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Telling the Story

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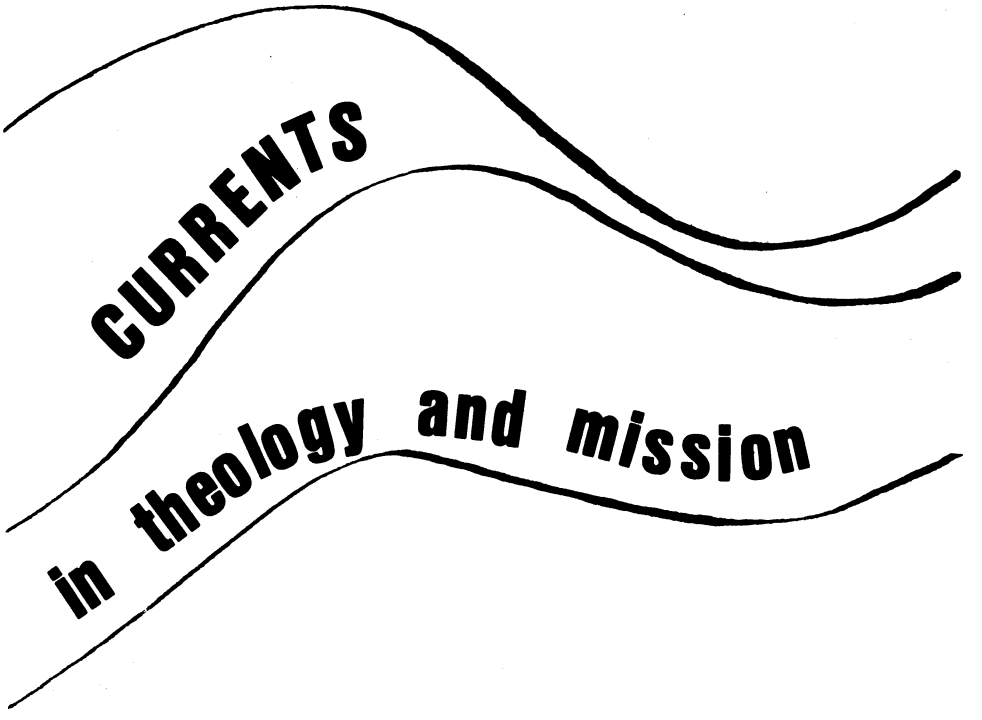
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Telling the Story

Theology is telling and interpreting the story we learned from our mothers and fathers to, and in the language of, our children. For that confessing movement within the one catholic church called Lutheranism, the story always centers on justification by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith. To tell, interpret, learn, and translate that story correctly and effectively requires the mutual conversation and consolation of sisters and brothers. In plain text: sometimes storytelling is hard, controversial, and discouraging; sometimes we grope — for a year, a decade, or a century — until we get the story straight for a new generation that again must tell and interpret the story to, and in the language of, their children.

In our generation the church has learned to say "sisters and brothers" (instead of brothers) and "Abraham and Sarah" (instead of Abraham). It is still divided on whether calling God "Father" is appropriate. **Ralph Quere** presents a case for retaining this term and masculine pronouns in referring to the deity. Let me mention three of his points: (a) "Father" is a *name* of God, not a metaphorical image; (b) The term "Father" is not a transferrence of our human experiences to the heavenly realm, but an analogy in which God is the starting point, both in relationship to Jesus and to his human children; and (c) Though "Father" and "he" are masculine words, they do *not* mean that God is male. Those who wish to discuss his proposals are invited to submit letters or essays to *Currents* for publication.

By the time you read this, we will be knee deep in the year of Mark. **James L. Bailey** suggests five perspectives for understanding the second gospel. To read it as gospel (cf. 1:1, 14-15) means that everything that transpires in the Markan narrative calls for repeated repentance and belief. Action is its dominant feature, and the kingly rule of God is consequently discerned in the activities of life. Mark is a puzzle, not only in its miracles and parables, but especially in its enigmatic ending. The picture of the disciples in Mark holds up a mirror to its readers and asks us whether our discipleship

can endure servanthood and suffering. As itself a parable, Mark challenges and subverts earlier understandings of Jesus and offers a new one in a new historical context pregnant with problems and promise.

How should pastors tell the story to couples who are already living together and want to get married? **Daniel Comsia** and **David J. Rolfe** argue that such couples are typically monogamous in their affections and are in fact living in a common law marriage. Skilled pastors, self-conscious about their own piety and sensitive to the laudable reasons that lead the couple to want a church wedding, can lead them through a series of helpful "how" questions: How did they decide to cohabit? How did they decide to marry? How do they relate these decisions to their Christian faith?

Paul Bauermeister wants us to adapt the old institution of Godparents to current needs. His extended Godparent plan might offer support for single parents, children living in stressful situations, and teenagers. He proposes a changed baptismal rite that will better express the congregation's commitment to the child, and he outlines the kind of recruiting and training such a Godparent group will require.

Christian storytellers are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, past and present. **Travis Du Priest** discounts worries about the historicity of the saints of old or those modern models whom we discover in contemporary fiction. These vital companions in the faith help up believe in God. The saints above become friends below and our companions along the way.

Is healing a legitimate ministry or an improper role for the church? **Jo Ann Learman** sought an answer among neighboring pastors whose interest was roused by the Service for Healing in the recent book of *Occasional Services*. Her interviews discovered caution, ambivalence, and worries about manipulative prayer and the dangers of institutionalizing so great a gift. But she also found many who testified to dramatic physical healing and who were able

to relate forgiveness to healing and forgiveness to wholeness. Her spot check may facilitate a worthwhile discussion in many another local setting.

In addition to a poem by **Mary Ellen Hansburg** and an editorial by **Walter Stuhr,** our "story" this time contains a large number of reviews of the latest in book-length proposals.

Confessing Christians love to tell the story — 'twill be their theme even in Glory. The exciting part, as we reflect on how to witness to our "children," those ever-moving targets, is to hear once more the story as if for the first time, and to interpret it and translate it as if the future of the church and the world depended on our telling.

Unless women and men are told, you know, they cannot believe. Moreover, all tellers of the good news are blessed with beautiful feet. (Rom. 10:14-15). So even with callouses, ingrown toe nails, and an outlandish size, I remain, by virtue of my office,

Your evangelical and handsome storyteller,

Ralph W. Klein
Editor

"Naming" God "Father"

Ralph Quere
Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa

"Tell me, I pray, your name" (Genesis 32:29) is Jacob's unanswered request when he strives with God at Jabbok. Moses gets an indirect answer to his indirect question: "If . . . they ask me, 'What is his name?' What shall I say to them?" The indistinct non-answer is: "I AM WHO I AM." (Exodus 3:13f). One preliminary conclusion is that *we* do not "name God": God is "self-naming," as Gail Ramshaw Schmidt says.[1] God's name, Yahweh, is *given* to Israel through Moses *by God,* i.e. it is divine revelation, not human interpretation! So also "Abba" is a *name* — not a "proper" name like Yahweh, but a child's form of address, thus a uniquely intimate name, for God: a name revealed *by* and *through* Jesus. It is "by" Jesus' teaching and preaching that we learn to call God "Father." It is "through" Jesus as "Son" that we come to God as Father and become children of God.

In the Old Testament adoption is implied when a king becomes a "son" of God and when the people of Israel are called God's children. God is thus portrayed in the Exodus as an "adopting Father" (see Ex. 6:6-8; 4:23);[2] in the New Testament the term adoption is used with some frequency. Crying "Abba" expresses the Spirit of adoption (Rom. 8:15). The designation "Father" in the Bible has to do more with God as Redeemer than God as Creator (The exceptions to this in Deut. 32:6 and Mal. 2:10 are relatively late.) God as Father in the New Testament has a double direction: to Jesus as God's Son and to us as God's children. For us, God as Father preserves us by giving daily bread, forgiving, saving, and delivering from evil. For Jesus, God as Father means a relationship of intimacy ("Abba") and identification ("I and the Father are one," John 10:30). Thus ultimately, it meant and means a trinitarian relation between the Father and the "only-begotten [Son]" (John 1:14) and with the Spirit "who proceeds from the Father" and is sent by the Son (John 15:26). Jesus is the link between trinitarian language about God the Father and God the Spirit and soteriological language about God as *our* Father and the Spirit as our *Paraclete.* But there's a clear distinction between *intra*-trinitarian language *(opera* ad *intra)* and God's external relation to the world *(opera* ad *extra).* Therefore we cannot substitute for God's trinitarian *name,* "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit," the *titles,* Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier; for these describe God's *works* in the world, not God. God *is* more than he does.

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[1] Gail Ramshaw Schmidt, 'De Divinis Nominibus: The Gender of God,' in *Worship,* 56 (March 1982), p. 122.

[2] Robert Hamerton-Kelly, *God the Father: Theology and Patriarchy in the Teaching of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), pp. 85f.

God is not male.

"Father" and/or "Mother"?

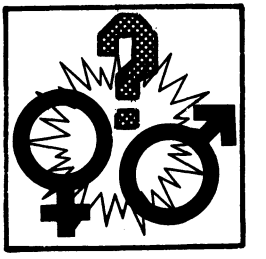
What do we make of the charge of idolatry in using the masculine name "Father" for God? What violates the divine command against having or worshiping other gods must be judged by Scripture and not by some rationalistic or iconoclastic definition of what idolatry is. Hence we are dealing with the dimension of biblical authority as norm. What is judged idolatrous are the gods and goddesses of Egypt — Ra and Isis; the gods and goddesses of Canaan — Baal and Asherah; the statue of Nebuchadnezzar; Mammon — the worship of money; the altar of Caesar and, I would interpolate, the hundred-fold other projections of the human self in place of God — including the one Freud noted: projecting authoritarian earthly fathers into heaven and shaping God in their image. So Michelangelo's Sky-Father "up there" and George Burns in the popular theophany "Oh, God" may both violate the first several commandments!

Hosea's imagery of God as husband shifts in chapter 11 to God as Father. In that very context God speaks through Hosea: "I am God and not a human" (11:9; cf. Numbers 23:19). The Creator is not converted into a creature — even though creatures are created male and female in *his* image or even when the Word becomes flesh; for the Word incarnate does not cease to be God. Yet God is not male, even though Scripture uses masculine pronouns. God is not male even though Scripture uses masculine nouns like Father or titles like King. God is not male even though God the Son became a man, sharing human "flesh and blood" (Heb. 1:1-2:14).

What then shall we make of the feminine images of God in Scripture? God is portrayed as a woman giving birth;[3] a nursing mother giving suck;[4] carrying, feeding, protecting, healing, guiding, disciplining, comforting, washing and clothing us.[5] Or God is portrayed as a midwife[6] or a homemaker (as in Jesus' parable of the woman who lost a coin in Luke 15)[7] or perhaps a baker-woman (as in Matt. 13:33 and Luke 13:20f).[8] Or again the animal images of mother bear, mother eagle or mother hen.[9] Do these clearly feminine images mean that God *is* feminine as well as masculine? Female as well as male and

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[3] Virginia Mollenkott, *The Divine Feminine* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), pp. 15-19.
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 20-25.
[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 27.
[6] *Ibid.*, pp. 32-35.
[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 60-68.
[8] *Ibid.*, pp. 79-82.
[9] *Ibid.*, pp. 49ff, 83ff, 92ff.



thus androgynous?[10] Should we then call God "our Mother" as well as "our Father"?[11] "Goddess" as well as "God"?[12]

There are similarities and differences in the way masculine and feminine descriptions of God are used in Scripture. None is used so literally as to teach that God is male and/or female, except, as I said, with regard to the incarnate Son. God is not a man, God is not a woman; God is not human — except in Christ. The Creator is not a creature — except in the man Jesus who is also God.

The difference between masculine and feminine language for God is the different between name and metaphor. "Father" in the New Testament is a name; homemaker, bakerwoman, and mother hen are metaphors. The woman who lost a coin and the woman baking bread are used in parabolic story or comparison to tell us something about the God and the kingdom we would not otherwise understand. The biological metaphors of giving birth and nursing are clearly feminine and clearly figurative — just like the language of God's face, arms, or hands. (The technical term is anthropomorphisms — ascribing to God human bodily parts in order to say

[10] Among those who suggest an androgynous understanding of God are: Ermine Huntress Lantero, *Feminine Aspects of Deity* (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill, 1973); Elaine H. Pagels, "What Became of God the Mother?" in *Womanspirit Rising* ed. by Carl P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), pp. 107-119. John Dart, "Balancing out the Trinity: The Genders of the Godhead," *The Christian Century,* 100 (Feb. 16, 1983), pp. 147-150 who suggests Jesus, whose "mother" was the Holy Spirit was symbolically androgynous. Arlene Swidler, "The Image of Woman in a Father-Oriented Religion" in *God As Father* ed. by Edward Schillebeeckx and J. B. Metz (New York: Seabury, 1981), pp. 75-80.

[11] The different options are represented by apparent stages in the thought of Jürgen Moltmann, "The Motherly Father: Is Trinitarian Patripassianism Replacing Theological Patriarchalism?" in *God As Father,* pp. 51-56 where his view is more androgynous or at least a balance of masculine and feminine terms. In *Humanity in God* written with Elizabeth Moltmann-Wendel (New York: Pilgrim, 1983) he argues for a social or family model of the Trinity with the Holy Spirit as "Mother."

[12] Rosemary Radford Reuther, "The Female Nature of God" in *God as Father,* pp. 61-66 points to some in the feminist movement of the 1970s as advocating a return of witchcraft and ancient goddess religion. Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology: The Mataethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon, 1978), is, in my view, an attempt to reconstitute such a goddess religion. Carol P. Christ, "Why Women Need the Goddess' in *Womanspirit Rising,* pp. 273-287, defines "the symbol of the goddess [as] the acknowledgement of the legitimacy of female power as a beneficent and independent power. For women, the divine principle, the saving and sustaining power, is in themselves, and they will no longer look to men or male figures as saviors" (p. 277). Or as one woman said: "I found god in myself and I loved her fiercely" (p. 277). Merlin Stone's article, "When God was a Woman" in *Womanspirit Rising,* pp. 120-130, seeks to establish through historical and archaeological research that the most ancient ruling deity was female, the great goddess and many-named "divine ancestress."

God names himself "Father"

something about God's attitudes or actions.) We can't do without such language and yet we know that God as spirit does not have fingers, breasts, or womb.

