

**OIKOS**

**The OIKOS Papers  
on  
Work, Family and Faith**

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and

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## OIKOS: Faith in the Balance

"Do you work?" the stranger asks. To which a question is returned, "Do you mean for pay? Outside the home?" A few years ago we would have known the questioner assumed that work was paid employment outside the home. A few centuries ago the query would hardly have been meaningful for the farm families that comprised 90% of the population. Today, however, the meaning of work is changing profoundly. Not only is the workplace changing but so is its relation to families and homes.

For most of us work is quite separate from the family. Balancing the demands of job and career with those of home, spouse, and family is quite an act, especially when we add commitments to church and community. We are tightrope walkers whose balance weights are supported on a long and slender pole. How we hold the two in balance is indeed a matter of faith – of our most basic values, loyalties, and perspectives on life. Questions of work and family strike at the deepest levels of the emotional field that energizes and guides our lives. The way we balance work and family is one of the most vivid expressions of our faith.

Even those whose work and family are intertwined face deep dilemmas. Farm families and small family businesses also seek ways to respond to dramatic changes in the economy, new tax laws, and tensions between work demands and the needs of family members. Farm families are perhaps most conscious of a now pervasive concern that affects us all – the relation of work and family life to the environment.

Economic changes have not only reshaped our work and family life, they have also scarred and altered our land, lakes, rivers, and atmosphere. During the week we work in industries that may in turn pollute the recreational areas our families seek to enjoy. In our need for time-saving devices in the home we exploit natural resources for precious metals and wrapping materials. The radical changes and disorders in workplaces and families lead us all to questions of ecology.

The way we work all week and the way we act in families affect not only the natural environment but the political one as well. When we are drained by workplace stress and family tensions we can scarcely support the churches, voluntary associations and public organizations that deal with the common good. When we learn defeat and subordination at work we can hardly exercise independent criticism in the public sphere. When family fragmentation robs us of our basic self-esteem and trust we are hardly encouraged to risk ourselves in public action against large institutions. When our work life excludes open communication about alternatives we have trouble developing the skills and attitudes necessary for preservation of public life in a democratic republic.

All of these effects of changes in work – on family, environment, and public life – drive us back to questions of basic values. Moreover, this question of “values” is not a

clean, neat, antiseptic and rational discussion. It is not unemotional. It is ultimately a question of the ground for having and pursuing values as well as for living in the face of their ambiguity and our failures. It is a question of our “faith.”

We are not talking here merely of the traditional religious formulations of that concept. We are talking of the basic structure of emotional loyalties and ways of getting at the world which govern our lives as individuals, as families, as associations, and corporations. We are speaking of the force field that holds us up in life. Unless we lift up these often competing and obscure faiths we cannot get to the task of knitting together our work and family life in a way that respects our environment and advances our public activity.

Before we describe a language and framework for examining these issues we have to take a deeper look at what they are. Let's look at the situation of Joyce and Tom to see how they develop in a not untypical experience.

Tom and Joyce got married a few years ago, she for the first time, he for the second. Tom has a daughter by his previous marriage, who lives primarily with her mother. Joyce is well embarked on a career in biological research. Tom manages the shoe department of a large department store.

Joyce and Tom have decided to have a baby. It is an experience they want to have as an expression of their own union. Joyce is feeling that time is running out on her years of healthy birth and youthful energy. They have always shared the tasks of housekeeping and are very committed to equality. However, as the birth draws near they realize more keenly that hard decisions will have to be made.

Should Joyce take extensive time off from her work? She has put in two years on a genetics project. Her team will have to go on without her, a real setback for her own participation in its accomplishments. Tom might be willing to take off time, but his firm won't provide any income for such a leave. Joyce's research grant isn't enough to support them both, at least not in this high-priced urban area. Moreover, they both know that Tom is very involved in his work. The odd moments around the house might be a torment for him and then affect their marriage.

Their church runs a near-by day care center. It might be affordable, but would mean a reduction of the parental care they feel their child should have, especially in the pre-school years. The choice of moving to a small town where part-time work by both of them might cover their costs is very unsettling to Tom, because he doesn't want to separate himself so far from his daughter.

How they resolve this dilemma will demand cutting off some aspirations to achieve others. It will be a major adjustment to the faith they have been trying to live out with their lives, whether it rests on commitment to career or to parenting. It is not an

unusual tension in our time. How would you resolve it? What changes do you think should be made by the institutions involved here – the store, the lab, the church, and our expectations of marriage and family?

This is the life stuff that the OIKOS Project emerges out of. It is an effort to deal with these questions at both the personal and structural level. Why do we call it the OIKOS Project? What's in this name?

OIKOS is not a flashy acronym. It is the Greek word for household, or habitat. In the ancient world the *oikos* was the domestic sphere where people were born, cared for, worked, worshipped, loved, quarreled and died. It was not only the family world but also its inheritance and patrimony.

Through this sense of inheritance and ancestry each *oikos* nurtured its own religion – a religion of the hearth. Ancestral claims to land, house, lineage, and loyalties permeated people's lives.

The *oikos* was also where people usually earned their livelihood, whether by farming, as most did, or through artisan labor. The household was also the workplace.

In short, the ancient *oikos* represents a tight integration of family, work, and faith. This is why we use this venerable term to describe our efforts to find a new kind of integration in our own time. And indeed, it must be a new pattern of integration.

Over the centuries, work developed independently of the household, especially after the advent of factories and bureaucracies. Work separated from home, and *oikos* yielded up the English word “economics” to describe the autonomous market controlling the workplace.

Religion and faith gradually moved out of the family as well. Religion was no longer a tribal performance but an association of believers. When the early Church began convening councils of these widespread believers, it called them “ecumenical” councils – councils from the world *oikos*, in which *oikoumene* meant the whole inhabited world. Ever since that time, and especially in our own era, “ecumenical,” at least for Christians, has meant a world-embracing, pluralistic faith.

When theologians tried to describe the ways God worked to save people through Christ and the Church they still drew on the old forms of household faith. They spoke of the “economy” by which God saves the world. The heritage of *oikos* was engrained even in the way they spoke about God's care for us.

With this separation of work from family and family from the ancient gods of the land we entered into an industrial way of life. While this has brought many benefits it has also polluted our natural environment and torn apart the delicate network of interdependence that binds all living things together on the earth. In our search to understand this interdependence we turn once again to the ancient *oikos*. We begin to study our “ecology,” the integrated household of life.

Oikos stands at the root of our sense that work, family, faith and our environment are all knit together. It is a symbol of the integration we need to forge in our own time as persons and as a society. How we can do that is the question behind the OIKOS Project.

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### **For Reflection and Discussion**

How did your grandparents put together their oikos? How has their “faith” helped or hindered you in putting together your own today?

How would you describe your own oikos?

How has your own oikos changed in the course of your life? Are you at a point of construction, consolidation or dissolution of an oikos pattern?

What are the points of balance or imbalance in your own oikos? Where are the points of greatest stress and where are those of greatest strength and value?

What advice would you give to Tom or Joyce? How would you like to change the organizations shaping their oikos?

What role do religious organizations play in the way you construct your faith and organize your oikos?

## **Oikos to Economy: From Household to Workplace**

Over the past four centuries the nature of work has undergone a dramatic transformation. These changes have been deeply intertwined with alterations in the family and in people's faith, that is, in the root values that guide their lives. A mountain of literature has been spewed forth from the volcano of concern erupting from this seismic shift. We cannot investigate every fissure and flow. We will only attempt a bird's eye view of this landscape in order to get our bearings on its impact on family and faith.

The many changes in the structure of work are often summarized under two sociological terms: "differentiation" and "rationalization." These two concepts are helpful baskets for gathering together the fallout from these explosive transformations.

### **The Differentiation of Work**

Work has become an activity distinct from other human activities. Anthropologists tell us that many cultures have no word for work. There is no such separate activity for them, just as they lack a word for religion or person. In our society, however, work is different from playing, praying, and personal expression. It has become differentiated from household, family, and the land.

In ancient Greece, as in all other pre-industrial cultures, what we now call work occurred in the household. We see this connection vividly in the way our word "economy" comes from the Greek word *oikos*, meaning habitat, or household. The main activities for supporting life were carried on under the eye of the parents, whether by children, servants, slaves, or relatives. Food was grown or captured by the family and prepared by it. Clothes, basic utensils, the house itself and most other essentials of care were created or performed by family members. The household was a productive economic unit, usually with a high degree of self-sufficiency.

In almost every case this household economy was rooted in agriculture. The household and its activity were tied to the land. House and land were passed down from generation to generation. In feudal times a lord was bound by oaths, literally by "faith," to a composite person of vassal-household-family-land. The serf could not be alienated from the land, nor could the serf simply leave his land and household. Moreover, marriage was the process of finding a woman to help administer this house and raise a new generation. Individual people were primarily the living manifestations of this "oikos," this house.

The development of urban centers, with their more specialized economy, began to break down this fusion of household functions. However, what happened then presaged patterns that have held until the last century. The male heads of households transacted business in the public sphere, while the women, as wives, mothers, and daughters, stayed

within the increasingly confined perimeter of the household. Their range of duties still encompassed the household, but the household itself grew smaller and smaller. Urbanization meant the increasing restriction of women's role in the total oikos.

From the fall of Rome until the fifteenth century urban development stagnated within a feudal and agricultural society. Around the sixteenth century, however, the pace of urbanization resumed. Serfs were increasingly moved off their land. They became itinerant weavers, artisans, and merchants. Land became only one factor in the economy. It could be bought and sold, just as the labor of people could be exchanged for money. The economy no longer was tied to the land. This process is not merely an occurrence in our past. It is going on with intensified speed all over the world in the “developing” nations. It is the economic revolution behind all the political and military revolutions we witness every day on our televisions.

When work moved out of the household and off the land it also moved out of the control of the family and the worker. No longer were the tools of the household also those of production. These tools were controlled by the owner of the factory. Oversight by parents became oversight by the boss.

This meant that control of people's daily efforts to sustain themselves was removed from familial ties. Crucial aspects of people's lives were no longer bound up in family relationships. People's relationships in the workplace no longer had the same emotional content as they had had when the family worked together. The relation between worker and work became more detached, cool, and rational. In obeying a supervisor men were no longer obeying their father and carrying on a whole family tradition. They were just doing a job. The original oikos had split into the familial household and the “economy.” The long march to our present complexities had begun.

### **The Rationalization of Work**

When the oikos split up, “doing a job” was no longer part of a whole cultural tradition. It was separate from ties to family, place, religion, and background. Only one value needed to be served in this circumstance – efficiency. Rationalization is the term used to describe the “means-ends” thinking that lies behind efficient production. The more clearly you can describe the goal, apart from all other considerations regarding family ties, religious concerns, artistic creativity and the like, the more precisely you can specify the means. Work becomes the achievement of the straight line from here to there, the straight line of means to ends.

What did this rationalization entail? First of all, it meant that work required the substitution of machinery for people. Machines are the ultimate means for separating labor from the family, for machines have no emotional ties, no spirit, no wider culture. Machines have no faith to fulfill. Human beings as workers are always on the brink of



being superfluous. Either we haven't found a machine that can do the job yet – like serving hamburgers – or we need people to think up new jobs which in the end will require machines. We are all on the edge of unemployment, retirement, additional schooling, or more subtle forms of “dropping out of the work force.”

Rationalization also has demanded that work be specialized. People no longer had the sense of following a productive process from planting to harvest, from felling a tree to putting the last shingle on the house. Work consisted in specialized functions within a larger process that no single person could accomplish. With this specialization came increasing demands for skills and schooling to operate the machines as well as to restrict the work force competing for the job of maintaining the machine.

Rationalization produced a process in which people were easily as interdependent as they had been in the household, but without the emotional bonds of family life. Since people were interchangeable as well as specialized, they couldn't really identify with each other. Each had a distinct trade or a distinct level in the factory hierarchy that they would never enter. Work under these circumstances was not a place of emotional solidarity with others. It was a place where people were tied together by contracts and hierarchies.

Relationships between workers and work were rooted in the strict exchange of labor for money. Gradually all other aspects of work relationships became part of a legal contract. The whole structure is legal and formal. “Get it in writing” is the watchword of suspicion that arises when you assume that your interests will always be clashing with those of others. This is the nature of the workplace apart from other components of the oikos.

Moreover, in this work situation, where money is practically the only incentive, a strict relationship of command and subordination has to organize the work. This is the classic bureaucratic model. Because work is as distasteful as war, it has to be organized in the same way. Since no one but the man at the top knows about the overall goals of the organization, only he can decide what ought to be done.

In this situation people could develop close ties only with others at their own level in the work force. The less they could identify with the overall organization the more they could identify with their guild, union or profession. To some extent for many workers the union became their family, just as many bosses looked on their firm as their family.

The differentiation of economy from oikos also gave to work a new sense of time. Agricultural work lived by the seasons. Work adjusted to the seasonal changes which dictated planting, growth, and harvest. This sense of time ruled everything, including the church year.

Rationalized work, however, ran by the clock. In our own time the economy runs continuously and by the clock. Like the postal service it knows neither rain nor sun nor snow nor ice. It doesn't even know day from night. Both families and churches have to adjust to fit these economic timetables.

## The Present Revolution?

The features I have described are usually associated with the change from an agricultural to an industrial society. Many people say we are leaving them behind as we move into the technological era. Certainly some very different possibilities are opening up. Hierarchies are questioned by those who see the need for a more fluid organization that can adjust to constantly changing circumstances. Many people are advocating a decentralization of giant corporations into many small subsidiaries or franchises united by values and a grid of financial relationships. Communication needs in such circumstances require experimentation that leads us beyond the memo-pad and the letter. Rigid job distinctions melt before the need for flexibility and diversification. Unions built on clear specialties and hierarchical classes of workers face an uncertain future. All of these developments portend deep changes. The volcano is still at work.

