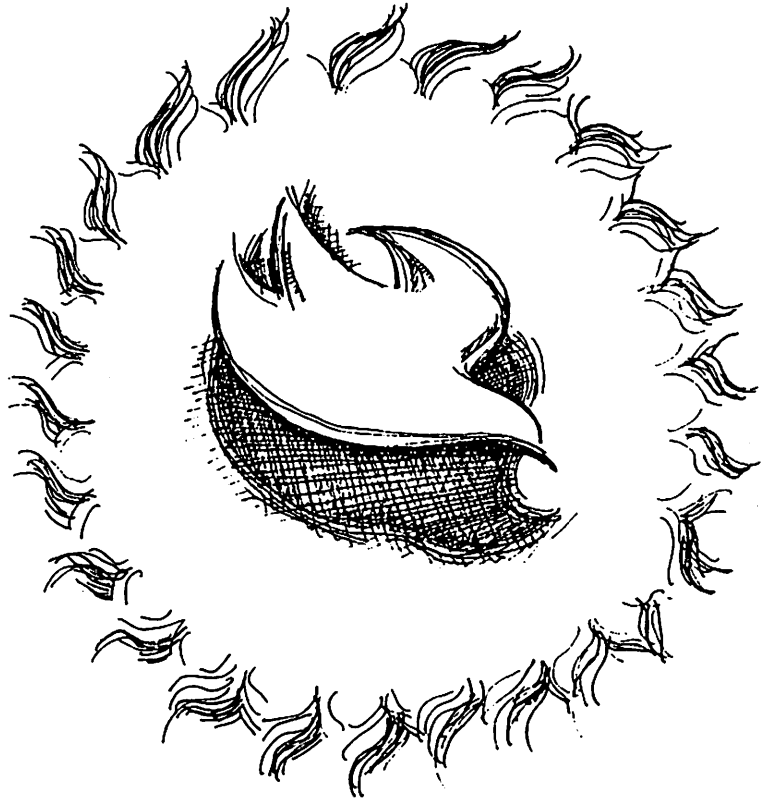


# The Celebration of Smallness



*Samuel J. Wylie*

Edited by Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann

**Cover:**

The light of Christ casts its shadow on the sun. This design, carved by artist John Whitfield, is embedded in the bishop's staff carried by Samuel Wylie and Thomas Ray, seventh and ninth bishops of Northern Michigan. As fragile as a bird on the wing, Christ outshines imperial claims. "Soar we now where Christ has led."

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## Introduction

From the moment my father learned the results of the diocesan election in Northern Michigan, a quiet joy began to work in him. He had been drawn to the openness and the independent faith evident in members of the Search Committee. He responded to the call to be bishop with a deep sense that God was about to do a special work in the Upper Peninsula.

Colleagues at General Theological Seminary murmured that my father was committing "career suicide" by moving to a "non-viable" diocese. But my father, who had always filled our home with visitors whose eyes were alive with faith and who travelled light, looked forward to the changes his election promised in his vocation and for our family.

In Northern Michigan, in 1972, my father had responsibility for 33 congregations and 18 priests. The diocesan staff was composed of one secretary. The office was in our home.

My father was delighted that relationships between people in the diocese could be primary. Discernment with one another was a joy unencumbered by multiple administrative meetings and arguments between trustees responsible for enormous assets.

I know now that my father had in his mind's eye dioceses like that of Michigan (before its recent division). In Detroit, the bishop could only hope to visit a congregation once every three years if he was on the road every single Sunday!

Before our move to the Upper Peninsula in 1972, I had known my father primarily as a man in a black suit and clericals who was on his way somewhere whether it was across the seminary close or across an ocean. If he found ways to relax, it wasn't in my presence.

In Northern Michigan, despite my parents' road trips to visit parishes, I saw my father more often than I had in New York and he was more relaxed. He spent hours working on sermons in a comfortable chair staring out at Lake Michigan.

Moving to the U.P. also brought my family closer to the freedom that the Little Brothers of Jesus had modeled for us. My parents had always had a special love for people of faith who refused to pursue money, living on the edge, trusting God, eager to share a bottle of wine and to tell stories of God's movement in our lives.

