

Fire in the Sanctuary

Leadership in the Presbyterian Church in Canada

Brian J. Fraser

St. Andrew's Hall
Vancouver School of Theology
Vancouver, B.C.
1993

PROLOGUE

Confidence, compassion, clarity, and courage are the four elements necessary to ignite and sustain the fires of faith--confidence in God, compassion in mission, clarity in purpose, and courage in action.

This book explores those images in relation to leadership in The Presbyterian Church in Canada. It may be of value to leaders in other branches of the church, but I have written it especially for those who are Ministers of Word and Sacraments, Diaconal Ministers, and Ruling Elders within my own denomination. They have all been given and accepted leadership responsibility among God's people and exercise their callings as a partnership in the denomination's courts and agencies. They are what a friend calls "that venerable guild of those who tend and water the Burning Bush."

That striking image captures both the significance and the frustration of being leaders in the church. On the one hand, we have to be motivated and encouraged to use our best abilities to fulfil the task to which Christ and His church have called us. On the other hand, we recognize our frailty and acknowledge that we often don't do the good we intend.

The outcome of our efforts depends on Christ, whose mission can proceed without us. Yet we have been called to participate in that mission, and the fire burns inside us. This book, then, has been written to fan the flames of faith and to encourage the people who have responded to the call to leadership among Canadian Presbyterians.

These chapters first appeared in public as sermons at morning worship during the 1992 General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada in Hamilton, Ontario. Sermons are meant for the ear, not the eye, and do not transfer directly to the printed page. In rewriting them for publication, I have tried to remain true to their substance while necessarily changing their structure.

Teachers, students, and friends have all helped my understanding of leadership and its essential place in the church. Special words of thanks are due to colleagues at St. Andrew's Hall and Vancouver School of Theology, and in the Presbytery of Westminster. In their company I have been inspired and nurtured. I also appreciate deeply the trust of the local arrangements committee of the Hamilton Assembly for inviting me to preach in the first place.

Bob Stewart, Nancy Cocks, Arnie Weigel, Beth Bretzlaff, and Glenn Cooper offered tough but encouraging criticism of the manuscript. My toughest and most loving critic is, as ever, Joan.

Proceeds from the sale of this book will go to the Bursary Fund at St. Andrew's Hall to provide financial support for Presbyterian students at Vancouver School of Theology.

Brian J. Fraser
St. Andrew's Hall
Vancouver School of Theology
Advent 1992

FIRE IN THE SANCTUARY

Scripture Reading: Exodus 3:1-15 (NRSV)

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the Lord said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain."

But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'the God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "**I AM WHO I AM.**" He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, '**I AM** has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations."

* * *

The timing of two events in the annual cycle of activities in The Presbyterian Church in Canada is particularly appropriate. First, the ballots cast to elect the Moderator of the General Assembly are counted on April Fools' Day. Second, the General Assembly meets at the beginning of Pentecost, the season of fire and fervour and of the disrupting power of the Holy Spirit. Pentecost is a time of remembering God's action in the midst of the mundane, action with astonishing results.

God's whole being burns with desire for steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in all the earth (Jeremiah 9:24). The church, created by and called to serve that desire, is the Body of Christ and continues the work and mission of Christ. Its purpose is to live the vision that the earth is the Lord's, that death and destruction do not define reality, and that God's passion and compassion bring redemption to the world.

As the church has a leadership role in the world so, within the church, people with particular gifts have specific leadership tasks. The gifts of confidence, compassion, clarity, and courage equip them to tend and stoke the divine fire that burns but is never consumed.

The Divine Fire

Moses experienced the disruption of the divine presence one day on Mount Horeb. It began as just another day with the sheep grazing beyond the wilderness in pastures partway up the mountain. Suddenly, a bush was ablaze, burning, but not consumed. Then the voice of God spoke from the midst of the bush, full of compassion for the suffering people of Israel and full of challenge for the one chosen to lead them to freedom. Moses' reaction was fear, confusion, and resistance. God's response was assurance, direction, and persistence. In the end, Moses answered the call, with astounding results.

He did not work alone. An enterprise as large and complex as the Exodus required organization and direction. While his was a central role, Moses needed other leaders who were also assured of God's presence and guidance. Together they received at least a degree of trust from the people of Israel and led them from slavery towards the promised land.

Throughout the Exodus, though, both people and leaders knew the fear, confusion, and resistance that had infected Moses on Horeb. The feelings beset their children and their children's children. God called generation after generation to be faithful, and generation after generation resisted. Yet God did not give up, but sent fire again and again to reveal, to refine, and to revive.

The pillar of fire in the wilderness gave assurance and guidance as Israel sought to follow God's ways. The searing fire of God's pain and anger from the lips of the prophets reminded Israel of their breaking of the covenant. The fiery passion of John the Baptist in the wilderness called for preparing the way of the Lord. The blazing compassion of Jesus took him to the pain and ignominy of the Cross. The hearts of the disciples on the Emmaus road burned as they broke bread with the risen Christ. And the tongues of fire at Pentecost drew together members of the body of Christ to take his ministry to the world.

The fire is not ours. It is God's passion for the earth and for us as servants of that passion. It burns to reveal God, to refine us, and to revive the vision of blessing for the whole creation. Church leaders are given the task of nurturing this vision--initiated in God's act of creation, clarified in covenants with Noah and Abraham and Moses, and culminating in the new covenant in Jesus Christ. When leaders tend and stoke the divine fire with all the elements God has provided, the church can fulfil its purpose.

The Furnace of Faith

The place where God's fire burns with the greatest intensity and warmth is in public worship. This corporate act, repeated week by week as both diet and discipline, is the primary place of encounter with God's fire, the furnace that forges faith. God's passionate longing and desire for human love and service appear most often, most regularly, in the church's worship.

Jock and Geordie both grew up in the same Scottish village. Jock went off to university and eventually answered the call to become minister of Word and Sacraments. Geordie took over the family feed mill and enjoyed great business success. Ten years before retirement, Jock returned to the village to minister in his home congregation. He and Geordie became fast friends once again.

When Jock retired, Geordie suddenly, and without explanation stopped going to church. Jock didn't say anything for the first couple of weeks, but finally decided to raise the issue when they got together to play cribbage that week. They sat together in Geordie's kitchen on a cold fall night before a glowing coal fire.

In the midst of the rubber match, Jock said, "I haven't seen you in church the last couple of Sundays."

"No, you haven't," responded Geordie.

"Been sick?"

"No."

"Not impressed with the new minister?"

"Not really."

"Think you'll be back soon?"

"I doubt it."

"Well, I must admit that I find that rather disturbing," mused Jock.

"I thought you probably would," said Geordie.

Jock reached for the tongs beside the fireplace, removed a glowing lump of coal from among the others, and set in on the hearth. They sipped on their drams of whiskey and smoked their pipes as they watched it burn out and die. Jock rose, buttoned his coat, and went out into the cold autumn night. The next Sunday, Geordie was back in the sanctuary.

Worship is to faith as fuel is to fire. Church leaders tend and stoke fire in their own congregations and throughout the wider church and world. They do it in country churches where a faithful family has fired the old wood stove hours before the service begins, and in city cathedrals with textured stained glass and pipe organs you can feel through your feet. Preaching the Word of God and celebrating the Sacraments nurtures disciples. In church sanctuaries God's passion smoulders, glows, and ignites human hearts. God forms our identity as the church, as Christ's body, in these sanctuaries. From these sanctuaries, God's passion radiates across the country as the people of Jesus Christ live their various callings.

There is a story told of Sam Keen, from whose book *Fire in the Belly* the title of this volume is shamelessly but gratefully taken. At a conference some years ago in the United States, he shared the platform with a liberation theologian from Latin America. When asked to introduce themselves Keen told of his place of birth, his early years in his family, his education, and so on. The Latin American theologian began by saying, "When my people were conquered by the Spaniards..." The contrasting answers reveal profoundly different assumptions about the origins of individual identity. Keen understood his life to be formed by personal experience; the Latin

American theologian saw himself in a broader historical and communal context.

