

A THEOLOGICAL METAPHOR AND METHOD

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A successful articulation of vision, however, depends upon the theologian's ability to experience and to understand both the crisis of meaning of traditional Christianity in the "Post-Christian" period and the present crisis of traditional modernity in the contemporary "Post-Modern" world. If this dilemma is experienced, it cannot but become a theologian's preoccupation, "haunting one's dreams like a guilty romance."

David Tracy,
Blessed Rage for Order

So haunted, I invite you as theologians and as bishops to such a preoccupation, for such a preoccupation clarifies our occupation and reveals our vocation. In building on the recent history and story of the House of Bishops as rehearsed by the Presiding Bishop, the Kanuga Planning Committee, in an attempt to be attentive to your responses and suggestions, discerned four objectives for our meeting this year at Kanuga.

During this session, I invite your attention to objectives #1 and #2:

1. Identify and affirm a way to be in "a new community of relationships" with each other.
2. Discover a means, in addition to the legislative approach, to deal with issues that confront the church.

In response to objective #1, I offer a metaphor for your consideration. In response to objective #2, I offer a method for possible adoption.

Objective #1, the need for a new way to be in relationship with one another, grows out of a dissatisfaction with the way we have lived and functioned together as a House of Bishops. The four hypotheses that we adopted as descriptive of our corporate experience disclose this dissatisfaction. In reading your responses and listening to your reflection on *Kanuga I*, I shared a metaphor for our existence as a House that members of the KPC found helpful in understanding how we have related to one another in the past and how we might better define our shared vocation in the future.

I. Covenant Existence

It is to the metaphor of "covenant existence" that I now invite your attention. In suggesting "covenant existence" as a metaphor for how we might live together as a House, I am not using "covenant" in any technical, juridical or academic way. Nor does the use of covenant refer to any particular school of biblical interpretation. Rather, I view covenant existence as a metaphor, an image, an interpretation, an icon, an invitation to transformation. I am indebted to Walter Brueggemann's notion of covenant as a metaphor which I shall cite explicitly in my second address, "Doing Theology in a Covenant Community."

Covenant existence as a metaphor suggests two ways or modes of being together as a society, community, church or House of Bishops. It has been a helpful way for me to better understand both the cultural context for our ministry and certain features of our shared vocations as bishops. The metaphor has been especially helpful in informing my understanding of ministry these past nine years in the Diocese of South Dakota, and especially with the Lakota/Dakota/Nakota/people of the Great Sioux Nation. Their organization of community and their interaction with one another embodies many of the tenants and elements of covenant existence that I shall be exploring, and it is perhaps best symbolized by the Sacred Hoop or Circle.

The most basic tenant of covenant existence is that before me and my needs, there is a Thou and a Thee. To recall Martin Buber's seminal work, I and Thou, covenant existence points to the deep and abiding affirmation that our lives in all aspects depend upon our relatedness to God, who is the initiator and sustainer of covenant in our lives and who wills more good for us than we can do for ourselves. We call this God's graciousness and no clearer articulation of it can be found than in Eph. 3:20, "To him who by means of his power working in us is able to do so much more than we can ever ask, or even think of...". Such a claim flies in the face of all attempts at self-groundedness in its many, varied and narcissistic forms. It is God who wills, makes and keeps covenant, "I will be your God and you will be my people" or from Isaiah, "I have called you by name. You are mine." The specific form which discloses the priority of Thou and Thee before me is Torah, a concept which Mark Dyer will explore in his reflections, "Torah: A Way of Life Called Episcopate." Suffice it

to say that Torah, when understood in relationship to the covenant metaphor, can be seen as a gift which gives purpose, guidance and identity to us as recipients and covenant partners.

But how do we get at this notion of covenant existence as a potential metaphor for guiding us in our vocation as bishops and members of the House of Bishops? In suggesting covenant existence as a metaphor, I mean to highlight certain elements of covenant that reveal an interpretation of what it means to be fully human and to experience redemptive existence. The metaphor, however, also discloses another way of life that is part and parcel of the culture in which we live. This mode-of-being is "contractual existence." By highlighting elements and characteristics of both contract and covenant existence, it is my hope that we might gain a clearer sense of theological anthropology in our "haunted" day and age as well as some indicators of how we might faithfully live and govern our lives together as bishops.