My father seemed genuinely pleased when he told us that as bishop, his salary would be reduced by half. (When the diocese worked to increase his salary by \$3,000, he put the money in a fund for clergy children who wanted to go to college.) My parents had no savings to speak of. My father joked that each of his four children was to inherit one wheel from the family car. Although our real inheritance is the love our parents shared and the commitment that passed between them in the sanctuary as hymns soared skyward.

My father's funeral in 1974 was held in Marquette just two years after his consecration. My mother didn't know what to make of the sense she had shared with my father that God was on the move in this diocese, preparing a work that might be a gift to the whole church. With continuing hope, she remained in Menominee.

When the diocesan center moved from Menominee to Marquette, a move my parents had also envisioned, my mother remained at Grace Church. All went along quietly until Tom Ray, consecrated in 1982, began to initiate mutual ministry - a relationship that involved more responsibility of lay members and promised only regular visits from seminary-trained priests.

Parish members at Grace Church rebelled, my mother among them. They were sure that Menominee could raise the money for a full-time priest. They *wanted* a full-time priest.

But during the decade of discernment that followed, my mother's feelings shifted. I remember her smile when it dawned on her that mutual ministry might well be part of the calling she and my father had experienced. God's vision, which celebrates smallness, is active as members of congregations throughout the diocese take responsibility

for the pastoring of one another, for building maintenance, even for consecration of the elements. And this vision is a gift to the whole church, reminding it of those things that are important in our faith and stripping it of the pretensions that we often substitute.

In *The Celebration of Smallness*, my father anticipates ways that the church might change. He wrote: "Lay responsibility goes with smallness. Where there is no possibility of a clerical bureaucracy, jobs get done by the people who can and will do them. Special lay education, in that case, will be necessary for very ordinary Christians."

As I understand it, the diocese has gone a step further, lifting up baptism as the empowering sacrament and giving every baptized member a seat and voice at convention. Clergy are no longer automatic delegates, and votes by orders have been abolished.

Members of the Wylie family are honored that the Diocese of Northern Michigan has chosen to republish *Celebration of Smallness* for its centennial. We are also grateful that Sam Wylie's work in the diocese, which was so short-lived, is claimed by the diocese as part its continuing work – a work we consider to be one of the most exciting things going on in the Episcopal Church today. We share Tom Ray's conviction that the Diocese of Northern Michigan is "being dragged into [its new understanding of ministry] relentlessly, inexorably, by the very Spirit of God."

*Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann*

## The Celebration of Smallness

I. I am grateful for the chance to reflect on the celebration of smallness: grateful the way someone is grateful for comprehensive degree examinations or a thorough physical. I have been obliged to remember and evaluate the past twelve years of my life and to form conclusions. Like Judy Collins, I can sing "Both Sides Now," but I am less wistful than Judy Collins about what I have learned. My observations can be stated in one sentence: I believe that scripture, theology, and experience agree that power in ministry and a sense of reality in prayer, for both persons and groups, are associated with simplicity and smallness, and therefore with relative poverty. I say "associated with" smallness rather than "identified" or "equated" with smallness, because it appears not to matter whether the smallness is born of necessity or is a style of life accepted as in obedience to Christ's example. Smallness is the Christian norm, I believe, a norm that practically nobody accepts, practices, or celebrates if it can be avoided.

I have seen both sides. I respect bigness and I am happy to have been rector of a big church [the Church of the Advent, Boston] for six fruitful years. Had God willed it, I would have been happy to spend my life there. The parish had size, prestige, history, influence, a strategic metropolitan location, devoted people, perhaps the best music in New England, and a \$2 million endowment. It is a symptom of our devotion to bigness, that when all other criteria fail, the endowment clinches the claim.

The churches of Northern Michigan, on the other hand, are few and they are small. And, while it is an awesome and great privilege to be a bishop in the Church of God anywhere at all, it is less prestigious in political and material influence to be the Bishop of Northern Michigan than to be the Dean of the General Theological Seminary in New York.

