the couple in which they thanked me for all I had done to preserve their marriage (I did not think that I had done much). They indicated that they were still with the counselor and sharing Sunday services and a weekly Bible study.

Pastoral work is not magic. Pastors are not witch doctors, but the work of pastors is creative. Pastors are allowed to see and participate in the creative work of God. Having experienced such dynamic creativity, they cannot be satisfied with predictable results from ordinary formulae. They may know some techniques of pastoral practice with some measure of predictability, but so very much of the practice simply does not submit to those formulae. (As I am writing this material I have just come from the side of a ninety-one-year-old man who was leaving his home of forty-four years in order to begin resident care in a nursing home. Where is the "formula" for helping in that situation?) If the chaos of the human situation is to expose any hope for redemption, it will be seen only by the creative eyes of God. Jesus demands of Peter and pastors that they have those eyes.

The Eyes of God Are Incarnate

When God purposed to reveal something of his nature to humans, he let light attach itself to a bush on the back side of the Midian desert. It appeared to burn but was not consumed. Such a phenomenon was enough to get the attention of Moses as he attended his father-in-law's sheep. After identifying himself as the God of the fathers, Jehovah revealed his person and strategy: "I have indeed *seen* the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying So I have come down to rescue them So now go. I am sending you" (Exodus 3:7-10, emphasis mine).

Seeing while not *really seeing* is a characteristic of humans. That characteristic is the myopia of the human condition, but when God sees, he *really sees*, and his moral nature demands that he do something about what he sees. "I have *seen* the misery of my people" simply must be followed with "so I have come

down.” Seeing as God sees cannot separate *seeing* and *coming down*. The two qualities are not two but one. If God is a seeing God, then he is by his moral nature incarnate. His coming as an infant son of the virgin is a part of the nature of things—“from the foundation of the earth” (Revelation 13:8 KJV). Not only did he create the world, but he is, from the beginning, deeply involved in it.

Pastoral Ministry Must Be Incarnate

If pastors are to see things as God sees them, they can anticipate that their seeing will force them to act in such a way as to become a part of the persons they serve. Satan’s key-keepers pray as the Pharisee prayed: “I thank thee that I am not as other men.” Pastors pray, “I thank thee that I am as ‘my people.’” And the phrase “my people” does not mean that the people belong to the pastor. It means the pastor belongs to the people. Those who see as God sees are committed to a radical sense of human *sameness* and celebrate its redemptive potential.

An incident from my own pastoral experience illustrates the way ministry becomes incarnate. On the third Sunday of August 1974 my wife and I were presented to the congregation in Nashville as their “pastors.” Technically, we were the pastors. We had accepted the call, said goodbye to a previous congregation, packed, moved, and then unpacked. We were living in the parsonage, and the white sign in front of the colonial style sanctuary even bore my name, but I knew that I was not their pastor. Not yet. Potentially, I was, but I was not actually. The incarnation had not yet taken place.

Much later, some seventeen years, 1800 or so sermons, hundreds of weddings and baby dedications, thousands of conversations in their shops and homes, and far too many funerals and divorces later I was their pastor. The incarnation had taken place. Pastors’ eyes must be like the eyes of Jesus—incarnate.

The Eyes of God Are Redemptive

Perhaps my assumption is now clear. God has come down to rescue humans. Since he sees as he sees, he rightly assesses humans’ needs. Therefore, he has not come to condemn or annihilate. Humans need rescuing. Rescuing is what he comes to do.

The whole Exodus story is a rescue story. Many episodes could illustrate. One is particularly helpful on the matter of seeing and redemption. Not atypically, the children of Israel had sinned and were suffering the invasion of the snakes. Jehovah instructed Moses to craft a bronze snake, hold it high in the camp, and call the people to “look and live!” (my paraphrase of Numbers 21:8). Healing was theirs for a look. Stories of the God who sees, bringing sight and wholeness to those who are blind and suffering, weave their way throughout Holy Scripture.

It is amazing how often the messianic hope is expressed in terms of bringing sight to those who are blind or in darkness. Frequently the phrase “in that day” is followed, as it is in Isaiah 17:7, with the phrase “men will look to their Maker and turn their eyes to the Holy One of Israel.” Isaiah 29:18 reads, “In that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll, and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see.” In 42:7 God promises “to open eyes that are blind” and “free captives from prison.” In that same chapter (v. 16) he says, “I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth.”

Most fascinating of all in this long series is the Lord’s reading of Isaiah 61:1 in the synagogue in Nazareth. “That day” has now arrived. This great messianic passage is intentionally read by Jesus as a declaration of the blessing of Scripture upon his unfolding ministry. As he reads it, either by the work of some unknown scribe or by the Lord’s own intention, the phrase from Isaiah 42:7 is inserted into the passage—“and recovery of sight for the blind” (Luke 4:18). When God sees, it necessarily follows that man must be enabled to see.

Pastoral Ministry Must Be Redemptive

Here is where Peter’s failure to accept suffering and death as a part of the redemptive plan earned him the anger of Jesus. His confessional orthodoxy was profound—even awe-inspiring—but it did not demand that he lay down his life. Because Jesus looked at things as his Father did, Jesus knew that suffering and death are essential to the redemptive formula. Suffering and death are the natural and necessary sequence to the incarnation. The identification is not thorough if it draws a line any-

where—if, at any point, it says, “Here, this is as far as I go!” Redemption is implied by the incarnation, which is implied by the creation. Redemption and incarnation are the ways God sees things, and those who are the “keepers of his keys” must see things in that same way.

When God sees, he sees in the light of a moral creation to which he commits himself (incarnation) as redeemer (redemption). These insights are most comforting when they are ascribed to God. It is wonderful to consider that God is the creator-God who has moved into human history to redeem humans from their lost condition. In fact, it sounds a lot like Simon Peter saying, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Orthodoxy is the easy part. Saying “You are the Christ” does not provoke the wrath of Jesus. The hard part is looking at things as God does when it demands that persons freely participate in the incarnation. It is tough to be agents of a moral creativity empowered by the resurrection which demands not only the Lord’s but one’s own crucifixion. The challenge is for persons to be agents of rescue in a recreativity that is incarnational and redemptive. Moreover, such rescue, recreativity, and crucifixion are the pastor’s assignment. Gaining insights on that task is the purpose of this writing conversation. I wish that I could make it easier. Confessing is easier, but then, again, confessors who do not see things as God sees them are called Satan.

CHAPTER TWO

A Pastor Is a Person

The burning bush story is a *who* story. Even before Moses asked to know the name of the one who had summoned him, the voice from the bush had said, “I have seen . . . I have heard . . . I am concerned . . . I have come down to rescue them . . . I am sending you.” Already God is revealing a great deal about *who* he is (Exodus 3:7-10).

This God had already “signed in,” as it were, in verse 6 with the identifier “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob.” Before Moses had asked God his name, God had already said a great deal about himself. He revealed his compassionate character and readily identified with specific persons with names and histories and character identifications. This story is a *who* story. When anyone asks God who he is, God responds with the names of specific people with whom he identifies and with specific characteristics of his own nature.

This is a *who story* on two accounts. Before Moses had asked God who he was, he had already asked the rhetorical question “Who am I?” It was a question that Moses had asked of himself. God did not need to ask Moses who he was. He already knew. Without formal or informal introduction the voice from the bush had broken the awestruck silence with the name of his visitor: “Moses, Moses!” God always interacts with humans in a personal way. He has no to-whom-it-may-concern messages. His epistles are never addressed to “Occupant.”

The specifics of Moses’ personal identification are very clear: a child of Levite parents (Exodus 2:1), delivered by a compassionate midwife (1:15-22), judged a “fine child” by his mother (2:2), placed in a river in a rush basket (2:3), rescued by the daughter of the Pharaoh (2:6), and nursed by his own mother (2:10). As he matured, he was sympathetic to his kinsmen (2:11). He struck an Egyptian down who was oppressing a “brother” (2:12). He escaped to Midian (2:15). He was kind to some women who were treated poorly by some shepherds (2:19). Eventually he married Zipporah, the daughter of Jethro, the priest of Midian (3:1). He and his wife had a son named Gershom (2:22).

Some readers may think that all of this personal material about Moses in Exodus is not essential to the story—that all of these details are not necessary for the story to be complete—but these details are needed if one understands that stories of God are always *who* stories. When God calls, he calls a person by name. Before God attaches any fire to a bush anywhere near a person, that person's name is before God along with the details of that person's birth, episodes from his or her youth, sins committed, the name of the other person whom that man or woman may have loved, the names of the person's children and in-laws. All of this information is pertinent to God's call to humans.

His call is never a generic call. It is never "boiler plate." One size does not fit all. God's call is specific, individual, and personal. There are no anonymous pastors. Every one has a name, a history, an association, and a company of acquaintances, and every piece of that information is pertinent to God's design in extending the call. The story of Moses is not complete without all that detail. God always works with *who* stories that are specific, particular, and individual.

One cannot talk about the role of the pastor without filling in a name. Doing so is unscriptural and unrealistic—perhaps even impossible. A pastor without a name is not a pastor. Some might argue that the concept of God's call can be discussed without attaching a specific name, but approaching this concept impersonally alters the reality of the concept. God's call is personal.

All pastors (and truly all persons) must answer for themselves the question that Moses asked: "Who are you?" Peter gave the correct answer to that question and was commended by the Lord, but the question that Peter did not answer well is the one that pastors tend to avoid. It has to do with redemption and the role of suffering that is essential to it. That question, in the long run, would have deep significance for Peter's life and eventual death. It is the "Who am I?" question. Peter's misunderstanding of that question got him into deep trouble with the Lord.

Pastors must not avoid that crucial question because it is the key to the whole issue of the call of God upon a person. For any pastor who will honestly face this identity issue, four aspects of life must be considered: personal history, individual intellectual insights, present spiritual fervor, and physical condition.

The Pastor's Personal History

My own personal history shows how the details of my life are an essential part of my whole story. Readers can anticipate that the same will be true for them.

My name is Millard. As you might guess there is a story behind that name, and the story has much to do with my pastoral perspective. In 1926 the holiness mission in the Mississippi River town of Hull, Illinois, had become the Church of the Nazarene, and the church was in revival with evangelist Millard T. Brandyberry. Harlow and Agnes Reed, my parents, finished farm chores and with their two small boys made their way to the white frame "church house." Singing was lively, preaching was strong and convincing, and the Holy Spirit convicted powerfully. My folks made their way to an altar of prayer, and their doing so affected my life in ways that are beyond my powers of comprehension.

By the time I was born in 1933, Dad had been sanctified wholly and had responded to the call to preach. His acceptance of God's call meant that he had to sell the farm goods and take the little family off to Olivet College where he enrolled in the ninth grade and took the course of study for preachers. Demanding days were made more difficult by the birth of two more babies, one of whom died. A first pastorate and first building program in Ilasco, Missouri, were followed by the organization of a new congregation in nearby Hannibal.

I was a child of the Great Depression, when men walked the streets, looking for work. A tent revival attracted great crowds, and while many were saved, others came to make trouble. Some threatened to cut down the tent, and someone actually drove nails into my father's new automobile tires. Following the tent revival, my father purchased a house with a vacant lot next door, bought two shovels and a wheelbarrow, and strode out into the middle of the lot and began digging a basement. A gentleman who entered the lot from the other direction about the same time asked dad what he was doing. "Building a church!" he said. "Great," said the stranger. "I'll help you." "That's why I bought two shovels," Dad responded.

The whole project was "impossible." That forty-by-sixty building cost a total of \$1,200. Used bricks from a building torn down by the men were cleaned by the women and carried by the chil-

dren. Sycamore posts were cut and stripped by volunteers, and day by day God brought in enough cash to keep the project going. Many worked for their lunch, which my mother, advanced in her pregnancy with me, served each day. Often it was soup made from beans which she had carefully sorted from the “culls.”

The only worker who received a real wage was the bricklayer, and when the walls reached as high as the bottom of the windows, he quit, leaving the project without its principal craftsman. My father was forced to learn to lay brick, and the building always evidenced his lack of skill, but it also showed that his bricklaying improved as the walls went higher.

One day, as the brick work was nearly finished and the walls had almost attained their full height, the scaffolding broke and fell, pitching the workers to the ground and breaking my father's ankle. By the next morning a “peg leg” had been devised for him, and he was back up on the reconstructed scaffolding. The work could not be delayed.

I was born during that construction project. Happy parents decided that their fourth son should carry the name of the man who had proclaimed the full gospel the night they were saved and gave me the name Millard.

All of these details have significantly influenced my perception of pastoral ministry. For thirty years Dad gave his full energy, visited the people, prepared and preached his sermons as “a dying man to dying men,” tended to the sick and dying, loved the children, laughed and scuffled with the youth, paid budgets, took revival meetings on the side, sent kids off to college, always attended annual assemblies, and was known and respected in the community. All the while in his house a boy named Millard watched and listened as God began to prepare his eyes to see things from a pastoral perspective.

My parents knelt on either side of me the night I was sanctified and acknowledged to the home congregation that I had been called to preach. They urged me to go to our church college and later helped my wife and me settle in at seminary.

About that time Dad's declining health took him out of the pastoral ministry. While preaching for an evangelistic series, he wrote me a note. Writing a letter was a rare thing for Dad, but Barbara and I had just accepted our first “student pastorate”

during my seminary years, and he had to send his blessing. That letter is a treasure. I keep it in my desk to this day. Here is the heart of it:

September 29, 1955

Dear Children,

We have been praying for you and Barbara. There is much work to be done. And there is so much you will never get in college or seminary. It can only be gotten alone with God. The minister's life is learning the way to that secret place of prayer and in tears ask God to make you a true shepherd. Jesus said, "Lovest thou me more than these?" "Yea, Lord!" "Feed my sheep and lambs!" Son, that is our job. It will not all be easy. But remember, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." [Mother and I] have the utmost confidence in both of you and I feel that God is leading. So "Where He leads me I will follow." We lay awake after you called and praised God for his goodness. One thing, know your Bible; it is a living word that reaches souls. They are hungry for the word. Study it until it becomes a part of you. Then get alone with Him until your soul is literally bathed with His presence. Then let Him pour you out upon the people. He never fails! His promise is true; what He says He will do! You will meet problems; [being a pastor] is not all sunshine. But just remember we are serving a mighty God. So when the problems come, keep holding His hand. Better still, let Him hold your hand. It is more safe that way.

Love, Dad

I needed my parents' prayers in that first student pastorate. Maybe my parishioners needed their prayers even more. I was twenty-one. Some skill in speaking and an outstanding student honor in my college graduating class had caused me to think that that rural northeast Missouri town would be impressed. They were not. Eight to ten of the faithful would gather each Sunday. I doubt that the investment of a year of my youthful energies was long remembered in that town.

Our first full-time pastorate was in St. Louis where we followed a near-fatal split in a two-year-old congregation. My pred-

ecessor had taken half the congregation and started a “new work” a few blocks from the church. The big moral issues were television and the wearing of wedding bands, make-up, and, for a few particularly conscientious folk, shoulder pads and deodorant. During four years we learned to pray—really pray—a lot. I remember well the afternoon I came to the very quiet conclusion that I was going to lose my mind. I did not know just when, but I knew that sooner or later I would crack and that the men with the white coats would pick up the pieces. I also recall the calm resolve with which I returned to my task, committed to serve as he had called. In time God gave a revival, and many were truly transformed.

The five years we served a wonderful people in Kenosha, Wisconsin, will always be treasured by Barbara and me. Their love for us and the church and the Lord gave us confidence that maybe the Lord could use us after all. In Kenosha the previous pastor was a maiden lady, age seventy-eight, who had retired after serving that congregation for twenty-four years. Every stereotype of the “old, retired pastor” was shattered as she watched from a distance, always boosting the young pastor and praying for his success. When God called us to another place of service, I literally suffered chest pains as we were driving out of the city. How dear those people had become.

Kenosha was a twenty-five-year-old congregation whose people were factory workers, craftsmen, and shopkeepers. Overland Park, Kansas, our next pastorate, was a newly organized church of some twelve to fifteen families who were meeting in the multipurpose room at Osage Elementary School. They were executives and junior executives, including some from the international headquarters of the Church of the Nazarene. Through eight and a half years, two major building programs, and a variety of innovative, new programs and dramatic numerical growth, these dear people and I learned from each other and grew together. Barbara and I were ready to spend the rest of our lives there in that lovely suburban city.

When “The Mother Church of the South” called, I found that I could not say no. Nashville First Church had emerged out of the holiness movement in Middle Tennessee in 1898. The Pentecostal Mission, as it was called in its pre-Nazarene days, had been led by the Reverend J. O. McClurkan, assisted by the

able layman John T. Benson. Upon arrival, I discovered that much of the temperament of the holiness movement remained. There was a great commitment to the spread of scriptural holiness around the world in a nonsectarian mood with a deep concern for the social ills of society. This large, Southern, metropolitan congregation had a strong sense of its own history and destiny. The people in the congregation knew who they were and where they were going, and they welcomed a pastor who was discerning enough to sense that mission and provide leadership for it. Love for missions (both in the world at large and at home), a commitment to service to the needy, and provision for the distressed was already a part of that congregation's character. For seventeen years that congregation and I had great fun together finding ways to structure and carry out that sense of mission.

Personal History—An Essential and Legitimate Factor in Pastoral Perspective

It must be obvious from this summary of my pastoral lifetime that my way of looking at life has been profoundly affected by the components of my story: by the parents who gave me birth, a name, and exposure to a highly contagious sense of mission; by college and seminary professors who modeled godly scholarship; and by four wonderful congregations who, during thirty-five years, allowed me to preach, responded to my personal ministry, followed my administrative leadership, and loved my family and me as dearly as any biological family could.

This writer makes no claim to objectivity; I cannot be anonymous. I cannot talk about the pastorate in the abstract anymore than one could speak of motherhood in that fashion. As soon as I hear *mother*, a picture comes to my mind that is specific and particular. I see a precious face. I feel a soft and tender touch. I smell a sweet aroma. Motherhood is that way. It can't be any other way and it should not be any other way. To take away the face and the touch and the smell may make it scholarly, but it would no longer be motherhood. It may be, at best, some scholarly reflection about motherhood with no fleshing out. No heart. No essence.

The term *pastor* is only an empty cask waiting to be filled, and it will not be filled by concepts or words only. It will be filled by

persons who, like mothers, have a face and a touch and an aroma. A pastor will accumulate these features through the years of experience. They will not be abstract either. They will be specific and particular. Like my story, a pastor's story will have dates and places and faces with names and identification. Some of those specific names and places will bring back pleasant memories and others will bring back memories that are still, years later, agonizingly painful, but God will have taken each of them, wasting none, and used them to prepare that pastor for a particular congregation in a given location for a designated time.

Objective and abstract categories simply are not adequate to describe this dynamic role, this task or function, or the person called *pastor*. While pastoral ministry may be assessed from a purely theoretical point of view, such a view is never adequate. The pastoral perspective is necessarily filled with specific persons and places that give meaning and substance to the task. Both objective and subjective analyses are valid, but the function of personal experience is essential in the acquisition of the pastoral perspective. Pastors who serve in this sacred role (and those who anticipate serving in that role) should examine one by one the long list of experiences in their lives and allow the one who has called them to show them how each experience has or will be used by him as a positive factor in the creation of their individual approaches to the pastoral task to which God has called.

The Individual's Intellectual Insights

Just as personal history is critical to who a pastor is, so, too, is individual intellectual insight. Where one is *intellectually* also configures the shape of one's ministry. The pastor is not anonymous, either personally or intellectually. A confession of faith cannot tolerate the separation of heart and mind. The essential point is that all pastors are significantly influenced by the intellectual insights which they bring to the pastoral role—whatever those influences are.

The role of the pastor's intellectual insights is explored by Daniel D. Williams in *The Minister and the Care of Souls*. Williams looks at Jesus with the eyes of the philosopher¹, identifying him as "the Logos, *the integrating meaning of our existence*" (emphasis mine). He goes on to say,

Every aspect of experience, therefore, presents a challenge to the Christian to learn more of God and his purpose. It is God who is the absolute truth, not theology. No theologian should regard any hypothesis which may possibly lead to knowledge in a spirit of condescension. He may have something to learn about Christ from any human experience. He holds every particular truth to be subject to examination in the light of the ultimate truth which is given us—but not possessed by us—in Jesus Christ.²

Ministers, therefore, need “both the light of faith and the patiently acquired light of empirical understanding if [they] are to serve God as ministers of the church.”³ Pastors need both “faith” and “empirical understanding”—philosophical insight and more. If Christ is “the integrating meaning of [human] existence,”⁴ then all of philosophy, the arts, and the sciences demand the attention of the pastor. Considering that specialists of every exotic variety are part of the congregation, the pastor must be the ultimate Renaissance man. This need is not just a matter of social convenience; it is central to the call to know Christ. All truth—philosophical, scientific, historic, artistic—is equally sacred and the object of reverential regard. Pastors are called to *know Christ* who is the *logos* of creation (John 1:3) and the one who holds all things together (Colossians 1:17), so they cannot disregard the world of science, nor should their concept of Christ be at odds with science, the arts, or philosophy. Integrity of faith and intellect demand that faith and knowledge inform each other.

¹Williams is representative of a number of persons who provided key insights into the dialogue regarding pastoral ministry in the fifties and sixties. Many were theologians by way of the subject matter covered, and they worked with scripture passages much as theologians have done through history. Their presuppositions, however, were philosophical rather than theological. They were sometimes spoken of as philosophical theologians; other times, as theological philosophers. This use of Williams is not intended to argue the validity of the philosopher's perspective but to illustrate that, at least in some degree, it is unavoidable. A pastor's intellectual insights will affect how he or she views pastoral ministry.

²Daniel D. Williams, *The Minister and the Care of Souls* (New York: Harper, 1961), 12-13.

³*Ibid.*, 13.

⁴*Ibid.*

The Pastor's Present Spiritual Fervor

Prior to the beginning of his ministry, Moses asked, “Who am I?” Pastors must know who they are in terms of their spiritual development. For pastors, Moses’ question becomes “Where am I just now in my passionate consciousness of the sovereign Lord in my life?” How pastors answer that question has a long-term impact on their spiritual development and is vital to the effectiveness of their ministry. The answer to that question greatly affects how this material aids them, how their understanding of pastoral ministry develops, how they serve their people wherever they are, how faithfully they carry out their call, and, ultimately, how they will spend eternity. The choice of the terminology *present spiritual fervor* is intentional. A pastor’s spiritual fervor is—at all times—vital.

One of the classics of pastoral ministry can help at this point. In *The Reformed Pastor* Richard Baxter writes about the spiritual state of the pastor and other topics.⁵ “Above all,” he warns, “see that the work of saving grace be thoroughly wrought on your own souls.”⁶ He laments,

It is the calamity of the church to have unregenerate and inexperienced pastors . . . to be sanctified by dedication to the altar as God’s priests, before they are sanctified by hearty dedication to Christ as His disciples; and so to worship an unknown God, and to preach an

⁵Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (London: Epworth Press, 1950), 155. For the better part of three hundred years, *The Reformed Pastor* (1656) was a primary guide to pastors. Baxter wrote it at a time when there was not only much neglect but also considerable wickedness among pastors. A report entitled “The First Century of Scandalous Malignant Priests,” published toward the end of 1643, contains a summary of the first hundred cases considered by this authority with the comment “The following centuries will make a full discovery of the wickednesses that are among us” (15).

As a practicing pastor, Baxter was a part of the tradition that visited in the homes. For Baxter, that visit was characterized by a catechism which examined each member of the family concerning his or her spiritual state. (His routine was to visit a minimum of fourteen homes each week to provide a catechismal examination [21].) This pastoral practice, which came to be known as the “Baxter Method” exerted a tremendous influence on pastoral ministry for the better part of three centuries.

⁶*Ibid.*

unknown Christ, an unknown Spirit, an unknown state of holiness and communion with God, and a glory that is unknown!⁷

Then he pleads, "O brethren, watch, therefore, over your own hearts! Keep out sinful passions and worldly inclinations: keep up the life of faith and love; be much at home; be much with God"⁸ He concludes,

Take heed to yourselves, therefore, lest you should be void of that saving grace of God which you offer to others, and be strangers to the effectual workings of that gospel which you preach; and lest while you proclaim the necessity of a Savior to the world, your own hearts should neglect Him, and you should miss an interest in His saving benefits! Take heed to yourselves, lest you perish, while you call upon others to take heed of perishing; and lest you famish yourselves while you prepare their food . . . Can any reasonable man imagine that God should save men for offering salvation to others, while they refused it themselves; and for telling others those truths which they themselves neglected and abused?

Many a tailor goes in rags, that maketh costly cloths for others; and many a cook scarcely licks his fingers, when he hath dressed for others the most costly dishes. Believe it, brethren, God never saved any man for being a preacher, nor because he was an able preacher; but because he was a justified, sanctified man, and consequently faithful in His Master's work. Take heed, therefore, to yourselves first, that you be that which you persuade your hearers to be, and believe that which you persuade them daily to believe, and have heartily entertained that Christ and Spirit which you offer unto others.⁹

How can we pastors properly weigh the importance of our own spiritual health as we attempt to search for, analyze, and assume a way of looking at things that is like God's? (How can

⁷*Ibid.*, 155.

⁸*Ibid.*, 157.

⁹*Ibid.*, 158.

we avoid childish pride in our infant piety?) How can we remain humble, even prostrate before God, acknowledging our total worthlessness in his kingdom's work but at the same time attain to some level of spiritual maturity so as to discern the true colors of God's eyes as contrasted with the false?

Physical Fitness

Physical fitness is the last of the four basic elements of pastoral ministry, but it might be argued that it is of primary importance. It is certainly true that a physical breakdown will cut off, or at least radically change, the nature of one's ministry. During the fifteen years that I preached twice on Sunday morning, once on Sunday evening, and once on Wednesday evening, I often received letters in which writers inquired how they should plan for two morning worship services. I always responded, "Are you in a good physical conditioning program? Preaching in two morning services is like playing an extra quarter of a football game. You won't feel the pain on Sunday morning. You will feel it on Sunday night." The first concern in preparing for multiple preaching services is the physical condition of the preacher.

Since there are so many conditioning programs available in America, this author will not suggest a particular program; however, any pastor needs to discipline his or her diet to a modest number of calories with a minimum of red meats and starches/sugars and with ample grains, fruits, green vegetables, fish, and fowl.

Some program of regular physical exercise is essential if a pastor is to have the energy for the demanding schedule of the local parish. The 140 X 20 X 4 formula for physical exercise is a sound plan. This formula requires any vigorous activity (preferably walking or jogging) that gets the participant's pulse to 140 and keeps it there for 20 minutes (a total of 30 minutes is a worthy goal and allows time for cool down) at least four times each week.

A modest diet and regular exercise will not only lend energy to one's schedule, it will help ward off disease. When the doctors tried to find a reason why my body survived the disintegration of my liver (See chapter eight), one doctor said, "Your physical conditioning may have saved your life." Maintaining physical fit-

ness is essential for the pastor who wants to survive the physical demands of ministry.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have pressed the case, almost entirely disregarded in the literature on pastoral ministry, that the pastor is a *person*. If I seem to strain the subjective aspect excessively, the reader must remember how often it has been ignored. The study of pastoral ministry is a *who* study, and its *who-ness* is not exhausted by objective philosophical reflection. Ministry is the work of individual persons with individual histories of great complexity, with intellectual insights that vary greatly, with specific and unique spiritual fervor, and with varied degrees of physical fitness. The range of variation that exists in these categories is far, far greater than most persons are inclined to think. Barriers of age, race, sex, confession, cultural orientation, and physical limitation are brought down by the one who has called everyone by name. All the complexity that is part of the pastoral perspective and the pastoral purpose is compounded by the complexities of those persons who hear the call of God and respond to it. No wonder this subject remains challenging to successive generations of pastors. Its complexity is unmatched.

Postscripts

• **The Need to Record One's Story—An Assignment**

I suggest that readers take the time to create their own biographies that include details of childhood, life before Christ, and the change that he has brought. That story should include the influential pastors who have served them and their families and the most meaningful service that they provided. These biographies should include some of those most painful experiences in or out of the church. This writing exercise should include reflection time in which writers allow God to show how he used (or will use) such bad moments to enrich their pastoral perspective, enabling them to serve someone who might not otherwise have been served. God works redemptively by turning bad things into good things, and this action is especially apparent in this wonderfully complex thing called pastoral perspective.

• **Challenges to the *Who Story***

Sooner or later every minister—and every devout Christian—will have an experience that calls into question that person's *who story*. A true story from my early days at Trevecca illustrates my point.

After serving as a pastor for thirty-five years, I accepted the call of Trevecca Nazarene College to become its president. That first October I was deeply involved in the life of the school and inclined, much like the pastor I had so recently been, to create a schedule that was far too tight.

On one October evening I had agreed to greet a group in the Jernigan Dining Hall (Christian college presidents do a great deal of greeting) at 5:45 P.M. At 6:00 P.M. I was scheduled to move to another part of Jernigan and meet with a new class of adult learners in order to provide a message of orientation about the nature of a holiness college. At 7:00 P.M. I needed to be at an area church for revival services. The schedule was doable but close.

I made my first appointment just fine and walked toward my second assignment at exactly six o'clock. As I walked past the elevator and toward the stairway that would take me to my second event, the doors of the elevator opened automatically. I never use the elevator, but on that night I stepped in, thinking that it might save me a few seconds. The doors closed automatically behind me, but when I pushed the button for the third floor, nothing happened. I pushed again and nothing happened. I tried every button. Third floor, first floor, second floor—nothing happened. I pressed the Open Door button. Nothing. A whole lot of nothing. It was time for me to reassess the situation. I reasoned that gears in the dead center possibly were locked, and I discovered that I could jar the elevator box by jumping up and down. Nothing happened. Back to the buttons.

The box that was labeled Telephone was at eye-level. I hated the idea of sending a call for help, but I was already now five minutes behind schedule, so I reached for the box. No telephone. All that the box contained was an empty cough drop box. In my panic I imagined a predecessor who may have lost his or her voice calling for help.

Beneath the telephone box was the red Emergency button. I

quickly pressed it, fearing that it might not work either, but it worked. It rang. And it rang and it rang and it rang; however, at 6:10 P.M. during the dinner hour no one paid any attention to a vagrant bell ringing in the student center.

By that time I was suffering first-level claustrophobia as my enclosed space in the elevator seemed to be getting smaller and smaller. Discovering that I could turn the bell off as well as on, I tried to remember my Boy Scout days and the Morse code so that I could signal my distress. When those memories would not come back, I opted to ring out the tempo of “Victory in Jesus,” hoping that someone would at least identify it as the call of a person in distress.

Halfway through the second verse of “Victory in Jesus,” a female voice from the other side of the door asked, “Are you in there?” With mixed embarrassment and relief, I answered, “Well, I haven’t gone any place.” Then she asked, “Who are you?” I was (and still am) disinclined to use the term *president* to refer to myself (It seems officious), but by then I had reached third-level claustrophobia, and I was ready to exert all the authority that I possessed. I responded in a loud voice, “I am President Reed!” After a very brief silence she countered, “Oh, you are not! Who are you—really?” I responded, “Well, whoever I am, I want out of here!” For three long minutes I heard nothing more from her, and then she said, “Oh, I forgot to tell you: I have gone for help.”

The story has no great conclusion. A technician soon found that the problem was a circuit breaker, and once he flipped it, the door opened automatically. As I walked out, the young female student who had heard my call said with disbelief, “Well, it is President Reed, isn’t it?”

After telling this funny story on myself several times, I finally heard it for the parable that it is. At one time or another all of us find ourselves boxed in. Pushing and jumping does no good. Even the expected lines of spiritual communication fail. We hit the panic button hard, and the bell sounds loud and clear to us, but no one seems to pay any attention—even in the household of faith. About that time the voice from the other side of the door says, “Who are you?” And we respond, with shaky confidence, “I am a child called of God!” And the voice responds, “Oh, you are not! Who are you—really?”

I remind you that when you are enclosed like this the problem is simply a circuit breaker. In God's good time the circuit breaker will be flipped, the door will open, and even the voice of the skeptic will confess, "Well, it *is* a child called of God, isn't it?"

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CHAPTER THREE

The Pastor Has a Distinctive Purpose

What is the essence of the pastoral task? What is it that a pastor does that if he or she should fail to do it would make the work no longer be authentically pastoral? What does a pastor do?

Chapter one in this book is an attempt at providing strong hints toward that purpose. The recognition of the eyes of God as creative, incarnational, and redemptive established some of the essential ingredients of that purpose and resulted in two conclusions. First, the personal aspect of pastoral ministry is a valid one. Second, the delineation of the pastoral function as “healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling” identifies practices through which the pastoral purpose could be carried out. A statement of the pastoral purpose, however, requires more definition. The following is a beginning place: **The pastor’s purpose is to discern and disclose meaning from within the midst of the chaos of an actual setting so as to effect reconciliation.**

In order to fulfill that discerning, disclosing, reconciling role in the chaos, a pastor must develop three sets of skills. First, a pastor must have skills of discernment by which to see meaning when it may not be visible to anyone else. In other words, the pastor must *do theology*. Second, a pastor must develop disclosure skills. A pastor must acquire all of the practical “crafts” of the trade in order to be able to disclose the meaning that is so elusive to the eyes of the parishioner. Third, a pastor must practice “in the midst of the chaos” of many settings. Each particular “chaos” is like no other. For this reason meaning cannot be mass-discerned. I am not saying that nothing can be learned from the observation of other pastoral settings, but I am saying that each chaos setting is unique, demanding specific and unique discernment and disclosure skills.

Furthermore, the matrix or source of purpose is chaos that is specific and particular. That matrix cannot be entered into by one who is anonymous, but it demands a specific person who is fettered by all the complex and particular factors that were discussed in chapters one and two of this study. Should this sound confusing, let me phrase it in more familiar terminology: The pastoral perspective must emerge out of death and resurrection,

not only that of the Lord Jesus Christ but also that of the pastor himself. Only when the hopeless chaos of a particular situation is entered into by a specific person called of God, can that person begin to see meaning and in so doing begin to acquire the eyes of God. Persons may ask for the eyes of God in order that they can go to the chaos of this world and there disclose meaning; however, the Savior calls persons to go to the chaos of the world in order to feel its hopelessness and there, in the middle of that hopelessness, felt really and radically by us, begin to discern his meaning—and in the practice begin to develop the eyes of God. In that process the person learns three very important lessons: (1) that natural sight is not adequate, (2) that the new insight comes only by a special gift from God (revealed theology), and (3) that the gift can only be granted in the midst of hopelessness of one's natural vision.

An incident that took place in Piedmont, Alabama, illustrates the need for pastors to develop new eyes. On Palm Sunday morning, March 27, 1994, a deadly tornado swept through Piedmont, Alabama, demolishing the stately, old sanctuary of the Piedmont United Methodist Church and injuring many. Twenty members of the church were killed, including the four-year-old daughter of Dale and Kelly Clem, the co-pastors of the church. The tragic account made network news across the nation.

A week later one television station did a follow-up story about the Easter morning service of the congregation that had been so devastated just a Sunday earlier. Twenty funerals had been shared. Twenty families had grieved deeply. Some injured ones were still in the hospital, but most gathered in a make-shift, open-air "sanctuary" at the edge of the rubble that had been their sanctuary for so long. Yellow tape warned the curious not to stray close to the rubble. Folding chairs were lined in friendly rows. The pulpit, scratched but intact, faced the small congregation. As a chord organ lifted the familiar melody of "He Lives," the decimated congregation began to worship.

I worshiped in this service as I sat in a motel room in nearby Gatlinburg, Tennessee. As I did so, I realized that three distinct sets of eyes were part of the setting. Each is legitimate to the telling of the story. One set of eyes is pastoral. The other two are important but not pastoral.

Spectator Eyes

From the comfort of my motel room, I watched this moving service and was deeply touched by it. I did so as a sympathetic spectator. I was not a citizen of Piedmont. I was not in that location. I enjoyed the illusion of being in the midst by way of the miracle of television. As a spectator I could hear the singing, catch a two-dimensional view of the ruins, and fill in the detail with my imagination.

As a spectator, I could and did judge the cameraman. I wish he had not made the clip so short. I would have liked to catch the scene from a different angle. I wanted to see Dale as well as Kelly, but those responses are part of the nature of spectator eyes. They can watch and sympathize or criticize. They are important. I would not have experienced this vicarious moment except by way of my spectator eyes, but they are not pastoral eyes.