Well, is not "Father" – even if it is name – used in exactly the same figurative way? No, not exactly. "Father" is used analogously, i.e. as an analogy in which *God* – not a human being like the prodigal's father or the woman with the prodigal coin – God is the starting point. We move from God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ to our new reality as children of this *heavenly* Father. We should heed the clue given in those familiar words "our Father *in heaven,*" that we are to understand the term "Father" from "above" and not from "below" – not by comparison to or projection of our earthly fathers. Among other things, that may be the meaning of Jesus' cryptic saying: "Call no man father on earth: you have one Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 23:9). Ephesians 3:14f points in this same direction, i.e. it starts from God "above" and moves "down" to earthly fathers: "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named . . ." The term translated "family," *patria,* is named from the *pater:* again, the starting point of human family or fatherhood is God as the Father. Berkhof says:

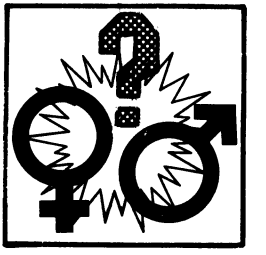
> As God he is not less but infinitely more "Father" than those who on earth go by that name. He is thus always more than expressed in these terms, but not essentially different. From this it follows that God's revelational assocation with us is itself the ground, the norm and the limit of the symbol language.[13]

Thus human fatherhood *(patera)* is an analogue which derives its very name from God the Father *(pater)* as its source. God names himself "Father" and names human fathers and families – not vice versa.[14]

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13 Hendrikus Berkhof, *The Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 69. Berkhof also writes: "The fact that we can meet God is evidence that from the side of God there is analogy. That is because he projects him onto us" (p. 67). Berkhof also argues that anthropomorphism is a form of analogical speaking (p. 68). For Aquinas, analogy finds it source and norm in God. A word "is used primarily of God and derivatively of creatures, for what the word means flows from God to creatures" (p. 70). For Barth, analogy is the mode of God's revelation; for Jüngel, the incarnation creates analogy (p. 71).

14 "Analogues" are related objects often with a common origin. "Analogies" compare the similarities of different objects. "Analogisms" involve a cause-effect relationship. Fuchs speaks of the "analogical power" with which Jesus sets forth himself and his obedience. See Norman Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress 1976) p. 131, cf. pp. 122-135.



It is clear in the Old Testament that "Yahweh" is God's *name*. There is less agreement today that "Father" is the *name* of God in the New Testament. The importance of Jesus' addressing God as "Abba' has been stressed by Jeremias. The intimacy implied by such a name — like our term, "Daddy" — shows Jesus' unique relationship to God and opens up the way for us to enter that relationship as childen. Thus according to Paul we too, prompted by the Spirit, cry "Abba, Father!" (Rom. 8:15 cf. Gal. 4:47).

But it's still not clear whether "Abba' or "Father" is the *name* of God. John's Gospel presents what might be called a theology of the name of God. Jesus says concerning himself and his mission in chapter 5(43): "I have come in my Father's name . . ." and to that the Father has borne witness. Jesus says he does his *works* in the "Father's name" (10:25): these too bear witness to the Christ. And then as the climactic hour of Christ's glorification on the cross approaches, Jesus prays: "Father, glorify thy name!" (12:28). And a voice from heaven answers: "I have glorified [my name] and I glorify it again." And then to explain the future glorification Jesus says: "I, when I am lifted up, will draw all to myself " (12:32). It is on the cross that the name of the Father will again be glorified. And then pointing to himself as the light of the world Jesus says ". . . believe in the light that you may become sons of the light" (12:36). The Father is glorified when by the cross of the Son of Man, we are empowered to become God's children and we acknowledge him as Father (cf. 1:12). It is on the cross supremely where we behold Christ's glory — glory as of the only-begotten Son of the Father, full of grace and truth (1:14). It is on the cross that the invisible God is made known by his Son who is in the bosom of the Father (1:15).

This name-theology climaxes in Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17. The prayer has a three-fold repetition of the address "Father" and a three-fold assertion about Christ's mission with reference to that name. The first petition parallels the glorification prayer of John 12:28: "Father, the hour has come; glorify thy Son that thy Son may glorify thee . . ." (17:1). Then Jesus continues: "I have manifested thy name to the people whom thou hast given me . . ." (17:6). Manifesting God's name as Father means revealing God so that we might become his children.

The second petition again begins with God's name, "Holy Father" and asks concerning the disciples, "keep them in thy name." Then Jesus asserts "While I was with them, I kept them in thy name . . ." (17:11f). Christ intercedes for those disciples whose relationship to the Father he has protected and preserved. To them he revealed the Father's heart.

The third petition expands beyond the disciples to all who will believe through them and concludes: "O righteous Father . . . I made known to them thy name and will make it known" (17:25f).

All we know about this hidden God . . . is the name: Father, Son, and Spirit.

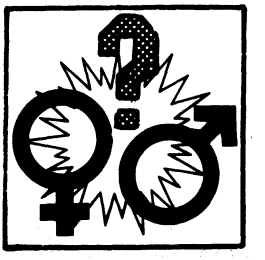
What Paul calls "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" shines forth so all can see and know the name of God. Christ has revealed this righteous Father's name (17:26).

It is through Christ's suffering that the Father's name is revealed. It is through Christ's suffering that we become children of God and through this the Father's name is glorified. It is thus that John's Gospel makes the name Father just as central to Jesus' mission as "Abba" is to Jesus' teaching in the synoptic gospels. So if Scripture is norm, the name "Father" can hardly be considered interchangeable with "Mother", nor can "Creator" be regarded as a substitute for "Father" for "Father" has to do primarily with our salvation as adopted children of God.

The Hidden God Revealed as Father

We have discussed our adoption as children of the heavenly Father; we have distinguished what are divine names and what are metaphorical descriptions of God's attributes, attitudes, and actions in relation to us. My final concern has to do with the knowledge of God that comes from revelation, and the faith that comes from the gospel, which are two sides of the same coin. First, the revelation side.

In the fourth century, Athanasius and the Cappadocian fathers argued against the Arians that there is a distinction between God's being on the one hand and on the other hand God's attributes and actions. We cannot make assumptions or even logical deductions about the being of God from what God reveals about how he relates to the world. For example, because God is almighty does not mean that we can discover some formula like $e = mc^2$ is the formula for his *being*. God's being is incomprehensible, hidden — Scripture says — in clouds and thick darkness (Ps. 97:2). What God reveals about his attributes, attitudes, and actions toward humanity tells us what he is *like*, but not what he *is*. Luther calls the being of God, that is God in himself, the hidden God. I would submit that all we know about this hidden God in himself is the *name:* Father, Son, and Spirit which is the basis of the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity as three persons in one God. I AM WHO I AM (Ex. 3:15) points to the incomprehensible mystery of the self-naming, self-defining God. The self-revelation of the Father in the Son through the Holy Spirit is the only glimpse we have into the inner life and being of God. To dare to alter the Johannine language of the *begetting* of the Son or the *proceeding* of the Spirit is to violate the record of God's self-revelation. The Nicene Creed interprets "only-begotten" as "eternally begotten" and eastern and western Christians argue over where we should say that the Spirit proceeds from the Father only or from the Father *and the Son*. But the



Father-Son language cannot be improved upon by adding "Mother" — whether to the first person or the third person, as many feminist theologians suggest. Moltmann's communal or familial model of the Trinity with the Holy Spirit as Mother has questionable roots in Scripture and tradition — mostly in Gnostic and mystic sources.[15] We have no clear word in Scripture to warrant such a dangerous, potentially polytheistic, shift in our concept of Trinity. Sexism will not be solved by tritheism. It certainly did not happen in Mormonism.

God is spirit (John 4:24): this I understand as a description of the mystery of God's being. This God is called light and love (I John 1:5; 4:8): this I understand as a description of God's relation to the world. These terms cannot, like Father, easily be misunderstood as male. The danger is that the terms "spirit," "light" and "love" may be understood as impersonal or pantheistic or sentimental. There's probably no part of revelation that can't be perverted or misconstrued. Similarly, titles such as King or Redeemer point to aspects of God's sovereign and saving action toward humanity. It seems to me that we can regard such descriptions and titles as analogues or metaphors:[16] not much is at stake here. I can see both metaphorical and analogical dimensions of such titles. The titles or so-called "offices" of Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King have to do with different facets of his work as Savior. That they are masculine titles simply matches the reality that in Israel these roles were usually carried out by males and the obvious fact that Jesus was a man. The deliverer-role is not somehow inherently masculine. God simply chose to save us in and through the man Jesus, the mediator between God and humanity.

First Prepositions, Now Pronouns

This is probably as good a place as any for an excursus on "pronouns." We Lutherans usually do a pretty good job with prepositions, like "in, with and under." But we are having as much trouble with pronouns as anyone! It seems clear from publishers and English teachers that the so-called generic use of "he" and "him" — as well as "man" — is being superceded in American English by a usage which regards "man" and

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[15] *Humanity in God*, p. 84-106. Pagels, Lantero, and Dart also point to the same Gnostic sources Moltmann cites for such expression.

[16] It seems to me that metaphor and analogue are adequate categories to discuss this issue. Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1983), p. 133 distinguishes between symbol which may require explanation and analogue which is self-interpreting because it is rooted in the nature of things. Paul Ricoeur, following Wheelwright, understands both names and metaphors as "tensive symbols" which point beyond themselves to limitless meaning. Cf. Perrin, *Jesus*, pp. 29f, 84f.

Not just biblical usage but English usage is at stake.

"him" as masculine, i.e. male.[17] English does not have masculine, feminine, and neuter *genders* of nouns, so even our distinction between sex and gender is unclear. So we are faced with a situation in which the masculine pronouns used for God in the Old Testament which also match the Father language in the New Testament are heard and rejected by some as implicitly (if not explicitly) male.

I argue for the continued use of the pronouns primarily because they are there in the text of the Bible — not always as many as appear in the translations, but *there* nonetheless. Not just biblical usage but English usage is at stake: "God so loved the world that God gave God's only Child . . .": that also is going to cause "hearing problems" for many people — and not only for people who have sexist or simplistic understandings of God as male. Anybody who cares about communication is going to be bothered by such redundancy. The emphasis that used to be possible by repetition will become the order of the day: for example, when Elijah confronts the prophets of Baal he cries: "the God who answers by fire, let him be God" (I Kings 18:24). Meaning as well as emphasis is lost if we say: "let God be God!" Under other circumstances "let God be God" has powerful meaning!

The Christmas gospel in *An Inclusive Language Lectionary* repeats "the Word" throughout John 1:1-14 so as to avoid calling the *Logos* "he" or "him" not only before but also after the incarnation.[18]

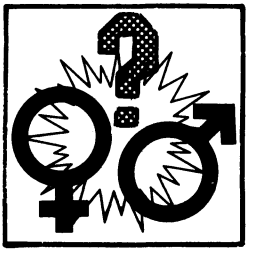
Again where a masculine title such as king is used for God — even if such titles are used metaphorically — the pronoun "he" can appropriately be used. The problem with translating "Lord" as "Sovereign One"[19] and refusing to use pronouns is that a text like Matthew 22:45 would read something like this: "If David thus calls the Messiah the Sovereign One, how is the Messiah the Sovereign (One)'s Son?" Clumsiness may not be a convincing theological category but it certainly applies to English usage and effective communication.

Most important, "he" is the pronoun that matches the name "Father." Though some regard both as male and therefore problematic, I would argue that though "Father" and "he" are masculine words, as used for God they do *not* mean that God is male. The way "Father" is used in the Old Testament — without a woman or goddess as female consort — makes it clear that this is a relational term for God's relationship with the king as "son" or the nation as "children" or "wife" — including of course the men as well as the women in

[17] *An Inclusive Language Lectionary: Readings for Year A* (National Council of Churches in the U.S.A., Division of Education and Ministry, Inclusive Language Lectionary Committee; Atlanta: John Knox, 1983), Appendix "Use of They, etc", n.p. Cf. Schmidt, "De Divinis Nominibus," p. 126f.

[18] *Ibid.*, n.p.

[19] *Ibid.*, Appendix, n.p.



this feminine image. The same is true of Christ's relationship to the church as bride in the New Testament. Nor is the maleness of God implied in the Father-Son relationship in the New Testament: for there is no mother and no birth in eternity for the Son. He was "in the beginning with God" (John 1:2). The creed of Nicea (325) rejects Arius' view that "There was when he was not" (i.e. "There was [a point in eternity] when [the Son] was not") and that "he came from what was not" (i.e. that the Son was created). The Son is "eternally begotten" (Nicene Creed, 381), i.e. stands in an eternal relationship with the Father. The Son was not conceived and born, nor was he created. Even the "virgin birth" of Jesus is *not* to be understood as if God the Father impregnated Mary. The miracle is attributed to the (neuter!) Holy Spirit.

Now as to the masculine pronouns, "he" etc., I'd like to suggest that they function as metonyms. An example: one often says cup or glass when one means the *contents,* "Did you drink the whole glass?" Or, as in the Lord' Supper, "cup" means the wine in the cup and the blood of the covenant the wine signifies (Matt. 26:26). In a certain sense all pronouns are metonyms. They stand, by definition, *pro*nouns — *for* and *in the place of* the nouns to which they refer. Relative pronouns like who or which are indefinite as to gender. "He," "she" or "it" are masculine, feminine or neuter *personal* pronouns — though "it" is obviously "personal" in a qualified sense. Most languages have such personal pronouns which often have little to do with specific sex. So in German, both female and male dogs are *der Hund* — a masculine word that takes a masculine pronoun. Thus my mother would refer to our dog as "He" even after "he" had a litter of puppies! That God is King and Father means that we use "he" as the pronoun that stands in the place of God. Neither King nor Father nor "he" means God is male. I know that many people hear "God is a man" when they hear "he." Perhaps to correct this in written English we shall have to go back to capitalizing "Him" or "He" to show we are using the words in an unusual sense. In spoken English we shall be forced to explain — which may be a good teaching and learning opportunity for all involved.

Divine and Human

Perhaps it is again helpful to speak of the divine and human nature in one person — since those terms are non-sexist. The emphasis of Chalcedon and classical Christology ever since is on the *humanity* of Christ — not his maleness.[20] Yet the New Testament also makes it clear that Jesus was a male human being. Christ Jesus . . . was in the "form of God" but

[20] Cf. T. van Balen, "Chalcedon: Then and Now" in *Jesus: The Son of God* (ed. by Edward Schillebeeckx and J. B. Metz; New York: Seabury, 1982), pp. 55-62.

No one can alter the gospel to suit agendas or ideologies.

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did not grasp "equality with God," Paul tells us in Phil. 2 (5f). This same Jesus exalted as Lord (2:9-11) reigns until all his enemies are conquered and death itself is destroyed and then hands over the kingdom to God the Father and subjects himself to the Father so that "God may be all in all" (I Cor. 15:24-28). Paul almost seems to be saying that at the end the subordinationists turn out to be right after all: The Son is subject to the Father. On the contrary: the end is like the incarnation in the sense that the Son as human delivers the kingdom to God the Father and God alone — not even God incarnate — may rule all. Thus as God "equal to the Father in divinity" (as the Athanasian Creed says), Christ shares in the rule of the kingdom which has no end (as the Nicene Creed says; cf. Luke 1:33). Yet as a man "subordinate to the Father in humanity" (again the *Athanasianum*), Jesus subjects himself to God, as he did in his earthly ministry. (This he does in and as the church, in and as the "new creation"! Thus Christ brings the church and the whole creation back into the creaturely, child-like relation which God designed at the beginning.) Therefore the distinction between God who is not a man and God who became a man is maintained.