I *have* seen both sides, and I am glad to say that I have loved both sides, and been very much aware of the useful-

ness of the job I was doing. Yet, I feel compelled to say (with some surprise) that I am more confident of being in the center of God's will, and of sharing some small bit of the mind of Christ, now, than I was able to do in the more prestigious and obviously influential situations. Please believe that this is in no way a reflection on those assignments or their importance. I am suggesting that smallness is the norm from which the church begins, and that it operates best when it carries into a larger ministry the insights and techniques of smallness.

#### **Power and splendor**

Because that kind of thinking is so different from our standard approach, I want to pause again to acknowledge that bigness obviously has its praiseworthy points. Some kinds of theological witness are best done in the context of numbers and splendor. The eschatological dimension of worship, when we honor Christ the King by trumpets and tympani and mighty organs, splendid choirs, warm light shining on brass and silver and gold, and proclaim the Word to hundreds or to thousands of hearers and worshippers, is an experience which creates faith and sustains it. As we plod along the road, it is good to be caught up from time to time in the splendor of the worship of the Book of Revelation as John envisioned it. I am never tempted to think that I am participating in the ultimate aesthetic glory as I share public worship in the churches of Northern Michigan. Should you be trying to duplicate the splendor of the Book of Revelation, you may have noticed that it falls flat if you are using a dubious organ, a weary choir, or a very uncertain trumpet. There is something mind-blowing about genuine splendor reverently offered. There is something soul-satisfying about rural simplicity. There is nothing to be gained by the attempt to switch roles.

There is another kind of power, the temporal power of a politically and economically strong parish or diocese. People listen to you when you intervene on behalf of the poor, the oppressed, and the ill when you argue from a position of strength, in a way that they do not if you share the poverty and oppression. Bigness can be used to insure equal

justice before the law.

Also, a good book or an impressive theologian can be presented to several hundred people on one occasion in one of the great centers of the church's life. A crowd like that can be assembled in Northern Michigan only for the consecration of bishops, and then only weather permitting.

But those things are not all of Christian witness, or most of Christian witness, nor, I think, the best of Christian witness. Further, they are achieved at the expense of other values that I have come to believe are more central to the Christian faith. The music I particularly enjoy in great parishes costs as much as the entire operating budget of strategic ghetto missions in the same dioceses. While it is the privilege of a wealthy parish to maintain splendid music on behalf of the whole community, I am sure that it is not the privilege of two wealthy parishes in close proximity to each other to compete in the same area while other important work goes unfinanced. Perhaps others, like me, have discovered that bad music heard with a good conscience is more acceptable than good music heard with a bad conscience. The reasons for having a good conscience or a bad conscience are part of the theological question raised in the second part of this meditation.

It is exhilarating to play the game of bigness. When clergy win (by the old ground rules), they may become bishops, and when they become bishops they smoke cigars and drink brandy with kings. When they lose, after achieving royal heights, the guillotine awaits the mitred heads as well as the crowned ones. We cannot call such deaths (whether actual or figurative) martyrdom in the ordinary sense of the word.

### **'Passing through the poor'**

"Our way to God passes through the poor," Yves Congar says, and the church's link with Christ is seen by her poverty and suffering as she follows his example and shares his concerns. If there is any truth in that statement, then bigness is not only a problem for the sensitive conscience, but it is a difficulty on the whole for Christian witness, a deterrent to general evangelism, and a great handicap for



experiments in new styles of living, particularly when these are informal and loosely organized. Certainly there are some big churches where good things are happening. However, where good things happen, it is often because the big church has abandoned its bigness, as a matter of strategy, to work with small groups, in diversified programs, in a decentralized way, within the single big parish.

Conversely, where small churches suffer the big church problems, I have observed that it is often because they have organized themselves as if they were big churches. They put on big church airs, use big church methods, evaluate themselves by big church criteria and fail, of course, pathetically, to measure up to big church achievements. Having denied themselves the small church satisfactions and advantages they fail twice, once in failing to be what they are called to be, and again in failing to achieve goals that are impossible and perhaps unworthy. The mystique of bigness is a hazard to the clear thinking of both great and small.