Technician Eyes

My criticism of the cameraman got me to thinking about him. He was anonymous but very important, even essential, to my experience of the story. A key aspect of the disclosure task was his. He was more actively involved than I. He was in the midst. He had made his way to Piedmont and had gone to considerable expense and inconvenience in order to share this experience. He had also given a significant portion of his life to learn the finer aspects of his specialty. He had learned how to operate the camera; which lenses to use to catch the right shades of light and shadow; and how to catch the proper balance of sound, how to create the impact picture, how to splice them with skill in order to create the total affect. Technician eyes are important. Training institutions give their energy to creating highly skilled technicians. Without a person who possesses and can use this skill, the story will not get out. Without that kind of technician, I would not have known of Piedmont nor been able to repeat this story. The eyes of the technician, however, are not the eyes of the pastor.

Pastor Eyes

After the congregation had sung "He Lives," a lay leader pre-

sented their pastor, the Reverend Kelly Clem. She walked to the pulpit that had been dragged from the rubble. It showed the scratches from the destruction. Her first words were these: "There is no place in all the world that we would rather be this morning than right here with one another." Then she began to quote, apparently from memory, phrases from Romans 8:35ff: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.'" As she spoke, the technician switched to a picture of her four-year-old daughter in what must have been her Easter dress, all frills and lace. Below the picture was the explanation that the little girl had been one of those killed by the collapse of the church building. Pastor Clem continued: "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth" About this time the cameraman zoomed in on Kelly Clem's face, and for the first time, I could see that her eyes were both blackened and that scratch marks marred her cheek. She concluded the scripture, ". . . nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Pastors' eyes are blackened. They have shared the assault of the elements, have taken their share of the grief or injury, and have emerged to confess the faith that has not circumvented the storm but has gone through the storm with its share of suffering and losses.

The eyes of the spectator and the technician are important and essential to the telling of the story, but the eyes of the pastor are blackened. They have shared the experiences of the congregation and emerged, through losses and scars, to confess the faith. The Piedmont story is more dramatic than that of the usual church chaos, but the essential ingredients are the same: The chaos is shared in an intimate and vulnerable climate in faith; that faith finds an expression that is made authentic to the congregation by the sharing; and such chaos requires discernment from within "the midst" accompanied by disclosure skills.

CHAPTER FOUR

A Pastor Affirms Meaning in the Midst of the Local Congregation

As noted in the preceding chapter, pastoral discerning and disclosing takes place in an actual setting. The task of affirmation is authentic only as it is in context, and it cannot be redemptive unless it is also incarnate. A consideration of several local settings will reveal aspects of the pastoral purpose at work there. The first setting is the local congregation, and the aspects of the pastor's role to be examined are authority, identity, and community.

Authority

Authority is a term that is familiar to persons in the ministry and to those whom pastors serve. Pastors are fairly comfortable with it or, as in the case of the student, eager to have it. At the time of ordination, the official of the church usually says something like "Take thou authority to preach the Word, administer the sacraments, etc." Such a charge is based on the belief that "[t]he elder is to rule well . . . in the name of and in subjection to Jesus Christ, the great head of the church."¹

While this function seems simple enough, it has been responsible for some of my most troubling thoughts through the years. My long-term reflection pretty well boiled down to this question: "How does anyone have the audacity to claim the eyes of God, discern meaning in the midst of the chaos, and disclose that meaning by preaching the gospel?" Considering the failing of the preacher (of his mind, of his morals, of his person), considering the magnitude of the task (the discerning and disclosing of meaning in the midst of the chaos), and the seriousness of the results (eternal life or death), how could anyone do that? How could one mind presume to communicate with a congregation of minds with a wide variety of backgrounds? How could one sinner person rebuke the offenses of another sinner person? What audacity!

¹*Manual 2001-2005*, Church of the Nazarene, par. 429.1.

Authority Bases

While most persons are more or less sensitive to that audacity, pastors must establish an authority base for ministry. I have observed five distinct authority bases which persons who would “take authority” have used to minister within the congregation.

• **Intellect**

Often a pastor assumes an authority that calls to the academy for support. It often relates directly to the number of years in advanced training or the number of earned degrees. Christian college professors are forced to lean on this base by accrediting associations. Pastors with intellectual inclinations will often find this base attractive and may pursue advanced degrees in order to strengthen it. Some are able to build such a base by independent study and/or acknowledged writing and so are recognized as “scholars” even though they do not have advanced degrees.

The intellectual dimension of the ministry is generally considered essential although in some local congregational settings individuals might consider it a barrier. It can give itself to artificiality. Witness the proliferation of “honorary doctorates” from question-mark schools or the sophomoric inclinations that some have when they drop the name of scholars or Greek terms in order to impress. In spite of all these inherent weaknesses, the intellectual authority base for ministry is not to be scorned.

• **Administration**

Elective office does lend an air of authority. Within a local congregation, board members, committee chairmen, et cetera, do carry a strong influence. Of course, the pastor, as the ex-officio member (sometimes chairman) of every committee, holds a position of unexcelled administrative authority in the local congregation.

This flow chart of authority is complicated, however, when it is overlaid with the hierarchy of the church. In that change of community the local pastor finds himself only one among many. In the hierarchy it is the district superintendent who assumes the role of authority. Of course, this hierarchy, too, is changed when overlaid by the general church.

This base of authority is important. More accurately, it is

inescapable. It is a part of the system that is essential to the carrying out of the work of the church. There are no exceptions. Sometimes those congregations that claim that they are exempt because they are non-structured are the most structured. These congregations must be forgiven because there are no sinless ones who can cast the first stone at those churches. Integrity demands the acknowledgement that the administrative authority base is inclined toward hierarchy and is given to levels of allegiance and subservice.

- **Charisma**

This authority base is difficult to define but easy to recognize. Some people simply have the ability to speak or influence in such a way that their words carry weight. They have strong persuasive powers over a congregation or small groups within a congregation. They have “the gift” of strong influence. Many pastors have this authority base naturally and develop it through the years of their ministry.

- **Private Revelation**

Christians believe that God speaks and that he speaks to mortals. We also believe that he speaks to a particular mortal at a particular time, so it ought to be expected that one might take personal revelation as an authority base. (Did not John Wesley list personal experience as one of the means by which the truth might be confirmed?)

Pressed to the corner, most of us pastors would deny being mystics, but we would still confirm that we are in the ministry and assigned to a particular assignment of service because, deep within our souls, we believe that God has called us.

This authority base, like the others, may be abused by egotists who claim that their channel to God is the only clear channel so that, once they have spoken, *all the world is to keep silent*. Nevertheless, the authority base of private revelation is not to be ignored.

- **Experience**

Experience is an authority base which, strangely, I tended to deny during the days of my youth. As the years have gone by, however, I have come to acknowledge that there is authority that accrues with the years of experience. The voice of the older pas-

tor is often stronger in gatherings of decision makers. Such an authority base seems scriptural (see Timothy 5:1) and natural to us pastors.

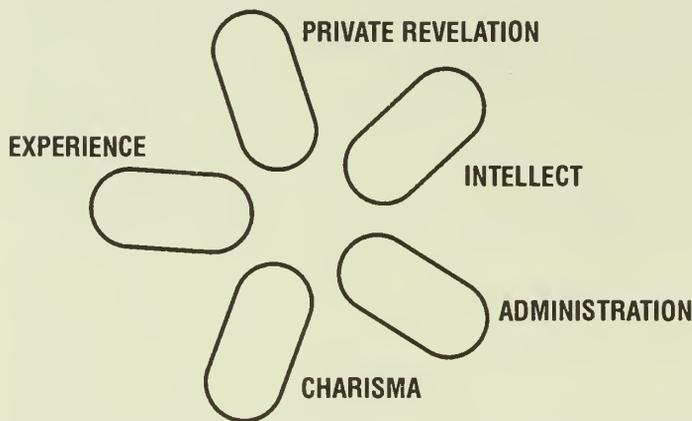


Diagram 1

The authority bases—intellect, administration, charisma, experience, revelation

These five perspectives make distinct claims to authority. While they are, at least to my mind, distinct, they do overlap like spheres, providing a variety of options within which an individual pastor may identify himself. An ideal balance might be judged to be a perfect mixture of intellect, administration, charisma, experience, and revelation. Following honest reflection, almost all pastors would find themselves within some combination that would be stronger in one area and weaker in another. (The model provides a way for readers to visualize their own authority base.) Each of these authority bases has a certain legitimacy for given areas of service. Parishioners and pastors often see them used in the life of the local church.

The more serious question is the following: Is this authority base, by whatever combination, adequate for the proclamation of God's Word? Is it sufficient for doing such an audacious thing as discerning and disclosing meaning in the midst of life's chaos? The immediate and strong answer, drawn from the pastoral perspective, is NO! NO! NO! Not intellect. Not administrative power. Not charisma. Not experience. Not even call. The *Manual* states the solution well. The elder is to "rule well . . . in the name of and *in subjection to Jesus Christ*" (emphasis mine).²

²*Ibid.* Pastoral authority must be in subjection to Jesus Christ. Peter was not looking at things as God does. He could not deal with Christ's definition of suffering as a part of the plan of redemption. Consider the passage from Matthew 16:21-25.

In a conversation with the disciples, Jesus captured the essence of the authority issue when he said,

“You know that in the world, rulers lord it over their subjects, and their great men make them feel the weight of authority; *but it shall not be so with you*. Among you, whoever wants to be great must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be the willing slave of all—*like the Son of Man*; he did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give up his life as a ransom for many.”

(Matthew 20:25-28 NEB, emphasis mine)

Authority bases can be carnal. Humans are inclined to *rule well* but *not in subjection to Jesus Christ*. When subjection to Jesus Christ is absent, each authority base becomes carnal. When an authority base is used for self-aggrandizement through platforms for manipulative power plays over those in subjection to a pastor, the resulting situation will reveal that the pastor is looking at things as man does and not as God does.

Intellectuals who do not look at things as God does become arrogant, looking with a superior attitude toward the less educated brother or sister or the ignorant but earnest folk of the congregation. These arrogant intellectuals tend to retreat from encounter with the unlearned in order to preserve the intellectual community, not recognizing that there is only one community and that it is only partially intellectual. They delight in logic. They find it hard to tolerate illogical things like conversion, incarnation, and resurrection.

Administrators who do not see things as God sees them develop the Caesar syndrome, which makes it easy for a pastor to fall prey to pride, then to arrogance, then perhaps to something even worse. Since it is the pastor's authority that is being questioned, the challenge must be met by the pastor's exerting an increasing emphasis on that authority, that right to rule. A split begins to develop between the minister's role as overseer and the other role as shepherd. As the split widens, the minister functions less and less as shepherd to those whom he or she begins to see as his or her enemies and the enemies of God. The greatest tragedy is when the shepherd attacks one of the sheep. We must always remember Peter's admonition: “Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care . . . not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock . . .” (1 Peter 5:1-4).

The charismatic who does not look at things as God does is inclined to manipulate. If the charismatic person is especially good at manipulation, he or she will probably make big-time television. What extraordinary gifts of communication and persuasion God has granted some men. These gifts may easily be misused—not only by national figures but by local pastors who forget that they are to rule well in the name of and in subjection to Jesus Christ.

The minister whose authority is based on private revelation or experience may be inclined to say, “I know more about God’s truth and God’s will than do my people. Moreover, I am more spiritual than they are. I am their pastor and they expect me to be more spiritual. Given my greater proximity to God, it must follow that any member of the congregation who is properly submissive to God will also be submissive to me. After all, who knows the will of God better than I?”

Although each of these authority bases seems legitimate at first glance, closer inspection reveals them to be grossly illegitimate and flagrantly carnal when they are not in subjection to Jesus Christ. None of them, nor any combination of them, can provide, in and of itself, the proper platform for discerning and disclosing the truths of God.

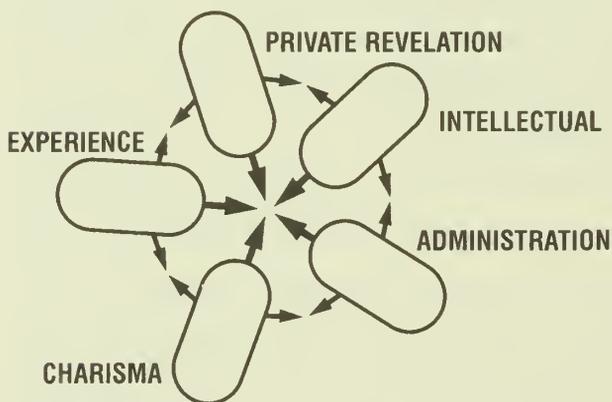


Diagram 2
The authority bases in conflict

In 1 Corinthians 1:17-2:5 (KJV) Paul discusses authority bases, and one can almost watch him go through the list of proposed reasons for authority and discount each one of them. To the intellectual, he suggests that were he to preach in wisdom “. . . the cross of Christ would be made of none effect” (1:17). He reminds the administrator that God chose the “weak things of

the world . . .” (1:27). To the one with personal charisma, revelation, or experience, he points out that God has chosen the “ . . . things which are despised and things which are not” (1:28).

In the light of this passage, the important questions are these: Who of us pastors is called because of his or her intellect? Who because of personality? Who of us is invested with the holy privilege because of his or her administrative skills? It is almost blasphemous to even ask the questions, yet our carnal temptation is to assume one or more of these authority bases as a fitting platform from which to preach the gospel of the despised and suffering Savior. Paul admonishes us to

Let your bearing towards one another arise out of your life in Christ Jesus. For the divine nature was his from the first; yet he did not think to snatch at equality with God, but made himself nothing, assuming the nature of a slave. Bearing the human likeness, revealed in human shape, he humbled himself, and in obedience accepted even death—death on a cross. Therefore God raised him to the heights and bestowed on him the name above all names, that at the name of Jesus every knee would bow—in heaven, on earth, and in the depths—and every tongue confess, “Jesus Christ is Lord,” to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11 NEB)

Whatever else may be said about pastoral authority, it must be in subjection to Christ, or else it reveals itself to be carnal and to be no appropriate base from which to discern and disclose the truths of God.

Five words and questions emerge from this focus on authority.

1. Authority

Question: How does anyone have the audacity to claim that he or she can discern and disclose meaning in the midst of this chaos?

Answer: One has the audacity to discern and disclose meaning in the midst of this chaos only by the authority granted (tenuously and specifically) by the Jesus who is “the body of Christ” and “the least of these.”

2. Identity

Question: How does a person claim to discern and disclose, et cetera?"

Answer: A person can claim to discern and disclose only as that person divests himself or herself of his or her rights or claims and then identifies radically with the Jesus who is "the body of Christ" and "the least of these."

3. Community

Question: How can Christians love one another? This question needs to be changed to *Whom are we called to love?*

Answer: Christians are called to love all who are "the body of Christ" and "the least of these."

4. Mission

Question: Why are we Christians here in the midst of this chaos?

Answer: Christians are in this chaos in order to discern and disclose meaning so that they can effect reconciliation between the alien forces.

5. Means

Question: How can we Christians accomplish this goal?

Answer: Christians can accomplish this goal by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. The message of reconciliation can be delivered only through the person and voice of those who have been crucified and resurrected.

Does the Church need the intellectual? Yes. Yes, many times over. The intellect is not the enemy of God. Christ places no premium on ignorance. The Church needs its very best minds developed to the maximum; however, if the Church's best minds want to facilitate reconciliation, they must—because intellect in its natural condition is inclined to be arrogant—leave behind some authority and identity and bow before the cross.

Is there need for administration? Certainly, the very best. Administrators, too, must find their way to the cross and there lay down their vaunted authority.

Is there a place for charisma? Of course there is. It is, after all, a gift from God. On the other hand, it so often charms the

recipient who is inclined to be fascinated by the gift and thereby abandons the Giver. Charisma must be sanctified or else it becomes an alien force within the fellowship, a devil with carnal designs.

Is there a place for personal revelation? Yes, personal revelation is how God calls persons, talks to us. Even personal revelation must be attached to the cross or else it becomes a mystic claim to certitude that abandons faith for spiritual arrogance.

Is there a place for experience? Yes, but it must be experience that causes a person to be humble and willing to listen to the experience of another.

Only those who are dead and resurrected may carry out this ministry. Only the enabling power of the Holy Spirit is adequate. Sanctification, entire and continuous, is required. The holy office must be filled by holy persons.

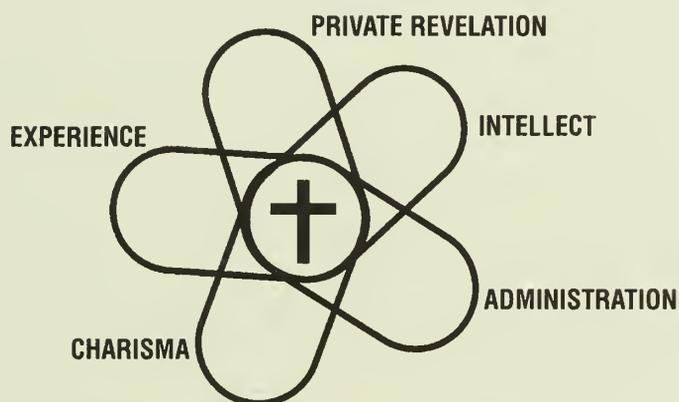


Diagram 3

The authority bases in submission to Christ

Works Cited

Manual 2001-2005. Church of the Nazarene.

CHAPTER FIVE

Jesus Is Lord

The following text was adapted from the address I presented to the Faith, Learning, and Living Conference on June 17, 2001, at Mount Vernon Nazarene University. In attendance were faculty members and administrators of all Nazarene colleges and universities in the United States.

Few, if any, passages proclaim the sovereign majesty of Jesus Christ as does Colossians 1:13-14. During my mature years, as pastor and now as president of Trevecca Nazarene University, this portion from Colossians simply will not let me go. It works me over. It fills me with awe. I want to draw some covenant statements from it as well as point out some results from that covenant statement.

In the New English Bible this passage reads this way: "He rescued us from the domain of darkness and brought us away into the kingdom of his dear Son, in whom our release is secured and our sins forgiven." Released from the guilt of sin, believers are forgiven; released from the power of sin's domain, believers are sanctified. The Scripture declares it. We are the delivered ones, and our confession is this one: He is the Lord of our spiritual life.

During my thirty-five years as a pastor, I observed that Satan most often attacked believers in the area of their confidence. Paul, the apostle, is always declaring that Jesus Christ is Lord, but first he begins with his own experience of the encounter on the road to Damascus where the Lord said, "I am Jesus whom you persecuted."

Christ is the one who has rescued us, has delivered us. This truth means that I will refuse to be the judge of my own spiritual condition. I am not the agent of salvation; I am the recipient of salvation. He rescued me. He rescued us. I will not assess today's spiritual climate. One of my favorite quotations from Bob Benson is this one: "We have some good days, and we have some bad days, and we don't know which is which." When we do assess just where we are spiritually, the good days and bad days intermingle. He is the Lord of my spiritual life. When Satan tries

to get me to cast aside my faith, I simply say to him, as I would if I were I working at McDonald's, "Pardon me, sir, I'm not the management here. You need to talk to the manager."

Our theological father, John Wesley, spoke of prevenient grace and the work of God the Father through Jesus Christ. Wesley's Covenant Service includes phrases like this one:

If I had come in my own name, Thou mightest well have put me back; but since I come at the command of the Father, reject me now, Lord, help me, save me.

I come, Lord. I believe, Lord. I throw myself upon Thy grace and mercy. I cast myself upon Thy blood. Do not refuse me. I have not whither else to go. Here I will stay. On thee will I trust, and rest, and venture myself. On Thee I lay my hope for pardon, for life, for salvation. If I perish, I perish on Thy shoulders. If I sink, I sink in thy vessel. If I die, I die at Thy door. Bid me not go away, for I will not go.¹

He is the Lord of my salvation. He is the Lord of my spiritual life. Wesley goes on to say,

Lord, put me to what Thou wilt; rank me with whom Thou wilt. Put me to doing; put me to suffering. Let me be employed for Thee, or laid aside for Thee, exalted for Thee or trodden under foot for Thee. Let me be full, let me be empty. Let me have all things; let me have nothing. I freely and heartily resign all to thy pleasure and disposal.²

That's radical grace. That's radical prevenient grace.

A few years ago when William Willamon spoke on campus, Jim Mahan, Trevecca's vice president for church relations, picked up Willamon at the airport. Thinking that he should prepare Willamon for Trevecca, Jim said, "We're pretty conservative people." Dr. Willamon said, "You're not conservative; you're radical. You believe that Jesus Christ is truly the Son of God, that he suffered and bled and died, that he was laid in a tomb and on the third day and rose again, and that, because he lives, you too may live with a life that is abundant. That's radical."

¹John Wesley. Covenant Service in *Wesley Hymns*, compiled by Ken Bible (Lillenas Publishing Co.: Kansas City, MO, 1982), A 6.

²*Ibid.*, A 7-8.

I declare to you from this text that Jesus is the Lord of our spiritual life; therefore, I will praise him at all times for rescuing me from the guilt and dominion of sin. I am suggesting—no, I am declaring—that since he has delivered us, we ought to be filled with praise. The words of an old song express my praise:

Blessed be the name of Jesus! I'm so glad He took me in. He's forgiven my transgressions; He has cleansed my heart from sin. I will praise Him! I will praise Him! Praise the Lamb for sinners slain! Give Him glory, all ye people, For His blood can wash away each stain.³

We who are the rescued ones must just praise the Lord. The psalmist said, "I will bless the Lord at all times. His praise shall continually be in my mouth." Wesley expressed his praise with these words: "Oh, for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise, The glories of my God and King, The triumphs of His grace!" How I love these songs, but there's a bit of mischief in me as I recall some of my own traditions. My dad sang, "Happy on the way, happy on the way, praise the Lord, I'm happy on the way." These words are not nearly as profound, but some of you will remember this old chorus: "I'm in right, outright, upright, downright happy all the time. I'm in right, outright, upright, downright happy all the time since Jesus Christ came in and cleansed my heart from sin. I'm in right, outright, upright—no, I'm happy all the time." The person who is really rescued should not be embarrassed to sing happy songs. I have the right to claim the sovereignty of Jesus Christ on behalf of my spiritual welfare and to praise his name.

Colossians 1:15-16a reads, "He is the image of the invisible God; his is the primacy over all created things. In him everything in heaven and on earth was created." That's the scripture, and the confession is "He is Lord of the universe." I affirm the Christian intellectual traditions, but I recognize that all scholarship, all invention, all discovery, all exploration—which is truth—is God's truth. Christians are to have a passion for learning based on the supposition that all truth is God's truth.

I love a statement attributed to President Kiper of Free University in Amsterdam, who said in his inaugural address, "There is not one square inch in the whole domain of human

³Margaret J. Harris. "I Will Praise Him."

existence over which Christ who is sovereign that does not cry, 'MINE!' So as Christians, we have to look at every square inch in the whole domain of human existence and cry out, 'HIS!'"⁴

Consequently, every science lab is hallowed with his presence. Every student of the sciences can enter the lab with a confidence that the created universe will demonstrate an order which, if discovered, may be utilized to bring reconciliation to an otherwise chaotic situation.

I ask all of you, I exhort all of you, I plead with all of you, but I especially ask you whose specialty is science: Can you believe that in him everything in heaven and on earth was created and that he holds it together? Talk about radical! Can you dare to believe that a little-known prophet from a remote section of a remote part of the earth, who lived some thirty or so years, is the one who put it all together and holds it all together? Can you dare to believe that he's the Lord of the universe? Paul declared that Jesus is the Lord of the universe, and Paul made that declaration within twenty years of the resurrection of Jesus. Because Jesus is the Lord of the universe, a Christian can resolve, "I will acknowledge his power in all created things."

Some five years ago you prayed for me because you thought I would die. The word of the physicians was that I had to have a transplant within six to eleven days, but the doctors did not truly believe that I would live to have the surgery. You prayed, and my local pastor anointed me, and I was healed.

My healing gave me trouble. At first, in the reflective hours after consciousness, I thanked God for doing his miracle in my body, but then after the passing of two or three weeks, I found myself feeling depressed. As an old, experienced pastor, I should have known that depression could follow such an experience. I wondered why God healed me and not Julie?⁵ Why me and not Amy?⁶ I was out walking one evening, trying to regain strength in a weak, weak body. I was doing it, by the way, on a

⁴Quoted by Chuck Colson in a speech to the annual meeting of the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities at Washington, D.C., February 2000.

⁵Julie Runyan, wife of a Trevecca professor, died after a courageous battle with brain cancer. Many had prayed for her healing.

⁶Amy Porter, who was (at the time of this writing) the daughter of a district superintendent in the Church of the Nazarene, died of cancer following a great outpouring of prayer on her behalf.

Sunday evening about six o'clock, the time when church usually begins and when for thirty-five years I had made my way to the pulpit and with strength and vigor tried to proclaim the gospel and get people saved. On that night I was walking with a weak body and a new liver in my body, and I was giving God a hard time because he had caused the miracle.

I stopped along the way in a neighbor's driveway where there was a patch of spring wildflowers. It was mid-April, and the leaves were new and fresh and pale green. Tennessee columbine was growing beside the driveway, and the blooms were beautiful. I was captured by those flowers. I stood there for a while, and a bumblebee flew up, did a 360-degree loop between my nose and those flowers, and then flew off in the other direction. For me, the experience had the hand of God on it. You see, bumblebees are too heavy to fly because their wings are too short. The Lord said to me, "That bee flies because I tell him to, and I do these new flowers every spring without your help, thank you. And doing you a new liver was no big deal." And then he said to me, "You've made an idol of the rational mind. You want to understand everything. Now bring that idol and lay it at the foot of the cross where you must deposit all your idols."

The experience was so deeply moving to me, I stood weeping, and God chided me a little bit, reminding me of the words from Job: "Where were you when I created the world and when I formed the leviathans of the deep?" Then when he had me in a better mood, he seemed to say, "We saw you in your misery, and I said to one of the heavenly host, 'Well, there's Millard. I tell you what let's do. Let's heal him. It will be fun watching him try to figure it all out.'"

Acknowledging that he is the Lord of the universe and that his power is revealed in the universe, we then can anticipate his activity in the land as well and in the sanctuary. Then we can sing, "Fairest Lord Jesus! Ruler of all nature! O thou of God and man the Son! Thee will I cherish, Thee will I honor, Thou, my soul's glory, joy, and crown!"⁷ We lift these words: "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty! All Thy works shall praise Thy name in earth, and sky, and sea."⁸ Verse 16 of the scripture passage says, "Not only things visible but also the invisible orders of

⁷"Fairest Lord Jesus."

⁸Reginald Hekes. "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty."

thrones, sovereignties, authorities, and powers: the whole universe has been created through him and for him. And he exists before everything, and all things are held together in him.” He is the Lord of the visible, but he is the Lord of the invisible order of thrones, sovereignties, and authorities. He is the Lord of history.

In his message at Mars Hill in Acts 17:26 (NEB), Paul says, “He created every race of men of one stock . . . He fixed the epochs of their history and the limits of their territory.” The confession is “He is the Lord of history.” These successive confessions grow more and more difficult. Is he the Lord of my spiritual condition? Encouraged by my pastor, I can dare to believe that. The Lord of the universe? There are universal laws. Some call them the laws of science. Christians call them Jesus Christ at work in the world. The Lord of history? Is he the Lord of thrones? Dominions and powers? CNN? Presidential elections? The apostle proclaims that he is the Lord of the invisible realms, thrones, dominions, and powers, the world, egos, individual ideas, and rebellions. Paul says that Christ is the Lord over all of this.

I have been reflecting on Christ as the Lord of history for a couple of years. The words of Rudyard Kipling have helped me. Kipling said that there are “parenthesis times” in which one era has passed and the next era has not yet been born. In those parenthesis times, humans are uncertain just how the universe and how society will go.

The observation made by Charles Dickens in *A Tale of Two Cities*—“It was the best of times; it was the worst of times”—can be proven with examples from history. For example, while the printing press brought the best of times in making the Scriptures more available, that invention also brought the worst of times: history was transformed, and the authority of the home was challenged. Then pamphlets were circulated and wars arose. The Hundred Years’ War, the worst of times. When God was at work in the Reformation and the pamphlets were sent to the German princes, God did a mighty act. In the midst of the worst of times, God does his “best of times” thing. He is the Lord of history. The Industrial Revolution brought major change. Wealth was no longer in land. Instead, wealth was in currency. Capital was no longer in manpower or horse power. Because of

the Industrial Revolution machines did the work of many men, many horses, and the result was chaos. People left the farms and migrated to cities. Slaves or children were needed to run the machines, resulting in the breakdown of the home. Pollution harmed the environment. During those worst of times, God raised up the Wesley brothers and others, and the machines made possible the modern missionary movement when those machines were used to transport persons around the world. From those worst of times, the holiness movement emerged, labor laws were enacted, programs for helping the poor and the elderly were begun, slavery in America was ended, and institutions like the Salvation Army and the YMCA and the YWCA were established. The worst of times became the best of times because God is the Lord of history and is at work.

Had we the time, representatives of our older schools could recount a story about how the school was almost lost. For Trevecca, it was not almost lost; it was lost. A scattering of file cabinets stored in one room was all that belonged to the school; the school even lost the privilege of calling itself Trevecca College. Those stories are part of the worst of times/best of times. When our schools arrived at the century mark, as Trevecca did, and we started writing our stories, most often the stories are worst-of-times/best-of-times stories. It is interesting that we want to tell those stories of the worst of times. Out of desperation we held on, and faculty kept working even though there were no salaries. When it seemed like there was no hope, God was at work so that when these parenthesis times, which seemed like the worst of times when they were actually happening, became the best of times when viewed from some distance. Because he is the Lord of history, we will anticipate his redemptive activity in all events.

Because he is the Lord of my spiritual life, then I will praise him at all times. Because he is the Lord of the universe, Christians should acknowledge his power in all created things. Because he is Lord of history, Christians should anticipate his redemptive activity in all events.

Colossians 1:18 (NEB) introduces a more complex idea: "He is, moreover, the head of the body, the Church. He is its origin, the first to return from the dead, to be in all things alone supreme." Now the confession is this one: He is the Lord of the

Church. This confession is a tougher one.

Lord of my spiritual life? By faith I can believe that he is. The universe? Well, there does seem to be a natural law. Lord of history? That one is tougher because there are different opinions and there are rebellious men. But Lord of the Church? Did Paul ever go to a General Assembly? Did he ever get voted out? Did he ever see how vicious congregations can get? Nevertheless, Jesus is the Lord of the Church—local people.

Since the confession is that he is the Lord of the Church, we will expect him to precede us through every crucifixion. He precedes us through the crucifixions into life eternal. It takes resurrection power to bring victory over these crucifixions. We do not avoid the crucifixions that are basic to us.

Last night's testimony from a member of this group brought me to tears. The speaker talked about the blessings of God upon her life. I was that woman's pastor when she was married. In fact, I performed her wedding ceremony. I also served on the disciplinary board that took credentials from her husband, and I watched her when she came back to the church where I was pastor, came back with her three little boys, all of them even smaller than she. I watched her as she pressed her way to the choir loft and sang in the choir. Last night we saw the glow of resurrection on her face, but I saw firsthand when she endured the dark shadows of crucifixion. Christians are not exempt from the crucifixions, but there is one who has preceded us through crucifixion to assure eternal life. From time to time we see the glory of God upon a face, and we know that these are not the exempt ones; these are the ones who give evidence when Jesus is the Lord of the Church. He is the one who precedes us and leads us into life eternal. His leading is the key to what you and I do.

The words of Henri Nouwen explain what happens when Christ is Lord of the Church:

If teaching (and) preaching . . . are acts of service that go beyond the level of professional expertise, it is precisely because in these acts the minister is asked to lay down his own life for his friends It is exactly this creative weakness that gives the ministry its momentum Teaching becomes ministry when the teacher moves beyond the transference of knowledge and is willing to offer his own life experience to his students so that par-

alyzing anxiety can be removed Preaching becomes ministry when the preacher moves beyond the “telling of the story” to make his own deepest self available to his hearer

All functions of ministry are life giving. [The teacher or the preacher's] aim is to offer new insight, to give new strength, to break through the chains of death and destruction, and to create new life which can be affirmed. In short, to make his weakness creative.⁹

He is the Lord of the Church, but he is also the suffering servant Lord of the Church who invites us to take up our cross. He promises that he will precede us through death into eternal life. Hallelujah!

He is the Lord of my spiritual life, so I will praise him. He is the Lord of the universe, so I will acknowledge his power in all created things. He is the Lord of history, so I will anticipate his redemptive activity in all events. Finally, he is the Lord of the Church, so I will expect him to bring resurrection through any and every crucifixion.

Until now, Paul has been making clear who Jesus is: Lord, Lord, Lord, Lord. Then he defines what Jesus does (Colossians 19-20 NEB): “For in him the complete being of God, by God’s own choice, came to dwell. Through him God chose to reconcile the whole universe to himself, making peace through the shedding of his blood upon the cross—to reconcile all things, whether on earth or in heaven, through him alone.” Then we confess, “The Lord brings reconciliation in and through all things.” This confession expresses the ultimate mission of Christians.

Many references to the Christians’ mission to make disciples can be found (Matthew 28 is one passage that refers to that mission). For Paul, the Church exists to bring reconciliation.

His mission (in being my Lord), the mission of the Church (of which he is Lord), the purpose of history (of which he is Lord), and the elan of the universe (of which he is Lord) is to bring reconciliation to all things as he has brought reconciliation to my own heart.

He is the Lord of salvation, the Lord of the universe, the Lord

⁹Henri Nouwen, *Creative Ministry* (New York: Doubleday, 1978), 113-114.

of history, the Lord of the Church. What he does is bring reconciliation, and he allows us to participate in this ministry of reconciliation. In 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 (NEB) Paul says, "From first to last this has been the work of God. He has reconciled us men to himself through Christ, and he has enlisted us in the service of reconciliation. What I mean is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, no longer holding men's misdeeds against them, and that he has entrusted us with the message of reconciliation." That is who Jesus is. He is Lord. He is Lord. He is Lord. He is Lord. What he does is bring reconciliation and he brings it by the shedding of his own blood.

He invites us then to take up our cross and to share in his crucifixion and resurrection, but he invites us "as oft as we will do it" to partake of the cup and the bread. He says, "This is my body. This is my blood. Do this as oft as you will in remembrance of me" (1 Corinthians 11:24-25, KJV).

I call you to consider that the elements which we consecrate very soon provide for us the witness of his presence, his resurrection, and his coming again. As the preacher says from time to time, "Let all who have with true repentance forsaken their sins, trusted in Christ alone for salvation, draw near to your soul's comfort and joy."

Let us proclaim Jesus as Lord, the one who brings reconciliation by the shedding of his blood.¹⁰

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³¹⁰The message was followed by Holy Communion.

CHAPTER SIX

Your New Life in Christ Produces Hope

This article was first published in Discipleship.¹

Their eyes, red from much weeping, revealed the overpowering stress experienced by parents who have spent anxious hours outside an intensive care room in a hospital where a child was struggling for life. Six days of thorough examination had confirmed their suspicions of the worst kind. A frantic trip halfway across the state had finally brought Fred and Mary to the big university hospital.

After another twenty-four hours of waiting and weeping, they had been given the verdict of the doctors: “Your six-year-old Danny has terminal cancer. Treatment may extend his life briefly, but it would be very painful for him. You must decide soon if you want us to begin the therapy. We’ll wait for your decision.”

Fred and Mary were the solid, pillar-of-the-church type of Christians. They had been active in the church for years and had been an encouragement to many others in hours of stress and grief, but the doctors’ diagnosis had made sufferers of them.

The distraught mother cried, “I cannot accept either option. I cannot let my Danny be hurt if it won’t really help him. On the other hand, I cannot stand by and do nothing.”

“Pastor Reed,” asked Fred, “is there any guidance for us? Is there any answer in the Scripture? What can we do in such a hopeless situation?”

The details are unique but the scene is familiar. Hundreds of pastors have gone with thousands of their people through the same valley of hopelessness and have made sincere but feeble efforts to offer some ray of light in the darkness. I reached out from my heart to Fred and Mary. I wept with them. We leaned heavily on one another, but my mind was fumbling.

¹*Discipleship* ed. Neil Wiseman (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1981), 143-153.

I thought of the scripture, "Let not your heart be troubled" (John 14:1 KJV), but it seemed small comfort. I thought of promises, such as "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7 KJV), but the time did not seem right for me to quote them. I thought of the Articles of Faith² that declare our confidence in divine healing (XV), the resurrection (XII), and the second coming (XI), but none of these statements could force their way to my tongue as I shared the anguish of their overwhelming sense of hopelessness.

The Scriptures are sure, the promises are true, and the Articles of Faith are sound, yet in that actual moment of despair that precious couple and I could not interject the deep meanings of those precious words into the painful situation in which we were engulfed. It is hard to understand, but sometimes God's greatest truths can get lost in the process of our trying to apply them to traumatic problems. He provides them for our edification. They are disclosures of his very nature. They may be exactly what our souls hunger for and need at a particular time, but the stress that accompanies our hour of grief distorts our understanding and makes it impossible for us to see God's provision for us. It seems that we cannot apply the balm of that truth to our aching hearts. For a time we suffer on.