The Latin American theologian's understanding was biblical. The roots of our Christian identity are in God's encounter with our ancestors in the faith--Abraham and Sarah, Miriam and Moses, the judges and monarchs of Israel, prophets and apostles. It is in the sanctuary that the fire of God forms and reforms our identity in continuity with the communion of saints who have gone before. Church leaders nurture that identity in the sanctuary, giving the church's present life and witness its proper historical and communal context. Ordination or designation to the work of leadership takes place in the sanctuary. And there Christians confess failures, hear words of healing, and receive vision and strength.

The sanctuary forms the centre of the church's life, the furnace that forges its faith and mission. From that centre the members of the body of Christ go to create a world that reflects the glory of God. To that centre they return for revival and renewal from the divine fire. They leave and return, go out and come back. It is the rhythm of the saints, those called to be servants in Christ, and is as regular as God's heartbeat. Church leaders serve God by nurturing the life and witness of the members of Christ's body.

Rekindled Leaders

This is a confusing time to be a leader among Presbyterians in Canada. Many seem overwhelmed by cynicism or pessimism about the future of the denomination. They cite stagnant membership statistics and financial figures. They complain about what went wrong with restructuring the national offices and agencies. Issues of sexuality, social justice, and spiritual renewal create a confusing clamour for attention.

What are church leaders to do?

A great temptation is to withdraw, to "cocoon," as futurist and trend analyst Faith Popcorn puts it. In *The Popcorn Report* she describes this tendency as the impulse to go inside when it gets too tough and scary outside, to hole up and hide out within a "shell of safety" protected from a mean, unpredictable world. For many within the church the urge results in their taking refuge in the comfort of their own congregation. Others withdraw even farther into a haven of individualized spirituality.

Of course people need to withdraw from the world from time to time for rest and renewal. Concern for one's health and the stewardship of personal resources is necessary for church leaders who take seriously their ordination and designation vows. If withdrawal becomes a lifestyle, however, Christian faith is replaced by a cocoon of protection against the difficulties facing the broader church and the world. Christian faith becomes escapism, and Christian witness disappears.

The text for the preambles, promises, and prayers of the ordination and designation services for Ministers of Word and Sacraments, Diaconal Ministries, and Ruling Elders are in the appendices to this volume. Essentially job descriptions, they show the church's understanding of leadership. Office holders will benefit from first reading the appendix that concerns their leadership, then

those concerning their colleagues. The three orders are a partnership for exercising the privileges and responsibilities of church leadership. Every section of the vows urges active engagement in God's redemptive activity. "Cocooning" is not an option.

Church leaders struggle with their responsibilities and with accomplishing the church's witness to the world. They are called by Christ, confirmed by the church in their call, and given authority to lead Christ's mission.

The task is to rekindle the fires in the sanctuaries and councils of the church. In many places, of course, the fire has never gone out, because it is God's fire, not ours. We do not provide the elements that keep it going. God does. But we are asked to stoke and tend it, with all our minds, and all our hearts, and all our might.

The next four chapters focus on the gifts from God that keep this fire going in the sanctuary and radiating into the community. Church leaders can ignore them, as they can any gift, but they are called to nurture them. The gifts are the basic materials for designing the mission of the church in this age. Church leaders must recognize these elements, and learn both to use them and to be fed by them.

They are the gifts of:

CONFIDENCE,
COMPASSION,
CLARITY, and
COURAGE.

Each gift has a special focus and will be discussed here as:

EVANGELICAL CONFIDENCE,
ECUMENICAL COMPASSION,
CONFESSIONAL CLARITY, and
REFORMING COURAGE.

With all four elements feeding the fire simultaneously, its revealing light will be bright, its refining work thorough, and its reviving power strong. Then passion for the Gospel will be rekindled and mission will flourish.

EVANGELICAL CONFIDENCE

Scripture Reading: I Corinthians 1:1-9 (NRSV)

Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, to the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind--just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you--so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

* * *

It's time for a little soul searching.

How often during this past year did you want to quit? Any reason will do--fatigue, boredom, frustration, resentment, anger, or discouragement. The feelings may have sprung from annoyance at any part of the body of Christ--the session, the congregation, the Presbytery, the church in general, the cliques in any one of these, even yourself.

It's no secret that leadership in the church can be hard slogging. The church is supposed to bring out the best in people, yet how often we encounter what seems to be the worst. What are church leaders to do?

A Troubled Church

Paul's experience with the Corinthian church is particularly helpful for Canadian Presbyterians facing the challenges of church leadership and many of the denomination's theologians have been drawn to the letters to the Corinthians. John Edgar McFadyen, Professor of Old Testament at Knox College from 1899 to 1910, wrote the commentary on the Corinthian letters in 1911 in *The Interpreter's Commentary on the Epistles* published by Hodder and Stoughton. The first book written by Walter Bryden, who taught at Knox College from 1927 until 1952, was *The Spirit of Jesus in St. Paul*, and deals with Paul's struggle to lead the Corinthian church. J. Stanley Glen, Bryden's successor as Principal of Knox College, wrote *Pastoral Problems in First Corinthians*. Among current scholars in the denomination, Dorcas Gordon recently completed a doctoral thesis on the social and cultural context of the Corinthian church and Stephen Farris is writing a book on preaching centred on the Corinthian correspondence.

Generation after generation finds fascinating both the church in Corinth and Paul's response to it. Walter Bryden recognized that Paul and the Corinthians struggled with problems similar to those in today's church. How do we know and communicate the presence and power of Christ? How

do we confront the moral and spiritual confusion of a cosmopolitan society and the opportunism that exploits its people? "Addressed to a church situated in one of the most profligate cities of the Roman Empire," J. Stanley Glen wrote in introducing his study, " [1st Corinthians] portrays the deep, uncompromising struggle of a pastor for the salvation of his people."

The Corinthian church, like ours, was a public relations headache. There are few romantic images and little glitz or glory. In Corinth, instead, was a church showing, week after week, that it was an earthen vessel.

The Corinthian correspondence is worth reading at one sitting. We usually read scripture in little snippets, like the one that begins this chapter; but 1st and 2nd Corinthians are letters. When we receive mail from a friend, we usually sit down with much expectation and delight and read it all the way through. Then we go back and reread the important parts, perhaps several times.

The delight of the church leaders who first opened the letters from Paul was probably doused early in their reading. The apostle pulled no punches, and knew the location of all the closets that hid Corinthian skeletons.

There's a satirical document that is supposedly a letter from Paul applying for a position with a congregation. One version ends with these words:

In conclusion, however, there are a few things of which your committee should be aware in considering my application for the position of senior minister in your congregation. I do have a criminal record, ranging from charges of murder to convictions for civil disobedience and disturbing the peace. I have been driven out of several communities. I have remained in no congregation longer than eighteen months.

Suppose a congregational profile for the Corinthian church exhibited a similar degree of honesty. It might end like this:

In summary, then, we are a congregation that is bitterly divided into factions, filled with members who are arrogant in their wealth and position in Corinthian society, beset by all manner of sexual immorality, lax in our celebration of the sacraments, confused in our theological stance, and bereft of stable leadership.

The church is a human institution, an earthen vessel. Its members have all the faults and foibles of their fellow human beings. That's not news to anyone in the church. But the church is also Christ's body, God's primary human instrument for divine activity in the world. It may not be the instrument any of us would have chosen, but God's wisdom is not our wisdom. Confidence in God's wisdom holds the clue to Paul's ability to deal with the problems in the Corinthian church, and the Corinthian church's willingness, in the end, to accept his leadership.

A Guiding Light

Sometimes people think that reading introductions is a waste of time. They say, "Why bother with that stuff at the beginning? Let's get to the real substance of the book." Unfortunately, they

often miss an important part of the book where authors describe their intentions and reasons for writing.