Those who are called to minister in the context of bigness, I am convinced, are called to a place of special hazard and to a status that is enviable only for dubious reasons. The counsel to avoid weight-throwing, or what the Roman Catholic Church calls triumphalism, to avoid snobbery or even the temptation to think that bigness (by the world's measurable standards) has anything whatever to do with the gospel or the Kingdom, and to avoid undue deference to mammon or money, is basic, and it provides a scheme for personal examination of conscience every day. This is necessary, because inevitably the more investment one has in the system, the more the system will put its claim upon you, dulling conscience and requiring time and energy to be spent in maintaining what you own.

Someone recently gave me copies of his most loved tapes to play in the long journeys I make by car through the diocese. The gift has made the hours fly by, but in our Upper Peninsula where no one locks cars, I now lock mine to protect the expensive equipment, and am sentenced to a kind of caution which does not exist for my carefree

friends who have nothing of value in their cars. This gives me a tiny insight into the burden carried by the wealthy, not least the wealthy institutions of the church. I do not feel obliged to abandon the tapes, and I am not at all suggesting the liquidation of all of the church's institutions. I am suggesting that in this instance I, and in more serious ways, they, must fight to hold on to the simplicity of life and the general trustfulness which people with less to lose simply take for granted.

Weight-throwing, snobbery, and mammon may be the problems of poor people and small institutions, too, but if so, it may be that they are magnified because the little ones have hitched their wagons to the stars of the Christian enterprise instead of taking comfort from the more modest example of their Lord. The point I am making is that the great ones by the world's standards must forget or abandon their achievements in order to achieve poverty of spirit which the little ones may take for granted. I claim, from experience as well as study, that Congar is right, the Little Brothers of Jesus are right, St. Paul is right, in reminding us that in having nothing we possess everything. Smallness, simplicity, an absence of possessions, is an estate to celebrate rather than to deplore.

II. God's endorsement of what is small, simple, and powerless in the world is part of the Word by which he judges both history and ourselves. When God chose a people and a place to call his own, he bypassed the early Egyptians, Assyrians and Babylonians, the later Greeks and Romans and selected the Jews. They were few in number and unable to hold their land for any great length of time, but they were God's by selection. "It was not because you were more numerous than any other nation that the Lord cared for you and chose you, for you were the smallest of all nations; it was because the Lord loved you and stood by his oath to your fore-fathers, that he brought you out with his strong hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh, king of Egypt" (*Deuteronomy* 7:7-8). Not because you were numerous, but because you

were loved. The principle might be invoked in determining viability.

#### **Saved by a remnant**

A saving remnant was what God used to achieve salvation. And the Savior is assigned a stable instead of a palace and Bethlehem instead of Jerusalem for a birthplace, and Nazareth ("Can anything good come out of Nazareth") for a home. Fishermen and a tax-collector are his "power structure" with an occasional Roman, Samaritan, and prostitute receiving honorable mention. He ignored, flouted, and finally baited the Council, the religious establishment, and not surprisingly paid for it with his life. That is the way of the world and there is nothing surprising about it. What is surprising, however, is that God raised him from the dead. For believers secular values have been reversed forever. The way of the world is not our model. It leads to death. The way of life and security is the way of the Lord, a nobody by the world's standards, whom God has raised to be King of kings and Lord of lords. I do not believe that we have taken in that fact, or picked up the implications even in the 1900 years that have intervened.

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus ...he made himself nothing - therefore God raised him to the heights," St. Paul says. Is that mind in us? There is a good deal of evidence that it is not. "Have no fear, little flock, for your Father has chosen to give you the kingdom," our Lord says. That is good news in small places and small groups. It hardly makes sense in the huge fashionable parishes, and it was downright embarrassing in the heyday of the Establishment in England. But it was comforting to John Bunyan in Bedford jail, I imagine, if not to the Bishop. Could it be that we have simply been on the wrong side in some of the things we glory in? The New Testament indicates that we were. "I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the wise, and revealing them to the simple." Turning to his disciples in private he said: "Happy the eyes that see what you are seeing! I tell you many prophets and kings wished to see what you now see, yet never saw it, to

hear what you hear, yet never heard it."

Annually we sing at Christmas in honor of shepherds as well as kings - and we feature the poor. Well we might. A carpenter's son in an occupied country, itself peripheral to Rome, is about as common a man as possible to be labelled the only-begotten Son of God. (Political wisdom called for a winsome Greek in the role, at the very least.) "The light of the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ" was shining from the face of a man whose appearance and lifestyle would threaten nobody.

