

EXPLORATIONS IN STEWARDSHIP

**EXPLORATIONS IN STEWARDSHIP**

**A PAPER PRESENTED TO THE TWENTIETH SYNOD**  
**UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA**  
**QUEENSLAND SYNOD**

MONDAY, 18 MAY, 1998

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

I have been invited to speak briefly on stewardship. I am indebted to a number of sources for informing my thinking on this subject. In addition to the Scriptures, I have consulted works by:

Daniel McDiarmid	<i>Stewardship and Tithing in the Episcopal Church</i>
Douglas Hall	<i>The Steward: A Biblical Symbol Come of Age</i>
Assembly Task Group on Mission Resourcing and Stewardship Education	<i>Many Opportunities, Many Doors</i>
Ronald Vallet	<i>Stepping Stones of the Steward: A Faith Journey through Jesus' Parables</i>
Matthew Turnour	<i>The Stewardship Paradigm</i> (a draft MA thesis)
Noel Preston	<i>WHEN ENOUGH IS NOT ENOUGH: An ethical analysis of Health Care Resource Allocation</i>

What I have to say is not a systematic treatise on stewardship. It is an attempt to open up the subject as one step towards a fresh vision for stewardship in the Synod.

## **2. THE UNITING CHURCH CONTEXT**

The context for our consideration of stewardship has a number of characteristics:

- As a church, we have been through a time of uncertainty about our identity. We have experience the pain of deeply held but differing convictions. We have struggled to express the faith that we hold in common in a strong and united sense of purpose.
- We have been reminded on many occasions that we are a greying church.
- Budgetary constraints have been experienced by parishes, presbyteries, the synod and the assembly.
- The Divisions and agencies of the Synod's Department for Community Service<sup>1</sup> have to reflect critically and intentionally about priorities and attendant resource allocation issues in an environment of high demand and resource constraint.
- The critical challenges facing the Uniting Church as it seeks to resource its life and mission in a changing mission context.
- The 8<sup>th</sup> Assembly's call to all other councils of the church to a vision for stewardship which, amongst other things, emphasizes that all Christians are called to be stewards.
- The individualism that stands in tension with a healthy communitarian interdependence.

## **3. THE WIDER CONTEXT**

### **3.1 THE WIDER CHURCH**

The church is in a time of transition. So what is new? After all, aren't we a pilgrim people on the way? Ronald Vallet, in writing of the churches in North America, makes the following observations:

- A massive shift in the mission funding of the North American church is taking place and is manifest in almost ever denomination.(157)

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<sup>1</sup> Now Uniting Care Queensland.

- The number of members of mainline protestant churches is declining and a crisis of identity and loyalty has emerged.(158)
- Denominations that once helped define the values of a society are now struggling to define themselves. (159)
- An even greater problem than the mission funding crisis and the loss of membership is the uncertainty over the mission of the church? (159)
- A commitment to mission must be at the heart of giving. Yet, because the nature of the mission is not clear, the centre or core of meaning is missing from prevailing and enduring fund-raising activities.(159)
- A commitment to mission must be at the heart of giving. The church must struggle with the question: What is the new understanding of mission that will take the place of national and international missions that have fuelled the denominations from the beginning of the twentieth century? (167)

### 3.2 THE WORLD

Canadian theologian, Douglas Hall, has been one of the most influential writers on stewardship over the past two decades. In his writings, Hall explored “stewardship” as response to the ecological crisis and concluded that, properly understood, **the mission of the church is stewardship**. The writings of Hall prepared the way for the Episcopal Church in the US to claim that “**Stewardship is the main work of the church.**”

In Hall's model for the church, stewardship moved to the centre and mission became a function of stewardship. McDiarmid (205) observed that Hall effectively called the church from *ecclesiocentrism* to *geocentrism*. His books have certainly called for an urgent consideration of ecological issues and are a reminder to the church that it does have a responsibility for “keeping the earth”. His major work on stewardship will be briefly summarized later in this presentation.

The utilitarian approach to nature and natural resources which dominated for so much of this century has begun to give way in some quarters to a recognition of the need for a better informed approach. Many church statements on ecology include an appeal to either stewardship or the creation ordinance given in Genesis 1:26-28 “be fruitful and multiply and subdue (softened in some instances to “keep”) the earth.” The church is showing some tinges of green.

Thus our consideration of stewardship occurs in the context of a growing dis-ease about the sustainability of patterns of use of finite natural resources.

## 4. LISTENING TO THE SCRIPTURES

### 4.1 THE OLD TESTAMENT

#### 4.1.1 REFERENCES TO “STEWARD”

There are a limited number of specific references to “steward” in the Old Testament. Hall notes that the usage of the term in the Hebrew Scriptures is uniformly technical or literal describing an actual office or vocation in society. Hall notes that the steward is a servant, but not an ordinary servant who takes the orders and does the bidding of others. Rather the steward is a superior servant, a sort of supervisor or foreman who must make decisions, give orders, and

take orders. Hall further notes that “the steward is one who has been given the responsibility for the management and service of something belonging to another, and his office presupposes a particular kind of trust on the part of the owner or master.” The latter is usually a royal personage – a king or ruler.

**Hall identifies four Old Testament passages where the term “steward” is used:**

- **Genesis 43 & 44** where the steward is a person accountable to Joseph.
  - He does Joseph’s bidding (Gen. 43:16-17; 44:1,4ff).
  - He is addressed by Joseph’s brothers as one with great authority. “Oh, my lord...” (Gen. 43:20)
  - He shows initiative and has authority to carry out activities in his masters household (Gen. 43:23-25)

Hall concludes that the whole episode establishes a concept of the office in which the steward is really a full representative or deputy of his master.