However, many other changes seem to be permanent. The differentiation of work from family, household, and land is still a fundamental assumption for our sense of the oikos. Seasons will probably never define us so pervasively again. No longer will the formal and legal relationships of work be like the diffuse and complex interdependency of the family. The experience of personal freedom made possible by the differentiation of the oikos will not be yielded up for the security of parental order. We are in a time when the structure of work is changing, but it is not returning back to its original form.

As the patterns of work change, organizations encounter problems of motivation and conflicting ways that people like to work. Some people see work as simply a means to feed their family and have little loyalty or interest in the organization, Others view it as a means of individual career advance but see the relationship of the organization to its community in a very restricted way. Still others give their all to the firm and then find themselves abandoned in mergers, takeovers, or relocations.

In response many firms claim they are a "family" and seek to draw on old family loyalties. They are often met with resistance against their intrusion into private spheres of loyalty and activity. Others retreat behind stricter job descriptions and formal organizational structures, only to sow resentment and alienation. Meanwhile, as a society we don't know whether businesses should be directly responsible for maintaining the conditions of an adequate oikos, or whether that is the proper function of government or voluntary associations. Who should provide for day care? Adequate family incomes? Health care? Meaningful work? All of these questions erupt in the wake of an oikos that has split apart.

These are not only domestic problems in the United States, however. They are also crucial to international relations. The disruptions of the traditional oikos in the "developing world" create situations of conflict embroiling the great military powers. While the patterns of agricultural and village life have practically disappeared in the

northern hemisphere they still exert enormous influence in the southern hemisphere. However, they are rapidly being supplanted amidst enormous conflagration by patterns of industrialization and urbanization. This does not mean that these societies will become printouts of our own programs. It does mean that the essential features discussed here will become predominant in their lives. Work will be separated from bonds to land, family, and household. It will become more rationalized by specialization, hierarchies, money and contract relationships, and mobility of people as well as capital. These will remain the defining characteristics of work for a long time to come.

We don't know what patterns will crystallize, but the current way work is related to family and faith will probably persist unless new forces arise to challenge the character of this differentiation – forces that we ourselves might engender in trying to reshape our oikos.

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### **For Reflection and Discussion**

How separate is your workplace from your household?

What boundaries do you draw between your work life and family life? Why?

What are the advantages and disadvantages of the way your work and household is related?

Would you like your workplace to be more familial or less familial in the way it operates?

How much rational order do you think is possible or appropriate for your household and family life?

How could the impact of unemployment on family life be lessened?

## **The Family: From Star to Constellation**

We often speak of “The Family,” usually in very positive terms. However, when we really try to communicate we run into trouble. Do we mean the family we grew up in or the family we have created? Do we mean the whole ensemble of relatives or do we mean those within our household? How do we address our father’s new wife? What term do we use to refer to the child of our mother and her new husband as distinguished from the child of our father and his new wife? These complicated and often novel relationships frequently twist our psyches as well as our tongues.

This is a practical and often poignant sign of what sociologists call family differentiation. “Family” is no longer a star whose components are all fused together into a single shining orb. Over the past few centuries (a pretty short time for family life) this star has exploded into a giant and expanding constellation. While these planets still share the same gravitational field, they are also wanderers, with orbits that often take them far apart. In order to understand this family system we need to identify these planets that once constituted the star. The four planets we will identify are the subjects of this system. They are the *person*, the *couple*, the *family* and the *household*.

### **The Person**

It is hard for us to realize that the idea of “person” is a modern one. It is only in recent times that we have come to think of individuals as unique, creative beings with certain inalienable rights and powers. In other times and cultures people have been known primarily as representatives of the family, which in turn was bound to a particular house and land.

I once worked with a Tanzanian elder on a church project. In trying to get across the difference between our view of the person and his traditional view he told us that when someone goes to a small village seeking a particular man, one does not ask for him by name. One asks first for the household or compound of his family. Upon reaching the house one simply asks “Is he here?” Everyone knows who you mean – the living “he” of that family line. It is a long way from that to our own culture in which people change their names practically at will and seek to be addressed by their first name in order to disguise their family connection altogether.

In all previous eras women even more than men gained their personhood through membership in a family, whether of their father or their husband. Without this connection they had no “persona,” no mask to enter into the drama of social life. They were unreal people. This is why divorce was such a shattering injustice, especially if the woman could not return to her family. This is also why widowhood was such a fundamental social problem.

In short, without family membership individuals were nothing. They had no social as well as practically no economic existence. In our own time this individual can exist apart from family and have a personhood, because he or she can have a job apart from a family or household. The separation of work from family has made it possible for people to have individual freedom and unique personalities. Without this independent economic power base this would be highly unlikely.

## **The Couple**

The second planet of our family system is the couple – husband and wife. This is usually what we think marriage creates. However, it is not very long ago that this couple was scarcely distinct from the children that almost automatically accompanied their union. To be married was to have children.

It was only in 1827 that the ovum itself was scientifically identified, and it was only at the turn of the century that the ovulation cycle was established so that people could ascertain the “safe” time for intercourse. The control of conception could only arise when people no longer needed children for economic survival and knew how to control it. Changes in the nature of work produced the first, changes in medical technology the second.

A third factor, the desire to control conception, lay in women’s increasing participation in public life and their desire to exercise other roles in addition to that of the mother. In controlling conception, spouses gained more control over their capacity to know each other as man and woman rather than merely as mother and father. Within the bonds of marriage they could be friends and spouses as well as parents.

The differentiation of the couple from the familial star did not result merely from control over conception. It was also due to the increase in human longevity. As people lived longer, the length of time after children “left the nest” lengthened. Just as contraception enabled the couple to exist for a period of time before children came (if they came at all), so health advances enabled them to live longer after the children left.

Moreover, the children left, not merely because people lived longer, but because they were not needed to operate the household. Children in an industrial or technological society are not parts of a productive household. They are consumers. They are an economic burden. They must depart in order to relieve that burden on the parents and form their own household.

Finally, the differentiation of the couple was promoted by the loss of other sources of friendship outside the home. Men found fewer enduring friendships in a competitive and hierarchical workplace whose members changed with increasing frequency. Women were cut off from their original family and from other women by geographic mobility in search of other jobs. The husband and wife had to meet their need for friendship within the marriage bond. Defending their conjugal world against their children, their relatives, and the outside world

became indispensable to psychological survival. Their spouses increasingly became their emotional anchors in a world of change.

## **The Family**

Parents and their children usually constitute what we mean by “family.” Family is constituted by parental bonds. These bonds are so central to our identity that we cannot speak of being a person before we talk about being the child of our parents. Their habits, values, behavior, language, and faith are embedded in us before we even breathe, much less walk and, talk.

Yet for all this we do separate ourselves from them. We do ingest other food than our mother’s milk, other advice than our father’s aphorisms. Indeed, this separation from our family of origin is so central to adult life in our society that it shapes influential approaches to therapy and family counseling. Without that separation and independence we will not develop the skills necessary for relating to other people and to our future spouse as equals in friendship.

This parent-child bond, this family unit, is once again reestablished when these emancipated youngsters unite with someone else and have children of their own. Our education, our search for work in another region, and our exposure to all kinds of media almost require that our family will be differentiated from the one we came from and from all other families.

Moreover, it is no matter of necessity, though still a great probability, that once we are coupled we will have a family. Between coupling and parenting usually stands a conscious decision. To say “couple” is not necessarily to say “family.” The family arises as an act of will rather than necessity. Parenting has become a matter of conscious choice, not only before one has a child but for every stage after that, as the deluge of parenting experts will testify. We are no longer carrying on family traditions as an unbroken chain. We are forming contracts with individual offspring so they can choose and execute their own unique life plan.

Even the family as a parent-child formation is therefore a specialized set of relationships. Since schooling, work, health care, and even religion are transmitted through experts outside the family, the central task of the parental bond is financial support and emotional nurture. It is these tasks which now constitute the official responsibilities of family life.

## **The Household**

This specialized family life also results from the peculiar meaning of householding in our time. Not only has work left the household, so has birth, burial, health care, care of the elderly, manufacture of clothing and utensils, and even food preparation. The oikos has exploded into a constellation of related but distinct organizations.

We can see this quite clearly whenever we visit places like Williamsburg, Mt. Vernon,

Old World Wisconsin or the dozens of other colonial reconstructions that have arisen for our leisure inspection. Each household is filled with paraphernalia for manufacturing the essentials of life. Today they are filled with means of entertainment or hobbies and recreation. Even the kitchen is rapidly being reduced to a microwave oven.

This conception of the household as an incubator for emotional life does not point to the most dramatic development – that members of a parent-child relationship need not live in the same house. Widespread divorce and remarriage mean that a “family” may live in two or more households. This is a matter of consternation to school administrators, elders, and ministers alike, but it is an increasing fact of life.

We still try to fit people back into an equation between “family” and “household.” We talk of single-parent families, when we actually mean a split family and a one-parent household. Some people speak of a broken family while others speak of a restructured household and a broken marriage. Perhaps the idea of the “nodal family” might help us think of a pattern of familial ties divided up among several households. Our struggle with language here not only reflects inherited norms but also befuddles our ability to deal with the realities of the present. At the root of much of this confusion is the differentiation of family from household.

### **The OIKOS Constellation**

These are only a few of the distinctions among the planets emerging from the stellar explosion of the ancient family. No longer is everything from faith to work contained in the oikos administered by the father’s family.

One of the fundamental reasons for this explosion was the original separation of work from the family. Along with this came the separation of the family from its ancestral land and house. Parenting and householding finally came to revolve around very specialized emotional functions of friendship and nurture. Eventually, in our own day the demand that spouses be friends before they are parents has required the institution of divorce and the resulting differentiation of family from household.

These radical changes in the structure of economy and family have transformed our system of values and the meaning of our faith. While traditional religion has tried to maintain the values from earlier forms of our oikos it has also had to change. We have to ask questions like these: Is the sacrament of marriage related to the fact of coupling or to that of parenting or householding? Should churches concentrate their limited resources on matters of marriage and divorce or on parenting and personal enrichment? Is there a particularly religious form for family organization? What should businesses and unions do about the family ramifications of their policies? How should family therapists take into account the work dynamics in people’s lives? These questions of public policy and personal faith have been fired in the glow of the family’s exploding star.

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### **For Reflection and Discussion**

How tightly do the elements of your family constellation stick together? Are they drifting farther apart or closer together?

What role do work organizations and religious institutions play in the shape of your family constellation?

When did you leave home? Why? How has that affected the type of oikos you have constructed?

Describe your family constellation. What relationships are most meaningful? Which detract most from the accomplishment of your life goals?

How are the roles of spouse and parent related in your life? What does it mean to look on your spouse as a friend? on your child as a friend?



## Vocation and the Oikos

Suppose you are entering a vocational training program, intending to learn computer programming. At the first class the instructor asks "What is the ultimate purpose of your community?" "What is the ultimate purpose of your life?" Surely you would be taken aback and immediately leave to see the registrar. You had come for technical job training and instead stumbled into religion and philosophy. Nothing could be farther apart.

However, if Abraham or St. Paul had come to that class the question would have been what they expected, for in its original meaning "vocation" meant a calling by God to a whole people. If we try to understand how that lofty understanding came to mean job training we will come a long way to understanding the relation, or lack of it, between faith, work, and family in our own lives.

The idea that God relates to us through calling begins with our earliest religious records. God called Abraham out of his native land of Ur in order to send him into a new and better life. But this calling was not to some individual person. It was to the patriarch of a whole extended household. The call was to an *oikos*, or "bayith" in the Hebrew, to uproot itself – wives, children, animals, servants and all. It was the oikos that responded to the call. It was the renovation of an entire oikos that was the purpose of God's summons and sending. A calling concerned the whole of life for the length of life.

This sense of a collective vocation permeated Israel's history. To be sure there were always tensions between the leaders who sensed the people's calling and the people who would prefer to remain in oppressive securities rather than to risk changes that might offer a greater closeness to God's purpose. This tension certainly existed for Moses as he cursed, cajoled, and prodded the Hebrews across the wilderness. It came to a fiery focus in the prophets like Jeremiah and Amos, who found themselves pitted against their kinfolk in their efforts to call their people back to God's purposes.

Out of this prophetic tradition came Jesus of Nazareth, for whom the sense of God's call demanded such a radical departure from householding as usual that he called people away from everyday family loyalties. Out of his prophetic ministry emerged a group of "called ones" who did not revere their ancestors but simply set out to follow "the way." The sense of calling had broken decisively with the maintenance of the whole oikos.

In the break between divine call and family loyalty people could come to a greater sense of themselves as individuals who had to choose to be independent of their old oikos. They became members of an assembly – an *ekklesia* – which means in Greek, the "called out ones." However, even here St. Paul, one of the primary founders of these ecclesias, called them "households of faith." The sense of the collective calling of the oikos held on even as it was breaking down. The household became the assembly of the

saints, each pursuing the calling to holiness extended to him or her from God.

In this shift to a more individualistic sense of calling, women could begin to emerge as recipients of a call. In the patriarchal household they usually received God's call through their husband or father. Now, as one of the saints, they could respond directly. However, after this burst of inspiration, the churches settled back into a male monopoly on calling until the Protestant Reformation.

At that time people still had a sense that “vocation,” God's call, was a unique summons to work toward God's promised land. It was a call to life in God's Kingdom. There was only one calling – the call to holiness and perfection – not a collection of callings. In subsequent centuries this single calling was focused in the calling to be the spiritual leader of the church community, first as monk and then as priest. Vocation was restricted to an ecclesiastical role reserved for men and occupied for life.

However, St. Paul inserted a peculiar and for many centuries neglected observation into his first letter to the Corinthians. He advised “each one to stay in the calling in which he was called” (I Cor. 7:20). For the first time the call became identified with a particular role – as servant, parent, spouse, farmer, and merchant. St. Paul seems to have meant that people are called “in place,” and there they should await the Lord, whose coming is imminent. By not leaving this occupation behind, they began to sanctify it with the patience, humility, perseverance, and character with which they waited faithfully for God's renewal of the creation.

