

A BINOCULAR VIEW OF RELIGION AND RESEARCH

Peggy L. Shriver
National Council of The Churches of Christ in the USA

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Let's get one detail straight from the outset in this highly academic audience--I have an honorable, but an honorary doctorate. In fact, let me put it in perspective through poetry, my most comfortable mode of expression, in this instance shamelessly larded with puns:

MUSINGS ON AN HONORARY DEGREE

*Have I been hood-winked?
Should I be mortarflod?
Or am I a robing Hood
with diplomatic immunity
until the Final Exam,*

*when I'll discover
with certainty
whether one can
become honorable
by degrees? (Shriver, 1990)*

I wrote that after receiving the degree and sent it to the college president--never got a reply!

It is not my purpose in this presidential address to "break new ground" in some aspect of religious research, but to walk the fields like an agricultural extension worker to assess the harvest, test the soil, and scatter a few seeds. First, I will look at religious research from the standpoint of religious institutions. I will have to do this from the vantage point and limitation of having served a number of years as head of the research office of the National Council of Churches. I am also an active Presbyterian and have served in the national headquarters of that Protestant denomination. These associations define what I have credentials to say. They similarly set the boundaries of the second part of my speech: some observations and challenges from research to religious institutions, and then a concluding challenge to both academic and religious research.

RELIGION SPEAKS TO RESEARCH

Religious research has become increasingly important and valuable throughout the twenty-some years I have been both a participant in and user of it. Without research we would be even more confused and uncertain than we are today. Think with me about some of the trends and traumas that have affected ecclesial life during those years: So-called "mainline" Protestant churches have experienced not only the sense of social location shifts toward the margins, but have in fact suffered serious membership decline. At the same time, there has been a militantly resurgent religious right, especially active in the media and in politics. These two facts exacerbate the tensions between liberals and evangelicals, most of whom distance themselves from the religious right on a broad range of subjects. Yet liberals persist in equating evangelicals with fundamentalists, and evangelicals lump religious liberals with secular left-leaning activists. They perceive each other as at opposite poles on such subjects as basic attitudes toward the Bible, issues of sexuality, women's rights and ordination, issues surrounding race and ethnicity, political and economic ideologies that infuse religious perspectives, priorities and strategies for social action and evangelism. To such already volatile issues as homosexuality and women's roles in church and home are added renewed uncertainty about drawing appropriate church/state lines.

Over all these concerns rests the anxious burden of economic dislocations and the hardships of financial decline upon most religious institutions. Roman Catholics, Protestants, Orthodox and Jews all participate in various dimensions of these challenges. Extensive immigration in recent years has also required religious organizations to adjust, to respond, to appropriate or to co-exist with variants of their own traditions. Still to be comprehended, appreciated and absorbed is the challenge of a radical multi-religious culture emerging in the U.S. and Canada. Religious institutions need and usually welcome help in developing wise and truth-based insights in all these areas of concern and conflict.

To become more currently and pointedly specific, let me cite several of the top ten religion stories of 1993 as reported by *The Christian Century*:

--Sexual abuse in the church, both by Roman Catholic priests and Protestant clergy, is religion's version of society's single most common occupational hazard unwanted sexual attention.

--The apocalypse in Waco is both a catastrophe and an example of new and sometimes unstable religious groups that populate our supposedly secular society. (Today we would be sure to mention the Order of the Solar Temple in Switzerland as a reminder that they are not all in the U.S.A.!)

--Conflict over sexual ethics has been hotly debated in denominational study reports on human sexuality, such as that of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's study and, before that, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

--Local political strategies led by the religious right in coalition with other faith groups have influenced many community elections, such as the school board in New York City.

--Medicine has raised religious and ethical questions at the poles of life--for example, both the technology of human replication like cloning and the issue of physician-assisted suicides, like those of Dr. Jack Kevorkian.

To these stories of 1993 one would surely add the follow-up reactions in 1994 to the 1993

fall conference in Minneapolis on "Re-imagining" theology and worship among women. In such times as these the role of religious research can hardly be exaggerated--even if it often shines only a dim flashlight beam into the void of ignorance.