People sometimes read Scripture the same way, and miss some of the most helpful sections of the Bible, especially of the New Testament letters. The quotation at the beginning of this chapter introduces the Corinthian correspondence. In a few short verses, Paul tells his readers what is in his heart of hearts and why he is taking the time and energy to write to this wayward and unruly collection of new Christians. Amazingly, there is no hint in the introduction of the problems that Paul and the congregation face. His greeting suggests a model Christian community: "the church of God that is in Corinth;" "those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus;" "called to be saints;" "I give thanks to my God always for you;" and, "you are not lacking in any spiritual gift."

What is Paul up to? Is this some kind of preacher's trick to lull the Corinthian readers into complacency before hitting them with criticism and judgement? Not at all. Rather it is Paul's confession of trust in the Gospel, of his evangelical confidence. It rings most clearly in the final sentence in the introduction. "God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." (v.9) It also seasons the entire correspondence.

Evangelical confidence is what sustains Paul's work with this rebellious people, this stubborn congregation and its fractious leaders. The confession of trust in God's faithfulness recurs throughout the letters and is the centre to which Paul returns after dealing with each problem the community faced. Its finest expression is in 1 Corinthians 15:1-11:

Now I would remind you brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which you stand, through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you--unless you have come to believe in vain. For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them--though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.

God works faithfully in every part of church leadership. That faithfulness is the source of our strength and patience in working with this earthen vessel to which God has entrusted the Gospel.

In his commentary on First Corinthians, John Calvin insists that Paul's intent throughout the letter is to foster assurance in the disciples. That evangelical confidence allows us to stomach the endless tasks and to surmount difficulty and discouragement. God's grace is sufficient. We are the servants of that grace, stewards of that Gospel and channels of that power. We are not the source, but the means. We cannot guarantee success but, with the help of God, we will be effective leaders.

At the end of the hall outside the faculty offices at Vancouver School of Theology hangs a copy of Rembrandt's portrait of Paul. It meets staff, students, and faculty leaving that area. Paul sits at what seems to be a writing desk. Is he working on the Corinthian correspondence? Dark shadows surround him and fatigue dulls his face. The cares of leadership among that motley collection of house churches he planted seem deeply etched on his features.

Light encircles his head, but an observer is drawn to the eyes, displaying a passionate calm, that evangelical confidence. There is a spark of the coal that warmed the sanctuary of Paul's soul and of the fire that burned in the sanctuaries of the early church. It is God's fire, revealing, refining, and reviving. It is the source of Paul's confidence in the light of whatever comes and his determination to pass on the faith to the members of the Corinthian church. The words that he wrote in Romans 8:35-39, probably while working in Corinth, express the breadth and depth of his evangelical confidence.

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we all being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

God offers the same evangelical confidence to leaders of the church in this age. While fruitless to compare Paul's problems with ours, suffice it to say that, as in his day, church leaders encounter difficulties that threaten to overwhelm and debilitate them. When facing the frustration and discouragement that come at such times, the flames of evangelical confidence that the Spirit kindles within the souls of church leaders are a welcome necessity. Aware of such assuring help, leaders may be confident of their ability to stoke and tend the flames in the rest of the church.

ECUMENICAL COMPASSION

Scripture Reading: Psalm 103 (NRSV)

Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and all that is within me,
bless his holy name.

Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and do not forget all his benefits –
who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the Pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
who satisfies you with good as long as you live
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

The Lord works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed.
He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel.
The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
He will not always accuse, nor will he keep his anger forever.

He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.
For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward
those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far he removes our transgressions from us.
As a father has compassion for his children,
so the Lord has compassion for those
who fear him.

For he knows how we are made;
he remembers that we are dust.
As for mortals, their days are like grass;
they flourish like a flower of the field;
for the wind passes over it, and it is gone,
and its place knows it no more.
But the steadfast love of the Lord
is from everlasting to everlasting on
those who fear him,
and his righteousness to children's children,
to those who keep his covenant
and remember to do his commandments.

The Lord has established his throne in the heavens,

and his kingdom rules over all.
Bless the Lord, O you his angels,
you mighty ones who do his bidding,
obedient to his spoken word.
Bless the Lord, all his hosts,
his ministers that do his will.

Bless the Lord, all his works,
in all places of his dominion.
Bless the Lord, O my soul.

* * *

Church leaders stoke and tend the fire in the sanctuary, and work to arouse the passionate engagement of Christians in the body of Christ for its mission in the world. The task is not easy, but assurance comes from the elements that God gives as fuel for the fire--evangelical confidence, ecumenical compassion, confessional clarity, and reforming courage. Together they sustain the vision of faith for church leaders

Dousing the Fire

The list of divine gifts, however, is peculiar. Or at least their manifestation in the church is peculiar. The words--evangelical, ecumenical, confessional, and reforming--too often divide Christians rather than unite them. They are attributed to various parties in the church, and used to describe conflicting attitudes to the church's life and mission. The Evangelicals struggle with the Ecumenists, and those who argue for a confessional stance are often at odds with reformers.

Charlie Scott, minister at Gordon Presbyterian Church in Burnaby, B.C., dramatized these tensions in his moderatorial sermon at the Synod of British Columbia in 1991. Titled "Games Clergy Play," he suggested the games in this decade would be video games. One, called "Terminator 666," has muscular warriors in clerical garb destroying each other on the basis of theological party and faction. Wisely, Scott did not identify the heroes, but made the point simply that this type of conflict can devastate the church's ministry.

Despite the humour and exaggeration, "Terminator 666" contains an important warning. The Presbyterian Church in Canada has its parties and factions, usually operating informally through loosely-knit networks, organizations, and meetings. Presbyterians too often use evangelical, ecumenical, confessional, and reforming as terms of division and even derision. At its best, though, Presbyterianism holds them together as reflections of the mind and heart of Christ, each one essential to the divine fire.

Of course there is tension, especially in the earthen vessel of the church, but tension can be creative. Might an evangelical confidence have an ecumenical scope? Would not a confessional stance strengthen a reforming strategy? Any interpretation of the Gospel that lacks even one of these elements will not reveal, refine, and revive the work of the church.

In this the rest of this chapter, "ecumenical" is not a party label, but rather a description of the breadth of God's compassion for the whole creation, and the arena for the church's life and mission. The word's origin is Greek, from "oikos" meaning "house," and "oikein" meaning "to inhabit." This element of the divine fire, then, refers to God's steadfast love for the entire household. It does not belong to any party or faction, but permeates the work of the church.

Rekindled Faith

Psalm 103 is one of scripture's most eloquent expressions of God's ecumenical compassion. It encompasses the fullness of the Gospel and has a central place in Psalter in Presbyterian worship. John Knox, for example, used the psalm in the Communion Service for the English-speaking congregation in Geneva during his years of exile there. The congregation recited it after the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving as a summary all the benefits of God's grace. It reviews the scope of God's mercy and compassion and recalls people to faith that is full, incorporating the personal, communal, and cosmic dimensions of God's work. Such an understanding of God's field of activity keeps the fires of faithful leadership alight.

The opening section (vs.1-5) is one of the most powerful hymns of personal piety in the Bible. It names the essential needs of humans--forgiveness, healing, the promise of eternal life, the assurance of love, and the necessities for abundant living. All are God's gifts.

For many, this is the heart of Christian faith. They believe because of what God has done for them, because of benefits received. Their faith begins and ends with their own salvation. It is an attractive and widely-held understanding.

The problem is that the psalm doesn't end there. The second section (vs.6-18) sees the gifts of the individual in the light of the history of God's people, a people in need of mercy and grace, compassion and love. Contrasting human fickleness with divine faithfulness, these verses take the readers beyond mere self-affirmation. God's faithfulness, not human effort, brings salvation and wellbeing to the world.

Further, no individual is an adequate agent for the work of God's faithfulness. God calls a community, and makes known the divine ways to the people of Israel, calling them, in turn, to participate in the vindication of the oppressed. The individual recipient of God's benefits is set firmly within the covenant community.