Further, God makes covenants with persons and with a community of people, not with institutions. The Old Testament shows God as being able to sponsor or abandon the monarchy. He replaced the twice-destroyed temple of stone at Jerusalem by the living temple of which we are a part. He was faithful to the Jews, and is, and he will be faithful to the church, the Body, the People, not to the summary of financial statistics which occasionally impresses Fortune Magazine and the Wall Street Journal. I cannot feel that God shares our grief at the collapse of many of our signs of temporal power and physical splendor. However, the church grasped temporal power as soon as it was offered. Early in the church's history it adopted the mind and manners of Rome and Byzantium instead of the mind of Christ. In protest, the Desert Fathers, hermits, demonstrated smallness and power of a different order. The pattern was set. Through the rest of Christian history the church has held economic and political power where it can get it, while small groups of Christians keep an entirely different sort of life alive in the monasteries, sects, prayer groups, communes, action groups, guilds, perhaps the early Methodist movement and today's Pentecostal movement, and others.

I suggest that their style and size are the norm for Christian life, and that those whose status is "small" should rejoice, and others should take smallness, or simplicity, as the model. The Upper Room, or the assembly at Pentecost, is the norm on which a cathedral should be based, however grand the spectacle at the cathedral may properly be.

We have made ourselves ridiculous trying to honor Christ by operating country missions by cathedral models, or cottages as if they were castles.

"Small," for many of us, suggests words like puny, mean, isolated. For Jesus it meant the mustard seed that grew to great and expansive measure.

### **Smallness and freedom**

"Small" can describe what is exquisite, beautiful, precious, and gem-like. Simplicity may indicate depth. A priest or any other church leader not sought after to run committees might have time to reflect, to pray, to write a poem, or a thoughtful letter to the editor, to paint a picture or to do a creditable job with a Bach two-part invention, or to make a window garden or hook a rug that praises God in design and color, or to combine art and skill in golf or fly-casting. It is intriguing to think that George Herbert may have been rector of a non-viable parish by present standards. If so, perhaps our job is to teach people how to use leisure rather than to keep all of their hours programmed. Surely a twentieth century poet or essayist with time to polish words, or a twentieth century person of prayer with time to listen and time for intercession, earns a right to food and housing and does what busier and more prosperous colleagues can not do. Should not viability include these "skills" too?

Our fretful and silly world suggests that if you are not "managing something," or selling, or earning, you are failing in responsibility. The manager is a necessary person and worthy of honor and gratitude. So is the clown. They need not envy each other. Christian good manners have never failed in respect to kings, generals, great ladies, and scholars. They simply have been more tenderly concerned about orphans and beggars, and the honors due to holy men and women. Christians are not involved in a class war on either team. Simplicity is the norm and humility is the norm, whether we are called to be kings or cornhuskers or to serve either or both.

If we take biblical smallness seriously, what change in our personal and institutional life can be expected? Clem-

ent of Alexandria, as early as the second century, comforted wealthy Christians who were aware of the Lord's enthusiasm for the poor and therefore fearful about their own salvation. He urged stoic detachment from their possessions and Christian generosity. The early Christians lived among Stoics and knew their splendid example of discipline, of the use of wealth without attachment to it, and of the hierarchy of values in which mere possession of objects had little place. They also knew the wholehearted self-giving and wealth-sharing of the exuberant Christian community. That combination of stoic detachment and Christian generosity is as good a basis for Christian stewardship today as it was 1,800 years ago. Perhaps we should add that if one is poor to start with, there is a certain advantage in having less from which to be detached and a greater opportunity of learning to live by faith alone. Today we should also say that Christians who are poor have the right as children of God and inheritors of the kingdom to renounce slavery, whether private or public, and to use their influence to outlaw the kind of poverty maintained to gratify greed.