Eventually, for Fred and Mary the light of hope replaced the darkness of despair. The Holy Spirit began to reveal to them the deeper meaning of his presence. When this experience becomes real to us, there is for the Christian no hopeless situation. It is the reality of God and the sense of his presence in our lives that make the final difference between despair and hope. Fred and Mary regained confidence and strength for victorious living when they discovered that Christ has conquered even death. In their time of need, they discovered a deeper ministry of the Holy Spirit than they had known before. They began to understand from experience what before they had known only intellectually: "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him" (Romans 8:28).

In announcing his mission in the world, Jesus quoted from Isaiah 61:1-3:

²*Manual 1980*, Church of the Nazarene, par. 15-18, 21.

“The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me . . . to comfort all who mourn . . . to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.”
(Luke 4:18-19)

Hope as Christian Expectation

The New Testament is laced with references to hope. Even a modest concordance lists nearly a full column of passages: “The creation waits in eager expectation” (Romans 8:19); “In this hope we were saved” (Romans 8:24); There is “hope . . . stored up for you in heaven” (Colossians 1:5); “Christ in you [is] the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27); and the “resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,” says Peter, “has given us new birth into a living hope” (1 Peter 1:3). One cannot understand the New Testament faith without some comprehension of the term *hope*.

• **Hope Brings Assurance**

Current Christianity has nearly lost the biblical meaning of hope. In some instances it has been understood to be a rather anemic or foggy wish, but it is more than that. Hope brings confidence and strength.

Most of us have heard preachers who put a strong emphasis upon what they call *know-so salvation*. They would assure their hearers that God had an experience for Christians that would bring such certainty to their hearts that they would truly know that they were saved. They contrast this know-so salvation with a hope-so brand of religion. Such preachers rightly highlight an important element of the New Testament gospel. The hymn writer called it “blessed assurance,” but the association of *hope* with *think* and *maybe* does a grave disservice to the abiding quality of hope.

Hope that brings assurance is essential to survival. The Freds and Marys of the world have sought comfort from their pastors and all too often have been given merely intellectual explanations of the creeds. There has been little of the vitality and verve that is the essence of Christian hope. No wonder so many collapse in the midst of their gloom. The biblical meaning of hope must be retrieved and applied in the context of twenty-first century realities. This hurting world cries out for a message of assurance.

- **Hope Is Basic**

Hope cannot be associated with *think* and *maybe*. To do so would destroy its abiding quality. At the same time hope must not be confused with faith or at least must not be considered synonymous with it. First Corinthians, chapter 13, makes it clear that there are three distinct spiritual foundations which abide forever—faith, hope, and love. Faith and hope are not the same, but they are mutually supportive. Hope is dynamic—it draws one on.

It is hard to understand why Christians have allowed hope to become merely a secondary shadow of faith. In doing so we have ended up with only two abiding qualities—faith and love. Clearly, faith and hope, while interrelated, are distinct from each other. Each is necessary to the believer.

It was in the 1960s that the Christian world began talking again about hope and its significance. Jürgen Moltmann, a key spokesman of this movement, distinguished between faith and hope as follows: “Faith is the foundation upon which hope rests; hope nourishes and sustains faith. Without faith’s knowledge of Christ, hope becomes a Utopia and remains hanging in the air. But without hope, faith falls to pieces, becomes a fainthearted and ultimately dead faith.”³

There can be no hope without faith, but hope is much more than a vain wish. It is more than a secondary shadow of faith. Without hope, faith is lifeless. Faith believes that Christ is Lord. Hope eagerly expects that he will demonstrate that lordship.

- **Hope Anticipates**

Hope has a dynamic not-yet-ness about it. It is not yet because it is unrealized. It is dynamic because it is alive with the expectation that God will do what he has promised. Paul expresses the anticipation that is part of hope when he says, “Hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently” (Romans 8:24-25).

Hope enables faith to lean expectantly toward its own future. Hope acknowledges that “here we do not have an enduring city” (Hebrews 13:14) and constantly probes faith, stimulating it against its inclination to settle down into wooden creeds. Hope

³ Jürgen Moltman, *Theology of Hope* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 20.

anticipates that the God who always goes before us is working redemptively so that no day, however dark, is shut off from God's glorious tomorrow.

• Hope's Foundation

The future toward which hope leans is assured by the redemptive activity of the faithful God. This God of hope is more than a God of contemplation. He is God in the midst of history. He is the God of promise who is known by seeing and hearing, by identification and obedience. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God who weaves his own future into the future of an unworthy people by way of promise and covenant.

This foundation of hope can be seen in these activities of God:

1. The God of hope demonstrated his redemptive creative activity in the creation of the universe. From the formless void he created a universe that he could call "very good" (Genesis 1:31).

2. Throughout ancient Hebrew history God proved himself again and again as a redemptive agent who brought help and hope to his people. He caused a bush to flame. He sent plagues. He held back a sea. He caused water to spring forth from a rock. He sent food from heaven. He stopped a river. He directed a stone from a shepherd's sling. He caused the sun to stand still.

3. The event that above all others displays the faithfulness of God and the greatness of his power is the resurrection of Jesus. Even though Jesus submitted himself to death—the ultimate hopelessness—the God of hope proved himself to be faithful through the event of the resurrection. The resurrection is the fulfillment of all past promises.

Christ's resurrection is an historic event—not just because it happened in history but because it breaks new ground for the future. It makes a story just as the first creation did. Through it promise and fulfillment find new form. They are bound up in Jesus Christ through whom God has laid the groundwork for the future of mankind. Latent in the resurrection of Jesus is the promise of God to bring salvation to us individually and to his total creation.

The crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus rest on the faithfulness of God and are the foundation of realistic hope. As Peter testifies, “The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead [has given] us new birth into a living hope” (1 Peter 1:3 RSV).

• **Hope's Prospect**

While hope grows out of these historic events, hope itself does not look backward but forward. As Christians, we look back and acknowledge that God acted in creation and that all nature is a confirming testimony to that creation. We look back to declare the resurrection of Jesus as the means by which we become new creatures, but we also hear the voice of Jesus speaking through John the Revelator declaring, “Behold, I make all things new” (Revelation 21:5 KJV).

Out of nothing the Eternal Word spoke a universe into existence. Out of the hopelessness of the tomb he broke forth to the eternal. He is our Creator. He is our Redeemer. He is also our coming King. Hope still leans forward to anticipate that he “who is, who was” is also he “who is to come” (Revelation 1:4). Jesus Christ “who is” never limits the apparent potential of the situation, always works creatively to bring the truly new to pass. He is the object of our hope from first to last. Christians have long recognized Jesus as the Alpha point—the beginning point—but he is also the Omega point—the ending point—standing beyond all time and at the end of history and drawing all things toward himself.

The Second Coming of Christ

There are aspects of the second coming that are hard to understand. The details of time and sequence are debated by earnestly sincere people. This confusion springs from the fact that humans are part of the old order. What Jesus will do in his second coming is as uniquely new as the Genesis creation or the resurrection. The old simply cannot fully comprehend it. The best we may expect is to “see but a poor reflection” (1 Corinthians 13:12).

We confidently declare that the God who goes before us has never been limited by the circumstances. He is not an inventor who devises machines from existing materials. He is a creator. He makes things new. He has worked after that fashion in the

past. He will work after that fashion in the future. His second coming is the ultimate declaration that there are no hopeless situations. He will make all things new and they will be right.

This belief in the second coming of Christ is a key doctrine of the Church. It is full of assurance which is the substance of hope.

• **The Resurrection**

The individual who is spiritually prepared is assured of heaven after death. The twelfth in the Articles of Faith of the Church of the Nazarene declares:

We believe in the resurrection of the dead, that the bodies both of the just and of the unjust shall be raised to life⁴ We believe that glorious and everlasting life is assured to all who savingly believe and obediently follow Jesus Christ as Lord.⁵

This truth enables believers to be filled with hope and to approach confidently the moment of death in anticipation of glorification.

• **The Risen Saints**

The Church struggles through an unbelievable variety of distresses in the hope of the second coming at which time the Church Militant will become the Church Triumphant. The Articles of Faith further declare, "We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ will come again; that we who are alive at His coming shall . . . be caught up with the risen saints to meet the Lord in the air, so that we shall ever be with the Lord."⁶

• **Redemption for the World**

The whole universe awaits its redemption. All that exists was created by the Living Word and it was declared "very good" (Genesis 1:31). Then sin defiled the order of the cosmic world. The resulting natural evil brought its disorder. Pain became a part of life. Paul describes the extent of that pain: "The whole creation has been groaning in travail" (Romans 8:22 RSV). But in hope believers declare with Paul that "the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God" (Romans 8:21). There

⁴*Manual 1980*, par. 16

⁵*Ibid.*, par. 18.

⁶*Ibid.*, Article 11, par. 15.

will be a “new heaven and a new earth” (Revelation 21:1 KJV). Consequently, for the believer, for the Church, and for the universe itself, there is no hopeless situation. The God who has acted, is now acting—and will act again.

The Final Hopelessness

The hope of humankind rests in God and in what he has done for them in Christ. The *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene affirms what the Bible teaches: that the atonement through Jesus Christ is for the whole human race and that whosoever repents and believes on the Lord Jesus Christ is justified and regenerated and saved from the dominion of sin (par. 25.5).

On the other hand, the Bible also teaches the hopeless outlook for those who are without God. Paul reminds early Christians of their hopeless condition before they found new life in Christ: “At that time you were separate from Christ . . . without hope and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12). Unless persons find new life in Christ, they remain without God, and without hope—both in this life and in the next.

• **The Judgment**

The Bible teaches that judgment will come to everyone: “It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27 KJV). The specific details of the final judgment are not known, but on the basis of biblical teaching the Church of the Nazarene asserts, “We believe in future judgment in which every man shall appear before God to be judged according to his deeds in this life.”⁷

• **Final Destiny**

The final destiny of believers is promised: “We believe that glorious and everlasting life is assured to all who savingly believe in, and obediently follow, Jesus Christ our Lord.”⁸ This statement expresses the Christian hope, but there is the dark underside of this truth. The Bible also affirms that one can alter that destiny by choosing to sin rather than choosing to live in obedience to God: “If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sin is left,

⁷*Ibid.*, par. 17.

⁸*Ibid.*, par. 18.

but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God” (Hebrews 10:26-27).

The Bible teaches and Nazarenes believe “that the finally impenitent shall suffer eternally in hell.”⁹ To be forever separated from God is to lose all hope. It is the ultimate hopelessness.

Hope as Christian Vitality

While there is life, there is hope. Where there is new life in Christ, there is Christian hope. Such hope reflects on the past, leans toward the future, and brings strength to the present. It has a here-and-now quality. It produces an energy for survival that is otherwise missing.

• **Ancient Israel Hoped in God's Promise**

The Covenant people were able to endure unspeakable hardship and survive generations of captivity because deep within them they knew that the God of creation, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, was at work. In time he would do “his mighty redemptive acts” on behalf of his people. This hope enabled them to survive what other peoples, less persecuted, were unable to bear.

• **The Early Christians Found Hope in the Cross**

Jesus was obedient even to death on a cross. That cross, a symbol of man's hate, became the symbol of God's love. God took the angry instrument of his own son's execution and made of it the vehicle for the salvation of the world. Here is creative power no less potent than that described in Genesis, and the disciples learned that the “God of hope” could glorify their personal crosses as well. They faced the ugly cross with eyes wide open and saw the glory of the resurrection in it. They endured persecution beyond imagination with the “patience of hope” (1 Thessalonians 1:3 KJV). Hope was their “helmet” of defense (1 Thessalonians 5:8 KJV). Death was no threat to them because their hope was beyond this life (1 Corinthians 15:19 KJV).

• **Believers Can Know the Vitality of Hope**

I would not mislead you. I wish I could tell you that as far as Fred and Mary are concerned, all is well. At this writing I cannot. The prognosis is still very serious, but Mom and Dad have

⁹*Ibid.*

found the presence of Jesus Christ as Creator, Redeemer, and coming King. They believe that his creative power can bring complete healing, and they continue to pray that he will do so.

They are confident that what the *Manual* says is right: "We believe the Bible doctrine of divine healing and urge our people to seek to offer the prayer of faith for the healing of the sick."¹⁰ They and others who have supported them during these dark days have sincerely prayed this prayer, but they have also followed through on the second part of the paragraph: "Providential means and agencies when deemed necessary should not be refused."¹¹ The situation is completely in God's hands.

Best of all, they rejoice in the evidence of Christ's redemptive power that has not only saved them but constantly comforts them. They realize also that the Master's creative touch might come to Danny through death and Danny might enter the "new kingdom" ahead of them. None of these options is hopeless. All are within the domain of the wise and able Jesus.

This confidence does not mean that they do not hurt. There is glory in their cross, but it is still a cross. Any cross is characterized by some sense of loneliness and the question "Why?" but it is never, ever hopeless.

Well-known evangelist and author E. Stanley Jones knew firsthand the cross of suffering. When he was eighty-seven, he suffered a paralyzing stroke, but he continued to write, and through much difficulty he dictated his last book, *The Divine Yes*. He cited 2 Corinthians 1:19-20 (Moffatt) as his text. Jones says, "The divine 'yes' has at last sounded in him, for in him is the 'yes' to all of life's noes." Holding up the resurrection of Jesus as the ultimate, divine affirmation, Jones asks, "How far can evil go in a world of this kind? Does the moral universe bend to evil? The answer is NO! Today, tomorrow, but the third day—NO! The third day, evil breaks itself upon the facts of life."¹²

To all who, like Fred and Mary, are going through the black Friday or dark Saturday of our lives, I write with great respect and understanding. The cross is ugly and hurts desperately. The

¹⁰*Ibid.*, par. 21.

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²E. Stanley Jones, *The Divine Yes* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975), 106.

circumstances do appear hopeless, but God is not only the God of the circumstances, he is also the creator God who brings the truly new. He causes joy to come in the morning, and he is the source of the believer's confidence so that the believer can sing with the hymn writer: "My hope is built on nothing less Than Jesus' blood and righteousness. . . . When all around my soul gives way, He then is all my Hope and Stay. On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand; All other ground is sinking sand" ¹³

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¹³Edward Mote, "The Solid Rock."

CHAPTER SEVEN

Spilled Soup and a Redirected Path

*This personal vignette was published in College Faith in 2002.**

Had I been a “reasonable” young freshman, I would have quit. Why I did not is beyond understanding. It was as low a moment as I can ever remember in my educational career. It may not impress some, and it may amuse others, but it was crucial for this eighteen-year-old.

During my freshman year, my college provided for meals with “a cafeteria plan.” Each student picked up food items at each meal and paid for them at the cashier’s table. Simply put, if you had no money you did not eat.

One Sunday I had no money, so I went to my room where my roommates and I had a hidden hot plate. Cooking in the room was against college rules, but I was hungry and didn’t know what to do. The only food in our “pantry” was an envelope of Mrs. Grass’s Noodle Soup. The envelope contained a yellow-looking powder mixed with inch-long “noodles” that, in their dehydrated condition, looked like pigmy broom straws. A gold-colored capsule that was to be dropped into the boiling water at the last moment provided the flavor for this culinary farce.

As I was cooking this excuse for a meal, I could see the other students lined up at the cafeteria door, anticipating a real Sunday dinner. Maybe it was because I was looking at them or maybe I experienced a Freudian moment of disgust, I cannot know for sure, but I dropped the pan and spilled all but a half-cup of my Mrs. Grass’s Noodle Soup. Since I was still hungry, I ate the remnant from the pan and then cleaned up the mess, carefully peeling the tiny noodles off the floor.

Had I been “reasonable,” I would have quit, but just a few months earlier I had put my trust in Christ alone for his guidance in my life. He had called me to pastoral ministry and had led me to a Christ-centered school.

That afternoon I read Proverbs 3:5. It had great meaning that day—that pivotal day in my college career. It has had great meaning to me ever since.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your

own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge him, And he shall direct your paths” (Proverbs 3:5-6 NKJV).

**College Faith.* Ed. Ronald Alan Knott. Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2002.

CHAPTER EIGHT

This I Have Experienced! This I Believe!

In the August 29, 1996, chapel at Trevecca, I delivered this report on my miraculous healing.

Scripture reference: John 20: 25, 28

In the familiar story of Thomas recorded in John, chapter 20, we see man's typical journey from experience to faith or from science to theology. The resurrected Christ had appeared to the other gathered disciples. Thomas will not accept the report of another. He needs hard, scientific evidence. "Unless I see . . . nail marks" (v. 20), he says.

By verse 28, however, Thomas has moved from science to theology. Jesus has appeared to the disciple and has shown Thomas his hands and side. Thomas' scientific doubt is satisfied, but he cannot stop there. Such evidence is so overwhelming that he finds himself compelled to make the faith declaration "My Lord and my God!" That confession was arrived at not by science but by faith.

Like Thomas, we humans are rarely satisfied simply to experience life's events. We must interpret them. Not only do we have the five senses by which to be aware of a variety of experiences, but also we have the inclination to ask, "What does this experience mean?" Religious reflection, or theology, has always been our activity as we try to determine not only what has happened but why it has happened.

The quest for why something has happened has been the preoccupation of the Christian community throughout history. The "Mighty Acts of God," usually listed as (1) the creation, (2) the exodus events, and (3) the Christ events (birth, death, resurrection), ever fascinate us. They are so magnificent that they keep us reflecting a lifetime. Only God is permanently interesting.

It is also true that a specific community will sometimes witness events that are so distinctive, so beyond the immediate understanding, that they demand interpretation. Members of that community then ask, "Why should these events have transpired

as they have?”

That same question is a valid one for the Trevecca Community: Why should this school move from surviving to thriving in five years? How does one explain the support of constituents with two recent \$1-million gifts and enrollment increases such as Trevecca has enjoyed? What about the acquisition of properties—Goodrich Tire Company, Cookin' Good, Howard Baer Trucking, Saturn Apartments, et cetera?

We view all of these events and say, “These are God’s blessings.” Indeed, I believe that they are and that this interpretation is the best way for us to view the bare facts that are a bit beyond our quick understanding.

Probably you have had some personal experiences similar to the ones I have named, and you may have already interpreted them as luck, for instance, or as bad luck or as God’s blessings or punishment.

Sometimes the community experiences along with an individual, and both the individual and the community are left to interpret, to answer this question: How do we make sense of these events? They theologize. They reflect.

Many of you and I experienced such an event last semester. It was dramatic for me and for you. We have not had a chance to theologize on that event since it happened. I have felt that we needed time together, so for this single chapel session I am asking you to join me in some reflection about divine healing—more specifically, my own healing since last February.

The Event

During the last week of February, I found myself feeling less than well. On the last Sunday of that month, while preaching at the St. Andrews Church of the Nazarene in Charleston, South Carolina, I began to chill and was hospitalized. Monday’s diagnosis was hepatitis A. On Tuesday the word *fulminant* was added with the conclusion that I would not survive without a liver transplant and that such a transplant would have to occur within the next six to eleven days. Doctors in both South Carolina and Nashville agreed on this ominous diagnosis. Not one of the twelve to fifteen doctors suggested that my body might generate a new liver spontaneously.

Thousands of people prayed. On Sunday, the eighth day, my

counts began to come down, without medication or surgery. On Tuesday I was out of intensive care. On Thursday I was sent home. The following Monday my liver specialist sat me down in his office and said, "I need to talk to you. You need to know that your liver has died and that your body is generating a new liver. It is not unheard of but it is very rare."

Through April and May he examined my developing liver and on the first of June declared it complete and functioning as a normal liver should function. Today I feel better than I have felt in years, and I am happy that the Board of Trustees at Trevecca is not searching for a new president to replace the recently deceased Millard Reed.

Those are the facts. Medical records are available for those, who like Thomas, would like to see the prints (John 20:25 KJV).

What are we to make of these facts? What, if anything, do we confess (John 20:28) from such an event? It may well be that some will conclude, "You are really a lucky guy!" or "You must have a very strong body!" There may be some limited truth to either of these interpretations, but during the months of convalescence, I have had time to think, theologize, and interpret. My insights are not new, but they are newly affirmed. I want to share these affirmations with you and ask that you interpret and theologize with me.

I. Physical Fitness Is Significant but Limited

Physical fitness is significant. Paul writes to young Timothy, "Physical training is of some value" (1 Timothy 4:8). While I was recovering, my liver specialist said to me, "Had you been a drinker, you would have been a dead man. Your years of physical conditioning may have saved your life."

The value of physical fitness is obvious. That fact is why your school has provided a wellness center for you. This facility is for every student—not for our intercollegiate athletes only. The stewardship of your body is a holy covenant with the Lord. I urge you to use the Trevecca Wellness Center for your physical fitness.

But physical fitness is limited. For forty years I never missed a preaching assignment because of illness. I have been very fortunate. Within three days, however, I was at death's door. Had I assumed that physical fitness would provide my ultimate salvation, I would have been wrong. Dramatically wrong. Woefully

wrong. Physical fitness is significant but limited.

II. The Cognitive Mind Is Fickle

I have spent my life trying to exercise my mind to the best of my ability. Most of my life I have been in a formal classroom as either a student or teacher/pastor. I am giving all my energy now to advance this institution of higher education, which is devoted to the development of the cognitive mind.

I learned that a temperature of 105 degrees and an enzyme count of 9,000-plus will do strange things to your mind. The doctors introduced me to a new word: *encephalopathic*—“a condition of the mind in which the patient seems alert and aware but retains no memory.”

Three incidents from those days of my illness will illustrate what being encephalopathic will do to a person. Within two hours of my being admitted to the hospital, Dr. Melvin Welch, a Trevecca administrator/professor, was at my side. He had driven all day Sunday to be at present for his father's surgery only to be told, upon his arrival at the hospital, that I was in the same city as his father and in the same hospital. (You might theologize on that a while also.) When I was told on Tuesday that I might not survive, Melvin tells me that I said, “It looks like this could go bad and that my family might not arrive in time, so I want to give you my testimony for them.” With that I began to recite the Apostle's Creed:

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord who was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate

At that point I began to add my personal confidence in the blood of Christ Jesus for the atonement of my sins. I wish that I could remember that testimony, but the mind is fickle.

Illustration number two took place after my family arrived. They made the decision to have me flown by ambulance flight to Vanderbilt University Hospital in Nashville. The doctors warned that I might not survive, so the children came in to my room to say goodbye. They tell me I said, “Now, children, God has been good to your daddy, and if this is the end of my time with you, we have no complaint to offer to God.” Then I asked my daughter to pray for me and then my son. I would give any-

thing to have heard their prayers—but the mind is fickle. That fact was illustrated further as my daughter said, “I will call Martha.” In spite of the fact that Martha is my only and dear sister, I responded, “Who is Martha?” And when they said “Your sister,” I asked, “Oh, do I have a sister?” How about that? The mind is fickle.

The final incident that illustrates the fickleness of the human mind occurred during a visit from my dear son in the Lord, Fred Huff. He was at the hospital because he, too, had an assignment with the South Carolina pastors. With deep emotion he leaned over my bed and told me he was praying for me and finally added, “I love you, man!” I responded, “Sounds like a Budweiser commercial to me.” The cognitive mind is fickle.

III. My Family Is Precious

Barbara, my wife, and our four children, were wonderful to me although my encephalopathic mind did strange things. I do not remember their being in South Carolina except to suggest, as they all gathered around, deeply concerned for my survival, “Be sure to take in the tourist attractions in Charleston while you are here.” I remember their looking at me as if I had lost my mind, as indeed I had for that time.

When it was finally determined that I would be flown back to Nashville, Barbara climbed into that little Bonanza ambulance plane to attend to me for a three-hour, bumpy flight while I was continuously asking to “get out.” At one point she did suggest that the first step out of the plane was a long one but that she was willing to take it with me if I thought it best.

After seven days deep in the mental fog, I began to clear. The first face that I recognized happened to be that of my daughter, Debbie. She smiled sweetly and said, “Hi, Daddy.” She was so beautiful. She radiated with a glow that must be what will characterize the heavenly beings. As other family members entered into that sphere of my newly regained consciousness, each was beautiful beyond my power to describe. Paul, Lisa, Steve, Diane, John, and Barbara—each is more beautiful than I have ever seen them.

I asked God to let me keep the eyes that see such beauty, and in great measure I think he has. I now know better than I had known that my family is precious.

Something of that glow rested upon my first time back with you at University Convocation time. Students were beautiful, the faculty, marching in their regalia, were glorious.

You see, what is true for the biological family is also true for the family of God. Hundreds, yes, thousands of people, members of my family began to pray for me. It was almost as if God had set up a series of prayer cells on my behalf:

- Pastors and wives in South Carolina were in session and prayed.

- Senior citizens at a retreat in Lake Yale, Florida, heard and prayed.

- Participants in the Improve Your Serve Conference in Indianapolis prayed.

- The General Board of the Church of the Nazarene meets three days a year—the three days of my most intense illness. Those members probably thought that they came to Kansas City to do business for the general church, but I know that they gathered to pray for me.

- Presidents of private colleges in Tennessee gathered for their annual meeting on one of my worst days. Harold McCue, Trevecca's vice president for university advancement, was there to represent me. They took time out to pray for me.

- That same evening the church board of Nashville First Church of the Nazarene gathered for its monthly meeting. Gerald Skinner was designated to represent me, and all members gathered around him, laid on hands, and prayed for me.

- And most significantly, members of the Trevecca Community went to their knees to pray for their ailing president. I am told that your chapel turned into a nonstop prayer meeting and that classes gave an hour-by-hour report on my progress and added to the prayer volume. The prayer banner that you made for me and which includes hundreds of your signatures and promises of prayer still hangs in my family room.

I was told that Marvin Jones, minister of music at Trevecca Community Church of the Nazarene, had learned while he was out of town how serious I was. When he and Paula, his wife, arrived back on campus, they saw that the flag was at half mast. Marvin said, "I went ballistic!" He soon learned that the flag had been lowered out of honor for a national figure and not for the death of the school president.

- So many phone calls came into the hospital in South Carolina that the hospital staff set up a separate and special room where my family could receive calls.

- Hundreds of cards filled with promises of prayer came flooding in.

- I suppose that every one of the 870 Churches of the Nazarene on the Southeast Educational Zone prevailed in prayer for me that second Sunday—and no doubt did many churches beyond the Southeast.

From time to time I hear derogatory comments about the church's grapevine, but I thank the Lord for that grapevine. I just want to be a part of it.

The extent of the *extended* family became clearer through an experience that I had in the Atlanta air terminal in late April. Pastor Ed Husband had met me there, and we were chatting about my recovery. A lady across the way kept edging closer to us as we talked. Finally, she interrupted us and asked if I was the president of a school in Nashville. When I told her I was, she said, "I have been praying for you for the past five weeks." She was a Church of Christ member whose Sunday school teacher is completing a degree here at Trevecca. He had made the request to his class, and she had been praying for me during those weeks.

The family is precious—both the biological family and the church family.

IV. Divine Healing Is Genuine

Healing is clearly endorsed in the Scripture: "Is any one of you sick?" asks James. "He should call the elders of the church to prayer over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make him well; the Lord will raise him up" (James 5:14-15).

The fourteenth Article of Faith of the Church of the Nazarene reads, "We believe in the Bible doctrine of divine healing and urge our people to seek to offer the prayer of faith for the healing of the sick. Providential means and agencies when deemed necessary should not be refused."¹

As I arrived at the Vanderbilt Hospital here in Nashville, my

¹ *Manual 1993-1997*, Church of the Nazarene, par. 18.

pastors Gary Henecke and Michael Benson were there to receive me. I am told that these elders of the church anointed me with oil in the name of the Lord Jesus and prayed for me. I do not claim to understand all that transpired after that. There are more details than I can share in this brief time. For much of the detail I depend on others since I was not aware.

The Saturday following the anointing was a very bad day, I was told. Doctors had agreed that my survival depended upon a liver transplant and that it must be available within no more than eleven days. It was then the seventh day of my illness.

Early on Sunday morning (I like the sound of that phrase. Some great stories have emerged following the phrase *Early on Sunday morning*.) my son Paul and his wife, Lisa, were attending to me in intensive care. I had been very restless, had pulled out my I.V., and had tried to get out of my bed. They had decided that a tape playing old hymns might calm me, as indeed it did. I seemed intent upon the music although to this day I have no memory of this event. When "'Tis so Sweet to Trust in Jesus" began to play, to their surprise and shock, I began to sing, "'Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus, Just to take him at his word, Just to rest upon his promise, Just to know 'Thus saith the Lord.'" The second verse that my encephalopathic mind chose to sing was "O how sweet to trust in Jesus, Just to trust his cleansing blood, Just in simple faith to plunge me 'Neath the *healing*, cleansing flood" (emphasis mine).

My children began to cry. The nurse saw their reaction and rushed in to ask if I was worse. "No," they responded, "he is singing!"

That afternoon, after hundreds of congregations had prayed for me that morning, my violent counts began to subside and move toward normal. That afternoon I began to return to consciousness. In the middle of that night I startled the nurses one more time when, half conscious, I began to sing,

I sing praises to your name, O Lord,
Praises to your name, O Lord,
For your name is great and greatly to be praised.
I sing praises to your name, O Lord,
Praises to your name, O Lord
for your name is great and greatly to be praised.²

On Tuesday, I was placed in a private room and on Thursday I went home, having had no surgery or corrective medication. No prescriptions were sent with me, and no diet restrictions were suggested.

As I sat in Dr. Burk's office the following Monday, he said, "I need to explain some things to you. Your liver died. Your body is disposing of three pounds of dead tissue and regenerating a new liver. It is not unheard of, but it is very rare." When I told him that my people view my recovery as a divine miracle, he responded, "Well, we doctors don't use that word, but I will tell you that I presented your case to a medical conference here at Vanderbilt, and I called it an *exceptional recovery*."

By the end of May he declared that my new liver was fully developed and functional and dismissed me to my regular internist who, when he looked at my chart said, "Well, congratulations on being alive. Few people survive what you survived." I told him what I had told my specialist: "Divine healing is a reality!"

V. God Is Both Sovereign and Benevolent

My theological reflection on my healing is most surprising to me although throughout my years as a pastor I witnessed similar reactions in others. Some four weeks into my recuperation I found myself strangely depressed. I could not deny that God had intervened to heal me. That fact was evident and undeniable, but I began to ask myself, "Why me? Why me and not Julie (Julie Runyan, Professor Greg Runyan's wife who died of cancer)? Why me and not Amy Porter (the district superintendent's daughter who died days before her wedding date) or others who were just as devoted to the Lord and for whom a volume of prayer had ascended to the throne of God, a volume of prayer which was not less than the volume of prayer on my behalf. Is God capricious? Or worse: Does God play favorites? Should I honor such a God even if I am one of those favorites?"

We mortals really do try to answer the *why* questions. My mind, just a few days from its encephalopathic tour into unconsciousness, was trying hard to arrive at a rational explanation for what had happened to me. For more than two weeks I wrestled

² Terry MacAlmon, "I Sing Praises," Integrity Music, Inc., 1989.

with this oppression.

My struggle ended with a foolish, nonrational experience that I want to share with you although I know that you will not view it as an intellectual breakthrough. During the third week of April I was out walking. (Typical of my self-help philosophy, I was trying to get stronger by exercising.) It was about six o'clock on Sunday evening—the time of the evening which, for my forty ministerial years, had always found me all tuned up and ready to preach the gospel one more time, eager to meet seeking sinners and pray with them to victory. I was plodding along with a new liver in a weak body and in deep anxiety because of what seemed to be a character flaw in the nature of God. I was still repeating my litany of questions: “Why me? Why not Julie? Does the God of the universe really attend to such detail at all? Or is the natural world a random one? What if I had died? Would God still have been good—not just to my family, but to me? Is heaven real?” (Don't I sound like Thomas?)

The evening was so beautiful. The long rays of the sun were caressing the new green leaves of the oaks and maples. I remembered what Jesus had said in his Sermon on the Mount about considering the lilies of the field and how the Father attends to them.

I had chosen to walk up my neighbor's winding drive rather than my own. About halfway up the hill I came upon a cluster of spring wildflowers that I recall from my childhood as lily bells. They were beautiful. Each one had the right design and each one was in its proper place. The evening sun and shadow highlighted each part perfectly. The scene so seized my attention that I could not keep from stopping a while to drink it in.

After maybe sixty seconds or so of reflection, a heavy-bodied bumblebee flew a quick exaggerated path right through the middle of my bucolic picture. Everyone knows that a bumblebee is an aeronautical impossibility. Its stocky frame and short wing span disqualify it for flight, we are told. But there it was, buzzing across my idyllic scene, and I saw it and its flight as the signature of God.

I broke into sobs, and the kind Heavenly Father seemed to say to me, “I am not only the God of the infinite expanse of the universe, I am also the God of the infinite detail of the creation. I can design each of these flowers and attend to their recreation

each spring. I enable the bumblebee to fly; he does it because I say so. And it is no big deal for me to generate a new liver in your body. I am your Father and I am sovereign. I am sovereign and you are not. Your rational mind is not. You, as all your kind, are so inclined to build idols and your idol is the rational mind. Shatter that idol. Allow me to be God in every aspect of your life. Allow me to be sovereign and benevolent. I find great joy in these flowers. I delight in my bumblebee. I am pleased to restore your body.”

It was a climactic moment that ended my depression. I cried until I laughed. As the Lord and I were strolling the remaining two hundred yards toward home, I thought I sensed him saying something like this: “I saw you in your deepest distress and considered what to do. I nudged one of the heavenly host and said, ‘Well, there’s Millard. I tell you what. Let’s just heal him. It will be fun to watch him try to figure it all out.’”

I do not have the answer to the question of why some are healed and some are not, but I do believe that divine healing is genuine and that God is both sovereign and benevolent. He is all-powerful and he wishes us well.

VI. Heaven Is Real

As I mentioned earlier, a part of my struggle to understand my healing included the question “Is heaven real?” If God is good, and I believe that he is, was he good to Julie?³ Was he good to Amy?⁴ Would he have been good to me had I died? If I had emerged from the mystery of unconsciousness on the other side rather than on this side, would I have been in the presence of the King? Would I have been in conversation with my beloved parents? Would I have been introduced by them to my elder sister and brother who died as infants long before I was born? Would I have met my great grandfather John whose conversion made such a difference in my family’s history? Do I really believe what I have been taught (and have taught) about heav-

³Julie Runyan, wife of a Trevecca professor, died after a courageous battle with brain cancer. Many had prayed for her healing.

⁴Amy Porter, who was (at the time of this writing) the daughter of a district superintendent in the Church of the Nazarene, died of cancer following a great outpouring of prayer on her behalf.

en? Not just confessionally but actually? Not just as a poetic explanation for the future unknown that finds its way musically into old hymns but as a central confession of my heart?

Some who testify to near-death experiences say that they are no longer afraid of death. I do not claim to have had a near-death experience, and I cannot say that I am unafraid of death. I do not like the idea. Death is still my enemy. I was healed. I was not resurrected. I still face the article of death.

I do, however, believe that the God who created a rendezvous with me midst the spring wildflowers that sweep along my neighbor's drive, and sent a bumblebee to teach me, is sovereign and benevolent and that his sovereignty and benevolence are not canceled by death. In his Son Jesus he has already conquered death. That Son, on the night of his own engagement with death, said to his disciples and to me, "I go to prepare a place for you . . . and I will come again . . . so that you may be where I am" (John 14, my paraphrase). Heaven is real.

Conclusion

During these last few months, I have lived out an extraordinary experience. Many of you have shared it with me. I do not claim to understand the experience. Neither can I help reflecting upon it, theologizing it, seeking its meaning. I do now believe, perhaps more intensely than ever before, these six confessions:

1. Physical fitness is significant but limited.
2. The cognitive mind is fickle.
3. The family (both biological and spiritual) is precious.
4. Divine healing is genuine.
5. God is both sovereign and benevolent.
6. Heaven is real

I propose to live a life that is consistent with these newly cherished beliefs.

I am coming to see that a phrase which may cover all the above is the *glory of God*. I give witness today to the glory of God—in all of life, in my physical body, in my mind, in the midst of my family, in the work of the school. It is all glorious. You are glorious. Yes, you are. This campus is glorious. All of it is the work of God, and it is glorious.

The native language of the Christian is praise. Like Thomas,

once we have seen the evidence, we have to conclude, “My Lord and my God!” Or we could sing again the song that my half-conscious mind sang at midnight in Vanderbilt’s intensive care unit: “I sing praises to your name, O Lord, Praises to your name, O Lord, For your name is great and greatly to be praised.”⁵

Works Cited

MacAlmon, Terry. “I Sing Praises.” Integrity Music, Inc., 1989. *Manual 1993-1997*. Church of the Nazarene.