- **1 Chronicles 27 & 28** where the stewards are identified as having responsibility for the various properties and aspects of King David’s total kingdom (treasuries, vineyards, herds, camels and flocks). The stewards are listed along with other key leaders (commanders of divisions, palace officials, mighty men and officials of the tribes) as “all the officials of the kingdom.” (1 Chron. 28:1)
- **Daniel 1:11, 16** where the steward has responsibility for young Hebrew prisoners of King Nebuchadnezzar and has authority to make certain decisions regarding them.
- **Isaiah 22:15 – 21** reveals that irrespective of how important the steward may be in the scheme of things, he is neither ultimately authoritative nor irreplaceable. Hall concludes that this passage elevates the concept of steward “to accommodate the idea that the ruler of God’s people is a steward, responsible to the master – that is, to Yahweh.”

In this Isaiah passage, “steward” is used synonymously with “over the house(hold)”. In fact this expression “over his house(hold)” first occurs in **Genesis 39:4,5** with reference to Joseph who is made overseer of Potiphar’s house. Joseph attains to this position because he had found favour in Potiphar’s sight. Potiphar placed all that he had in house and field in Joseph’s charge and, with Joseph as his “steward”, he had no concern for anything but the food he ate.

In **Numbers 12:7**, Moses, as Yahweh’s servant, is entrusted with all Yahweh’s house. According to Hebrews 3:2,5, Moses was faithful in all God’s house as a servant. Although the words “over the house” and “steward” are not used in this verse, the concept expressed is similar and it is reasonable to refer to Moses as Yahweh’s steward.

**Other references to a person who was “over the house(hold)” occur in 1 Kings 4:6; 16:9; 18:3; 2 Kings 18:18,37; 19:2; Isaiah 36:3, 22; 37:2. The LXX (the Greek Translation of the Old Testament) uses *oikonomos* in all of these as well as in Esther 1: 8 and 8:9.**

**These additional references confirm Hall’s view that the Old Testament has a high conception of the steward who is usually accountable to a royal personage – a king or ruler.**

Hall concludes from his analysis of the Old Testament data regarding “steward” that “the two poles between which the later New Testament usage of stewardship moves have already been established.”

- **One pole** (positive) is *the close identification of the steward with his master*. The steward can be regarded almost as the representative or vicar of the one who has employed him even though he is only a servant.
- **The other pole** (negative) is the insistence that *the steward* is not the owner or master. He *is strictly accountable to his lord* and will certainly be deprived of his authority unless he upholds, in his actions and attitudes, the true character and wishes of this other one whom he is allowed and commanded to represent.

Hall concludes: **“In establishing these two conditions of stewardship...the Hebrew Bible sets up the two most important points upon which all subsequent discussion of the subject turns.”** (34)

#### 4.1.2 GENESIS 1:26-28

It is beyond the scope of this paper to examine this passage (and related passages such as Genesis 2:15-17, Psalm 8, etc.) which place humankind in a place of dominion over the whole earth. However, a full consideration of stewardship would need to take this passage into account.<sup>2</sup>

### 4.2 THE NEW TESTAMENT

#### 4.2.1 REFERENCES TO STEWARD/SHIP

The rudimentary picture of the steward as servant manager of something or someone not belonging to himself is the most obvious meaning of some of the passages referring to stewardship in the New Testament: for example, Matthew 20:8 (in the parable of the householder who hired workers for his vineyard) and Luke 8:3 (reference to Herod's steward). In both cases the word used is *epitropos*.

The words most commonly used in the New Testament are *oikonomia*, stewardship or economy, (Luke 16:2,3,4; 1 Cor. 9:17; Eph.1:10; 3:2; 3:9; Col 1:25; 1 Tim 1:4) and *oikonomos*, steward (Luke 12:42; 16:1,3,8; Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor 4:1,2; Gal. 4:2; Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 4:10).

The following observations have been made by Hall with reference to the development of the meaning of steward in the New Testament:

*In the distinctively Christian writings, however, there is a certain development or evolution in the idea of **stewardship**. Here it **assumes a theological and metaphoric meaning**...*

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<sup>2</sup> Since this paper was prepared in 1998, the whole issue of stewardship of the environment has moved to a more central place. The greater public awareness of the issue of climate change and global warming would demand a more holistic consideration of stewardship. Eco-theology has emerged as an important category in the whole theological enterprise. If I were to present a paper on the topic of Stewardship now (October, 2014), I would explore fully humanity's role as stewards of creation. Such an exploration would include a synoptic study of Genesis 1:26-28 and Genesis 2:15-17; the significance of the Sabbath and Jubilee Years in the Torah, and the various frameworks used by Old Testament scholars in their consideration of the significance of the "promised land" for the Hebrews. In the process, I would draw upon the works of Norman Habel and Walter Brueggemann on "the land" and Rev Dr. Clive Ayre's work on eco-theology and eco-mission [See <http://www.uq.edu.au/hprc/dr-clive-ayre> for a list of his publications.]

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Thus in **Luke 12:42ff**, where “steward” and “servant” are used interchangeably, stewardship together with watchfulness are characteristic marks of Christ’s true followers. The “master” ...is ...the risen Christ. The disciples, during their leader’s absence, are charged with responsibility for Christ’s household. As stewards of this household, the disciples are accountable for those who dwell in it – to see that they are properly fed, and protected from thieves and nocturnal robbers...

The passage ends with a summary statement that has had great importance for all serious discussion of the meaning of stewardship:

*Every one to whom much is given, of him will much be required; and of him to whom men commit much they will demand the more. (Luke 12:48b)*

...The stewards of God’s universal grace are, it is true, given much; but because what they are given is intended for a much wider company, much will be required of them as well. They are a means to something greater, not...an end in themselves.

In the Pauline and other epistles, the gospels’ parabolic treatment of stewardship becomes almost doctrinal. In **1 Corinthians 4:1-2**, Paul applies the concept of stewardship to himself as an apostle and implicitly to the church at large...

...”this is how one should regard us (i.e. Paul and his associates – but implicitly the church at large) – as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy” (4:2) **Here the property for which the Christian stewards have responsibility is not the material effects of a royal household, nor noble prisoners like Daniel and his companions...but the mysteries of God: that is, the gospel itself, which is intended for the whole family of humanity, God’s household.**

This same theological nuance is assigned to the metaphor of the steward in **Ephesians**. Here, however, the scriptural context adds yet another dimension to the meaning of the steward idea for the early Christians.