This peculiar claim lay dormant for many centuries, only to be raised up again by the sixteenth century reformers Martin Luther and Jean Calvin. Roman Catholic reformers like St. Francis De Sales and St. Ignatius Loyola also picked up the theme. For Luther every role and occupation was sanctified into a calling by the trusting faith of the believer in it. How one loves and trusts in one's role is the mark of one's response to God's call to holiness.

Calvin and his successors pushed this idea one step further. Not only was one to be faithful in a role. One was to use one's role as an instrument to change the world. Having a calling was to become an instrument of God's renovation of the world.

At this point we can see three different religious conceptions of vocation that had emerged: the Catholic emphasis on vocation to leadership of the church, the Lutheran emphasis on playing a role within the community and especially the oikos, and the Calvinist emphasis on transforming the public world. Thus the concept of vocation took on distinctive shape within the church, the household, the economy and the public order.

Most significant for our interests is that vocation came to be attached to any everyday role. Moreover, especially under Calvinist and Puritan influences it meant the exercise of one's role in such a way as to change the world. Not only was one's occupation to evidence peculiar higher virtues of fidelity, justice, holiness, and self-transcendence. It was to be part of world transformation. Vocation had moved outside the traditional oikos and church. It became identified with the rational, systematic, and

even disinterested exercise of a role for, the greater glory of God.

These components of community, household, and church held together into the Puritan era in the founding of this nation. However, it was not long before people simply came to assume that whatever they did in their everyday work fitted automatically into the good of the whole. As Adam Smith said so famously, our self-interested pursuits in the market place would be guided by an “invisible hand” to serve the good of all. However, the notion of call slipped away from this background of “the people” and came to rest securely on the individual occupation. The Calling had become a calling, and a calling had become an occupation. An occupation in turn became a job. The sense that a call was for life was still retained in the sense of “career” – a series of related jobs moving toward greater perfection, or success. The idea of collective vocation dissolved into nationalism.

Into this very particular activity of the job have been funneled all the energies and meanings once associated with the dramatic call to Abraham to found a new world. Like the ancient vocation it has demanded all our loyalties, our prime time, and the subordination of all other interests. If we “worth-ship” our job, our job will reward us. And, for those who reach perfection in a career, the social rewards are great. For those who do not, the impact on self-esteem and family welfare is devastating.

So we come from the sands of Mesopotamia to the computer programming classroom. It's a long way from job-holding to holiness, and yet we can see how holding a job and pursuing a career dominate not only our time but our whole sense of worth. Moreover, like Jesus' call in Galilee, it makes us leave behind our families, communities, and churches to follow the way of mobility, progress, and success.

We can see that our present occupational structure and career culture is the secularized version of vocation. It still contains some positive religious values. It is a place where individuals can show their personal worth apart from birth, family, race, and gender. At least, that's the way we think it ought to be. It is a way we can effectively serve others and fit into the immense network of cooperation necessary to sustain an industrial and technological society.

Yet it also exhibits some heretical distortions. Jobs, occupations, careers, even professions, are cut off from the call to the whole people to greater holiness, justice, and peace. Corporations have not felt constrained to be responsible for the land, for the families connected to them, and for the greater public good. Families have tried to behave like isolated farms or baronies in suburban “estates,” “woods,” and “farms.” Churches have been more interested in being Gothic than faithful. However, this disintegration of ancient connections has begun to hurt us too much. We are in pain as we neglect our children for our jobs, as we taste the empty cup at the end of our promotions, as we lose our jobs to run-away plants.

We are ready to pick up the pieces of vocation and re-knit them in a new and different

oikos. It will have to have some new features, some transformations of the old. We will have to fashion a sense of vocation that is not reduced to a job. We will have to find ways of sharing our calling – with spouses, children, neighbors, fellow workers and citizens. We will have to ask what is the calling of all God's people and how do our nations, firms, and households fit into that embracing call.

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### **For Reflection and Discussion**

What sense of vocation has shaped your life?

What meaning of vocation have you received from your faith tradition?

Have you changed occupations? How did that change affect your sense of what you wanted to do with your life?

How would you change your work life in order to reflect a wider sense of vocation?

How would you define a sense of your vocation that is not restricted to your job or career?

## Faith in the Oikos

In the ancient family faith and religion were passed on within the family. The father was the chief priest of the family religion. The hearth fire was not merely a means for warmth and cooking. Its airy presence symbolized the union of the family with its land and its past. The hearth still conveys some vague connotation of “home,” though its function passed into vigil lamps, eternal flames and the TV, which is left on whether we watch it or not, symbolizing a connection with what is really going on in life.

This fusion of family, household and faith is typical of almost all ancient cultures. Over the centuries religion passed out of family hands. It became the property of prophets, priests, and religious professionals. The church or synagogue became an institution separate from the hearth and home, just as politics would later become separated from religion and work from family.

“Religion” is a word that originally meant “to bind” or “to bind back.” It was in essence a reverence for ancestral bonds. Similarly, the word “faith” originally meant a bond of trust between two people, such as the solemn oath between a feudal lord and his vassal. Faith meant loyalty to a relationship.

This is the meaning of faith we want to use in order to understand the way the relationships within our oikos are matters of faith. Faith is above all commitment to a trustworthy relationship. The faith of Christians and Jews is not belief in a set of propositions. It is fidelity to a special relationship with God. It is fidelity to those who share in God's special relationship with humanity. Faith is a pattern of supremely trustworthy relationships.

Over the centuries religion has come to mean something institutional, while faith has come to mean something individual and personal. Faith has become a matter of conscious decision and commitment, religion a matter of inherited bonds. Unfortunately faith's relational meaning has been lost in the process. Faith is relegated to feelings and ideas individuals can hold apart from their relationships, while religion becomes an ossified tradition.

Sometimes when people speak of their faith they mean their church. Sometimes they mean their own personal system of values, commitments and beliefs. Both need to be considered, but from the standpoint of our concern for the total oikos of work, family, and faith, we need to focus on faith as the pattern of trustworthy relationships by which people try to live out their lives.

The differentiation of the primitive oikos has entailed profound changes in the life of religious organizations as well as in our conception of faith. Our sense of uniqueness apart from family, couple, and household is reflected in an increasingly non-relational view of faith. The explosion of the family star is mirrored in religious pluralism. We now have a multiplicity of faiths, a milky way of religious alternatives, none of which bind a multitude

in the way religion did in the past or still does in other cultures such as Saudi Arabia or Iran.

These are profound changes. What has the differentiation of the oikos meant for faith and religion? Let us look at four key effects that we must grapple with if we are to be faithful people in a differentiated or fragmented oikos.

### **Personalization**

The rise of our sense of unique individuality is promoted not only by the way work is organized and the way we have been raised but also by our experience in religious organizations. School and work treat us, as individuals apart from family connections. Parents try to foster a sense of unique individuality in their children. Religious organizations foster the values of personal dignity, freedom, and conscience over obedient humility, chaste submission, and conformity to God's command.

This does not mean these traditional values have gone totally underground. It means that they are always qualified by the others. God does give commands, but these are always to be adapted to specific situations. We do submit our lives to God, but we do so by cultivating a conscience to deal with a variety of situations and possible consequences.

This means that religious groups take a different posture toward the economy. Church pronouncements do not take a form of dos and don'ts but of guidelines and general principles. Businesses and professions try to fashion their own particular codes of conduct. For a long time churches withdrew altogether from formulating an economic ethic. They relied completely on the formation of individual consciences and only later resorted to governmental legislation and regulation. Only recently have they begun once again to deal directly with economic issues, but in a very different spirit from the past. Personalization has left its mark in a greater flexibility and sensitivity to differing circumstances.

### **Voluntarism**

Personalization has also meant that religious membership is increasingly a matter of individual choice. Hitherto most churches could rely on family procreation to increase their numbers. Churches were one institutional expression of the vast mushroom undergrowth of extended families. The graveyards next to them held the watchful spirits of the founding fathers. No more. Increasingly people are choosing religious affiliation on the basis of personal need, interest, ministerial charisma, and friendships.

This means that churches cannot rely on family loyalties. They have to appeal to particular interests and needs. Motivation for church or synagogue membership comes not from family ties but from a personal reward gained through active participation.

Moreover, the life of religious organizations depends on volunteers. This has always been the case with the more congregational churches, but it is increasingly true of those formerly run by priests and sisters as well. Churches are not so much communities but collections of interest groups and associations appealing to people's interests. This is what people volunteer to support.

At the same time, however, the volunteers have less time and energy for church because both women and men are involved in the workplace. Work time competes with church time. The result is either volunteer burnout or increasing professionalization of church staff. In the first case churches risk collapse, in the second they risk detachment from the real interests of their members.

As voluntary associations churches move away from being like families and become more like corporations, political parties, or fast food franchises. They also become more specialized in their focus. They become associational and specialized.

### **From Patriarchy to Public Association**

As voluntary associations churches have to foster a sense of equal partnership rather than paternal command. People can vote with their feet and their pocketbooks. Even if they don't leave they can withhold time and energy. They can refuse to volunteer. This is why religious bodies tend toward a congregational form in America. They are governed by volunteers who supply the money and energy the organization needs on the basis of their satisfaction with its performance.

In short, churches become more like little democratic republics. Members are more like citizens than children. They seek to act as a council or college of equals. Though many churches may claim to be “families” of some sort, they often function like voluntary associations in a democratic republic.

Sometimes they aren't so much like a political body as they are like the fast food outlet down the street. Perhaps we could call them “fast faith” franchises. They offer a set of specialized products governed by the demand in the religious market. In the process they often overlook religion that is slow and cool, replacing it with faith that is fast and hot – a faith that sells. Hardly any church is immune from this market process.

While the local congregation often looks like a political party or fast food franchise, it is the denominational hierarchies that tend to adopt the model of the corporation. Here the features of rationalization and specialized differentiation really take hold. Denominations have offices, goals, objectives, evaluated performance, separation of work from family ties – all the polish of a well-run corporation. Their corporate style excludes appeal to patriarchal privilege, tradition, and childlike trust. It is rational, functional, goal-oriented.

In all these associational patterns church staff function more like professionals than parental figures. They draw their authority more from professional competence in

their jobs than from their imitation of a father or mother. They are judged according to their expertise rather than their status. As professionals they tend to treat members more like a clientele to be helped than a flock to be herded. Thus the personalization promoted by economy and family finds its manifestation in changes in the way religious organizations function.

### **From Sunday Service to Special Services**

The way people live in the present oikos is greatly affecting the programs as well as the structure of religious organizations. In the village or agricultural community, the whole congregation gathered at the same time, usually between milkings, for an act of worship that arose from their common life together. Within the complex schedules of most work patterns today, we have much more trouble gathering at the same time. Moreover, the people we worship with are rarely our associates, neighbors, relatives, or even our friends. Sunday, especially Sunday morning, gives way either to work or to family recreation. Because the family is pulled in all directions during the week, Saturday and Sunday become more important times of domestic regrouping.

So religious organizations adapt. Worship occurs at other times. Prayer groups, bible study circles, committees, choirs, and special support groups all take over the functions that used to be met at the weekly worship. The new congregation is the special interest group gathered as its common schedule permits. The minister who has been geared to the importance of the collective worship is redirected toward the chaplaincy of these many small groups that actually nourish and guide the members.

This increasing specialization in the churches also reflects the distinction between personal faith and institutional religion. Because of the variety of life patterns possible in our oikos we each develop a unique faith that needs to be supported by a resonant group. Successful churches develop numerous satellite groups to meet these demands.

These are some of our responses to the new shape of our lives within the oikos of work, family and faith. Faith is more personalized in order to guide unique individuals through their own peculiar career. Religious membership is more voluntaristic. Religious organization reflects associational patterns of the market, politics, or the corporation rather than the extended family. Religious congregation occurs around special interests rather than embracing communities.

Our faith as well as our religious institutions are challenged not only to confront people with the fragmentation of their common life, but also to develop patterns of faithful living that can encounter people in their own unique pattern of trustworthy relationships.

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## **For Reflection and Discussion**

Where is the hearth in your home?

How does this understanding of faith as trustworthy relationship compare with the idea of faith you received while growing up?

Identify the trustworthy relationships that shape your life. What basic pattern emerges? Is it from family, friendship, work, school, sports, politics? Are there basic tensions among these patterns in your life?

Trace the impact of a particular faith value you hold, such as the equal dignity of all persons before God, on the way you relate to others at work.

Trace the impact of personalization, voluntarism, associationalism and specialization on your own life.

## **Stewardship: Talented Trust**

"She has such talent! What a shame she hasn't developed it more. She could really make some money at that."

"Yes, what a waste."

These are lines we all have probably heard or spoken. When we discover a special ability in someone, even in ourselves, we call it a "talent" and expect that talent to be developed, especially in a way that brings fame and money. We are constantly searching for talent in our society, whether to find a star or simply to match occupations with people. We assume that everyone has some special talent which can be cultivated and which can be translated into a position in the economy. We seek the story of our lives in the mythology of the talent.

This is not merely a secular viewpoint. It is heavily overlain with religious tones. We see our special talents as not mere happenstance abilities. They are gifts. They are special attributes given uniquely to each one of us by God. To fail to develop and exploit them is to deny God's creative goodness toward us. Many is the child who has been coaxed through extra years of piano lessons with the parental admonition, "You have a real musical talent God has given you. You wouldn't want to disappoint God, would you?"

This may have helped support piano teachers and may even have produced a few exceptional pianists, but it's not clear that the load of guilt was worth it. Moreover, this tactic reinforces a popular myth about talent and reward that directly contradicts the very religious source it claims to be based on – the Parable of the Talents. From this little parable of Jesus' our own society has harnessed some mighty motivation while denying its original message.