⁵*Ibid.*

CHAPTER NINE

Preaching Holiness Sermon Series*Introduction*

I gladly identify myself as a holiness preacher. My father was a holiness preacher before me. My own claim to that title did not come automatically, however.

The material that follows is my testimony of my embracing of that title. Following my testimony are brief descriptions of six messages that could become a sermon series. My hope is that they will be message starters which a pastor could develop. Narrative outlines for the first two messages of the series are included.

During my college and seminary years I grappled with the validity of the doctrine which had embraced me from my childhood. I found that I could not deny the validity of the holy quality of my parents' lives or that of my own experience. I did have unanswered questions concerning perfection and was helped a great deal by *Hebrew and Greek Thought Compared* by Thorlief Bowman, which I used as a reference in my master's thesis, entitled "Paul's Concept of Perfection." The dynamic concept of the Hebrew mind contrasted with the static mindset of the Greeks (more accurately, Aristotle) enabled me to think of perfection in the functional rather than the absolute sense and so liberated me to hold the faith while still having unanswered questions.

My first pastorate forced me to deal with extreme legalism in the local church and liberalism in the seminary I was attending (Eden in St. Louis). During that pastorate and the following two (Kenosha, Wisconsin, and Overland Park, Kansas), I grappled especially for a definition of the "carnal nature." "Propensity to sin" or "the inclination toward evil," et cetera, did not satisfy me. Each described an effect, it seemed to me, and so could not be the source and, hence, not the definition. Each was a derivative and not a first cause.

During this period of my pastoral years, I intentionally decided not to use the holiness terminology. It seemed unclear and often laden with legalism or sectarian bias, both of which

seemed contrary to the spirit of holiness that I observed in others and enjoyed in my own heart. I chose to use terms like *consecration* or *deeper walk* rather than *sanctify* or *holiness*. I was not alone in this practice. The terminology, and in many instances the doctrine itself, had fallen into disrepute. This situation seemed sadly regrettable to me.

Late in my Overland Park years, I began to notice two things. First, many of the people of my congregation did not have the legalistic history that had characterized my earlier congregations. Legalism was not their problem. Hopelessness was. They were eager to hear a message of power and transformation. Second, the traditional words were biblical and better than the ones that I had put in their place. *Consecrate* is not the same as *sanctify*. I do one and God does the other. The *deeper life* is not as definitive as the *holy life*. My new terminology was vague and did not communicate clearly the wonderful experience awaiting the children of God and the lifestyle available to them by God's grace.

Consequently, I intentionally turned a corner and returned to the biblical terminology, trying my best to fill each term with biblical rather than parochial, sectarian, or legalistic meaning. (As evidence of my change, later in my pastoral career I asked to be the preacher for a ten-service holiness revival in my own congregation in Nashville.)

As I did so, I began to notice that much of the lost reputation of the holiness movement emerged by way of a lack of balance. I first noticed the imbalance that holiness folk often demonstrated between (1) doctrine, (2) experience, and (3) ethics. Like a tripod, which falls if one of its legs is missing, holiness is discounted when one of these aspects of the movement is emphasized to the neglect of the others. Many had observed this fact before I did so, but it came to me as a helpful insight. About this time I moved to Nashville and was impressed with the balance called for in the writings and the polar tension tolerated in the philosophy/theology of the first pastor of the Nashville congregation, J. O. McClurkan. He reminded me of the Hebrew mind rather than the Greek or of the philosophy of Hegel, Whitehead, and E. Bloke (or maybe Kierkegaard in *Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing*) rather than that of Plato and Aristotle.

A second tripod became clear to me about that time, one that I had not noted before. It is not original. It is very simple: The imbalance of these three dimensions of the holiness message distorts the message and discredits the movement. Conversely, when a balance is struck, the message communicates well both within and without the movement. It has become the insight which I sense is a simple but key insight for the preaching of holiness. Since I did not hear many (actually, any) noting this three-aspect balance, it has become my passion or burden for the holiness movement.

Drawing on the role of Jesus as Prophet, Priest, and King, I hear the call to holiness as an affirmation that Jesus provides power (prophet), that he brings cleansing (priest), and that he is Lord (King). The people with whom I have associated through the years have tended to neglect sovereignty, and by their/our neglect the comprehensive and balanced message has taken on distortion, leaning one direction or another.

It is the intent of these messages to provide for the hearers a biblical perspective on holiness with a balance of doctrine, experience, and ethics (referred to briefly) as well as a balance of power, cleansing, and lordship. Since power and cleansing have been emphasized by us holiness people, I will focus on sovereignty, always affirming the power and cleansing aspects of the balanced message.

My purpose in these messages is not simply to inform with sound doctrine or to instruct in matters of ethics. My purpose is to witness to believers experiencing the work of the Holy Spirit who alone is able to empower, cleanse, and establish as well as maintain the lordship of Jesus Christ in the human heart. The text of this series is 1 Corinthians 12:3: "No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit." The six messages follow.

Overview: Holiness Message Series

Sermon One: Jesus Christ Is Lord

This introductory message uses 1 Corinthians 12:3 as the text and introduces the balance called for in the material previously mentioned. Each subsequent message reviews this material briefly and is intended to bring the hearer along toward application.

Sermon Two: Why Two Works of Grace?

This message illustrates the key role of lordship claims in the biography of the sanctified with five predictable stages in the journey of grace (conviction, conversion, entire sanctification, Gethsemane, and glorification). It is really part two of the earlier message.

Messages three through six illustrate and apply the truths laid out in messages one and two.

Sermon Three: Jesus Is Lord of Interpersonal Relationships

The book of Ephesians provides background for this message. The characteristics of the holiness lifestyle that will be featured are the twin virtues of love and humility—or “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

Sermon Four: Jesus Is Lord of Earthly Possessions

Our Lord's comment in Matthew 6:33 is the text, and his encounter with the rich young ruler is the illustration. Paul's conversation with the Corinthians recorded in 1 Corinthians 8-9 provides the exposition. The characteristic of holiness people noted here is generosity.

Sermon Five: Jesus Is Lord of Body and Mind

1 Corinthians 6:19 is a point of departure along with 3 John vs. 2. The substantial scripture is Colossians 1:15-20. The message points out the radical cosmology of the Christian faith. I use my own miraculous healing and make the case that we holiness folk are healthy not because we are immune to sickness but because we have the adequacy of the Lord of the universe who reigns in our sickness and in our health, in our life and in our death. A service of anointing would be appropriate.

Sermon Six: Jesus Is Lord of My Spiritual Condition

The Epistle to the Galatians is the basis of this message. It focuses on the liberty and law debate of the New Testament and contemporary times. It emphasizes the fact that holiness folk are to be characterized by assurance or confidence. It includes a brief reference to the rest of the people of God discussed in the book of Hebrews.

This material is more than a series of messages for me. It is a passion of my heart. I yearn for the good people of our congregations to know the love/humility, generosity, health, assurance that is theirs by the sovereign reign of Jesus Christ in their hearts and lives. When I preached these sermons, I was aware that my words and thoughts amounted to less than nothing unless the Holy Spirit, whose role it is to make Jesus known, did his work in my heart and mouth as well as in the hearts and minds of the hearers.

Sermon One: Jesus Christ Is Lord

Text: 1 Corinthians 12:3b

Introduction

Great spiritual movements are often undetected in the Church. As a rising tide slowly changes the sea, so a great spiritual movement changes all of the atmosphere, yet it goes undetected.

Many of you might be surprised to hear that *The Dictionary of World Religions*, a nonsectarian reference work, speaks of the holiness movement as “the most significant of the last two hundred years.”¹ This volume

- Lists adherents as ten million
- Lists the Nazarenes as the largest body in the U. S. and the Salvation Army as the largest worldwide group
- Defines holiness people as those who hold that the image of Christ may be realized in the human heart in this life
- Does not include Methodism since not all Methodists hold this truth
- Does not list Pentecostals since they had not yet developed a doctrine

Why has this “most significant movement” been disregarded? Or worse yet, why has it fallen into disrepute?

During the 1994 meeting of the National Holiness Association in Nashville, Tennessee, Keith Drury spoke of the holiness movement as “dead.” He later said that the movement

¹This quotation was in my notes. I was unable to locate the edition I was using at the time when I took the notes.

was like Jairus' daughter: "She is not dead; she is asleep!" said Jesus."

After being in Nashville for about two years, I grew bold and suggested that my church, First Church of the Nazarene, have a revival with me as the preacher and that it be an eight-day, ten-service revival with holiness as the topic of each message.

Since the church was going "all out" for this revival, the religion editor of the local paper came to my office to interview me about the series. When she asked me about holiness, I turned the question back to her and asked, "What came to your mind when I said 'holiness'?" She smiled politely and said, "Oh, nothing." "Are you sure?" I probed. "Did you think of snake handlers in East Tennessee or legalistic extremists? Or judgmental attitudes?" She did not want to offend but nodded in the affirmative. I regretfully admit that the beautiful doctrine of holiness has fallen into disrepute when we have lost balance.

I. Nazarenes must have a balance of doctrine, experience, and ethics if they are to assist in the spreading of holiness throughout the world.

A. We Nazarenes must be clear in doctrine. The Bible colleges, universities, and seminaries of the Church of the Nazarene must give themselves to the constant examination and endorsement of the doctrine. If we fail to do so, the message will become obscure and unclear. On the other hand, if we emphasize doctrine to the neglect of experience and ethics we become theologues. (Emphasis is on the log—dead and dry.)

B. We must also emphasize experience. If we lack here, we are without a witness. On the other hand, if we overemphasize experience to the neglect of doctrine and ethics, we become irresponsible emotionalists.

C. We must also emphasize ethics. The holy life is characterized by a specific lifestyle. To fail here is to be a laughing stock of the world. Balance is called for. When we have lost our balance, we have lost our influence.

II. Nazarenes must have a balanced understanding of the three roles of Jesus—Prophet, Priest, and King.

A. Jesus is our Prophet.

He is the Great Prophet who is greater than any prophet (Hebrews 1). In both the Old and New Testaments the figure of the prophet connotes power. Old Testament prophets were empowered to do exploits.

We of the holiness movement have used that imagery often and appropriately, for we witness to the power that he provides in order to deliver us. The imagery of Pentecost is that of power, mighty rushing wind, and tongues of fire. (We are not surprised that Luke, the Gentile Roman, would focus on this aspect of the work of the Spirit.) We have emphasized his role as prophet with eloquence and effectiveness. It is in our preaching. It is in our songs:

- “There is sanctifying power like a sweet refreshing shower, waiting for each consecrated heart.”
- “There is power, power, wonder-working power in the precious blood of the Lamb.”

B. Jesus is our Priest.

The operative word here is *cleansing*. Priests sanctified themselves and the utensils as they went into the tabernacle or the temple, and sanctification meant cleansing. The movement has done well here. Cleansing is in our preaching. It is in our songs:

- “Refiner’s fire, go through my heart, illuminate my soul, scatter thy life through every part, and sanctify the whole.”
- “Oh make me clean, oh make me clean; mine eyes thy holiness have seen.”
- “He brought me out of the deep miry clay, he set my feet”

C. Jesus is our King.

We Nazarenes have emphasized cleansing very well, but balance is our concern. We have been inclined to neglect the third role of Christ on our behalf. He is also King, Lord, and Sovereign.

I do not know why we have been slow to talk in terms of sovereignty. We may have thought that the Baptists have a franchise on sovereignty, but we need to acknowledge Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King. Lacking the third leg of the tripod causes us trouble. It works this way: We holiness people believe in power. We believe that he gives us power to keep us

from falling and that he empowers us for service beyond our own ability. We believe that he cleanses from inbred sin. We think on those things that are “lovely” and “of good report,” yet we feel weak, and sometimes our thought life strays. Satan will suggest bad thoughts and then accuse us because those thoughts passed through our minds, and the accuser does his work to persuade us that we must have fallen from grace. Many holiness folk are spiritually sickly, living in a mixed bag of confidence and doubt and robbed of the joy of the holy life.

What should we do? I propose that we strike a balance and proclaim that Jesus is Prophet with power, Priest with cleansing, and King with sovereign reign.

III. How does Jesus become Prophet, Priest, and King of our lives?

The text says, “No one can say Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3b). The text, like a coin, has two sides, two points to be made.

A. We are not able to say “Jesus Christ is Lord” on our own.

That fact is why holiness preaching cannot ultimately depend on logic. I cannot talk you into this experience. I cannot really win the debate or convince the doubtful. Why? Each of us has a subtle deceiver within us to distort our logic and reason. It is a perception. More accurately, we operate under a misperception. We operate under the delusion of our own sovereignty. It keeps us from saying “Jesus is Lord.”

We are like the lame man at the pool of Bethesda; he was aware of his need but his lameness was precisely what prevented him from making it to the pool in time for healing. Our carnal nature with which we were born and for which we are not guilty is, nonetheless, a distorter of our perspective. Since we have no memory prior to this misperception, we assume that it is not a misperception at all.

Still, from time to time we realize our inadequacy. In crisis times we conclude, “I can’t handle this!” Indeed, we cannot. That conclusion is a correct one. When we think we can handle what life hands us, we are deluded. I ask the falsely confident among us, “How about your own death? Do you think you can manage that?”

The dilemma is the one that Paul describes: “Oh wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?” Who indeed but the one who is truly Lord? “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 7:24-25 NKJV). By the enabling work of the Holy Spirit one may declare the lordship of Jesus Christ. The image of Christ may be realized in the human heart in this life.

Conclusion

A. In this series, we will go into greater detail about just how the lordship of Christ comes to pass in your heart, how the no to the will of God in your life can be turned into a yes—a wholehearted and unadulterated yes.

B. While we are very pessimistic about the nature of man and sin, we are very optimistic about the nature of grace.

The Holy Spirit has one task: to establish and maintain the lordship of Jesus Christ in the human heart.

Appeal

For this time of prayer, I have but one question. I am not asking if you are a church member, a board member, a pastor, or a Christian worker. I am not even asking if you are a Christian. I am asking is Jesus Christ Lord of your life?

If you can say “Yes,” then I know who enabled you to say it. You cannot say it on your own. Only the Holy Spirit can enable you. He makes known to you the Jesus who empowers and cleanses, and he becomes sovereign King. What I have described is the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

J. O. McClurkan is reported to have said, “There is a sinful self to be crucified. There is a human self to be disciplined. There is a true self to be realized.”

Suggested songs for response

“I’ll Say Yes, Lord, Yes, to Your Will and to Your Way” or “Jesus Be the Lord of All”

Sermon Two: Why Two Works of Grace?

Text: 1 Corinthians 12:3b, 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 (Read both passages.)

Review

The holiness movement is the most significant spiritual movement of the last two hundred years. (Examples that could be noted are these: social reform in Great Britain with new labor laws, et cetera; the role of the holiness leaders in the abolition of slavery in the United States.)

When the movement has lost balance, it has fallen into disrepute and lost its influence. In these sermons my intent is to present an appeal that (1) is balanced in doctrine, experience, and ethics and (2) presents Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King (thus providing power, cleansing, and sovereign lordship).

We will also remember a statement from J. O. McClurkan with three points: "There is (1) a sinful self to be crucified, (2) a human self to be disciplined, and 3) a true self to be realized."

Introduction

We holiness people have maintained that the image of Christ may be realized in the human heart in this present life. We believe that the doctrine is biblical, that the experience of entire sanctification brings assurance, and that the ethical model is the life of Jesus. We observe a predictable sequence in the spiritual journey of every believer. The work of the Spirit that we identify as entire sanctification is such a crisis; we have tended to focus on it as a second blessing.

Those unacquainted with our tradition have been inclined to ask, "Why two works of grace?" That question is the title of this sermon. Does the Church of the Nazarene emphasize two works of grace because of the undebatable word of Scripture?

The episodes from Scripture are persuasive. As the disciples tarried in the Upper Room, awaiting Pentecost, their state of grace would not be questioned. Therefore, at least in this case, the visitation of the Spirit came subsequent to regeneration. Paul's encounter on the Damascus Road and his subsequent infilling with the Holy Spirit at the residence on Strait Street suggest sequence (Acts 9:1-18). Then there were those believers whom Paul came upon at Ephesus (Acts 19:1-7) who had been

baptized unto repentance but were subsequently filled with the Holy Spirit.

Moreover, there is the record of the Holy Spirit's coming upon believers in Acts 2 and again, presumably the same people, in Acts 4. By now some are ready to debate on the negative side of my claim. H. Ray Dunning of Trevecca Nazarene University observes that the call is clear but that the steps in sequence are less clear in Scripture.

Do we believe in two works of grace because of the nature of humankind? This question gets us closer. We know that something happened to the nature of humankind in the Garden of Eden when our first parents sinned (fell), and we know that that condition must be remedied before we enter heaven. This fact leads us to ask if we believe in two works of grace because of the nature of sin. The answer is yes.

Sin is "missing the mark." That definition is accurate but inadequate; it addresses the deed part of sin. Sin is also rebellion—or the delusion of our own sovereignty. This definition addresses the disposition factor in sin. We are plagued not only by "the nature of sin" but also by a "sin nature."

- "I was shapen in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psalm 51:5 KJV).
- "We are by nature the children of wrath" (Ephesians 2:3 KJV).

We are not guilty for having a sinful nature any more than we are for our gender or skin color, but it cannot be ignored. It is a part of the condition of humanity. We have no recollection prior to it. We cannot remember when it was not a part of us. The sinful nature is a perspective, a way of looking at things, and a world view.

Holiness folk are those who maintain that the grace of God can impact and change, in a positive way, this misperception. Furthermore, holiness folk believe that the grace of God can shatter this delusion and bring the believer into a right and authentic relationship with God and others.

I would like to lay them before you in a kind of biography of the sanctified. I ask you to see how these three steps compare with your own experience so that you may identify where you are on your spiritual journey and what expression of grace may be available to you for further progress toward your eventual

encounter with the true Lord of the universe.

Although we are two-works-of-grace folk, I submit that five distinct stages or points of progress are made possible through grace. In the following material I will use myself as an illustration, with “the delusion of sovereignty” as the operational definition of the sin nature, and then demonstrate how God deals with that delusion in a sequence of grace. While I also hold the empowering and the cleansing terminology, the “lordship or sovereignty” terminology clarifies the sequence of grace more adequately.

I. Conviction

For eight months, I restlessly anticipated my arrival on earth in the warm, moist atmosphere of my mother's womb. I finally arrived a full month early and immediately began giving orders. You see, just like you, I labored under the delusion that I was the center of the universe. My mother, family members, and nurses reinforced that delusion by responding to my every demand.

For a number of months everything went according to my dictates, but in the course of time my delusion of sovereignty was challenged. (I have no memory of the following incident, but I believe those who reported it to me.) Our neighbors' little Susie also labored under the delusion of her sovereignty. When the family visited our home, a collision of sovereignty claims took place. My playpen seemed a convenient place to put both of us eleven-month-olds. Then she invaded my “domain” and took my red ball. As any sovereign would, I took it back with the force of my new teeth and bit her. Since she also had new teeth and since she was also a sovereign, she bit me back. For the first time, my lordship claim was challenged, and I did not like it. It hurt. It hurt badly.

Conviction—the first work of grace. Even though conviction is a primitive form, it is the gracious activity of God which informs us that there are painful consequences when we assert our sovereignty claims on others. In time, this conviction may be informed by moral standards, but in its most primitive form is it the simple awareness that our lordship simply does not work out. When our claim to lordship is challenged, a great deal of pain is involved—pain for others but also pain for ourselves.

II. Conversion

In the course of time, our primitive conviction is more fully informed. We learn that we have violated others and that our offense is a violation of the laws of God as well. We learn that our deeds have been evil. We have missed the mark.

We find ourselves in the limitation of time. We know that we violated others and the laws of God, but we have no device by which we can go back and correct those misdeeds.

Then we hear the good news. I was just five years of age when I first sensed it. I remember the experience vividly. My daddy was the preacher. I do not recall what he said, but I recall how I sensed that I had done wrong things. As I stood at the front pew of the church, I began to cry. My mother saw that I was moved and asked me if I wanted to pray. I told her that I did. She knelt with me and told me that if I would tell Jesus that I was sorry he would forgive me and I could be his boy. I believed whatever my momma told me. I sensed that I truly belonged to Jesus and was forgiven of my sins. Those misdeeds of the past were not held against me anymore.

In conversion, Jesus becomes “Lord of our past.” His grace does what we cannot do—i.e., erases the sins of the past. John Wesley speaks of this work of grace as sanctification begun. It certainly is an expression of prevenient grace.

III. Entire Sanctification

Only with my misdeeds dealt with did I become fully aware of my delusion problem. Conviction and conversion made me aware to some degree. My delusion of sovereignty caused me pain and got me into trouble, and I was unable to correct past violations. With past deeds atoned for, I acknowledged a new Lord. I became what James described as “the double-minded man.” He speaks of him as being “unstable in all his ways” (James 1:8 KJV).

The work of the Holy Spirit continues. 1 Corinthians 12:3 reads, “No man can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.” In one area after another of our lives he asks gently, “May Jesus be Lord here?”² This process of surrendering to the lordship claims of Christ and the accompanying forfeiture of our own

² See pamphlet “Our Christian Journey” by Millard Reed, produced by First Church of the Nazarene (Nashville, TN) and available from Trevecca Nazarene University.

claims in one area after another is the dynamic of sanctification. In the course of time, and by the continued faithful work of the Holy Spirit, all sovereignty claims are shattered. Jesus becomes Lord of all. The sanctification is entire. There are no known noes to God—no known noes.

The double-minded person is now single-minded. The title of a work by Soren Kierkegaard says it best: *Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing*. The hymn writer wrote, “My stubborn will at last has yielded. I would be thine, yea, thine alone.” The delusion with which I was born and which colored all my considerations has been shattered and replaced with the true persuasion that Jesus Christ is Lord.

I discover the authentic role for which I was created: I was intended to be a steward. I never was intended to be lord. I am not designed to be lord. It is no wonder that bad things happen to me and to others when I act as if I were lord. Lords can make no error. They must be without flaw. Stewards are received as perfect when their hearts are right toward their Lord. He accepts that heart condition and calls it “faithful.”

I regret that my “last yes” was a call to preach. Not everyone is called to preach, but everyone has that last thing which must be surrendered to the lordship of Jesus Christ. I bargained with the Lord. I offered to pay double tithe and to be the best layman that the world has ever known, but what I was really doing was trying to retain a remnant of lordship. The Holy Spirit was faithful and did not let me off. How good to discover that his will for us is so far better than our own will for ourselves. Entire sanctification is a work of God’s grace.

IV. Growth or Maturity or Gethsemane

I am still seeking for an adequate term. *Growth* and *maturity* are not as precise as I would like, for there is a work of grace here that needs to be identified. While there are no known noes in the life of the sanctified, there are some “Oh noes,” and there is grace available for such times.

I find wondrous mystery in Gethsemane. Our Lord knew from the foundation of the earth that he would suffer and die at the hands of cruel men. He tried to prepare his disciples before they, then he, went up to Jerusalem. Still he prays, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me” (Matthew 26:39ff).

Did Jesus rebel against the Father? I do not believe that he did. Did Jesus agonize? He did. Did he sweat great drops of blood? Dr. Luke reports that he did. Luke also reports that “an angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him” (Luke 22:43).

Jesus was living out his earlier consecration. Did he renege on his commitment? I don't think so. Did he sin? Certainly not. But he so agonized with the actualization of the prior consecration that the Father sent an angel to strengthen the one who Paul says created and holds the universe together (Colossians 1:13-20).

I was truly sanctified at age seventeen. My last surrender to God's will was that I would serve him and the Church in the pastorate. I knew more about the pastorate than the average seventeen-year-old, but could I have possibly comprehended all that a lifetime of service would involve? Of course not! Did I truly surrender? I believe that I did. Sometimes clearly committed believers are shocked by the unfolding of God's plan and they respond, “Oh, no!” Sometimes it is heartbreak. Sometimes it is surprise.

Fourteen years ago while vacationing in Bangkok, Thailand, I received a phone call and was told that I had been elected president of Trevecca Nazarene College. My first response was “Oh, no!” I loved the pastorate and did not want to leave. (Isn't it interesting that my last point of surrender when I was a teenager was to enter the pastorate, and my point of surrender at age fifty-seven was to leave the pastorate?)

At such times there is Gethsemane grace. This fact is important for the sanctified to know because Satan attacks at such times and sometimes causes a sensitive soul to say, “I must not be sanctified.” Quite the contrary. “Oh noes” occur in the life of the sanctified, and there is a work of grace for the occasion. Grace is available for the “Oh no” times of life.

V. Glorification

As long as I am in this world, there will be the evidence of sin upon me. My mind will not work well. I will be a faithful steward but not flawless, blameless but not flawless. There will always be times when the proper thing for me to do is apologize. Even John Wesley acknowledges the place of repentance in the life of the believer. The reader will recall the words of McClurkan:

“There is a human self to be disciplined.” Even when I am entirely sanctified, I am not glorified.

Some people confuse sanctification with glorification. In this life I will have frailties, but someday I will stand before the King without the stain of sin upon me. I will be glorified. Glorification is a work of grace, also.

Conclusion

Where are you on your journey? There is grace for you for

1. Conversion
2. Entire sanctification
3. Grace (like Jesus had in Gethsemane)

The Holy Spirit is here and eager to provide for you.

CHAPTER TEN

The Glory of His Presence in Advent

Sermon and Worship Resources for the Season

The material that follows was first printed under the same title by Beacon Hill Press in 1987.

Introduction to the Sermon Series

When I was pastor of First Church of the Nazarene in Nashville, Tennessee, I observed, with pleasure, as the people of my congregation warmed to a celebration of Christmas after the traditional schedule of Advent. They looked forward to the first Sunday of Advent as a time when a theme was introduced and, by the aid of some simple liturgy, followed through to Christmas Day.

From time to time neighboring pastors, or subscribers to the church's tape ministry, asked that I share the materials, and I was happy to do so. I offer this material in the hope that it might be helpful to my pastor friends. If this material can be useful for you, I suggest that you rework it in order to make it your own. I submit it humbly. If it assists you in your task, I will be pleased.

This material assumes a five-service schedule which would begin the first Sunday of Advent and be used on Sunday mornings only, except for the last service, which would be either on Christmas Eve or the Wednesday night before Christmas.

The theme "The Glory of His Presence" is drawn from the prologue to John's Gospel:

First Service	The Glory of His Creative Presence— 1:1-3
Second Service	The Glory of His Revealing Presence— 1:4-9, 15, 18
Third Service	The Glory of His Incarnate Presence— 1:10, 14a
Fourth Service	The Glory of His Regenerating Presence— 1:11-13
Fifth Service	The Glory of His Redemptive Presence— 1:7b. 1:11; 13: 31-35; 17:1-6

The song "The Glory of His Presence" works well with this material and could be sung by a soloist with refrains used from

time to time in the sermons and by the congregation throughout the season. The material for each service includes the following: suggested music, a liturgy for the lighting of the Advent candles, Scripture passages, sermon outlines, and sermon scripts (that include the sermon outline). The liturgies for the candle lighting are prepared for two readers; I recommend using teens as readers and children as candle lighters. Relatively inexpensive Advent wreaths can be purchased at Christian book stores or devised by persons in your congregation.

May the "glory of his presence" be with you.

Millard Reed

First Sunday of Advent
The Glory of His Creative Presence

Suggested Music

"Gloria in Excelsis Deo"
"Come, Thou Long-expected Jesus"
"O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"
"No One Understands like Jesus"
Prayer Chorus "He Is Lord"
Solo "The Glory of His Presence"

Liturgy for the Lighting of the First Advent Candle

First Reader: We have gathered in this house of praise to celebrate the glory of the presence of our God.

Second Reader: Again this year we enter the Advent season and approach the Advent candles with worthy motives. We want to worship our Savior in the beauty of holiness.

First Reader: This year we see the candles as a testimony of the glory of his presence.

Second Reader: The first of the candles is to represent the glory of his creative presence.

First Reader: "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:3).

Second Reader: "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made"

(John 1:3). We light the Advent candle, and we let its glow, which is possible because of our Savior's creative power, remind us of the glory of his creative presence.

Text: John 1:1-3

Sermon Outline: The Glory of His Creative Presence

Introduction

- I. John, as a Hebrew, has a rich understanding of the relationship between God and nature.
 - A. The Hebrew view differed from those of other ancient thought processes.
 1. Fertility cults
 2. Greek mythology
 3. Greek philosophy
 - B. All Hebrews knew the Confession.
- II. John does an incredible thing: he declares that
 - A. Jesus is pre-existent/eternal.
 - B. Jesus is omnipotent.
 - C. This declaration has both positive and negative implications.
 1. Positive
 2. Negative

Introduction

We begin our Advent journey: "And we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). John is our guide this year as we set out on our pilgrimage to bow down and worship the infant King, Christ Jesus. John, like the others, had heard the prediction of Isaiah that there would be one who would come whose name would be Emmanuel, "God with us."

Each of the others had interpreted what that presence of God in our midst would be. According to the writings of Iraenus (about 185 A.D.), "Luke, the follower of Paul, put into a book the gospel that was preached by him." In so doing Luke wanted to call the Greeks to come and worship. To do so, he calls them back—back to the humble setting of a cave, a cow stall—and there around the manger the common men gathered, the shepherds. There they worshipped the Christ child.

About that same time, Matthew gave his account. Matthew, according to Iraenus as quoted by Origen, wrote of Jesus in order to win new converts from Judaism. He wished to present Jesus to them as the King of the Jews, so he calls them back in their journey, directing their attention not to a cow stall but to a house where there is a small child. The small child is sought out by the potentates from the East so that they can esteem him as the one born King of the Jews, and they bow down before him, and they bring their gifts, gifts considered worthy of a child king. We join Luke and make our trip back to the manger. We join Matthew and make our way to find those early kings.

Probably the earliest of the gospels was Mark's. There are fragments that date back to the 40s, very early for Mark. It was Mark's purpose to present Jesus as the suffering servant, and he, therefore, felt no need to include a nativity story. Within the first chapter of Mark are indications that this Jesus whom he is to present is to be known as the suffering servant. Clement of Alexandria indicates that Mark wrote what was preached by Peter, particularly to the Romans.

Finally, near the end of the century, John, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, provides his account of the Lord Jesus. John's Gospel was probably written at least twenty years later than the other Gospels. Someone said that the Synoptics are written, as it were, along the highway of life but that John turns aside to enter into a chapel, and in the chapel he reflects upon the glory of God. John had experienced that glory no less than did Matthew, Mark, or Luke. Many would argue that he experienced it more. He would not hesitate to make the journey with them and revel in their presentation, but in this passage John is meditating and reflecting. He has seen the glory of God. The key to all of John's Gospel is found in 1:14: "And we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

The theme of this Advent season is the glory of his presence, and on this first Sunday I submit to you the glory of his creative presence. I begin with John, chapter 1: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." John has done an incredible thing.

I. John, a Hebrew, had a rich understanding of the relationship between God and nature, the natural world.

Every Hebrew could quote Genesis 1:1: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." No other ancient religion had such a clear-cut and amiable relationship between God and his creation.

A. The Hebrew view differed from those of other ancient thought processes.

1. Fertility cults

The ancient fertility cults, for instance, saw an identity between the vitality of the natural world and the practice of the temple prostitutes. For them the natural world was somehow contextualized in the immorality of the practices in the temple.

2. Greek mythology

Not greatly different from the view of the fertility cults was the view of Greek mythology in which the dramatized carnal competition between either the sexes of the gods or the orders of the gods was used in a mythological drama to explain the relationship between God and the natural world.

3. Greek philosophy

The Greek philosophers contrasted the imperfect physical world with the perfect metaphysical world.

B. All Hebrews knew the Confession.

In stark contrast to these views, the Hebrews had for many centuries been declaring in a confessional way, "In the beginning God created the heavens and earth." God. One God—benevolent God, creator God, sustainer God, a God who is in fellowship so that immediately he is caring for his creation and before long is walking with Adam and Eve in the cool of the day. In the Hebrew tradition there is a rich, rich relationship between God and his creation.

Psalm 104 illustrates the connection of the creator God and his creation, nature:

Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God, thou art very great; thou art clothed with honour and majesty. Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment: who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain: Who layeth the beams

of his chambers in the waters: who maketh the clouds his chariot: who walketh upon the wings of the wind: Who maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire: Who laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be removed for ever.

What a fantastic poet David was. He conveys an understanding of the creator God who is benevolent, who has fellowship with his creation, and whose creation is in some way an extension of his own power and grace. Verse 24 is a summary verse: “O Lord, how manifold are thy works! In wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches.” This verse expresses the Hebrew understanding of a god who is a creator God, and that expression, that confession of Genesis 1:1, is sacrosanct. No Hebrew would alter it: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” A Hebrew would rather touch the Ark of the Covenant in fear of dying than alter one letter of one word of that initial, ancient confession concerning the relationship between God and his creation.

II. John does an incredible thing.

John does an incredible thing, but he has to. He has seen the glory of God. In order to introduce us to Jesus, he needs to summon us, as Luke did, to a cow stall, a cave, and a manger with worshippers, and he does, but he must do more. He must not only summon us all the way back to the visiting potentates as Matthew did, but he must also call our attention to the suffering servant as Mark did. To tell the story of Jesus, John must retell the creation story so that he does not show it in error. Oh, no. He wants to introduce us to the one, the very one, by whom the creative events took place.

He takes this ancient confession, “In the beginning,” that every Hebrew knows by heart, and every Hebrew knows what the next word is supposed to be—“In the beginning God created.” Instead, John says, “In the beginning was the Word.” I can almost hear the scribes catch their breath. “Scandal,” they cry. “You have altered the ancient confession.” But John proceeds, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with

God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.”

If we truly take John as our guide, the journey is not only a trip back to the manger; it is not only a journey to the wise men. “We must take the wings of the morning” and go all the way back to the morning song of creation. For John is saying, “I have beheld his glory.” It is a glory that initially is the glory of creation. I want to take my shoes off right now.

I hope the glory of it may break upon you with newness. As members of the Western culture we have tended to assume that the sweet stories of Christmas are stories that might parallel the great stories of the call and mission of other great prophets and other great teachers. You cannot read John and you cannot accept John as your guide and make that conclusion. You must conclude, if you accept John as your guide, that Jesus, the one whom they touched and saw and their hands handled, is somehow by the mystery of divine omnipotence the very power of creation. Amen. That conclusion leaves us with such wonder that we exclaim, “O the glory of his presence!”

For that reason, every time I come to Advent I find myself very close to Easter. The power of the creation is the power of the resurrection, and the power of the creation and the resurrection is the power that sang sweetly the angels’ song on that holy night. It is the same song that was sung at creation’s morning because the presence of the babe in Bethlehem’s manger is the presence of the eternal God of creation. Now that conclusion has some extraordinary implications.

A. Jesus is preexistent/eternal.

Jesus whom we worship, whom we serve, is eternal. He was and is and is to come.

B. Jesus is omnipotent.

Jesus is omnipotent as well. He dramatizes his creative power by the power of his miracles, and he dramatizes it ultimately by his resurrection from the grave. While John is our guide, he is not distinct in the New Testament. All of the writers seem to understand that Jesus is the power of creation. Paul says, “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness” (2 Corinthians 4:6). Does that statement sound familiar?

Remember that Paul, too, was a Hebrew, trained at the feet

of Gamaliel. He knew all the story of creation, of Genesis. The great story of the creation is in the words God spoke: "Let there be light For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." That phrase is a wonderful one. Would you like to see the glory of God at Christmas time? Yes, we would like to see the glory of God—the same God, the God of creation, whose glory we see as we go out on a winter evening and watch the sun set and watch the stars as they break into view. These parts of nature reveal the glory of our creator God, but Paul is saying that the very same God who called light out of darkness has chosen to reveal his glory in the face of Jesus. "O the glory of his presence, O the beauty of his face; I am his and his forever. He has won me by his grace." I call you to consider the glory of his creative presence.

C. This declaration has both positive and negative implications.

The glory of his creative presence brings a positive and a negative insistence upon our lives.

1. Positive

First, the positive: Every scientist working in a laboratory, if that scientist is perceptive, will see the glory of the face of Jesus. You may be thinking, "Science? I thought it was science over here, religion over there." Yes, that is what twenty-first-century people say, but that is not what the Bible says. It is not what John says. John says, "I have seen his glory. Now, let me tell you who he is, and in order to tell you who he is, I must retell the creation story because the God whom we have esteemed through the centuries as the God of creation with a benevolent relationship toward his creation is the one whom we have known and whom our hands have handled." John's view of the interrelatedness of science and religion makes me want to pray, "Lord, help some scientist somewhere, shut away in his laboratory, maybe not feeling particularly religious, help that person to see your face." I have never prayed that prayer, but I think maybe I will because the God to whom John introduces us is the God by whom the world came into existence.

