OUR THEOLOGICAL TASK

The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church
¶ 105. Section 4

https://www.umc.org/en/content/book-of-discipline-105-our-theological-task

OUR THEOLOGICAL TASK

Theology

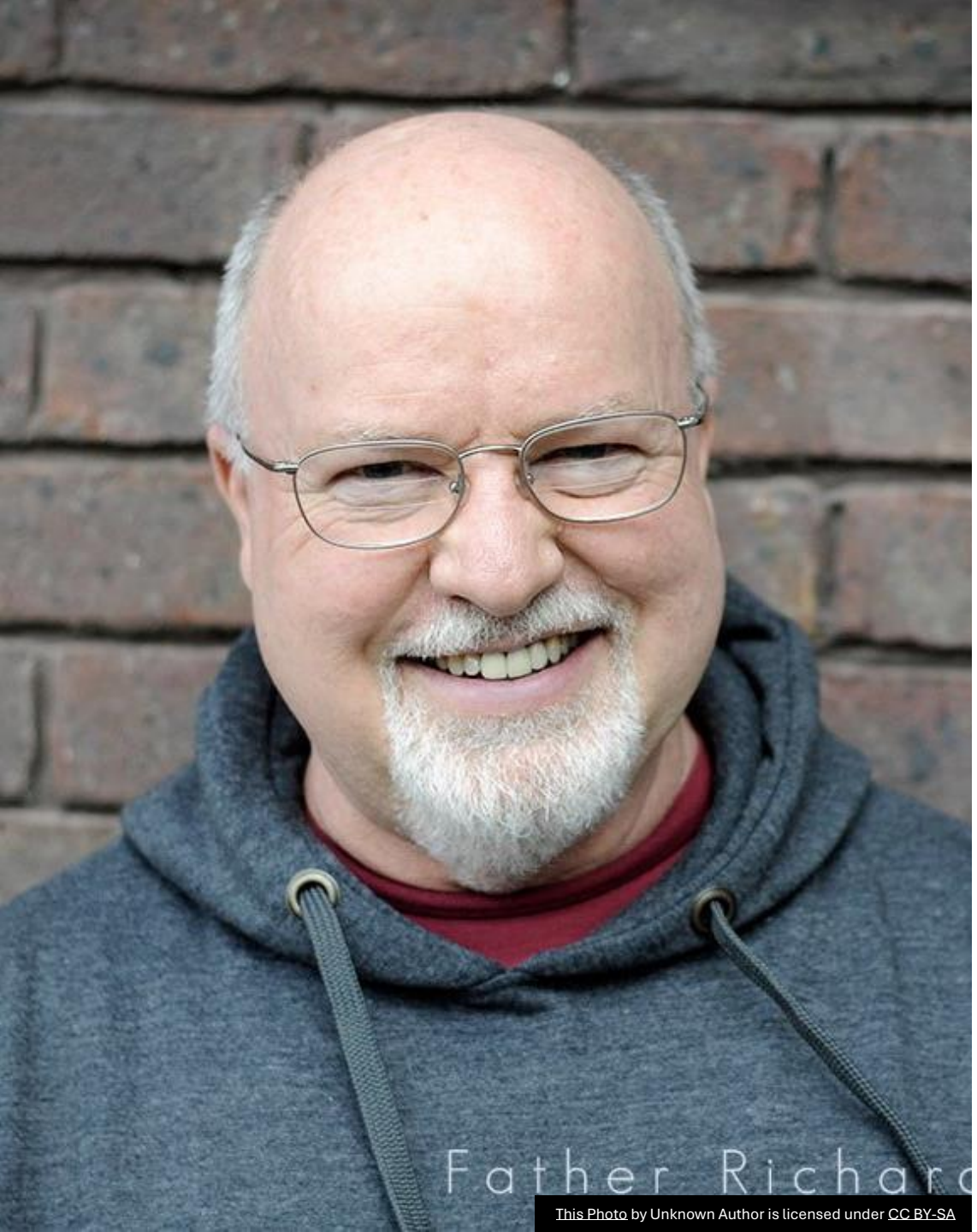
is our effort to

reflect upon God's gracious action

in our lives...

Richard Rohr ~ *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*

"I believe that God gives us our soul, our deepest identity, our True Self, our unique blueprint, at our own "immaculate conception." Our unique little bit of heaven is installed by the Manufacturer within the product, at the beginning! We are given a span of years to discover it, to choose it, and to live our own destiny to the full....



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- We are the clumsy stewards of our own souls. We are charged to awaken, and much of the work of spirituality is learning how to stay out of the way of this rather natural growing and awakening. We need to *unlearn* a lot, it seems, to get back to that foundational life which is “hidden in God” (Colossians 3: 3). Yes, transformation is often more about unlearning than learning, which is why the religious traditions call it “conversion” or “repentance.”

OUR THEOLOGICAL TASK

In response to the love of Christ,

we desire to be drawn into a deeper relationship with

"Faith's pioneer and perfector."

OUR THEOLOGICAL TASK

Our theological explorations seek to give expression

to the mysterious reality of

God's presence, peace, and power in the world.