In order to unpack the significance of the myth of talents in our own time we have to go back to this little story to find its original meaning. Few of us have escaped it, even fewer have been able to read it with fresh eyes.

### **The Parable of the Talents**

Matthew includes this parable in a section about the judgment at the coming of God's kingdom. Jesus tells his disciples that a master entrusted various amounts of money to his stewards to administer while he was gone. On his return he found that some had invested it to good success. One, however, had done nothing, returning only the amount he had received. This timid fellow received condemnation, while the faithful, entrepreneurial servants received their master's blessing. The master's judgment concludes with the declaration, "For to every one who has will more be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away."

Now the unit of money used in the parable was the Greek "talent." For us it would be the

dollar. To understand the parable we must find out what those “talents” stood for. When we look at the broader sweep of Matthew's Gospel we come to the unavoidable conclusion that the talent stands for the Gospel itself. (See the “Parable of the Sower” in *Matthew* 13:1-9.) The “talent” entrusted to us is the knowledge of Jesus as the Messiah who is to bring in the new order of justice and peace.

The task of believers is not to hide it under a bushel basket but to spread this good news to all the world, building up the community who give witness to this new realm. (See the “Great Commission,” *Matthew* 28: 19-20.) The “talent” to be “invested” is the joyful news about God's redemptive advent. If it is buried, even with the laudable purpose of keeping it pure and unspoiled, the evangelical purpose is thwarted. However, to tell it to others begins a multiplier effect that spreads throughout the country.

It is this Good News which Jesus entrusted to his followers. This is the stewardship that is being emphasized in Jesus' parable. Everywhere else we encounter this stewardship motif in the New Testament it is in the context of stewarding the mysteries of God (*I Corinthians* 4: 1, *I Peter* 4: 10) or of the Gospel (*I Corinthians* 9: 17, *I Timothy* 1:11, *Titus* 1:7). It is the churches, not individuals, who are the trustees and stewards of this Gospel “talent” for drawing the world together in justice and peace.

The parable itself, however, was so strong that it overwhelmed its own meaning. Fifteen centuries later it became the seedbed for nourishing individualistic performance in the marketplace of an emerging capitalist era. The very word “talent” came to be applied to one's special abilities – abilities to be demonstrated in the marketplace. Jesus' analogy became an admonition for personal investment and individual striving.

The religious metaphor of the talent became a spiritual engine in the dynamo of individualism, entrepreneurship, and market-oriented reward mechanisms. It put the manager of money and property at the center of religious significance. Little wonder that our society has found it such a useful parable. The original meaning of the story was lost entirely. Jesus may be amazed at what has happened to his Gospel. He would be even more amazed at what his little parable has done.

## **Reclaiming our Stewardship**

In this long development both the content and the style of stewardship has been greatly altered. This change accompanies and supports the differentiation of the oikos discussed in previous *OIKOS Papers*. Not only has the meaning of talent changed, so has the meaning of stewardship.

Originally, this fine Anglo-Saxon word referred to the custodian of the main hall. He was in charge of feeding the manor. This meant the care of animals as well as preparation of food. Gradually, the word “sty” moved from describing the whole hall of the household to the barn where today we keep the pigs – a very important source of food, then and now. The sty-

ward was a central figure in the sustenance of a household. The steward, like the Biblical deacon, is one who maintained the oikos.

Moreover, the steward, though holding the whole operation together, does not ultimately “own” it. The steward maintains it in trust for a whole line of participants and descendants. A pattern of cooperation, trust, shared values and mutual confidence permeates the trust of stewardship just as it did the ancient oikos. Thus “steward” became a high office and gave us the name of a royal family - the Stuarts.

In our own time we have achieved a greater personalization and autonomy for each individual, and this is a great achievement. But it has been bought at a great price. Autonomy can also mean isolation. Independence can also mean arrogance. The right to privacy may also be the ticket to paranoia. The common life that knits together work, family, and our basic values disappears in a marketplace of talents where the claims of stewardship are lost.

### **Stewards of a Talented Trust**

What light can our recovery of the Parable of the Talents shed on these dilemmas? The first is personal. The central meaning of our life does not lie in the discovery of some special “gift” that distinguishes us from everyone else. God's special gift to us is the bonds of love and justice that unite us with others and lead us into the cultivation of a greater community. This is the “talent” we are to cultivate. It is always a shared gift of relationships grounded in an ethical vision. Faith does not drive us to an anxious and guilt-ridden search for some peculiar ability that glues us forever to an occupational slot. It invites us to participate in cooperating with others to create a community at peace with its neighbors and environment.

The second is interpersonal. Because talent is no longer interpreted individualistically we can move toward an image of stewardship that takes into account the whole pattern of our oikos. Our energies can be given more forcefully to the way our whole family, whether as spouses, parents, children or relatives, participates in a worldly work. We can respond to the invitation to explore ways both spouses can share a common stewardship, whether through a common work, parallel activities or coordinated work and career patterns. Likewise, we can examine more energetically the ways our own work shapes the lives and work expectations of our children. Stewardship of God's “talent” extends to the whole oikos which we hold in trust to an extended network of other people.

The third impact is corporate. The organizations in which we work themselves participate in God's talent. They are also invited to be stewards of community-building. Our fresh understanding of God's talent enables us to see what many firms are already struggling to act out – that they hold their wealth in trust to the community they exist in. Market relations define the way they do things, but community relations define the ultimate source and purpose of their existence.

Moreover, the new understanding of “talent” as a cooperative trusteeship can extend to the management of personnel. We can stop concentrating on the task of matching peculiar abilities with job descriptions. People can do all kinds of things with a little help. Personnel managers can start focusing on constructing a network of encouragement, guidance, and support to enable a person to work together with others to achieve the goals of the enterprise. Relational skills may be more important in the long run than highly specific technical abilities.

Finally, a note for the churches that live in the light or the shadow of this parable: Tell it as it was. Look at the patterns by which you administer your own household of faith. Your organization is your message. The purpose of the church is not merely to help individuals identify their own peculiar abilities, but to hold forth the vision of a new community of justice and peace. Moreover, you cannot exercise this stewardship on your own. Stewarding God's talent demands full attention to the whole oikos of life in which people live and live out their hopes for God's future republic.

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### **For Reflection and Discussion**

How has the idea of talent figured in your life? What is the oikos you are steward of?

What kind of gospel are you a steward of in your life?

What kind of stewardship does your work organization exercise? How could it be a better steward?

What should be the role of church deacons from the oikos perspective? What implications does this idea of talent and stewardship have for church stewardship programs?

## The Covenanted Oikos

All organized life is held together by a network of trust. Whether we are in a marriage, a business, or a government, we are held up in life by a web of trustworthy relationships. This is what we mean by faith. All of us live by some kind of faith in our relationships.

The primordial oikos was a particular web of trust. It was a powerful way of being faithful. Because of the clear and distinct way it held people's lives together, it can serve as a symbol of the search for a faithful life of integrity today.

However, our world is very different from that of our distant ancestors. Theirs was shaped by “natural” forces of food supply, geography, and biology. The web of trust was gripped in the hand of necessity. Theirs was a natural oikos. Our world, however, supports a more voluntary oikos. Only two per-cent of our work force supplies our food. Control over conception is beginning to give women and men choices about their roles in all sectors of their oikos. Every person's oikos becomes a construct of many decisions. Some of them are fully in our own power. Many of them result from choices made by others. In either case the web of natural bonds breaks apart under the impact of human decisions.

This does not mean we are all happy or well served. The freedom of a voluntary life has meant irresponsibility as well as altruism. It has meant the fall into alienation and impoverishment as well as the ascent to greater goods. It has meant isolation as well as blessed independence. Nevertheless, this is the condition in which we generally seek to live out a life of faith and trust. Ours is a social experience of real choices and real independence from a natural oikos. That is the social reality in which we seek to advance our lives.

Behind this voluntarism and personal independence lie some strong social norms. First, our life is regulated by contracts. We speak of the contract of marriage, of labor contracts, business contracts, and even psychotherapeutic contracts. The myth of some original social contract suffuses our assumption that all of life is contractual. We think of our life as a collection of limited agreements between free parties.

Just as a myth of contracts lies behind our experience of voluntarism, so does the importance of opinion lie behind the experience of personal autonomy. Hardly a day goes by that we do not hear of another opinion poll that shapes our judgment as well as our understanding. Our education in church and school fosters group discussions demanding the formulation, expression and defense of our opinions. Many an argument grinds to a halt on the ultimate defense: “That is my opinion (belief, feeling) and there's nothing you can do about it.” Our opinions are the public expression of our personal uniqueness and

dignity. Not to have them is to dissolve into a sea of anonymity and votelessness in the election of our life.

Contracts and opinions form the world we are supposed to operate in as we seek to forge a network of trustworthy relationships for our life. However, our religious traditions sense a deeper layer beneath this to guide us. Beneath our contractualism lies the religious concept of covenant. Beneath our opinions lies our “faith.” The notion of faith as a set of ultimately trustworthy relationships has been presented in an earlier *OIKOS Paper*. Covenant is the particularly Biblical expression of this sense of faith. Covenant is the original and persisting form of our ultimate network of trustworthy relationships with God and with each other. In order to get down to the bedrock underlying our vision of a trustworthy oikos we need to understand this idea and chart the path it has taken to reach us.

### **The History of Covenant**

From the earliest Biblical times God's relationship with us has been seen as a covenant (Hebrew *b'rith*). The idea of covenant arose when representatives of two clans, or “houses” (*bayith*), the Hebrew *oikos*) wanted to form a bond of mutual obligation that could not be guaranteed by kinship ties. It represented the first step in social life beyond the bonds of marriage and descent. The most widespread practice of covenanting involved a dominant leader and a dependent or vanquished neighbor. In return for providing protection the superior party required certain payments or performances by the dependent party.

For the Hebrews this relationship was the most appropriate way of grasping their relationship with a transcendent God. This Lord had rescued them from Egypt and would protect them in the search for their promised land in return for obedience to the Divine will as expressed in the Torah. They became the peculiar people of a unique covenant—not with any earthly king, but with the Creator of all.

Because their God was the Creator, Israel's covenant involved not only the people but the whole condition of their “houses.” It was a covenant with the land as well as with the people. It was, as we would say today, an ecological covenant. It was a covenant with a comprehensive and integrated oikos, for it was only within the whole life of the oikos that people could achieve the fullness of life promised to them by God.

The Hebrews also came to call other relations between houses covenants, even when they were equal in power. The covenant between Abraham and Abimelech (*Genesis* 21:32) seems to have been of this kind, as was that between David and Jonathan (*I Samuel* 18:3). Interestingly enough, marriage was not seen as a covenant, for it still existed within the practice of paternal property characteristic of the ancient oikos, including the Hebrew “house.” It was only with the prophet Hosea that marriage was

used metaphorically to speak of God's relation to Israel. God's relation to Israel, however, was not applied to marriage itself. This was actually a much later Christian development.

The early Christians also moved within this covenantal understanding of life. Jesus was seen as the mediator of a renewed covenant between God and the People of God (*Hebrews* 8, 12). Here the land drops away as a party to the covenant and a deepened personalization sets in upon the saints bound together in covenant in the world's last days. Here we see in a religious expression the removal of the earth from the original oikos of trustworthy relationships. The House of God becomes an assembly of believers who are pilgrims on this earth.

The Latin-speaking Western Church usually used the term “foedus” to translate the Hebrew word for covenant. The *foedus* (league or treaty) was still essentially an agreement between different peoples. It was a treaty involving reciprocal rights and duties among strangers.

After the collapse of the Roman Empire, Europe was organized by an elaborate network of obligations between lords of the land and those who lived upon it. This was the feudal system. While the word “feudal” actually arose from an old word for cattle, the system itself was very covenantal in appearance. The Medieval oikos was still a tightly knit network binding together land, families, and faith.

With the breakdown of this system in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Calvinist thinkers began proposing that society, like the ancient order of the Hebrews, was a network of covenants. Society was “foederal.” The task of Christians, such as the New England Puritans, was to build the perfect federal society as their proper obedience to God. They were to be people of a renewed covenant in a new land. While at this point the land rejoined the sense of covenant, it was soon once again sharply subordinated to the interests of individuals in the rush to dominate a seemingly infinite space.

Nevertheless this sense of society as covenantal, or federal, was laid down as a bedrock in the emerging American consciousness. When the founders wrote a constitution for this Federal Republic in 1789, God and the land had retreated to the background, but the covenantal outlook remained to shape the legal structure of government.

Over the past two centuries continual attempts have arisen to bind the covenant back together – a covenant including the land, its original inhabitants and all its immigrants, and the God who is the author of its history. From John Winthrop to Jonathan Edwards, through John Calhoun and Abraham Lincoln, and from Woodrow Wilson to Martin Luther King, Jr., Jesse Jackson and Ronald Reagan in our own time, Americans have struggled with the search for a proper form of federal order. They have struggled with the question of what it is to be the people of a new covenant – a federal people. The pendulum of reform continually returns to the task of binding together this



immense household in a governing covenant – a federal society in content as well as form.

The problem of being a federal people is not merely a governmental one. It is not simply a matter of the relations between the central government and the states. From the perspective of the *oikos* it is also a problem of relating families, land, production, exchange, and ultimate faith. The constitution articulates an order for governments, but what is the total covenant binding together the elements of our *oikos*? That is the deeper question raised by seeing that the original covenant was with a whole “house.” It is a challenge to find a covenant knitting together the fragments of this *oikos* in our own time.

### **The Elements of Covenant**

Throughout the history of covenant four elements constantly recur in the covenant-making process – *God*, *the people*, *the history*, and *the land*. The first step toward federal living is an understanding of these elements.

