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because of the kingdom of heaven"—is called, because of the demand of God's kingdom, to suffer the loss of certain goods. What particular goods any particular individual will be called to sacrifice is something that cannot be decided in the abstract; it is something that appears to the individual only as the Christian life is lived out rightly. But it remains true, it is a Christian rule, that all of us will be called to sacrifice things we treasure.

One final point: Jesus was a "eunuch for the kingdom of heaven"; that is, he sacrificed the good of marriage because the kingdom required it of him. But marriage is not the only thing that Jesus sacrificed. At the heart of all Christian faith is this: Jesus sacrificed his very life. Now surely if anything is ours by "right," it is life itself. But this was precisely what Jesus was called to hand over. Life, the gift of God we value most, the gift that makes everything else possible—that is what Jesus gave away. So Jesus must be seen as the one who made the ultimate sacrifice, the sacrifice which symbolizes and sums up all other sacrifices. And he thereby becomes our model. Like him we too are to offer sacrifice: *imitatio Christi*, the imitation of Christ. Not, of course, that any of us are likely to be called to martyrdom—or even to abstain from marriage for that matter. But we are all called to enter into the sacrificial spirit of Jesus, the spirit which could give up not only marriage but even life itself. We must learn to see that our so-called "rights" are not the ultimate reference point. Jesus justified his celibacy with these words: "because of the kingdom of heaven." The thought behind these words also led him to his death. And the same thought must direct the course that our lives take. As we progress along the pilgrim's path, these words, "because of the kingdom of heaven," which demand nothing less than painful but whole-hearted sacrifice, are to be our signpost.⁸

¹ "If any one has been obliged to undergo a surgical operation from disease, or has been castrated by barbarians, let him continue in the clergy. But if any one in good health has so mutilated himself, it is right that, if he be enrolled amongst the clergy, he should cease from his ministrations; and that from henceforth no such person should be promoted. As, however, it is

plain that this is said with reference to those who dare to mutilate themselves, therefore, if any persons have been so mutilated by barbarians, or by their own masters, and in other respects are found worthy, the canon allows them to be admitted to the clerical office." Compare with this the *Apostolic Constitutions* VIII, 47, 21–24.

² A comparison of Isa. 39:7 and 2 Kgs. 20:18 with Dan. 1:1–3 shows why Daniel and his associates were thought to have been eunuchs. Incidentally, this conclusion did not set well with everybody. How could the great Daniel have been a eunuch? Would Scripture have recounted the shame of the righteous (cf. b. *Sanh.* 93b)? Some rabbis affirmed that the fiery furnace had been an instrument of healing and restoration (y. *Sabb.* 6, 9) or (by a far-fetched exegesis) that the eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon (Isa. 39:7; 2 Kgs. 20:18) were not Daniel and Shadrach and Meshach and Abednego but Babylonian idols; for idol worship became "sterilized" in the days of Daniel (b. *Sanh.* 93b). Note also the first century A.D. *Liv. Pro. Dan.* 2 ("in his manhood he was chaste, so that the Jews thought him a eunuch").

³ The rabbis were concerned to make the distinction between the eunuch of the sun and the eunuch of man because they believed that certain prohibitions applied to one type but not the other; see, for example, m. *Yeb.* 8:4 and b. *Yeb.* 80b.

⁴ So also H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrash*, vol. I (München, 1926), 805–807. Against C. Daniel, "Esseniens et eunuques (Mt 19,10–12)," *Revue de Qumran* 6 (1967–69), 353–90, "eunuchs made eunuchs by men" are hardly to be identified with the Qumran Essenes, who otherwise play no role in the gospel tradition.

⁵ See esp. 2 Cor. 10:1, 10; 11:6 and 29 and the context of these verses.

⁶ A few, of course, have argued that Jesus was married; e.g. W. A. Phipps, *Was Jesus Married?* (New York, 1970). But against this, Paul, in 1 Cor. 9, 5, refers to the fact that the rest of the apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas have wives; Jesus he does not mention. But he certainly would have done so in this context if he had known that Jesus had been married.