To the institutional church, I believe that harsher words are in order. We have missed our chance to establish solidarity with the poor. For example, most clergy live on the same low but life-sustaining pay scale as the vast majority of the citizens of this country. The clergy have the choice of deploring their bad luck, or of using evangelical simplicity to evangelistic advantage. Surely there is no gospel warrant to be ashamed of poverty or to conceal poverty by false elegance. Style depends on taste and the use of what resources one has. And, if poverty is to be overcome, do not biblical norms indicate that aid for all needy citizens, or at the very least our needy colleagues, takes priority in our planning over greater professional rewards for professional skills? How far above the nation's median family income should the ordained representatives of Christ allow themselves to be pegged? Would two neighboring clergy-people receive \$20,000 and \$80,000 respectively if the total needs of the community and of the church were concerns

of both vestries and both priests? Would the relationship of the priests be improved if they lived in at least comparable salary terms? Behind these questions is the prior one with which we began, are we intent on discovering the mind of Christ?

### **Hoarding wealth**

For almost 2,000 years we have told people to give their property to the Lord, and the church has held title (for him, presumably) to as much of it as it could get its hands on. We have urged anyone who would listen to live austerely in order to give to the Lord, and as the Lord's stewards some of us have lived rather well on the sacrifice of others. We have urged that treasures be laid up in heaven rather than earth, and we have hoarded the treasures turned over to us. The church as an institution has failed in stoic detachment and Christian generosity more often than its members. Our theology has altered to suit our style and we are close to forgetting what day by day pilgrimage means or feels like. There is no social injustice the church condemns that it has not practiced itself, no economic exploitation of which we have not been guilty. The church has usually used political power for the protection of its own wealth, and if, in the last 10 years, it has used political power on behalf of the poor, it has still tried to do it as a wealthy part of society, exercising secular power against secular power. As one observer puts it: "We have acted out of our affluence not our courage."

I am personally opposed by both theological conviction and politics to the alliance of religious and political conservatives which says that the church should be non-political - meaning that the church should be silent before injustice. But I now believe that the political champions of the poor have sometimes been guilty of putting more emphasis on a secular political program than on a Christian political presence, and have suffered the consequences. Perhaps we are called to the more profoundly disturbing Christian witness which the Quakers, the Mennonites, and others have made. They are small groups who have stayed out of party politics but who have put their own bodies and their own

the commitment idolatrous in a theological sense (adoration of a false god) and dangerous politically (they are ripe for a demagogue). People are political animals and Christian convictions are expressed in politics, but as Jacques Ellul reminds us, politics is an illusion if approached as a Savior.

This French thinker, who calls us to avoid all idolatrous identification of Christian discipleship with the American way of life, or Marxism, or the New Left, or anything else, says that the Christian is a person "of the future, not of a temporal and logical future, but the eschaton, of the coming break with this present world." That is the revolutionary situation into which Christ calls Christian revolutionaries: "To be revolutionary is to judge the world by its present state, by actual facts, in the name of a truth which does not yet exist [but is coming] - and it is to do so, because we believe this truth to be more genuine and more real than the reality which surrounds us." These are the credentials of the Christian as revolutionary: "He [or she] is the one who already 'lives' [the return of Christ] and already makes it actual and present in his [her] own environment." Christians lead a "style of life" which confirms what God has done for us all in Christ, and by this very confirmation they reject and oppose the explicit dehumanizing of the technological society. Christians, of all people, therefore, must be aware "that what actually matters, in practice, is 'to be' and not 'to act.'" It is "not a question of doing works but of bearing fruit." It is also a responsibility that has nothing to do with size or affluence, although it can best be carried out without the restrictions imposed by complicated organization or the management of wealth.

It is hard for activist Americans to believe that Ellul's "program" for Christians means anything. We are to be a "presence," he says, of the kingdom, focusing on *being*, on relationship, on creativity, on love, on play. We stand at the place where the kingdom and history intersect, and are available for God's use, not bought by the state or by the culture.

Such a theology requires activity on the part of Chris-



wealth behind their convictions about peace and the help of the helpless, going where they are needed and sharing risks. Their witness is quiet because they are small. The numbers would still be small if all concerned Christians put their money, their mouths, and their muscles behind the needy, but they would be large enough to influence the political parties by their character, apart from any effort to capture political machinery.