Some Words of Gratitude

It is highly appropriate for me, therefore, to speak a word of appreciation as the first message from religion to research. Religious communities have benefited greatly from the careful insights of religious researchers. Not all fine religious research gets the attention of religious institutions, for a variety of reasons. Much of the research that does get noticed depends upon its relation to the kinds of issues I've just catalogued that consume those institutions. Even though I risk omitting some very important contributions, I think it may be instructive to be quite specific, if hardly comprehensive. Let me comment, therefore, on a few examples of very helpful research.

Women of the Cloth (Carroll, Hargrove, and Lummis, 1983) and related research on the ordination of women have been especially valuable to denominations as they have learned from one another, taken courage, hope, criticism, even shame in the struggle to discern God's intention for women in the church. I'm glad that a decade later a further study on "women of the cloth" is in the making. Basic statistics from our NCCC data as gathered by the late Constant Jacquet and the material in this book have been among the most sought after information by church and public since it first became available--based on my experience of telephone and written requests to the NCCC.

Understanding Church Growth and Decline: 1950-1978 (Hoge and Roozen, eds., 1979) and related studies have been essential among church leaders to try to grasp the rapidly changing statistics of their own denomination--and, most importantly, to understand their context and mutual experience in the church at large. The graphs and charts force the attention of church leaders to unwelcome information. But by demonstrating the similar patterns of denominational groups, these studies steer church leaders away from simplistic solutions and often destructive interpretations of the problem. *American Mainline Religion* (Roof and McKinney, 1987), a worthy successor to the volume on church growth and decline, must have catapulted Bill McKinney and Wade Clark Roof into the church circuit orbit. I discovered them speaking to church groups everywhere, as concerned church people tried to grasp what is causing the hemorrhage from church membership rolls. This analysis caused a lot of discussion, in part because the authors provide lucid diagnosis but don't tidy up the ending with a sure-fire, pat prescription for cure. We want Drs. McKinney and Roof to heal us with some patent medicine, not to show the complex mix of factors that make church membership decline in mainline denominations immune to a quick fix.

Sociological community studies that examine the relation of religion, economics, and politics have opened our eyes to significant aspects of religious organizational life, such as the pioneer work of Liston Pope in *Millhands and Preachers* (1942), and the follow-up study by Shriver, Knudsen and Earle, *Spindles and Spires* (1976). Embedding studies of specific congregations and pastoral leadership in the environment of a community's ideology, its economic and political reality, its demographics, its history, are all too rare. We tend to choose either to examine in micro-detail or to survey the macro-scene. Seldom do we attempt both at the same time, as these studies do, and as Robert Bellah has done.

Religious institutions need this kind of research to make them less myopic, claustrophobic, even narcissistic.

As in previous and successive work by Robert Bellah, *Habits of the Heart* (Bellah, et. al., 1985) reached into the hearts of an astounding number of church people. Here is an example of the power of narrative, spoken about so eloquently by Clark Roof in RRA's first presidential address two years ago. While "reading the lips" of these storytellers as they described their spiritual quests, we could appreciate more fully some of the things being alluded to in more abstract ways by Roof and McKinney. Steve Warner's *New Wine in Old Wineskins* (1988), which examines a California Presbyterian congregation in transition from liberal to evangelical leadership, and Nancy Ammerman's (1987) erapathetic examination of a fundamentalist congregation continue this effective narrative approach, as does Clark Roof himself in baby-boomer research. Although more journalism than research or sociology, Samuel Freedman's *Upon This Rock; The Miracles of a Black Church* (1993) is a sensitive account of a pastor, Johnny Youngblood, and his congregation, St. Paul Community Baptist Church, and its neighborhood in Brooklyn. His writing is so skillful that I've urged him to team up with a religious researcher on some future project. All of these exhibit the enduring value of congregational studies, including the many self-studies advocated and stimulated by James F. Hopewell.