By *God* we mean that which lies ultimately behind the relationships we live through. People have had widely differing understandings of this ultimate power. God has been seen as liberator from oppression – whether in Egypt, Europe, or America. For others God has appeared primarily as the natural force of the unknown wilderness of nature. Many North Americans have viewed their God as the invisible hand of the marketplace, turning all their greed to common gain. Still others see their God as the voice of public opinion molded through public debate. The kind of relationships we form – whether through revolution, marketplace competition, public debate, or frontier pacification – are shaped by the kind of God we believe in.

The second element in covenant making is *the people*. Who are we as a people? Are we a population of unique individuals with no underlying bonds? Is each one an *oikos* unto himself or herself? Are we an amalgam of immigrant peoples, now conformed to the original Puritan prototype? Are we a mosaic of ethnic communities in loose coalition with each other? Covenant-making always forces us to ask, Who is included in the covenant? Who is excluded? And who are the invisible children cowering in the dark corners of this covenantal house? Our own American history can be seen as a continual expansion of our understanding of who is included in our covenant. The kind of covenant we make demands a definition of the people as well as of God.

Thirdly, the covenant formulas in the Bible usually recite the *history* of graciousness and gratitude bringing the people to this covenant. A covenant is motivated by relationships of indebtedness and gratitude rather than servility and obedience. It acknowledges that the people have become who they are through their historical encounter with a mysterious purpose. It may be a gratitude for liberation from slavery and oppression, or from hunger and disease. In a personal relation it may be gratitude for

resonate friendship and the escape from loneliness. In any case a willingness to commit ourselves to future obligations through covenant has to rest on a sense of the providential well-being we have experienced in our past. Only on this basis can we enter into a more binding relationship of trust.

Finally, in this covenant of trusting obligation we assume responsibility for administering the “land,” the “substance” we have received. Almost universally, this has involved land, from which springs the very necessities of life itself. But it also may involve something as intangible as freedom. The substance housed in this covenantal oikos could also be children, knowledge, and productive enterprise as well. The covenant consists not only of a web of trust held together in mutual confidence. It also, like any trust, has some distinct property, some “land,” which holds the people up in life.

### **Re-covenanting Our Oikos**

We need to identify the sense of God, of peoplehood, of history, and landed substance underlying our covenant-making. Then we need to turn to the task of making the covenants that shall cradle our future lives. Awareness of the oikos demands we turn to at least three types of covenants – personal, corporate, and public.

#### **Personal Covenants**

First we need to take a new look at our marital and parental covenants. We have moved from a situation where the “contract” of marriage was simply imposed on the spouses. They were to have and to hold in property relation, with all that entailed for the powers and rights of the husband and wife. Now, each couple formulates its own living contract, with the law and custom struggling willy-nilly in the rear.

At this point we are grappling with the question, What kind of covenant will best preserve the conditions for the substance of marriage – the sense of friendship and communion that have melded the two together as one? What covenant is most appropriate to their history as members of particular ethnic groups, churches, races, languages, and as custodians of bodies and memories? Where is the God, the ultimate sense of loyalty, in which their bond is grounded? These are all delicate and difficult questions, but each couple needs to address them and each community needs to discuss the patterns that have proven most trustworthy.

The covenant of marriage, however, has become distinct from the covenant of parenthood. When the oikos was tightly fused there was often little difference between the relation of father to wife and father to child. Women were seen as dependents all their lives. Today, however, the covenant of marriage is increasingly a relationship of equals to preserve a friendship. We are still groping for a sense of parental covenant that stands on

its own, regardless of marriage, divorce, death, remarriage and adoption. In the parental covenant we find the original pattern of care and dependency in God's relation with Israel and then the Church. Here we have to articulate most clearly the ultimate values we think worthy of passing on to another human being. Here we re-establish a sense of who we are in selecting those characteristics we wish to perpetuate. Here also we experience most poignantly the historic defeats, frustrations, and tragic rebellions that force us beyond our own strength and understanding.

The parental covenant is not merely a personal and private trust. When we look at the historic understanding of covenant, we are led to examine the way our own acts of parenting bind us in common concert with others. Parenting should not be an isolated and private burden of individuals, usually women, cut off from public support. Nor can we tolerate acts of parental abuse that deny our basic values as a people. How we respond to these kinds of needs expresses the covenant of parenting we take on as members of a people.

### **Corporate Covenants**

Corporations are central to the construction of our oikos today. They are the primary means for the creation of the wealth that we use and are to hold for future generations. They have enormous impact on our familial relations, public decision-making, and the value systems that orient our lives. Yet we see them only in the context of discrete contracts rather than in covenant responsibility with the whole oikos.

In response to greater public demands many corporations have developed codes of conduct to inculcate a higher level of ethical awareness into their corporate action. Moreover, corporations make a major community impact on communities through their charitable programs and foundations. Much more needs to be done, of course. Deep economic dislocations have ravaged family and community life – both in “sunset” and “sunrise” regions. We are in a time of immense changes in the relationship of corporations to families, communities, governments, and an emerging global order. The question before us is What kind of covenant do we want to forge for corporate relations with the whole oikos in the coming years? What covenant should a corporation make with its supporting communities? To what degree do employees enter a covenantal bond with a corporation that includes their families as well? What should be the relations between corporations and religious groups in the work of building a more just and plenteous community? These are the questions raised when we see that covenant concerns the total pattern of relationships binding together the oikos of our lives.

## **Public Covenants**

Finally, covenant embraces the sphere of public decision-making as well. In the development of our society the decisions that were once made by the paterfamilias about education, production, war, and domestic order became dispersed to many other areas. Overarching them all is the public sphere and the governments occupying it. It is essential for the vitality of public life that the covenantal bonds underlying it be strong and resilient or else governments will overwhelm it, dominate it, and finally tyrannize over us all. Their proper goal is to serve the public. Without an understanding of the covenant that defines the common good of this republic, we will be unable to judge how government is to serve us. The crucial task of covenant-making in our time is the recasting of this covenant.

This process must emerge out of our public discussion about who we are as a people, what our peculiar task is among our neighboring peoples, what are the just claims of all our members on the common weal and what can we all demand of each. What are our obligations to the eldest and feeblest, not only of this decade but of future generations? This is the kind of debate that must be fostered by the sense of covenant which lies in the marrow of our own history.

The Biblical idea of covenant has decisively shaped our history and offers us a way of understanding the web of trustworthy relationships constituting our oikos. It helps us move beyond the narrowly individualistic sense of contract that governs our economic life. By giving attention to the elements of God, peoplehood, history, and land, we can reshape our personal, corporate and public covenants in a more faithful way. That is the challenge of entering into a covenantal oikos today.

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### **For Reflection and Discussion**

Identify the covenants holding your oikos together. Would you like to change them? How?

Identify the way the four elements of covenant figure in your personal, corporate and public covenants.

Have you ever participated in covenant-making in your church, marriage or public life?

Imagine a covenant between your work organization and the other actors in the oikos.

## Crises and Conversions: Reshaping the Oikos

Bob Laughlin retires early with full benefits and finds himself wandering around the house. Juan Morales is the rising star at University Hospital. His wife has just asked him for a divorce. Fred Kunicki is trying out his third job in a year since his parents told him he had to get out on his own at 25. Marge Gilbert has begun her first full time job in the wake of a divorce after 20 years of marriage and motherhood. John Michaels has just entered studies for the ministry after 15 successful years in advertising.

These events happen all the time. We tend to be casual when they happen to others, traumatized when we face them ourselves. Getting a grip on these crises is a major task confronting all of us. Books like Gail Sheehy's *Passages: Predictable Crises of Adult Life* and Daniel Levinson's work, *Seasons of a Man's Life*, speak to this urgent need. In Sheehy's view men and women walk typical life paths through a series of predictable crises which challenge them to unfold more and more of their potential, authentic selves. For Levinson, life is a series of transitions in which people seek a deeper integration of their outer and inner selves. While both authors emphasize that basic changes in our lives involve a struggle with our work, marriages and families, their own descriptions often lose sight of this wider oikos. The deep changes in our lives begin to look like they are caused by our biology or psychology rather than by sharp changes in our world.

From a faith viewpoint these deep changes are the crucible of conversion. Unfortunately conversion has often been seen as the result of some cosmic or divine intervention from above that zaps us into being a totally different person. The experience of being born again causes us to focus on the image of a little baby who is completely uninvolved in the real life of corporations, careers, parenthood, or unemployment.

From the standpoint of the oikos, conversion means something different from this. Conversion is our response to the way God is transforming our oikos. God is not a supernatural agitator but a Settlor of a household and the Governor of history. This God is seeking to bring about an oikos of faithful relationships. This God has elected us to be citizens of a perfect republic. God will be faithful to this goal until it is finally realized, even if this demands a total re-creation of our world. The crises of our lives are therefore opportunities to seek a closer partnership with God in the rebuilding of the oikos of God.

Conversion is therefore a response to God's action. It is a response in which we seek greater coherence for our lives and firmer centering of our spirits. It is an effort at a more comprehensive integration of the elements of God's oikos.

Conversion is a response to changes in our oikos. Thus, it is not fundamentally a result of our age, sex, or logical development. Neither is it caused by the position of the

stars or the spots on the sun. It is a depth response to what is going on in our world, and for most of us our world is the bounds of our oikos.

Thus, to the resources offered by guides like Sheehy and Levinson, we need those provided by a faith perspective on the oikos. There are two kinds of changes most often challenging us to conversion. They are changes in the balance of our energies within the oikos and changes in the structure of our relationships in the oikos. In the remainder of this paper we will look at these kinds of changes.

## **Changes in the Balance**

### **From Home to Work**

One of the most frequent conversion challenges in our lives occurs when we leave the relative seclusion and security of the home to engage in work as an individual. For most of us this is a gradual process that occurs in the school system. Others experience it more abruptly. In either case, as we look back on this shift of focus we can often see that our whole attitude toward life has changed. We have moved from reliance on parents to reliance on the skills we offer the marketplace. We have moved from trust in familial face-to-face relations to impersonal, legal, contractual obligations in the corporation. We have moved from a God of tender intimacy in the home to God as the rational legislator and governor of the public world. The balance of our energies and commitments has shifted dramatically.

The crises of late adolescence and the early twenties are often created by this change in our oikos. How we negotiate them is one of the great challenges of our lives, especially in light of the enormous gap that separates these two aspects of the oikos in our own society. Many of us have floundered in this chasm, others have drowned. Hardly any of us have moved across it unscarred or untransformed. The God of the whole oikos challenges us here to bridge this river in such a way that we can maintain effective bonds with both sides.

### **From Family to Church**

Another form of this shift occurs when our loyalties move from family to church. While we usually associate this move with adolescence, it is a change that can happen to women and men at any time in life. The bonds of family become too oppressive, too limiting or too weak to allow for an adequate response to the God of the wider oikos. Churches, religious communities, and action groups offer space for devotion to a wider God. Conversion is the fire that breaks old bonds and welds new ones in an explicit association of faith.

This “religious attack on the family” goes back from the cults of today to Jesus' exhortation to “leave the dead to bury the dead... and follow me.” It offers a powerful moment of conversion in our lives.

### **Re-balancing “Family”**

Conversion away from family occurs for both women and men, though often at different times and in different ways. In our own radically differentiated oikos, it is one of the main paths of conversion for us. There is also another point of conversion that reflects the increasingly sharp differentiation among the elements of family itself – the person, the couple, the family, and the household.

As Sheehy, Levinson and others point out, divorce is a widespread moment of conversion in our lives. It is a death challenging us to conversion and inviting us to resurrection. In divorce we face the tearing apart of marriage from family, of self from marriage, of family from household. These elements, especially if we are parents, must find a new balance and relationship. We must seek to maintain parental bonds even as we sever those of marriage. For many women it means the conversion of energies from the old family to work as well as to new patterns of parenting. For many men it means the demolition of their assumption that parenthood and marriage were automatic supports for their individual performance in a detached workplace and career. For both it is a time for conversion or for chaos.

### **From Work to the Wider Oikos**

A less-recognized moment of conversion occurs when we shift our focus from work to family or church. Sometimes this occurs because of unemployment. Often with shocking suddenness we are thrown back into unaccustomed hours in the household. Other times it is the not unexpected transition of retirement, in which we have to re-imagine ourselves as a volunteer in church and community. Husbands underfoot at home and women searching for new public roles are challenged to conversion from a workplace identity to a more balanced faith among the other sectors of the oikos.

Sometimes this shift happens at the end of an initial period of investment in work and career. We reach a pause, a plateau, or a stopping place that requires us to re-examine our relation to work. This may be triggered by blocked opportunities in the workplace, other times by the departure of the last child from home. Changes in home life as well as challenges from the side of faith can cause a re-examination of work and a conversion to a new oikos.

This change in the balance between family and work often precipitates a new work commitment in the church or in community service. The ethical claims of corporate



responsibility or faith demands for integrity in the face of economic injustice force a conversion of our oikos. As a result some of us find “second careers” in ministry of various kinds. But the term “second career” may mask an even more fundamental conversion in the way we view work, career, and family. It may be a transformation in the way we understand our vocation to an oikos that is more comprehensive than a job or career.

These are all ways we shift our energies from one sector to another of the oikos. In each of them we face the challenge to a deeper conversion affecting our faith, vocation, and covenantal bonds. It can be a time of chaos and abandonment as the equilibrium of the old oikos collapses. It can also be a time for significant re-integration – a new pattern of trustworthy relationships that is more open to the God who governs all.

### **Changes in the Structure**

Changes in our oikos challenge us to conversion in another way as well. When we shift our focus among the three sectors of the oikos, we also experience different patterns of relationship. When we move from the parent-child relationships of the home we may gradually come to know about relationships among equals. This demands a conversion from dependency relations to peer relations among equals.

Much of the psychotherapy of our time has been devoted to helping people make this conversion from childhood to adulthood. Again, this conversion moment is not restricted to adolescence. It occurs whenever we move from family to work or to other public associations.