The givenness of that revelation is like the givenness of the gospel. It is God's gospel (Mark 1:1) — the gospel proclaimed by and about Jesus Christ, the messenger who becomes the message. The gospel is not "the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man." Rather Jesus' own unique relationship to God as *Abba* and his death to save us and thus to glorify God — this is good news! Since "Christ died for our sins — according to the Scriptures" and "was raised the third day — according to the Scriptures," (I Cor. 15:3f) the message is not ours to alter. That message has relevance for all sorts of needs and concerns — including human liberation; but no one can alter the gospel to suit agendas or ideologies superimposed from the outside. The gospel is "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit" creates faith and makes the faithful children of God, our Father.



Perspectives on the Gospel of Mark

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Mark is no longer a neglected gospel. During the last few decades, an amazing amount of scholarly research has been directed to understanding the Markan Gospel. Most recently, redaction criticism has given way to narrative and socio-historical criticisms. Narrative critics assume the unity of the Markan narrative as it now stands and seek to make sense of the story-world of Mark. They use the analysis of rhetorical techniques to explain the structure and development of the Markan narrative. Socio-historical critics investigate specific Markan texts and themes, and even the entire gospel, on the assumption that all ancient documents communicated meaning within their own social systems and can be better understood by comprehending the socio-cultural mileau in which these writings emerged. These scholars employ social science models in arriving at their results.

In this essay, I approach the Gospel of Mark from five different though overlapping perspectives, and thereby seek to clarify various ways that contemporary scholars are interpreting this earliest written gospel. Although certainly other perspectives on Mark could be described, I think that these five can be helpful in revealing the advances of Markan scholarship as well as demonstrating the fruitfulness of this work for preaching and teaching the Markan texts during this coming lectionary year.

Mark as Gospel

Of the Synoptic evangelists, only Mark designates his work a "gospel." Mark 1:1, appearing to be a title for the entire book, reads: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God."[1]

In Paul's letter, *euangelion* stands as a summary word for the good news of God's victory over sin and evil through Jesus' death and resurrection. The focus is on the saving outcome of the death and resurrection of the Lord.[2] But in Mark, the term refers to the entire narrative, not just Jesus' death and resurrection, and thus includes all the described episodes of his Galilean ministry, journey to Jerusalem, and stay there. Jesus' interactions with the other characters in the story – disciples, family, women, crowds, blind, sick, opponents, etc. – unfold as part of the "gospel." In other words, everything which transpires in the Markan narrative can in some way or other shed light on the gospel or reveal a glimpse of God's graciousness in its particular and concrete expressions.

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[1] Not all the reliable manuscripts include "Son of God." See Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1971), p. 73, for a discussion of this omission in some manuscripts.

[2] See Leander E. Keck, *Paul and His Letters* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979),. pp. 32-48.

"Beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ"

Mark's opening line makes clear that the gospel is "about Jesus Christ." Interpreting "of Jesus Christ" in 1:1 as an objective as well as a subjective genitive, we can conclude that Mark is asserting that Jesus who announced the gospel of God (1:14-15) is himself the historical figure who embodied in word and deed this gracious invading reign of God. As Christians knew, Jesus' message about God was mediated through the church's message about Jesus.

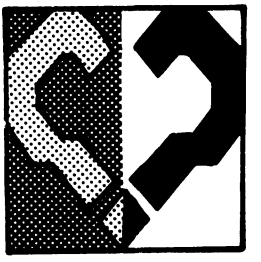
Note as well that Mark 1:1 reads "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ." In what sense is this the beginning? Leander Keck has argued that by this phrase the evangelist makes the claim that the gospel has its starting point in the events of Jesus' earthly ministry — baptism, temptation, preaching and healing activities — and not exclusively with the post-resurrection faith of the Church.[3] Most likely Mark writes his gospel to correct some misunderstanding, perhaps docetic, about Jesus as the Lord. The Markan Gospel underlines that the one proclaimed Lord in the church's message is none other than this Jesus of Nazareth. If the entire Markan narrative is intended as the "beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ," then the hearers are also being invited by the evangelist to understand their own preaching and mission as the necessary continuation of the story until the parousia.

Mark employs the term "gospel" a second and third time in 1:14-15. Jesus not only proclaims the nearness of God's kingdom but also calls for a response. Jesus' appeal for the appropriate response is rendered with present tense imperatives: the words call for continuing and repeated repentance and trusting in the gospel, that is, trusting that indeed the kairotic time had arrived when God's gracious rule was invading their historical reality.

Mark 1:16-20, the story of the call of the first four disciples, moves the Markan theme forward. The repentance and belief which the gospel calls forth are immediately depicted in their "following Jesus." For Mark, to be engaged in hearing and doing Jesus' words is to be engaged in hearing and doing God's will. Mark 1:16-20 carries paradigmatic force by illustrating the decisive character of repentance and trusting the gospel. Response to Jesus' message and person can issue in dramatic reorientation of human activity and priorities. Even family and daily occupation can be left behind.

As the Markan narrative unfolds, the audience views episode after episode in which the characters face this same challenge to repent and trust in the gospel as presented in the words and activities of Jesus. As 1:15 suggests, discipleship for Mark involves a journey

[3]See Leander E. Keck, "The Introduction to Mark's Gospel," *New Testament Studies*, 12 (1966), p. 359.



of repeated repentance and gospel-trusting in every new and challenging situation.

The evangelist subsequently discloses to his audience more implications of trusting the gospel and following Jesus on the way (synonymous engagements) by also employing the term *euangelion* later in the narrative. "Followers" will experience hardship and suffering (see 8:35 and 10:29), be led into a mission to the Gentile world (13:10), and finally be poignantly faced with the reality of Jesus' crucifixion (14:9). Mark's repeated use of this key term *euangelion* throughout his narrative illuminates significant dimensions of discipleship.[4]

Mark as Action

Werner Kelber has called attention to the claim of Gilbert G. Bilezikian: For Mark "action represents the substance of the gospel."[5] In creating his Gospel, Mark has taken stories about Jesus, many out of the oral tradition, and fashioned a narrative which moves and develops. The story moves from the Jordan River to Galilee to Jerusalem, slowly developing its crisis and then offering its apparent resolution.

Frequently, Markan scholars have drawn attention to stylistic features which suggest urgency and rapid movement of the story. Kelber has argued that this "activist syntax" at many points reflects oral forms incorporated into the Markan narrative.

> What reinforces the action-packed narrative is the oral principle of the interchangeability of actions and words. Actions manifest a didactic intent, which pulls them into the orbit of words, and words embody the vitality of happenings, which makes them indistinguishable from actions . . . Words carry the force of action, and actions speak as loud as words. It is this reciprocal relationship of deed and word, the word-character of actions and the action-character of words, that further enhances the gospel's activist syntax.[6]

This reciprocal relationship gets played out at many points. For example, in Mark 2:1-12 Jesus announces forgiveness to the paralytic, a word which effects what it announces, and then the healing-action comes as a visible word of forgiveness. The two, the word and the action, stand together as part of the same reality. Throughout the narrative, actions and dialogue are juxtaposed and thereby illuminate one another, both pointing to the same kingly activity of God.

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[4]See Willi Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, English trans., 1969) pp. 117-150, for a study on Mark's use of *euangelion.*

[5]Werner H. Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), p. 117.

[6]*Ibid.*, pp. 65f.

The Gospel is action-packed.

More than Matthew, Mark is an activist gospel, urging the readers to be "on the way" with Jesus and the disciples. Although Jesus as teacher plays an indispensable role in the Gospel,[7] there is a paucity of actual sayings and parables when compared to the action-dominated stories of healing and exorcism. The Gospel is action-packed. New insights emerge for the readers as they discern the significant interrelation of episodes in the narrative. They gain insight and learn how to act in their own daily activities as they ponder the individual episodes not just singly but as intertwined in the larger whole. Often Mark juxnation of Jesus' healings (3:22)" Or another as a literary technique to sponsor larger meanings. It is in relationships, one episode to another, that a story and a "way" of living gets illuminated. As readers move through the Markan narrative, they are led to ask, for example, "How is his family's censure of Jesus (3:20-21) related to the scribes' condemnation of Jesus' healings (3:22)?" Or "What does the raising of Jairus' daughter have to do with the healing of the woman with the flow of blood (5:22-34)?"

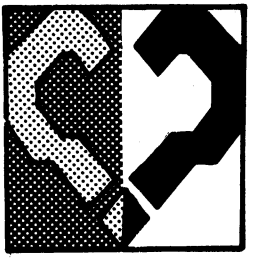
Thus, the Markan narrative suggests that the kingly rule of God is to be discerned in the activities of life, both in the story-world of Mark and in the readers' own world, not just in isolated incidents but as one episode gets inextricably intertwined with many others. As in life, Mark invites the readers to understand the whole narrative and thereby how the individual episodes share in the larger and often complicated mix.

Mark as Puzzle

Much in Mark defies easy explanation. All does not transparently fit together to offer a coherent and easily understood message. The scholarly debate on Mark testifies to this fact. More so than Matthew and Luke, Mark possesses an enigmatic character. How are we to understand the so-called "secrecy motif"? How are we to make sense of the much discussed comment of Jesus to his disciples in 4:10-12 regarding the purpose of his parables? How are we to understand the ending in Mark 16:1-8 which seems so unlike an ending?

The Gospel begins boldly and confidently enough: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God." It all seems clear enough to Mark's audience, yet before they have proceded very far into the narrative, they observe Jesus silencing the evil spirits who recognize him (see 1:25 and 1:34) and then wonder why his family members and intimate

[7] See especially the recent socio-rhetorical study by Vernon K. Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984). Robbins analyzes the Markan presentation of Jesus as the authoritative teacher in the light of both Jewish and Greco-Roman traditions and literary conventions. His work advances Markan scholarship by combining both rhetorical and socio-historical criticism.



associates do not comprehend who he is or what he is about. In Mark, both Jesus' miracles and his parables are misunderstood.

When the readers finally arrive at the end of the narrative (16:1-8), they have followed the story to Jerusalem and on the way overheard Jesus' correcting misunderstandings of the disciples regarding his need to suffer and die. They have observed the scenes of crucifixion, burial, and empty tomb, with only the women and a stranger present while the disciples are missing. Then they stand at the conclusion of the Markan story which seems so abrupt and inept. They witness the women arriving at the tomb to anoint Jesus' dead body and there meeting a young man who announces the resurrection. He instructs the women to report this to the disciples and to tell them that Jesus will meet them in Galilee. But finally the readers are told that the women flee the tomb astonished and fearful, and tell the message to no one. They are commissioned to speak, yet they remain silent.

Although none of the canonical Gospels offers a description of the resurrection itself (the apocryphal Gospel of Peter comes closest to doing this), Mark does not even describe post-resurrection appearances of the risen Lord but abruptly ends his story. Moreover, the Markan ending in 16:8 ("And they said nothing to any one, for they were afraid") closes in a syntactically clumsy and theologically unsatisfying manner. The addition in 16:9-20 attests to early dissatisfaction with verse 8 as an ending to the Gospel. There must be more.

Frank Kermode appropriately states:

> . . . we are left with a choice between saying that Mark was simply incompetent, or that the ending, though strange, is right if rightly (finely) interpreted. We have to explain why a book that begins so triumphantly and makes promise of a certain kind ends in silence and dismay without fulfilling the promise.[8]

Most recent scholars have concluded that 16:1-8 is the intended ending for the Gospel,[9] and some have suggested finely nuanced interpretations as to its meaning. By way of illustration, I summarize three interpretations.

For example, Werner Kelber[10] interprets 16:8 in connection with the Markan portrayal of the disciples. They have misunderstood Jesus as the suffering Messiah together with his teaching about discipleship, and finally at Gethsemane (later for Peter) they have deserted him. Thus, at the end of the Gospel the women provide the only link between

[8] Frank Kermode, "Sensing Endings," *Nineteenth Century Fiction* 33: 140-58 (1978), p. 148, as quoted in Norman R. Petersen, "When is the End not the End? Literary Reflections on the Ending of Mark's Narrative," *Interpretation*, 34 (1980), pp. 151-166.

[9] See Thomas E. Boomershine and Gilbert L. Bartholomew, "The Narrative Technique of Mark 16:8," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 100:2 (June 1981), pp. 213-223.

[10] Kelber (see above, note 5), pp. 128f.

Interpretations of Mark 16:8

Jesus and the disciples, and their silence implies that the Galilean meeting never takes place. The ending, according to Kelber, offers the final evidence in the story-world of Mark that the disciples are discredited. In Kelber's hypothesis, Mark uses this portrayal as a criticism of the apostles and other leaders of the Jerusalem Church — represented in the story by the disciples and family of Jesus — who have misrepresented the gospel message.

Thomas Boomershine offers another interpretation. Rejecting explanations like Kelber's which view Mark 16:1-8 as a theological polemic against some group in the early Church, Thomas Boomershine argues that the ending is designed to address the fear of the Christians in the Markan Church as they face risks in proclaiming Jesus' resurrection.

> The intended meaning of the ending is, therefore, the total effect of the ending. The ending is designed to be an experience of conflict between the scandal of silence and the fear of proclamation. In response to the shock of realization that the response of silence is utterly wrong, the story appeals for the proclamation of the resurrection regardless of fear. In the silences surrounding the climactic short statements of 16:8 and the surprising ending, Mark invites his audience to reflect on their own response to the dilemma which the women faced.[11]

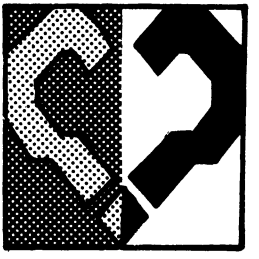
The work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza[12] provides a third interpretation of Mark 16:1-8. Noting the Markan criticism of the male disciples, she argues that the evangelist has presented the women as "those disciples who have understood and practiced true Christian leadership." The women are the ones who authentically follow Jesus. Further, this portrayal of the women is not contradicted by the Markan ending. The women fear being caught at the empty tomb since they would be identified as followers of the executed Jesus and thus arrested by the authorities; they do not fear the angel or the resurrection news. According to Fiorenza, the statement that they kept silent means only that they did not speak the message in public. It does not imply that they failed to disclose the information to the specified persons. To quote Fiorenza, "Despite the extraordinary fear for their lives the women disciples stood with Jesus in his suffering, sought to honor him in his death, and now become the proclaimers of his resurrection." Thus, contrary to Boomershine's explanation, Fiorenza's interpretation suggests that the women do overcome their fear and share the news of Jesus' resurrection.