This is the faith of many in the church. The family of faith is a haven in which they receive God's benefits. It is a communal cocoon in which to enjoy the fellowship and support of other members of the Christian family protected from a heartless and threatening world. Again, this is an attractive and widely-held view of the church and the Christian faith.

Again, though, the psalm does not end there. It sets the people of God in a still broader context, that of God's loving reign over the whole creation.

The third section of Psalm 103 (vs.19-22), and the continuation of this hymn of praise to God's ecumenical compassion in Psalm 104, expresses God's expansive sovereignty. Here, at last, is the

full scope of God's steadfast love. It extends to all places in the universe and encompasses the whole creation.

Worship conducted in the spirit of Psalm 103 equips the saints and their leaders for a comprehensive ministry, and tends the personal, communal, and cosmic dimensions of life with God.

Psalm 103 also helps put in its proper place the factionalism that too often infects the church. People create organizations and networks to protect and propagate what they consider essential--and threatened. If some believe individual conversion and personal faith are most important, they organize to promote that dimension of the faith. So with others who think that the church's confessional integrity is central. Still others focus on social justice, mobilizing like-minded believers to advance the cause. But the witness of Psalm 103 is chastening, because each dimension of faith is essential. Any who try to make one aspect the sole focus of Christianity are guilty of reductionism, the most common and most destructive heresy in the church, as Walter Bryden repeatedly stressed.

Psalm 103 expresses the full depth and breadth of God's work. It is a constant reminder to the church of the fullness of faith and sets the style for worship in the sanctuary, where the fire of God reveals, refines, and revives week by week.

Forging Christian Influence

An example of the providential timing mentioned at the beginning of Chapter One was the meeting of the General Assembly at the same time as the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. Commissioners who managed to follow the news as well as the Assembly reports, discussions, motions, and amendments, heard debates and discussions from the official summit and from the parallel conferences of Non-Governmental Organizations, including the churches. Charges flew back and forth between the rich nations and the poor. Condemnations were levelled at environmental policies of the haves, and fears expressed for the environmental devastation among the have nots. Whatever one's position on environmental issues, one fact was clear: world leaders, including the churches, face bewildering complexities that defy simple solutions.

A striking cartoon in *The New Yorker* shows a young boy about to eat supper. "I don't like spinach," complained the boy. "Now, Johnny," replied the mother, "you eat that spinach all up. Just think of the starving millions of the world." Grim-faced, Johnny forced down the spinach. The telephone on the wall rang and Johnny answered. "Hello!" the final caption read, "We are the starving millions of the world and we'd just like to thank you!"

Again, what are church leaders to do?

The common sense answer is, "Do what you can where you are with the resources you have." This type of wisdom used to be passed on from generation to generation in a natural, almost unconscious, manner. Wise advice on how to contribute to the good of the world came down from parents and grandparents, aunts and uncles, ministers and teachers. Now such wisdom comes from best-sellers and companion audio and video tapes. Father figures like Robert Bly,

Sam Keen, Richard Pascale, Peter Senge, Thomas Moore, Scott Peck, John Bradshaw, Kenneth Leech, and Henri Nouwen, and mother figures like Alice Miller, Anne Wilson Schaef, Carol Gilligan, Gloria Steinem, Marion Woodman, and Deborah Tannen write the books and produce the tapes that provide the advice that used to come through family networks.

One of the best of this genre is *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People (1989)* by Stephen Covey. His distinction between "circles of concern" and "circles of influence" can help church leaders stay within the realm of God's ecumenical compassion.

"Circles of concern" range from personal well-being to the state of the universe. Health, wealth, family, work, national affairs, nuclear war, the state of the environment, are concerns of most church people and reflect their sharing of God's compassion for the creation. Particular individuals, though, have little control over many of these matters. Few are directly involved in decisions about nuclear war. Few have direct access to the policy-setting boards of multinational corporations whose decisions affect both economics and environment.

Individuals can, however, make a difference in some areas, and these are "circles of influence." Self-directed people, whom Covey calls "proactive," focus energy and activity on their circle of influence. The result is that their circle of influence expands, moving increasingly into the circle of concern.

People following the opposite pattern of behaviour, which Covey labels "reactive," focus their circle of concern, about which, in many instances, they can do nothing. The consequence is a sense of victimization, of blaming and complaining, and of helplessness. Then the circle of influence shrinks.

A faithful Christian community has a circle of concern as broad as the steadfast love of God. In addition, though, leaders need to recognize the circles of influence of church members, including themselves, and be sufficiently self-directed (or, better, "Spirit-directed") so that their witness to the Gospel does not end in frustration and despair. The variety of passions and abilities in the church are all needed. Hindering individual contributions with pettiness or partisanship obstructs the work of Christ.

Paul's words to the faction-ridden church in Corinth found in I Corinthians 12:4-7 retain their power.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

These words were originally read in the sanctuaries of Corinth that nurtured the full range of God's gifts for the church's mission. The sanctuary is still the place that forges the church's faith and unity.

We attend worship, whatever our partisan passions, and acknowledge our profound need for

God's grace, sit under the Word of God, gather at the Lord's Table, and respond to the Spirit's fire. We do these things together, and the depth and breadth of Christ's mercy enkindles us again.

CONFESSIONAL CLARITY

Scripture Reading: 1 Timothy 6:11-21 (NRSV)

But as for you, man of God, shun all this [false teaching]; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. In the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will bring about at the right time--he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings, and Lord of lords. It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.

As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.

Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you. Avoid the profane chatter and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge; by professing it some have missed the mark as regards faith.

Grace be to you.

* * *

In *Leadership is an Art*, Max DePree writes, “The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between the leader is a servant.”

Such counsel is in a long tradition of wisdom stretching back at least to the Pastoral epistles addressed to Timothy and Titus, letters that for generations have been primary leadership manuals for Presbyterians, especially clergy. As is evident in the above quotation, they define reality as “eternal life” and firmly link it to Jesus Christ. More than an immeasurable length of days, eternal life is “life that really is life,” a quality and depth of life lived in relationship to Christ.

Eternal life by definition, then, is “life in Christ”, for both individuals and the Church.

Central to Paul’s theology, the same emphasis on “life in Christ” is in John Calvin’s writings and continues in the Reformed piety reflected in Psalm 103 to the present day. Church leaders have the daunting task of tending and articulating an understanding of reality that holds together the personal, communal and cosmic dimensions of life in Christ.

Flaming Heretics

“What this church needs is a good heresy trial!”

Bill McKeown, minister at Drummond Hill Presbyterian Church in Niagara Falls, spoke these words when I was contemplating a call to the Ministry of Word and Sacraments.

I was confused. My understanding of heresy trials had been shaped by the Spanish Inquisition, Calvin’s treatment of Michael Servetus, the Salem Witch Trials, and other repulsive expressions of intolerance and hatred that scar church history.

Only after several years have passed did I begin to grasp what McKeown was suggesting. It came as I read Walter Bryden, McKeown’s theological mentor at Knox in the 1940’s.

Bryden had lived through a pre-video version of Charlie Scott’s “Terminator 666.” What was usually called the Modernist-Fundamentalist Controversy reached the height of its intensity in the 1920’s and the 1930’s in the United States. Modernists wanted to adapt the Gospel to contemporary trends largely by emphasizing its ethical dimensions. Fundamentalists saw the Gospel threatened by cultural adaptation and hoped to preserve it with an authoritative system of rational belief developed by Francis Turretin in seventeenth-century Geneva and propagated through Princeton Theological Seminary in the United States in the nineteenth century. Through people like Gresham Machen, this way of thinking about the faith had a significant impact on Canadian Presbyterianism. A small, but influential, group of fundamentalists were part of the resistance to Church Union among Canadian Presbyterians and filed a legal writ in 1923 to have the union declared illegal because it rejected the confessional standards of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Though the writ did not succeed, it contributed to the widely-held, though mistaken, view that the resistance to union was an extension of fundamentalism in the States.