To these I must add Lincoln and Mamiya's *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (1992), which helps fill a huge deficit of understanding and information about the Black church. It is an important contribution in an area where most of our studies, including Bellah's, are weak. Ruth Doyle has done for the Latin-Hispanic community, through the major Roman Catholic study a few years ago, something of what Lincoln and Mamiya have done for the Black church. We need more such detailed queries into the lives of immigrant communities if our churches are to serve them well and to counter the negative pressures of ignorance about them. Who is studying, I wonder, the remarkable vitality of Korean churches in the U.S.?

I feel endangered by the desire to name a number of additional favorites--Wuthnow's restructuring books, Carl Dudley's church community ministries project, several books about the religious right written since I wrote *The Bible Vote: Religion and the New Right* (Shriver, 1981) in desperation to find something that did not sound hysterical, Tex Sample's (1990) irenic and clever typologies, Stark and Finke's (1992) illuminating, troubling historical look at church growth versus an educated clergy, and efforts by Dean Hoge and others to handle the muddle of church finances. I look forward to the next issue of the *Review of Religious Research* that is devoted to financial trends and am sure it can be very useful to the churches I know something about.¹

As I enumerate only some of the outstanding research that has been offered to religious communities for insight and assistance, I am acutely conscious that this is *my* list. Down the hall from me in the National Council of Churches in other staff offices only a few of those books might have reached their attention. I have tried to mention mostly books that have attracted the notice of a broader church sample than just other religious researchers.

"Finders Keepers"

But how we get our research work into the bloodstream of the church, synagogue and

mosque is a mighty question--including the implicit question of whether or not we care. Church people, frankly, sometimes wonder. The childhood saying, "Finders keepers" seems to apply, as though what we find out in our studies we are only too ready to keep to ourselves. Throughout the years I headed the NCC research office, I was deeply appreciative when a researcher voluntarily sent me a copy of research findings, and often such material became part of the mosaic for the large picture our office was gradually discerning. If you have done significant research that would lend insight to religious institutions, please consider it an obligation of your craft to share those findings broadly among them.

I know that communicating one's research is sometimes dishearteningly difficult and expensive. Some of my most satisfying and significant research efforts have been done in rather massive collaboration with other religious groups--the "Unchurched American" Gallup study, for example, or the "Religion and Television" study by Annenberg and Gallup, or the 1980 Church Membership Study.² In each of these instances we mounted a major national press conference to release the findings. I discovered too late that many researchers work on tight deadlines, up to the last moment, even and perhaps especially the most prominent researchers, so that sponsors and reporters get the badly digested, poorly organized first pass at the findings together. And if you can't grasp the heart of the material when it is put into your hands still warm from the photocopier, you may miss forever the opportunity to describe the important things you have learned to a reporter. There are no "heart transplants" a few days later in the news.

"The Unchurched American" Gallup study was studded with gems that required time for tilting the data until they glinted in your eye. But once they were discovered, the journalists had long since moved their attention elsewhere. By the time the "Religion and Television" study was put in the sponsoring researchers' hands the day before release, reporters had already sniffed out that the big controversial issue was the size of the electronic church audience--and they didn't want to ask about anything else. Such significant findings as the failure of religious television of any persuasion to reach young people was not uncovered for the press. Were I to do such coalitional research over again, I would insist upon copies being placed in the hands of research sponsors two weeks before public release--upon threat of canceling the press conference if they were late!

On the other hand, a 1980 Church Membership Study press conference was a model of success. A map had been thoroughly prepared in advance to illustrate the membership findings county by county across the U.S., reproductions of which were in the press kit. We had a panel of researchers to interpret the data. There was only one small problem--except for notable Mormon growth, nothing much had significantly changed; the news was that stable patterns of distribution of church bodies prevailed from the previous study. Try making an arresting headline out of that! Even so, the map was reproduced in dozens of newspapers around the country.

Why bother with press releases? When *USA Today* made the "Religion and Television" study its lead story, we had potential public attention to the issues of the study that our own resources could never buy. We sold more copies of the full study than we anticipated and handed out summaries like flowing water. If it is worth finding out, it is worth conveying to those who are interested. Even with a surprising amount of coverage for a somewhat obscurely written report and summary, church people around the country were largely unaware of it and its findings, however, or so it has seemed to me.