In my opinion, God's action in nature means that it's okay to have a Christmas tree. You know why? Because the one whom I worship made that tree. Yes, he did, and I think it's nice to have the sheep around, and the lambs, and the animals because the one in the manger made them all. Yes, he did. And I think it's delightful to have the star. It is a symbol, and I'm the kind who just loves to look at the night, especially crystal clear winter nights. There seems to be a show of stars that is more brilliant in the winter season than at any other time, but the one whose glory I experience is the one who made each of those stars. "O the glory of his presence!"

2. Negative

There is a negative message here, too, and I hesitate to deliver it, but I think I need to do so. The New Age Movement talks about "the god within you" and reincarnation and all the rest of that nonsense. Actually, this movement is not new; it is the old world heresy. They now call it spiritism, but they used to call it spiritualism. I saw a cartoon that had two little lizards looking at each other. One of them is saying to the other, "I keep getting this impression that in a previous life I was Shirley MacLaine."

Karl Barth spoke of the infinite qualitative difference between God and man. Yet, in the fullness of time God came in Jesus Christ to sinful man—lost, damned, undone, hopeless. When Thomas recognized the Christ, he cried out, "My Lord and my God." I do not stand on the beach, as do members of the New Age Movement, and cry into the wind, "I am God. I am God. I am God." Rather, I bow contritely and say, "I am sinful and I am undone." Jesus said, "My son, I have come to redeem you, and there is within me creative power; I will make of you a new creation." I am not my own salvation. Jesus is my Savior, my Redeemer, my Creator, and all of that is glorious to my eyes, and I sing of the glory of his presence, the beauty of his face.

The hymns of Christmas that serve us so well do not serve us so well on this theme. The theme is clearly biblical, but carols do not always tell it well. A hymn that does serve well is "Joy to the World." It does not say, "Joy to the Hebrew nation." It does not even say, "Joy to the people."

It does proclaim, "Joy to the world! The Lord is come; Let earth receive her King." The whole universe was created by him, sustained by him, maintained by him. Let every heart prepare him room, and let heaven and nature sing. Heaven and nature—how appropriate. For all the sounds of nature, all that are discovered or will be discovered, are his.

Sometimes we behold the beauty of God in the quiet of the chapel. Sometimes we behold the beauty of his face through the lens of the microscope or the telescope that enables our eyes to see his glory in the infinitesimal world or the gargantuan universe. We join Paul when he says, "The one that called light out of darkness has revealed to us his glory in the face of Jesus Christ."

"O the glory of his presence, O the beauty of his face." Let's behold his glory this Advent season—the glory of his presence.

Second Sunday of Advent *The Glory of His Revealing Presence*

Suggested Music

"Gloria in Excelsis Deo"

"Hark! The Herald Angels Sing"

"Thou Didst Leave Thy Throne"

"O Come, All Ye Faithful"

Prayer Chorus "O Come, Let Us Adore Him"

"Redeeming Love"

Liturgy for the Lighting of the Second Advent Candle

First Reader: We joyfully celebrate the glory of the presence of our God.

Second Reader: It is his creative presence that makes this gathering possible. By the power of that presence we "live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). We light the first candle in celebration of his creative presence.

First Reader: The second candle represents the glory of his

revealing presence. John wrote, "No one has ever seen God, but God the only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made him known" (John 1:18).

Second Reader: We light the second candle in celebration of the glory of his revealing presence, and rejoice that he has revealed his presence to us.

Text: John 1:4-9, 15, 18

Sermon Outline: The Glory of His Revealing Presence

Review

Introduction

- I. The glory of his presence is unrecognized by sinful humanity.
 - A. Old Testament assertion (Exodus 33:20)
 - B. New Testament assertion (John 1:5)
 - C. Incomprehensible mockery of unrecognized glory
 1. Russian cosmonaut
 2. Job
 3. Contemporary thinker
 4. Family in poverty
- II. To such sinful ones the Son makes known the Father.
 - A. He reveals to all.
 1. Mission effort
 2. Personal soul-winning
 - B. He reveals well.
 1. Philip
 2. The Book of Hebrews
 - C. He has revealed thoroughly.
 1. In him is light
 2. In him is the beauty of holiness

Summary

Invitation

Review

John testified, "We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). There is a sense in which each of the Gospel writers gave himself to the task of summoning his audience back to behold the glory of God in Christ Jesus. Mark, appealing as he did to the Romans, called them back to see the glory of the suffering ser-

vant and made no mention of the nativity. Luke, who presented the Son of Man to the Greeks, invited them to make the trip back to the cow stall in a cave where humble shepherds gathered around, and he presents the story of God's glory in that setting. Matthew, who wrote primarily for the Jews, appealed to his audience to consider the glory of the King of the Jews. It is understandable that the nativity story which he preserved is the story of the visiting potentates from the East who came with gifts fit for a king and sought the King of the Jews. Each of these accounts is glorious.

John is the only one, however, who so forthrightly states, "We beheld his glory." His account was written much, much later than the others. He had time to meditate "in the chapel along the way," so when he gives his invitation to his audience, he invites us all the way back, past the suffering servant, past the Son of Man, past the King of the Jews. He invites us all the way back to the creation, and he has to begin by declaring that the one of whom he now gives an account is the very one by whom the worlds came into existence. We hear him saying, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

Readers have not read very far into John's account until they know that his thesis is "The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." "O the glory of his presence!"

Our celebration of his glorious presence must include the glory of his creative presence. I repeat: the radiance of the face of Jesus illuminates the scientist's laboratory as surely as it illuminates the sanctuary. The hidden secrets discovered by the great minds of any age are the secrets placed there originally by the hand that the shepherds touched in the manger. Do you believe that? I believe you do. We are rather quiet about it, but it is the glory of his creative presence, nonetheless.

Introduction

On this second Sunday in Advent, we go to John 1:18: "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." This verse is a parallel truth to that of verses 1, 2, and 3, which we read last Sunday. At that time we considered the glory of God's creative

presence, and we declared that wherever the glory of creation is viewed, it is God's creative presence. The parallel truth is that "No one hath seen God at any time."

I. The glory of his presence is unrecognized by sinful humanity.

The glorious presence of God, as glorious as it is, is unrecognized by sinful humanity. I know you are saying, "That's not what you said last Sunday, Pastor Reed." Stick with me a little while. As glorious as the presence of God is, humans in their lost condition cannot see God.

A. Old Testament assertion

A theological truth is expressed early in the Old Testament. In Exodus the voice of God speaks: "There shall no man see me, and live" (Exodus 33:20).

B. New Testament assertion

John says, "And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not" (1:5). Then in verse 10 John says, "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not."

C. The incomprehensible mockery of unrecognized glory

Here is a paradox: There is the incomprehensible mockery of unrecognized glory. Karl Barth, the twentieth-century theologian, is said to have spoken of the "infinite qualitative difference between God and man," a phrase that expresses tremendous separation between the holy God and sinful humans.

1. Illustration: Russian cosmonaut

Even though all that we said last Sunday about the glory of God and his creation is true, still the Russian cosmonaut was not necessarily being irreverent when he said, as he went around and around the globe, "I did not see God there." The eyes of humanity are veiled, and their ears are stopped when they fail to witness the glory of God. This fact does not mean that God is not glorious. It simply means that in our lost and sinful condition we do not see, we do not hear, we are dead in trespasses and sin, and we do not behold the glory. Even though God's glory is among us, that fact does not necessarily enable us to conclude that immediately, *ipso facto*, our eyes should see.

2. Illustration: Job

Job himself cried out and said, "Oh, that I might know where I might find him." The sincere heart often fails in its pursuit of the presence of God. Many have written about the deadly silence of God and about times when they cannot see God in their lives: "No man hath seen God at any time."

3. Illustration: Contemporary thinkers

What we have presented for us here is what the theologians talk about as revealed theology in contrast to natural theology. Some conclude that, since the natural world is created by God and is so indwelt by his glory, people ought to know that glory immediately or automatically. If we were speaking only of the natural world or speaking only of God, that conclusion would be valid; however, once you consider the seriousness of the sinful state of man, once you consider how far humanity has fallen, once you consider how distorted all our images and our perceptions are and how at best we see "through a glass darkly," you have to conclude differently.

4. Illustration: Family in poverty

Around the time of the Great Depression, a family in Kansas lived in abject poverty, without enough to eat, with hardly enough to clothe themselves, and with inadequate housing. After the Depression ended, the family discovered that beneath the small plot of land they owned was the richest oil pool on the North American continent. Wealth that was theirs beyond their imagination had previously had been of no benefit to them because they had no knowledge of it.

We are that family—dead in our trespasses and sin. We hear other people talk about the glory of God, and our own hearts say (and sometimes our lips say), "I do not see his glory." Paul would say that we are blinded by the "gods of this age." He describes every one of us.

II. To such sinful ones the Son makes known the Father.

"No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John 1:18). Let me make the second basic statement: To us,

blind ones who are dead in sin, the glorious Son makes known the glory of the Father.

I suppose I should have started here last Sunday. I started where I started because, in the context of history, I thought that the first glory we should consider was the glory of his creative presence. The truth is that without the glory of his revealing presence, we do not even discover the glory of his creative presence. Far too many scientists do not discover the glory of his presence in their laboratories, and far too many worshippers do not discover the glory of his presence in the sanctuary. It is only by the revelation of his grace, the glory of his revealing power and presence, that the glory of his creative presence or the glory of his redemptive presence can even be perceived. We may see only through a glass darkly, but we will one day see face to face.

By some measure our spiritual ears are made sensitive to hear. If I had a prayer for you and for me at this Christmas season, it would be, "Oh, God, give us eyes to see and give us ears to hear the sound of your glory." It is a miracle because "No man hath seen God at any time."

It is only by the glory of his revealing presence. I could not appeal to you just on the basis of rational processes. I could not arbitrarily ask you to finally conclude that God is here in his place. It is the glory of his revealing presence that makes any insight possible.

The phrase "The only begotten Son" deserves a closer look with the help of different translations. Moffatt says, "The divine One, the only Son." Beck says, "The one who is God and close to the Father's heart." The precious, old New English Bible says, "God's only son, he who is nearest to the Father's heart." Even the darkest heart has had the light of Jesus shine upon it at some time. That statement betrays some people you know. There are those who try to act as though they do not believe and that they have had no light, but according to the Scripture, the God of the universe has shined in their hearts also. He has done his work on the behalf of every lost child of Adam's race. That truth should encourage us in our evangelistic efforts.

The statement "He hath declared him" is worded by Knox in this way: "the Father, has himself become our interpreter." I like that phrasing. I cannot understand it, and it does not make sense to me, but the Son comes along and by the power of the

Holy Spirit interprets to us or, as the Revised Standard Version says, "He has made him known."

The Son reveals the hidden glories of eternity. You can look at a sunset better after Jesus has come to you to interpret it for you. You can look at all the glories of nature and say, "My Father did that for me!" I almost want to add, "Personally, just for me." When I see the livid, brilliant colors of the sunset, I say, "Thank you, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for doing that." His revealing presence enables us to comprehend, to lay hold of those truths. He is faithful in the glory of his revealing, illuminating presence. It is administered to all.

A. He reveals to all.

Verse 9 reads, "That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." In the first century the Gnostics believed that God revealed great truths but that he revealed them selectively. They believed that God designated a few in whom he placed the *gnosis* and that to those persons God delivered the secret messages. They were the select few. In the twenty-first century some still think that there are the preordained and predestined, but John said that the light of the glory of God illumines every man. Not just Gnostics. Everyone.

1. Illustration—Mission effort

Consider the implications of this truth to the Church's mission efforts. Some of you have wondered about those who have never heard the name of Jesus. What about those in distant lands where the gospel has not yet been preached? It means, I believe, at least this: that every missionary should be encouraged, knowing that as he or she begins to deliver the message, the light of Jesus has shined already upon the hearts of the hearers. There is no one—not one—who has not already had the illumination of the light of Jesus shined upon him or her.

2. Illustration—Personal soul-winning

The awareness that God is at work revealing himself to everyone should encourage those who work in evangelism, who knock on doors or give a ticket to someone and say, "Come to the musical Friday night," or who talk to others about the Lord Jesus. Every heart has seen the light of Jesus at some time—even those whose hearts seem so very dark.

There are those who try to act as though they do not believe and as if they have had no light, but according to the Scripture, the God of the universe has shined in their hearts also. He has done his work on the behalf of every lost son of Adam's race. That truth should encourage us in our evangelistic efforts.

B. He reveals well.

He has done his illuminating work well. Some New Testament passages illustrate his activity in this area.

1. Illustration—Philip

In John 14, Philip said to Jesus, "Lord, shew us the Father, and we shall be satisfied" (J.B. Phillips). Do you remember what Jesus said in response? "Have I been so long a time with you, without your really knowing me, Philip? The man who has seen me, has seen the Father" (J. B. Phillips). Jesus has done his job well. He has sometimes done it through the Living Word, or his own presence among us. Sometime he does his work by the printed word. He always works by the power of his Holy Spirit, but when he comes he does his work well.

2. Illustration—The Book of Hebrews

Whoever wrote Hebrews had received the illuminating, revealing work of Jesus. The first three verses of Hebrews 1 are these: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds." He and John were in agreement, weren't they? Listen to this next phrase: "Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high." Oh, the task of Jesus. In his presence the glory of God is revealed in our midst. He has done it universally, and he has done it well.

C. He has revealed thoroughly.

1. He also has done it thoroughly. Because the phrase used here is light—"In him was light, and the light was the light of men"—the figure seems simple. Light—pure, undiluted, not complex! A prism shows that light is, in fact, quite

complex. It has all the colors of the rainbow within the purity of its beam. When that beam is sorted out by the prism, then we see red, yellow, blue, and all the mixtures in between.

2. The glory of the light of his presence is holiness. It is love. It is purity. It is peace. It is joy. It is all the gifts of the Spirit. When the light of his presence shines on sin, it rebukes sin so that the very light of his presence is the light of conviction as well. Throughout history, as recorded in the Scripture, whenever any persons were in the presence of God, they prostrated themselves before him. Because a person's eyes are unaccustomed to the light, when the light first shines upon them, the glow of that light is painful, and so the person is inclined to turn away.

I call you to observe the glory of God—not only of his creative presence but the glory of his revealing presence as well, making known to us the beauty, the holiness of our God. As he makes known his holiness and as our blind eyes are unable to see, our eyes may also begin to focus upon the sin of our own life. I call you—I appeal to you—to heed the striving, to heed the revealing work of Jesus in the Advent season, remembering that in the Scriptures, God himself says, “My spirit will not always strive with men.”

Summary

All of this is a paradox to me. On one hand, we who are blind can be so touched by the Holy Spirit that we can see his glory. It is an amazing thing that we who are damned and cursed and dead in trespasses and sin can be somehow touched by his grace so that we are enabled to see. On the other hand, the paradox is compounded at least twofold when we consider that it is possible, after having seen his glory, to reject it, to refuse it, and to cling adamantly to our sin.

Invitation

I want the closing moments of this message to be vibrant with evangelistic appeal. Somehow the glory of his presence is violated if we view it only as a pleasant, nostalgic, warm spot in our hearts. To sense the convicting power of the Holy Spirit saying, “Child, my presence is here not only to convict, but to forgive

and to redeem and to make new,” and to be impressed by his glory but ignore his message is blasphemous.

There is extraordinary contrast in the writings of John. In his Gospel he makes it clear that we are created by the Eternal Word and, by the same power, we are enabled to recognize him as our Redeemer and become heirs by receiving him. In the First Epistle of John he indicates, “When he shall appear, we shall be like him” (1 John 3:2). These created bodies, though sinful, are going to be resurrected. They will become glorified bodies, and these eyes will look upon the glory of God, and we shall see him as he is. If that truth does not put a little shout in your heart, almost nothing will.

John’s writing also describes a situation that provides a startling contrast. In Revelation 6:15-17 this same John, who saw visions there on the Isle of Patmos, passes this word along to us about the end time: “And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” In that last Judgment Day, brothers and sisters, a day which every one of us will face, we will stand before the judgment bar of God to give an account of how we responded to that revealed light within our hearts. The Scripture makes it very clear that great numbers of people from all social classes will cry for the rocks and the mountains to hide them from that illuminating face. What a contrast with John’s description of the redeemed in 1 John 3:2: “We shall be like him; for we shall see him as He is.” Oh, the glory of his revealing presence. Oh, the fearsome dimension of his revealing presence.

Now, my dear ones, has his revealing grace exposed sin in your life? Is there an unconfessed, unrepented sin? Is there a carnal disposition that needs to be cleansed and sanctified wholly?

Suggested song: “There Is Room in My Heart for Thee”

Third Sunday of Advent
The Glory of His Incarnate Presence

Suggested Music

“Gloria in Excelsis Deo”

“Angels from the Realms of Glory”

“It Came upon the Midnight Clear

“As with Gladness Men of Old

Prayer Chorus “O Come, Let Us Adore Him”

Liturgy for the Lighting of the Third Advent Candle

First Reader: Our hearts are glad as we celebrate the glory of the presence of our God.

Second Reader: We relight the first of the Advent candles and rejoice in the glory of our Lord’s creative presence. “Through him were all things made; without him nothing was made that has been made” (John 1:3).

First Reader: As we relight the second candle we thank him for the glory of his revealing presence. “In him was life, and that life was the light of men” (John 1:4).

Second Reader: The third Advent candle represents the glory of his incarnate presence. John said, “The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us” (John 1:14). We light the third candle and praise the Father who sent the Son into the world.

Text: John 1:10, 14a

Sermon Outline: The Glory of His Incarnate Presence

Review

Introduction

I. “And the Word”

A. Heraclitus

B. Stoics and other philosophers

C. John and the term *logos*

II. “became flesh”

A. Humanity complete

B. Divinity complete

C. Humanity universal

III. "and dwelt among us"

Review

As John said, "We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." I want to sing, "O the glory of his presence, O the beauty of his face!" What a task it must have been for those first-century apostles—even with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit—to begin to record in some measure the glory of what they had seen.

Since Mark addressed the Romans, he pointed out the glory of the suffering servant, feeling no necessity to describe the birth of our Lord. Luke, addressing the Greeks, pointed out the glory of the Son of Man and gave details of the nativity scene and the gathering of the shepherds around the manger. Matthew wrote to the Jews and so presented the glory of the King of the Jews. He described potentates from the East who came with gifts appropriate for nobility. They approached the young child in his house. All of them are speaking of the glory of God, but John, the last of the writers, having time to "reflect in the chapel" for a while, invites his audience far beyond the nativity scene, back to the glory of creation: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." In a little while he says, "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." It is the glory of God's creative presence.

Last Sunday we moved to the other end of the prologue where in verse 18 we heard "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." There we observe the glory of his revealing presence. As glorious as his creative presence is, it goes unobserved by sinful man, for in his sinful state man is blind and cannot see. Glory all around, then, is of no benefit to eyes that are blind, but the same Jesus whose glory John sees as "creative glory" is also "revealing glory." He makes it possible for us, whose eyes are blind, to behold the glory of God. It is his revealing glory.

Introduction

We return to John 1:14 where two Sundays ago we focused on

the concluding words, “We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” Today we come to the offense of the gospel. We come to the bombshell of John’s writing. We of the twenty-first century do not notice the offense because we view it in a rearview mirror. The mirror is colored Jesus, and we have already accepted this Jesus as the Lord of history, so it does not offend us. On the other hand, first-century believers, and particularly first-century Gentile and Greek believers, would have been offended by the opening words of verse 14. Here is the bombshell: “The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us.” If we understand this proclamation properly, we will never, ever give ourselves to comparative religions; we will never, ever see Christianity as one of the great religions. We will understand as did the hymn writer who said, “None other can with him compare among the sons of men; fairer is he than all the fair that fill the heavenly train.”

I invite you to observe the glory of the incarnation: “And the Word.” We will look at each one of these few phrases individually.

I. “And the Word”

Let’s focus first on the word *Word*. It is an unfortunate thing that this is a Greek term that has no precise English equivalent. Most of the translations have said *Word*, but it is inadequate for us, and it is awkward when I try to refer to the word *word*. The Greek word for *word* is *logos*. It is a technical word from Greek philosophy. I’m going to walk through a little bit of teaching here, but you come with me. You’ll be glad you made the trip because the glory of his incarnation and the word that John selected intentionally and by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is potent.

A. Heraclitus

Remember Philosophy 101? If you do, you will remember the name Heraclitus and that *logos* is a term that was used in Greek philosophy from about 500 B.C. until about 300 A.D. It was first coined by the philosopher Heraclitus, one of the pre-Socratics (that is, those philosophers who preceded Socrates) whose pursuit was ultimate reality. They asked the question “What is truly real?” The earliest of them concluded that the ultimate element, and so the final reality, is earth. Since we came from earth and we will all return to earth, the

ultimate reality is earth. Soon there were others who said, “No, the ultimate reality is water.” Another said that the ultimate reality is fire, and finally Heraclitus said that the ultimate reality is change. He is the one who voiced the expression that some of you will remember: “You can never step into the same stream twice,” pointing out that while you would go to the same stream on any number of days, the stream is never the same. It moves continuously and so it is impossible to step into the same stream twice. Heraclitus said that the ultimate reality is change.

In order for there to be any continuity, in order for reality to escape chaos, there must be a principle of continuity, the philosopher said. The principle of continuity that saves us from chaos is *logos*. In a changing world, the alternative to *logos* is chaos. The basic principle that enables the ultimate reality to be changed is the principle of continuity to which all change must adhere, *logos*. Thus, it is either *logos* or chaos. In the course of time, other philosophers within the Greek framework seized that same understanding, that being itself is the principle of *logos*.

B. Stoics and other philosophers

Still other philosophers, the Stoics, specifically, worked on the difference between the metaphysical world and the physical world. They perceived that there was a “metaphysical or spiritual world as well as a physical world” and that, since the physical world has such change in it, the ultimate reality is the unchanging metaphysical world. They took this concept of Heraclitus, but they said that the *logos* is the universal mind (intellectual and ethical), so that whenever the human mind functions intellectually, it participates in the *logos*. Likewise, whenever persons give themselves to conduct that is good, they participate to that degree in the *logos*. Therefore, said the Stoics, the *logos* is that eternal principle that keeps order when otherwise there would be chaos, but it is also the supreme intelligence, and it is the supreme ethic. Every thought that is a thought of integrity and every deed that is an ethical deed participate in the *logos*. Consequently, by the time of John’s arrival, the word *logos* was a precise, technical Greek word with a philosophical background.

C. John and the term *logos*

John seizes the *logos* term. John and the disciples saw Jesus one day, and Jesus said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." John followed. John watched Jesus as he taught. John was there when Jesus healed. John was leaning on Jesus' breast the night Jesus was betrayed. John was there when the tomb was empty. John was there in the Upper Room when Jesus said, "Thomas, come here. Put your finger in my hand, your hand in my side." John was there the day Jesus rose, ascended, disappeared from their sight, and when an angel said, "Men, why are you here gazing into heaven? This same Jesus is going to come back" (paraphrased).

John was conscious of the Gospels' having been written by the others, and as he begins to approach the late years of his life, inspired by the Holy Spirit, he senses that he has beheld the glory of God and that somehow he must describe it. He had seen Jesus in all of his earthly majesty and power. John is the pastor at Ephesus. He becomes conscious of the Greek world and its historic and philosophic background. He becomes conscious of the word *logos*. It was not a word used commonly in Hebrew background, but by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit John begins to write, "And in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The typical Greek would not have been offended by these words. The Greeks somehow assumed that there must be some metaphysical principle of order, so the Greeks would say, "Yes, that's all right."

"All things were made by him and without him was not anything made that was made." Still the Greeks would not object because the concept of the glory of creation would probably have been shared by the Greeks. John goes on to say, "In him was life; and the life was the light of men," and the Greeks would probably hesitate at that point because John is now beginning to speak of a principle in a personal term, *him*. The *logos* is not simply a principle; it is a person. John moves on: "He was in the world, and the world was made by him," and I can see that the Greeks would be mystified by John's words. Somehow God gave power to become the sons of God, and the Greeks would not mind that idea because they termed every one of their emperors or rulers "Sons of God." By verse

14, however, John is ready to explode the bomb, and he says, “and the Word [*logos*] became flesh and dwelt among us.”

Bless John's heart. I wonder how long he thought about that part. He knew what meaning the Greeks attached to that word. He knew that it was a technical term, and he is bold to say that “the glory that I have beheld” (paraphrased), as he says over in his epistle, “that I have handled with my hands” “is the glory of the eternal *logos*,” but it is the *logos* that has become flesh and dwelt among us.

We read this verse too casually. We have heard it so often: “The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us.” John is saying something so cataclysmically bold that it is an explosion. If you have any idea of comparing Jesus with some other great teacher or of calling him an extraordinary prophet, you have not heard John. John takes the essence of the power of creation and joins with it the essence of the continuity of the physical world, until then viewed as essentially metaphysical by the Greeks, and he declares, “He is the one whom I walked alongside. I touched him; he touched me. He served me communion. He is the Lord of eternity. There is none that can compare with him” (paraphrased). Therefore, here is the Word, the eternal *Logos* among us.

II. “became flesh”

But John has more to say, something that is equally important, equally startling: “The Word (*logos*),” he says, “became flesh.” The term for *flesh* is *sarx*. *Sarx* is “everything that is essential to humankind—spirit, soul, and body.” Here is the further offense. The Greeks were ready to believe that God might be a spirit, but never flesh—never flesh.

A. Humanity complete

In this statement John is saying that Christ's humanity is complete, it is real, and it is permanent. John does not say that Jesus was clothed in flesh. The NIV says, “And the Word became flesh.” The Docetic Gnostics of the day were saying that God is a spirit, that his body is not real, that his body is only an appearance (maybe a phantom), and that it is some kind of metaphysical expression.

Some of you have been fascinated by the New Age Movement. This movement is not new; in reality, the New Age

Movement is the old world movement. And all of these extra-body experiences, detached from the body, that assume the essential vileness of the body, are contrary to the Scripture.

John says the eternal Word became *sarx*, became flesh, became everything that is essential to humanity—soul, mind, and body. That reason is why John is able to say that Jesus was in the world (verse 10) and “he became flesh” (verse 14). When John writes his epistle he says, “[W]hich we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have handled.” As Paul says in his Corinthian letter, “We have known him after the flesh.” He was made flesh.

B. Divinity complete

Jesus’ human and divine natures remained and did not change, but rather each fulfilled its mission so that later theologians could say he was “very God and very man.”

C. Humanity universal

His humanity was universal. His humanity (the Word becoming flesh) was universal rather than individual. Let me phrase that statement in ways that will bring it home to you. Women, it does not say that Jesus became a man. People of fair skin, it does not say that Jesus became one of olive skin. Gentiles, it does not say that Jesus became a Jew. The Word became flesh.

It can be said of Jesus (and only Jesus) that there is nothing characteristic of the human condition that is foreign to him. There is no one like him, and yet he is like every person. It means that it is appropriate to say that he knows all about our struggles, that he was tempted in all points as we are yet without sin. It is proper to say that he has borne our grief, that he has carried our sorrows. His humanity was universal—not individual.

One day I stood at Olivia Griffin’s side. She, who was usually in a wheelchair, had fallen and broken her hip the previous Sunday morning on the way to church. On Friday she had surgery, her twentieth surgery, and I visited with her. I said, “Olivia, I don’t know how you keep a sweet spirit like you do.” (Isn’t that a terrible thing for a preacher to say?) Then she said, “Well, Brother Reed, Jesus is with me.” She was so correct. The Word became flesh. Oh, hallelujah. I do not know what burden you’re

bearing right now, but it is part of a fleshly situation, and Jesus knows all about your struggles. He's the Word—the *Logos*—the principle of order in a changing world.

III. “and dwelt among us”

Jesus tabernacled with us; he pitched his tent among us. What is so wonderful about that picture is its specificity. It is specific. John is saying that the eternal principle of order is not a principle but it is a person. He came to the world. Not only is it personhood in some grand, broad sense, but as Luke said, it was in the days of Herod the King; Cyrenius was governor of Syria. As Matthew said, it was in a town called Bethlehem, quoting the prophet, and in the land of Judah. Or as Luke said, “In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee named Nazareth” (Luke 1:26). Notice all the particulars there, all the specifics: “To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary” (1:27).

We are no longer just talking abstract principle, and really, we are not just talking about universal mind and universal ethics. We are talking about a given time and a given place and an individual, and we are talking about Jesus teaching in Galilee and making his way to Jerusalem. Additionally, we are talking about his being buffeted by a real crowd, and we are talking about real thorns, and about his being stretched on a cross of wood, and about his rising on the third day. Every detail has specificity to it. It is specific and particular because the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. “And I watched him” (paraphrased), John would say, after fifty days when gravity could no longer hold on to Jesus, and the angel said as he ascended, “Why are you waiting here? He's coming again!”

Conclusion

“And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory.” Not only is it a glory of the creation or of his revealing grace, but it is a glory of the amazing incarnation, and if you do not catch the offense of it, you have not studied it carefully enough. For the mind says, “That's impossible!” But God speaking to us in his Son says, “I am come that [you] might have life, and that [you] might have it more abundantly” (John

10:10). The glory of the incarnation brought him who brings order out of our chaos in a changing world. It is he, who is the essence—the universal, if you please—both of the mind and of conduct in ethics; it is that same Jesus. John claims that his hands handled Jesus and that his eyes saw Jesus.

My favorite Christmas poem expresses John's proclamation so well.

The Mystery of Incarnation*

He who is the Almighty,
Became a suckling baby.

He who is all-wise,
Took on the dumbness of a newborn.

He whom the heavens cannot contain,
Was enclosed in a woman's womb.

He before whom the seraphim continually cried, "Holy, holy,
holy,"

Was born of a sinner into a world under the dominion of sin.
He who is unchanging went through nine months of constant
change

To enter a world of change.

He who is all-knowing had to communicate through baby
cries.

He who is infinite became but a microscopic cell.

He who is loved was born outside a hotel because no one had
room for his laboring mother.

He who is the Ceator became a creature.

He who has always been spirit took on the awkwardness of a
human body.

He who is eternal allowed himself to be bound by time.

He who is light was entombed for nine months in warm
blackness.

He who is just was accused of being an illegitimate child.

He who is sovereign God became dependent upon a human
man and woman for his food and clothing.

He who is clothed with majesty was born in a cattle trough.

He who alone is self-sufficient had to be cleaned and nursed.

He who is life was born with a death warrant around his neck.

Can there be a greater mystery? Can there be a greater miracle? "O the glory of his presence." Emmanuel, God with us. I cannot get over it, can you? Glory be to his name. Amen.

*I do not know the author's name.

The Fourth Sunday of Advent

The Glory of His Regenerating Presence

Suggested Music

"Joy to the World"

"I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day"

"Silent Night"

"O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"

"Thou Didst Leave Thy Throne"

Prayer Chorus "O Come, Let Us Adore Him"

Liturgy for the Lighting of the Fourth Advent Candle

First Reader: Welcome to this fourth Sunday of Advent. Join in a festive celebration of the glory of the presence of our God.

Second Reader: Our first candle represents the glory of his creative presence. We relight it and thank God that "through him all things were made" (John 1:3).

First Reader: The second candle represents the glory of his revealing presence. We relight it and rejoice that "the only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made him known" (John 1:18).

Second Reader: The third candle represents the glory of his incarnate presence. "The Word became flesh" (John 1:14). He really is among us.

First Reader: The fourth candle represents the glory of his regenerating presence. "To those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God . . . born of God" (John 1:12-13).

Second Reader: We light the fourth candle and celebrate our new birth in him.

Text: John 1:11-13

Sermon Outline: The Glory of His Regenerating Presence

Review

Introduction

- I. The Test Question for Us: How may we obtain this new life?
 - A. The negatives
 1. Not bloodline
 2. Not ritual
 3. Not human effort
 - B. The positive—"but of God"
- II. The Answer: "as many as received him"
 - A. "received him"
 - B. "believe on his name"

Conclusion

Review

John said, "[A]nd we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." When he said *we*, he must have included the other gospel writers, for they too beheld that glory and, inspired by the Holy Spirit, tried to describe it. Mark, addressing the Romans, saw glory in the suffering servant and called his readers back to look upon the face of Jesus in the agony of his hour of death. Luke, addressing the Greeks, chose to point out the glory of the Son of God and so invited them to consider the visit of the shepherds who came and surrounded the manger and worshipped him. For Matthew, addressing the Jews, it was the glory of the King of the Jews. It is understandable then that he would ask us to come back and witness those potentates from the East who came, saying, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" The picture that he paints is of the wise men bowing and presenting gifts worthy of a king.

On the other hand, John, having had time to reflect upon it, also summons us back, back beyond Jesus' mature ministry, back beyond these scenes of nativity; John invites us all the way back to the creation. He invites us to view in the mighty acts of creation the presence of Jesus as the eternal Word. John would have us see the glory of Jesus' creative presence. We have raced to the other end of the prologue where in verse 18 we discovered the glory of his revealing presence, and we read, "No man

hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” We considered the glory of his revealing presence in verse 14: “The Word became flesh.” John, inspired by the Holy Spirit, picked up the technical term *logos* from Greek philosophy: *logos*—the principle of order in the midst of chaos. John is saying, this *logos* is more than a principle. The *logos* is a person, and he became flesh and dwelt among us. To this point our hearts have been filled with awe for the majestic nature of our eternal God as he expresses himself to us in his Son, Jesus Christ.

Introduction

To this point we have considered Jesus as the source of all life, the giver of light, the veritable Light that shines in every man. We have viewed him from the objective point of view, and what we have seen has filled us with awe.

Our consideration and the glory that we have observed has been the glory of his objective presence. It is the nature of God; it is who he is in all his majesty. The existential question has not yet been asked: What difference does it make to me? Of what significance is it to me that this one who came is the power of eternity? What difference does it make that the *logos*, the eternal *Logos*, has indwelt flesh and made his presence to be seen among us? What difference does it make that John cries out in his epistle, “Our hands have held him and our eyes have beheld him”? If that existential question is not answered, then we shrug, and we walk off casually.

In the Gospel of John we discover that John does not speak succinctly of his purpose in chapters 1, 2, 3, or 4. It is finally in chapter 20 that he speaks clearly of the purpose of his writing: “But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.” The great *why* of his creative power, the great *why* of his revealing power, the great *why* of the Word, the *Logos* becoming flesh, is so that you and I might have life. Our appropriate awe in his creative glory, in his revealing glory, and in his incarnate glory does not find its ultimate purpose until his glorious presence comes and brings regeneration, new life.

John specifically speaks of his purpose in chapter 20, but in chapter 1:12-13 he says, “But as many as received him, to them

gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” The *logos* principle is not a cosmic principle only; it is a personal principle, too. John’s understanding of Jesus, the *Logos*, was that he is the power of order in the midst of chaos for the cosmos, for the universe. Consequently, when we consider the creative activity of God—“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God”—it is Jesus at work in the cosmic sense, bringing order out of chaos. John says that the same principle that is true cosmically is also true in the lives of men and women. There is a sense in which all of the Gospel of John is an annotation, a listing of people who discovered that their lives were transformed because Jesus came.

I. The Test Question for Us: How can we obtain this new life?

The scripture portion points out that the *Logos* brings new life, and it helps answer the question that follows: How may I obtain that new life? The text gives at least three negatives and a strong positive.

A. The negatives

1. Not bloodline

Our new life is not achieved through a bloodline. The translation says, “Which were born, not of blood,” but the literal Greek word is the plural word *bloods*. That Greek word has caused some confusion and some variety of interpretations among our scholars. The one accepted by most is that John is speaking of lineage, so that the text is saying, “We do not receive this new life because we are children of Abraham.” There were those who would have claimed it on that basis. They were the ones who focused on the exclusive appointment of the children of Israel as God’s chosen people. The scripture here is saying that while our generation is found in our father, Abraham, our regeneration is not found there. It is plural because, by this time, many people might have claimed, with some pride, that their lineage was the basis of some kind of spiritual superiority. But John is saying, “That is not the kind of lineage that I am talking about.”

2. Not ritual

This new life is not achieved by the virtue of ritual. The plural *bloods* is important here. At the time of Old Testament provision for proselytes, the proselyte could become a child of promise (1) by way of circumcision (the blood of circumcision), (2) by baptism, and (3) by the blood of sacrifice. There are the two bloods, and some scholars have said that is exactly what John is speaking about. The cultic practice of the high priest would indicate that the way we find new life is by the practice of the cultic ritual, but John is saying, “No, it is not by that means.”