*For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles – assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written (3:1-2)*

The new dimension in this important passage is what we may call the **dimension of participation**. Although the steward of God (or Christ), like the stewards of earthly lords, can claim nothing for him- or herself, that steward is not merely an outsider – hired help, so to speak. Rather, the steward participates in the very “household of God.” As such, the steward is called and enable to share “this grace” (v. 8) with others, and to bring them in turn into God’s household.

This dialectically offsets the other side of the Bible’s discussion of stewardship, i.e., its negative or critical side which repeatedly emphasizes that stewards are only stewards, and warns them therefore not to consider themselves owners or masters. While that warning is certainly sustained by Paul, the Ephesians reference to stewardship accentuates the high meaning of the metaphor: the steward is herself a participant in the very bounty (grace) for whose distribution she has now a mandate. This not only picks up the “positive” connotation of the metaphor as it applies to the office of steward in the Hebrew Scriptures: it adds to it. The steward of the mysteries of God not only represents her sovereign but she shares fully in the grace that those mysteries connote.

A further dimension is added by **1 Peter 4...the eschatological dimension** of the theme in the New Testament. For here, the fundamental assumption is that characteristic, apocalyptic belief of the early church – that the end is near:

*The end of all things is at hand; ...As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:...in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 4:7-11)*

Whatever else the eschatological context of the Christian life implies, one thing that appears prominently in this passage is the way consciousness of the end reinforces the gift character of life. Part of what this means, concretely, is that our human tendency to isolate ourselves and our talents pridefully is reduced. The sense of an ending brings us into fuller recognition of our own transience, and our creaturely solidarity. We are all "in the same boat." And it is God's boat, God's ark. Here the eschatological and the ecclesiastical presuppositions of stewardship are inextricably linked together. (pages 35 – 39)

**NOTE:** In a detailed study of the use of the Greek word, *oikonomia*, (the word is generally translated as "stewardship") in Greek sources to about 100 A.D., John Reumann draws some important conclusions:<sup>3</sup>

- (i) The term was in widespread and constant use.
- (ii) It never lost its etymological meaning of "household management" – the ordering, administration and care of the domestic affairs within a household – but took to itself the idea of an expanded household and was used with reference to military matters, city, and political affairs, etc.
- (iii) It applied too to management of the largest household imaginable –the universe – including the arranging of the cosmos by nature or God. This was developed, especially in stoicism, with reference to divine universal government.
- (iv) Reumann concluded that as Christianity moved out into the Graeco-Roman world from its Palestinian birthplace and sought to express itself so that the peoples of that world could understand its message and claims, it found in *oikonomia* and related terms, a set of terms in which it could express and develop its ideas. (Hence its use in Luke, Pauline and deutero-Pauline writings.
- (v) "Steward" was not always a servant. The householder, not the employed steward, had primary responsibility for the stewardship of the household.
- (vi) Even in its primary meaning of "household management," *oikonomia* had a connotation of shrewdness and business acumen, connivance and discretion.
- (vii) Although many words were used to describe Jesus as servant, and subordinate to the Father, the early Christian writers avoid the title *ho oikonomos* (the steward) for Christ and for God. In this, Biblical and Patristic writers followed the example of non-Christian writers, avoiding applying to the deity a word which was sometimes used to denote a petty government official, or a niggardly house manager. (McDiarmid: 1992,170-174)

#### 4.2.2 OTHER NEW TESTAMENT PASSAGES

There are several references to the collection that Paul was organizing for the church in Jerusalem: **1 Corinthians 16:2; 2 Corinthians 8 (esp vs 3-5); 2 Corinthians 9 (esp vs 6-8).**

A number of key ideas or emphases emerge:

<sup>3</sup> John Reumann, *The use of oikonomia and related terms in Greek sources to about a. d. 100, as a background for patristic applications*, Ph. D. diss. University of Pennsylvania, 1957. The thesis provided the basis for a number of subsequent papers on *oikonomia* by Reumann.

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- ❖ Grace
  - God's grace in Jesus Christ, who, though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. (2 Cor 8:9)
  - God's grace that has enabled the churches in Macedonia to give most generously (2 Cor. 8:1)
- ❖ Unity - The Macedonians did not think of themselves in isolation. (2 Cor 8:4)
- ❖ Giving according to means and sacrificially. (2 Cor 8:3)
- ❖ Giving in the context of an act of devotion. (2 Cor 8:5)
- ❖ Solidarity and equality. (2 Cor 8:14)
- ❖ The power of example to encourage and to test earnestness (2 Cor 8:8)
- ❖ Giving must be a personal choice (2 Cor 9:7)
- ❖ Giving must be done cheerfully (2 Cor 9:7)
- ❖ Giving should be done regularly (1 Cor 16:2)
- ❖ Giving in response to a need; giving should have a purpose in view. (2 Cor 8:4)

These three passages are worthy of prayerful and careful study and reflection.

### 4.3 TITHING

*It is almost inevitable that any discussion of stewardship will raise the question of tithing.* This century has seen an inconclusive debate about the biblical basis for tithing. McDiarmid, in his study, *Stewardship and Tithing in the Episcopal Church*, noted the significant impact of the Alabama Plan in the doctrinal development of the tithe within the Episcopal Church. (It was so named because it arose out of discussions in the Diocese of Alabama.)

**The Alabama Plan** insisted on tithing as the minimum standard of giving, and the sharing of testimonies about the impact of tithing on personal life and finances. The plan required the rector of the parish to be a tither, or to be willing to commit to the principle of tithing as a personal or family goal, and expected the lay leadership of the parish to accept the principle of proportionate giving – again, with the tithe as their minimum standard or goal. The lay leaders also needed to demonstrate a preparedness to commend this principle to the rest of the congregation. (McDiarmid: 267)

A Bible Study focusing on the tithe was part of the plan. That study highlighted five Old Testament reasons for tithing:

- (i) Because it's commanded (Deuteronomy 12:6; 14:22).
- (ii) The tithe is holy and belongs to the Lord (Leviticus 27:9, 26, 30).
- (iii) That the tithe might teach people to fear God – to put God first in their lives (Deuteronomy 14:23).
- (iv) That it is congruent with the history of God's people to give thanks (Deut 26).
- (v) As a means of blessing "that things might go well with you" (Deuteronomy 12:28 also Malachi 3:7-12).