SOME ELEMENTS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF:

CONTRACT EXISTENCE

Individual
Identity
Self
Land or space as possession
Introspection
Social compact/contract
Litigation
Legislation
Competition
Success
Individual rights
Privatization of religion
Subjective intentionality
Consumerism
"Triumph of the therapeutic"
Technological reason
Linear
Politically correct
Chronos

COVENANT EXISTENCE

Nation/tribe
Mission
Other/other
We are of the earth
Collaborative theological reflection
Community of care and moral discourse
Dialogue
Consensus
Cooperation
Faithfulness
Social responsibility
Faith's realities known in community
Intersubjective intentionality
Sharing
"Honor the tribe"
Transcendental reason
Circle
Theologically true
Kairos

Professor George C. Lodge of Harvard, in a book entitled The American Disease (New York: Knopf, 1985), defines "ideology" as a collection of ideas through which a society translates its values into action. He notes that one of the primary constituent parts of ideology is the relationship between the human being and the community, the individual and the group. He goes on to suggest that there are two dominant ideologies in the world today: individualism and communitarianism. The traditional ideology of the United States is individualistic and according to Lodge, "...we could not abandon individualism without ceasing to be Americans in the most meaningful sense of the word."

The roots of such individualism as definitive of contractual existence can be traced to the early experience of the Colonies and the influence of Hobbesian and Lockean understandings of social compact/social contract. In social contract theory, the purpose of the state is to guarantee, sustain and protect the rights of the individual for "the pursuit of life, liberty and happiness". Such individualism is an ideological thread in our history from the early Colonies to the "rugged individualism" that characterized westward expansion and "manifest destiny" to the "me generation" of today. Self-reliance, autonomy, the Protestant work ethic, the Horatio Alger myth, and our marketing and therapeutic culture all support and reinforce this particular ideology.

In contrast to the culture of individualism, Lodge notes another dominant ideology, that of communitarianism. It is the communitarian ideology that undergirds and describes "covenant existence," with its insistence that the individual can only be understood in relationship to the

nation, tribe or group. Such an ideology and existence suggest that one's status, role, and identity as an individual is defined by the community, which is prior to the individual and will continue after the existence of the individual. Martin Heidegger's notion of our being "pushed" into a space in time and pushed out of existence captures this sense of the priority of the Other and the other. Varied critics of American culture have called for more balance in advocating aspects of covenant existence and this communitarian ideology for our individualistic culture. Certain names come immediately to mind, such as Peter Berger, Robert Bellah, Walter Brueggemann, Christopher Lasch, and Philip Rieff, to mention but a few.

In contractual existence, the primary concern is with identity and instant personal gratification, whereas covenant existence places emphasis on mission and patient service for and with the other. In contractual existence, the locus of interest and attention is on meeting the needs of self; in covenant existence attention and concern are directed towards the Other or God and how this Otherness is experienced in relationships with others. Said differently, in covenant existence, the self is discovered in relationship to others and there can be no self-understanding apart from a recognition that we are by nature created to be in community and for relationship.

In contractual existence, the primary mode or focus is introspection, whereas, in covenant existence the quest for meaning involves collaboration and dialogue in that enterprise that we call theological and moral reflection. Whereas contractual existence is defined by ensuring

the rights of the individual in social contract, the primary focus of covenant is on care for the community exercised as hospitality. The mode of interaction in contractual existence is litigation in order to protect the rights of the individual, whereas, in covenant existence the call is for dialogue leading to reconciliation allowing for the slippage of grace and the possibility of forgiveness. Legislation is characteristic of contractual existence in making decisions, whereas consensus is the norm for decision-making in covenant existence. In making this distinction, I am reminded of Henri Bergson's critique of legalism... "The inner energy of an intelligence which at each moment wins itself back to itself, eliminating those already formed ideas to give place to those in process." This is also an insightful way to see how the tradition is used in contractual existence as a fixed content (tradita), whereas in covenant existence, tradition is an ever-evolving process of God's divine self-disclosure (traditio). The primary motive in contractual existence is competition, whereas in covenant existence the call is for cooperation and mutuality. In contracts, successful resolution and winning is the goal, whereas in covenant, faithfulness and righteousness are the primary values.

With regard to religious experience, in contractual existence there is a privatization of the sacred and a concentration on faith's realities as being realized primarily in an intra-personal or subjective way. In contrast, covenant existence suggests that religious experience is interpersonal and intersubjective, meaning that faith's realities, e.g., redemption, salvation, atonement, reconciliation, are not the possession of or in any one individual but are realities that take place between persons. In contractual existence, one's sense of worth is quantified

and generally stated in terms of possessions. An example can be seen in response to the question, "What is s/he worth?" The answer is usually given in noting the amount of money one makes or possessions one has amassed, in the spirit of the bumper sticker, "S/he who ends up with the most toys wins!" This tendency of contractual existence, underscored in our consumeristic society, results in the quantification of worth, time and space. One's greatness is measured by how much one can accumulate. In contrast, covenant existence suggests that sharing is the norm and one's greatness is measured not by how much one can accumulate but by how much one can give away. This realization came to me in a very profound way shortly after becoming Bishop of South Dakota. I was told by a very wise and caring Lakota priest that in Lakota culture giving is not from excess or surplus, but giving is an expression from poverty and grief. One's greatness in the community is measured not by what one can accumulate, but by what one can give away. This notion of Lakota culture and covenant existence challenges our understanding of stewardship in profound and significant ways.