3. Not human effort

Then he says that the new life is “not by the will of the flesh,” not by self-effort. He does not speak here of a new ethical formula. It would have pleased the Pharisees had a new ethical formula been the conclusion because they tried to attain the elite spiritual life by way of their ethical conduct. Not by the will of man, John says. No human effort, no power, no force. John’s description rules out the kind of Messiah that many were anticipating at that time—a military ruler who would throw off the oppression of Roman rule. On the contrary, John says that this new life will come not by bloods, not by the will of the flesh. The will of man has no part in this new life. It comes by God—only God.

B. The positive—“but of God”

I regret that the unfolding of this Advent season has placed the glory of the creation and the glory of the revelation and the glory of incarnation in separate services because there is only one glory. It is the glory as of the only begotten who is our creator force, who is our Revelator, who dwells among us and whose work brings us new life. All that he has done by the power of his creative force and all that he does by convicting force is incarnational glory.

It is mighty and he has done it to bring us new life in Christ. It is the regeneration that we now enjoy—new life by the *Logos*.

II. The Answer: “as many as received him”

This new life is received as we receive Jesus. We return to the text, verse 12: “but as many as received him.”

A. “received him”

The phrase is too anemic in our language. We have been inclined to make receiving an intellectual exercise. We have often built on the phrase that appears in 1 John 5:1: “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.” We have accepted that truth, but we have made it an intellectual believing. Receiving is much more than that. The culture in which it was written used the word in a social context, as one receives a guest into the home.

For example, if I ask you to come into my home, I receive you into my home. In this culture we tend to say, “Make yourself at home,” but we do not mean those words in the same way that John’s contemporaries did. In John’s culture the importance of receiving a guest was felt very intensely, so that to welcome you into my home and to say that my home is your home, my servants are your servants, and the resources of my home are yours means that you are welcome in every room. It means that I invite you as guest to become lord of my house. In some cultures, because of the intensity of what it means to receive a guest, that invitation is taken to such an extreme that a man’s wife is available to the guest.

I remember some good, old-fashioned, holiness preaching that talked about bringing Jesus into the rooms of your heart and opening every one, and I heard the preacher ask, “Is there any corner of your life where Jesus is not welcome? Do you remember the shelf behind the door?” What we are talking about here is receiving Christ and opening every door of one’s life to him. He becomes the Lord of my life. There’s not one corner of my life in which he is not sovereign, and I am able to say, “Lord, I surrender all my resources, all my assets. Your instruction to me now is to be obeyed. Your instruction to any one of my servants will be obeyed by them as if it were an instruction from me.” John says, “You receive Jesus.” In Revelation 3:20 he says, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will

sup with him, and he with me.” Do you know eternal life and the glory of his regeneration? It is known only by those who receive him.

B. “believe on his name”

The second part of verse 12 says, “To those who believe on his name.” Jesus is known only by those who believe on his name. This knowing is not simply knowing what his name is. It is rather knowing the innermost essence of his person. It is not merely knowing what he said; it is knowing that he is the creator God and that because he is the creator God he can bring newness to me. It is knowing that he is the Revealer and that his revelation is true and faithful. It is knowing that he is the Word made flesh. It is knowing that he is the *Logos* who invades the chaos of my life and brings order to it; thus, to believe in his name as used here is basic to all the rest of the gospel.

The remainder of the Gospel provides footnotes and illustrations for the prologue. (1) You do not finish chapter one until you find a man by the name of Andrew who meets Jesus, and his life is transformed. (2) Soon he introduces Jesus to his brother, Peter, and Jesus says (paraphrased), “I know your name is Peter, but I’m going to call you Simon. You are going to be a rock from now on, and I’m going to transform you.” (3) Pretty soon it is Nathaniel. (4) Soon it is Philip. (5) Then it is Nicodemus coming and saying, “Rabbi, we know you are a teacher come from God, for no man can do the miracles you do except God be with him.” Jesus explains to him that he must be born again.

(6) In chapter four it is the woman at the well who says, “If you will just give me this water I won’t have to come here and drink anymore,” and soon the whole town is saying, “We, too, believe because we have heard with our own ears.” (7) Shortly thereafter it is the man at the Pool of Bethesda (John 5:6); Jesus asked him what he asks all mankind: “Wilt thou be made whole?” Here is demonstrated the power not only of generation (that’s his creative power) but also of regeneration. (8) Soon it is the twelve, and then it is (9) the seventy who are following him. (10) Before long it is those who are the likely, like Nicodemus or Joseph of Arimathea. (11) After a while it is the unlike-

ly also, like Zaccheus, a tax collector (Jesus catches him up in the tree and transforms his life), and (12) before the story ends, it is the thief on the cross.

In chapter 20, John says again, “These things are written that [you] might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing [you] might have life through his name.” Talk about the existential application of the *Logos*! Here is the *Logos*, transforming lives and making them new.

The story is not over with the account of Scripture. If you move through history, where will you start and where will you stop in making annotations? (13) There is Augustine—immoral, vile. The early accounts of his life are X-rated, but when he heard the Voice and took up the Book and read, his life was transformed and he became St. Augustine. (14) What can we say of a Martin Luther who, after the pattern of the Pharisees, was trying to find eternal life by the efforts of his will? Then “The just shall live by faith” came alive for him. The eternal *Logos* revealed himself to him, and his life was transformed, and Church history was transformed. (15) There is John Wesley, who made his way to the States, and his pursuit, like that of the Pharisees, became almost military in fashion. He expected to gain eternal life because of the efforts of his own will, but Scripture finally got through to him: “It’s not the efforts of your will.” His heart was “strangely warmed” at Aldersgate Street, a change that transformed his life and Church history, and the transformation continues.

(16) The world watched Chuck Colson when the details of his involvements in power, politics, and illegal chicaneries unraveled, and he landed in prison. When he walked out of prison a transformed man, the world did not understand his transformation. His ministry to prisoners and his Christian writings testify that he has been born again.

(17) What about Little Richard? Little Richard claimed to be, and probably was, the predominant early influence in the whole Rock ’n Roll Movement. He was openly and blatantly homosexual in his lifestyle and in his attire. One evening when Johnny Carson said on television that Little Richard would be giving his testimony that evening, I stayed up to hear him. First of all, I did not recognize him

because he looked like a man. Then he told how he met Jesus Christ as his personal Savior and how Christ had cleaned up his life and reordered his desires and his drives. Candidly and publicly, he testified for all the world to know that Christ had transformed his life.

Conclusion

We have come together to behold the glory of God and the glory of his presence. It is always wonderful and awesome. I celebrate with you the glory of his creative presence. When I watch the changing of the seasons and the sun rising and setting, I say, "Glory to God." I read a passage of Scripture and I realize that every inspiration is somehow carried out by the *Logos*, and I hold my Bible close to me and say, "Thanks be to God, glory be to God for his revealing presence!" When I read last week "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us," it was wonderful to celebrate the glory of God that transforms and redeems a human heart. There is no glory to match it. I suppose it may be different for the angels, but for us it is the sweet glory of transforming grace that comes down and makes us new.

There's an old song that I think every aspiring tenor used to sing in the days of my childhood: "There'll be singing up in heaven such as we have never known, As we join the ransomed army around God's throne." That song unfolds the story, but the real punch line is in the chorus: "'Holy, holy, holy' is what the angels sing, and I expect to help them make the courts of heaven ring. But when I sing redemption's story, they will fold their wings, for angels never felt the joy that our salvation brings." "O the glory of his presence, O the beauty of his face; I am his and his forever. He has won me by his grace."

It is appropriate and proper for us to sing hymns that praise the power of his creative presence: "For the beauty of the earth, for the glory of the sea." It is marvelous for us to sing praises about his revealing presence, but my heart cries out that always there would be a *shekinah*, a glow about this sanctuary, because here lives are being transformed. Oh, the glory of discovering that God's grace goes deeper than the stain of sin has gone. There is, it seems to me, no glory to match it. Praise the Lord.

Invitation

Suggested song: "O, Come to My Heart, Lord Jesus"

Christmas Eve Communion Service *The Glory of His Redemptive Presence*

Suggested Music

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

“Good Christian Men, Rejoice”

“Angels We Have Heard on High”

Liturgy for the Lighting of the Christ Candle

First Reader: We gather in the atmosphere of the manger to celebrate the birth of our Savior. We will surround his table in the glory of his presence.

**Second Reader:* In his presence we celebrate the creation. We light the Advent candle and remember that “all things were made by him” (John 1:3).

**First Reader:* The second candle reminds us of his revealing presence. The Son has made the Father known, and the presence of God is glorious (John 1:18).

**Second Reader:* The third candle reflects the glory of his incarnate presence. We rejoice but we also wonder as we read “And the Word became flesh” (John 1:14).

**First Reader:* With the lighting of the fourth candle we consider the glory of his regenerating presence: “In him was life; and that life was the light of men” (John 1:4).

**Second Reader:* Tonight we turn to the center candle. It represents the glory of his redemptive presence.

First Reader: John says that “the light came . . . so that through him all men might believe” (John 1:7b).

Second Reader: And now, the candles all send forth their glorious light. By this radiance let us share the Lord’s Supper at his table in the spirit of rejoicing.

**These parts could be read by five readers (one for each of the candles) instead of two.*

Text: John 1:7b

Sermon Outline: The Glory of His Redemptive Presence

Review

Introduction

Text : John 1:7b, “that all men through him might believe.”

Scripture portions: John 2:11, 11:30-40, 13:31-35, and 17:1-6

- I. We see his glory and believe (John 2:11, 11:30-40).
- II. We see his glory and love one another (John 13:31-35).
- III. We see his glory and receive eternal life (John 17:1-6).

Holy Communion

Review

John cried out, “And we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” When he said *we*, he certainly must have included all the other witnesses. All of them were overwhelmed by his glory and tried to tell of it.

Each of the Gospel writers saw that glory from a different perspective. Mark saw it in the face of the suffering servant and shared what he saw with the Romans. Luke observed glory in the one who was none other than the Son of God and told his story to the Greeks. Matthew witnessed glory in the promised King of the Jews and shared it with his Jewish brothers.

John affirms the glory of each of these witnesses, but upon reflection, he asserts that the source of the glory goes back much further than Bethlehem, or Nazareth, or even Jerusalem. John sees and gives witness to the fact that the glory of Jesus goes all the way back to creation morning. The glory John saw in the face of Jesus is nothing less than creation glory (1:1-3), and he is ready to announce that fact to the whole world.

From that point of beginning, he goes on to say this glory is also a revealing glory (1:18), incarnate glory (1:14), and regenerating glory (1:12-13). We have sung (and John would sing with us if he were present) “O the glory of his presence, O the beauty of his face.”

Introduction

Tonight we come to the last public service before the celebration of the birth of our Lord. The last of the Advent candles has been lit. Our young people have told us that those candles represent Christ's redemptive glory. We will hear the Scripture

speak of that glory, and we will revel in the truth of our own redemption as we share the Lord's Supper.

Our point of beginning is the phrase from John 1:7b, "that all men through him might believe." Isn't it a humbling experience to arrive here and in some measure comprehend that the ultimate purpose of the expression of such matchless glory is our own salvation? Let us look and believe and celebrate together.

John has already given us some insight into the purpose of his Gospel when he explains the way we may become children of God. That way became clear to us as we considered the glory of God's regenerating presence (1:12-13). Very late in his Gospel—in fact, in one of the closing paragraphs of his word—John becomes very specific about its purpose. In 20:31, he writes, "[T]hese are written, that ye might believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name."

We see clearly from these verses that John perceived the purpose of the Father's sent-forth glory. It is nothing other than, nothing more than, redemption. This theme is also borne throughout the gospel.

I. We see his glory and believe (John 2:11).

The setting is the marriage in Cana of Galilee. A practical problem causes an anxious mother to look with pleading to her eldest son. The first miracle is wrought by his glorious power. The marriage feast is rescued, the governor of the feast is impressed, and the people can scarcely believe their eyes; however, the point of the episode as viewed by John comes out in verse 11: "This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory, and his disciples believed on him."

John knew that his master was not a shallow exhibitionist, that he did not brandish his glory as idle boasting. It always had driving purpose. Jesus did his first miracle—and the disciples believed.

Jesus' power is illustrated again in John 11:39-40. The event is a family gathering, but this time it is not a wedding; it is a funeral. Lazarus, beloved brother to Mary and Martha and beloved of Jesus as well, had died. Mary laments as Jesus arrives on the scene, "Lord, If thou hadst been here, my brother had not died"

(11:32). Jesus makes comments about the resurrection that Martha does not really hear, and soon they are standing and grieving at the tomb. Jesus weeps but only for a time. Soon he requests that the stone be removed, and when Martha objects, he says, “Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?” The stone is removed. Lazarus is called forth, alive. John, an eyewitness to this event, comments: “Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him” (11:45).

The glory of his presence does not have as its dynamic purpose some ego-gratifying ecstasy of subjective experience for the worshipper. Rather, all the glory of eternity has as its essential purpose a calling forth of faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. We see his glory and believe.

II. We see his glory and we love one another (John 13:31-35).

This truth, implied by the context of this Gospel, is very explicit in John's epistle where he writes (1 John 4:12), “No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.” At first, the two key statements would seem contradictory. (1) In the Gospel and again in the epistle he states, “We beheld his glory.” (2) In tonight's passage he writes, “No man hath seen God at any time.” The full implication of the meaning of the apparently contradictory phrases cannot be explored in this message. What is very obvious, and what I wish to emphasize, is that the design of God's glory is to find expression in the love that believers have one for another.

All of John's writings are laced with calls for all the children to love one another. It is both the purpose of his expressed glory and an expression of that glory. As we share the Lord's Supper, I ask you to consider that if there is glory about the table—and there must be glory around the table—it must find expression in the love that we have one for another. If there is ill will toward any brother or sister, confess it to God and to that brother or sister. Let the glory of his redemptive presence shine forth in the love of the fellowship.

There is a third passage that imparts further richness to our understanding of his redemptive glory. It is found in our Lord's high priestly prayer as recorded by John in 17:1-6.

III. We see his glory and we receive eternal life (John 17:1-6).

Jesus prays with the holy joy of accomplishment, "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" (17:4). The purpose of his mission is made very clear in verse 2: "that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him." The old gospel song testifies, "Eternal life begun below, now fills my heart and soul. I'll praise his name for evermore whose blood has made me whole." Another songwriter says, "I am redeemed by love divine," and the next line chimes, "Glory, Glory, Christ is mine." His redemptive presence is glorious! We who were dead in trespasses and sins are now the happy possessors of eternal life. No wonder we sing, "Glory, Glory!" It is not just the song of the visiting angels; it is the song of the redeemed.

As the redeemed

We see his glory—and believe.

We see his glory—and we love one another.

We see his glory—and receive eternal life.

Conclusion

Now we come to the Lord's Supper. The holy sacrament is filled with all the glory of John's Gospel. In a few moments as you take the morsel of bread and the cup of wine, take a moment to hold it, to look upon it. It is an expression of his creative presence. By his hand the created order, of which this is a part, came into existence. Behold the glory.

As you meditate on the elements, consider that by the instruction of our Lord himself this mortal element was to reveal his presence. He spoke of it as "my body," "my blood." Except for the revealing power of our God, we have to say, "It is only bread. It is only grape juice." His revealing power makes it glorious.

Here, too, is the symbol of the incarnation. John could speak of "hearing, seeing, handling" (1 John 1:1). We do not have the privilege of looking upon the physical form of Jesus tonight. He has ascended to the Father. But our Lord himself arranged for us to hear, see, and handle these elements as a witness to his glorious incarnate presence. His regeneration glory is not just symbolized, but actualized here. This very bread and this cup will be consumed by our mortal bodies and become the energy by which we move among our brothers and sisters. Tonight we literally take

new life into our physical bodies. As we do, let us rejoice in the glory of his regenerating presence—both physical and spiritual.

Finally, here is the token of our redemption. Paul makes it clear that those who are yet unredeemed should not partake of the holy meal. As your pastor, I warn you not to partake just because we are gathered as families on a festive Christmas service. It is a meal reserved for the redeemed. The glory that surrounds it is filled with miracle, mutual love, and eternal life. If you have not yet received Christ as the source of eternal life, I ask you now to consider that the purpose of the invading glory of God into the world was to bring you life eternal. Even now, as we are moving toward the table, you may prepare to participate—not by some meritorious act on your part but by simple confession of your sins and by faith in Jesus Christ as your Redeemer. “O the glory of his presence, O the beauty of his face!” Now hear the next phrase: “I am his and his forever. He has won me by his grace.” Let the words of this song be the genuine expression of your heart as we move to the holy table.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

How Pastors and Professors Need Each Other

The following material was presented at the first Consultation on Clergy Preparation Conference in Breckenridge, Colorado, on June 21, 1990, and parts of it were reprinted later in The Preacher's Magazine.¹

The culture of the institutions of preparation is distinctively different from the culture of the local church, thus making it very difficult—virtually impossible—for those institutions to prepare for leadership in the local church. Can professors prepare persons to pastor?

Consider How Different Our Cultures Are

It is the normal pattern of us pastors and professors to focus on how we are similar. Each of our Nazarene colleges and universities makes a point to emphasize that it is not an “institution of the church” but is “the church in education.” I agree with that conclusion. Moreover, I thank God for that distinction, but it is also true that we are different. Our roles are distinctive. As we fail to honor those distinctives, we make theological intercourse with its resulting creativity impossible between us. It is my desire to point out differences, a pointing out that is intended not to alienate but to facilitate creative dialogue.

While I affirm our association in the household of faith, consider with me how we are different. Very literally, how you as professor and I as pastor are different.

We Speak Different Languages

Professors and pastors speak different languages. Their different realms require specialized languages. The realm in which the professor functions demands that he or she speak with the precision of prose—words that describe a world that is organized in settled formulas, speech that is unencumbered with con-

¹Millard Reed. “Can You Be Prepared in the Imperial Realm for the Mysterious Mission Field?” *The Preacher's Magazine*, December-January-February 1992-1993, 4-8.

creteness but one that has ontologies well in place, that exercises reason as a technique, and whose high country is the abstract. I appreciate this language—prose. It is the essential language for the transfer of knowledge. The great thought of the ages cannot be communicated in a different tongue. Expertise in it is not only helpful but essential in the dialogue of the educational institutions. Professors must be able to speak in prose.

Pastors, on the other hand, must speak in poetry. The truth is that pastors must be bilingual. Walter Brueggemann, in his book *Finally Comes the Poet*, says, “By poetry I do not mean rhyme, rhythm, or meter, but language that moves like Bob Gibson’s fastball, that jumps at the right moment, that breaks open old worlds with surprise, abrasion, and pace.”² It is unembarrassed about concreteness, is unencumbered by ontologies, assaults the imagination, and questions presumed objectivity as only imagined. This poetry spoken by the pastor purposes to destabilish all settled facts and calls into being new life and new power. I might have opted for the biblical term *prophet* rather than poet, but the point is the same. The pastor must not only have a facility with prose but must also break out with the language of the poet/prophet. That poetic/prophetic word must be strong enough to shatter an old, settled world where even the gospel has been “flattened, trivialized, and rendered insane.”³

To speak in poetry is dangerous. The pastor runs the risk of being heard as the purveyor of fantasy and falsehood. It is a risk that a pastor must take, for the message has within it an invitation—an invitation that holds the only chance for changed behavior. Those to whom the poetic invitation is addressed are not ultimately in need of new insights; they need new strengths, new courage, and new freedom. They need to hear the announcement that they are authorized to act upon the promises of God.

The pulpit and the lectern accommodate different languages. Each is essential to its realm/field. Both pastors and professors must be bilingual, but a failure to acknowledge the distinctiveness of the two would be as debilitating for a pastor as

²Walter Brueggemann. *Finally Comes the Poet* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 3.

³*Ibid.*, 1.

ignorance of the local language would be for the newly arrived missionary. Pastors and professors speak different languages.

We Also Function in Different Time Zones

Professors and pastors reside in different time zones. In the realm of the professor, everything runs on *chronos* time. The whole of the operation—the requirements for graduation—are well-specified, measurable, predictable. The whole—the total—may be broken down into measured parts: semesters, terms, credit hours, class hours, number of teaching sessions per credit hour, and number of teaching minutes per session. It is the nature of the beloved realm. Accrediting associations see to it. There is a certain contractual accountability the school has to the student. This *chronos* time is the stuff of contracts. It makes possible job descriptions, where expectations are measurable and either party may be faulted and finally sued for noncompliance.

By contrast, a pastor's primary time ingredient is *kairos* time. The pastor must comply with the demands of *chronos* time, but his or her essential function is not defined by *chronos* nearly so much as it is by *kairos*. It might more precisely be called timing.

A few nights ago I was called to the bedside of the dying mother of two of my fine young men. Both fellows are professionals who, along with their wives, are very active in the life of the church. All four of them play in our handbell choir. After a couple of shared hours, it was nearly 2 A.M., and the children began to urge me to return home “to get my rest.” My response to them included this comment: “Being a pastor is like playing the handbells. You can tarry ever so long just counting time, as long as you are there at the moment when the orchestration calls for that tone. Miss it, and the whole of the presentation is irretrievably marred.”

This kind of timing is crucial for a pastor. Like music, it demands the skill of an artist. It is more difficult to measure, and so it does not easily lend itself to contract.

Job descriptions are not adequate for it. A job description for an organist might say, “Play the organ at certain times.” But a job description is blind to the great skill of the accomplished organist as compared to the novice. *Kairos* time finds its comfortable expression in covenant rather than contract—and says things

like “whithersoever thou goest,” “thy people . . . my people,” and “till death do us part” (see Ruth 1:16-17 KJV). As pastor and professor, we function in different time zones.

We Also Operate with Different Currencies

Professors and pastors use different currencies in their work. I use the term *currency* to describe the basic measure of wealth that is negotiable in our distinct areas of service. I borrow the terms used by J. Mortimer Adler, who lists “information, understanding, and knowledge as the first three of the four categories of learning.”⁴ The basic currency for the professor is knowledge. It is the coin of the realm for the classroom—although, in some classes I have taught I had to be satisfied with a glimmer of understanding. In some cases I prayed that the information was at least in the student’s notebook for future reference. Nevertheless, the bright hope of the classroom is knowledge.

Accrediting associations insist that professors have a comprehensive awareness of the information within the discipline. The function of the professor is, in the first sense, derivative. That is, the professor dispenses that information to the student from class session to class session (in *chronos* time) in such a way that the student understands it well enough to return it to the professor at examination time and, in the exercise, accumulates knowledge. The professor also desires that the student will be so stimulated by this aided exercise that in time the student may acquire information with understanding, an activity that results in the acquisition of knowledge that is unaided by a professor.

I find great personal and philosophical delight in the pursuit and acquisition of knowledge. It is an impressive currency. I even enjoy the ostentatious display of that wealth—the academic procession. Each hood, each symbolic color, each mortarboard and tassel, the occasional tam from old, aristocratic academia, or a gaudy robe from a European school is testimony to knowledge—the currency of the classroom. Professors must be able to deal in the currency of knowledge.

A pastor must also have some accumulated knowledge, but the currency that is negotiable in the congregation is not knowl-

⁴ This information came from notes I took while listening to Mortimer Adler during an interview on public television.

edge. It is wisdom, the fourth quality identified by Adler. He speaks of wisdom as the political quality. He uses *political* in the broader sense as that quality that enables one to function with and give leadership to people. I am sure that you are not taking offense with this figure. I am not saying that it takes no wisdom to teach a class of graduate students. I am not saying that at all. I am saying that grade point average is no indicator of wisdom, and I am saying with emphasis that *summa cum laude* does not prepare a person for the creative function (not derivative) of the pastor (creative because the pastor must respond to undomesticated people, make judgment calls, speak or not speak at a precise but unpredictable moment in time, and do so in wisdom). The pastor is not in a laboratory. The atmosphere is not sterile. It is laden with all kinds of ideological and theological infections—some carried by the pastor himself. The effects of the care of souls are far more weighty than those of grades or degrees. The welfare of individuals, families, and the congregation is often at stake as well as the eternal destiny of never-dying souls. The currency called for here is wisdom.

Some argue that our separate currencies (knowledge/wisdom) may be exchanged like other great currencies of the world. I would observe that the office of exchange is experience and that the officers of the exchange seem to serve some far more rapidly and at a more favorable exchange rate than they do others. As a personal aside, Adler comments that he has seen few, if any, wise persons younger than the age of fifty. That thought is not an encouraging one when one considers the age of most first-year pastors.

Let us acknowledge, then, that the language, time zone, and currency of the professor and the pastor are different.

Our Political Philosophies Are Also Different

Professors and pastors do not share the same political philosophy. I am not saying here that all professors are Republicans and that all pastors are Democrats. I am saying that our differences are more basic and comprehensive. Professors function in an elite, patrician world. Please do not recoil too quickly. I do not judge critically. I just observe this situation to be so. With the greatest facility of the language, with control of the *chronos* time zone, and with the far superior accumulation of the cur-

rency of the realm (knowledge), professors are the imperial heads of their realms. Professors attract their own kind to themselves. The professor is a model. I delight in that fact. I have been powerfully impacted by those who were my chosen mentors. At times I have tried to talk like them and walk like them, thinking that doing so would enable me to be like them.

The route to the aristocracy in this realm is clear: i.e., speak the language (prose), acquire the currency (knowledge), dispense it at the right time (*chronos*), and become *summa, magna*, or *cum laude*. What I have described is the social order of the beloved imperial realm.

In contrast to a resident of this imperial/patrician realm is the pastor whose intellectual and emotional matrix is sacramental. That pastor presumes to accept the call of one who “made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant . . . he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:7-8). The pastor’s world is a plebeian world (opposite of patrician). If that pastor were to minister only to those with whom he or she was ideologically compatible, that pastor would exclude a very large portion of the congregation and would destroy the Body of Christ. He or she would not be the pastor of a church but of a sect, that is, a section of the church. That pastor’s function would no longer be pastoral. The pastor must practice neither intellectual nor personal elitism. The shepherd cannot be selective in the care of the flock.

Vulnerability is the primary, not the secondary, quality for a pastor who must function from that vulnerable point on behalf of all persons, regardless of philosophical or theological suasion. Service in the sacramental requires that the one doing the serving be sacramental. In the field to which Jesus has called the pastor, the first must be last, and the person who would be the greatest must be servant to all. Our Lord nailed it down tightly by saying, “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40). The political philosophies of the professor and the pastor are not only different but nearly polar opposites.

How Do We Work Together?

How can pastors and professors work together in this effort to produce pastors? As a way of summarizing these thoughts, I

have named our different areas of service. To the area where the pastor functions I give the title the mysterious mission field. I call the place where the professor functions the beloved imperial realm.

The pastor functions in the field. The terra field is intended to describe boundlessness. There are no fences, no limits. It is inclusive. By saying "The world is my parish," John Wesley was not expressing a mission philosophy, but rather he was declaring the essential inclusiveness of the gospel. The term *mission* is used to express the fact that the pastor is called to shout forth with wisdom the incredible word of the gospel in poetic/prophetic language until every person hears the transforming word and the Lord of the field brings the final ingathering. All of this activity is mysterious—not mystery that is solvable, but unsolvable. It is a mystery that is of the essence, one that will not and cannot be resolved in terms of understanding. It remains a mystery to the most experienced pastor. It also remains fascinating. The pastor, therefore, must function in the mysterious mission field. That is, he or she must speak the gospel in the language of the poet/prophet with a wisdom that causes it to effectively confront every person at the appointed time.

Professors, on the other hand, function in the beloved imperial realm. Again, each word is essential to this title. It is a realm in that it is not the whole of the Church, but it is an essential part of it. Since it is essential, it is beloved. It is also beloved for personal reasons. Many of us treasure the familiar specifics of this subculture genuinely. It is also imperial. Its hierarchy is well-defined; its elitism, specified. Because professors function in the beloved imperial realm, they must be able to speak in well-structured prose from their wealth of knowledge in the prescribed *chronos* time to those who have qualified to enter the realm.

I repeat my thesis: The culture of the institutions of preparation is distinctively different from the culture of the local church, thus making it very difficult—virtually impossible—for those institutions to prepare for leadership in the local church. I return to my earlier question.

Can Professors Produce Pastors?

Is it possible for professors to produce pastors? I acknowledge that it is impertinent of me to raise the question, but it is an impertinence that is not mean-spirited. I raise the question and then suggest that it may be impossible for professors to produce pastors. Pastors and professors speak different languages, function in different time zones, have differing currencies, and espouse radically different political philosophies. We are continents apart. It simply is not reasonable to assume that professors cohabiting with professors will produce pastors. Such cohabitation violates the genetic code. God said, "Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind" (Genesis 1:24 KJV). It is reasonable to conclude that professors cohabiting with professors will, from their intellectual and theological intercourse, produce professors.

This impertinence as a pastor addressing professors is not mean-spirited, and it is not intended as an insult. It is intended as a flirtation. We are different—you and I; however, as the young couples who come to me for premarital counseling unanimously exclaim, "Vive la difference!" They celebrate their differences. They see potential in their differences. They are downright passionate about their differences.

I do not want my flirtation to be subtle. I boldly suggest that we pastors and professors share the mindset of those young couples. We too should celebrate our differences with mutual regard. I have admiration for you whose primary place of service is the beloved imperial realm. I admire and am sometimes well-nigh awestruck by your ability to speak the language, negotiate the currency, and manage the time schedule of the realm. Like most pastors, I blush at my own inferiority and my own ineptitude when I make the occasional junket into your land of primary ministry. I feel my own awkwardness in the presence of your grace. But, like the young lover, I bear that embarrassment in this very presentation in order to declare my regard and admiration of you. Also, like young lovers, we pastors yearn to hear and need to hear that we are highly regarded by you—that you might be a bit awestruck by the mystery of the field and that you admire those who can speak the language and function in the time zone of our plebeian atmosphere.

There are rumors about our romance that are disquieting. They say that we are alienated, that we disregard each other, and that we distrust each other. Since I am insecure in this courtship, I have been, from time to time, inclined to believe the rumors. From time to time, I have heard pastors speak disparagingly of ivory-tower professors who have no regard for or knowledge of the real world. I have wondered from time to time if the professors, long removed from the mysterious mission field, remembered how delicate the art of being a pastor is, how difficult the language, how devastating or how glorious the sacrament. I wish that any new curriculum or education procedure would be the product of our shared procreation and would result in shared celebration.

I am pleading that we see the fertile potential in our differences. It is not reasonable to expect that the cohabitation of professors with professors would produce pastors. On the other hand, a covenant cohabitation of professors with pastors would produce at least some pastors. Maybe this cohabitation would produce some who are pastor-professor, others who are professor-pastor, some professor-professor, and some pastor-pastor—but, in this case, the genetic code is in our favor toward the production of pastors.

This is not the time to present innovative curriculum changes. It is the time to declare that there is a significant and obvious value to be gained by programming significant practitioner input into the training of clergy. How else will young pastors-to-be begin to learn the language, become familiar with the currency and time zones, and invert their political philosophy to that of the field?

Traditional intern programs are helpful to this process. I admit that they are difficult to operate. Few have been done with success, but this fact should not keep us from making creative efforts toward effective internship programs. Other adjustments can be made within the realm in order to simulate something of the atmosphere of the field. Here are modest examples.

Bring in two or more professors who can integrate other disciplines into the class. With two or more imperial heads in a single class, the imperial atmosphere is compromised, and the student is a step closer to the field.

Draw in a qualified pastor or pastors to co-teach a class along

with a professor. In this case the teaching team must make sure to identify which language will be spoken, et cetera, before the class begins. The greatest good will not be gained by forcing the pastor to adjust to the realm. The greater good and the greater effort will be for the professor and the class to adjust to the field. Let it be a plebeian rather than a patrician exercise.

Intentionally devise ways in which the atmosphere of the field may be simulated in the realm. A simulation is the best you can do and all you want to do. The real thing might be fatal. I am only jesting when I suggest that you might have the students vote on professorial arrangements with two- or four-year renewals, and with, of course, the possibility of being voted out.

Here is another plebeian idea that is less threatening for the professor: I suggest that the grade for a student's term paper could totally depend on the professor's mood at the time the student delivers it—or whether or not the professor is present at all on the morning when the student delivers it. Do you see how this situation is similar to the one that a pastor encounters on the field? A pastor can pour his or her best into preparation only to have the sermon missed because members did not show up or because their minds made no recognition even though they were present in body.

Crucial to the facilitation of such field simulations as these within the realm is the continuing and significant involvement of the professor in the life of a particular local church. There the professor retains the use of the language and deals in the currency of the field within its political philosophy. Being an itinerant guest preacher does not qualify one to apply for a resident's visa for the realm.

These three feeble suggestions are only tokens of the potential that is ours as professors-pastors. I ask us to look for the creative potential that springs from the dialogue made possible by a candid acknowledgment of our differences. Beyond the acknowledgment of our differences, there must be within both of us a passion to create. Without that passion we will find the unproductive corners of the kingdom—each of us convinced of our singular cause but also aware of a certain incompleteness in our roles.

Illumined by the passion, we can see that our engagement is serious. It must be other than and more than a short-term infat-

uation. We can also see that it is dangerous. It may force us to progress to adjustment and to mutual humble submission, a quality not natural to either of us.

Empowered by the passion, we will engage each other, persuaded that the task is too great and its result too significant for us to grow fainthearted and quit the pursuit. The field has never been more mysterious, more demanding, more painful than it is now. But the realm has never been better manned, more fully equipped, nor more fully facilitated than today. If we pastors and professors engage in the preparation of clergy together, we can accomplish the desired and effective result.

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CHAPTER TWELVE

Passion vs. Organization

I wrote the following introduction for A History 1898-1915 of the Pentecostal Mission, Inc., written by John T. Benson, Jr. The book describes the tension that always exists between the dynamic passion of a movement and the necessary but stifling influence of organization.*

This study of the work of the Pentecostal Mission by John T. Benson, Jr., has deep spiritual implications. It is no objective history. If such is ever possible, and I doubt that it is, it is neither possible nor desirable here. Who the author is is more than coincidental; it is rather an integral part of the story. Only John T. Benson, Jr., from his unique perspective, could reflect the essential life that he reflects. He sat with his mother on the platform during the General Assembly of 1911 and watched the people wave handkerchiefs and heard their shouts of holy joy. For well over a quarter-century he reflected on “those days” with his parents. For sixty years and more he has lived the later chapters of the continuing story, and that intimately, as president of John T. Benson Publishing Company, minister of music at the First Church of the Nazarene, and secretary of the Board of Trustees of Trevecca Nazarene College. This account pounds with a heartthrob that one recognizes as attuned to that of his father.

Brother Benson has given an invaluable service, by not only preserving the facts of the movement, but by presenting them to us from the intimacy of his unique vantage point, so that we also catch mood and feeling and motivating purpose. Such a life-reflecting account makes obvious deep, spiritual implications that would not be seen in a less intimate presentation.

The passion of the movement was scriptural holiness and its transforming work in the lives of believers. J. O. McClurkan, John T. Benson, Sr., and the growing company of “possessors” were ardently—some would say “foolishly”—committed to the “cause.” The wide range of ministries that developed—foreign

*Benson, John T., Jr. *A History 1898-1915 of the Pentecostal Mission, Inc.* Nashville, TN: Trevecca Press, 1977.

missions, home missions, education, publications, social work, camp meeting, and much more— were all expressions of the single passion.

They were no less passionately persuaded that scriptural holiness was that freeing and unifying work of the Spirit that made organizational frameworks unnecessary and denominational lines unimportant. They seemed confirmed in the conviction that holiness is not something that can be fenced in by a denomination. While their number included holiness folk of many denominations, and they welcomed many more, they firmly resolved not to become a denomination.

Yet, within these few short years reported by Brother Benson, the full transition was made and the Mission did precisely what it resolved not to do—joined a denomination. Strong and contradictory forces were at work during those years. The Mission and especially McClurkan were deeply devoted to a nondenominational setting as essential to the central meaning of holiness. At the same time, organization was inevitable in order to carry out the mission of the holiness message. For seven years the annual conventions agonized with the riptide caused by these contradictory currents. No man was torn by them more than J. O. McClurkan himself. Only after his death was the union with the Church of the Nazarene finalized.

This segment of church history provides a classic example of the tension that always exists between the dynamic passion of a movement and the necessary but stifling influence of organization. Brother Benson projects the question Can holiness be organized? I think the question must be stated in the negative: Can one keep from organizing holiness? The Pentecostal Mission made a noble effort. From the very beginning the Mission moved irreversibly toward denominationalism. Organization was unavoidable.

Fervent passion and organization are the two necessary forces of every dynamic organization, even though they are contradictory. McClurkan saw the contradiction and recognized further that while organization follows inevitably, fervent passion does not. So the historic tendency is for an organization to lose the passion that called it into existence and allow its ultimate goal to become its own perpetuation. The sectarian spirit was seen by McClurkan to be a contradiction to the holiness passion.