The Alabama Plan quoted Matthew 23:23 ("these you ought to have done..." i.e.. tithe mint and dill) to illustrate Jesus attitude about tithing.

It began to be influential from the beginning of the 1970's.

McDiarmid notes that "in a series of resolutions beginning in the late 1970's the Episcopal Church centred its stewardship doctrine on the phrase, 'stewardship is the main work of the

church,' and has claimed the tithe as the minimum standard of giving for Episcopalians, and as the biblical standard of giving."

So *what do the Scriptures have to say about tithing?* For a start, it needs to be noted that *the practice of giving a tenth part of one's possessions for the maintenance of both cult and government is ancient and widespread.* It is to be found as a practice amongst neighbouring nations such as the Canaanites, Phoenicians, Arabs, Carthaginians and Lydians, as well as the Greeks and the Romans (Verhoef: 1987,303).

The earliest reference to tithing is **Genesis 14:20** where Abraham pays a tithe to Melchizedek, the priest of God Most High. In **Genesis 28:22** Jacob vows to give a tenth to God of all that God gives to him. In both of these cases the tithe can be seen as an expression of gratitude to God for blessings bestowed. Tithing subsequently became obligatory and the various laws and ordinances relating to tithing occur in **Numbers 18:21-32, Deuteronomy 14:22-26, 27-29; 26:12f, Nehemiah 10:37-39; 13:5.**

*The basis biblical data has been traditionally interpreted in two different ways:*

**(a) A Fourteen Tithe System (e.g. favoured by Josephus)**

Year	Tithe Number	Recipient	Bible reference
1	1	the Levites (1/10 to priests)	Num 18:21-32
	2	to be spent in Jerusalem	Deut 14:22-27*
2	1	the Levites	
	2	to be spent in Jerusalem	
3	1	the Levites	
	2	to be spent in Jerusalem	
	3	<b>the poor</b>	Deut 14:27-29
4	1	the Levites	
	2	to be spent in Jerusalem	
5	1	the Levites	
	2	to be spent in Jerusalem	
6	1	the Levites	
	2	to be spent in Jerusalem	
7	<b>3</b>	<b>the poor</b>	
	None	A Sabbath rest	

*\* And before the Lord your God, in the place which he will choose, to make his name dwell there, you shall eat the tithe of your grain, of your wine, and your oil, and the firstlings of your herd and flock; that you may learn to fear the Lord your God always.*

**(b) A Twelve Tithe System (e.g. supported by the Mishnaic rabbis)**

Year	Tithe Number	Recipient	Bible Reference
1	1	the Levites (1/10 to the priests)	Num. 18:21-32
	2	to be spent in Jerusalem	Deut. 14:22-27
2	1	the Levites	
	2	to be spent in Jerusalem	
3	1	the Levites	
	2	to be spent in Jerusalem	
4	1	the Levites	
	2	to be spent in Jerusalem	
5	1	the Levites	
	2	to be spent in Jerusalem	
6	1	the Levites	
	2	to be spent in Jerusalem	

7                      None                      A Sabbath rest

In **1 Samuel 8:15**, Samuel warns of the tithe, the tax that would be required by a king to support the royal infrastructure. In **Nehemiah 10:37, 38** the people were required to bring their tithes to the Levites as part of the post-exilic restoration of the cult system. **Nehemiah 12:44** indicates that the giving of tithes, etc, was an expression of rejoicing before the Lord. This post-exilic restoration is the possible context for the passage in **Malachi 3:8-10** where the people are commanded to bring their full tithes into the storehouse (temple).

From this material it can be deduced that:

- The people were to pay a tithe for the maintenance of the temple cult. Neglect of that duty placed the people in a vulnerable situation calling forth a strong word from Malachi.
- The people were to either eat a tithe in Jerusalem or, if Jerusalem was too far away to carry the tithe there to eat it, the people could sell the tithe and use the proceeds “for whatever you desire, oxen, or sheep, or wine or strong drink, whatever your appetite craves; and you shall eat before the Lord and rejoice, you and your household.” (Deut. 14:24-26). *This practice had a pedagogic function.* It emphasized for the people their dependence upon God for the blessings that came from the produce of the earth. It was both an action of joyful thanksgiving and learning to fear the Lord.
- That *there are major difficulties in trying to generalize the particular historical circumstance addressed by the words of Malachi into a universal principle applicable to Christians today.*
- The practice of requiring the consumption of one tithe in Jerusalem had the effect of consolidating Jerusalem’s position as a hub of religious life and also ensured that it was supported financially.
- A substantial contribution was given to the poor once every three years.
- In the seventh year, no tithes were paid as the land was to rest (Sabbath).

(This takes no account of the free will offerings, gifts and tributes dealt with in the Old Testament.)

***References to tithing in the New Testament are scant.***

**Matthew 23:23** (and Luke 11:42) indicates that tithing was considered by Jesus as one of the less weighty matters of the law. The weightier matters of the law are justice, mercy and faith. (or the Lucan equivalents, justice and the love of God).

In **Luke 18:12**, in the parable of the Tax Collector and the Pharisee, Jesus has the Pharisee boast of the fact that he pays his tithes. However, it is not the self-exalting pride of exact religious observance but the humility of spirit that matters.

**Hebrews 7:4-10** refers to tithing by Abraham to Melchizedek and by the people to the descendants of Levi. However, these references are part of the argument that the author of Hebrews develops setting out the superior priesthood of Jesus, “a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.” (Heb. 7:17)

***On the basis of the minimal data on tithing in the New Testament, scholars have understandably reached quite different conclusions.***

For example, *on the one hand*, Lukas Vischer concluded that the argument for the tithe in the New Testament was very weak. *On the other hand*, the Episcopal Church used Matthew 23:23 as the proof text for its tithing doctrine. (**Note:** In Paul’s letters to the Corinthians, there is no mention of tithing in the collection for Jerusalem (1 Cor 16:1ff; 2 Cor. 8;9)).