Similarly, the patterns of relationship we experience at work are ones we may try to bring with us to church. The professional models of rational decision-making, contracts, and personal detachment challenge models of religious community based on more emotional, communal and traditional bonds.

Similarly, the kinds of communal obligations we may be devoted to in church life can challenge us to conversion in the workplace. We may come to demand more community-mindedness from corporate life, more mutual accountability, and more attention to the sacred worth of each person in our work organizations. These are moments not only for personal conversion but for organizational conversion as well. They challenge us as individuals as well as corporations to rearrange the basic faith out of which we operate. That is what conversion is all about.

### **Making the Journey**

Changes in our oikos demand transformations in our faith. Sometimes these are changes in the balance of work, family, and religious association. Sometimes they are

changes in the basic model we use for relating to family members, fellow workers and our friends in faith. Making the journey through these changes is usually painful and always uncertain. It demands a death to an old pattern and birth to a new one.

To make this journey we need to talk with guides who have made a similar move, people we can trust. These are often hard to find, because we can't easily trust friends from our old oikos, yet we haven't yet settled into a new one. Sometimes we finally have to appeal to a friend in the spirit – whether it be Jesus, a saint, a distant hero, an Abraham or a Moses of other journeys.

Organizations also need spiritual guides and communities of support for the journey. Sometimes management consultants play this role of midwife. Professional associations can also provide the stimulus and guidance for the conversion. We also need to reach out to wider aids – community groups, trade associations, unions, and public agencies – to enable us to make the transition as corporations.

Conversion, then, is never an isolated dynamic, though we may feel isolated on the journey. It is a depth response to changes in our oikos. It demands an awareness of the relationships that are ending and beginning as well as of the deeply interior rebirth it asks of us.

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### **For Reflection and Discussion**

What have been the conversion moments of your life so far?

What changes did they make in your faith?

What were the wider changes in your oikos that precipitated your conversion?

What is your image of God? With what part of your oikos does it resonate – family, work, church, public life?

What has been your experience of guides for the conversion journey? How could we learn to play that role better for others?

What would it take to convert our industries from war to peace? From heavy industry to service and high-technology? From energy-intensive to people-intensive?

## **Vocational Loyalty and Spousal Bond**

Frank teaches in Pittsburgh. Elaine markets cosmetics in Detroit. They look forward to their weekends together. So do their two children.

Esteban works first shift. Maria works second shift so they can share the parenting tasks. They try to catch up on weekends, but church and the Little League take up their time.

Sheila has a chance to take a research sabbatical in Thailand, but Jack can't get that much time off from his bank. They have compromised by having Jack's mother move in for the year to help with the children. Jack and Sheila will have a vacation together in Singapore in January.

A few years ago these arrangements may have been as unusual as the absence of the sailor. Today they have become as commonplace as they are painful and difficult. They present us with new challenges in the ordering of our oikos.

In the traditional oikos spouses played tightly meshed roles in a common productive enterprise. Work and household occupied the same space. Though the husband and wife may have had distinct areas of work, they could see themselves as part of a naturally common life. This was true for most artisans as well as farmers and many small merchants.

With the enormous separation of work from family and household prevalent in our own time, spouses have to struggle to mesh their lives. They are not parts of a common oikos. They expend their energies in very separate spheres. What holds them together is not a dense web of household, work, place, and kin, but a more specialized sphere of raising children, house maintenance, and perhaps a common volunteer activity, such as a church or club.

What we have then is the development of two separate spheres -- one of work and one of marriage and family. In this paper we will highlight some of the issues that arise for work organizations and for couples in this situation, and explore the possible impact of a new sense of vocation for responding to them.

### **Vocation and Work**

The concept of vocation plays a decisive role here, not only in the development of faith-filled approaches to work, but also to marriage and family. On the work side it has motivated people to expend their principal energies in a work separated from the home. For some it has meant the dependable performance of a job with technical competence. We find this in Luther's original statement that the calling of a shoemaker is to make a good shoe.

For others it has meant the pursuit of a career with wider and wider responsibilities. This is typical of people who see themselves as professionals. In its most secular form we call it careerism.

Still others have been motivated by a sense of calling to build an enterprise that might be a living witness to their vision and abilities. This is the vocational sense of the entrepreneur who opens up new markets, develops new products, and responds successfully to the demands of clients and consumers. It was a sense of calling that produced J. C. Penney, Thomas Edison, and William Danforth as well as Andrew Carnegie and David Rockefeller. Today it is expressed by the millions of loyal company people who gain their sense of vocation through service to a firm they believe in.

All of these are differing impacts of the sense of vocation motivating people's work and giving it meaning. Each one has a different impact on people's construction of their personal oikos.

### **Vocation and Marriage**

Vocation has also been important to the definition of marriage. In Roman Catholic tradition, until quite recently, to have a “vocation” meant precisely to give up marriage and procreation for the sake of church leadership and spiritual witness. Marriage was a secular “state” which gained religious meaning in so far as it served the Church through offerings, sacramental participation, and the preparation of children who might have a call to church service. Though fallen, the marriage relation could be redeemed by its bond with the Church. In Lutheran churches, however, marriage was a relationship in which believers were to express the fruits of faith – trust, patience, love, and fidelity. The spousal relationship was an arena for cultivating and expressing trust in God.

In Calvinist traditions marriage was usually seen as an instrument for transforming the world. Response to God's call was not so much a call to cultivate certain virtues in marriage or to serve the Church, but to use it as an instrument of God's wider transforming activity. The classic expression of this is the missionary and ministerial couple. It also appears in many other religious movements today, such as the largely Catholic Christian Family Movement. In this kind of marriage the marital bond is constituted by the couple's response to a common call.

Still others have found their marital response to God's call in the decision to bond together with other couples in a communal life. Here we find a response with strong echoes of the traditional, tightly integrated oikos of ancient Israel and the early Church. As Mennonites, Hutterites, and the new communal movements of our own time, they have always been a peculiar but powerful witness.

## From Familial Vocation to Marital Communion

When marriage is seen as a kind of vocation it gains a value that begins to rival that of the workplace or church. It attracts more of our energy and asks to play a bigger role in our oikos. On the other hand, the more our work, whether as job, career, enterprise or company, fills our vocational vision, it demands to have a bigger share of our oikos. In both cases these two protagonists for the vocational crown seem to usurp the commitment formerly reserved for the monastery and church. Each one seeks the full loyalty originally found in the household called to serve God.

For most men the call of career defines the vocation for their entire oikos. Not only is their own sense of ultimate worth defined by their career position, but it greatly affects the life opportunities of their spouse and children. Health insurance, pensions, housing, education, and even religious and political affiliation can hang on the peg of our career. However, over the past 20 years this pattern has begun shifting. Over 60% of working age women are now working outside the home. Most of these work to supplement family income, but an increasing number are equal providers to the family or are following an independent career call. They are on an equal footing economically and sometimes have equally strong calls to a career outside the home and family.

As long as the wife felt called to a maternal role in the home, the career call addressed to the husband did not rob the oikos of its vocational aura. However, when both feel called to a public role the faith image undergirding marriage and family shifts. We are less able to think of our marriage as a calling. It becomes an intimate friendship binding us in communion. It is this tension between marital communion and public career that forms the problem for an increasing number of couples today.

In order to understand this tension we need to recognize that with vocation, our lives are seen as roles played in the drama of God's redemptive and creative activity. This is even true in the secularized versions of a career sailing the stormy seas of invisible and mysterious market forces.

When marriage was tightly tied into the administration of an oikos of children, animals, and implements, playing a role was quite appropriate for the maintenance of the marital bond embedded in that network. To be married was to have a specific standing and role. It was not merely to be a wife, but to be a housewife. It was not merely to be the man, but to be a husband (“house-bound”), with all the overtones of agricultural care that term conveys.

However, to play a role in the marriage relationship is precisely not what marital communion demands. It demands the shedding of roles and the expression of our innermost vulnerable selves. It is built on personality rather than duties. In the emotional welding together of two similar people as sexual friends we find the bond of true marriage – of marriage that survives beyond the performance of roles as worker, parent, church member, and

citizen. This communion requires constant nurture, not by solidifying the roles we play in the wider oikos, but by intimate conversation. It requires that we treat our bodies and our relationship not, as an instrument for work and procreation but as an expression of our response to each other.

In this case the demands of vocation in work and communion in marriage come into conflict. It is this particular conflict that forms the focus of this paper. These conflicts affect us at our deepest level. How we seek to resolve them has an enormous impact not only on our marriages but on our work as well.

### **Vocation versus Communion: Patterns of Tension**

How we experience these tensions varies from situation to situation and is affected by the intensity with which we are seized by loyalty to a work vocation or to our marital communion.

Couples are tied into the workplace in various ways. Some share a load of providing income for the family, which is really their primary loyalty. Some of these are co-providers, each indispensable to the income needs of the family. In most cases, even today, the husband is a primary provider and the wife a supplementary one. This is mirrored in the way the mother is probably the primary parent and the father an auxiliary one.

The more the role of provider is weighted to one spouse, the more likely they are to have a marital bond in which they perform roles in distinct spheres. Communion is subordinate to vocation, principally the husband's vocation. As Jane Hood has pointed out in *Becoming a Two-Job Family*, the more the providers are equally indispensable, the more they tend toward a companionate marriage. The religious symbol of communion is most appropriate to this marital form.

However, just as this more equal involvement in providing income favors a greater attention to communion in marriage, it produces new instability. Job holding for the sake of the household gives way to personal advance in a career and loyalty to a profession. The job that served family needs begins to serve a call beyond the family, one that easily becomes antagonistic to the demands of marital communion. This is the experience of the dual-career couple.

Here we have not merely a tension between a call to work and a commitment to home. We have two calls to two divergent works – whether as career or corporate commitment. Couples in this situation often find themselves bonded through a complex set of roles for taking care of the house and raising the children rather than through an immediate communion with each other. If procreation and householding become substitutes for marital communion, these spouses, who otherwise possess the equality of power necessary for true communion, fall into estrangement and conflict when the children are gone.

Corporate practices have tended to aggravate this situation by hindering spouses from working together. After the introduction of professional management practices at the end of the nineteenth century, corporations strove to rid themselves of the cross-cutting loyalties of family bonds. They instituted strict anti-nepotism laws so that Uncle George could not give special treatment to Aunt Lucille. This “rationalization” of business had many positive goals in terms of efficiency and public justice. However, it also further undermined the bonds of family loyalty that cradle our intimate fortunes.

Today, however, when the family is no longer part of a clan and the children may live hundreds of miles away, anti-nepotism policies can be relaxed in order to promote a more coherent oikos for employees and also to further the basis for the bonds of marital communion.

Marital communion cannot be sustained as a purely emotional, unworldly bond. It must finally be incarnated in some vocational and covenantal body. However, it seeks a pattern of living that will honor the mutuality and equality inherent in the bond of intimate sexual friendship. Marital communion thus demands a restructuring of the total oikos. Its basic demand is that work be arranged in such a way that it honors not only the needs for parenting but the needs for nurturing the spousal bond. How can this be done?

Basically, it requires that couples share a work that goes beyond their parental calling. This may involve sharing an enterprise, as has been the case in farming and small retail trade. Here the only adjustment is in the way these family businesses are organized in order to be an equal partnership. To this has been added opportunities in all areas of educational service and public relations. Couples can have a joint calling as independent entrepreneurs.

Secondly, we begin to see ways that couples might share a position and with it a career. Clergy couples exemplify this trend, but it is also beginning to occur in education and social service. The next step would be to enable couples to share jobs in corporations. Some firms have already experimented with enabling employees to share jobs. Why not extend this to couples?

Even when a couple do not share directly in a job, they can share in an occupation, company, or career. Here, the food for marital discussion may not be the job itself but their common occupational world. In this case, what seems to be important for marital communion is that they share in similar organizational patterns. The communication patterns between women and men at work should be brought into line with those appropriate for equals in a marriage, even though one is a public forum of respect and the other a private sphere of intimacy. It is very hard to be trained in steep hierarchies in the workplace, especially ones that subordinate women to men, and then act in an egalitarian way in marriage. Couples will have to come to terms with this tension in a way appropriate to their own values, but it is a question that must be addressed.

These are some ways that the need for marital communion demands alterations in the way we work – both in its timing and its structure. Communion changes the way we pursue the call to career.

Not only is the way we organize our vocation altered, but the way we see vocation has to be reoriented toward the whole oikos of our life and not merely to a segment of it. God calls a “household,” but it is the whole ensemble of home, family, work, and marriage. By refocusing our religious concept of vocation onto our whole oikos we can begin to redeploy our energies in a more balanced way toward the various aspects of our oikos and not merely to that which occurs at the workplace. This is a challenge not only to us as individuals and couples, but also to the organizations where we work.

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### **For Reflection and Discussion**

Describe your typical communication pattern at work and in your marriage. How do they affect each other?

Where are the biggest tensions between the demands of your work, your marriage, your parenting, and your church and community life? What personal and structural changes need to be made in order to integrate your oikos more satisfactorily?

What policies govern employment of spouse and family members at your workplace? Should they be changed?

What differences do men and women have in their sense of vocation? How does this affect the way they participate in a common oikos?



## Management in Faith Perspective

In "Faith in the Oikos" we pointed out that faith is a pattern of supremely trustworthy relationships. Faith is a pattern of fidelity to God and others. That means that if we are to look for our real faith we will find it in the web of relationships that really empowers our lives – whether at work, at church, or in our families. This was driven home vividly in an interview with a president of a manufacturing firm that was organized with a very “flat” management structure. The ratio of highest to lowest salary was about five to one, with managerial offices directly adjacent to the shop floor. The firm was in fact owned by the management and employees. They all met every few months to discuss the financial status of the company and any other issue that any member wanted to address.