⁷ Credit for this insight apparently goes to J. Blinzler, "Eisin eunouchoi. Zur Auslegung von Mt. 19,12," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 48 (1957), 254–70. He has been followed by many, including T. Matura, "Le célibat dans le Nouveau Testament d'après l'exégèse récente," *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 107 (1975), 481–500; J. Kodell, "The Celibacy Logion in Matthew 19,12," *Biblical Theological Bulletin* 8 (1978), 19–23; and F. J. Moloney, "Matthew 19,3–12 and Celibacy. A Redactional and Form Critical Study," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 2 (1979), 42–60. Blinzler's interpretation (and ours) presupposes, obviously, that Matt. 19.12 goes back to Jesus. For the claim that it does not, that Matt. 19.12 is instead a redactional formulation of the first evangelist, see R. H. Gundry, *Matthew, A Commentary on his Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1982), 381–83. Gundry's argument, based solely upon word statistics, is unconvincing. Among other things, Justin Martyr (*Apol.* I, 15.4) seems to preserve a version independent of Matthew; see J. Blinzler, "Justinus Apol. I,15,4 und Matthäus 19,11–12," in *Mélanges bibliques en hommage au R. P. Bédard Rigaux*, ed. A. Descamps and A. de Halleux (Gembloux, 1970), 44–55.

⁸ We have herein been concerned only with Matt. 19.12 as a word of Jesus; its interpretation by Matthew has not been within our purview. Nonetheless, we should perhaps mention that there are two very different ways of approaching Matt. 19.12 within its present context. According to the traditional interpretation, the verse has to do with those who have never been married. That is, it is a general call to consecrated celibacy (cf. 1 Cor. 7:25–39). For this position see the articles of Matura and Kodell cited in note 7. But 19.12 has also been understood as an integral part of 19.1–12: the eunuchs because of the kingdom of heaven are those who have become divorced (cf. 19.1–9) and they are to remain single. So Jacques Dupont, *Marriage et divorce dans l'évangile. Matthieu 19,3–12 et parallèles* (Bruges, 1959), 161–222; Q. Quesnell, "Made Themselves Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 30 (1966), 335–58; and Gundry, *Matthew*, 382–83.

Theological Soul-Searching In The United Church Of Christ

by Gabriel Fackre

Some call the mood one of "ferment" (President of the UCC), others "turbulence" (*Seventh Angel*), still others a challenge to the "theological disarray" in the United Church of Christ (*Christianity Today*).

The theological dynamisms current in the UCC make it a laboratory for learning how a Church can both be open to the mandates of mission and unity and at the same time preserve its theological identity and some doctrinal coherence. The denomination—a conjunction of four somewhat diverse streams of Protestantism—Congregational, Christian, German, Swiss and Hungarian Reformed, and the part-Lutheran and part-Reformed Evangelical Synod of North America—has grown up in the twenty-seven years of its life in the midst of major theological and social upheavals. Reflecting its origins and formative years, the UCC has been deeply involved in social issues, open to cultural questions, an advocate of justice for marginalized groups and active in peace movements. These diversities and directions have brought the charge that the Church in its national expression is essentially a social action group, subject to the influence of one or another current ideology, and that its local congregations are the home of "a pallid but personable faith" (*Time*).

How to hold together the "world-formative" (N. Wolterstorff) character of its Reformed tradition, and the world-drenched nature of its recent history, with its historic rootage in scriptural authority and creedal and covenantal bonding—that is the question. Right now the UCC is in the middle of this kind of serious soul-searching.

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What follows is a chronicle of that quest from the perspective of one participant-observer.

Post-60s Searchings

The present self-inquiry has long roots. From the beginning, these heirs of Jonathan Edwards, the Mercersburg theology and the Niebuhr brothers have never been devoid of theological concern, as evidenced by the widely used Statement of Faith of 1959, thoughtful Christian education programs, liturgically rich worship books, and strong ecumenical involvement, all concurrent with a passionate social witness.

However, signs of burnout after the activist 60s, concern about the reduction of mission to only its deed dimension, and worry about the acculturation of its message brought the beginnings of a new theological agenda. The meaning of mission became a natural early focal point. The Board for World Ministries began to explore its understanding of mission with a task force inquiry on evangelism, and the development of a statement of its dual nature as deed and word. In a similar vein, the Board for Homeland Ministries, having declined to participate in the nationwide Key 73 evangelism campaign, held a summer conference at Deering, New Hampshire in 1972 to examine its responsibilities in sharing the faith. Participants seized the initiative and produced the Deering Statement of Commitment that fused the social imperatives of the 60s with the faith sharing mandates of the 70s. Influenced by current action-reflection modes of theology, the Statement spoke of word in deed, the word of faith linked inextricably with deeds of mercy and justice. This grassroots movement, supported by BHM resources, developed extensive materials and training programs using "story" as its the-

ological metaphor—"getting the story out."