***Some scholars use arguments from silence to contend that Jesus must have tithed.***

A typical use of that approach goes like this:

- Jesus came to fulfil, not abolish the law.
- The payment of the tithe was normal practice at that time.
- Jesus would have been criticized by the Pharisees if he had not fulfilled the basic requirement of the law to tithe.

Jeremias' work, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, challenges the second of these assertions (1984:108) In addition, McDiarmid notes that nowhere does Jesus criticise people for failing to tithe (322).

Thomas Aquinas, in his *Summa Theologiae* (Question 87. "Tithes") determined that the church, taking into consideration the times and the situation of its people involved, could determine that a tithe, or any other proportion, should be paid. [If Thomas had been writing about the Uniting Church at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, I wonder whether he would have said the same thing about the church determining what should be paid.]

The comments of Bishop Azariah of India are pertinent at this stage:

*The New Covenant is not a covenant of law but of grace, The Christian is not under commandments and regulations, but under the more compelling rule of love. Consequently, the New Testament never commands the offerings of tithes, first fruits, or firstlings; but reiterates the principle of freewill offerings, as man's [sic] response to God's wonderful love in Jesus Christ. Among the disciples at Antioch, every man "gave according to his ability" (Acts 11:29). Christians in Corinth were urged to set apart Sunday after Sunday, "as he may prosper" (1 Corinthians 16:2). The churches of Macedonia were commended because they gave "according to their means" and "beyond their means" (2 Corinthians 8:3).*

*So, in the New Testament, we have examples of carrying out in practice this principle of freewill offering. The Pharisees in the parable gave a tenth of his income (Luke 18:12). Zacchaeus gave one half of all he possessed (Luke 19:8). The widow and Barnabas gave their all (100 per cent) (Luke 21:4; Acts 4:37)...*

*The Christian is thus not under the Law of Tithes, precisely as he is not under obligation to observe the Jewish feasts, or to offer the Levitical sacrifices, or to obey the laws of the Sabbath. To enforce, therefore, the tithe on Christians as a biblical command involved a misunderstanding of the relationship between the Old Covenant and the New.*

***God has given man His all. He expects man's relationship to him to be a relationship of gratitude, thanksgiving, and love. Moved by such love, the redeemed man must determine for himself what his response should be in terms of money. This response is bound to vary for different persons. She loves much to whom much is forgiven. (Luke 7:47). Consciousness or recognition of God's love and forgiveness decides the proportion.*** (V. S. Azariah, *Christian Giving*, 1956:83f)

## **5. LISTENING TO OUR EVANGELICAL TRADITION**

### **5.1 JOHN WESLEY'S SERMONS**

Two sermons of John Wesley are of particular interest.

**5.1.1 THE GOOD STEWARD** uses Luke 16:2 as its text: *Give an account of your stewardship; for you may no longer be a steward.*

Wesley observed that “no character more exactly agrees with the present state of man, than that of a steward.” Wesley expounds on three issues:

- The respects in which we are now stewards.
- That “we have this trust reposed in us only during the short, uncertain space that we sojourn here below.”
- That we have to “give an account of our stewardship.”

Wesley identifies the respects in which we are now stewards under four specific heads:

- our souls;
- our bodies;
- our goods and
- whatever other talents we have received (including our bodily strength, health, pleasing personality, agreeable address, learning and knowledge, influence over others, time and that on which all the rest depend, the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit.

In expounding the third, namely “That we have to ‘give an account of our stewardship’”, Wesley returns to the four specific heads set out above. His questioning in relation to the grace of God and the Holy Spirit is searching:

*Above all, wast thou a good steward of my grace, preventing, accompanying and following thee? Didst thou duly observe, and carefully improve, all the influences of my Spirit – every good desire, every measure of light, all His sharp or gentle reproofs?*

**5.1.2 THE USE OF MONEY** uses Luke 16:9 as its text: *I say unto you, Make unto yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness: that, when ye fail, they may receive you into the everlasting habitations.*

This sermon has been popularly summarised as:

- Gain all you can.
- Save all you can.
- Give all you can.

**(a) Gain all you can**

observing these cautions and restrictions:

- Without hurting your body (by excessively long or hard labour, by depriving your body of appropriate food and sleep)
- Without hurting your mind (i.e. without engaging in any trade that is sinful, that is contrary to the law of God or your country)
- Without hurting your neighbour (in substance, body or soul)

These being observed, it is the bounden duty of all who are engaged in worldly business to observe that first and great rule of Christian wisdom with respect to money, “Gain all you can” by:

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- Honest industry
- All possible diligence in your calling
- Losing no time (no procrastination)
- Doing nothing by halves
- Using in your business all the understanding that God has given you
- By continually learning from experience (your own and others), reading and reflection so that you daily improve what you do

In summary, **Gain all you can** by honest industry and unwearied diligence.

### **(b) Save all you can**

by

- Not wasting money on gratifying the desires of the flesh (e.g gluttony, drunkenness, delicacy and variety)
- Not wasting any money on superfluous or expensive apparel, needless ornaments, superfluous or expensive furniture, elegant rather than useful gardens
- Not doing anything out of vanity (seeking the admiration or praise of others)
- Not spending wastefully on your children
- By not leaving money to your children if you have good reason to believe they will waste it, but only leaving them enough to keep them above want and to give all the rest in a way which you judge would be most to the glory of God.

### **(c) Give all you can**

God has placed you in this world as a steward (not as a proprietor). As such God entrusted you with goods of various kinds but the sole property of these still rests in God. Your soul, your body and your substance (property) belong to God.

God has told you how to use your substance for God, in such manner that it may be all an holy sacrifice, acceptable through Christ Jesus. God has promised to reward this light, easy service with an eternal weight of glory.