OUR THEOLOGICAL TASK

We attempt to articulate more clearly our understanding

of the divine-human encounter and we are thereby

more fully prepared

to participate in God's work in the world.

OUR THEOLOGICAL TASK

Our theological task includes the

testing,

renewal,

elaboration,

and application

of our doctrinal perspective in carrying out our calling

"to spread scriptural holiness over these lands."

DOCTRINAL STANDARDS:

https://www.umc.org/en/content/foundational-documents

The United Methodist Church identifies four documents as the "doctrinal standards" of the denomination:

The Articles of Religion and Confession of Faith provide the foundational framework for United Methodist doctrine.

John Wesley developed his set of Standard Sermons to be preached verbatim by those still learning Christian doctrine and how to preach. His *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* offers brief commentary on the New Testament.

THE ARTICLES OF RELIGION

- The Articles of Religion were edited and adapted by John Wesley from the Articles of Religion of the Church of England (1563). John and Charles Wesley were priests in the Church of England, and many of the first Methodists were members of it. The Methodist Episcopal Church slightly adapted them in the early years of the denomination (before 1808) for use in the United States of America.
- Read the Articles of Religion.

THE CONFESSION OF FAITH

- The Confession of Faith from The Evangelical United Brethren Church contains 16 articles. They are similar to the Articles of Religion, on which they are largely based. The Confession of Faith also includes perspectives unique to the heritage of the Evangelical United Brethren. United Methodist interpret the Articles of Religion and the Confession of Faith as complementary and not as contradictory.
- Read the Confession of Faith.

WESLEY'S SERMONS

- In his day, John Wesley was a popular preacher. He often published sermons in inexpensive tracts, many of which were quite popular. He also published collections of sermons he titled *Sermons on Several Occasions*. Much of what we know of Wesley's theology is contained in these sermons.

  - Read Wesley's *Standard Sermons*.

WESLEY'S NOTES ON THE NEW TESTAMENT

- Wesley's *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* are a verse by verse tool to help us interpret the Bible. They alert us to Wesley's deep understanding of Scripture, including his knowledge of the original languages and the thinking of early church writers.

- Explore Wesley's *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*.

The General Rules of the Methodist Church

- The General Rules are Methodism's guidance about how to live as faithful disciples of Jesus, fulfilling the vows of baptism. There are just three rules, under each Wesley gives a variety of examples.

- The rules are (1) to do no harm, (2) to do good and (3) to attend upon all the ordinances of God, including worship, searching the scripture, personal and family prayer, fasting, and the sacraments. Practicing these means of grace empowers us to live as United Methodist Christians.

- Read Wesley's General Rules.

OUR THEOLOGICAL TASK

- …the Church encourages serious reflection across the theological spectrum.
- As United Methodists, we are called to identify the needs ***both*** of individuals ***and*** of society and to address those needs out of the resources of Christian faith in a way that is clear, convincing, and effective.
- Theology serves the church by interpreting the world's needs and challenges to the church and by interpreting the gospel to the world.

OUR THEOLOGICAL TASK

- Our theological task is ***both*** critical ***and*** constructive.
- Our theological task is ***both*** individual ***and*** communal.
- Our theological task is contextual and incarnational.
- Our theological task is essentially practical.

OUR THEOLOGICAL TASK

It is **critical** in that we test various expressions of faith by asking:

- Are they true?
- Appropriate?
- Cogent?
- Credible?
- Are they based on love?
- Do they provide the church and its members with a witness that is faithful to the gospel as reflected in our living heritage ***and*** that is authentic and convincing in the light of human experience ***and*** the present state of human knowledge?

OUR THEOLOGICAL TASK

Our theological task is **constructive** in that every generation must appropriate creatively the wisdom of the past and seek God in their midst in order to think afresh

- about God,
- revelation,
- sin,
- redemption,
- worship,
- the church,
- freedom,
- justice,
- moral responsibility, and other significant theological concerns.

Our summons is to understand and receive the gospel promises in our troubled and uncertain times.

OUR THEOLOGICAL TASK

- Our theological task is contextual and incarnational. It is grounded upon God's supreme mode of self revelation the incarnation in Jesus Christ.
- God's eternal word comes to us in flesh and blood in a given time and place, and in *full identification with humanity*.
- Therefore, **theological reflection is energized** by our incarnational involvement in the daily life of the church and the world, as **we participate in God's liberating and saving action.**

OUR THEOLOGICAL TASK

- Our theological task is essentially practical. It informs the **individual's** daily decisions **and** serves the **Church's life and work**. While highly theoretical constructions of Christian thought make important contributions to theological understanding, we finally measure the truth of such statements in relation to their practical significance. Our interest is **to incorporate the promises and demands of the gospel** into our daily lives.

- Theological inquiry can clarify our thinking about what we are to say and do. It presses us to pay attention to the world around us.

- Realities of intense human suffering, threats to the survival of life, and challenges to human dignity confront us afresh with fundamental theological issues: the nature and purposes of God, the relations of human beings to one another, the nature of human freedom and responsibility, and the care and proper use of all creation.