Parallel with these outreach settings for theological recovery were inreach developments in the Office of Church Life and Leadership. Seeing a growing interest in congregations in exploring ultimate questions, OCLL instituted a "faith exploration" program in which small gatherings were encouraged to share their doubts, hopes, and convictions, and move ahead on their spiritual journey. OCLL also gathered a group of pastoral and professional theologians in the mid-70s who issued a call for "Sound Teaching in the United Church of Christ," one that sought to integrate social witness and faith commitments.

Significant impetus was given to theological consciousness-raising in the UCC by two grassroot movements that emerged in the late 70s: BTL and UCPBW. BTL—the Biblical-Theological-Liturgical group, the "BTL Club"—was born at an anniversary celebration of the Evangelical Synod of North America, one of the streams of UCC history, in September, 1977. Organized by a local church pastor, Frederick Trost, the gathering (some in it) concluded that the time had come to work more aggressively on the biblical, theological and liturgical tasks represented by these and other forebears. Developing a membership throughout the Midwest and East, BTL has met yearly to hear papers on Authority in the Church, Baptism, Eucharist, the Augsburg Confession, and the proposed new UCC worship services. An East Petersburg Statement was issued in 1981 criticizing the captivity of churches to bourgeois values and calling the UCC to its biblical and christological standards. Trost, now leader of the Wisconsin Conference of the UCC and convener of BTL, also founded an occasional journal, *No Other Foundation*, bringing theological and homiletical resources together for UCC clergy. The most significant contribution of BTL to date may be its sponsorship of the Craigville Colloquy, an event to be described in connection with the vigorous activities of 1984.

The United Church People for Biblical Witness (UCPBW) was formed in April, 1978 at a convocation of UCC clergy and laity who questioned the influence of contemporary values and ideology on a human sexuality report prepared for the UCC General Synod of 1977. Behind that lay a perceived erosion of biblical authority in the denomination. Similar concerns had been expressed earlier by a small group of conservative evangelicals, organized as the Fellowship of Concerned Churchmen. Led by Barbara Weller in its early years, with pastors Gerald Sanders and Martin Duffy as key associates and Donald Bloesch and Royce Gruenler as important theological resources, the UCPBW sought to make its influence actively felt on UCC policy through committee representation and Synod resolutions on the one hand, and an educational venture within the denomination on the other. The latter has included the production of an alternative resource on sexuality, *Issues in Sexual Ethics*, and a journal, *Living Faith*, with its commentary on denominational issues and theological essays, and a study guide on controverted UCC issues, *Affirming our Faith*. I shall treat its Dubuque Declaration and reorganization in 1984 subsequently.

Responding to the vocal presence of the UCPBW and noting its numerical growth in the UCC (with estimates as high as 50,000), another group of UCC members established a counter organization, Christians for Justice Action, which seeks to press the social issues it believes UCPBW neglects.

1983-84: Years of Ferment

1983 was marked by an acceleration of theological activity that prompted talk of a "movement" or "theological renewal" (Executive Council statement) in the UCC. Aforementioned groups showing continuing signs of vitality and new manifestations were to be seen:

1. BTL scheduled its yearly meeting at New Brunswick Seminary in New Jersey in conjunction with clergy and seminary people from both the UCC and the Reformed Church in the United States to discuss the Mercersburg theology, a sacramental and ecumenical tradition shaped by 19th century theologians Schaff and Nevin. On that occasion a new organization alongside BTL was founded, an ecumenical Mercersburg Society. In the days that followed, many of the New Brunswick attendees journeyed to Washington, D.C. to join the UCC delegation in the mass demonstration marking the twentieth anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.'s March on Wash-

ington for justice and peace, showing the linkages between social and biblical commitments envisaged by this kind of theological renewal.

2. After a determined effort up to and including the 1983 General Synod to air its views on sexuality and inclusive language, with little apparent result in the councils of the Church, the UCPBW constituency reviewed several scenarios for reorganization, looking toward possible broader alliances and more impact on denominational decision-making. At a November board of directors meeting, the Dubuque Declaration was drawn up, asserting biblical authority (in the infallibilist rather than the inerrantist tradition), loyalty to the Nicene Creed and faithfulness to the theological commitments in the Basis of Union and Preamble of the UCC Constitution. The new organization proposed was named the Biblical Witness Fellowship.