God's directions for the use of your worldly substance, if you desire to be a faithful and wise steward, are:

- Provide things needful for yourself (food, clothes, what is required to preserve the body in health and strength)
- Provide these things for your household (spouse, children, servants, others)
- If you have any left after these two, "do good to them that are of the household of faith."
- If you have any left over, "as you have opportunity, do good unto all men."

In so doing, you give all you can, all you have. All that is laid out in this manner is given to God. You "render to God the things that are God's," not only by what you give to the poor but what you expend in providing things necessary for yourself and your household.

If in doubt about any item of expenditure, apply the following fourfold test:

- (1) Am I acting as a steward of my Lord's goods?
- (2) Am I doing this in obedience to his Word? Scriptural justification?
- (3) Can I offer up this expense as a sacrifice to God through Jesus Christ?

- (4) Have I reason to believe that this expenditure shall be rewarded at the resurrection of the just?

If you still have doubt, you may examine yourself by prayer according to those heads of inquiry. Try whether you can say to the Searcher of hearts, your conscience not condemning you:

***Lord, thou seest I am going to expend this sum on that food, apparel, furniture. And thou knowest, I act herein with a single eye as a steward of thy goods, expending this portion on them thus in pursuance of the design thou hadst in entrusting me with them. Thou knowest I do this in obedience to the lord, as thou commandest, and because thou commandest it. Let this, I beseech thee, be an holy sacrifice, acceptable through Jesus Christ! And give me a witness in myself that for this labour of love I shall have a recompense when thou rewardest every man according to his works.***

Now if your conscience bear you witness in the Holy Ghost that this prayer is well-pleasing to God, then have you no reason to doubt but that the expense is right and good, and such as will never make you ashamed.

In giving all you can, do not stint yourself to this or that proportion. "Render unto God," not a tenth, not a third, not half, but all that is God's, be it more or less

- By employing all on yourself, your household, the household of faith, and all mankind
- In such manner that you may give a good account of your stewardship when ye can be no longer stewards
- In such manner as the oracles of God direct, both by general and particular precepts
- In such manner, that whatever ye do may be "a sacrifice of a sweet-smelling savour to God," and
- That every act may be rewarded in that day when the Lord cometh for all his saints.

Can we be either wise or faithful stewards unless we thus manage our Lord's goods?

## 5.2 VARIATION ON A THEME

In 1914, an American Methodist layman, Harvey Calkins wrote a book, *A Man and His Money*. McDiarmid observed in his thesis that **Calkins used a sequence that would be followed by most later writers on stewardship. Calkins noted that stewardship covered a very wide field of obligation, and to consider the whole theme would constitute a treatise on the whole Christian life, therefore consideration of stewardship would be confined to stewardship of possessions.**

McDiarmid notes that Calkins put new emphasis on the steward as administrator and modified the tripartite formula of John Wesley accordingly. Thus the steward will:

- Earn all he can
- Save all he can
- Administer all he can

Calkins did not avoid the challenge to give. He believed that God should be honoured by the tithes of all the faithful given to the church. As with many stewardship writers, he made use of Malachi 3:10, "bring ye the whole tithe into the storehouse" where the church is the modern storehouse.

The steward also had responsibility for family, the state and the poor as part of sacred obligations.

## **6. TWENTIETH CENTURY CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE CHURCH'S UNDERSTANDING OF STEWARD/SHIP**

### **6.1 DOUGLAS JOHN HALL - *THE STEWARD: A Biblical Symbol Come of Age***

As noted earlier, Douglas Hall, a Canadian theologian, has made a significant contribution to the development of thinking about stewardship. I will endeavour to present a brief outline of the thesis and arguments set out in his book, *THE STEWARD*. Briefly stated, Hall's thesis is that "the biblical metaphor of the steward has assumed the status of a symbol in our time." (122)

Stated a little more fully, his fundamental proposition is:

*That the concept of human stewardship is pertinent for articulating the gospel today. Looking through the lens of Scripture at the world in which we are living, we are being impelled to conclude this: Ours is a world in which human beings are required to find a new way of conceiving of their identity and vocation; otherwise there can be no averting the catastrophic future we are courting. Simultaneously we bring to our reflection on the biblical text this existential concern for the future and the specific demand for a new image of the human implicit in it, and we find ourselves searching the Scriptures for appropriate clues to such an image.*

*And amongst these clues the biblical metaphor of the steward becomes highly suggestive. It is an ancient metaphor that, in the view of the present intricate constellation of problems which conditions our context, has become newly accessible to the community of faith as a medium for its message. That is to say, the steward metaphor of the biblical lens ought to be considered a full-fledged symbol. It has come of age. (75,76)*

Stewardship has not only to do with budgetting and finances but with the whole ordering of our life, our corporate deployment of God's varied grace in the daily life of the world. Hall offers theological reflections on the word "steward" looking at five dimensions: theological, christological, ecclesiastical, anthropological and eschatological.

#### **(a) *The Theological Dimension***

The first stage in the evolution of the steward concept is the idea that there should be someone to manage the affairs of another. The concept moves from there to the metaphoric meaning and in that transition, as evidenced in Isaiah 22, the "other" whose affairs the steward manages is God. Yahweh becomes the royal figure by whom the steward is commissioned and to whom the steward is accountable. Hence, ownership, mastery, ultimacy of authority, and sovereignty are attributable to God alone. (42)

#### **(b) *The Christological Dimension***

Referring to the long tradition of contemplating Christ's work as fulfilment of the offices of prophet, priest and king, Hall suggests that steward could be a particularly provocative office to consider in this regard.

*Jesus as chief steward of the mysteries of God lives in such faithfulness to the stewardly vocation as it is already outlined in Hebraic Scripture and practice, that he becomes the primary model for our stewardship.*

*He is, however, not only a model or example. That would leave the matter of our being stewards in the realm of commandment and imitation of Christ, whereas the most basic presupposition of our stewardship is grace. The christological assumption of Christian stewardship is that as those who are ... "in Christ" we are taken up into this stewardship. It is not that we achieve the stewardly status through our works, our imitation of him. We are graciously brought into a stewarding of God's grace that has already been enacted by God's chief steward.*

*In other words, **Jesus Christ, who is God's, is the initiator and enabler of Christian stewardship: "you are Christ's; and Christ is God's."** The christological basis of stewardship means not only that our stewardship is exemplified by Jesus; rather... it is the prior stewardship of Jesus into which, through the Spirit and through faith, we are initiated.*

....