I wanted to know where this dedication to a democratic style of management had come from. Was it from his church? No, it was hierarchical. Was it from American life generally? Maybe, in some vague way. Maybe from some other vital experience? After a few other exchanges, we touched on his experience in Marriage Encounter programs, which stress couple communication. “That's it!” he exclaimed. “I try to communicate at work in the same way I have learned through 12 years of Marriage Encounter.”

The pattern of communication about important issues between equals had formed his “faith” – his pattern of supremely trustworthy relationships. His management structure and style were an attempt to embody this model in another part of his oikos, even when his church stood for a different pattern altogether.

This faith is not only a pattern of trustworthy relationships. It is emotionally grounded in these bonds of trust. Faith is more than a set of detached “values” to be achieved. In this manager's case, appeal to American democracy, while perhaps appropriate, had nothing of the emotion connected with the communication pattern of his marriage. There lay the root of his operative faith.

A faith perspective on management highlights the web of emotionally grounded relationships of trust underlying any management pattern. The rise of such an awareness has been heralded by recent developments in managerial theory. Many of the current trends in management have been stressing the importance of values in an organization. We have moved from the view that management simply serves to achieve objectives to one in which managers are to clarify and inculcate values. We have moved from goal seeking to value steering. Without a clear set of common values a complex organization loses cohesion, direction and motivation.

This is an important move toward grasping a fuller understanding of the way relationships work – whether at work or in the home. In this view the manager moves from being a taskmaster to being a steward of values. However, our understanding of relationships from a faith standpoint demands that we see that underlying all these “values” is actually a “faith.”

People who talk about the “corporate culture” of an organization seem to be getting at the same thing. By speaking of it as a “faith,” however, we can illuminate the way it is a pattern of loyalty and trust that empowers our lives. This approach also enables us to bring in the other aspects of faith explored in previous OIKOS Papers – concepts like stewardship.

Stewardship, like covenant, points to the fuller oikos of relationships knitting people together. Life is not simply a matter of achieving individual values but of participating in a network of trustworthy relationships. The current managerial stress on values and culture is helpful, but not enough. We need to see through these impersonal values to the underlying web of trust we call faith.

### **Faith: The Patterns**

Faith is both a pattern and a planting. It is a genetic pattern of relationships giving shape to our life. It is also a seed that needs to be planted somewhere in order to grow and give life. The organizations in which we live, worship and work give us both these faith patterns and the soil in which they can flower.

First, we need to identify some of the basic kinds of patterns which are faith alternatives for us. They are the market, the public, the marriage and the congregation. Let's look at each of these as a kind of faith calling for our commitment.

#### **The Market**

The faith of the market is a faith that the exchange process between people with goods and credits will eventuate in what is best for everyone. Marketplace faith sees life in terms of exchanges between autonomous individuals (or corporations) who seek advantages from each other. The basic faith of the market appears in the centrality of the contract for human relationships. Through contractual negotiation each party is most likely to maximize its satisfaction.

Our purpose here is neither to extol nor vilify the market model, but to identify it as a kind of faith which claims our allegiance to various degrees and in various ways. This is our intention with our description of the other faiths competing for our loyalty.

#### **The Public**

The public is an open arena of debate about decisions affecting all the participants. Matters of common concern are lifted into the light of shared examination, critique, and persuasion until a decision is reached by commonly agreed upon procedures. This process appears in any kind of public debate, but especially in the formal setting of court and congress.

The public as a faith pattern, however, can extend into any sphere where people seek to form relationships based on participation, argument, discussion, and an open sharing of information. It is a faith that believes that out of this public argument will arise a truth that will bind the people together in common accord, just as the market bound them together in reciprocal satisfaction.

### **Marriage**

Marriage as a faith has already been dramatically lifted up in our introductory example. Here we find a faith based on an intimate trust far removed from the market or even the public. It is rooted in a mutual sharing which creates an emotional bond where each is willing continually to sacrifice for the other because they are pledged together for life.

Of course, there are even different faith patterns by which people approach marriage. They may not be the intimate partnership we have just described. Moreover, the relationship of parent and child is different from this. The inequality of status between parents and children has also often been used in politics as well as industry to justify hierarchy and paternalism. We would do well to see the ways these family faith patterns influence the rest of our oikos. At this point, however, we are lifting up a peculiarly strong marital dynamic as a kind of faith which we might hold to be supreme in our lives.

### **Congregation**

Finally, we mention the congregation, by which we mean an assembly organized for divine service through worship and action. Every church or religious association has its faith – not merely in some set of doctrines and beliefs, but in the way people are organized within them. Some congregations seek guidance from a Spirit that can speak through any member. Others are presided over by a priest who executes powerful symbolic actions. Others turn to the Bible and the words of a preacher and teacher. There are many combinations of these. Each one cultivates a disposition toward a particular way of doing things – toward a faith – which then seeks to permeate other relationships as well.

The congregation is distinguished by its focus on a transcendent source of power, worth, and nurture. Relationships within the congregation are explicitly structured with respect to God. People are bound together not only by exchange of favors, by a rational search for truth, or by the intimate bonds of marriage and family. They also come together by a common allegiance to a God who declares them each ultimately important and also responsible to each other. A concern for the whole person is thus tied to a respect for each as God's own.

Market, public, marriage, and congregation are distinct patterns of faith. They are different relationships in which we place our highest trust. They all develop emotional bonds that elicit our devotion and lead us "to carry these patterns into other areas. We seek to apply this faith in every sector of our organized life.

### **Faith: The Planting**

This desire to generalize our faith pattern leads us to the theme of planting. Our basic faith grows up in a certain garden of experience, whether it be work life, marriage, public affairs, or religious activity. We then begin to propagate it. We plant it elsewhere and seek to make it grow. We are then confronted with the question, how extensive is this faith's impact? Where else can it grow and flourish?

We then have to ask, Does the encounter of marriage stay within the bounds of the family? Or do we find ways to let it permeate our work or our church life? If it does become a more extensive faith that permeates our whole oikos, do we find ourselves imposing it in an inappropriate way? The same can be said for patterns nourished in the other gardens of our life.

For instance, for many years "Management By Objective" was a very popular approach to management. Impressed with this managerial experience people started applying it to family life, personal career planning, and church administration. It became the real faith of parents, pastors, and teachers as well as managers. However, then its limits became apparent as it began to violate values crucial to other parts of our oikos. An intense faith had become more extensive, but then revealed itself as only a partial faith arising from one fragment of the whole oikos – one governed by the market model.

Work life has also given us the pattern of the work team, the quality circle, and the management group. Here the bond of the small group working cooperatively energizes the organization and accomplishes its goals. Consequently the team concept (originally derived of course from sports) turned up in pastoral teams, committee teams, and even the family as a team. Here faith consists in the trust that competition that occurs within certain rules can bring out our cooperative best. The limits of this model will also be uncovered as we discover the frailty of our rules and the hostility cultivated in our competitiveness.

Similarly, the very concept of ministry often finds extension into people's conception of their work. Administration calls out for some of the nurturing, mentoring, and ongoing cultivation characteristic of the pastoral role. Motivation at work is raised when people can see ways that their work is some kind of a ministry beyond strictly market calculations. Moreover, within the family we find couples talking about their ministry with and to each other – a ministry that extends even to their parenting. And here too we come across limits, whether they be those of a paternalistic infringement on personal rights within the business or the professionalization of marital roles which then kills the free intercourse between the spouses.

These are only a few of the ways that a pattern which arises in one sector of our oikos becomes planted in other areas – with positive as well as negative results. Each of us can look at our own life and the organizations we live in for ways that this process goes on constantly as we seek to integrate our lives within a common faith.

In discovering our operative faith – both its pattern and its planting – we come up against the major challenge we face in our highly differentiated and often fragmented oikos. What kind of faith will help us to integrate these various spheres of our life – as individuals and as a people? These alternative patterns of management, family life, and religious association are all real faiths. Yet they are also partial. They are fragments of a whole.

Because the whole oikos was originally the bearer of faith, we cannot shrink from the task of once again cultivating some underlying faith that can find visible expression in appropriate ways in every corner of our oikos. Only then can we really become people of faith – people with integrity who participate in a network of mutual trust.

We live in a tension between the nostalgic desire to return to the fused oikos of our ancestors and the exhilarating freedom of the complex oikos. The fused oikos, with one managerial form, resonates with our desire for integration. But the differentiated oikos is the home of our personal freedom. Thus, finding our faith demands weaving together a complex network among family members, churches, work organizations, and communities, not to mention the land that sustains us all.

In this situation the concept of covenant has gained increasing popularity as a kind of integrating symbol, for it allows for the relative independence of participants but also demands that they enter into a solemn trust with each other that knits them together in an economy of mutual salvation.

From the perspective of the oikos, management is a pattern of faith that arises out of the patterns and values empowering our domestic and faith life as well as our work. Management from a faith perspective cannot be conceived within an isolated workplace removed from these sources of our life. Therefore, the management of work must take account of these other gardens of our faith. Not only do our institutions need to take account of this rich interweaving of faiths, we also as individuals, couples, families, and small groups must find ways to weave together a faith by which we can better manage our lives. It is a stewardship that binds us not only to one another in community but to the God that finally knits together the fabric of our lives.

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### **For Reflection and Discussion**

How would you describe the trustworthy pattern of relationships which is your faith?

What are the competing faiths that produce the most tension in your life?

How have the market, the public, marriage or the assembly formed your faith?

Do you ever see yourself as a manager of your faith? Where does this faith find its most intense focus?

How extensive is this faith to other parts of your oikos? What other important values limit its application to other sectors of your life?

How does your role at work differ from that at home or at church? Where are the points of tension? Where are the points of possible resonance?

How much of the oikos is taken into consideration in managerial decisions or policies in your workplace?

## **Parenting in Corporate Culture**

The demands of corporate life make an enormous impact on the way we raise children. The requirements of mobility uproot children from friends, schools and churches. Career ambitions remove fathers, and increasingly mothers, from their children's call. Day care becomes a vexing problem demanding ingenuity and commitment from businesses, churches and parents alike.

No matter how we deal with these problems, we are always confronted with how we shall in fact exercise our parental roles. How shall we relate to our children once we do claim the time and place? That is the concern of this OIKOS Paper.

A short story might illustrate some of this problem. A friend of ours was immersed in the latest parenting techniques. He was quite committed to a rational approach to raising his children according to contracts. One day his daughter wanted to go to school in late October without her coat. He remonstrated with her, holding that she ought to wear a coat, because the forecast was for cold weather. She held her ground, so he contracted with her that she would have to bear the consequences of being cold. She agreed. It turned out that her class went to a pumpkin farm that day. She caught cold and had to stay home from school for a few days. Her father had to rearrange his schedule to care for her. That was the last we ever heard him extol the use of contracts in parenting.

This incident raises to our awareness the way in which our parenting is influenced by behavior we learn at work. Fathers are especially influenced, but to an increasing extent so are mothers. Rationality, task performance, contracts, scheduling, planning, and reward systems developed in organizations often find their way into the little organization of the household. Sometimes they are helpful. Sometimes, as in our little story, they are not.

This is not a one-way street, however. As with all relations in the oikos, influences go the other way as well. In this paper we will trace the way patterns of management and patterns of parenting influence each other. Then we will add to that some religious patterns and show how they can provide a resource for developing an appropriate parental perspective in corporate culture.

### **Managerial Parenthood**

Management patterns have always resonated easily with parental ones, because both contained relationships between superiors and subordinates. The hierarchical command structure of the traditional industrial organization was easily transported into large families where sheer size made it necessary for parents to run their household like a factory or an army. Commands passed on down the line from parent to older child, to

middle child, and on down to the baby, who scolded the cat in turn. People grew up in such households well prepared for life in a large bureaucracy.

In such a hierarchy there was little concern for what we call feedback. Commands were obeyed. The parents, like the boss, steered the ship from the top deck. However, when family patterns became more complex, when routines were broken down by school programs, car use, fast food jobs, and changing shift work, greater communication was needed up and down the line. Parents and children had to consult more.

Organizations, faced with similar problems, began to call for more feedback. Elaborate organizational flow charts were developed showing who needed to consult with whom about what. Families responded with family councils. Parents listened to their children and started negotiating more.

At the same time smaller families enabled parents to be more intimate with their children. They moved from verbal commands and messages to more subtle emotional communication and, we should say, manipulation. Just as families and households became smaller, businesses also began to recognize the need for more of a team approach. Organizations sought greater operational decentralization, even as they grew larger legally and financially. Contracts around goal setting and planning began to define managerial life. Parents transmitted this pattern into household life, as did our friend for his daughter. Parenting through rational contract remains today as a powerful model for many parents.

Most recently, organizations have come to emphasize the need for leadership through clarification and inculcation of key guiding values. Neither clear commands from the top nor specific contracts among teams is enough. Organizations must be motivated, held together, and guided by clear common values. As we said earlier, the manager emerges as a steward of values.

We expect we will soon see a family version of this emerge, in which the main role of parents is to enunciate clear key values for the family and seek to inculcate them through specific family rituals and activities. In a sense, then, parenting models would have come full circle, to a position where the parents are priests of the family tradition – shades of the original oikos! This development alerts us to ways that religious patterns influence parenting. We will get back to that in a moment after showing ways that family patterns influence management.

## **Parental Management**

We tend to be more familiar with the ways parenting patterns have influenced management. The paternalism of older hierarchies is famous, because it combined complete control with opportunities for compassion. This made it possible for men to exercise the same role at work as at home – as long as they were the chief. For the vast



majority of men, however, it meant that work was an experience of a juvenile dependency they no longer experienced at home, though often found in their relationships with wives whom they treated as mothers or daughters.

The rise of professional management sought to eliminate these vestiges of the home. Decisions were to be made according to rational and objective criteria. Management-labor agreements sought to eliminate arbitrary paternalism, and increasingly complex organizational patterns made any simple authoritarianism more difficult.