Given these interpretations and other possible ones, most of which draw conclusions about Mark's ending based upon

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[11] Thomas E. Boomershine, "Mark 16:8 and the Apostolic Commission," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 100:2 (June 1981), p. 237.

[12] See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing House, 1984) pp. 316-323.



the scholars' hypothetical reconstructions of the problems being addressed in the Markan church, we can say: Mark 16:1-8 is indeed a puzzling ending and perhaps deliberately ambiguous. At the end, the readers are left hanging, uncertain about the fate of the disciples and perhaps as stirred by the mystery and awesomeness of the empty-tomb announcement as were the women. Jesus is raised from the dead: yet the parousia still lies ahead and the future for the Markan Church is not yet settled.

The readers are thereby invited to respond to the ending. And, as Peterson has suggested,[13] the women's reaction acts as prism through which they can review the entire Markan narrative. If Mark 13 represents the readers' world of false messiahs and threatening persecution, then they find themselves awaiting the parousia and in the meantime searching for further insight into the significance of Jesus' crucifixion. Though he is proclaimed Lord, he is yet absent to their situation and has not returned in obvious triumph over the sinful world. Puzzling though it be, the Markan narrative with its abrupt ending offers hope to the Markan audience precisely in their difficult and threatening historical circumstances.

Mark as Mirror[14]

In the perplexing passage 4:10-12, Jesus clearly states that the secret of the kingdom is given to the disciples but not to outsiders. The disciples, the readers must assume, are the insiders who have the possibility of understanding the parables. In the Markan narrative, the disciples are called and chosen to be "with Jesus" (see 1:16-20 and 3:13-19); they receive private instruction regarding the parables (4:33-34); they witness Jesus' powerful exorcisms and healings (1:21-34, 4:35-5:43); and they participate in the feedings of the multitudes and the rescues on the lake (6:30-52).

Yet, as the narrative moves to its midpoint, the readers learn little by little that the disciples lack insight into who Jesus is (although the demons know). Their dullness, fear, and lack of faith first show up in 4:35-41, and then in the second lake story (6:45-52) they are astonished at Jesus' appearance on the water, Mark explaining their lack of understanding as due to their "hardness of heart", a description previously reserved for Jesus' opponents (see 3:5). Next in 8:14-21, they must be reminded like little children of what occurred in the two feeding episodes. They did not understand the obvious.

All this leads to the hinge text in 8:27-38, where Peter confesses Jesus as the Christ, the first time the disciples recognize Jesus' identity. But im-

[13] Norman R. Petersen (see above, note 8), p. 159.

[14] Robert Tannehill use the "mirror" image in his study book on Mark entitled *A Mirror for Disciples* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1977).

Mark's portrayal of the disciples . . . seems deliberately designed as a mirror for his readers.

mediately when Jesus predicts his suffering as the Son of Man, Peter reacts in a manner which demonstrates that he holds no place in his thinking for a suffering Messiah. He is not able to think "the things of God." Thereupon, Jesus gathers the crowd with his disciples in order to instruct them in the nature of discipleship as denying oneself, taking up the cross, and following him.

As most Markan scholars have agreed,[15] this three-fold pattern of passion prediction, misunderstanding by the disciples, and corrective teaching regarding the character of discipleship is thrice repeated in 8:22-10:52, the central and pivotal section of the Markan narrative:

Passion prediction	8:31	9:31	10:32-34
Disciples' misunderstanding	8:32-33	9:32	10:35-41
Nature of discipleship	8:34-9:1	9:33-37	10:42-45

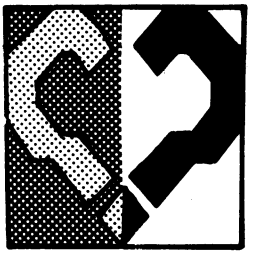
This striking repetition reveals the importance of this theme and its notable difficulty in being comprehended. Further, the blindness of the disciples is likely being symbolized in the bracketing stories where Jesus heals a blind man, in 8:22-26 where the man receives his sight in two stages and in 10:46-52 where Bartimaeus receives his sight and immediately follows Jesus "on the way." Clearly, for Mark, "on the way" involves the way to the cross (see, for example, 10:32), and thus implies that sight for blindness only comes when disciples are willing to go the way of the cross.

Near the end of the Markan narrative as Jesus dies on the cross, it is the centurion — a Gentile — who recognizes Jesus with the full confession of him as Son of God (15:39). The disciples who should have understood Jesus and his identity have fled and in no way follow him to the cross, while unlikely followers — women and strangers — have the possibility of authentic understanding.

Certainly the Markan readers would have most readily identified with the disciples in the narrative since they too considered themselves followers of Jesus. As Tannehill has masterfully shown,[16] Mark's portrayal of the disciples in the narrative seems deliberately designed as a mirror for his readers. As the portrayal becomes more and more negative, the readers would have been forced to distance themselves from the disciples and ponder why Jesus' followers had failed. In turn, the narrative would invite the readers to examine themselves in their discipleship role. The unflattering picture of the disciples in the story-world

[15] See, for example, Norman Perrin, "Towards an Interpretation of the Gospel of Mark," in *Christology and a Modern Pilgrimage: A Discussion with Norman Perrin,* edited by Hans Dieter Betz, (Claremont, Calif.: Society of Biblical Literature, 1971), pp. 7-13.

[16] See Robert Tannehill: The Disciples in Mark: The Function of a Narrative Role," *The Journal of Religion,* 57 (1977), pp. 386-405.



thus becomes the vehicle for Mark's contemporaries to assess whether or not their discipleship could endure servanthood and suffering.

Mark as Parable

Building on the considerable scholarly work on parables and particularly on the suggestion of John Dominic Crossan that in the primitive church the Jesus who announced the kingdom in parables was presented in the Gospels as the Parable, Kelber has recently elaborated his notion that Mark as the written gospel functions as a parabolic discourse.[17] If Kelber's analysis is correct, then Mark's act of writing the Gospel was not simply a reiteration of what the conveyers of the oral tradition had assumed about Jesus but entailed a dramatic and deliberate challenge to these earlier interpretations of Jesus. Accepting Crossan's definition[18], a parable is a story which "subverts" the hearers' world; it challenges conventional understanding and offers a new one. And, according to Kelber, this is precisely how the Markan narrative as a whole functions. By design Mark does not include the most provocative parables of Jesus (see 4:1-34 and 12:1-12) since he has fashioned the entire narrative to shatter the old world of his hearers in order to present a new vision of Jesus. As we have seen, he has done so especially in the exaggerated way he presents the dullness and blindness of Jesus' disciples; those who should be the "insiders" appear as "outsiders" while "outsiders" understand Jesus better than the "insiders."

> That parabolic reorientation by disorientation is the narrative route toward the kingdom is finally confirmed by the gospel's open-endedness. By carrying the insider-outsider dichotomy to its parabolic conclusion, the gospel fails to release its hearers or readers into a perfectly harmonized world, but rather jolts them into the realization of the extravagance of the kingdom of God.[19]

Attuned to the surprising character of Jesus' message and ministry, Mark thus repeatedly employs the technique of inversion: the powerful Messiah is the one crucified, the astounding miracles of Jesus do not necessarily bring people to recognize the presence of the kingdom, sinners become accepted while righteous end up looking like sinners, Jesus' own people often respond to him in hostility while some Gentiles are open to his healing work, Jesus calls men to follow him but they do not follow him when it really counts, women and strangers who would appear to be outsiders end up acting like devoted disciples, the first become last and the last first.

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[17] Kelber (see above, note 5), pp. 117-131.
[18] John Dominic Crossan, *The Dark Interval: Towards A Theology of Story* (Niles, Ill.: Argus Communications, 1975), pp. 59f.
[19] Kelber (see above, note 5), p. 217.

Take seriously the ambiguity and alienness of the narrative.

Mark, the first Gospel written, was thus a creative work which did not simply describe Jesus' parabolic presentation of the kingdom of God as an event of the past but became itself the parabolic medium of that surprising gospel of Jesus Christ in a new historical context pregnant with problems and promise.

Conclusion

Before I conclude this essay, I want to suggest some implications of the above perspectives on Mark for preaching and teaching this Gospel.

First, we need to study Markan texts with eyes and ears sensitive to their unfolding action and dialogue. Moreover, we need to be aware of the role of any specific text or segment within the flow of the Markan narrative as a whole. In preaching, we are challenged to be as concrete as the Markan texts are. The meaning and pull of the gospels are discovered in historical particularity — then and now. Viewing a preacher as a story-teller, Charles Rice quotes W. H. Auden's description of an effective poet: "A poet's hope: to be like some valley cheese, local, but prized elsewhere."[20]

Second, we should not overlook or quickly dismiss the puzzling features of many Markan tests. Rather, faithfulness to the Markan presentation of the Jesus-story implies that we take seriously the ambiguity and alienness of the narrative. For example, we can be alert to Mark's use of questions. Repeatedly, Jesus raises questions rather than providing answers, or utters provocative and puzzling words. Good preaching will more self-consciously focus on the important questions in and behind the Markan tests rather than rush on to apparent answers.

Third, as we study the texts, we need to be alert to the parabolic quality of the Markan narrative. What surprises or jolts us? Where does the text meet resistance in us? How have commentators tended to domesticate Jesus' words in the Markan story? Recognizing our tendency to tone down the radicalness of Jesus' kingdom message and to qualify God's surprising and disturbing graciousness, we will resist eliminating the jarring character of the Markan narrative.

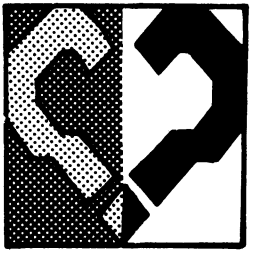
Fourth, contemporary hearers like those in the Markan church will be encouraged to identify with the characters in the story. For example, if we are preparing a homily on the story of the paralytic in Mark 2:1-12, are we to identify with the paralytic, or the four men who brought him to Jesus, or the crowd, or the opponents of Jesus? How can the text function as a "mirror" so that we can view ourselves in a fresh and honest way?

Finally, we need to ask of every Markan test, "What is the good news in this for us?" How does the text invite us

to repent (have a new vision) and act in a faithful manner. In what ways is the gospel evidenced among us in all the vicissitudes of life? Insightful preaching which leads hearers into the story-world of Mark will indeed shape the listening community. As a result, people will more clearly recognize accepting and forgiving activity in their midst; they will learn to struggle with the right questions rather than want easy answers; they will become increasingly engaged in their place for the sake of peace and justice despite the cost to themselves; and above all they will discover richer experiences whenever the community gathers for worship to celebrate God and his unexpected Word to them in Jesus of Nazareth.

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[20] Quoted by Charles Rice in his article "The Preacher as Storyteller," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 31:3 (Spring, 1976), p. 197.



Meditation

Not so long ago,
I was stretched out under the trees
wondering what it must feel like to be a cloud.
Captive of places where feathers and fairy dust speak to my heart:
Flowers bend in gracious greeting, "God's Good Morning, God's Good Evening,
God's Day.
The road printed on the map of your heart was sunshine and smiles,
laughter and tears.
This is the road to Heaven, the feeling of a cloud . . . buoyant lightness,
Float,
floating,
freely. Whisked from place to place: a white bottom on a skirt of blue lace.
I am a cloud.
One with all.
Up, up and away,
Down,
down gently,
back to green earth.
I am a baby rocking in a cradle.
I am a grandmother rocking in a chair.
I am the sea, washing in and out.
I am the earth, spin,
spin,
spinning. I am nothing.
Between the beginning and the end, sharing and staring,
living and loving,
Losing self to be in Being.
I know I am, only when I am with God.

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Marriage Preparation with Cohabiting Couples: A Challenge to Pastoral Skills

Daniel Comsia and David J. Rolfe

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Today more couples live together "without benefit of clergy" than ever before. Increasingly, when these couples decide on marriage, they are open about the fact of their domestic situation. There is less of the self-condemnation and embarrassment we used to see on the faces of such couples. In these circumstances how do clergy — the churches — minister to cohabiting couples contemplating marriage?

It is important for the pastor to realize that what has been learned in the past affects attitudes that one might have today toward a couple that is living together. In his work on premarital counseling, H. Norman Wright gives a definition of fornication that has been generally held in the church: Fornication equals sexual intercourse between any two people not married to each other (pp. 144-145). This perspective derives much of its authority from St. Augustine's post-conversion asceticism and his reflections on his pre-conversion debaucheries. It gained impetus and further articulation during the Victorian era.

The Scriptures do not address the problem that we face today with cohabiting couples. "Fornication" in the Bible is related to the idea of prostitution. To equate cohabitation with fornication therefore, is incorrect.

If by fornication we mean the "using" of a partner, and or giving oneself "to be used," fornication occurs just as often within marriage as outside it. This is an obvious conclusion from the current statistics on physical and sexual abuse in families. Clearly, Christian faith condemns such fornication without exception.

In general, we find ourselves in agreement with the late Bishop John A. T. Robinson who wrote that is was possible for a couple to have intercourse prior to marriage and not be violating their Christian faith. In our marriage preparation sessions we have worked with Christian couples who are actively involved in premarital intercourse; with others who had engaged in sex but stopped; and with others who had never had intercourse. None of these couples was fornicating. In all instances their intentions were clear and their thinking open and honest. They had openly and repeatedly talked together of their mutual sexual attraction, their faith, the meaning to them of sexual expression, and their struggles with commitment, future plans, and current activity.

Fornicating couples, in stark contrast, are distinguished by a lack of depth in thinking, an inability or unwillingness to separate feelings from action or to match behavior with commitment to a long range relationship growth. Incidentally, we have also worked with couples who had not had intercourse before marriage, not because of faith or integrity, but because they had chosen to avoid thinking through the significance of their relationship, commitment and sexuality. This failure is a danger signal for the ensuing marriage.

Cohabiting partners . . . are typically monogamous . . . and living in a common law marriage.

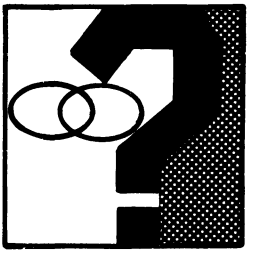
The cohabiting partners most likely to present themselves as candidates for Christian marriage are typically monogamous in their affections and are in fact living in a common law marriage. The church should welcome them when they come to the church for sanctification, for blessing of their private vows, and for association with the Christian community.