*In short, the Christian view of stewardship starts with the stewardship of the One who did not grasp at equality with God, but was obedient (Phil. 2). It is **his** stewardship in which by grace we participate...(44-46)*

**(c) The Ecclesiastical Dimension**

*... The church is a stewarding community. As the body of Christ, the disciple community is being incorporated into the work of the great steward. As servants of the Suffering Servant, they are being constituted "stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 Cor. 4:1) through their witness to the Crucified One—both their verbal testimony and their share in Christ's suffering. Their whole life is to be an outpouring of God's varied grace.*

*Here as elsewhere there is an implicit polemic in the New testament against the church as end-in-itself. (45)*

**(d) The Anthropological Dimension**

*There is no doubt that the New testament intends us to think of **Christians** as stewards. It does not develop in an explicit way the idea that **human beings as such** have a stewardly vocation, any more than it concerns itself directly with the worldly meaning of stewardship.*

*... the New Testament certainly implies, both in its discussion of the disciple community that is being conformed to Christ's genuine humanity, that stewardship is a human calling. It applies not only to those who are being called into the life of explicit discipleship, but to the human species as such. God intends that the creature whom later scholarship designated *Homo sapiens* should live as God's steward within the creaturely sphere. (46,47)*

**(e) The Eschatological Dimension**

*We have noted that within the metaphor of stewardship one is accountable. It is therefore not surprising that the eschatological dimension should appear so frequently in the New testament's treatment of this metaphor, as well as implicitly in the Isaiah passage. The Lukan references are especially noteworthy in this connection:*

*Who then is the faithful and wise steward, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom the master when he comes will find so doing. Truly I tell you, he will set him over all his possessions. (Luke 12:42-44)*

*The parable of the unjust steward also is full of eschatological significance. The whole context of that story is its consciousness of the End – which implies accountability. “Turn in the account of your stewardship!” the writer is saying (Luke 16:1-9). Stewards must be watchful (Luke 12); trustworthy (1 Cor 4:2), blameless (Titus 1:7) – but not simply out of moralistic concern. Rather, they know that with which they are charged is the property of another. It is God’s grace (Eph. 3:2), and therefore, like the servants who are given talents in Jesus’ parable..., they must finally report on their use or misuse of what they have been given.*

*This note of impending judgement (krisis) of the steward is, as we have seen, especially the theme of the passage in the first epistle of Peter. ...It remains true even after the End is no longer perceived as an immediate Parousia that “the judgement begins with the household of faith” (1 Pet. 4:17). Because those who are being incorporated into the life and work of the Great Steward have been given much, their failure to give much in return is especially serious. (48)*

Hall asks why more has not been made of the metaphor of “steward”, with its real potential for symbolic profundity in relation to the life of the disciple and the disciple community, in the theology as well as the practice of Christianity in the world? (51) He suggests two reasons:

*The general changes in Christian self-understanding occurring during the first four or five centuries of the church had an effect on may if not all aspects of Christian belief, including stewardship. Two eventualities within these centuries materially affected the directions that would be taken by this incipient symbol of the Christian message and life:*

**First**, the movement of Christianity away from its Hebraic matrix into the cultural milieu of the so-called Hellenistic world;

**Second**, the adoption of the Christian religion by Constantine and his successors as the official religion of the Roman Empire. (53,54)...

*What happened in the move of the Christian faith into the Hellenistic world was that Christianity, which at first was an essentially Jewish offspring, underwent a process of spiritualization that robbed it of its potential for “world orientation” that it had inherited from its parental faith. ... In terms of the biblical sources of our faith, when they themselves are not distorted through our acquired ambiguity about creaturehood, Christianity shares with its parental faith, Judaism, a profound world orientation: for the tradition of Jerusalem, the world is both real and good. This is the presupposition without which the whole notion of the Incarnation would be meaningless. (57)*

How did this spiritualization shape the destiny of the stewardship motif within the evolution of Christian thought?

*...it leaves the Christian movement with a highly spiritualized version of the biblical metaphor; therefore it discourages the development of the stewardship theme as a way of thinking about human existence in its totality – in the psychosomatic unity of its creaturely condition. (59)*

Hall noted some impacts of the adoption of Christianity as the official religion of the empire in the fourth century upon the stewardship motif. In the pre-establishment situation, Christians had to take direct responsibility for their own life and work.

*After the establishment of the Christian religion, Christianity became an officially supported cult and the support extended to material as well as less tangible matters....After the reign of Theodosius the Great (346-395) it was sheer political*

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*necessity to be a “Christian.”... This is a far cry from...the situation of Paul of Tarsus, for instance, an important part of whose ministry was convincing his converts in the gentile world that their new faith obligated them to share their money not only with one another but with congregations poorer and more persecuted than themselves.*

Hall goes on to develop in detail five principles of contemporary stewardship praxis and then applies them to three areas of current major significance. In brief, the five principles are:

- (i) **Globalization** - that **the whole earth** is a steward's responsibility
- (ii) **Communalization** - our situation calls for a more wholehearted effort to think corporately. Stewardship implies that **together** we are responsible for the whole earth.
- (iii) **Ecologization** - this responsibility includes the **non-human as well as the human world.**
- (iv) **Politicization** - this responsibility must seek to express itself in **just and merciful political forms.**
- (v) **Futurization** - This responsibility must be exercised in the light not only of the immediate situation but of the near and distant future as well. (148)

Hall then proceeds to apply these principles to three specific areas of our “worldly problem”:

- The quest for justice (126, 155-184)
- The quest for a more acceptable relation between humankind and the extrahuman creation (126, 185-215)
- The quest for world peace (126, 216-237)

A couple of concluding remarks from Hall:

*Through this metaphor, the biblical authors with their genius for images found a single term that could point simultaneously to all three foci of Christian faith:*