The research community may sting a bit when challenged by religious institutions to convey more effectively to them what religious researchers are learning. Many religious leaders find the jargon of religious researchers almost as confusing as most of us would feel trying to understand an article on particle physics. Stephen Hawking has tried in *A Brief History of Time* (1988) to make theoretical physics clear and understandable--but it still takes *work* to understand his clarity. Our task is not nearly so daunting, but we nevertheless need to take an extra step of "translation" and interpretation to reach most religious practitioners who are not themselves researchers. Harried church leaders seldom make the effort to understand research findings unless some important significance is promised and delivered. As one of the reviewers of submissions to the *Review of Religious Research*, I find that too many articles are weak either in their ability to communicate outside the small circle of religious researchers, or they make no effort to connect what they have found out with the decisions and realities of institutional religion. If we have no particular desire for our findings to be used and understood, then what purpose have we besides self-serving career goals for doing the research?

A second observation regarding the communication of research to those who need to receive it has to do with the imagery of language. Although the title of the "Unchurched American" is admittedly clumsy, it did readily convey what it was about. The United Church of Christ headline to describe the *essence* of the study's learning was an outstandingly communicative encapsulating phrase: "Belief without Belonging." I admire whoever coined it. Ironically, the "religion and television" study, which should have been ultra-sensitive to the need to use compelling images and language, never did communicate. Not a sound bite! Sponsors had to attempt their own imagery and summary phrases. Even the terms "electronic church" and "televangelism" were incongruous, faulty terms; the "electronic church" is *not* a church--one of the points of the study, while "televangelists" are not successful in doing evangelism, another key insight of the study.

Finding the most helpful, communicative word or image often eludes us, but we must continue to try. For example, we are still trying to find another word to replace the no longer accurate term "mainline" churches. "Sideline" isn't any better! "Oldline" may still describe it best. As another example, the term "culture wars" that James Hunter has used with startling effect may obscure that very large relatively pacific middle about which he also speaks, and which Nancy Ammerman found so evident in her research, recounted in her H. Paul Douglass address last year (Ammerman, 1994). Unless we can find a name or an image, we may not even be fully aware of the impact of a pervasive perspective. Steve Warner's (1993) provocative piece on a "new paradigm" is a remarkable summative survey. It challenges a paradigm, which he does not name, that has received an almost unconscious acquiescence by churches to "religion at the margins of an increasingly secular society." Nancy described it in her address as "secularization, the core myth that defines our discipline." This paradigmatic perception of secularism's "ripple effect" upon religion, moving it outward in weaker and weaker circles from the center, fits both the religious right's sense of alienation from society and the so-called mainline's experience of dislocation toward the margins. But it ignores the fecund religious vitality that pervades U.S. society. Frances FitzGerald's image that has application to a new paradigm is "the centrifuge." Although useful, it seems to image *society* as doing the spinning or spitting out of new combinations and groups from the social center, rather than believers themselves acting through the "new religious voluntarism." So

perhaps Wuthnow's "religious marketplace," or even a "global bazaar" is more helpful, or perhaps Harvey Cox's "selective collage." I challenge Steve and all of you to work until you discover a truly apt image or phrase as we enter vigorous debate on this "new paradigm." Until we find one, our religious communities will probably not pay any attention or become engaged in that debate.

Make Religion Recognizable!

Before turning to research speaking to religion, I have one more serious word from religion. I turn for aid in addressing it to a most unlikely source--the decidedly non-religious Stephen Jay Gould, whose *Wonderful Life* (1989) I have read with argumentative appreciation. Gould abhors and rejects the elevation of "hard" over "soft" science. He says, "The status ordering of the sciences has become so familiar a theme that the ranking from adamant physics at the pinnacle down to such squishy and subjective subjects as psychology and sociology at the bottom has become stereotypical in itself" (Gould, 1989:278). He regrets the efforts of "soft" science to "attempt to ape inappropriate methods that may work higher up on the ladder" as they perceive it. "Like the prison trusty who, ever mindful of his tenuous advantages, outdoes the warden himself in zeal for preserving the status quo of power and subordination," he adds picturesquely. But, he insists, "Historical science is not worse, more restricted, or less capable of achieving firm conclusions because experiment, prediction, and subsumption under invariant laws of nature do not represent its usual working methods. The sciences of history use a different mode of explanation, rooted in the comparative and observational richness of our data. We cannot see a past event directly, but science is usually based (also) on inference, not unvarnished observation (you don't see electrons, gravity, or black holes either)" (Gould, 1989:279).