Another historical factor affecting the relationship between pastor and couple needs to be recognized. The church has sometimes been ambivalent about allowing sexual expression. In Reay Tannahill's recent book *Sex in History,* she provides a summary of the Medieval attitude toward sexuality, which even in its exaggeration, is instructive:

> "What marriage did was confer the right (not the duty) to indulge in sexual intercourse, a right that existed only within marriage, though not very often . . . Some rigid theologians recommended abstention on Thursdays, in memory of Christ's arrest; Fridays, in memory of his death; Saturdays, in honor of the Virgin Mary; Sundays, in honor of the Resurrection; and Mondays, in commemoration of the departed. Tuesdays and Wednesdays were largely accounted for by a ban on intercourse during feasts and festivals — the forty days before Easter, Pentecost, and Christmas; the seven, five or three days before Communion; and so on." (Tannahill, 1981, p. 146)

A more current example of such a perspective may be found in a recent series on sex education. In the book for the 5 to 8 year olds the following idea appears: "So with God's blessing, they get married. Then they decide that they want a little baby to share their love. God answers their prayers and then the baby grows inside its mother for nine months." (Green, 1982, pp. 16-17). The implication seems to be that prayer, not intercourse, causes conception. In every congregation there are some *married* couples who feel vaguely guilty for enjoying their private, marital sexual contact. It is still difficult for many adults to talk about sexuality directly and without embarrassment.

Another factor may affect the meeting between the pastor and the couple that wants to marry. If the pastor had premarital intercourse and is unsure about its morality, then this pastor may well have trouble being objective and may project self-hate and self-condemnation onto the couple. Equally, fantasies about cohabitation can influence the pastor's viewpoint. Fantasies about unrestrained passion with a mistress, the joys of lovemaking on Saturday evening or Sunday morning without pre-sermon jitters, may make him react with unadmitted jealousy. A female pastor can also become subjective. She may feel protective of the "poor girl" who has allowed her body to be ravished in return for vague promises of better times in the



future. Perhaps the pastor will subtly condone the cohabitation. No matter. What does matter is that none of these personal and cultural perspectives will be of help in ministering to the couple and must be consciously kept out of the interviewing process.

In working with couples, there is a vast difference between making a perfunctory judgment on a couple's behavior and challenging them to think through their direction in life. Some couples want the pastor to condemn and reject them so that they can feel at ease condemning and rejecting the church. After such a confrontation they feel they can move ahead with impunity, live outside the church, taking from the community and contributing nothing to it. Giving a cohabiting couple condemnation gives them the easiest escape possible. If we write them off, they write us off, and feel justified in so doing. If instead of judgement we offer acceptance of them, and this is coupled with the call to apply their intelligence to their decision making, then we have given our best to encourage them in making a life plan that is consonant with the Christian faith.

In short, cohabitation is a challenge to the pastor to exercise *skill.* By clearly reviewing decision-making habits, and challenging a couple to develop awareness of the full impact of their decisions, we give each partner the opportunity to affirm and own their real part in the life choices already made. This may be the first time that a person has been challenged to make intentional choices.

Skill in ministering to cohabiting couples comes at three levels. First is the awareness of my own piety. This encompasses my self-acceptance, and the impact of my own personal life history. If I am not clear about myself, and cannot accept what I am — sexual urges and all — I am liable to act out my tensions on a conveniently vulnerable couple.

Second, the pastor needs to ask why the couple has come to a pastor. We have no right to assume that the couple needs counseling. To tell them that they do demands that they confess to having a problem, and that they be prepared to put themselves in a one-down position with the pastor. The fact is that the cohabiting couple is in the pastor's office to talk about getting married in the church, before God and community.

The third dimension is the form of discussion used in meetings with the couple. "Why" questions demand justification and open the door to intellectualization, rationalization and just plain old story-telling. Far more effective for all concerned is to ask "how" questions. This draws on a different order of deliberations. We thereby ask for process, not content. The pastor can request clarification from a genuine position of ignorance: "I'm lost in how you got from A to B. Please help me get this through my head."

Three main areas to review with the couple

There are three main areas to review with the couple as they evaluate where they are going with their lives. The areas are: the decision to cohabit; the decision to marry; the question of faith.

The Decision to Cohabit

Skill questions include: How did you make the decision to live together? What does living together signify to you? Ridley, Peterman and Avery (1978) have proposed a series of excellent questions which include: "Could you talk a little bit about how each of you came to the decision to live together?" "Perhaps each of you could discuss a minute what each of you think you have gotten out of living together?" "Could each of you discuss what you see as your role and your partner's role in the relationship (e.g., responsibilities, expectations)?"

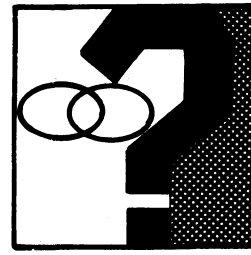
The Decision to Marry

How did you arrive at the decision to marry? What differences do you see between living together, and being married? How will marriage change your lives? What will you lose by getting married? How do you think marriage might make your life together more difficult? (See Watson, 1983, for details on research that shows that couples who live together before marriage have a harder time adjusting to marriage than couples who do not cohabit.)

More and more pastors are recognizing that for some cohabiting couples, divorce is the goal of marriage: When a couple lives together and one feels the need to break up, the other reacts by grasping. Obviously a couple almost always will not recognize this dynamic at first. Through exploring *how* their choices have been decided, the couple can see more clearly why marriage has now become an option. Hint: in taking the usual family and society history on the couple, look not only for evidence of escalating conflict, diverging life patterns, lack of vitality in the relationship, but also watch for events of death, the marriage of relatives, pregnancies and births in the couple's families and social circle. Is the woman in the couple pregnant? Pregnancy can result from a grasping tactic by *either* partner. How about a sudden opportunity for promotion on the job? Would having a "live-in" partner reduce the chances of gaining the promotion?

The Question of Faith

Faith questions almost always need to be prefaced with a statement such as "I (the pastor) do not have control over what you do, it is your business. I am, however, interested to know if what you do is in accordance with your beliefs." Without such a prefix, all questions about belief may well be heard as the prelude to judgment, condemnation, and rejection. After the initial framing



question, the pastor can go on to ask how comfortable each person is with the current status of their Christian beliefs and practice. Much later in the conversation, each person can be asked how they have dealt with questions of faith and living together. Example: "I have lost the connection. You are Christians, but feel that your faith allows living together. I believe that you are Christians, and that you are sincere in your beliefs. I have obviously missed the way you arrived at your conclusions. Can you help me follow the way you have worked this through?" If we can get a couple to examine their decision making process, we are in a position to challenge them to reexamine their behavior in light of their faith.

Going back to separate accommodations can be a way to avoid this process of reviewing how decisions are made. Moving out, without working through decisions that led up to cohabiting in the first place, allows the appearance of change without any real growth having occurred. Marriage does not solve the issue either: it merely substitutes a new reaction for the previously unresolved problem. Getting married can never be a valid resolution for conflict about living together, or for feelings of guilt or embarrassment. Marriage needs to be freely and deeply chosen as a step forward, not as a step away from an undesirable situation. Christian marriage is a covenant to be freely entered, and includes the acceptance of self and the other "as is" with no plans to reform the partner. Clergy truly minister to cohabiting couples when they don't rush to endorse either separate accommodations or marriage. Promoting careful, in-depth thinking, even if painful, is the pastoral skill most valuable in this context.

Thinking faithfully implies using good common sense, considering the impact of decisions on self and others, and keeping habits in harmony with beliefs. In essence, the pastor will need to be able to tolerate watching people in pain as they struggle. It is also important that the pastor keep the component of pain in clear perspective. Pain comes from self-examination. Pain is not good for a person. If the pastor *enjoys* watching a couple struggle, the pastor is transferring his or her own self-condemnation onto the cohabiting couple. To say "serves them right" is not in keeping with the message of the gospel. At the other end of the continuum, clergy do not like pain (a healthy motivation) and are frequently predisposed and trained to "rescue" people from pain and confusion. Sometimes to rescue another is a way to protect oneself from internal pain. In this process of working with the cohabiting couple, rescuing them from their dilemma, perhaps providing quick advice, is as destructive as criticism and condemnation.

Marriage preparation for cohabiting couples is not going to evaporate. Do we accept and face the challenge to minister to these couples? Are we secure enough

Helping couples face this issue

to accept the couples as persons, while challenging the process of their decision making? Do we run and hide behind condemnation, or collude in a hastily planned marriage; a cosmetic cover up which attests to our lack of pastoral fortitude? By helping couples face this issue in all its dimensions we can minister *faithfully.*

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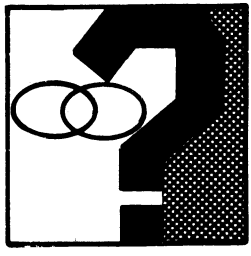
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Godmother! Godfather!

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Remember Godparents? Some of us called them sponsors. They were that favorite aunt who always remembered your birthday and that fine uncle who knew how to carve sail boats out of wood with a pocket knife. Aunt and uncle got together at the time of your confirmation and gave you the Bible with the soft leather cover, the one with your name on it in gold letters. With the presentation of that Bible, their job was done, and you were carefully taught to expect no more birthday presents.

It was a fine tradition we inherited, one that parents could use to honor certain relatives or friends, to establish a link between their new-born child and some interesting, caring, possibly well-to-do adult, thereby giving some special advantage to that child which they, the parents, could not provide. By designating a Godparent an automatic bond was created. The exact nature of that bond was never entirely clear, nor was it made explicit.

In the Baptism rite the Godparents promised to oversee the child's Christian education and spiritual nurture, "especially if he/she should lose his/her parents." Some good people understood that line as also implying that Godparents would then become kind of automatic foster parents, "if he/she should lose his/her parents," but this understanding was not that universally recognized as part of the responsibilities of Godparents.

Godparenting is a fine old institution that has served us well. Its lack of specificity allowed for individual variation to fit individual needs and styles. Which brings me to the point of this essay. Not individual needs, but, rather, collective needs face us, the needs of the church and the needs of the nation. Now all of a sudden I find myself grateful for the lack of precision in our understanding of Godparenting because that means it will be easier to adapt Godparenting to current needs.

The current needs are those of single parent families, those of families in transition because of divorce, blended families where portions of two families are put together (yours, mine, and ours), and other families that get themselves into unsolvable conflicts between parents and children.

The proposed change in our understanding of Godparenting is a simple one to describe. Of course we can still name a couple of special Godparents for each child baptized and gather all the usual benefits from that institution. But as we do that, let us make very clear that these special Godparents, two or three in number, are but a symbol of the Godparenting ministry of the entire congregation to this child. We can all be Godparents to this child because that is what the child may need. By all being Godparents we are all committed as a congregation to deliver as much Godparenting to this child as the child may require.

The fragmentation of the nuclear family has been brought about by large scale, uncontrolled, and rapid social changes. This is reflected in staggering divorce rates, increasing numbers of single parents, rising numbers of two career households which produce more latch key children, increasing domestic violence, run-away substance abuse and even an alarming increase in childhood suicide. It is not that people "don't give a damn about marriage any more." Nobody knowingly walks into a buzz saw. People are doing the best they know how to do. But some of them don't do very well because they never learned how at home, or because the learning they did get at home proved no match for the onslaught from outside the family that began hitting them at about age three or four years. To some people it seems that the rules keep changing. Life is like playing poker with a deck of 78 cards selected at random from two or three regular decks. Some of your rules work and some do not, but you do not know which do and which do not.

The extended Godparent plan could begin to meet some important needs of children in the congregations. It could provide a surrogate extended family when none exists locally. It could provide the child with a whole set of friendly -aunts and uncles ready to baby-sit or go to the zoo or bake cookies or fix the vacuum cleaner or shoot a few baskets in the company of a child or teenager yearning for conflict free adult companionship. Calling them aunt and uncle might define the role a bit more clearly for everyone. I called my Godfather uncle even though he was my mother's cousin and not my uncle at all, so it is keeping with the old tradition.

In instances of single parenting, the Godparents could provide the gender role model of the absent parent. Children whose only live-in parent is a mother need to relate to kind, consistent men. When the single parent is father, the children need experience with confident, caring women.

At times of particular stress, as for example when a family is breaking up in divorce, or when an effort is being made to blend two families, the Godparents can provide stable, reliable, caring hearts, hands, and ears for the children who are facing one of the worst times in their lives.

One more situation might be amenable to the help of Godparents. Clashes between teenagers and their parents are expected and might even be a necessary part of the process of growing up and breaking out of the family. But unfortunately they sometimes get badly out of hand, to the point where the teenagers are threatening to run away or have run-away and refuse to return or even to let anyone know where they are. The parental response to this situation is intense anxiety, all too often expressed in increasingly rigid efforts to control the adolescents' behavior. Tensions might be reduced if the teenagers knew of some congregational Godparents where they could spend a few days or weeks or months A safe place, with responsible people who would set limits for the teenagers' behavior, communicate with their parents and yet provide a listening ear and a conflict-free zone in which to live.

Two alterations are needed to effect the necessary change in Godparents. The first is an amended Baptism rite that broadens and makes more explicit the congregation's commitment to the child. My additions to the LBW rite are in parentheses:

> The minister addresses the sponsors, parents (and congregation.) P: In Christian love you have presented

these children for Holy Baptism. (As we baptize them we accept the sacred duty to love and care for them in every need, to strengthen and nourish them in every necessity of life.) (We) should, therefore, faithfully bring them to the services of God's house and teach them the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments. As they grow in years (we) should place in their hands the Holy Scriptures and provide for their instruction in the Christian faith, (keeping constant watch over these lambs of the flock of Christ,) that, living in the covenant of their Baptism and in communion with the church, they may live Godly lives until the day of Jesus Christ. LBW p. 121.

At the conclusion of the rite we amend the welcome to the newly baptized thus:

C: We welcome you into the Lord's family. We receive you as fellow members of the body of Christ, children of the same heavenly Father and workers with us in the Kingdom of God. (We will love and care for you in every need, keeping faithful watch over you during your growing years.) LBW p. 125

Making these changes in the rite will not by itself affect the social changes we have in mind. It only signals them. The social changes will require the recruiting, organizing, training, and sustaining of a Godparent Group.

Ideal candidates for the Godparent Group would be a married couple with some experience as parents. Likely candidates would be a couple recently "empty-nested" by their own children and not yet gifted with grandchildren or only with grandchildren far away. Age doesn't seem an important consideration. Age can range from that of the parents of the children to be Godparented up to the grandparent age range, as long as children are generally welcome and easily tolerated. Recruiting should be done carefully to include those with the most to give to the children and excluding those with an evident need to judge other people as well as those who would establish dependent or manipulative relationships with the children because of their own needs. People who could not property handle confidential information would also be excluded. In short, we are looking for models of the Christian life that also have proven parenting skills.

Because of the sensitive pastoral nature of this group's ministry it would be wise to keep its establishment and direction under the control of the Board of Elders or the Church Council and make membership conditional on appointment by such an official group.

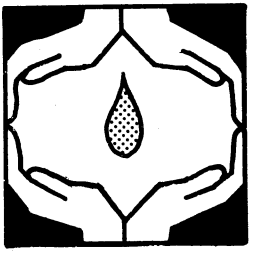
Training for the Godparent Group would need to draw on some mental health resource persons either in the congregation or in the community. The group would need to spend some time in clarification of their role as neutral, objective helpers, distinguishing it from busy bodies, gossips, and social reformers. Remember what I said earlier about surrogate aunts and uncles? Child development issues and family dynamics could be helpfully explored especially as they relate to family struggles and family disintegration. Basic helping techniques with children would also be essential. The importance of absolute confidentiality cannot be over stressed.