### **Or choosing a ministry of shared presence**

A picture comes to mind to illustrate a ministry of presence: Bishop Ambrose Reeves darting among Africans under the guns of the South African police during a confrontation. The bishop was simply (though deliberately) shaking hands with a great many friends scattered in the group, and protecting, by the intervention of his own body, the bodies of those whose deaths might have been a matter of less concern. Charles de Foucauld, loved by Muslim Berbers as well as French colonials, little brother of Jesus, little brother of all, was the first of hundreds of spiritual sons and daughters to put his life alongside the "worthless" lives of this world, and, like his friends, to live without institutional support. The thousands of youngsters from the "third world" and all worlds who find in Taizé a spiritual home, are learning by life and love and friendship to be "a sign of contradiction" to both the consumer culture of the world we know and to the philosophical materialism of the Communist East.

Their example is timely. Some of our friends have gone from capitalist materialism to the New Left and now to isolation and contemplation believing that each, in turn, was the secret of where life is to be found. They are very sincere. They celebrated the good life as suburbanites, they learned to be unselfish and to share from the Marxists (they simply did not know from its life-style that the church also believes in those values), and now they are learning about contemplation from the Buddhists. They sincerely offer to whatever movement reveals some aspect of truth a commitment that belongs to God alone. They commit themselves totally and uncritically, which makes

tians, but not the "bigness" on which political success depends. It leaves room in Christian social history for St. Francis, not as a harmless sentimentalist but as a maker of culture. It leaves room for a resident ministry of intercession. The "weak things" of this world are the people of the eschaton, of the future. Such a theology can also be held and practiced by people thrust into bigness, who carry their theology and their integrity with them. John XXIII was Pope: Sovereign Pontiff, surrounded by imperial symbols. He did not flout the conventions, but the man shone through the conventions not as an emperor but as an apostle.

III. Where might a commitment to the theology of smallness lead? It could lead to shoddiness, mediocrity, laziness, and a total lack of vision if smallness is the goal in itself. Too many of our "dear little churches" are wilfully ugly, musty, and full of last week's badly mimeographed bulletins. Too many Christian votes are lost to strategic moral ends because someone said, "What's the use: we're not big enough to impress them." Too many sermons are shockingly poor in preparation, content, and delivery because the preacher feels the size of the congregation warrants no more than they are getting. Too much theology is limited to a couple of bland themes. These regrettable results flow from the contemplation and practice of smallness as the world sees it, smallness as immaturity or atrophy.

The theology of smallness, of course, is something else. It is the wonder of the Covenant made between the Lord of All and the church, the wonder of the Word by which the worlds were made, lying in a young mother's arms, the wonder of Christ sharing leadership with the uncertain Twelve, the wonder of the Bread of Heaven cradled in a child's cupped hands at the altar, the wonder of the vulnerability of God.

Smallness as the style by which God is revealed, and which we learn to practice by following God's example, will lead naturally to increased sensitivity and mutual af-

fection. We will not ordinarily need techniques to induce them: the fellowship and discipline of the job to be done will test, refine, and enable us. We will need experts in the understanding of process to help us and all the contributions of the behavioral sciences, but small congregations will probably not feel the need of conferences and weekends dedicated to the discovery of feelings or the dynamics of groups. One expert, trained from among the members of the local group at their request, may help it achieve its goals and discover the depths of its power.

### **Lay responsibility, prayer and intimacy**

Lay responsibility goes with smallness. Where there is no possibility of a clerical bureaucracy, jobs get done by the people who can and will do them. Special lay education, in that case, will be necessary for very ordinary Christians, the ones for whom little or no education or training is provided at present. A few minutes' reflection will indicate that few summer conferences or regular courses at any seminary are geared to genuinely common people. Does any group sponsoring lay ministry cater to the intellectual needs of Archie Bunker and his friends? Yet Archie with all his prejudice, dogmatism, and a sort of native goodness, in spite of all, is represented on hundreds of vestries. A converted Archie could make his presence felt among his cronies in a way that lay leaders as we now think of them could not.