So Gould the biologist urges us in the social sciences not to feel too captivated or awed by that word "science." He thinks that the comparative and observational richness of our data require different skills--an argument that supports a more generous use of narrative and participant observation rather than reliance upon mathematically assembled data alone. Naturally, one would not want to eliminate religious research whose work is inductive survey material assembled with mathematical rigor. That has an important contribution to make but, would agree with Gould, it is not the only contribution. Here I would second Wade Clark Roof, as I read and re-read his perceptive address on the use of narrative as a significant methodology for religious research. I quote just two of his sentences in his quotation-rich text: "Narrative approaches also promise to move us beyond the methodological individualism that characterizes so much of our research--to push us beyond attention simply to individual attributes and to looking at cultural narrative more broadly. This would be no small accomplishment for it would integrate the study of religion with the study of culture--which in my judgment would be enlivening for the field" (Roof, 1993:304).

I end these comments from institutional religion, therefore, with a plea to take seriously the research methods that are recognizable for the religious practitioner, ones that embed the believer in a culture, a tradition, in a quest, a journey, a story or series of stories or dramas in which one is a character or an actor. Too often we simply do not recognize ourselves in the questions and multiple-choice offerings and exempt ourselves therefore from the findings. We ask, "Is religion *real* for the religious researcher?" I will return to this concern in my concluding remarks. But let research now speak to religion.

RESEARCH SPEAKS TO RELIGION

T. S. Eliot, with an assist from Anthony Smith, asks:

Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?

Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?

Where is the information we have lost in data? (Dennis, 1994)

So much of the research work done by religious institutions these days seems lost in minutiae of data. We become handmaidens of bureaucracies, carrying out micro-tasks for helping administrators make decisions. "Should we produce a new hymnal? What should we do differently at the next youth assembly? What agenda items were most appreciated, too long, unnecessary, well documented at some national meeting?" Often these are valuable evaluative research endeavors, and they are the bread and butter of many denominational or ecumenical research offices--but unfortunately they seldom can get on with the meat and potatoes of religious research. This is a condition as distressing to the institutional religious researcher as to the academic. One ought not disparage these denomination-serving tasks, and I for one have done my full share of them, but unfortunately they leave the burden of comprehensive and integrative religious research to those mostly outside of religious practice I academe. Of course, many an academic is carrying out micro-studies as tightly focused as those of the religious practitioner.

Most of us religious researchers pick up the binoculars, so to speak, and focus them closely on some small part of the whole. If you turn those binoculars to the opposite lens end, you view the whole scene as from a great distance, but it is all encompassed in a macro-view. Both of these approaches have value and have need of one another. The macro-viewer may misread the tiny images in the full picture without the assist of the micro-vision. And micro-vision loses sight of where it is in the human stage when it fails also to attend to the macro. Some research analysis tries to combine these two ways of seeing, so that one can benefit from the strengths of both. This can have startling results, as when Kirk Hadaway, Penny Marler and Mark Chaves take the standard macro-information on church attendance over many years and focus in on Ashtabula County in Ohio.

One of the important tasks of an ecumenical research office, like the one I headed in the National Council of Churches, is to redirect the binoculars of research as needed, sometimes to the macro-view, sometimes to the micro, sometimes to both. It is also a place to relate various sets of findings and studies to one another so that a clearer, larger picture emerges. It is my sincere hope that some version of an ecumenical research office will be reinstated in the National Council of Churches someday. Anything you can do to encourage it, please do! But the task of integrating the findings of many studies into a more coherent mosaic of the religious scene is a task any of us may choose to attempt, hazardous as it may be.