- *Its orientation to the one whose sovereignty the steward acknowledges;*
- *Its orientation to humans, who participate in ...universal stewardship...;*
- *And its orientation to otherkind and to the earth, our common house. (232, 233)*

*There is no need, of course, to make extraordinary claims for the metaphor. It is not the only way in which the first witnesses to the “grace in which we stand” articulated their conception of faith. It is not even the most important among them. In comparison with many other images, ideas, and terms that have made the impact historic Christianity (“body of Christ,” “bride of Christ,” “ambassadors for Christ,” “witnesses,” “kingdom of priests,” or “people of the Way”), the metaphor of the steward is perhaps even of minor importance.*

*But images have their time and place. (233)*

***Being a steward is not the only vocation of individual Christians, it is the mission of the whole body. What I mean is that stewardship is the church's mission. Rightly to understand the depths of this old-metaphor-become-contemporary symbol is to realize that when we speak of the stewardship of the church we are speaking about its mission. (244)***

## 6.2 OTHER TWENTIETH CENTURY UNDERSTANDINGS

- Christian stewardship .... means nothing less than faith in action. (WCC 1<sup>st</sup> Assembly, 1948)

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- Stewardship ...should be seen in the light of total dedication of one's gifts to the glory of God in all spheres of life. (WCC New Delhi, 1961)
- In the Bible, the steward is depicted as a person who is given the responsibility of managing something belonging to someone else. The steward is thus responsible to the owner. At the same time, the steward is not simply a passive caretaker of what has been entrusted to him or her. The steward is the full representative of the owner. (Vallet: 1994,3)
- Kantonen, writing in 1956, rejected what he saw as a simplistic approach to stewardship which he summarised as:

*God is the owner of everything. He has entrusted his property to us to be used according to his purpose. We must answer for that use before his judgement seat. We must therefore act as responsible and faithful stewards.*

*Sound logic as far as it goes but it does not carry us one step beyond the Old Testament or even the Koran. There is not a trace in it of the gospel which as "the power of God unto salvation" transforms our status from that of steward in the original sense of hired servant to that of God's children.*

Kantonen's theology emphasized stewardship as a response to the revelation and action of God in Christ, and he deliberately eliminated any elements of "bootstrap" theology. The relationship to God upon which stewardship is based is more than trusteeship or vocational service. "We are sons and heirs not merely trustees and servants" and he insisted that the relationship between owner and steward was not one of contractual obligation but one of love.

*For Kantonen, the only principle of Christian giving should be "Freely ye have received, freely give". (McDiarmid: 1992,167-170)*

- Stewardship is nothing less than a complete life-style, a total accountability and responsibility before God. Stewardship is what we do after we say we believe, that is, after we give our love, loyalty and trust to God, from whom each and every aspect of our lives comes as gift. As members of God's household, we are subject to God's economy or stewardship, that is, God's plan to reconcile the whole world and bring creation to its proper end. (Westerhoff: 1983,15)
- Our churches' understanding of stewardship is so controlled by the logic of exchange that we are threatened with no longer knowing what it means to be gifted and to have gifts. Vallet consistently points to the way the parables break the grip of exchange by showing God's own generosity and excess in the gift of his Son, God's own life, for the sake of the world. "He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for us all, will he not with him give us everything else?" (Rom. 8:32). Stewardship is thus based on the joy of being found and given life against death; the way upon which the journey of stewardship treads is gratitude. (M. Douglas Meeks in the Foreword to Vallet's book, 194:xiv)
- *When we recall that Jesus Christ is the Chief Steward, we realize that our redemption necessarily involves us as stewards also. Douglas Hall noted that the Christological basis for stewardship is exemplified by Jesus, but also that it is the prior stewardship of Jesus into which, through the Spirit and faith, we are initiated. (Vallet: 1994,42)*
- In 1959, Joseph Fletcher presented a paper to a Theological Study Conference on Stewardship. Fletcher thought his economic context was so different from that in which stewardship theology was formulated, that basic stewardship aims should be recast. He described this change of context:

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*Most of the classical concept-forming for the doctrine of Christian stewardship was carried out in the past era of widespread poverty in the agrarian and low-energy societies of the biblical and European worlds, not in the mid-twentieth century opulence of America.*

In his presentation, Fletcher drew a distinction between the “micro-ethics” of stewardship – the area of personal giving and personal responsibility – and the “macro-ethics” of stewardship which concern the structural redistribution of wealth.

He believed the “micro-ethical” approach was inadequate and commented that **“Private self-taxation at the level of grace, as in tithing, is too little and too spotty.”** (McDiarmid: 1992,184-185)

- Within the Roman Catholic Church in the U.S., a distinction has emerged in recent decades between the smaller picture of stewardship (financial giving) and the larger picture of stewardship (all of life). (McDiarmid: 1992,274-275)
- Stewardship – to be a partner with Christ in the purpose of God. (Versteeg: 1923?)
- Stewardship is partnership with Christ through the Holy Spirit in fulfilling the purpose of God in the world. (Conrad:1954,27 – quoted in McDiarmid: 1992,169)
- Stewardship is nothing but the gospel on finance. It is the spirit and mind of Jesus shown through money. (Versteeg: 1943,71)
- Helge Brattgard, a Swedish Lutheran, defined stewardship as “that responsibility which each Christian must assume for his congregation. ”His theology turned towards God’s oikonomia – God’s entire plan of salvation, in which Christ plays a central role. Christ —the steward – has the keys to the house, and the house is the Christian congregation, “the people of God’s household”. He focussed on both the individual person and on the church, its worship services and ceremonies, its hospitality and educational programs. **He concluded that humans are stewards within God’s stewardship (God’s total plan of salvation).** (McDiarmid: 1992:177-179)

## **7. CONCLUSION**

I have sought in this presentation to open up the subject of stewardship for fresh consideration and re-appropriation. I trust that the material presented will assist the Synod in its consideration of this important topic and will thus be one step on the way towards a fresh vision for stewardship.

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**18 MAY, 1998**