Intimacy in corporate prayer, whatever the rite, goes with smallness. Goals in intercessory prayer are more likely to be personal and immediate and expectation higher. Small groups of Christians, vulnerable to poverty and to ridicule, learn to depend on God. The gratitude for a table regularly well spread, an "endowed table" if you like, is different from the table thanks offered over a meal by people not sure that a meal would be there. Establishment and comfort obscure one of the essential ingredients of Christian spirituality. Besides, God who so consistently affirms the small, the obscure, the weak, and the poor, is more likely to be found among the people about whom God expresses enthusiasm than among the arrogant, the self-

sufficient, the satiated. Perhaps God has not been hiding in recent years: perhaps we have made it a point to avoid the places and people in whom God most naturally dwells.

A theology of smallness leads to the reconsideration of standards for "viability" of missions and small groups. The rehabilitation of smallness and the questioning of professionalism among the clergy, would in turn hasten the development of new forms of ministry in which clergy support themselves in order to share their apostolate with other Christians. These new forms are presently being tested. The speed with which they are developed and the rigor of the testing will be sharply altered if they are considered crucial rather than an accessory to the church's essential mission.

Styles of lay ministry seldom now considered might develop. Mission priests report a new popularity of shared meals in connection with a weekday eucharist, with an attendance greater than on Sunday, when people are scattered in several directions. Common work or study is part of the evening program, which may also involve a project in children's Christian education. Often priests find themselves responsible only to celebrate and eat with one gathered group: a further argument for non-stipendiary clergy. Reports come of occasional plans for shared tools or cars as a blow against an overly acquisitive culture and as a way to redeploy money to Christian ends. The projects do not need to be promoted among small mutually committed groups: they evolve.

Commitment to a theology of smallness leads to critical examination of the church's real estate holdings and investments with an eye to ecumenical sharing and the social needs of local communities. Mission churches need not be closed unless they are unnecessary, the work of mission being done by other Christians with whom we are in communion or soon may be. Three small congregations might well agree to use one building without merging, restoring property to the town tax rolls and freeing money for more effective ministry. If some of these actions should lead to numerical growth, let us be sure, this time, to keep

the style and humility that go with smallness so that we will not again lose God's power for a share in Caesar's dress and diet. Meanwhile, some parts of the New Testament experience long forgotten will come to life for us. Once, the words that close this paragraph could have been said by Christian bishops gathered in convention. Perhaps they may be appropriate to such a synod in the future. At any rate small groups of enthusiastic and disciplined worshippers here and abroad, evangelical and Catholic, "regular" and underground, are discovering that to die to almost everything their neighbors set store by is to enter into joy, peace, and power. There have always been such groups in the church's history. Perhaps, today, more of us are prepared to say that they are the Christian norm for whose service, guidance, and preservation hierarchies and staffs exist:

*"In order that our service may not be brought into discredit, we avoid giving offense in anything. As God's servants, we try to recommend ourselves in all circumstances by our steadfast endurance: in distress, hardships, and dire straits; flogged, imprisoned, mobbed; overworked, sleepless, starving. We recommend ourselves, by the innocence of our behavior, our grasp of truth, our patience and kindness; by gifts of the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, by declaring the truth, by the power of God. We wield the weapons of righteousness in right hand and left. Honor and dishonor, praise and blame, are alike our lot: we are the impostors who speak the truth, the unknown whom all people know; dying we still live on; disciplined by suffering, we are not done to death; in our sorrows we have always cause for joy; poor ourselves, we bring wealth to many; penniless, we own the world"*

II Corinthians 6:3-10

**Samuel Joseph Wylie was born to first generation immigrants from Northern Ireland in 1918. Raised in the Bronx, he was encouraged to go to college by a high school teacher. After graduating from Wheaton College in three years, he attended Biblical Seminary in New York where he met and married Beatrice Browne. Ordained a Presbyterian, Wylie served John Hall and worked as a Navy chaplain in the Pacific during World War II. Received into the Anglican Communion in 1955 while a chaplain to Protestant students at Columbia, he later became chaplain to Episcopal students at the University of Virginia, then at Brown University. He worked in the student division of the National Council of Churches, 1958-1960; was rector of the Church of the Advent in Boston, 1960-1966; was dean of General Theological Seminary in New York from 1966-1971. In March 1972, Wylie was consecrated the seventh bishop of Northern Michigan. He died May 6, 1974.**