Bryden concluded that both parties in the theological battle were heretical. For him, a heresy was anything that reduced the divine mystery and paradox of the Gospel to human dimensions, to a system of morality or belief controlled and manipulated by human effort. Modernists, in Bryden’s mind, reduced faith to an ethical system, a code of conduct, and a set of rules. Fundamentalists, in a similar manner, reduced faith to an intellectual system, a code of belief, and a set of propositions. Neither acknowledged the centrality of the Living Word, Jesus Christ, and the way in which faith is formed and reformed by an ongoing encounter with that reality. There are, of course, important ethical and intellectual elements in Christian faith; however, by making them absolutes, each side lost sight of the priority of God’s redemptive work in Jesus Christ.

Curiously, a careful reading of the literature produced by this controversy suggests that Bryden himself was guilty of reductionism in his analysis of the two positions. Nevertheless, his point about heresy stands. Theological controversy usually leads to a presentation of the Gospel that is shrunken and narrowly-focused. Confessional clarity that is centred on God’s redemptive work in Jesus Christ must communicate faith in its fullness.

Bill McKeown longed for such clarity in the confession of The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

A heresy trial, in his mind, would redirect the church's attention to the foundations of its life and witness and would move it toward a clearer understanding and expression of its view of reality. The centre of faith, for McKeown and others influenced by Bryden, could only be the living and present Word of God in Jesus Christ.

In one of Bryden's favourite phrases, Jesus is the "Judging-Saving Word." In Christ, God takes the initiative, simultaneously judging and saving a fallen humanity enslaved by sin. It is the divine initiative, and that along, that instills evangelical confidence, calls forth ecumenical compassion, stimulates confessional clarity, and inspires reforming courage.

Clear Vision

The human response to God's gracious activity in Christ is gratitude. Within this response, the world is understood as God's gift--created, redeemed, and sustained by grace. Here, then, is the rhythm of Christian life: grace and gratitude.

Literary critic and social commentator Kenneth Burke defines "piety" as:

- 1) an awareness of being connected with the source of being; and
- 2) a sense of what properly goes with what.

In terms of confessional clarity, what is the piety at the centre of Christian faith? How do we live out our connection with the living Word of God in Jesus Christ? And what properly goes with what?

Such questions intimidate. It is often difficult to tell even a trusted friend why we spend so much time, energy, and ability exercising leadership in the church. Can we tell our children, our colleagues at work, a stranger on the bus or airplane?

The challenge is particularly disturbing for Presbyterians with their proverbial reticence. Yet the questions are increasingly important as secularism and pluralism intensify, and we move beyond a time when mainstream Christians assumed that all North Americans at least knew, even if they did not accept, the essentials of the Christian faith. The church is, and will continue to be, the primary witness to Christ in the world. How do we present the Word that speaks to the deepest needs of humanity? How do we make our confession? How do we articulate clearly the centre and sense of Christian faith?

Consider the questions from another perspective. When we invite family or friends into our congregation's sanctuary, do they discover the fires of faith burning there with a clear light? Does the Holy Spirit find the elements needed to convince visitors of the wisdom and value of the Christian faith? Do they encounter a community ignited by evangelical confidence, ecumenical compassion, confessional clarity, and reforming courage?

The church at worship is the foundation of evangelism. People are best introduced to the fullness of Christianity when the body of Christ draws together in the sanctuary to experience revelation,

refinement, and revival.

When strangers worship in our sanctuary, do they know Christ's welcoming hospitality when they enter? Do they experience all the dimensions of the Gospel in the various components of worship? Are they greeted with delight afterward? Are they encouraged to return and take part again? Are there people with the appropriate gifts who can invite them to a deeper attachment to and understanding of Christ? If our answers are in any way hesitant, we have work to do, stoking and tending confessional clarity.

Worship reminds the church and shows the world the heartbeat of the Gospel. Most Presbyterian orders of service follow a particular rhythm: worship begins with an approach to God, with adoration of the divine attributes and activities, and with confession of the human condition; it continues as the congregation encounters Christ in scripture, in the Word preached, and in the Lord's Supper; the congregation then responds in gratitude with tithes and offerings, and with prayers of thanksgiving and intercession; finally, the people are blessed and dismissed to live with gratitude for the grace received.

The sense of what properly goes with what for the Christian faith emerges from the rhythm of worship. Three particular emphases characterize the coherence of a Presbyterian piety, according to Richard Robert Osmer in *A Teachable Spirit: Recovering the Teaching Office in the Church*. They are:

- 1) a sense of the transcendent majesty and sovereignty of God;
- 2) a recognition of the radical sinfulness of humanity; and
- 3) an understanding of regeneration as the partial restoration of the divine image in and intention for humanity.

In this understanding of reality, God takes the initiative by creating the universe good and designing it to operate as a household of steadfast love, justice, and righteousness. Human sin distorts and mars creation, mutating it into a labyrinth of evil and death. God does not abandon creation, but brings renewed hope and meaning to it through Christ and the Spirit, creating a covenant community to serve God's purposes. The church needs three keywords--God, sin, and redemption--to tell the full story of the Christian understanding of God's world and its ways.

Given the reductionist tendencies of the human mind, the church's confession of faith is often limited to one or two of these keywords. North America's strong revivalist tradition frequently ignores the first, that God is the source and creator of a good universe. Its starting place is usually a fascination with human sin that presents Christ as the solution to all human problems, both individual and corporate. Christ saves us from the world's evil, and salvation lies in escape. That presentation of the gospel distorts, however, because it is incomplete; the whole creation is God's, enclosed in and filled with divine compassion. Perhaps in reaction to the revivalist stress on sin, another tendency denies evil and presents a romantic tapestry of the perfections of nature, or childhood, or whatever. A false confidence in innocence and the goodness of what God has created leads to denial of the evil in which we participate. There is also a growing sense of

resignation and hopelessness in our society that denies the reality of the redemption wrought in Christ. If our attention becomes fixed on one of these keywords without the others, or if we mix up the order of what properly goes with what in God's plan of redemption, our confession will be stunted and confusing.

The worldview reflected in Christianity's full confessional pattern--God, sin, and redemption--unfolds when the church gathers to adore God, confess sin, receive the pledge of redemption, and take that pledge to the world. In his manifesto of gratitude, *What's Right with the Church*, William H. Willimon says that the idea of worship as an escape from the real world is wrong. It is precisely in the encounter with God in worship that we discover the real world, the world God intends.

A hope grounded in the living Christ is desperately needed, if not yet recognized, by a world groaning in labour pains while it awaits redemption (Romans 8:23). Confessional clarity and the hope it reflects provide the context, focus, and direction for those leaders called to chart the course for the church's mission.

REFORMING COURAGE

Scripture Reading: John 16:1-15 (NRSV)

"I have said these things to you to keep you from stumbling. They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, an hour is coming when those who kill you will think that by doing so they are offering worship to God. And they will do this because they have not known the Father or me. But I have said these things to you so that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you about them.

"I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because they do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned."

"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you."

* * *

"What are you looking for in a new minister?" As interim moderator of a congregation in Vancouver, I asked this question of the session. "What are your hopes and dreams? What kind of gifts are needed by the person you call?"

Several elders responded, and the last to speak did so softly, but firmly. "I have one burning desire, and that is to come into the sanctuary each week and be challenged to change."

That elder was 90 years old, and he understood.

He had come to know the fires of faith as the Word of Christ was revealed week by week in that congregation. He knew Christ's challenge to the world, and to him and his circle of influence. He knew that the world, and he, needed to change at every level--personal, communal, and cosmic.

Faith that is dynamic (the opposite is "stagnant") is at the centre of the Reformed tradition. The church is reformed, yes, but also always reforming according to the Word of God, as it lives in obedience to Jesus Christ.