In covenant existence, the primary claim and allegiance is "to honor the tribe," and in such deference the individual receives honor status and worth. Whereas the movement in contractual existence is linear, normally hierarchical and heavily dependent upon individual power and influence, the movement in covenant is circular, requiring consent and negotiation in light of decisions that affect the life of the community and the individual. In contractual existence, with its emphasis on the quantification and measurement of experience (scientism), technological reason tends to triumph and dismiss the need for transcendental reason and

moral discernment. Dualism is overcome through the collapse of transcendence to include the "death of God." Alternatively, transcendence is trivialized through the platitudes of civil religion and political correctness. By contrast, covenant existence views all of life as imbued with the sacred; and truth, not technology, as descriptive of a way called Christian and a life called salvation. These elements of contractual and covenant existence are by no means exhaustive but suggestive of two ways of being-in-the-world, of being human, of being the church and, importantly and for our purposes, being the House of Bishops.

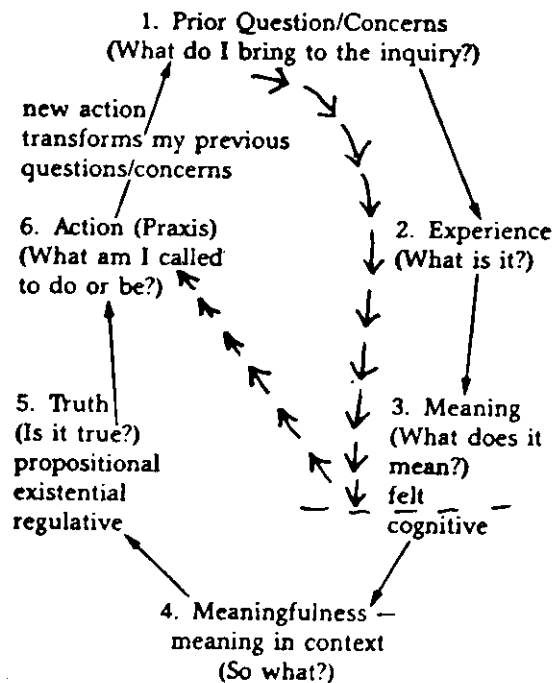
It is important to note that at times contractual existence is appropriate. We all live with contracts day in and day out. I am reminded of this whenever I make a house payment or as recently as yesterday, when I had a disagreement with a rental car agency as to the details regarding the stipulations in the contract as written and how these needed to be honored. However, in sharing this metaphor, it has been my experience that we, as a House of Bishops, have tended to consciously and perhaps unconsciously to rely on contractual ways of being together and being the Church rather than recognizing our call, vocation and mission as covenant partners.

Having suggested covenant existence as a metaphor which might help us in addressing objective #1, I now invite your attention to the need to move from metaphor to a method appropriate to covenant existence. In taking this turn, it is my hope that we will in some way address the need articulated in objective #2, namely, that of exploring a means other than legislative to interact, decide and provide leadership for the larger Church.

II. A THEOLOGICAL METHOD

To begin our reflection on theological method, I call to your attention a brief piece that I wrote entitled, "A Theological Method," an excerpt from the book, To Seek and To Serve, Forward Movement: 1991, pages 364-365:

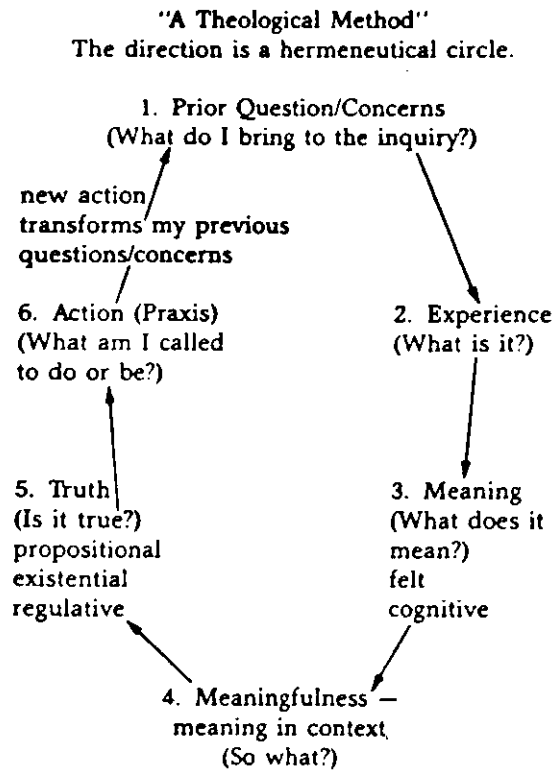
"The method is offered as representative of doing theology from "below to above." It presupposes the Anglican model of theological authority for meaning and ministry as discerned in Scripture, Tradition and Reason. Sources that inform this method are: Hans George Gadamar, Truth and Method; Edward Farley, Ecclesial Reflection; Bernard Lonergan, Method in Theology; David Tracy, Blessed Rage for Order; David and Evelyn Whitehead, Method for Ministry; and George Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine. In addition, the method draws on the work of Karl Rahner as well as Anglican Theologians, John MacQuarrie and U.T. Holmes.



Given this circular method, I would like to suggest an analysis to provide a clue as to the four hypotheses regarding our life together as the House of Bishops. It has been my experience in the House of Bishops that we have not been intentional or disciplined in using explicit theological methods, but have used contractual methods, i.e., Roberts Rules of Order and a legislative process to do theology. Theology presupposes an appropriate theological method. As I believe Rahner once noted, no method or no intentional method is a bad method.

The method that I offer is not "the" but "a" method that might help us to more adequately work together as theologians and as teachers of the Church. In offering it, I also offer an analysis in what I see to be a present problem in terms of another aspect of contractual existence: the need for instant gratification. In reference to the circle, we as bishops tend to bring our prior questions, concerns, deep felt convictions, ideological and theological commitments to the House of Bishops (step #1). In sharing those experiences and those commitments as a part of our common experience (step #2), we move to meaning of the felt type. Felt meaning is not simply personal feelings or emotion. Felt meaning has to do with the values, attitudes, and convictions that each of us hold dear as individuals. While these are important, in theological reflection they need to be mediated, tested, and subjected to sustained argumentation by employing warrants or evidence from the model that we all espouse as Anglicans: Scripture, Tradition and Reason. In recent years, this has happened far too infrequently in our trying to wrestle with theological issues in context leading to Truth and Praxis (steps #3, 4 and 5). Our tendency has been to move from felt meaning to

action as illustrated:



Why is this the case? Paul Ricoeur states that "felt meaning," and the way we are using it here in terms of unconscious and conscious aspects of contractual existence, is the most powerful motive for and to action but it is for the most part reaction. The call for mediated action through the cognitive retrieval and employment of Scripture, Tradition and Reason, in an existential context, has the potential for not only a thoughtful response versus a reaction but, in covenant existence, through a deep listening to the Other through the other, a chance for mediated Truth leading to Praxis. This is the goal of theological reflection, and when it is not realized, we have not only a bad theological method but bad theology funded by contractual existence. Said differently, we are called to move beyond our own

preoccupations, commitments and agenda in giving ourselves to the Other through the other by deep listening, "thick description" and exegesis of the text - not only the Scriptural text, but the human document and communal context. We need to be reminded that we always hear, read and interpret the biblical text and witness in the context of our prior concerns and experiences (step #1 and #2). Said still differently, we are called to move beyond a captivity to felt meaning, in functioning as a House of Bishops, to what Ricoeur calls a "second naivete" born of understanding and historical awareness, " a simplicity on the other side of complexity."

It is my hope that such an awareness in terms of this circular method might deliver us from hurling ideological slogans at one another followed by a "calling for the question" and then referring to such a process as theology. A legislative process only exacerbates the tendency for us to cut out the necessary theological reflection and discernment of meaning in context and the truth in its varied forms disclosing Truth that can lead to action or praxis. In not attending to these important steps of completing the circle, we should hardly find it surprising that we and those in the larger church are often unhappy with the results of our theological teachings, pastoral letters and decisions.

Kanuga I served as a way to break this pattern of short-cutting meaning, meaningfulness and truth in looking at the authority of scripture. The question is, can and will we take the time to create the atmosphere and space as a House to be more reflective in our life together as

Bishops? We have changed our behavior and method through Bible study and organizing our life around the Daily Office and through small table group discussions. This represents an important beginning in changing old patterns and in reminding us that, "first we pray and then we believe," to which I would add that the law of praying leading to the law of believing leads to the law of action or ministerial praxis funded by that which we call Torah in covenant existence.