The final link in the chain is the one that makes the connection between the Godparent and child and is best handled by the pastor. Of course, Godparents would be used only with the approval of those having legal custody of the children. In a divorcing family the story might go like this. The pastor might become aware of the family difficulty in

a variety of ways. In the course of the ministry of pastoral care to the family, the pastor might suggest the involvement of a Godparent or a Godparent couple "to give the child some time away from home with a neutral, responsible, caring adult." If divorce occurs and single parenting follows, the Godparenting care can continue.

Once trained, the Godparent Group would continue to meet on a regular basis with the pastor and whatever other professional persons they saw as helpful. The goal of these meetings is continued growth via in-service training and mutual support.

Admittedly, this approach does not alter the major social problems that are so damaging to family life, but it could bring some very important, and much needed help to the next generation, the ones we know to be the lambs of the flock of Christ. And think what it might do for people's understanding of Holy Baptism!



Friends Above and Friends Below

Travis Du Priest

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Most often when we think of friends we think of those people with whom we spend time, at work, at church, or at social engagements. Sometimes we think of friends who live elsewhere but who nevertheless remain in touch by letter or telephone. Once in awhile we think of a deceased friend whose company we can no longer enjoy, but whose memory gives us pleasure. Rarely, however, do we think of the saints of old, the holy men and women of God, as our friends.

A year ago, I attended a conference for faculty members of Lutheran colleges. One evening during the conference, the chaplain for the group asked me if I knew anything about Aidan, Bede, and Columba. On the Lutheran calendar — one of the most ecumenical calendars of the whole church — these three were commemorated together on that particular day, and the chaplain wanted to make note of them at compline.

I remember my response to the chaplain's question because at the time I was a bit startled at what I heard myself saying: "Yes, I know them well. They are friends of mine." My friend chuckled a bit, and I continued: "I've visited all of their homes. I've seen where Bede went to school. I lived for a year across from his resting place where I have prayed many times. I've been to where Aidan lived and worked; and one Holy Week my wife and I spent time at Columba's great abbey home on Iona."

Because these people were friends of mine, I ended up giving a meditation that evening on these three holy men and their teachings for men and women of faith in our own age. At the conclusion of the meditation, another conference participant spontaneously asked, "Would you like to hear 'Caedemon's Hymn' which Bede records in his *History?* I know it in Anglo-Saxon." We were then treated to a lovely recitation because of this woman's friendship with Bede and the shy monk who gave us the first poem in English, Caedemon.

Looking back and reflecting on that wonderful evening which was enlivened by the memory and knowledge of several saints of old, I realize that many of my friends are members of what the church calls the communion of saints, men and women whose lives are part fact and part fiction, but who have passed on the faith and who have contributed much to the building up of my faith. And I realize that through the gift of memory that these men and women are not so much dead and gone as they are present and encompassing.

For me, the communion of saints is a fellowship, a friendly group of people, some of whom I know by name only, others of whom I know quite well. I happened to know rather well the three men mentioned above because I spent a year studying in Durham, England, and had the opportunity to visit many places, including Lindisfarne and Iona, which are associated with the early church of the 6th, 7th, and 8th centuries. To learn of the Northumbrian Renaissance and of

the spread of Christianity to northern Europe has been enlightening and instructive. It has also helped me form vital friendships.

My Lutheran pastor friend did not know these three too well, but it was obvious from his meditations throughout the week that he knew many saintly friends of the past and present whom I did not know. We all form different close ties because of our own personalities and inclinations. We all travel different paths in life, literal and metaphorical, and encounter different personages at different times and places, in person or through our reading. Wherever and whenever we make new acquaintances, we have the benefit of having a new companion along the way of faith and goodness. Companionable friendship is a large part of the communion of saints, a bonus blessing of church history, traveling, reading, or conversing.

These new companions, these holy people of God, living or dead, great or small, become, if we let them, vital companions in faith. To put this another way, we do not believe in them. Rather, they help us believe in God; they are friends in faith.

I particularly like to read stories about ancient saints, many of whom do not even have names remembered by modern men and women. Many of whom, on the other hand, have not only names but decades of folklore and tales fastened onto their lives, which may have, in fact, been rather dull and undramatic. I think of Godric of Fincale. The remains of the Abbey at Fincale, outside of Durham, on the River Wear, are lovely, placid ruins which themselves invite romantic visions and stories. I think of the monks coming out for the summer to pray, and swim, and fish in the river. And, of course, I think of the lore that built up around Godric, as it has with Simon Styletes, and of how he was reported to have spent much time in the ground planted as a root. And how a much larger audience can think of Frederick Buechner's wonderful novel, *Godric,* based on this fascinating man.

The more I know about such men and women of faith from long ago, the more my own faith and wisdom and sense of humor are kindled, and the more and more they come to mind in various places and at various times in my life. They are — Aidan, Bede, Columba, Cuthbert, Godric, Chad, and the like — a part of the community of my mind, a part of my inner communion of fellowship.

It bothers some people and some churches that much we read about the saints of old is not factual. That is to miss the point. I hear a lot about close friends of mine from week to week that I know is not factual. On the other hand, I hear some things that are not literally factual but which are true to my friend's nature and I could believe it of him or her. Truth, the mythic truth of scripture and faith, is not pinned down by literal, empirical fact. Many saints, as Lawrence Cunningham says in his thoughtful, illuminating book, *The Meaning of Saints,* dwell in the world of fiction. And they are none the less saints.

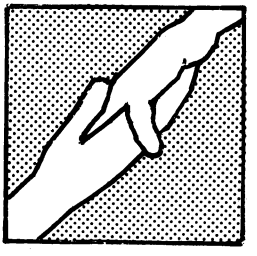
Saints need not be flesh and blood people. The church's fuss over such saints as Christopher and George, who never lived in actuality, but who are powerful and deeply moving images of faith, is regrettable: the gentle loving Christopher with the Christ child on his back and the handsome, gallant George in shield with red cross, holding the spear over Satan are deeply embedded in our storehouse of Christian models. Such saints are emblems of faith. That authorities are so concerned about data

and facts can only be a selling short of our concepts of truth and of the ways truth and goodness are passed from one generation of believers to the other.

Saints are often noble people about whom we read in fiction. One such woman who comes to mind is Phoenix Jackson in Eudora Weltry's masterful short story, "A Worn Path." Old Phoenix makes regular trips at great personal struggle to get medicine for her sickly grandson. The reader of the story can tell by the way Phoenix relates herself to nature, to the animals she encounters, to the people she meets along the way, and to God that she is a saintly figure.

Indeed, if I had to choose one person who exhibits contemplative prayer in action it would be Phoenix Jackson, a woman who never physically lived, yet who has lived in the hearts and minds of many readers who think of her enduring hardship and pain and inconvenience while remaining at peace with herself and her world. She is a part of my communion, of my fellowship of saintly friends. She lifts my heart. She takes me to God. She helps my unbelief.

Faith-filled friends of the past. It is they who are a part of the "great cloud of witnesses" who surround us, support us, and enliven our faith. These are our friends above who can, when we open ourselves more fully to the storehouse of wonder and stories in the tradition of our faith, become our friends below and our companions along the way.



The Healing Debate among Lutheran Churches

Jo Ann Learman
Madison, Wisconsin

This article reports on the ways Lutheran pastors are using healing in their ministries in Dane County (greater Madison), Wisconsin. Their experiences may prove to be symptomatic of what others are discovering since the publication of Occasional Services. *The article was first published in the newsletter of St. John's Lutheran Church, Oregon, Wisconsin.*

Diane Ranum's life had been laden with crisis. Born with the same heart condition that killed her mother and brother, she spent the last twelve years of her life living day by day. One doctor told her point-blank "Every day you wake up, you're lucky."

About a year and a half ago, the wife and mother was hospitalized. Again the doctors gave up hope. While Diane lay in the hospital near death, the members of her congregation at the Evangelical Free Church in Mount Horeb devoted their weekly prayer session to praying for her recovery.

She did recover, and she was convinced that the healing power of prayer lengthened her life. So is her husband, Tom. "I think we prayed her back this last time," he says.

Diane recently died of the heart condition, but her story is a dramatic example of an issue with which the Lutheran Church is now grappling: the place of healing in the church's ministry. Some believe the growing popularity of the charismatic movement has forced the church to confront the issue.

The inclusion of the "Service of the Word of Healing" in the 1982 edition of the *Occasional Services* book used by most Lutheran ministers is the closest thing to an official position on healing in the church. For the first time, the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) and the American Lutheran Church (ALC), which publish the book jointly, have officially sanctioned a healing service.

Reaction among Lutheran ministers to the new service is varied. "A lot of Lutheran clergy as well as lay are scratching their heads and saying, 'OK, what do we do with this?' " says Pastor Dan Anderson of St. Stephen's Lutheran Church. "And I think that's healthy, in the sense that it's acknowledging the fact that there are some things that the church has not paid attention to that perhaps it should have."

Many pastors are uncomfortable with the church's movement — however cautious — towards healing. One would be hard-pressed to find a Lutheran minister who would deny God's power to heal, yet many are wary of institutionalizing that power within the church.

One reason for their wariness is the image of the hysterical. "Throw down your crutches and *walk*!" faith healer whose "miracles" turn out to be staged deceptions. "I think we have to recognize the fact that . . . some so-called 'faith healers' have done tremendous damage to the whole area of healing," says Pastor Don Altmann of Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Sun Prairie.

But there are other, deeper considerations than a mere image problem. How does one pray with expectation and still believe that God is the one in charge? Is healing a selfish means of manipulating God to our own ends? And what if a healing service fails? Does that mean the supplicant didn't have enough faith?

Pastor Anderson admits he is still trying to sort out his feelings on the issue. "When I say I don't have a position on it, I guess I don't mean that God doesn't have the potential to heal," he says. "I'm not questioning that. The question is how God chooses to function and what our role is in that process."

"I think one of the reasons there are a lot of problems with the whole issue is not only that congregations aren't sure where they are, but that frankly, a lot of pastors — and I would have to include myself — aren't necessarily sure where *we* are . . . and what we want to affirm."

Morton T. Kelsey writes in *Healing and Christianity* that almost one-fifth of the Gospels is devoted to Jesus' healings and the discussions they caused. Forty-one separate instances of both physical and mental healing (the "casting out of demons") are recorded.

Not only was healing a central part of Jesus' ministry, it was an important part of the early Christian church. But gradually, by the time of Charlemagne (742 to 814 A.D.) the order for healing was transformed into an order for dying. Christians had come to view sickness as punishment inflicted by God on sinners. As Kelsey puts it, "Care of the soul became much more significant than care of the body . . . Any kind of healing began to be treated with suspicion." The healing role of the church gradually faded away.

One reflection of the new-found interest in healing was a workshop entitled "The Healing Ministry of the Lutheran Church,"held in Madison. The workshop was organized by Wayne Larson, area director of Lutheran Social Services, and pastors from two ALC and two LCA churches. Eighty-five people, including 30 Lutheran ministers, attended.

Participants discussed spiritual and physical healing, wholeness, and wellness, Larson explains. They also performed the new Service of the Word for Healing. "We felt that there was a need for education preceding the use of that service," he says. Larson says more than 90 percent of those who responded to a follow-up questionnaire favored further workshops on the topic.

Pastor Anderson was on the task force that put the healing workshop together. Despite his personal ambivalence, he found the workshop valuable and shared what he had learned in a three-week adult education class at St. Stephen's.

St. Stephen's is "at a stage of trying to sort out things," says Pastor Anderson. "I have to say there isn't a lot of interest, although there are certainly people who are sympathetic to the fact that the church has sort of, probably unwisely, written off the whole area for a lot of years."

In the absence of pressure from the congregation, St. Stephen's has no plans to begin offering healing services. "But, on the other hand," says Pastor Anderson, "it's probably not helpful for us to continue to postpone any decisions on that for a long time, either, because I think we have some responsibility to make a decision one way or the other."

Pastor Anderson's cautious approach stems from his fear that people might misunderstand the intent of healing services. Above all, he wants to guard against a view of prayer as "a human method of manipulating God to get him to do something that he wouldn't ordinarily do." Anderson is also concerned that people's expectations be realistic; that they not view healing as "some sort of guaranteed physical fix-it shop." He worries about what would happen if a healing service failed to produce the desired result, be it physical, mental, or spiritual. "Your next step is that you've

somehow got to figure out what went wrong, and, of course, the immediate temptation is that the reason it didn't happen is that you didn't have enough faith," he says. If people blame themselves, they could end up feeling worse that before they sought help, he points out.

Although Pastor Anderson favors more discussion and education on the subject, he adds one final caution: "Important as the whole healing question is, it is not the ultimate question in terms of the faith, because ultimately everybody dies."

Pastor Anderson's first personal experience with healing was at the healing workshop. But Pastor Tom Berlage at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church says his experience with healing goes "way back, and that's unique."

Pastor's Berlage's home church in Clearwater, Florida conducts monthly healing services. He attended his first while still a teenager.

In college, Berlage attended healing services to pray for his mother, who was dying of cancer. He would also pray for the strength to cope with her illness. He describes these services as restrained, not in the highly emotional vein many people associate with "faith healing."

"I remember being moved by the service and feeling a little more in touch with God," he recalls. "I find it very moving, personally, when a minister anoints me with oil and puts his hands on my head."

Pastor Berlage's mother died about five years ago, and he spent years learning to accept her death. "It's been a slow process of healing," he says.

Good Shepherd is offering healing services on a quarterly basis. Both Pastor Berlage and Good Shepherd's senior pastor, Pastor J. Clemmons Peterson, conducted the first healing service in what Pastor Berlage describes as a low-key, casual manner. They anointed with oil those who came forward, the pastors laid their hands on the individuals and prayed for them, using the Service of the Word for Healing.

For Pastor Berlage, the service was a great success. Although not all of the dozen or so participants came forward, many later told him they were glad they had come. To his knowledge, there has been no negative reaction. "I haven't heard any blatant rejection of the service or of the idea," he says. He acknowledges that some people may have attended purely out of curiosity.

Berlage discovered an unanticipated benefit of the healing service: "I found it very helpful in terms of my ministry," he recalls, "to understand where some people's hurts are that I didn't even know were there. I can have my antennas out now."

The impetus to start healing services came from a core of Good Shepherd members who came from non-Lutheran backgrounds and had been exposed to healing before. "We had a number of people who were really pushing us," says Pastor Berlage. "I was a little more anxious to get involved than some other people because of my background. I don't carry quite the same negative baggage that others do."

"My understanding of healing is wholeness with a capital W," he says. "And any time things get disordered, we have dis-ease."