3. With some overlap with the BWF in its constituency, a Fellowship of Charismatic Christians founded in the 1970s continued to make its presence known and concern felt in the denomination through its publications and national meetings on renewal.

4. Theologians involved in the development of the "Sound Teaching" document (Fred Herzog, Walter Brueggemann, Douglas Meeks), together with others on the faculties of the seven UCC-related seminaries (Barbara Zikmund, Max Stackhouse, Susan Thistlewaite, etc.), believing the time had come to raise serious questions about the lack of theological clarity in the UCC, circulated a statement among that group, signed in the end by thirty-nine UCC teachers. The statement, "A Most Difficult and Urgent Time," declared that judgment on "worship resources, language practices, life-style and modes of accountability in the Church appeared to be 'made. . . on grounds of 'pragmatism,' 'liberalism,' 'conservatism,' 'pluralism' which are inappropriate to the church of Jesus Christ. . . postures (arrived at) happenstance without the discipline and guidance offered to us in our theological tradition." The appeal was sent to the Executive Committee of the UCC with the urging that some serious theological grounding be sought for the policy and direction of the Church.

5. Decisions made by the Church at large or action taken by its agencies with clear theological import evoked wide discussion and controversy within the Church. Among them: a) A new set of services for the worship, sacraments and rites of the Church, long in the making by a task force of OCLL, were published in 1983 and began to be tested throughout the Church. Attention was given in these services to the classical traditions in liturgy, on the one hand, and on the other hand an effort was made to render virtually all the language of liturgy in inclusive terms. b) The Executive Council that acts for the Church between Synods entered the lists by voting approval of an inclusive language version of the UCC Statement of Faith. Debates about inclusive language and its theological import were fueled by the concurrent release of the National Council of Churches lectionary readings that went further than UCC inclusivist proposals. c) Responding to the 1979 General Synod call for direction on Disciples-UCC union talks, the joint steering committee put forward the plan "Shared Life: A New Approach to Church Union" with proposals for common life and work as a matrix for decision-making on merger. The prospect of this union and the way toward it contributed to the growing theological discussion with special reference to the nature and mission of the church. Increasingly vocal opposition was heard from those with more organic views of the Church (especially in former Evangelical and Reformed areas) who felt these would be put in further jeopardy by Disciples polity and practice, and by others who argued that preoccupation with the mechanisms of merger would spend energies that should be devoted to mission.

6. An UCC-EKU (Evangelical Church of the Union in Germany) Working Group, sponsored by the United Church Board for World Ministries, became increasingly active in the publication of materials on the theology of the UCC. In 1983 and 1984, in its UCC-EKU Newsletter, it published essays from representatives of the seven UCC-related seminaries on various theological topics (authority in the Church, the teaching office, the confessional nature of the UCC, the Trinity and inclusive language, etc.) Those papers were in turn critiqued by faculties in other seminaries and then shared with EKU

counterparts.

7. Sensing the ripeness of the moment for more official action on the theological front, the Office of Church Life and Leadership in 1983 launched a church-wide program to facilitate theological dialogue among the membership. The OCLL staff invited thirteen UCC people representing a spectrum of interest and constituencies to spend a year thinking through what such a denomination-wide effort would entail, identifying issues, possible areas of agreement and tasks to be undertaken.

8. The deans of the seven UCC-related seminaries put in motion a proposal to create a theological journal of and for the denomination.

9. Ethnic and minority groups in the UCC organized around advocacy issues joined together to form COREM (Council on Racial and Ethnic Ministries) to give voice to their perspective on both action questions and the widening theological discussion. Similarly, women's caucus groups throughout the UCC focused on rights issues have had to deal with theological questions (ordination, inclusive language, etc.) propelling them increasingly into the explicitly doctrinal arena. The organizing of a Coordinating Center for Women in Church and Society in the UCC and annual national women's meetings have provided a forum for these growing concerns.