The concern of McClurkan reflected to us by Brother Benson in this history is ever current. The same dynamics are at work today. So this history is of more than casual interest. It has deeply spiritual implications. Brother John confesses his love for his "dear father" in this book. As his pastor, I confess my love for him and his family and my gratitude to him for the insights reflected within these pages.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Your Church Can Grow

*A brief study of church growth principles as related to Circles of Concern**

No church puts a “Keep Out” sign in the yard to tell people they are not welcome. It isn’t necessary! In a variety of subtle ways the same message is communicated. Lack of program, staff, space, or friendliness suggests to people that they should look elsewhere for a church home.

None of us intends to communicate that message. All of us are sincere in our desire to reach more for the kingdom. Still, many families who are earnestly seeking Christ and the fellowship of his people wander in and out of our churches unimpressed by our sometimes frantic effort to enlist them. How is it that our good intentions fail? We must be putting up “Keep Out” signs without knowing it.

How do we find them and pull them down?

This writing proposes to make a start toward answering that question—and to do so from a practical point of view. The presupposition is that any healthy church will grow if it is allowed to do so— if the barriers are removed. This presupposition was arrived at through several years of pastoral experience. There are no footnotes. Ideas and conclusions grew out of many conversations with laymen and staff. I don’t know which are theirs, which are mine, or which they or I drew from our reading. The concepts were basic to the development of the Circles of Concern ministry in Overland Park, Kansas, and Nashville, Tennessee. Other meaningful names could be used for the same type of program, but the principles are the same.

A number of friends have inquired about the Circles program, and I have been slow to share without first talking about the philosophy that supports the program. Accordingly, I am writing these few pages and dedicating almost half of them to some basic observations concerning ministry. I hope they may enable some to discover and pull down the “Keep Out” signs so that their church may be allowed to grow.

*This work was published in 1976 by Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, Missouri, in a volume entitled *Let Your Church Grow*.

First Observation: People Hunger for a Sphere of Intimacy

Throughout the history of mankind, the extended family has provided a cohesive sphere of intimacy. A warm sense of belonging has been provided by the great-grandparents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, nieces, nephews, and the in-laws who have surrounded each individual.

Somehow this extended family cared for almost all the needs of all its members. Physical needs were met as the family worked together and provided food and shelter. The social needs were met as it had picnics and “just visited.” And somehow, every person had a confidant among the relatives. A teenage girl would talk to Grandma, or Dad would talk to Uncle Charlie in stress times, or Mom would talk to Cousin Tillie.

Spiritual needs were often met there, too, as the family prayed and dedicated their babies and buried their dead. They cared for their own infirm, senile, or insane. In the sphere of intimacy called the extended family, one lived, loved, fought, played, worshiped, and “worked things out” together.

Today the old sphere of intimacy is gone. Our mobile society has destroyed that precious, ancient matrix of life itself. Now families may expect to move on the average of once each three years. Brothers and sisters hardly know each other, let alone the other assorted relatives.

Only a fragment of the former sphere remains. I call it the mini-family. It is usually one father who is gone most of the time, one mother who works forty hours a week, and two or three children who are busy with a variety of lessons and school activities.

These mini-families, deprived of all the resource people and activities of the extended family, must bear all the pressure of twenty-first-century living. The simple fact is that the mini-family is not equipped to handle it. Divorce seems the only way out for many pressure-ridden parents. But the end result is an even more untenable family unit with a divorced mom and perplexed children who cannot understand the court-ordered “visiting day.”

Consequently, communities are filled with people who earnestly long for a sphere of intimacy where they can belong, can be loved and needed. They need a place where they are important and their absence is noticed. They are eager for a fellowship where they can talk about their problems with someone

who will not judge them. They yearn for a friendly atmosphere in which they can play and relax. They are looking for a warm, loving situation in which they can pray. In short, they are looking for what every other generation of the world's history has had—a sphere of intimacy.

They are finding their hunger met to some degree in a variety of places: health clubs, bowling leagues, football leagues, PTA, et cetera. Each of these does a good service. But no institution can meet the tremendous spiritual and sociological needs like the Church of Jesus Christ doing just what Jesus commanded us to do: “Love one another.” Here the Church has its greatest challenge.

The people who wander into our churches are looking for a sphere of intimacy. If they find it, they will stay. If not, they will seek elsewhere.

Second Observation: Ministry Happens in Intimacy

For ministry to happen in intimacy means that one has to know someone and be known by that person in order to be able to minister to that person in a consistent and meaningful fashion. I am aware that some may take issue with this observation. I acknowledge the rich ministry of the radio preacher, the TV personality, as well as the evangelist or the pastor who sees his task as preaching only. But the mini-families that I know need someone who knows the Lord, who knows the Bible, and who knows them—by name and personality. This task is a prime one for the minister.

This observation raises two questions: Is there a limit to the scope of intimacy? Are there ways of staying close to increasing numbers of people?

The answer to the first question seems to be yes. Remember the difficulty Moses had as he tried to judge all Israel. He simply could not do it. Our Lord himself selected twelve with whom he would share the intimacy of his earthly ministry. Some modern psychologists indicate that the human capacity for close friends is about seventeen. Therefore, the examples of Moses and our Lord would indicate that any human being has a limit to his or her capacity for intimacy. A person can be close to only a limited number.

In the pastoral ministry this limitation is called the one-pastor

plateau. When I began my pastorate in Overland Park, the attendance was about fifty, and there was a great feeling of closeness. Strangers noticed how friendly the church was because we members of the congregation quickly surrounded them with our welcome. As our number grew to about 150, I noticed that the earlier automatic inclusion no longer occurred. A family could slip in and out of our worship services and be “lost in the crowd.” No one intended to exclude them, but they were overlooked.

It was then that I drew two conclusions. It is a mistake to assume that what worked to build a church from fifty to 150 will continue to work to build it to 300 and on—but it simply must be done harder. There is a one-pastor plateau. One man can stay close to only so many. How many will vary with the man and the situation. In a small town the number is larger, and in an urban area it is smaller, but usually it is around 150. Could this explain why 82.6% of the Churches of the Nazarene are less than 150 in membership?

Many pastors and churches are clearly bucking the one-pastor plateau by refusing to adjust their organization or strategy. Pastors work hard digging out the new families, but while they are busy doing that, the old families feel neglected and drop out. Pastors go to the assembly with glowing reports of the new ones, but the total active membership has not increased, and the income is up only slightly. In conventions and preachers' meetings we pastors are often made to feel that we could do the job if we tried harder, so we go back to try harder to break the laws of intimacy and somehow stay close to more people. The result is fatigue, then frustration. Consequently, when the call to another church comes, it is easy to assume that “the Lord is through with me here,” and we move on. Yes, there is a limit to the scope of intimacy.

The next question is this one: Are there ways of staying close to increasing numbers of people? I believe the answer here is “Yes.”

Fortunately, Moses had a father-in-law to point out that he was a “bottleneck” and to suggest a plan of organization with lower and higher courts. There are also Spirit-blessed options for the servant of God who proposes to serve a growing congregation. They are basically two in number. (1) He or she may make addi-

tions to his or her staff. A full-time staff person increases the sphere of intimacy and influence and enables the total ministry to increase. A full- or part-time secretary frees the pastor from clerical duties and gives the pastor more time to be close to people (When I originally wrote this article, Nazarenes averaged one staff member per 100 members, whether in large churches or small ones). (2) Pastors may devise ways of sharing the pastoral ministry with their laypersons.

The young congregation in Overland Park, heavily burdened with building debt, could not afford paid staff. Our only option was some organized method of sharing the pastoral load with the laymen of the church. Circles of Concern became that method.

Third Observation: Relationships Are More Important than Programs

A “program,” like the exposed part of an iceberg, is what is most obvious about a church. It is usually what is written up in denominational papers and copied by other churches and pastors who wish to duplicate some degree of success. Anyone who has been in the pastorate long can recall the history of various programs—buses, contests, day care, IMPACT, shade-tree evangelism, outreach, athletics, feathers, et cetera. All of us in the church have watched their popularity rise and fall and sometimes rise again. An alert pastor is always watching for good programs, for through them many people have been won to Christ and the Church.

I have observed an interesting paradox: Some churches seem to be alive and growing in spite of the fact that what programs they have are weak and poorly organized. On closer observation, I have always discovered the same simple but profound truth: Members of those congregations simply love one another. They will not argue about the fact that their methods are poor, but they just enjoy being together and say, “Even if old Brother So-and-so can't preach, we still love him and we think he loves us.” What they are really saying is the following: “We have found a sphere of intimacy and we like it here.”

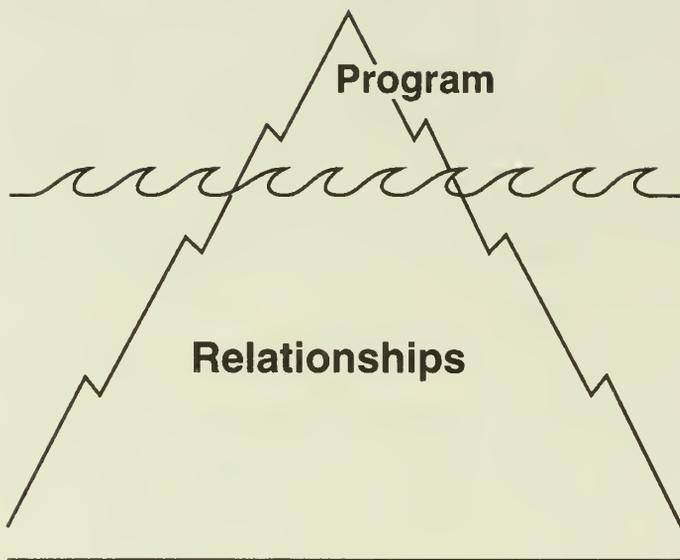


Diagram 1

The “iceberg shape” of relationships and programs

This realization brought me to the conclusion that what is not readily seen but is most important (like the base of an iceberg) is relationships (See Diagram 1). A strong base of mutual affection and sanctified Christian love will support almost any amount of program, but when pastors and churches cast frantically about to copy someone else’s program without strong relationships to support the whole, it is not very long until the whole thing turns over and shows its ugly bottom. Too often board members are disheartened from having observed the capsizing of many “great” programs. We preachers may get provoked with them because they seem not to be cooperative when what they are wishing for is a strong base upon which to build their programs.

Wherever any program has made a lasting contribution in kingdom work, it has been based on and maintained by good relationships. Busing, shade-tree evangelism, athletics, and all the things that go into a church are meaningful only as people come to know, appreciate, and love one another as people.

Circles of Concern is not primarily a program, although that term may be used. It is intended as a method by which people may be brought closer to each other and the ministry of their church. It is simply an effort to fulfill the command of Jesus to “love one another.”

Fourth Observation: Relationships Tend to Follow Certain Patterns

A church—any church—is a sphere of influence. Whether the atmosphere is large or small, it will tend to take a shape like the one in Diagram 2.

N=Nucleus people
P=Perimeter people
U=Unchurched people

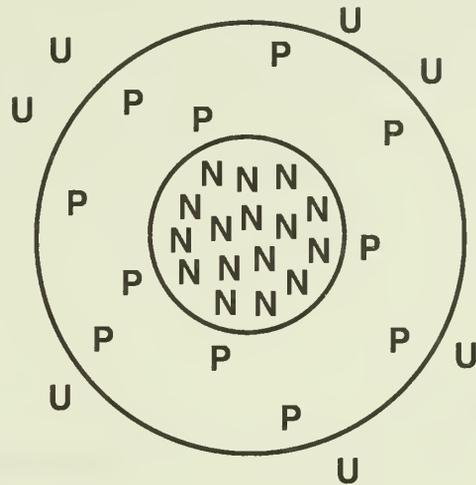


Diagram 2

The sphere of influence of the average church

Nucleus people are the ones who “carry the load” financially, spiritually, and with service. They may or may not be members. They are the ones who can be depended upon. Without them there would be no church.

There are also perimeter people. Some are close to the nucleus, and some are near the outer edge. They call the church theirs, and it is. They attend quite regularly but only at selected services. They probably give regularly, too, but not so much as the tithe. Only rarely do they accept responsibility.

There are also the unchurched of the community who, if asked to make a church preference, might name your church. They come on rare occasions. They might have a relative or friend somewhere in the nucleus or the perimeter.

A sphere of intimacy, already discussed, is the warm center of a sphere of influence. The purpose then of the church is to draw people into the sphere of influence and then into the sphere of intimacy.

Every church has the nucleus-perimeter-unchurched components, but the proportions may differ greatly. When I went to be the pastor at Kenosha, Wisconsin, I found a church almost twenty-five years old with a strong, small nucleus but a wide perimeter which had developed over those years. Its shape was something like the one in Diagram 3.

N=Nucleus people
 P=Perimeter people
 U=Unchurched people

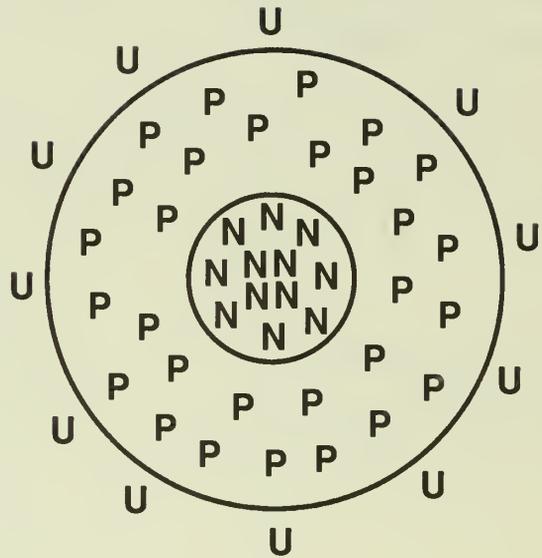


Diagram 3

The nucleus-perimeter-unchurched configuration of an average, established, strong church (e.g., the Church of the Nazarene in Kenosha, Wisconsin, in the 1960s)

The Sunday school was considerably larger than the worship service, and the income was not large even though those of the nucleus gave liberally. Rally days and contests in Sunday school were very successful as we drew the perimeter people in.

When I left Kenosha, I went to Overland Park, Kansas, where sixty-one people had just signed a charter and were worshipping in a school building. The proportions of the congregation were similar to those of Diagram 4.

N=Nucleus people
 P=Perimeter people
 U=Unchurched people

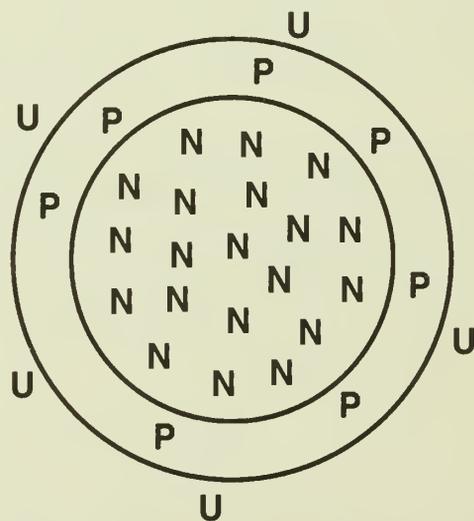


Diagram 4

The nucleus-perimeter-unchurched configuration of a new church (e.g., the Overland Park [Kansas] Church of the Nazarene, 1966-1974)

We had as many in morning worship and on Sunday evening as we had in Sunday school—often more. The income was relatively high. Rally days and contests were usually completely unsuccessful, for there was no perimeter on which to draw.

Methods of growth are different for the nucleus and the perimeter. The first need of the congregation in Overland Park was to develop the perimeter, so we did door-to-door surveys and published newspaper advertisements. I joined the Rotary Club. We did everything we could to let the community know we were there and to draw a large number of persons into the perimeter of the influence of the church. This task is primarily promotional. Conversely, the task in Kenosha had been to enlarge the nucleus. Building the nucleus is somewhat slower, and it is finally the work of the Holy Spirit. Only he can bring people under the load as burden-bearers in the church. Of course, building goes on, on both fronts at the same time, but at given times the greater need is at one spot or the other.

While any church may be evaluated using the analysis tools offered above and while every church's diagram would be slightly different, there are some laws that are almost as unchanging as the laws of physics—a kind of "law of relativity." (1) The growth of the perimeter is directly related to the growth in strength of the nucleus. This law is true financially, socially, and spiritually. Many of the unfortunate repercussions that sometimes follow dramatic outreach programs reflect the fact that the core group that carried the load of the program had not increased its strength as the program grew—it did not grow in number, in financial support for the program, in leadership exerted, in space provided for the program's needs (or in the finances to provide that space), or in spiritual depth that was needed to make the church the sphere of influence it is intended to be. (2) On the other hand, a strong nucleus that does not reach out to draw in the perimeter will become exclusive, fold in on itself, become critical, and ultimately divide.

Love is the magnetism that holds it all together. That sphere of intimacy within the sphere of influence is the place where one feels wanted and needed and missed. Strong love holds it all together. Any time there is a portion of the sphere that does not feel the magnetism of that love, it tends to migrate or move toward another sphere of intimacy. The further from the center such parts are the more likely such a migration is to occur.

In order to communicate love's magnetism from the center to the perimeter, warm relationships should extend across the lines. Let me clarify. Normally, a great percentage of the fellowship within a congregation is within an area, a condition that is illustrated below in Diagram 5.

N=Nucleus people
 P=Perimeter people
 U=Unchurched people

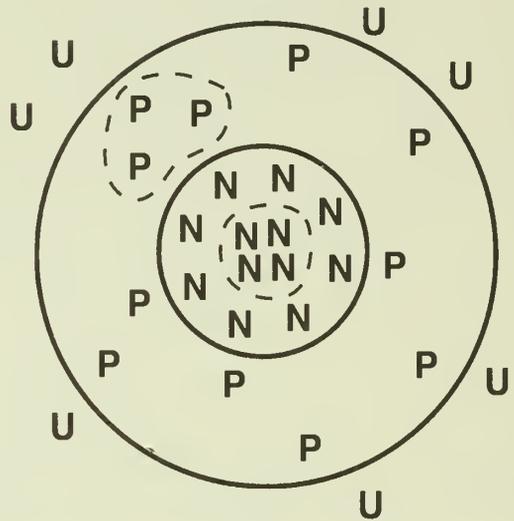


Diagram 5
 The configuration of a church with small, inner groups forming

As this illustration shows, folk who are nucleus people get together for services, planning sessions, and socials. Perimeter people may get together occasionally, but the unchurched rarely join in the fellowship of the church. Ideally, the redemptive fellowship should extend across those lines as illustrated here:

N=Nucleus people
 P=Perimeter people
 U=Unchurched people

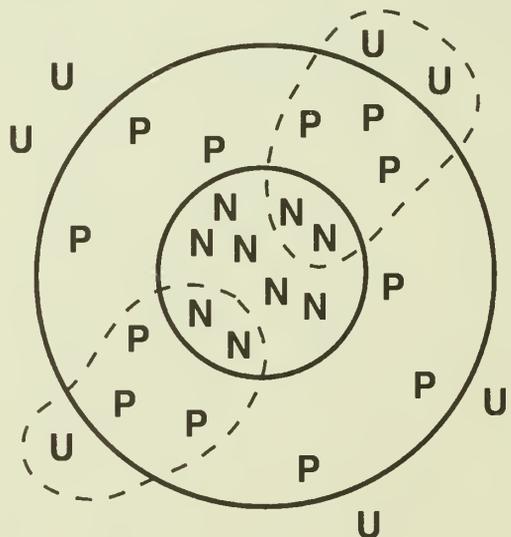


Diagram 6
 The configuration of a church in which redemptive fellowship occurs

Such fellowship will communicate the love outward and draw from the perimeter toward the burden-bearing center. I am con-

vinced that love must move across these lines in an inclusive fashion in order to remain love. When love becomes exclusive, it is incestuous, closes in on itself, and dies.

Fifth Observation: A Redemptive Sphere of Intimacy for Every Person

It has taken several pages for me to begin to talk about Circles of Concern. I hope you now see that the Circle ministry is not just a program but a sincere effort to open redemptive spheres of intimacy for every person of a congregation and extend the intimacy potential of pastors by giving them access to each person. I am sure there are other ways to create and maintain some meaningful sphere of intimacy, but this method has worked well for me in more than one situation. I would be very happy if it works for anyone else. I would not want anyone, however, to simply “take the top off the iceberg.” That person would be disappointed and his or her people would be disillusioned. With these cautions in mind, let me proceed to explain some facts about Circles of Concern by answering very basic questions.

• **Why have Circles of Concern?**

The real goal is to create spheres of intimacy for every person through which the pastor can communicate with a greater number. It might be commented that Sunday school classes, youth groups, et cetera, already accomplish this goal. I would respond that they do and should continue to do so, but I also point out that each of these is individual-oriented and interest-centered.

What pastors and churches need are tools to keep in touch with the basic sociological unit—the family. Many present structures focus on the individual by age or interest. If Johnny is absent from the junior class, the teacher calls Johnny. If one is interested in missions, one joins a missionary chapter. What about the whole family? What about those whose interests do not bring them into our Sunday school, youth meetings, or the meetings of any other group? Circles create a magnetic sphere for all family units.

Circles also capitalize on community interest and should be organized on a geographical basis. An organization plan that is based on geography may lessen the cliquishness of selective circles, and it has the added advantage of building on the natural

closeness that is a part of sharing a community. Within any community will always be a variety of persons with a variety of spiritual and physical needs. It becomes natural that within a Circle occasional fellowship times are shared, or prayer cells might be formed, or assistance given in times of emergency and death. Those activities are the natural outcome of Circle members' being good neighbors.

• **When should Circles be organized?**

The most natural time to organize is at the one-pastor plateau. Usually, before that time the existing natural circles of concern (that is, Sunday school classes, various church activities), along with the work of an active pastor attending to family needs, keep persons feeling needed, wanted, and missed. In Overland Park we organized just as our Sunday school attendance averaged about 150. When we counted the number of family units (nucleus and perimeter), it was seventy-six. Of that number about twenty-five to thirty-five could have been considered nucleus families. In four years the total number of families grew to about three hundred.

When we moved to Nashville and discovered a large congregation with a total of some 650 to 700 family units, I hesitated to recommend Circles. After studying the situation thoroughly, however, I concluded that the program could and should be instituted. I made the conclusion because of the willing spirit of the people to follow and the availability of a good number of prospective leaders.

• **How should Circles of Concern be organized?**

Organization of Circles should be accomplished through the church board and with details preferably worked out through the Outreach Committee of the board. Circles must be a "native plant." The committee can help shape the program to the needs and aptitudes of the people. If the people are not interested, some groundwork will need to be done first.

When the board is convinced of the philosophy of caring that is basic to creating spheres of intimacy, and the pastor is convinced that there will be committed leadership, proceed with the following: The pastor and planners

1. Secure a large map of the community and place a tack at

every spot where the church has a family. These tacks should be in four colors: (a) for active members, (b) for non-active members, (c) for active nonmembers, and (d) for new or peripheral people. This map will help Circle planners know the “shape of the congregation” in both geography and strength. The active members and active nonmembers probably comprise the nucleus. The others are the perimeter. (This activity should help planners conclude what the primary work of the church should be. If a great portion of the total is nucleus, then members of the nucleus need to extend the perimeter. If only a small portion is nucleus, then, by the power of the Holy Spirit, more folk need to get under the load.)

2. Sit down with the committee and the map and do some “sanctified gerrymandering.” Establish geographical areas with about twenty families in each (churches with fewer than one hundred families should make it about ten families in each area), considering natural and community boundaries and available leadership.

3. Proceed, with secretarial help, to create a “Circle sheet” for every family. Three to five copies of each will be needed, depending upon the size of the program. A small three-ring Circle book should then be compiled for each Circle leader. Each book includes the information about the families in that area, a map of the city, and a map of that area. The pastoral staff should have a book that is a compilation of all the Circles.

4. Select, recruit, and train leaders—with the prayerful aid of the committee.

a. Selection of leaders is the key.

They must be people who care, the kind who enjoy people, can keep in touch, and can identify with the needs of others. They are an extension of the pastoral ministry, and they should possess the same qualities that are needed by members of the pastoral staff with one exception: They need not have public-speaking abilities.

The limitations of geography will seem stifling at first but will finally create some pleasant surprises. Often as my staff and I studied an area, we wondered where the leadership was. Finally, we selected leaders with fear and trem-

bling only to find out that they responded beautifully to the challenge. (See "Surprises," p. 180.)

How many leaders? When we first organized in Overland Park with seventy-six families, we formed ten Circles and selected ten leader-families. Within one year the number of families exactly doubled. With such growth it became obvious that we needed a change in organization. As the church grew larger in Overland Park (and later in Nashville), each Circle grew to about twenty families. It became necessary to name one family as Circle leaders and one as assistant leaders. This addition created a team feeling within the Circle and enabled us to use people as assistants who would be hesitant to be leaders.

b. Recruitment is a major task for the pastor.

The pastor is inviting prospective leaders to become an extended part of the staff, and the initial invitation is to a preliminary session in which the whole program will be explained. After this introduction prospective leaders are given time to pray and make their decisions. At the meeting the philosophy should be shared briefly, the map reviewed, the books shown, and the requirements outlined. It is important that the following requirements be laid down frankly.

Circle leaders agree to the following:

- (1) Be caring people who pray daily for their families
- (2) Be aware of their people, that is, notice absences and personal or family needs of any kind and share with the pastoral staff in ministering to those needs
- (3) Share at least one session per month for training and one per quarter visiting with the pastor in the homes of their Circle
- (4) Commit to a two-year term of service. (Ideally, half the Circle leaders are replaced each year)

The one-to-ten principle should to be followed generally with staff help as well. One pastor can stay close to only about ten Circles with twenty leaders; therefore, if a congregation is large enough to demand more Circles, the pastor will need another staff person to have Circle leaders under him or her. In Nashville (at the time when this piece was originally written) we had thirty-eight

Circles, and the two visitation pastors shared the load with me. Each of us had twelve to thirteen Circles under his or her ministry.

It is important to emphasize to the Circle leaders that the program not be over organized. This ideal does not mean that they will have little to do. It means that, under the Lord's leadership, they will be governed by their own inclinations and the nature of their Circles. Prayer cells, Sunday dinners, Bible studies, coffee klatches, fishing trips, picnics, help in moving, bringing in dinner in times of sickness, providing recordings of the service for shut-ins, et cetera—all of these will develop out of Circles of Concern. A great deal will depend on how much one cares and how God leads.

In the recruitment sessions the Circle leaders must be assured of the aid that will be given them and the training that will be provided.

c. Training of the Circle leaders is constant and varied.

Initial training should include approximately four to six hours of familiarization with the tools and methods. Each leader will receive a Circle book and should be informed that whenever a new family is brought into the sphere of influence of the church (by visiting our services, et cetera), the leader will receive a new Circle sheet with information about that family. It will be the leader's task to make contact and make that family feel welcome. Initial training should also include instruction on friendship calls, soul-winning calls, and follow-up calls. Again, the leaders should be ready to do what they expect the pastor to do. It is not that the pastor will do less but that through them the pastor will be able to do more—much more.

(1) Monthly training

It is advisable for all the leaders to meet monthly for updating and encouragement. We usually did it before the service on Sunday evening. Leaders need reinforcement. The devil will work as hard to discourage them as he does the pastor.

(2) Periodic special training

Occasionally have an extended course on devotional life, soul winning, et cetera, that would help them sharpen their pastoral skills.

(3) Quarterly on-the-job training

On a rotation basis from week to week the pastor/staff should spend the better part of a day in calling with various leaders. I liked to take a Saturday and start about 9:30 or 10:00 A.M. I spent about an hour talking and praying with the leader, and then the rest of the day the leader and I visited in the homes of the Circle. During that time many kinds of opportunities opened which both trained and inspired the Circle leader. We encountered the whole gamut of pastoral ministry from comforting the bereaved to soul winning. This shared work allows leaders to see and feel a pastor's heart.

Of course, the time between stops is of great value. With concentrated effort, calling in small geographical areas, one can visit the twenty families in a Circle in five to six hours on Saturday. It is a great experience. (I liked the quarterly cycle and, for that reason, also recommend that a pastor or staff person have no more than thirteen Circles under him or her.) Relationships must be warm and personal between the pastor/staff and the Circle leaders. Remember that relationships are more important than programs.

• **How does one introduce Circles of Concern?**

After the ministry of Circles has been endorsed by the board, implemented by the Outreach Committee, and placed in the hands of trained and capable leaders, it should be presented in a public service. My own inclination is to make the presentation low key. It is not a high-powered program; it is a method of keeping close to each other. One may wish to introduce the Circle leaders and show the map.

Following this presentation the pastor should send a letter to every member of the congregation, explaining his or her desire for the program and endorsement of the Circle leaders. That letter should include a list of the names, addresses, and phone numbers of each person in that Circle. (In smaller churches the pastor may send a list of the entire congregation.) Then the activities of the Circles should be listed in the bulletin and/or weekly paper.

• **How can Circles be maintained?**

Circles are maintained very carefully. The work of the pastor is not reduced—it is enlarged. The heart of the pastor's role is keeping the extended staff encouraged and challenged. Here are some tools.

1. Use personal letters.

The constant flow of new Circle sheets, address changes, et cetera, will require frequent contact with the leaders. Each mailing of new sheets should be an opportunity for the pastor to include a personal note supporting the leaders in their work.

2. Allow for individuality.

Do not standardize the Circle work. For example, every Circle should not be required to have a prayer meeting on a given night before revival or a dinner on a certain day. Such regimentation would kill the program. I sent a letter to all Circle leaders in which I shared ideas that had worked for other Circles. If a revival was approaching, in that letter I also pointed out which Circles planned special prayer meetings.

3. Give public recognition.

Remember that there is an image for the Sunday school superintendent, missionary president, et cetera, but none for Circle leaders. In Overland Park I used them to read the scripture in the Sunday morning service. In Nashville I featured them in the *Weekly* (our church newsletter). Use any method possible to let the people know of their important role.

4. Create a display on a bulletin board.

Posting all the Circle information (members' names, addresses, phone numbers) on a bulletin board is a simple suggestion, but it is a helpful tool.

By the end of a quarter a pastor can see exactly where he or she has been, and the places he or she has neglected. If a pastor has several on the staff, different colored markers will also tell exactly who has made the calls. Most of all, the maintenance of the program has to be on the heart of the pastor.

• **How should Circles relate to other ministries of the church?**

A Circles ministry should not take the place of any other ministry of the church. It is to supplement every ministry of the

church. Often Circle leaders will encourage the folk of their areas to share in the Sunday school, youth work, missionary emphasis, et cetera.

1. Sunday school

It is a good idea to provide Circle leaders a full list of Sunday school classes with the names and phone numbers of the teachers. With that information a leader will be able to call a given teacher to suggest that there are some very fine prospects from his or her Circle for that teacher's class.

2. Soul-winning teams

Every Circle leader should be ready to show a person how to accept Christ, but not all will be able soul winners. In the Nashville church there was a team of some eighteen who had been trained as soul winners before the Circle work began. They were used immediately as resource persons for the Circle leaders. Any leader who was hesitant to introduce one to Christ would call on one of these trained persons from his general area.

• **How will Circles be affected by a pastoral change?**

Any program must have the support of the pastor, but Circles of Concern, if organized properly, will not be a one-person program. Ideally, it should lend continuity and strength to that awkward interim between pastorates as well as help introduce the new pastor to the families of the congregation.

In Nashville I became pastor to seven hundred families. By the time that the Circles ministry was organized, the number of families exceeded 750. Simple math shows that the task of getting to every home alphabetically would be almost impossible. With the Circles, I visited one Circle each Saturday. Assisted by the Circle leader, I found the homes quickly and was able to visit every home. Within about nine months I had visited every door. I saw no other way to do visit each family and maintain the other responsibilities of a growing congregation.

Since a Circles ministry is primarily concerned with relationships, the situation is always dynamic—always affording new opportunities as well as problems to solve. The structure itself should remain flexible, following the basic principles of geographic boundaries and a leader-member ratio of about one to ten.

• **Circles of Concern Is a Cooperative Effort**

Pastors live among and have the joy of ministering to wonderful people who have the basic human needs of love, acceptance, and belonging. Because of sociological upheaval they have been deprived of the ancient privilege of the extended family. They long for a sphere of intimacy.

No institution can offer this sphere of intimacy as effectively as can the Church of Jesus Christ. The true love of a sphere of intimacy can be found in the family of God, but we ministers who would presume to administer such a benefit have our physical and psychological limitations. In one sense we cannot be all things to all people. We cannot be superhuman. On the other hand, we must not compromise the gospel that makes central the warm bonds of love between God and his people as well as among his people.

In the light of this dilemma pastors must devise methods whereby laymen are drawn into the pastoral ministry of the church as Ephesians 4:11-12 instructs. Circles of Concern is one such effort. It is, of course, not the only way, but the call to "shepherd the flock" demands that pastors find some method whereby the love of the Body of Christ can be communicated to each lonely person within the influence of the church. The commission of the Master and the need of the people demand that we take down the "Keep Out" signs and let the church grow.

Some Final Thoughts

• **Barriers to this Program**

I believe that the internal, dynamic principle of church growth presented here is sound and that any church will grow if it is allowed to do so. I do admit that there are external barriers to church growth which cannot be ignored. This diagram illustrates the principal barriers.

Any one of these four external barriers will keep the church from growing or will distort the shape of its growth. Such barriers will limit the assimilation of unchurched people in particular. The nucleus will not be greatly affected, but the perimeter will be somewhat affected. Worst of all, the assimilation of the unchurched group will be virtually eliminated.

N=Nucleus people
 P=Perimeter people
 U=Unchurched people

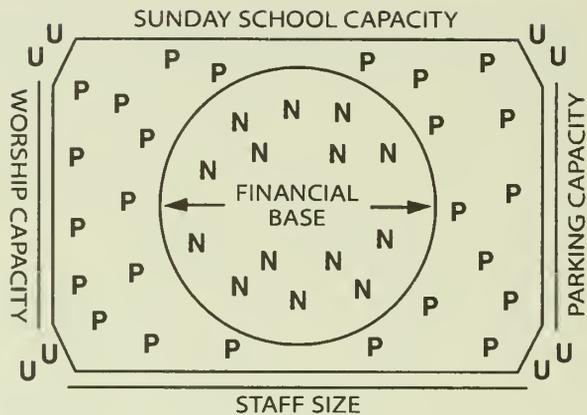


Diagram 7

The configuration of a church that is limited by the external barriers of staff size, Sunday school capacity, worship capacity, and parking capacity

Notice that the four external barriers—staff size, Sunday school capacity, worship capacity, and parking capacity—will limit the ultimate configuration of a church. The financial base, as diagrammed within the nucleus, will determine a leader's ability to remove those external barriers. It is the nucleus people who will determine what action can be taken; therefore, while the perimeter count, which has become so important in statistical accounting, is important, the Holy Spirit-prompted growth of the nucleus must, for the sake of the church's future, keep pace.

• Surprises

The implementation of Circles of Concern produced surprises for me and for those who worked in that program. One of the big surprises is the way that this program changed lives. The following story illustrates that point.

I really did not want to name Faye as a Circle leader. A divorce had left her with two small boys who were not much past the carrying age. She had to work days to support the children, and the neighborhood which she was to serve was a "tough" part of town. But we had no choice. She was the only vital Christian in the area who would accept. She became the leader.

Did I ever misjudge the situation! That "tough" part of town had many older people, several of whom were shut in, lonely and neglected. Faye began tagging those youngsters along with

her to visit such apartments. The glow returned to many wrinkled old faces as they talked to a young mother and held the boys on their knees. She offered to help them do shopping or bring cassettes of the services. Sincere interest softened the hardened hearts and did what a mountain of organizational program could not have done.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Embrace the Heritage

This address was presented to the Nazarene Leadership Conference February 13, 2005.

Introduction

I intend to accomplish three things. First, I embrace my own Nazarene heritage. I hope that my story will provoke memories of your own so that many of us, maybe most of us, even non-Nazarenes, will join in the embrace, whatever our denominational heritage. The story of how God has dealt with us through the years is worthy of celebration. Second, I identify an aspect of the holiness movement that was essential for the Church of the Nazarene to have merged into existence. Third, I assert that this essential aspect is most needed today as our beloved denomination struggles with diversity.

I. Embracing My Nazarene Heritage

Let my witness be clear: I am proud to be a Nazarene. My preacher daddy used to sing the refrain, “I am so glad that I can say, I’m one of them.” Why wouldn’t he sing that chorus? It was the Nazarenes in the little Illinois town of Hull (300 friendly people) who called holiness evangelists Lida and Millard T. Brandyberry to hold a revival meeting. My dad was saved, sanctified, and called to preach. Pastor Arthur Nutt said, “A call to preach is a call to prepare.”