A Burning Desire to Learn

Church leaders do well to reread regularly Jesus' farewell discourses in John's Gospel (chapters 13-17). These words would later invoke in the disciples confidence, compassion, clarity, and courage. Christ promised the Holy Spirit's presence, and in the following months and years the Advocate prodded, challenged, and confronted the apostles to make the changes necessary to bring the church to a more vigorous witness to the Gospel. The Helper created in them "a teachable spirit" so that they became channels of God's grace and models for humanity's gratitude.

Teachability is a mark of reforming courage. We learn from God, through each other, via the church, for the sake of the world. It takes patience to learn. It takes determination to change. When comfortable habits are--uncomfortably--broken, faithful participants in Christ's mission are able to take greater risks for the Gospel.

Richard Robert Osmer, again in *A Teachable Spirit*, describes John Calvin's conversion as a turn to teachability. In one of the few written references to his religious experience, Calvin introduces his commentary on the Psalms by saying that God brought his mind "to a teachable frame." He records that he was "immediately inflamed" with an intense desire to progress in both the knowledge and the practice of the Christian faith. From that moment, Calvin's life was marked by a burning passion to open himself to the forgiving, transforming grace of God--not only in the study of scripture and theology, but also in the practice of faith in the world. His conversion--like that of biblical men and women, and of people today--was only a starting point. The initial change to teachability simply sparks a zealous spirit. More and more of God's intention awaits discovery.

As a leader of both a congregation and in the broader church, Calvin had an eager curiosity about God's challenge to change. Christ's Advocate and Helper inspired his teachable spirit in pastoral conversations with church members, in inviting them to worship, in reading and preaching the Word, in celebrating the Sacraments, in participating in church councils, and in addressing the civic community. As pastor, preacher and teacher, presbyter, and citizen, Calvin opened his mind and heart to the leading of Christ's Spirit. God would provide such direction because, quite simply, Christ had promised it. Such evangelical confidence and confessional clarity about Christ's ecumenical compassion led to his reforming courage.

The same Spirit of reforming courage is available to, and desperately needed by, the leadership of The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

But again, what--specifically--are church leaders to do?

The answer is, "I don't know, but I suspect you do!"

Your understanding of your congregation and your community is the first and biggest part of the answer. Reforming courage calls for witness that is particular, specific, and local. To borrow a phrase from the environmental movement, think globally, but act locally. What are the local conditions that the Gospel needs to address?

No flawless formula exists to guarantee success. When God gives responsibilities, we accept them with the fear and trembling that Paul felt when he preached to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 2:3) and that the church faced in designing its mission in Philippi (Philippians 2:12).

The gift of reforming courage, and the teachable spirit that comes with it, leads beyond the strange mix of passivity, self-assurance, and fear that grips too many congregations and other church bodies. In the face of an unfamiliar and threatening world, we are tempted to cocoon with the recognizable: we meet with suspicion new faces at the sanctuary door; our worship is for the comfort of insiders; we limit mission giving to a small percentage of our total congregational budget--and our mission work gets even less of our time, talent, and energy.

This is no way to exercise leadership in Christ's church. Yet, to our shame, the description comes embarrassingly close to the truth about our congregations, presbyteries, synods, and national agencies. Leaders need all the reforming courage Christ has to give. Thank God it's available.

Designing Leaders

Presbyterian church leadership is collective. Sessions, presbyteries, synods, and general assemblies--not individuals--design the church's life and witness. No one person ever makes a decision for The Presbyterian Church in Canada; our Calvinist sense of sin is too strong. People take counsel together, trust the guidance of Christ's Advocate and Helper, and arrive at a trustworthy, if never perfect, understanding of God's will. Our understanding is that God calls church councils to discern, develop, and deploy the talents he has given for the church's work in the world. To speak simply and boldly, the councils design the ministry of the body of Christ.

"To design" means to use available resources creatively to attain a particular goal, even though there are always limits. Think of a house-builder, using lumber, nails, wiring, plumbing, roofing, and all the rest. If the pieces are put together with the proper creativity, the house-builder will reach the goal--a home. But the builder works within certain limits and cannot therefore use the same resources to create, say, an 18-wheel tractor trailer.

How, then, are church leaders to use creatively the available, though certainly limited, resources to attain the appropriate goal?

In *The Design of Everyday Things*, Donald A. Norman of MIT says that the fundamental principles for design are:

- 1) have a good conceptual model for the user; and
- 2) make things visible.

With those points in mind, think of people coming into your congregation to worship for the first time. Will they encounter "a good conceptual model" of the church from the welcome you give, the literature you offer, the liturgy you present, and opportunities you provide for their growth in the faith? Will God's gracious activity in the church and the world be visible in the life and

witness of your congregation? These are questions church leaders need to ask when considering how to design a clear mission.

In *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, author Peter Senge suggests that a thriving institution is a learning organization, and he describes five essential disciplines for its effectiveness.

- 1) Its members take seriously the need to deepen their vision, focus their energies, develop their abilities, and sharpen their perceptions.
- 2) Its members know the mental models that shape their views, how deeply entrenched they can be, and how important it is to be ready to unlearn some of them.
- 3) Its members commit to building shared visions that foster dedication to the purposes of the organization, not just compliance to them.
- 4) Its members recognize the paradox of team learning—that people working together catch insights, recognize patterns, and effect changes that are not possible for individuals working alone.
- 5) Its members practice "systems thinking," what Senge calls the most important of the five disciplines. In this perspective, all parts of reality interrelate. While attention to detail is important, being able to see the forest as well as the trees allows leaders to make changes that are worthwhile.

New styles of leadership can help organizations and the people in them nurture a teachable spirit. Leaders who follow traditional methods focus on "the chosen few" to set directions make key decisions, and energize the troops. The world of such leaders is made up of people connected only by lines of authority and is not at all a "system." Learning organizations, on the other hand, have leaders whom Senge describes as designers, stewards, and teachers. "They construct enterprises in which people continually expand their capacity to understand complexity, clarify vision, and improve shared mental models—that is, they are responsible for learning." This understanding is often described as a "holistic" or "ecological" view of reality in which all parts intertwine.

While there have been advocates of a systems approach to mission and theology in The Presbyterian Church in Canada, their voices have not been heard widely. One belongs to John Ross, former Dean of St. Andrew's Hall in Vancouver. The disciplines that focus on the pattern of the processes needed to achieve specific goals, especially engineering and architecture, fascinated Ross. He helped form the General Systems Group, which brought together faculty members from a variety of disciplines at the University of British Columbia for discussion. In his intellectual autobiography, *This Backlit Universe: Mysteries of Systems*, he writes:

The general idea of a system is that of things set up together so as to interact interdependently.... In modern formal usage, the word "system" refers to an assemblage of things which are connected dynamically and interdependently so as to form a complex functional unity.... The

parts of a system, being interdependent, mutually affect each other.... The advent of the system approach to the world has signalled the acceptance of a due and proper attitude of humility as befitting those who really know the complexity of the actual world.... No one who is aware of the systemic nature of things and of the potentialities of personal participation. We can make a difference in the systems of the world, and every difference makes a difference.

Throughout his stimulating volume of reminiscence and reflection, Ross witnesses to the God of creation and redemption whose "light beyond light" fills the universe.

Does a systems approach offer practical wisdom for church leaders? Absolutely! Our work already involves consultation in the courts and agencies of the church. As Christians we already acknowledge the divine system of redemptive grace. And we know already that God's gifts to individuals are for the sake of the "system"--the church's life and mission.

Does the church, then, need to develop a "holistic or "ecological" view of reality in which all parts intertwine? Of course not! We already have it. But do we recognize and use it?

EPILOGUE

This book does not provide easy formulas or simple solutions to the challenges that face church leaders. The church deserves better.

This book does offer a framework for designing and carrying out Christ's mission in the world. The task is daunting, yes, but the resources are more than adequate. We are called and equipped to work with and for Christ. We are called and equipped to participate in Christ's ministry and-mission. We are called and equipped to be leaders of the church in a witness that is forged in the furnace of worship by all the elements in the fire of God and radiates with Christ's passionate love to the ends of the earth.