In turning our attention again to that aspect of the hermeneutical circle that we have tended to ignore, a few remarks related to meaning, meaningfulness, and truth seem in order. As noted, most of our action is a reaction to felt meaning. Such meaning, however, needs to be mediated in that as human beings we have been given the gifts of memory, reason and skill. We are called at times to "bracket" and check our strongly held convictions through reflection and analysis before action. This creates the need to share or "self-disclose" through dialogue with one another in a willingness to be open to other points of view and possible conversion.

The movement from "meaning" to "meaningfulness" is a recognition that meaning can be somewhat theoretical, abstract, and obtuse if it is not grounded in experience. Step #4, or meaningfulness, is to return meaning to experience and thus its fullness in asking the question "So what?" or "How is this meaning realized in my experience or in the community or the diocese of which I am a part?" To reiterate, it is a recognition that text is read within context or that our understanding of meaning is always influenced by the history and the

particular lived-theologies of the local community. As an example, tomorrow we will be hearing from Chris Epting and Murray Newman, in an attempt to use this method in addressing racism within the House, within the Church, and within the culture. While racism has common elements and common meaning, I know that the experience of racism in Appalachia is different from the experience of racism in South Dakota. There are different contextual issues and problems involved, i.e., the "reservation system" and property rights as well as civil and human rights in South Dakota versus the experience of institutional and individual racism in Appalachia.

In turning to "truth," George Lindbeck in The Nature of Doctrine, suggests that there are three understandings of truth. The first and most obvious is "propositional" and tends to characterize contractual existence born of our Enlightenment heritage. Proposition is the language of lawyers, logicians, and the scientific community. Again, there is a need for propositional truth in the doing of theology but if truth is reduced to proposition alone or to the verifiable, we fall prey again to the contractual fallacy.

Various truths as revelatory of the Truth is "existential truth", and understood theologically, is revelation, grace or gift. It is the "ah-ha" experience, the awareness that God works through intuition and imagination in apprehending truths that theologians refer to as transcendental truth. It is this Truth that compels, calls and moves us. It is this Truth that drives us to prophetic utterance and justice. Existential truth is often experienced as God's call to us. Such Truth, according to Rahner, Lonergan and Tracy, results in the formulation

of doctrine and dogma which inform action as praxis. It is in this movement, the completion of the circle, that we are reminded that all theology is ultimately practical theology. Truth as disclosive of and leading to praxis leads to a completion of the circle with the recognition that new actions and new behaviors transform prior questions and concerns (step #1). It is this existential understanding of truth, mediated by reflection that aids in our understanding of Jesus as not only the "Way and Life," but also the embodied "Truth of" God.

This afternoon, Mark Dyer will help us look at the third meaning of truth as "regulative" in Torah. He will illustrate through stories which disclose context and meaningfulness and suggest to us that Torah as Truth brings with it a "regulative dimension" for our life together as a covenant community. Tomorrow, we will attempt to use this method in addressing a specific issue before us in the church, the issue of racism. Chris Epting and Murray Newman will lead us through our experience of racism as a House of Bishops to the meaning, meaningfulness and truth that tradition, scripture and reasoned discourse reveal to us for praxis within the House of Bishops and the larger Church.

The intent, then, this afternoon and tomorrow, in light of objective #2, is not only to discover a means other than legislative to deal with issues that confront the church, but to test and use such a method in doing theology.

In closing, I invite your attention to the fact that such theological reflection and methodological consciousness will require patience and sensitivity on our part in ways that

are characteristic of covenant and not contractual existence. This will necessitate a willingness to listen, to share, to self-disclose, and to participate fully as a member of the covenant community. Such a willingness might help us to be free from the guilt that haunts our unhealthy preoccupation with ourselves. Such a willingness might turn us in metanoia to God's vision for us and call us to articulate and profess such vision with courage and resolve.

The small group questions are designed to be discussion starters in reflecting on the metaphor of covenant and theological method which might help us to move beyond the four hypothesis that describe our life together at the present time into a new more gracious and faithful way of being together as a House of Bishops.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS: SESSION #3

Craig Anderson

- 1. Share your experience of contract model of being versus covenant model of being within the Church, House of Bishops, your Province, and within your Diocese.**
- 2. How can the covenant metaphor help us in addressing the desired change we seek in light of the four hypotheses?**
- 3. What other theological methods/models might be helpful in the promotion of theological reflection leading to ministerial praxis?**