In any case, we need to tend the relationships between the religious research practitioner and the religious research academic to keep them in close touch with one another. That is, in fact, the *raison d'être* for the Religious Research Association. Each group has access to people and groups the other needs. Carl Dudley's efforts to establish a computer link among researchers interested in maintaining this intersection of the practical and the academic, and to stimulate research from both ends of the binoculars, is underway. As outgoing President of

the RRA, I hail this project and urge you to avail yourselves of it.

But as we encourage these collaborations, religious institutions need also to be challenged by academics. What passes for "research" in many religious institutions can itself be self-serving. Churches are not noted for broadcasting unwelcome news or uncomfortable information that they generate themselves. Nor do we readily receive such news from others. Seminaries may cogitate on the deep meaning of trends, but church structures find little time for profound reflection. Research that breaks into our time-bound, pressured, frantically mobile lives has developed a rare skill in communication.

When researchers do try to work with religious structures to meet information needs important to both, they often find that the religious practitioner wants something quick, cheap and simple -- or may require interminable time getting clearance for it. While the religious leader may ask, "Are you serious about religion?", the researcher may counter, "Are you serious about research?" Are you willing to *pay for it*? To do it with the care, depth, precision and scope that will achieve the standards of research excellence to which the researchers would be willing to attach their names? Will you really pay attention to the results? Will you recognize that it may make your work more difficult rather than easier? More complex rather than simplified? The religious practitioner who is also a religious researcher knows how important these questions are to their own efforts to do respectable research in the religious community.

Religionless Religious Research

But I would like to end my remaining public moments as President of the RRA with a concern that is addressed to us all, but especially to the researcher who is also a religious practitioner. It has haunted me ever since I administered the "Unchurched American" Gallup study and struggled to interpret its findings. It has to do with religious research taking *religious faith* seriously.

Stephen Gould is no help to me here in fact, his book on the paleontologists' controversies about fossils in the now-famous Burgess Shale argues strongly against my concern. Gould documents how an eminent paleontologist named Charles Doolittle Walcott misread the message of the Burgess Shale fossils because he was dominated by an attitude of faith in God's pattern of upward striving, giving history a moral meaning. Gould tries to release us from the "conceptual lock" that conditions us to read the "ladder of life" as leading upward in complexity to the human, and likewise to see a widening cone of increasing diversity in nature. Such false iconographies of ladder and cone, says Gould, "nurture our hopes for a universe of intrinsic meaning defined in our terms." He therefore throws out God along with the false concepts of ladder and cone. He firmly condemns Walcott for having been so locked into a belief in the moral meaning of life that he was blind to evidence that contradicted his concepts.

Many of us working with religion as a subject of study would, in all honesty, side with Gould. Keep God out of it. We are studying a *human* phenomenon. It is tough enough to have our work recognized as "scientific." If we act as though we give credence to an invisible transcendent force, by whatever name, we are certain to be dismissed from the halls of the academically serious. Yet even Gould acknowledges that black holes, electrons, and gravity,

while not directly observable, are certainly taken into account in the behavior of the cosmos. (Other scientists like Hawking and Feynman find "imaginary numbers" helpful in understanding that cosmos.) And I wonder how Gould can dismiss the conceptual lock in Walcott and not openly acknowledge his own--his contingency view of history, which he describes as our inability to "rewind the tape" of history and have it play back the same way. History is "an unpredictable sequence of antecedent states, where any major change in any step of the sequence would have altered the final result" (Gould, 1989:283). Contingency is "the affirmation of control by immediate events over destiny, the kingdom lost for want of a horseshoe nail" (Gould, 1989:284). That, too, I maintain is a "conceptual lock," a blindness, as surely as is Walcott's faith in a God with a divine concern for creation.

We can agree with Gould that theory exerts a subtle and inevitable hold upon data and observation. Reality does not speak to us objectively. No scientists can be free from constraints of psyche and society. We are all, says Heisenberg, unavoidably entangled in that which we study. My concern is that, in our attempt to be objective, to deny theory or theology, we are subtly *ignoring the* content of religious faith in much of our study of religion. Let me return to the Gallup "Unchurched American" study, because in it I am also being self-critical. Many of us participated in the design of the questions. Later, in reviewing the findings, I felt the flatness of our questions about why people do or do not go to church. We were remarkably timid, as we probed about location, like or dislike of pastor or worship, areas of controversy, or "just not getting around to going to church in a new location." Had we taken religious faith *seriously*, we might have dared such questions as:

--Are you staying away from a possible confrontation with the Holy that might influence your life in ways you want to resist? That might make you question your present lifestyle? That might require much of you?