Attitude is the key. It must be something we want to do, something that ignites our passion and delight. Lloyd Gaston, New Testament professor at Vancouver School of Theology, caught something of this spirit in a sermon he preached in the school's chapel. He contrasted things in his childhood that he had to do and things that he liked to do. Cleaning blackboards after school was something you had to do. Swimming in a cool lake on a hot summer afternoon was something you got to do. He paused for a moment, then said, "The Gospel's a bit like that, you know. It's not about what you have to do, but about what you get to do."

Church leaders get to design and put into action the church's mission--the most important thing in the world. We get to be an integral part of God's redemptive grace. We get to be part of Christ's ministry. We get to be part of the Spirit's mission. The call to participate in stoking and tending the fire in the sanctuary is not to be taken lightly, but it is to be enjoyed.

The elements discussed in this book--evangelical confidence, ecumenical compassion, confessional clarity, and reforming courage--burn with greatest intensity in the fires of our sanctuaries when Christ's promised Advocate and Helper enkindles church leaders with wisdom and strength.

May we all faithfully stoke the fires in our sanctuaries to God's eternal glory. Amen.

REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

- p.5 Sam Keen, *Fire in the Belly: On Being a Man*. New York: Bantam Books, 1991.
- p.6 Faith Popcorn, *The Popcorn Report: Faith Popcorn on the Future of your Company, your World, your Life*. New York: Doubleday Currency, 1991.
- p.8 John E. McFadyen, *The Epistles to the Corinthians*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1911.
- Walter Bryden, *The Spirit of Jesus in St. Paul: A Study in the Soul of St. Paul based upon the Corinthian Letter*. London: James Clarke, 1925.
- J. Stanley Glen, *Pastoral Problems in First Corinthians*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964.
- Dorcas Gordon, "A Sociological Exegesis of 1 Corinthians 7," unpublished ThD thesis, Toronto School of Theology, 1991.
- pp. 15-16 Robert Bly, *Iron John: A Book About Men*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1990.
- Richard Pascale, *Managing on the Edge*. New York: Touchstone Books, 1990.
- Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*. New York: Doubleday Currency, 1990.
- Thomas Moore, *Care of the Soul: A Guide for Cultivating Depth and Sacredness in Everyday Life*. New York: HarperCollins, 1992.
- Scott Peck, *The Road Less Travelled*. New York: Touchstone Books, 1980.
- John Bradshaw, *Bradshaw on the Family: A Revolutionary Way of Self Discovery*. Deerfield Beach, Fla.: Health Communications, 1988.
- Kenneth Leech, *Soul Friend: The Practice of Christian Spirituality*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980.
- Henri Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership*. New York: Crossroad, 1991.
- Alice Miller, *The Drama of the Gifted Child: The Search for the True Self*. New York: Basic Books, 1981.
- Anne Wilson Schaef and Diane Fassel, *The Addictive Organization*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990.

Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982.

Marion Woodman, *Leaving My Father's House: A Journey to Conscious Femininity*. New York: Shambhala, 1991.

Gloria Steinem, *Revolution from Within: A Book of Self-Esteem*. Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1992.

Deborah Tannen, *You just don't understand: women and men in conversation*. New York: Ballentine Books, 1991.

p.16 Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change*. New York: Fireside Books, 1989.

p.18 Max DePree, *Leadership is an Art*. New York: Doubleday Currency, 1989.

p.21 Richard Robert Osmer, *A Teachable Spirit: Recovering the Teaching Office in the Church*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990.

p.22 William H. Willimon, *What's Right with the Church*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989.

p.25 Donald A. Norman, *The Design of Everyday Thing*. New York: Doubleday Currency, 1989.

p.26 Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of The Learning Organization*. New York: Doubleday Currency, 1990.

p.26 John A. Ross, *This Backlit Universe: Mysteries of Systems*. Chilliwack: Shore Lines Publishing, 1990.

APPENDICES

The Presbyterian Church in Canada ordains, designates, inducts, and recognizes church leaders in public worship. At the heart of each service lies the promises made by leaders, the preambles in which the church defines leadership, and the prayers and actions with the church appoints its leaders. The appendices are from The *Book of Common Worship* of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Members of other denominations will benefit from a close examination of their own, similar services.

APPENDIX ONE

The Ordination of Ministers of Word and Sacraments

Preamble and Vows

All ministries of the Church proceed from and are sustained by the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our Prophet, Priest and King, the Minister of the covenant of grace. By the operation of God's Word and Spirit, the Church is gathered, equipped, and sent out to participate in this ministry. All members of the Church are called to share the Gospel with the world, and to offer to the Father the worship and service that are due to the Creator from the creation, through Christ the only Mediator, until he comes again. That the Church may be continually renewed and nurtured for ministry, Christ furnishes the Church with pastors and teachers. He requires and enables the Church to discern and to confirm by ordination those whom he calls to this pastoral and teaching office. The standards of his Church he entrusts in a special degree of responsibility to their care.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada is bound only to Jesus Christ, the Church's King and Head. The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as the written Word of God, testifying to Christ the living Word, are the canon of all doctrine, by which Christ rules our faith and life. We acknowledge our historic continuity with the Holy Catholic Church and our doctrinal heritage in the ecumenical creeds and the confessions of the Reformation. Our subordinate standards are the Westminster Confession of Faith as adopted in 1875 and 1889, the Declaration of Faith Concerning Church and Nation of 1954 and such doctrine as the Church, in obedience to Scripture and under the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit, may yet confess in the Church's continuing function of reformulating the faith.

All these things you have examined and are ready to accept. Being assured of your faith in Christ and your love for people, the Presbytery is prepared to ordain you in the name of the Triune God to the ministry of Word and Sacraments. That your faith may appear in the presence of God and the people of God, we now ask you the appointed questions in terms of this preamble.

1. Do you believe in God the Father, made known in His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom the Holy Spirit witnesses in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments?
2. Do you accept the subordinate standards of this Church, promising to uphold its doctrine under the continual illumination and correction of the Holy Spirit speaking in Scriptures?

3. Do you accept the government of this Church by sessions, presbyteries, synods and general assemblies, and do you promise to share in and submit yourself to all lawful oversight therein, and to follow no divisive course but to seek the peace and unity of Christ among your people and throughout the Holy, Catholic Church?

4. Do you promise in the strength and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ to conduct yourself in your private and public life as becomes his gospel, and do you give yourself diligently and cheerfully to the service of Christ's word, sacraments and discipline, for the furtherance of his reconciling mission in the world?

May the Lord bless you and give you grace to fulfil these vows. Amen.

Ordination Prayers

We praise and glorify you, Lord God Almighty, that you have created us and called us to yourself; that you have redeemed us in Jesus Christ your Son; you sustain our lives and our works through the presence and power of your Holy Spirit.

We praise and glorify you, Lord God Almighty, that you have formed throughout the world, the church to be your chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, belonging to you alone to declare the praises of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We praise and glorify you, Lord God Almighty, that in every age you have chosen servants to speak your word and to lead your people. We give you thanks for your servant who has been called to be a minister of your church.

(The Moderator, followed by other ministers, places a hand on the head of the ordinand. The Moderator continues:)

Spirit of God,
rest upon your servant ,
whom, with prayer and the laying on of hands,
we receive in your name
and ordain to the ministry of Word and Sacraments
in the holy, catholic church.

Spirit of God, anoint him/her with power to proclaim the gospel in word and sacrament, in love and truth, in the name of Jesus Christ.

Spirit of God, anoint him/her with power to announce forgiveness to the penitent, to bind up the broken hearted, to bring healing to the sick in the name of Jesus Christ.

Spirit of God, anoint him/her with power to proclaim liberty to the captives of sin and death and to challenge the oppressors of the weak in the name of Jesus Christ.

Give to your servant, we pray, good health of body, mind and spirit. Give him/her strength and gladness, willingness and usefulness, patience and courage, common sense and humour.

Be present through the joys and sorrows, the doubts and triumphs, the certainties and the uncertainties of the life and ministry to which you call him/her. Let him/her not be easily puffed up by the praise of others nor easily depressed by the blame of others.