"We're trying to aid people in becoming whole. I see so many people that are so uptight and hyper. We need to learn to deal with all that stress. Maybe a healing service is one way to help people."

Pastor Berlage is well aware of the objections to incorporating healing within the church. "I think one (objection) is trying to institutionalize something in-

tangible like healing," he says. "And I guess I see it more as offering the opportunity. If only two people show up, I find that just as legitimate as if I have a whole crowd." Another is the fear the Lutheran Church is starting on the path towards dramatic physical healing. "But that's not what we're about," he says. "We try and we try and we try to tell people, but some people don't take the time to listen."

"When we have a healing service, we're primarily praying for spiritual healing. We're not denying the fact that physical or mental healing may take place because we don't want to limit God."

If one believes stress and guilt can cause physical and mental illness, then praying for strength and forgiveness is, in a very real sense, asking to be healed. Indeed, the argument could be made that any time a person prays for divine intervention to soothe life's hurts, that person is asking to be healed. By the same token, many of the day-to-day duties of a parish pastor — visiting the sick, counseling the troubled — can be described as spiritual and psychic healing.

Pastor Berlage believes a powerful link exists between forgiveness and healing. "The most powerful healing that I have seen is one-on-one, behind closed doors," he says. "That's when I have seen it happen right in front of my eyes, in this very office."

He tells the story of a man, not a member of Good Shepherd, who came into his office severely depressed. The man was having trouble on the job and couldn't eat or sleep. When Pastor Berlage asked, "Have you done something you can't forgive yourself for?" the man's pent-up emotions spilled forth like water out of a dam. Tearfully, he confessed that he had gotten drunk and committed adultery. Pastor Berlage administered the service for private confession and forgiveness.

Two days later, Pastor Berlage saw the man on the street, dressed in a three-piece suit. In that short time span, he had landed a new job and bought a house with his wife. He had been healed of his guilty conscience.

Healing services are nothing new for Pastor Don Altmann of Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Sun Prairie. "I have been promoting it for probably four or five years now," he says. "You've got to take the lead. If you wait for the church, you're going to be behind. The church is always behind."

When people come to him with problems, Pastor Altmann either suggests they join a prayer chain or attend a private healing service. He holds these services for people suffering from depression and marital problems, but he says fully 60 to 70 percent are seeking physical healing. The services have had dramatic results. Pastor Altmann recalls a case in which a tumor no longer showed up on an X-ray. And he remembers a distraught diabetic who was not able to cope with the disease and the insulin shots anymore. Although the diabetic was not physically cured, the individual experienced a complete and lasting change in attitude.

Pastor Altmann generally uses a service he wrote himself, which includes the laying on of hands and anointing with oil. "That service in the *(Occasional Services)* book is really shallow," he says, "and I don't mean that in a derogatory way. It's just that there's a whole lot more that needs to be said and done."

Before a private healing, Pastor Altmann meets with those involved. He tells them the story in Mark 9, of the disciples' inability to heal a boy. The boy

is brought to Jesus, who tells the boy's father, "Everything is possible to one who has faith." "I have faith," the father cries, "help me when faith falls short."

Pastor Altmann tells the story because he doesn't want people to have unrealistic expectations of a healing or to blame themselves if it fails. "We *do* have faith," he says, "but none of us so much that we don't need more."

"God accepts us at whatever stage we are at in our faith," he adds. "Our job is to pray, and we ought never to presume what God's response will be."

Often, a person's Christian friends also attend the service. In this setting, eyeball-to-eyeball with their closest friends, people discuss their most intimate emotional, sexual, and physical problems, "and that's not something you're going to do in front of the congregation," Pastor Altmann admits. That's one reason he hasn't offered healing services in the corporate setting.

Pastor Altmann has no doubt that he is doing God's work. "The Scriptures surely talk about the value of prayer and healing," he says firmly. "We ought not to be afraid of that."

At Bethel Lutheran Church, Pastor Willard Lund has conducted healing services in different ways. For a time, he offered weekly and even twice-weekly healing services that involved the reading of Scripture, meditation, hymns, prayer, and the laying on of hands. "I have tried to get a handle on this thing so that it could have some kind of meaning for people," he says.

Despite the fact that the church's prayer group requested the services, Pastor Lund says there wasn't much response. As a result, he now performs them only on request. "It's something that I haven't given up on, but I'm not moving very fast either," he says.

Like Pastor Berlage, Pastor Lund favors a wider definition of healing. "I think personally that healing is going on all the time, through general worship, prayer support groups, Bible study, etc." he says. "It pervades almost every part of the church community."

"It seems as if some people within the church community need a more intentional type of healing, but at this point there don't seem to be enough to require special services," he says.

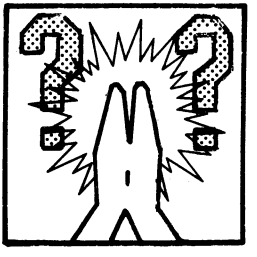
Interest in healing services varies greatly from minister to minister and congregation to congregation. What seems clear is that the Lutheran Church is moving cautiously on the issue. As Pastor Lund puts it, "a lot of groundwork has to be laid, a lot of education. We still need a lot of help from our church leaders, which is slow in coming."

Recommended for Further Reading:

Healing and Christianity by Morton T. Kelsey, Harper & Row, 1973.

The Healing Light by Agnes Sanford, Macalester Park Publishing Co., 1947.

Healing by Francis MacNutt, Ave Maria Press, 1974.



A Book Worth Discussing: The Naked Public Square*

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As is his wont, Richard Neuhaus has again located himself right in the vortex of a swirling controversy. This time it concerns the role of religion in American political life. As he puts its: "The question is whether we can devise forms for that interaction which can revive rather than destroy the liberal democracy that is required by a society that would be pluralistic and free." (p. 9) For Neuhaus this is an open question, because the proper way for biblical religion and ethics to enter the public sphere of American liberal democracy has not yet been found. At the same time it is a critical question, because he believes that the Americans democratic experiment cannot be sustained by a "naked public square" in which religiously grounded values are ruled out in principle.

Neuhaus argues that we are in the midst of a "first-principle reexamination of the role of religion in American life." (p. 7) This has been forced by the emergence of the religious new right. For Neuhaus the religious new right is that part of American evangelicalism that is both fundamentalist and politically active. It has come in from the political cold to which it was sentenced from the time of the Scopes trial. The religious new right is a populist revolt against the naked public square, and as such it is a sign of hope.

What we have, according to Neuhaus' analysis (and this is basically an analytical rather than a constructive book), is the collision of two hard-line approaches and the retreat of one soft-line. The two hard-line approaches are secular liberalism and politically active Protestant fundamentalism. The retreating soft-line is establishment, mainline Protestantism.

First, hard-line secular liberalism. This is the ideology of the secular state in which religion is viewed as a purely private matter. Stemming from the Enlightenment, secular liberalism views religion as divisive emotivism. Religion is not grounded in reason and therefore should be kept from the public sphere. It is treated at best as representing an "interest." Secular liberalism, however, has moved from a rather wholistic notion of reason, which at one time gave considerable substantive guidance to both private and public life, to a decisively truncated version — the principle of free consent. Anything goes as long as adults freely consent. Such a viewpoint, which Neuhaus believes is dominant among many American elites in education, culture, media, and the courts, leads to a moral relativism that is chilling indeed. Such is the trajectory of secular liberalism; it has led to a naked public square with little religious or moral meaning, and therefore little religious or moral legitimation. Following the

By Richard John Neuhaus. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984. vii and 280 pages. Cloth. $16.95.

arguments of ethicists like McIntyre and Hauerwas, Neuhaus believes the insistence upon an "autonomous ethic" leads to contentless liberalism.

However, a vacuum of religious and moral meaning cannot be tolerated by state or society. Into the vacuum will rush political ideology (Marxism) or religious populism (Moral Majoritarianism). In either case, the democratic project, which Neuhaus believes is dependent upon biblical religion for its healthy development, will be foreclosed. Neuhaus argues, wrongly, I think, that Marxist totalitarianism is the more likely winner in the modern world (p. 83), but he also warns of right-wing populism.

The move toward a secular state, long promoted by Enlightenment liberalism, has been challenged by the second hard-line approach. American evangelicalism, particularly its fundamentalist wing, has long suffered under the dominance of secular liberalism. It has seen its cherished moral and religous notions increasingly driven from public life. Well, it has had enough and won't take any more. From the Carter campaign onward, American evangelicalism has urged its way into the public sphere. Its hard-line fundamentalist component has been the most politically effective, pressing its case on issues like abortion, prayer in the public schools, the ERA, gay rights, etc. It has been ascending in confidence and power; it will not go away.

Arguing that this particular hard-line viewpoint has been necessary to wake America up to the dangers of the naked public square, Neuhaus nevertheless finds it deficient in making the proper connections between religion, ethics, and politics. Moral majoritarians tend to forge non-negotiable links between the ultimate meanings of the Christian faith, their particular interpretations of Christian morality, and the political policies that express their convictions. They leave little room for debate among even Christians of good-will. Moreover, Neuhaus thinks that this hard-line refuses to submit its positions to public debate and discourse, instead claiming that they are based purely on revelation, which of course cannot be scrutinized. (p. 158)

Out of this crucible of clashing hard-lines tip-toes a depleted and retreating mainline Protestantism. Once the "shakers and movers," the Methodists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Episcopalians are presently in disarray. They, with their cherished offspring, the ecumenical agencies, have lost confidence and interest in transcendent religious symbols. Instead of offering authentic criticism and guidance from a recognizable religious point of view, they accommodate to left-liberal politics and actually acquiesce to the liberal call for a naked public square. In one of the better lines of the book, Neuhaus writes, "It has been said of mainline Protestantism today that it is embarrassed to make any religious statement that does not possess redeeming social merit." (p. 215)

So that is our present situation. Religion, ethics and their involvement in American democratic politics have not found their proper relation. But Neuhaus believes that there can be no coherent American civilization without a religious base. The American project is deeply dependent upon a lively and healthy interaction of religion and public policy.

From whence comes our help? Neuhaus suggests that the best efforts might come from Catholics, Lutherans, and non-fundamentalist evangelicals who still have lively confidence in the religious meanings they bear, who have ways of distinguishing between ultimate and penultimate judgments, and who

can find common ground among themselves and others for public debate. They will also tend to hold together prophecy and patriotism, love for America as well as needed criticism. Only such combinations will be able to give moral definition to the nation. (p. 77).

Needless to say, this is an important and provocative book. In delineating the major lineaments of Neuhaus' analysis, I have mentioned only a few of the many insights in the book. That plenitude of insights, however, is also a part of the problem. The book is not tightly argued; indeed, at times it seems as if the author threw everything but the proverbial kitchen sink into the book. The chapters do not flow from one to the other in a sustained way. Perhaps I am used to the pithy compression of Neuhaus' more journalistic writing, but I found the book in need of more careful editing. For example, the expression "so to speak" is used copiously throughout the book, three times on pages 12 and 13.

More seriously, the book's shortcoming lies in its skirting of constructive proposals. There are suggestive hints toward relating biblical religion, ethics and American public life, but they are not sustained or systematic. Perhaps this is the challenge for a companion volume. If so, let me point to some issues that must be worked through.

First, I am not sure that mainline Protestantism should or can be dismissed as thoroughly as Neuhaus does. Lay Christians from the mainline occupy precisely those positions of power where biblical values and policy issues intersect. All of them have not accommodated to secular liberalism nor to the alleged misdirection of their leaders. In fact, among Methodists and Presbyterians there are rebellions in the ranks that are calling, successfully in the case of the Presbyterians, for new directions in leadership. A large number of mainline Christians are as disturbed by the naked public square as Neuhaus, are longing for more substantive religious grounding, and are more compatible partners in a constructive search than Neuhaus avers.

Second, how *particular* should religious symbols and morality be as they are articulated in the public sphere? Sometimes Neuhaus suggests that they should be quite particular indeed (p. 89), but yet he criticizes fundamentalists for their kind of particularism. Jesse Jackson gave us an example of highly particularistic use of religious symbols in his speech at the Democratic National Convention, and I for one found such particularism offensive. I would suggest that more common and general religious and moral notions will be more helpful. This might mean the adoption of some sort of civil religion approach, if by that is meant the religious and moral heritage that Jews and Christians hold in common. Moreover, such commonly shared religious notions are more translatable into arguments that appeal to reason and experience. For example, one can hold religious notions about the divinely intended dignity and loving quality of sexual relations and yet join forces with feminists who make quite a different kind of argument for public policy surrounding the pornography issue. In short, the less particularistic arguments will be more amenable to the public discourse and debate that Neuhaus calls for. In his constructive companion volume, then, Neuhaus will have to be more specific about the *kind* of religious arguments that ought to be made in public.

Third, I do not think it will wash to reject so sharply the philosopher's quest for an "autonomous" ethic — an ethic based on reason alone. Neuhaus follows McIn-

tyre and Hauerwas too closely here. True enough, too many claims have been made for autonomous ethics; the "universality" of such an ethic resembles uncannily the Judeo-Christian moral tradition of the West. But there is a value and a nobility in the search for common ground in reason. And if Neuhaus wants a public debate, such a debate implies a common ground broader than biblical religion. Besides, that common ground is suffused with the moral teachings of western religion as it has influenced western culture for centuries. What is called "rational" is often the echo of Christian moral teaching that no longer is identified solely as such. Thus, Neuhaus should be more "catholic" in his epistemology if he is to provide a common ground broad enough for a truly public debate.

I raise these issues as a prod for more constructive reflections on our and Neuhaus' part. They, like this book, have an importance that will not quickly disappear.

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Book Reviews

THE MESSAGE OF EXODUS: A THEOLOGICAL COMMENTARY. By Lester Meyer. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1983. 173 pages. Paper. $8.95.

Augsburg is well along with its commentary series on the two testaments. Interestingly, the two series differ somewhat in approach. Where the. NT series tends to comment verse-by-verse, the OT series deals with larger pericopes and motifs, as indicated by the "Message of" in the title.

Each approach has its strengths, of course, though in the case of Exodus, with its web of historical and legal details, the latter is surely the more appropriate. This allows Meyer to be selective in his choice of topics, and to give fuller attention to pericopes or motifs that are more troublesome (bloody bridegroom, plagues) or more central to the concern of modern readers (Decalogue). It also allows Meyer to leave the technical and critical studies for other commentaries — the one place where such concerns surfaced, an illustration of the JEP sources, was simply too brief to be either convincing or helpful. Finally, this approach allows Meyer to highlight the theological significance of each pericope.

In his preface, he says he is writing for readers among whom "no previous acquaintance is presumed," and indeed jargon and technicalities are kept to a minimum. However, that does not consign this book to superficiality. In fact, this book is helpful also to those who have a good bit of acquaintance with Exodus and all of Scripture. This is a good foundational tool, both a commentary on and an introduction to Exodus. This whole series would be a good resource for a church library.