--Are you afraid to become part of a group that, by their own powerful collective belief, might reinforce stirrings in your spirit that discomfort or challenge you ?

--Conversely, are you disappointed that other believers do not live up to what a religious person ought to do, and so you stay away?

--Have you felt bereft when you called upon God, or Jesus, or Allah, the Great Father, the Holy Spirit? Have you experienced desolation? Have you found a new relationship again? How did it happen?

--Are you now in church because of gratitude? Because you have experienced feeling forgiven, released from guilt? Or because the beauty and intricacy of the earth compels worship? Because the love of another person has led you to believe in a transcendent love?

To ask these questions, in more carefully constructed form than the ones I as examples, requires the researcher to think into the content of religious so that one can imagine that an experience of divine holiness and mercy have something to do with church membership. It does not require the researcher to be a believer, but it does require that a conceptual lock of disbelief to strain out such questions as irrelevant or suspect.

Let me put that concern another way, using Timothy Ferris's *Coming of Age the Milky Way* (1988). He ends his marvelously lucid and entertaining of how we have come to know what we know about the universe and place in it with comments on "the persistence of mystery." Science is always open-ended, exploratory. According to Godel's theorem, the full validity of any system cannot be demonstrated within the system itself. Something the frame

of the system is needed against which to test it -- therefore the cannot explain everything by definition, since something stands outside Our danger as social scientists is that we work within too small a frame, and we ignore a wider reference frame outside our narrow system. Scientists that acknowledge "nature may be counted upon forever to retain the mysterious magical quality that arises from the contrast between her innumerable and the limitations of our metaphors" (Ferris, 1988:386). We who with the remarkable nature of the human must also acknowledge the mysterious qualities of our humanity, individual and social, the culture and context in which we live, the reach of mind and imagination, of faith existential anxiety. We need to resist the temptation to squeeze out mystery in order to make human behavior manageable and measurable within our research methodology.

Perhaps you have been fascinated, as have I, by the daring research of a Larry Dossey (1993), who decided to investigate the mind-body relationship in healing, particularly through prayer. His careful laboratory studies, to my knowledge, have not been scientifically challenged, suggest prayer does influence healing, even when the patient is unaware of prayers, and especially when the person is "held in consciousness" rather by interceding for a particular outcome. Daring to take seriously the possibility that there is something to be learned here is what I am arguing for in these remarks. Religious persons may be able to identify themselves in our research, if we are able to enter their faith, in all its fragility, volatility and mystery more seriously. So I am suggesting that the skills of communication, the elimination of jargon, the use of imagery, the press releases and even the collaboration of religious institutional and academic researchers may still not get at the heart of our problem of sharing research findings with religious participants. Unless we respectfully enter their life and spirit, the very content of their religious convictions in our probing, the faithful will experience our research as irrelevant.

As I began my remarks with a light-hearted poem, so I will close with a serious one, which compacts my final point.

THERE IS A FIRE IN FAITH

*There is a fire in faith.
It illuminates and purifies,
refines, transforms,
consoles.*

*There is a fire in faith.
It rages uncontrollably,
consumes, disrupts,
destroys.*

*There is a fire in faith,
A mystery ignited by
the universe
of stars;
An inner incandescence
stirring love and joy
and hope.*

*Approach such faith with caution
In believers that you meet,
For you cannot know its power
Until you feel its heat. (Shriver)*

NOTES

1. This issue was published in December, 1994, subsequent to this address, as a special issue of the *Review of Religious Research* (Vol. 36, No. 3) entitled "Patterns of Financial Contributions to Churches".
2. These three major collaborative studies were administered through the Research, Evaluation and Planning Office of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. during my years directing that office as Assistant General Secretary.

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