Hear our prayers, in the name of Jesus Christ, through whom, with whom, and in whom, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honour is yours, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

APPENDIX TWO

The Designation of Members of the Order of Diaconal Ministries

Preamble and Vows

The Presbyterian Church in Canada is bound only to Jesus Christ, her King and Head. The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as the written Word of God, testifying to Christ the living Word, are the canon of all doctrine, by which He rules our faith and life. We acknowledge our historic continuity with the Holy Catholic Church and her doctrinal heritage in the ecumenical creeds and the confessions of the Reformation. Our subordinate standards are the Westminster Confession of Faith as adopted in 1875 and 1889, the Declaration of Faith Concerning Church and Nation of 1954 and such doctrine as the Church, in obedience to Scripture and under the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit, may yet confess in her continuing function of reformulating the faith.

The church is created by God. The church is Christ together with his people called both to worship and to serve him in all of life.

The church is one. It is one family under God whose purpose it is to unite all people in Jesus Christ.

The church is holy. It is set apart by God through the Holy Spirit to be a chosen people in the world.

The church is catholic. It is universal, including all people of all time who affirm the Christian Faith.

The church is apostolic. It is founded in Christ and the apostles and is in continuity with their teachings.

The church is in constant need of reform because of the failure and sin which mark its life in every age.

The church is present when the Word is truly preached, the sacraments rightly administered, and as it orders its life according to the word of God.

Christ continues his ministry in and through the church. All Christians are called to participate in the ministry of Christ.

As Christ's body on earth
we all have gifts to use in the church and in
the world.
In the oneness of Christ we seek to serve God.

Through the church, God orders this ministry by calling some to special tasks in equipping the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

Specialized ministries are recognized as through the designation of men and women to the Order of Diaconal Ministries.

Those designated to the Order of Diaconal Ministries join with the ordained and laity to enable the whole people of God to participate in the reconciling ministry of Jesus Christ.

God has called you by the voice of the church to serve Jesus Christ. You know who we are and what we believe, and you understand the work for which you have been chosen.

Being assured of your faith in Christ and your love for people, the Presbytery is prepared to designate you in the name of the Triune God, to the Order of Diaconal Ministries of The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

Declare now your faith in the presence of God and the people of God by answering the appointed questions.

1. Do you believe in God the Father, made known in his son, Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom the Holy Spirit witnesses in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments?
2. Do you accept the subordinate standards of our Church, promising to be guided by them as you lead the people of God?
3. Do you accept the government of this Church by sessions, presbyteries, synods and general assemblies, and do you promise to be subject to these courts and to work for the unity and peace of Christ within the church and throughout the Holy Catholic Church?
4. Do you promise, in the strength and grace of the Lord, Jesus Christ, to govern the way you live as becomes the gospel, and do you promise to serve the people with compassion, energy, intelligence, imagination and love- for the furtherance of God's reconciling mission in the world?

May God bless you and give you the grace to fulfil these vows. Amen.

Designation Prayers

God, our creator and guide: we marvel that you have made us to be your church, co-workers in your divine purposes and instruments of your gracious love. We rejoice in the means of grace by which we celebrate the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We thank you for the Spirit who descended at Pentecost to abide in the church forever, filling earthen vessels with heavenly treasures.

Hear our prayers, for your servant _____, as in your name we designate her/him to the Order of Diaconal Ministries.

May the truth of your gospel shine forth so that the gifts of service may flourish. Bestow upon her/him compassion and humility uncorrupted by self-seeking and boastfulness.

Spirit of God, enhance her/his education as teacher, enabler and leader that all knowledge may be applied with an understanding, diligence and integrity which is faithful to your gospel.

Spirit of God, fill her/his ministry with creativity, vision and honesty that your church may flourish. May the grace, love and peace of Christ reflect your image in all her/his relationships.

Spirit of God, enrich her/him with good health of body, mind and spirit. Endow her/him with strength and gladness, patience and courage, common sense and laughter.

Spirit of God, save her/him from pride and hasty judgment, from apathy and despair.

O saving Christ, dwell in her/his heart. By your passion, sustain her/him in times of betrayal, discouragement and disillusionment. By your cross, uphold her/him through times of loneliness, dislocation and darkness.

Living Christ, by the power of your resurrection, may _____ be continually renewed to live and work with you for the reconciliation of your world.

Receive our offerings of prayer, Holy God, for we prayer in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

APPENDIX THREE

Ordination of Ruling Elders

Preamble and Vows

All ministries of the Church proceed from and are sustained by the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our Prophet, Priest, and King, the Minister of the covenant of grace. By the operation of God's Word and Spirit, the Church is gathered, equipped, and sent out to participate in this ministry. All her members are called to share the Gospel with the world, and to offer to the Father the worship and service that are due to Him from His creation, through Christ the only Mediator, until He comes again. That the Church may be continually renewed and nurtured for her ministry, Christ furnishes her with officers, among whom are Ruling Elders.

The Form of Presbyterian Church Government of the Westminster Assembly reminds us that Christ has furnished some in His Church, besides the Ministers of the Word, with gifts for government and with commission to execute the same, when called "thereunto, who are to join with the Minister in the government of the church, which officers reformed churches commonly call Elders.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada is bound only to Jesus Christ, her King and Head. The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as the written Word of God, testifying to Christ the living Word, are the canon of all doctrine, by which He rules our faith and life. We acknowledge our historic continuity with the Holy Catholic Church and her doctrinal heritage in the ecumenical creeds and the confessions of the Reformation. Our subordinate standards are the Westminster Confession of Faith as adopted in 1875 and 1889, the Declaration of Faith Concerning Church and Nation of 1954 and such doctrine as the Church, in obedience to Scripture and under the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit, may yet confess in her continuing function of reformulating the faith.

The duties of a Ruling Elder are: to be an example in the Church and to all people of Christian faith, knowledge and behaviour in all public and private relations; to share with the Minister and other Ruling Elders in the Gospel discipline and pastoral care of the Congregation, and in the work of training and leading Christ's People in their mission to the community, the nation, and the world; and to represent his or her sisters and brothers in presbytery, synod, and general assembly when so commissioned.

That your faith in God and your integrity of purpose may be declared before Him and all people, you are required in terms of this preamble to answer the questions appointed for all who would enter the office of the Ruling Elder.

1. Do you believe in God the Father, made known in His son Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom the Holy Spirit witnesses in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments?
2. Do you accept the subordinate standards of this Church, and do you promise to be guided thereby in fostering Christian belief, worship and service among the people?

3. Do you accept the government of this Church by sessions, presbyteries, synods, and general assemblies, and do you promise to share in and submit yourself to all lawful oversight therein, and to follow no divisive course, but to seek the peace and unity of Christ among your people and throughout the Holy Catholic Church?

4. In accepting the office of Elder, do you promise to perform your duties in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, striving to build up His Church to strengthen her mission in the world?

May the Lord bless you and give you grace to keep these vows. Amen.

Ordination Prayers

We praise and glorify you, Lord God Almighty, for you have created us and called us to yourself; you have redeemed us in Jesus Christ your Son; you sustain our lives and our works through the presence and power of your Holy Spirit.

Almighty God: in every age you have chosen servants to speak your word and lead your people.

We thank you for these men and women whom you have called to serve you as ruling elders. By the power of your Spirit, develop in them the gifts of ministry; may they have the same mind that was in Christ, serving you in the world as long as they shall live; through Jesus Christ the Lord.

(The minister places a hand on the head of each new elder in turn, calling each by his or her Christian name. The congregation shall say the following prayer in unison:)

God of Grace, who baptized us into a common ministry as ambassadors of Christ; who called us to be a priesthood of all believers; who entrusted to us the message of reconciliation; we pray for courage and discipline to follow where your elders rightly lead us, that together we may declare your mighty acts and show your love to the world; through Jesus Christ who is ruler of all.
Amen.