However, we still recognize a more subtle form of parenting in work life. Many people recognize the need for a patron to assist one's advance in the organization. The lack of a patron can nullify any advantages gained by education or expertise.

More recently, there has been considerable discussion of our need for mentors in work life. Here, the parental role still found in the patron is combined with that of the teacher. A mentor, however, is not merely a teacher, but one who helps develop the outlook and habits to succeed in a career. The mentor, like the patron, has contacts and can open doors, but even more importantly can provide the emotional training and support of a parent in the organization. The mentor emerges just as our own parents recede in their ability to guide us into a work life. It is this surviving need for parenting within work life that continues to re-emerge, whether as patron, mentor, father, mother, or older brother or sister.

Not only do students of management recognize this need for nurture beyond skill development. They also turn to religious notions like that of the priest to talk about an organization's need for someone who can clarify and transmit traditions to new generations of congregants. The 'priest,' as Terrence Deal and Allan Kennedy point out in *Corporate Cultures*, remembers the organization's story -- narratives that convey the models and values of esteemed life in a dramatic form. People are thereby invited and initiated into the roles of the corporate drama. The existence of this religious figure in our work life opens up the question of how religious models affect our parenting as well.

### **Religious Leadership and Parental Management**

Styles of parenting have also been heavily influenced by religious roles. Some families are focused on the word of the parent. Here the mother or father is a prophet declaring the plumbline of judgment for children's actions. In a softer version the parent becomes a teacher of some kind, helping the child to become rational and literate in the ways of life.

The parent can also appear as a kind of priest who focuses on the need for a stable ritual of family life, clear values, and attachment to key symbols integrating the family – whether they are a reverent care for the bird feeder or a daily reading of the newspaper.

Holidays and meals, of course, figure prominently in this approach to parenting.

The religious leader as a seer, mystic, or catalyst can produce a form of parenting in which the parent seeks to be an enabler. The parent assists the child in discovering mysteries which are new for each generation. Parents inspire children by encouraging them to explore the unique character of their experience.

Each of these religious forms also finds its way into work organizations, but we have to leave that up to readers at this point in order to move to the way in which we might find some additional aids from faith for our parenting. We are not only concerned with how religious roles can be models for parenthood. We also want to understand this unique parental relationship from the standpoint of faith. To do that we turn once again to the central symbol of covenant.

### **The Parental Covenant**

The idea of covenant continually re-emerges as helpful in our approach to problems of knitting our oikos together, because it brings together themes of faith, stewardship, and vocation so central to the historic oikos. Here it is helpful to realize that the original form of God's covenant with Israel and then with the church is a parental one. God originates the covenant, just as the parents originate the child. God goes on pursuing the covenant in spite of Israel's and the Church's rebellion and mistrust. So does the parental covenant endure in spite of the children's behavior. Finally, God's love and faithfulness toward this chosen people provides a grounding of acceptance that makes it possible for us to love in turn. Similarly, parental nurture is indispensable to our own ability to love others.

The parental covenant is uniquely religious then, even in a way that the marital covenant between spouses is not. What does it offer to our understanding of parenting in a world influenced so heavily by corporate cultures?

First, it moves us beyond a strictly contractual understanding of the parent-child relationship. There is something to be transmitted to the child from the superior position of the adult. Parenthood is in some way an act of seeking to replicate the treasures of our experience in the next generation. It is an act of transmitting a heritage rather than negotiating a contract. In a highly differentiated or fragmented oikos parents are challenged to search for new ways to lead their children into God's covenant with the entire oikos.

Second, since God's covenant is rooted originally in the totality of the oikos, the parental covenant seeks to relate children to the world of productive work as well as religious depth. It is a covenant to lead the child out into the full oikos of faith. One of our central problems in parenthood is that our children do not learn about work through the emotionally charged bonds of family life. Work loyalties cannot be constructed through the family. That task has been assigned to the schools, which cannot do their

work of socialization effectively because they cannot be parents for their students. Finally, the workplace, which has assiduously sought to divest itself of parental marks, finds only the resources of market incentives for enlisting people's motivation. Ironically, this only accentuates the circulation of workers in the “free” marketplace of labor. In our time the covenant of parenthood calls us to find ways to enable parents to lead their children into work life – a process demanding institutional as well as personal changes in our life.

Thirdly, this covenant is not an excuse for parental arbitrariness or despotism, for it is a trust held from God. The parent receives the child in trust. The child does not belong to the adult, but to God. This may help relieve us of some of the sense of total responsibility we often feel. It also gives us a kind of framework within which to curb our own inclinations to reduce our parenting strictly to a one-on-one relation with a child apart from the wider covenanted oikos.

Finally, as a covenant embedded in the entire oikos, it encourages us to share our parental responsibilities with others – cooperative nurseries, relatives, friends, churches, schools, and even work organizations. It belongs in some sense to all adults, single or married. Parenthood as a covenantal task leads us to see it in this broader context of the community of faith. However, this is not an excuse for delegating authority but for sharing it. Parenting can help us knit together the fragmented oikos of our time by involving all of us, whether as businesses, schools, churches, or homes, in the tasks and joys of parenthood.

The models for guiding and motivating our parenting arise out of our search for a consistent pattern of faith for approaching all our relationships within the oikos. We need to be aware of the connections among the ways we are organized for parenting, working, and believing. Within this richness we are called to construct a covenant of parenthood which can lead us out of our family into the whole oikos of God.

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### **For Reflection and Discussion**

How has your parenting been influenced by corporate policies and values?

Which parenting styles described here are most visible in your own approach?

What parental styles are visible in your own workplace? How has your work organization dealt with people's needs for ongoing parental care?

What religious model has most influenced your parenting?

How would you describe the parental covenant you were raised in and the one you have with your own children?

In what ways can your parental tasks be shared better with the other members of your oikos?

What is the role of single people in the parental covenant of the entire oikos?

## **Managing the Church**

Pastor Melli was confused and angry. After laboring for months over his long-range planning proposal for religious education, he had seen the council demolish it with a bombardment of arguments. What had gone wrong? He had carefully set forth the goals and objectives for the educational program after consulting with the Director and the Education Committee. He had made sure as much of a cross section as possible was present in the council. And the specific strategies had flowed clearly from the goals. Instead of a reasonable consensus, the group had exploded in his face with a confused wrangle, only half of which seemed to bear on the substance of the proposal.

Maurice Johnson had supported him. His years in city planning probably gave him a better grasp of this kind of thing. But Deborah Quinney, very concerned about children, had waffled and gone off on a tangent. John Eaglesworth, a veteran of the council, had simply failed to warm up to the process. And Jane Danek had simply asserted that the people would not support it. She felt the whole matter was done in an “illegitimate manner.”

Clearly, some factors he had not accounted for had sabotaged the plan, even though it had all the earmarks of careful professionalism. Indeed, John Barker had enthusiastically embraced it precisely for that reason. But he wasn't able to carry anybody with him. Clearly Pastor Melli had come upon some dynamics that didn't fit the pattern of church decision-making he was accustomed to. The problem seemed to lie more in people's basic attitude toward the council's deliberations than in any specific aspect of the proposal. That made it even harder to get hold of.

Something had gone on in this process that couldn't be seen through the filter of church administration which he had learned in his advanced pastoral studies. Perhaps another filter was needed -- one that could be supplied by the perspective of the oikos.

### **The Faces of the Fragmented Oikos**

Further reflection on Pastor Melli's part turned his attention to the attitudes the members had brought to the council from their life situations. From the standpoint of the oikos, each person was trying to put together a coherent and consistent approach to human relationships from his or her various involvements in marriage, home, work, and community affairs. The church had become a mine-field of conflicting expectations about “the right order of things.”

For Maurice Johnson the planning process had been a thoroughly understandable and legitimate process because of his long commitment to the profession of planning. But why had Al Nikkelsohn, a banker, resisted? It was not simply the costs involved.

Actually, what seemed at work is that Al felt that the church should be very different from a work organization like a bank. The church should be entirely separate from economics. That is what he believed in – the separation of church and economics. For him, the church should be more like the kind of family he had grown up in. The Pastor should be like a paterfamilias, who decided in his wisdom what should happen.

But Pastor Melli had not approached this decision like a fatherly householder. He had taken his signals from the most current business models of planning and decision-making. Clearly, some people simply couldn't associate this with their idea of church order. It seemed too “secular.”

Take Deborah Quinney. What was bothering her? She had spent a great deal of time in child development centers. Didn't the proposal take that into account? As a basic concept it did, but what had been overlooked is that Deborah, in her own work as a therapist, was committed to the spontaneous interaction possible in small growth groups. Binding, long range plans to organize the changing variety of people in the church didn't take account of what she might have called, in religious terms, the “moving of the spirit.”

Jane Danek's sharp judgment about the legitimacy of the process must have been rooted in some fragment of the oikos outside the church as well. It seemed like a legal or political criticism. Indeed, Jane was deeply involved in the “fringe politics” of the community – workers' rights groups and the sanctuary movement for refugees. For solutions to problems Jane instinctively turned to politics and voluntary associations. Her commitments there probably led her to expect the same of the church as of politics – that it be highly democratic. The plan was illegitimate in her eyes because it had been devised by experts, rather than welling up from “people's real needs,” as she so often put it.

What about John Eaglesworth – the opposite end of the spectrum from Jane? He had always supported the leadership, almost blindly Melli thought. Why had he folded? After looking down the list, it became clear that John's life revolved around what the others called “the old guard.” While John had been involved in the council's deliberations, he himself was not the group's mind or representative, and they had not been consulted, since Pastor Melli looked at the program as primarily aimed at the parents and children, forgetting that John's friends saw themselves as the grandparents of the congregation's children. They wanted a role, but the plan couldn't accommodate their vision of being a grandparent and passing on their stories, crafts, and recipes within their families and homes, not in a church program. Being a grandparent for them took place at home. Pastor Melli's plan had not taken into account either their sense of role in the congregation or their conception of grandparenthood.

## **Facing the Fragments**

Each of these people had brought a different set of expectations about how the church should be organized – some from business and professional life, some from their families and homes, others from politics. It was in this cross-fire of people's life orientations that Pastor Melli's plan had been shot down.

Indeed, these dynamics are at work all the time in the church, though not always focused so intensely. Whether consciously or not, people expect the church's pattern of managing its life to reflect their own oikos - the way they manage their wider life. Some desire the church to be like a family – nuclear, extended, or over-extended. Others seek professionalism or the rational planning of a business corporation. For some, the church is actually a kind of union arrayed against the overlords of the earth. For many others it is to be like a nurturing mother or a therapist.

Jane Danek presents us with a further challenge. For her the church should be like a political organization, and a special kind at that. From the oikos perspective we have to remember that the public sphere grew up to coordinate and integrate the various fragments of the oikos. It inherited, though often in a truncated form, the original tasks of religion to hold the oikos together. To the degree that the religious process of life integration now revolves around government, people often want the two spheres to be organized in the same manner. Such a connection makes sense, but only adds further complexity to Pastor Melli's task.

## **Toward Identification and Integration**

Pastor Melli, like most ministers, has to find a way to manage the church with a clear awareness of its ties to the broader oikos without having the church torn apart by the contrary loyalties of people who emerge from its various fragments. He has to find a way to acknowledge the tendencies people have to view him as father, statesman, manager, planner, professional, politician, and son. He has to find a way to accommodate the kinds of patterns that are actually moving people's lives without giving away the church's unique commitments to a more inclusive, integrated life.

The first step in this direction is simply to identify the oikos out of which each person comes. Usually, these can be grouped together to form a collective portrait or mosaic. Helping people become aware of how the church as an organization fits into their own oikos can help them focus more clearly on the confusing and often conflicting dynamics of church meetings, decisions, and their execution.

This process of identification can help individuals, families and groups work on the tensions in their own lives. It can also help the church to begin moving toward an image of itself that can relate to the many oikoi of its members as well as to its own faith.

At that point the church can see how different parts of the church often pursue different models of management because of the oikos of their members. The finance committee often cannot hear the education or worship committee, not necessarily because they exercise different functions but because their members come out of a different oikos. Each denomination, in fact, has implicit in its organizational pattern a dominant model drawn from a particular oikos or from the political order that tries to coordinate its parts, whether that be the patriarchal family of Roman Catholicism, the school of the Presbyterians, the voluntary association of the Baptists, or the town meeting of the Unitarians. The degree to which each denomination wants to hold to its historic associations with a particular oikos is a question fraught with additional difficulties.

The oikos perspective needs to supplement our ordinary view of church administration, which often sees the church as a self-contained organization like those pictured in rational schools of management. However, no organization can ignore the actual oikos out of which its members operate. In addition, the church, which bears the heritage and historic mission of integrating the actual oikos of our lives, must be doubly sensitive to this dynamic without falling back into the patterns of family, work, or even politics which bear only a fragment of the whole.

We have focused here on the way awareness of the oikos can help us understand the variety of patterns people expect to live out within church life. It helps us understand why we think certain ways of doing things are legitimate or illegitimate. It also helps us understand why we warm to some aspects of church organization and not to others. It can also help us think about other practical matters as well.

Awareness of each person's oikos helps us think about how church events are scheduled. Do they take account of people's current work schedules, shifts, and patterns, or are they simply following those adopted in another era and another oikos? Are the actual points of emphasis in church programs oriented to the pressure points where people are trying to put together their work, family and community? Does the rotation of members among various responsibilities take account of their career or family stages? These issues in organization and programming can be clarified by keeping in mind the wider oikos of church members. The church is not only a fragment of this wider world but is also a remnant called to lead us to a life of greater wholeness, which is what holiness originally is all about.

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### **For Reflection and Discussion**

What part of your oikos do you turn to for models of church management?



What managerial patterns from the wider oikos are most visible in your church? In your denomination?

What is the primary image your church uses as a foundation for the way it is organized?