Winter meetings of one or another segment of UCC leadership hosted by Florida constituents, are becoming a sounding board for denominational policy. In February of 1984 a joint gathering of Conference executives, agency heads and denominational officers aired the question of "a theological centerline" in the UCC with Roger Shinn, drafter of the original UCC Statement of Faith, reflecting on this issue and responses from feminist, Black, and evangelical perspectives. In a separate meeting of the executives of the 39 UCC Conferences, Disciples-UCC proposals for steps toward union—the "shared life" approach—were critically reviewed and a larger shadow cast over the future of these negotiations. An even more negative response to the prospects of this union was given at another winter meeting of UCC pastors from larger congregations with a signed protest from them and others appearing in the denominational information journal, *KYP*, as a "Committee for a New Alternative."

The faltering Disciples-UCC conversations are not a measure of UCC ecumenical commitments, to judge from other theological signs in 1984. The ten denomination project in unity, COCU, continues to enjoy wide tacit support in the UCC, although there is no vigorous campaign right now for it. The BEM document (*Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*) produced by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches is currently being discussed throughout the Church with agreements regularly expressed on the Baptism and Eucharist sections, but questions posed about its failure to honor adequately the ministry of the laity, and the too-priestly cast given to the pastoral office. 1984 also saw the discussion of the Lutheran-Reformed document of agreements and challenge, *Called to Action*, in which dialogue UCC was represented, and *Called to Witness to the Gospel Today*, an invitation from the World Alliance of Reformed Churches to respond to its theological concerns. A revitalized Council on Ecumenism actively discussed these proposals and made a public plea in *KYP* for support for the ecumenical agenda.

1984 was a year of transition for the United Church People for Biblical Witness-Biblical Witness Fellowship. The reorganizational proposals of its Board were confirmed, and the Dubuque Declaration was endorsed at a meeting in Byfield, Massachusetts attended by 400 members and observers from around the country. Responding to criticism that it represents a potentially schismatic movement in the UCC, the leadership declared that it was in for the long haul, saw positive signs of theological renewal throughout the church, and was more determined than ever to press vigorously for its issues.

Questions of piety and spirituality, regularly intertwined with theological matters, emerged in their own right in the spring of 1984. A "spirituality network" was officially formed with a call for reinvigorated personal piety and public worship with appropriate theological undergirding. And a "Third Order of St. Francis—United Church of Christ" (chartered in 1983) began to gain momentum.

Craigville, 1984

The Craigville Colloquy represents, in the writer's view, the clearest expression of the direction, mode and possibilities of current theological soul-searching in the UCC. With neither budget nor staff, in fall, 1983 BTL and the Mercersburg Society issued a call for a grassroots assembly on UCC theological basics, with the 50th anniversary of the Barmen Declaration as background, prevailing upon the Craigville Conference Center in Massachusetts to house the event. The invitation generated twenty pre-Colloquy discussion groups around the country seeking to identify elements in a statement the Colloquy might make about the UCC theological framework. On May 12, 1984, 160 people from California to Maine to North Carolina arrived, with the largest numbers from New England, Pennsylvania and the Midwest. With its focus on the teaching premises of the UCC, and therefore the responsibilities of the teaching office, participants included pastors, local and regional (the latter being State Conference Ministers), with some seminary faculty and students, laity in leadership, and national executives, including the President of the Church, Avery Post, who was on a "theological sabbatical." Forty women were present in leadership roles and as participants. Many of the partisans in recent theological disputes were on hand, representing a variety of points of view concerned to make their voices heard, running from evangelicals in BWF and sacramentally-oriented Mercersburgers through UCC leadership figures and theological centrists to feminists and political activists.

With a sixty-page notebook of pre-Colloquy reports in hand, the participants met in twelve working groups to further clarify the themes that might appear in a Craigville statement, one determined in a plenary session to be "epistolary" rather than a formal declaration, since a "Letter to our Brothers and Sisters" reflected better the alongsided spirit and form that was sought. Feeding into the process of theological reflection were a series of presentations on the four traditions that formed the UCC—Congregational (Joseph Bassett), Christian (Willis Elliott), Evangelical (Fred Trost), Reformed (John Shetler)—the ecumenical challenge (Diane Kessler), the Third World Context (Orlando Costas), the UCC theological trajectory (the writer), and a report from the President on responses expected of the UCC from various ecumenical entailments. An intense theological discussion about these issues was carried on in the setting of six worship services.

After plenary reports and discussion of the working groups, the material was turned over to a drafting committee formed in the self-select, "theology-from-below" mode at work in UCC theological renewal, with five members chosen by lots from a volunteer pool of thirty, with two "poets" added, Fred Trost the Colloquy convener, and the writer. The committee worked eight hours through the night presenting its results in a plenary session that debated and modified the text, voting it in the end, 141 to 1, with a standing ovation and doxology.