The Nazarenes had provided a college where a twenty-six-year-old farm boy with an eighth-grade education could enroll in the ninth grade and complete the course of study for ordination; hence, Mom, Dad, and my two oldest brothers were off to “Old Olivet” and a lifetime of joyful service. Why wouldn’t my dad sing that chorus? Our whole family history was radically changed because of the Nazarenes.

Why wouldn’t I sing, “I am so glad that I can say I am one of them”? By the providence of God and the vision of Nazarene leaders, several ministry programs came along just in time for me.

• Youth Camps, International Institutes, and Education with a Christian Purpose

The concept of youth camps swept across the Midwest during the late forties. At age fifteen I helped my dad and others make the Pine Crest Camp in Missouri ready for its first encampment. I was a part of that first group of campers, and Eugene Stowe was the preacher. Two years later at that camp when Mendel Taylor was the preacher, I was saved and acknowledged my call to preach. I have often wondered how my life would have been different had it not been for the Nazarene youth camp.

When International Institutes emerged on the camping scene, I was the right age to be a young pastor counselor. Later, I served as international Bible quizmaster, IMPACT team director, and regional representative on the General N.Y.P.S.¹

Dr. Reed, president of my regional college, along with a men's quartet arrived at that Pine Crest camp at assembly time. They talked to me about the opportunities of "Education with a Christian Purpose." I was a part of the freshman class at Olivet Nazarene College that fall. Later my graduate studies at Eden Seminary, The University of Chicago, and Vanderbilt University, including seminars under world-renowned scholars Paul Tillich and Karl Barth, demonstrated that my four years study at Olivet and two years at Nazarene Theological Seminary were in top quality educational environments.

In 1951 when I met "Dr. Reed from the college," I could not have imagined that forty years later I would be "Dr. Reed from the college." Trevecca Nazarene University, along with our other colleges and universities, make me sing, "I'm proud that I can say I am one of them."

Local Pastorates and the Nazarene "Family"

My first local pastorate that I must thank the Lord for was the one held by my father for twenty-three years. All of my early training was gained through the precious people of the Hannibal (Missouri) Church of the Nazarene. I was sanctified

¹Before IMPACT, I led a team of teens in Wisconsin with the acronym NET standing for "Nazarene Evangelistic Team." On the Kansas City District the acronym became "Immediate Personal Action for Christ." The district president there was Paul Cunningham, the guest evangelist was Reuben Welch, the music director was Lee Steele, and the host pastor was Ron Wilson.

wholly there at a Friday night young people's prayer meeting. I preached my first sermon there a week later, and my girlfriend, and now my bride of fifty-one years, was my first convert.

My own pastorates numbered five. The first was a storefront building, and the last was "The Mother Church of the South"—thirty-five years of service all together. Serving each was a privilege. Kind superintendents and gracious laymen created relationships that were as dear, sometimes closer, than that of blood kin.² The spirit of co-operation that was a part of these churches enabled creative ministries to emerge. Faith Promise, once condemned by our headquarters, became a tool blessed of the Lord and the Church. Work and Witness built churches and created missionary vision all over the world. My own pastorates included twelve major Work and Witness projects overseas. As if to demonstrate that it is not either/or but both/and, those same churches completed five major buildings at home.

Among the great qualities that are a part of our heritage that deserves to be embraced is the close association that is so much like family. The "Nazarene Family" operates on the local level, but it is also strong on the district and general levels. This meeting is a demonstration of the family ties. The fellowship in these plenary sessions is only the beginning. Soon we will engage in these halls and around tables at mealtime.

When the Billy Graham team came to town a few years ago, I was asked to join another person from Nashville and two of the team for dinner. Small talk found the Graham team member asking me if I knew Nazarenes he had known. In every case, I knew whom he asked about. He finally said, "You Nazarenes! I've never seen your equal. You all know each other!"

This quality is a great one and should be embraced. It is really why we go to the General Assembly. Business is somewhere down on the list. The real reason we go is to see the "family."³

I have a special reason to embrace my Nazarene family heritage. Most of you remember where you were when you heard

²It was my honor to pastor distinguished men and women of science and business as well as church leaders, including G. B. Williamson, V. H. Lewis, George Coulter, Edward Lawlor, Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, and others.

³As the denomination grows, maintaining the family ties will be more difficult. Some of the anxiety the church now experiences in diversity (loss of sameness) is the loss of "family."

that I was sick unto death and was not expected to live unless a liver transplant could be found within ten days. Well, the “family” went to prayer, and I became the “poster boy for divine healing.” My body created a new liver, and the family joined me in celebration.

I apologize for these personal references, but I cannot help myself. I hope you have parallel stories of you own. I embrace—no, that word is not strong enough—I *celebrate* my heritage as a Nazarene. The church is my mother. She may have a flaw or two, but I do not notice them. She gave me birth, nursed me, trained me, rebuked me, prayed for me, and called me back from near death. For forty-nine years she has given me a place to serve that has been challenging and rewarding. Now she sends me a retirement check each month, and one day she will conduct my funeral service and bury me. When the Lord returns, she will join me at the table of the Lord to enjoy the Marriage Supper of the Lamb—together. I gladly embrace my Nazarene heritage.

II. A Plea for Fatherly Leadership

Our heritage provides a model for leadership that is remarkable. It may be unique in American church history. The Church of the Nazarene, we have been proud to say, was not a “split from some other denomination” but a coming together of movements that sprang up in various parts of the nation near the turn of the twentieth century. Nazarenes have justifiably viewed this beginning as something of a miracle, considering the diversity of our various groups. I ask you, church leaders, “What kind of leadership must it have taken to bring the South, the North, the East, and West together? What kind of genius or what kind of Spirit anointing must have been granted our founding fathers? What arbitration skills must have been exercised to bring unity that allowed for, even blessed, diversity? What reflection caused them to discern the difference between sameness and unity?”

You know that it is more than idle curiosity that causes me to raise these questions. As we gather, at the turn of the twenty-first century, our church must deal with a diversity that may equal, probably exceed, that of a century ago. The demands of the multicultural, global village in which we serve call for a reincarnation of that same leadership style, that same anointing of the Holy Spirit. We come today seeking to embrace this dimension

of our heritage not just as a sentimental gesture to the past but because we need to find and emulate that leadership style in our day of diversity.

Using Paul's metaphor of the family, I wish to entitle this part of my message "A Plea for 'Fatherly Leadership.'" The first model that I cite is the founder of the Church of the Nazarene, Phineas F. Bresee, as he engaged the founder of the Pentecostal Mission, J. O. McClurkan, one of my predecessors, as pastor of the Nashville congregation.

The first evidence to indicate that the two men knew of each other is in correspondence dated 1907. The mission had begun in Nashville in 1898 and in California in 1895. The letters indicate that the two men—McClurkan, a Cumberland Presbyterian, and Bresee, a Methodist—had much in common.

Both attended the meeting in Chicago (October 1907) and a delegation from Nashville was present at Pilot Point, Texas, in 1908. It was in Texas that Bresee asked, "What can we do to make you Southern brothers happy?" McClurkan responded, "We don't know." So the glorious march around the tent to the tune of "Dixie" became history. I do not know if the Nashville delegation marched or not. They may have for they were cordial fellows. They did not join Bresee's group, however.

When the annual convention of the Pentecostal Mission (the Nashville group) convened October 4, 1910, Nazarene General Superintendents Bresee, Reynolds, Ellyson, and Bud Robinson were the guests of the convention. Many assumed that the Mission would merge with the Nazarenes. Curiously, McClurkan excused himself from the chair at 11 A.M. "to teach a class." John T. Benson, Sr., assumed the chair and, between eleven and noon, the convention voted to join the Church of the Nazarene in McClurkan's absence (34-0). Brother Benson appointed himself as a committee of one to "inform Brother McClurkan." The convention reconvened at 2:00 P.M. with Brother McClurkan "in the chair." Between two and four there was a "free discussion concerning the proposed merger participated in by the sisters as well as the brothers."⁴

⁴This account of that meeting is taken from John T. Benson, Jr.,'s book *A History 1898-1915 of the Pentecostal Mission, Inc.* (Nashville: Trevecca Press, 1977), 136.

At four o'clock the convention voted to allow the committee to convene in order that Dr. Bresee and Brother McClurkan could "work out their differences while the convention continues in prayer." The minute-taker joined the committee and recorded the proceedings. Dr. Bresee asked McClurkan about his concerns in uniting. McClurkan responded that he did not like the general superintendents to have veto power. Bresee said that they did not have veto power but that district superintendents had to approve the purchase of property and the call of a pastor. This information seemed to satisfy.

McClurkan then said that he wished there was a clearer premillennial statement. Bresee said that some Nazarenes held the premillennial position while others held to the postmillennial view. He noted that there seemed to be scriptural support for both views and then said, "We don't think this should keep us apart."

Finally, McClurkan said that he did not like the idea of women preachers. Bresee pointed out that the Scripture records women in significant leadership roles and again said, "We don't think this should keep us apart."

At six o'clock Benson interrupted the conversation to say that he would refuse to sign the articles of agreement, and then the minute-taker recorded, "Dr. Bresee gave us a strong and stern lecture to the effect that we Southern brothers need to make up our minds what we want to do." The committee went back to the convention, still in prayer, to announce that the negotiations had broken down.

Notice the spirit of Bresee and Benson (both of the Arminian persuasion) that enabled them to continue the conversation with McClurkan (a Cumberland Presbyterian with Calvinist leanings). At Benson's suggestion, the Mission invited the Nazarenes to hold their 1911 General Assembly⁵ in Nashville with day sessions at the Mission and night sessions across the alley in the Ryman Auditorium. Most assumed that the Mission would join the Nazarenes at the assembly. Old-timers in Nashville contend that the Nazarenes made two concessions: (1) McClurkan could continue to pastor the local congregation and remain a Cumberland Presbyterian elder and (2) Mission

⁵*Ibid.*, 141.

people who used tobacco could continue to do so. It was a “grandfather clause.” New Nazarenes could not use it. There was also accommodation regarding “secret orders.”

Concessions notwithstanding, the Assembly came and went, and McClurkan could not bring himself to part from his affiliation with the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. Each year the Mission discussed possible merger with the Nazarenes. His people would not oppose their beloved leader. Each year they took no action. In September 1914 McClurkan died at age fifty-eight. The following February the Mission merged with the Nazarenes. The negotiation toward merger had been done years before.

Throughout all of these negotiations, Bresee had demonstrated his fatherly leadership. He was ready to allow some lack of sameness in doctrine (postmillennial/premillennial), in polity (ordination for women) and, if the rumors are true, allowing an elder from another denomination to be the pastor of a Nazarene church, and in ethics (the use of tobacco) as a small price to pay to affect a union.⁶

Before Bresee were Wesley, Baxter, and Arminius.⁷ Clearly, both Bresee and Benson were “children of Wesley.” Bresee’s phrase “We don’t think that should keep us apart” reflects the saying used so often by Wesley that it is often ascribed to him: “In essentials, unity. In nonessentials, liberty. In all things, charity.”

Wesley used the phrase often in the 1700s. It was coined, however, in 1620 by Peter Meiderlin, a Lutheran pastor.⁸ He had grown tired of the rancor and division caused by the doctrinal disputes following the Protestant Reformation. Richard Baxter (1625-1691) adopted the expression as his personal motto and

⁶Following McClurkan’s death, his widow, who had been an “exhorter” in the Pentecostal Mission, was ordained as an elder in the Church of The Nazarene.

⁷John Wesley, Richard Baxter, and James Arminius

⁸Meiderlin wrote under the name of Robert Meldenius. German theologians refer to these phrases as the *Friedensspruch* or “Peace Saying.” Baxter used the saying in his book *The Saint’s Everlasting Rest* (1650). The Baxter Method of home visitation was endorsed by John Wesley to his pastors. This material was found in the following: Dan Clendenin, “A Prayerful Admonition,” *The Journey with Jesus: Notes to Myself* (21 May 2001) found online at <http://www.journeywithjesus.net/Essays/1001052JJs.html> and accessed 10 February 2005.

urged that Christians must “tolerate tolerable differences.” Wesley was influenced significantly by Baxter and assumed his motto.⁹

The post-Reformation Protestant Europe was, in great measure, divided between followers of John Calvin and James Arminius. Calvin was an adherent of “propositional truth” and “separation” while Arminius practiced “accommodation.” This compromise was not one in the worst sense of the word. It is making a place for another’s view. When one successfully books accommodations in a hotel, the outcome indicates that the hotel has a place for that person. While it is simplistic to say it, it remains generally true that current Christian life is influenced by either Calvin or Arminius. Our heritage is clearly in the Arminius-to-Baxter-to-Wesley-to-Bresee tradition.

The holiness movement and the appearance of the Church of the Nazarene could not have been facilitated by “children of Calvin.” Calvin’s adherence to static, propositional truth left no room either for liberty in nonessentials or charity in all things. Calvin’s autocratic rule in Geneva that refused to intervene at the execution of Servetus demonstrates the intolerance of others. His theme could have been “Unity in essentials, unity in nonessentials, and unity in all things.” Truth for Calvin was like “the earth is flat”—unchanging and absolute.

Before any of the above was Paul the apostle. His letters to the church at Corinth make it abundantly clear that not only was the church there diverse but also it was divided. Paul wrote, “One of you says, ‘I follow Paul,’ another, ‘I follow Apollos,’ another, ‘I follow Cephas.’ Still another, ‘I follow Christ.’ Is Christ divided?” (1 Corinthians 1:12-13).

One can almost hear the fury in Paul’s voice. The situation called for an effective leadership style, and soon Paul describes the church as “family” and himself as “father.”¹⁰

Hear Paul say, “I am not writing this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children. Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel” (1

⁹Carl Bangs, *Our Roots of Belief* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1977), 33.

¹⁰Paul also refers to the Church as a field with concern for a great harvest and a temple with focus on quality.

Corinthians 4:14-15). He continues, "Shall I come to you with a whip or in love and with a gentle spirit?" (1 Corinthians 4:21). Paul picks up the idea again later: "I hope that you will put up with a little of my foolishness; but you are already doing that. I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him" (2 Corinthians 11:1-2).

I cite these references to demonstrate the point that Paul's model for leadership in times of diversity and division is the fatherly leadership model. He provides the context for my use of the phrase. I believe that the phrase most accurately describes the kind of leadership that was and is essential for us in the holiness tradition.

III. The Characteristics of Fatherly Leadership in Our Heritage

I am awed by the leadership skills of our heritage. I sense the need today to emulate them. We need a Bresee, a Wesley, an Arminius, a Paul, but we are the ones designated to lead, and it remains for us to identify as clearly as we can the central characteristics of fatherly leadership. I will do so by reflecting on the term *accommodation* from Arminius and then the phrases repeated by Wesley: "In essentials, unity. In nonessentials, liberty. In all things, charity."

From Arminius, we accept the concept of accommodation.¹¹ This word is more palatable if you keep it in the context of the family. It is not compromise unless you put the best meaning on that word (such as negotiating for peace as at the end of war). Since most of us are, or have been, participating members of families, we understand, or at least appreciate, *accommodation* as a desirable word in our vocabulary and practice it. When the new baby comes, the older brothers and sisters have to accommodate. When grandma has to move in, accommodate. When Dad loses his job and the income is down, accommodate.

Those who practice fatherly leadership understand accommodation as give and take and middle of the road.¹² They also

¹¹*Ibid.*, 33. English Arminianism retained the liturgy and vestments which survived the early Reformation, while the Puritans refused to read a prayer or wear a surplice.

recognize the importance of balance. When the holiness movement has maintained balance, it has blessed the world.¹³

Much of the tragic chaos in holiness denominations comes from an emphasis on one aspect of the work to the neglect of another and a resulting loss of balance. The children of Calvin have an easier time of it. The world-is-flat doctrines are easy to articulate and defend. When the goal is unity in essentials, liberty in nonessentials, and charity in all things, there is no need to identify what is essential and what is nonessential. We Nazarenes who are “children of Arminius” have needed to spend quite a lot of time determining what is essential in such a way that we still maintain balance.

Fatherly leaders maintain a balance of doctrine, experience, and ethics with a humble regard for those who may differ in matters of interpretation—even in doctrine.

Several different doctrinal texts have been assigned to the course of study over the years. This diversity has not seemed to trouble us until recently.

At our recent theological conference, our general leader seemed disturbed that W.T. Purkiser said upon reading H. Ray Dunning's theology, “Perhaps there is now room for two theologies in the Church of the Nazarene.” My response was “Are we down to two? Only two?” When I entered Ralph Earle's class in New Testament back in '55, he suggested, “Wiley, Miley, and

¹²At the Evangelism Conference in 1958, held in Kansas City, then Director of Evangelism Edward Lawlor made a strong case for the middle ground between fundamentalism (which we are not) and modernism (which we are not).

¹³Here are some examples of truths that must be held in balance: 1. Balance of personal transformation and social reform—Wesley's theme was “We'll spread scriptural holiness throughout the land and revive the nation.” 2. Balance of love and humility. 3. Balance of Jesus' role as (a) Prophet with power, (b) Priest with cleansing, and (c) King with sovereign reign. So which is it? Is it power, or cleansing, or lordship? To ask is to identify yourself as a child of Calvin. Balance with a statement attributed to McClurkan: “There is (1) a sinful self to be crucified, (2) a human self to be disciplined, and (3) a true self to be realized.” You cannot discipline the sinful self. It is not subject to the law of God, et cetera. It must be crucified, but you do not try to crucify the human self. It needs patient discipline. Moreover, there is a true self, the person God intended us to be, that will be in his likeness. Our church has been committed to the task of maintaining the balance.

Pope.” I remember that we chanted it like a double-play combination: “If you want an A on your paper, quote Wiley, Miley, and Pope.” Other accepted theologians included E. P. Ellison, A. M. Hills, S. S. White, and J. B. Chapman. Can we not maintain balance and also read Wynkoop, Dunning, Greathouse, Grider, and Metz?¹⁴ Do we have to be down to one official theology in order to have balance? Does not balance infer a counterbalance? Isn't it good, not bad, that the early councils did not have to decide which gospel was the right one and which ones to delete? Luke seemed to have a very different mindset when he said, (free translation) “Since everybody else is telling the story as they know it, I think I'll try my hand at it too.”

The Gospel writers' reports were not the same, but there was one story. What degree of sameness is essential for unity? I observe that our church has perhaps done better than the average church in allowing unity that did not demand sameness in details of doctrine.

Regarding experience, we Nazarenes have always emphasized personal experience without being guilty of what Wesley called enthusiasm or extreme emotionalism. We have been willing to be charitable, allowing liberty in the types of experience. Some of our people have enjoyed the “sparks like smitten steel, just so quick salvation reached me” experience while others sing the song written by a Nazarene, “Blessed Quietness.”

I have always believed that the apparent theological differences between Nazarenes who emphasize the crisis experience vs. those who emphasize process are not theological differences at all but are ontological differences. Ontology refers to ultimate reality, and what Nazarenes are expressing are two views.

The most common view of ultimate reality in the Western world is called Greek and holds that ultimate reality is static. God is the unmoved mover. He answers Moses when he asks for his name, “I am that I am.” It is reasonable that persons with that world view would focus on the crisis.

The Eastern world view holds that the ultimate reality is dynamic. God is the God who acts. He calls a people. He sends a death angel. He pushes back walls of water to liberate his peo-

¹⁴Mildred Wynkoop, H. Ray Dunning, William M. Greathouse, Kenneth Grider, Donald Metz

ple, and he sends his son. His response to Moses is “I will be who I will be!” It is understandable that such persons would emphasize the continued activity of God both before and after the crisis experience.¹⁵

Can there be difference without dissidence? Arminius, our father, has served us well as a fatherly leader, making the point that in the family we accommodate one another, providing balance and counterbalance and (to mix the metaphor) maintain the middle of the road. Now from the phrases first coined by Meiderlin but repeated by Wesley and considered for our purposes in reverse order: charity, liberty, and unity.

- **Charity in All Things**

A fatherly leader, the kind who brings us together, is as concerned about the individual as he is about the family. It was the chief priests who reasoned, “For the good of the people this Jesus must die.” They were not fathers. They were judges with an institution to preserve, and they presumed to have accomplished that preservation by the extinction of the one who seemed to threaten the institution.

I have witnessed reenactments of that reasoning in contemporary times, but those outcomes are not characteristic of fatherly leadership. Following a family reunion, my children and I discussed this question: Exactly what level of obnoxious does one tolerate in a family member? We have agreed that a family must tolerate a pretty high level. Excommunication is not an option.

A fatherly leader, who brings us together, knows the difference between unity and sameness. A father knows from experience that, as much as he loved the first child, that second child, although much different from the first, will be loved no less.

Any father will tell you, no matter how many children he and his wife may have, “No two are alike!” No two are the same. A father understands why Paul must create a new metaphor to illustrate how essential each member is to the health of the body—even those “which we think are less honorable” (1 Corinthians 12:23).

A father can appreciate loyal opposition and minority report.

¹⁵Years ago I hammered out a descriptive pamphlet entitled “Our Spiritual Journey” in which I tried to clarify the crisis moments in the context of dynamic continuity.

A father takes pride in each of his children and for different reasons. The family is united but in no way are all the members the same. There can be difference without dissidence.

A fatherly leader, the kind that brings us together, will not tolerate elitist or pejorative labels, and the two are the same. Those of the Apollos Party viewed that title as elitist while the other parties would use it as pejorative. How do I know this? Because that is the way it works among us.

Shall we take out our pocket glossary of terms and compare notes?

liberal – This term is, for the most part, a negative word to describe someone who is (in my opinion) on my left theologically.

Left – See liberal. These two terms are (in my opinion) theologically interchangeable.

Fundamentalist – This term describes someone who is (in my opinion) on my right theologically; however, being on my right theologically is (in my opinion) better than being on my left theologically.

“middle of the road” – This phrase describes (in my opinion) the ideal theological location—neither right nor left, neither liberal nor fundamentalist: it is exactly where I am.

Charismatic – This term refers to those who are gifted. (How is that for diplomacy?)

The list goes on. Some negative connotation may be drawn by association. The new word to my vocabulary is *baptistification*. I do not have the glossary on that term, but judging by the first two syllables, I think that it is not good. When I received e-mails indicating that Mildred Wynkoop may have been baptistified, I had the strange feeling that that was not good. I was relieved when Stan Ingersole made it clear that she had not been baptistified after all. This situation did cause me to wonder about some of my fellow university presidents who had attended Baptist graduate schools. I wonder if they had been baptistified. I wondered if I had been methodistized for having attended Vanderbilt. Perhaps a Vanderbilt education is bad, too. After all, isn't Vanderbilt liberal? (Refer to list of terms above.) I reasoned that Vanderbilt had long ago drifted from the Methodist fold so that I need not worry, but, I thought, I do have reason to worry

since, in the minds of some, I am a part of the Trevecca Connection. This phrase needs to be added to our glossary:

Trevecca Connection – This term refers (in the opinion of some) to a group of theological scholars who are not Fundamentalists and who have ties of some kind to Trevecca Nazarene University.

A fatherly leader would not even let this conversation commence. A leader who would bring us together will have nothing to do with our glossary of terms. All it tends to do is divide us. I know that there are legitimate titles to describe schools of thought and identifications with innovative thinkers, but we are living in such a divisive era that we should resolve to use the labels as little as possible, and when we must use them, we should use them with the utmost charity.

• Liberty in Nonessentials

The discussion regarding what is essential and what is nonessential has preoccupied us through the years. Our tradition includes holding some doctrinal views as nonessential.

Timothy Smith's comment on Bresee's response to McClurkan, dated August 1, 1907, clarifies the differences between essentials and nonessentials:

Bresee stressed the point that the doctrinal basis of belief should be "very simple, and embrace what is essential to holiness." Nonessentials should be relegated to "personal liberty," a phrase which Bresee said referred to a person's right to hold a belief, and his obligation "to recognize the same right in another to believe differently, without fussing about it. We have and do hold," Bresee went on, "that any truth about which there can be two theories, and a person can be holy and believe either theory, may be safely, and should be, relegated to individual liberty." This, he understood, was the gist of what McClurkan had said, and it was the platform of the Nazarenes.¹⁶

In matters of experience, we Nazarenes have always held that each person may experience that saving activity of God in unique individual ways and that no particular experience form

¹⁶Timothy Smith, *Called Unto Holiness* (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1962), 193.

is essential to salvation.¹⁷ Strangely enough, it has been in matters of conduct or ethics where the list of essentials has grown longer and/or shorter. It is here where the battle for conformity has been most public.¹⁸

A story from my life illustrates how the church expressed itself in liberty on nonessentials. When I was nineteen and a member of the Vikings Male Quartet, we represented Olivet Nazarene College at the 1952 General Assembly. Since the time of the previous assembly, television sets had begun to appear in appliance store windows, and the Nazarenes were faced with a dilemma. The “long list” in ethical matters had clearly prohibited movies (of the Hollywood type), so the question was “How can we be consistent and let television into our homes?”

During the '52 General Assembly resolutions on both sides of the issue were submitted for action. In order to observe the discussion, I attended the meeting of the committee that processed such issues. The committee room was not big enough, and the proceedings had to be moved to a much larger room in order to accommodate the crowd. General Superintendent G. B. Williamson acknowledged that he owned a television set. His vote for re-election showed a sharp decline. It was rumored that Hardy C. Powers did not own one but that he had rented one. The resolution opting for moderation rather than prohibition prevailed, but the topic remained a hot issue.

Our quartet was scheduled to sing for the home mission service on Wednesday night, the evening of the day when the vote was taken on the television legislation. Our quartet sang “Old Camp Meeting Days,” a selection which seemed to please the divided crowd. The speaker, Dr. E. O. Chalfant, was introduced

¹⁷The position held by many Pentecostal groups, that tongues speaking is the evidence of the infilling of the Holy Spirit, was rejected by the Church of the Nazarene from the beginning.

¹⁸It was interesting for me to discover that the Pentecostal Mission (which merged with the Nazarenes in 1915) had very few rules on conduct. Its statement of faith was very similar to our present statement. But, as the denomination grew, it seemed to need conformity to maintain identity. Prescriptions concerning apparel (especially for women), jewelry, hair styles, entertainment, began to create a rather long list of “essentials” to which we were expected to subscribe in order to be “united.”

as the “dean of district superintendents.” Chalfant was known for his fiery rhetoric filled with a combination of humor and wisdom. He had worked his way through the first half of his message and moved to a crescendo with the phrase “Bless God, my wife doesn’t wear a wedding ring, she has not cut her hair, and we don’t own a television set!” Then, in Chalfant style, he repeated, “We don’t own a television set! We don’t own a television set! We don’t own a television set!” The conservatives, who had lost their cause that day in the legislative session, broke into thunderous applause and shouted, “Praise the Lord! Hallelujah!” and “Preach it, brother!”

Chalfant waited for the crowd to grow silent. Then he said, “But I have friends whose wives have cut their hair, whose wives wear wedding rings, and who own television sets, and they are just as good a Christian as I am. They are just as good a Christian as I am! They are just as good a Christian as I am!” Thunderous applause, which may have been louder than the earlier expression, went on for an extended time.

I am not sure that that moment was our proudest moment as a church, but it does illustrate that as late as the fifties the spirit of Bresee guided the denomination in determining which issues of ethics were essential and which were nonessential. Chalfant was acting in the spirit of Bresee when he said, “We don’t think this should keep us apart.” The essence of Chalfant’s message was “Although we are not the same in our view of the ethics in this regard, we are equally ‘Christian.’” This approach is an example of fatherly leadership. Some held a differing view and soon left the Church of the Nazarene because it would not insist on sameness.¹⁹

• Unity in Essentials

We can express “charity in all things” and enjoy “liberty in nonessentials” to little effect if we are not “united in essentials.” Our fatherly leadership would only be grandfatherly doting if there is no center, no here-is-the-heart-of-the-gospel passion for us to live by and die for. I must, therefore, add one more duty of a fatherly leader to the list: (1) Maintain a balance of doctrine, experience and ethics; (2) Be as concerned for the indi-

¹⁹Bible Missionary Church and others.

vidual as for the institution; (3) Know that difference is not always dissidence; and (4) Refuse to deal in labels.

The fifth duty of a fatherly leader is this one: (5) A fatherly leader must also recognize and affirm the characteristics that comprise the family identity. My oldest son motivated his girls to be brave beyond normal expectation by making the point to them that “Reeds are not wimps!” When my youngest son, age seventeen at the time, was given an ultimatum to leave home if he could not be honest with us, he said, “Well, you know us Reeds: we are pretty hard-headed!” And he walked out of the loving safety of his home and by that very act affirmed his character as a Reed (i.e., hard-headed).

What is the essential with which we must be united? What are the characteristics which make a local church a Nazarene church or a person a Nazarene person?

A quadrennium ago, our Board of General Superintendents addressed this question and produced a booklet whose title gives their answer: “Christian, Holiness, and Missional.” I view this publication as good work and a help to us in our effort to identify our basic characteristics.

In an article titled “A History of the Church of the Nazarene,” Bresee states, “This church is not different from other churches in general statements of doctrine” Bresee is saying that the Church of the Nazarene is Christian; Nazarenes join Christians around the world in reciting the Apostle’s Creed or the other creeds. Bresee continues,

. . . but it believes in the reality of the truths stated in the creed, and insists not only upon the belief of the truth but in the knowing of the reality of the transforming power of the Spirit of God This is the doctrinal peculiarity of the Church of the Nazarene—it believes in the incarnation of the truth by the Holy Spirit in human hearts.²⁰

At the heart of the Church of the Nazarene is the experience of the transformed life. Our general superintendents described it as “Christ-likeness”²¹ or our traditional phrase “entire sanctification.”

From this creedal point of beginning, all of the church’s Articles of Faith are drawn and all our rules are assessed. It is

²⁰Mildred Wynkoop, *The Trevecca Story* (Nashville: Trevecca Press, 1976), 75.

²¹“Christian, Holiness, Missional.”

also the presupposition of our covenant with new members. The *Manual 1993-1997* of the Church of the Nazarene, paragraph 801, requires a commitment by new members to the following statement:

The doctrines upon which the church rests as essential to Christian experience are brief:

We believe in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We especially emphasize the deity of Jesus Christ and the personality of the Holy Spirit.

We believe that human beings are born in sin; that they need the work of forgiveness through Christ and the new birth by the Holy Spirit; that subsequent to this there is the deeper work of heart cleansing or entire sanctification through the infilling of the Holy Spirit, and that to each of these works of grace the Holy Spirit gives witness.

We believe that our Lord will return, the dead shall be raised, and that all shall come to final judgment with its rewards and punishments.

Do you heartily believe these truths?

These statements are what one must believe in order to be a member of the Church of the Nazarene. They are all that one must believe in order to qualify for membership in our church. It is interesting what it leaves out. There is no mention of creation, the inspiration of Scripture, Pentecost, marriage, abortion, entertainment, et cetera. On the other hand, it focuses intently on the experience of entire sanctification. The transformed life remains the essential of our faith in which we must be united.

• Creeds and Theology

The creeds are not intended to explain all truth. They answer the *what* questions. They posit the basic belief system as a skeletal system provides structure for an animal. They enable us to stand. They hold us together. Theology, on the other hand, provides the fleshing out of our faith. It deals with and proposes to answer the *how* and *where* and *when* questions. For instance, the creed provided for new members "Our Lord shall return." It does not say how or when he will come. That issue is left for the theologians to sort out. It speaks of an entire sanctification but does not instruct how one must enter the experience. That

issue is left to the theologians to work out. Moreover, these theologians often have shades of disagreement among themselves. There may be differing schools of thought, but we are united in our statement of faith.

Our creed declares what is essential, and the church welcomes good faith dialogue among students of the Word and the history of our faith regarding doctrine. It is essential that a church's theologians be united with their church in its creedal *what* statements. It is also desirable that a free-flowing dialogue be carried out among the church's theologians regarding the *how* and *when* questions. Such dialogue enables the church to apply its creedal truth to succeeding generations.

In the recent theology conference General Superintendent Bond pointed out that some twenty years ago the Board of General Superintendents issued a ruling "which in essence put the church's blessing on understanding Article X either in the historic Wesley way or the modern holiness movement way." Dr. Bond suggested that the church may want to revisit that issue. I would only comment that such an accommodating ruling is consistent with our tradition. In that action the general superintendents were "children of Bresee": they were leading in the fatherly fashion.

I grow anxious when I hear, of late, a desire to "get back to one theology." First, I doubt that we were ever a people of one theology. We are a people of one creed and compatible theologies. Are "the historic Wesley way" and "the modern holiness movement way" compatible theologies? Some twenty years ago the Board of General Superintendents decided that the two theologies were compatible. They accommodated sincere persons who held either view. Must we now select one of them as our heritage and discard the other? Which would we choose? What would I do if my party were discarded? Would I be left out, my unity in creed notwithstanding? Where would I go?

My concern is not for myself only but for all who may not be identical in doctrine, which, come to think of it, includes each of us in one way or another. Another dialogue from the 1908 meeting in Pilot Point, Texas, illustrates my point. When Bresee asked the delegates from the South, "What can we do to make you Southern brothers happy?" and McClurkan responded, "We don't know," an impatient voice from the crowd called out, "Mr.

Chairman, let them go.” A second time the voice from the crowd called out, “Mr. Chairman, let them go!”

There will always be a voice from the crowd saying, “Let them go.” I have been tempted a couple of times to call out myself. If they stay, they will make demands on my time, my energy, the way I think. I am tempted to be a voice from the crowd.

As a leader, a fatherly leader, I do not have that option. Bresee was a fatherly leader that day when, from the platform, he responded, with hands raised high, “We cannot let them go . . . they are our own folks.”²² In his concern for those who were his own folks, Bresee was a leader who was a child of Wesley. That role requires grace and patience. It probably takes a gift of the Spirit for leadership, but, used of the Spirit, such a leader can bring differing parties together so that the family thrives.

Conclusion

I have done my best to embrace the heritage personally. I cannot imagine my life had there been no Nazarenes. I have also endeavored to face squarely the task that is ours as leaders to ensure essential unity in a day of increasing diversity. I have gladly referred to Bresee, Wesley, Baxter, Meiderlin, and Paul, each of whom served in a divisive time, as examples of a fatherly leadership that unites the family in essentials but is able to grant liberty in nonessentials and charity in all things.

Holiness or Christ-likeness or the transformed life is the creedal unity of the Church of the Nazarene, and I appeal to all of us to be focused in that unity as essential. I also appeal to all of us to grant liberty to those who are serving the church so that they can be led by the Spirit of truth as they continually interpret our creed into theological persuasions.

Our founding fathers (Bresee, in particular) were able to bring essential unity to divergent groups in a divisive era. That grace, that fatherly leadership spirit, is a part of our heritage. In our day, which is no less divisive, I call upon us as leaders to pattern our leadership after theirs. To endorse that spirit is to embrace our heritage.

²²Smith, 220.

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Conclusion

A Winter's Eve

The inclusion of this poem as the final piece of this book seems appropriate. As the conclusion to this collection of writings about topics that are close to my heart, this poem, although written by me when I was sixteen years of age, still expresses my deep, abiding faith and is a fitting ending place for this volume.

I stood alone on a winter's eve
As snow flakes 'round me fell.
A tranquil peace swept o'er my soul
A feeling that all was well.

I asked myself in quiet tones,
"What charm has this brisk air
That it should free my heart from sin
My soul from deep despair?"

And then my heart, which had been hard,
Was filled with loving care.
I stood in silent reverence for
I knew that God was there.

Continued from front panel

September 1961 – June 1963

Took additional graduate work at the University of Chicago

April 1966 – July 1974

Was pastor of the Church of the Nazarene, Overland Park, Kansas

August 1974 – July 1991

Was pastor of First Church of the Nazarene, Nashville, Tennessee

September 1977 – June 1979

Completed doctorate in ministry at Vanderbilt University

August 7, 1988

Celebrated 30th anniversary of ordination

June 1991

Elected president of Trevecca Nazarene College

July 1991

Became president of Trevecca

June 2005

Retired from presidency of Trevecca Nazarene University



Millard C. Reed

Ask any person who was in one of Millard Reed's congregations to name a quality that seemed to be most apparent in Dr. Reed's ministry, and the answer would have something to do with "his pastor's heart." For forty years parishioners in his churches felt the impact of ministry that *came from the heart*. During his years as president of Trevecca Nazarene University, college students and college employees enjoyed his ministry as it continued on the college campus. In addition to his responsibilities as president, each fall Dr. Reed taught the Pastoral Theology class, preparing religion students to become pastors who would also know how to share their hearts with their own congregations.

This volume is a collection of Millard Reed's writings that address issues that are close to his heart. They address subjects about which he is passionate. They present his core values—as a minister and as a president of a Christian university. These writings are from the heart of a pastor who loves his Lord and his church, its people and its educational institutions.