Developed according to the rhythms of worship, the letter moves from praise through confession and assurance to affirmation and thanksgiving. Its goal is the clarification of first principles—the assumptions behind what the UCC is and does. In the section on authority, it lifts up the UCC constitutional commitment to a christological center of the normative prophetic-apostolic testimony of Scripture (showing parallels with the Barmen Declaration), with the creedal and covenantal heritage of UCC faith honored in its relative role, and it declares the task of reinterpreting that faith in ever-fresh historical and cultural settings. In doctrinal content it speaks of the UCC's trinitarian framework of faith, citing the narrative sequence from creation to consummation, with its center point in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ (a framework familiar to UCC members through its Statement of Faith). It speaks of a sacramental life in Baptism and Eucharist, and holds to the importance of both the pastoral office and the ministry of the laity. The letter acknowledges some of the unresolved issues in the denomination from polity to morality, but forcefully affirms the UCC commitment to justice and peace and the covenantal ties that bind the members of the Body. Following Barmen, it ventures some specific rejections, ranging from the issues of "self-liberation" and relativism to racism and sexism, and, again following Barmen, disavows the ideologies of both left and right, and concludes with a doxology.

As important as the agreements reached in the Letter was the Craigville process. From invitation through pre-Colloquy discussion to the exchanges at the Colloquy, accent was placed on self-activated, theologically energetic participation. No official "line" was laid down, and no pattern of representation was demanded (either confined to or dominated by one theological perspective, or determined by proportional representation of advocacy groups). Does the Spirit work best in such an open-ended venture? Can there be a *sensus fidelium* as the matrix of sound theology? The vitality of the exchange among diverse groups and the remarkable consensus that developed are strong arguments for trust in this kind of forum. Those with heavy axes to grind will, of course, be suspicious if the result does not include their conclusions. The Colloquy assumed that the UCC is a Church of Jesus Christ in which the Spirit lives, a Spirit who will let light and truth break out when the ways of the Spirit among the people of God are honored.

The reception and sequel events are a measure of the UCC quest and hope for theological identity and integrity. Recognizing the significance of a theological framing for which the UCC had not often been known, the media gave Craigville wide coverage, with long articles in the *Boston Globe*, a Religious News Service report, *Christianity Today* and *Christian Century* coverage and front-page stories in UCC-related organs *KYP* and *Seventh Angel*. Many UCC members committed to the Church's justice and peace agenda but troubled by its theological unclarity and developing polarization in its ranks, responded enthusiastically to a statement of first principles and an apparent consensus on the biblical and christological basics by the otherwise diverse constituencies present at Craigville. A number of letters and testimonies from leaders in other denominations and in the larger Christian community expressed appreciation for UCC commitment to biblical authority and classical faith, assuring continuing linkage with the ecumenical movement. Evangelicals in the UCC, including BWF leadership were on the whole pleased with the sections in the Letter that declared UCC commitment to biblical authority and the hope it represented for coming together of partisans around matters of basic framework.

Critics soon appeared. A Boston Feminist Dialogue group was formed to assess the Craigville letter and raised questions about the weight given to biblical authority, traditional theological formulations and matters of inclusive language (the Letter was scrupulous

in its use of inclusive language but employed the baptismal formula "In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" to affirm ecumenical Christian usage in this binding rite.) On the other hand, one editorialist criticized Craigville for taking up issues in a denominational context that belonged more appropriately to an ecumenical setting. Some evangelicals were unhappy about a view of biblical authority that appeared to be limited to faith and morals and made a place for "ever new light and truth," a position which they judged contrary to the necessary conception of inerrancy. On the other hand, some advocacy groups and activists were concerned that more explicit positions on current ethical issues from a nuclear freeze to the abortion debates were not included.

A long critique by Al Krass in *Seventh Angel* faulted the Letter for its "blandness," failing therein to condemn specifically such evils as "the social and economic policies of Reaganism," and judged that the Colloquy was the product of aging middle class male clergy and seminary professors seeking to reassert their authority in the UCC after a season of contextual theology, much like the restrictiveness of the John Paul II era in Roman Catholicism vis-à-vis Küng and Gutierrez. Some from denominations with more dogmatic definition thought Craigville's theological assertions too minimalist. Others felt that the openness of the UCC was imperiled by any attempt to bring up theological premises, including the elemental one found in the UCC Preamble to the Constitution.

The Craigville event is having its own immediate institutional effects—widespread study of the Letter in congregations and pastors' groups, and the planning of two subsequent events: a May, 1985 BTL-Mercersburg meeting in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, responding to the WCC proposal "Toward Confessing the Apostolic Faith Today," the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, and the Lutheran-Reformed dialogue agendas, and a September, 1985 church-wide Craigville II on the critical questions of Scripture/Word in the United Church of Christ (organized by a diversity of theologically active groups, official and unofficial). Even more, it has accelerated the theological soul-searching we have traced here, accenting a special dimension to that process, the work of "theology from below:" pastors and people of the UCC making their views and concerns known, especially as they are concerned with grounding the witness of this Church to justice and peace in the soil of biblical authority and classical faith.

The Craigville Letter

Grace and Peace:

On the 50th anniversary of the Barmen Declaration we have come together at Craigville to listen for God's Word to us, and to speak of the things that make us who we are in Christ.

We praise God for the theological ferment in our Church! When such life comes, and light is sought, we discern the Spirit's work. The struggle to know and do the truth is a gift of God to us. So too are the traditions that have formed us — Congregational, Christian, Evangelical, Reformed, and the diverse communities that have since shaped our life together. We give thanks for the freedom in this family of faith to look for ever-new light and truth from God's eternal Word.

Thankful for the vital signs in our midst, we know too that our weaknesses have been the occasion for God's workings among us. To make confession at Craigville is also to acknowledge our own part in the confusions and captivities of the times. The trumpet has too often given an uncertain sound. As the people of God, clergy and laity, our words have often not been God's Word, and our deeds have often been timid and trivial. Where theological disarray and lackluster witness are our lot, it is "our own fault, our own most grievous fault."

Yet we trust God's promises. Mercy is offered those who confess their sin. Grace does new things in our midst. Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto God!

In our deliberations we have sought to honor the ties that bind us, and to learn from the diversities that enrich us. We gladly speak here of the

affirmations we can make together, and the judgments we share.

Authority

Loyal to our founders' faith, we acknowledge Jesus Christ as our "sole Head, Son of God and Saviour." (Preamble, Para. 2, *The Constitution of the United Church of Christ*). With Barmen we confess fidelity to "the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and death." (Barmen, 8:11). Christ is the Center to whom we turn in the midst of the clamors, uncertainties and temptations of the hour.

We confess Jesus Christ "as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture." (Barmen, 8:11). As our forebears did, we too look "to the Word of God in the Scriptures." (Preamble, Para. 2). Christ speaks to us unfailingly in the prophetic-apostolic testimony. Under his authority, we hold the Bible as the trustworthy rule of faith and practice. We believe that the ecumenical creeds, the evangelical confessions, and the covenants we have made in our churches at various times and places, aid us in understanding the Word addressed to us. We accept the call to relate that Word to the world of peril and hope in which God has placed us, making the ancient faith our own in this generation "in honesty of thought and expression, and in purity of heart before God." (Preamble, Para.2).

Affirmation

According to these norms and guides, we call for sound teaching in our Church, and so confess the

trinitarian content of our faith. Affirming our Baptism "in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," (Matthew 28:19) we believe that the triune God is manifest in the drama of creation, reconciliation and sanctification. Following the recital of these mighty acts in our Statement of Faith, we celebrate the creative and redemptive work of God in our beginnings, the covenant with the people of Israel, the incarnation of the Word in Jesus Christ and the saving deed done in his life, death and resurrection, the coming of the Holy Spirit in church and world, and the promise of God to consummate all things according to the purposes of God. In the United Church of Christ we believe that the divine initiatives cannot be separated from God's call to respond with our own liberating and reconciling deeds in this world, and thus to accept the invitation to the cost and joy of discipleship.

Church

Our faith finds its form in the Christian community. We rejoice and give thanks to God for the gift of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, gathered by the Holy Spirit from the whole human race in all times and places. That Church is called to share the life-giving waters of Baptism and feed us with the life-sustaining bread and wine of Eucharist; to proclaim the Gospel to all the world; to reach out in mission by word and deed, healing and hope, justice and peace. Through Baptism the Church is united to Christ and shares Christ's prophetic, priestly and royal ministry in its servant