Henry Rowold
Concordia Seminary
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MICAH. By Delbert R. Hillers. Hermeneia. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984. xviii and 116 pages. Cloth. $17.95.

> Therefore, because of you,
> Zion shall be plowed as a field,
> Jerusalem shall become ruins,
> The mountain of God's House an elevated thicket.
> But there shall come a time afterwards
> When the mountain of the Lord's House
> Shall indeed be established on the peak of the mountains,
> Raised higher than the hills,
> With peoples streaming up to it.
> (Micah 3:12-4:1, reviewer's translation)

So concludes Micah, chapter 3, and begins Micah, chapter 4, a fact which has elicited the hottest question in Micah studies during the past two centuries: how do the oracles of doom and the oracles of hope relate? The answer Delbert Hillers offers enters the debate like a revitalizing breeze.

In a brief but lucid introductory overview, the commentator recalls for us the widely accepted opinion that the authentic Micah material is to be found in the doom of chapters 1-3, while the mostly hopeful chapters 4-7 are exilic (or early post-exilic) additions, visions which peer beyond the horizon of the debacle of 587. Hillers rehearses the cantata of scholarly voices who recently have examined the book of Micah by means of diachronic redaction-histories. One problem: these presentations all differ on the provenance of the various oracles. This confusing state of affairs may not utterly doom diachronic studies of Micah; but it may suggest there is hope for a synchronic approach.

Hillers tackles this latter, less popular method. Admitting that his thesis is "hypothetical and provisional," he suggests that the book of Micah be understood as emerging from "a movement of protest and revitalization", a phenomenon common among oppressed

groups, universally attested, and recurrent. Often caused by "deprivation" and "defection of authority" (Hillers quoting Norman Cohn), these protest-revitalization movements usually produce leaders and spokespersons who not only protest and condemn, but also revitalize by offering hope through a vision which looks beyond the present. Conventional among their hopeful visions of the future are five characteristics: "the removal of foreign elements," a "time of troubles" before the "golden age," "the reversal of social classes," "a righteous, peaceable ruler," and poetic descriptions of the "new age." If Micah was a part of such a movement of protest and revitalization, virtually all of the oracles in the book of Micah could come from him or at least from his time, though Hillers' thesis does not rule out exilic touch-ups, for example, in 4:10 and 5:2 (EV 5:3).

This commentary is a much-needed correction to the current course of Micah studies. That "revitalization" could take place in Israel/Judah only during and after the Exile, as is often assumed by the diachronic approaches, is an unproven and, at root, illogical hypothesis. Certainly there were disasters during the lifetime of Micah which would have called forth revitalization (e.g., the fall of Samaria in 722 or the invasion of Sennacherib in 701) and, just as certainly, protest/condemnation and revitalization/vision of hope may occur simultaneously. Thus, theoretically, there is not a problem with Hillers' thesis. (Others, including recently Leslie C. Allen, have argued along similar lines.)

However, to buttress their arguments, redaction-historians sometimes turn to queries about vocabulary or style. Each word, phrase, or expression must be examined individually; but Hillers demonstrates that in quite a number of cases the language of a given "oracle of revitalization" is by no means clearly Deuteronomic, Second Isaian, proto-apocalyptic, or "late" as certain commentators have claimed. Working carefully with a keen historical and archaeological awareness, Hillers avoids being dogmatic and eschews assigning various oracles to specific historical events, while presenting a convincing case for understanding the book of Micah within the life-setting of the prophet.

A good commentary on Micah not only asks how doom and hope oracles relate historically, but also raises questions about how they were redacted. Hillers exegetes the book on the basis of "the smaller units of composition," since "larger units — groups of oracles" are difficult to determine, and "nothing like an overall plan or structure is discernible." Nonetheless, his synchronic approach encourages him to discern certain oracular collections based on catchwords or common themes, and even to discover some currents flowing between collections. For example, he notes "the mountain of (the Lord's) house" and other verbal connectors between 3:11-12 and 4:1-5; the "you-now" collection in 4:8-5:1 (EV 5:2); the unifying themes of "the city" and "my people." Hillers does far more than most to elucidate the cohesiveness of the oracles in the book of Micah; and by realizing that theme and catchword form the redactional glue which bonds the oracles together, he avoids the prevalent error of importing to the book the editorial scheme of alternating judgment and salvation which, however delightful to Lutherans, is not indigenous to the Hebrew text, in my opinion.

The textual criticism in this volume moves cautiously and informs the reader of variants extant in the four published scrolls (three Hebrew, one Greek), found in the Judaean desert, which contain portions of Micah. A fresh English translation is offered which is clear, if a bit literal.

In the 1880's, Bernhard Stade forcefully argued what became the majority position among biblical scholars: that Micah is a prophet of doom. It is appropriate that Hillers' work should appear a century later — in 1984, no less — proposing that the prophet not only protests, but also revitalizes. If the thesis is correct, and I think it is, then Micah becomes somehow more believable, more human. For the prophet becomes not only one who laments, but also one who praises; one who cries, "Woe is me!" (7:1) alongside "But as for me, I watch for the Lord, I wait for the God of my salvation!" (7:7). In short, Micah becomes more like Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, the psalmists; more like me.

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READING LUKE: A LITERARY AND THEOLOGICAL COMMENTARY ON THE THIRD GOSPEL. By Charles H. Talbert. New York: Crossroad, 1982. 246 pages. Cloth. $17.50.

Over the last decade Talbert has made many contributions to the understanding of Luke-Acts, both by participation in the Luke-Acts seminar of the Society of Biblical Literature and through the publication of more than a few articles and books.

It is always interesting to see what happens when an acknowledged expert sits down to compose a comprehensive study such as a commentary.

Talbert begins by coming clean on his biases. He shares the widespread loss of confidence in the two-source theory, partly, it seems, because he has lost interest in all source theories. They probe behind or below the text into the geology or evolution of the document. He prefers geography to geology, and wants to grant the text its integrity, comprehending its parts in relation to the whole, sensitive to plot, character development, literary devices, and the drama of the narrative line.

Furthermore, he intends the present work, he says, as an introduction not to the world of scholarship on Luke-Acts but to the world of the biblical text itself.

Talbert views Luke-Acts as a form of cultic biography with volume one (the Gospels) devoted to the founder and volume two (Acts) to his successors. Such biographies were intended to exhibit the career of the founder as normative for the lives of his followers and to legitimate his successors by showing how they stand in continuity with the founder.

The Gospel of Luke commends Jesus (the founder) to the readers as one whose career and teaching can be known with certainty and as one who is worth knowing and revering. Luke's basic devices of recommendation and persuasion are fulfillments of prophecy, miracles, and the selfless commitment of martyrdom.

Luke wanted his readers to emulate the work and words of Jesus, not mechanically but imaginatively in the power of the Spirit.

Talbert does not offer a verse-by-verse and word-by-word exposition of the text. He divides the Gospel into 33 segments and then focuses on the heart of each unit. So in the comments on Luke 2:1-20, Talbert focuses almost but not quite exclusively on two matters: 1) The structure of 2:1-20 and how it fits into the larger unit of 1:57-2:52, and 2) The meaning of the angelic announcement of "peace."

His interests are not sociological, and so we do not constantly run into terms like "honor," "shame," "dyadic personality," "marginal social status" or "cognitive dissonance." Nor do his literary critical interests lead to a discussion of author, implied author, narrator, first readers, implied readers, plot, and story. He focuses on structural matters such as parallelism, chiasm, inclusion, repetition. He constantly refers to such ancient authors as Suetonius, Ovid, Philo, Josephus, Lucian, Justin Martyr, Diodorus Siculus, Polybius, Plutarch, and Diogenes Laertius. By asking, "What would a Greco-Roman reader understand by this word or passage?" he endeavors to open up Luke's theology.

Talbert has not attempted to tell us everything he knows about Luke, but has deliberately limited himself. He has produced a very interesting and useful commentary, tightly focused on the structure and theology of Luke's Gospel.

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THE NEW TESTAMENT WORLD: INSIGHTS FROM CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY. By Bruce J. Malina. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981. 169 pages. Paper. $8.95.

Malina insists that it is difficult but not impossible for ancients and moderns to understand one another.

In an immensely illuminating and refreshing fashion Malina discusses honor and shame in relation to social standing in the ancient Mediterranean world (ch. 2), the first century personality (dyadic) in contrast to modern American individualism and competitiveness (ch. 3), vertical (patron-client) and horizontal (collegial or peer group) relationships in the system of pre-industrial cities with their satellite villages (ch. 4), kinship and marriage and the fusion of honor of two ex-

tended families (ch. 5), and the rules of purity enabling social groups to determine who or what is out of place and out of phase — or in place in and in phase.

This work will remind readers of J. Duncan Derrett's *Jesus' Audience,* but Malina is more systematic and takes readers into his confidence, explaining to them how and why he approaches texts as he does. He carefully reveals his assumptions.

One or two small quibbles may be entered. Malina here and elsewhere seems to regard the major models introduced in chapter 1 ("Bible Study and Cultural Anthropology") — structural functionalism, the conflict model, and the symbolic model — as complementary theories. They are in reality fierce competitors, and they were all invented in the last century or so for explaining how modern industrial societies function and change. Are they relevant to an understanding of pre-industrial societies?

And was there such a critter as "the first century Mediterranean world"? Malina confines his study pretty much to the first century Jewish and Christian societies, but in chapters 4 and 5 he speaks extensively about social arrangements in the Old Testament Jewish world. The Roman world of the first century was wracked by competition between the emperor and the traditional ruling classes of Rome, and equestrians were on the rise. The Greek cities boasted of a glorious past and some had an important present. Jerusalem and Syrian Antioch were more oriental than Caesarea Maritima or Tarsus. Some people in the Mediterranean world were aware of disturbing differences in culture and values, and they complained of the Orontes fouling the Tiber.

Malina is right where he likes to be, on the edge, blazing the trail. And he is a good guide, and he casts light on passage after passage. He abundantly proves his point that the New Testament world did not work the way ours does. He hypothesizes brilliantly, and in a set of experiments appended to each chapter he invites readers to test the hypothesis on specific New Testament texts.

This is a ground-breaking work.

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JESUS THE TEACHER: A SOCIO-RHETORICAL INTERPRETATION OF MARK. by Vernon K. Robbins. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975. xv and 238 pages. Cloth. $23.95.

The trouble with Mark's gospel is that it is hard to pigeonhole. Is its hero to be thought of as a Hebrew prophet, as a Jewish rabbi, as a Hellenistic miracle-working "divine man," or what? Is the document itself a cult legend, an apocalyptic narrative, a biography, or a tragic drama?

Vernon Robbins, professor of religion and classics at the University of Illinois, insists that Mark's gospel must be studied within the literary conventions of the Greco-Roman world. Thus, the closest parallels to Mark are to be found in the stories of disciple-gathering teachers whose integrity leads to their deaths but whose teachings are carried on by their students. Helpful examples are the stories about Socrates enshrined in Xenophon's *Memorabila* and Plato's *Dialogues,* as well as Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius of Tyana.*

Basic to such literary traditions are the ideas that the teacher himself practices what he preaches, that he verbalizes his system of thought and actions to his followers, that his teachings inevitably lead to his death at the hands of his opponents, and that his ideals are transmitted to later generations through his student-disciples.

According to Robbins' outline, after an Introduction (Mk 1:1-13) which places Jesus within the prophetic tradition of Isaiah and John, the interaction of Jesus and his disciples passes through three stages: In the Initial Phase (Mk 1:14-3:6) Jesus summons his followers, and they in turn accompany him, imitate him, and are defended by him.

In the Interim Phase (Mk 3:7-12:44) Jesus introduces the basic details of his program (3:7-5:43), enables the disciples to imitate many of his teachings and deeds (6:1-8:26), interacts with them over central tenets and requirements of his system (8:27-10:45), and experiences the ramifications of his teachings and actions in public confrontation with the authorities (10:12-44).

In the Final Phase (Mk 13:1-15:47)

Jesus prepares his disciples for a future without him (13:1-37) and then accepts his arrest, trial and death (14:1-15:47). the Conclusion (16:1-8) announces Jesus' transformation into a heavenly being and also impels the disciples — plus all readers of this gospel—to continue propagating Jesus' teachings.

Robbins needs to be challenged at several points: Why must Jesus' healing ministry be subordinated to his teaching ministry, rather than vice versa (p. 114)? Is Mark really more folkloric and attuned to less elite circles than Matthew or Luke (p. 212)? On the whole, however, this is a valuable study because it takes the overall literary structure of Mark's gospel seriously on its own terms, and because it gives first place to the social environment within which that gospel first circulated.

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FROM NICAEA TO CHALCEDON: A GUIDE TO THE LITERATURE AND ITS BACKGROUND. By Frances M. Young. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983. ix and 406 pages. Cloth. $22.95.

The first 289 pages of text discuss the careers of nineteen theologians who played important roles in the Christological controversies of the fourth century. The remainder of the book consists of footnotes and two comprehensive bibliographies. The first bibliography consists of pertinent works that are available in English. The second bibliography consists of works in various languages published since 1960 and is consciously designed to bring Quasten's *Patrology* up to date. The footnotes and bioliographies make this book invaluable to patristic scholars and to all students of the history of Christian doctrine.

Young's brief treatment of the nineteen protagonists is valuable because she incorporates much recent research and passes balanced judgments on many of the sources that she quotes. She consistently refuses to be classed with the thorough-going revisionists, while admitting the validity of some of their insights. The book is filled with stimulating suggestions that she often tosses off rather casually. The typesetter had some difficulty distinguishing between a "t" and an "n". Several times "that" emerges as "than."

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LUTHER AND HIS SPIRITUAL LEGACY. By Jared Wicks. Theology and Life Series, Vol. 7, Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1983. 182 pages. Paper. $7.95.

Wicks, a member of the Society of Jesus, has prepared a great gift to Roman Catholic-Lutheran dialogue as well as a better understanding of Martin Luther's lifelong focus on his conversion experience. In the Foreword, the author states that in his judgment Luther has much to say today about living mature Christian lives, and then goes on to suggest that Luther's teaching on "conversion, on trust in Christ and his word, and on life-long healing from inveterate sinfulness can lead us to fuller Christian authenticity."

He has wisely decided to avoid detailed study of the controversies that dogged Luther throughout his life or of the sources that influenced Luther's thought. In his judgment, Luther was a creative religious genius "who quickly outstripped those who formed him." He states points of disagreement between Luther and contemporary Catholic thought, but never argues the points. His bibliography, as one would expect in view of the purpose for which he writes, stresses more popular works. His quotations are usually five to six lines long and the great majority are taken from the American edition of Luther's works.

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LUKE-ACTS: THE PROMISE OF HISTORY. By Donald Juel. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1983. 138 pages. Paper. $7.95.

Donald Juel has written a very readable study of Luke-Acts. He argues throughout that Luke-Acts must be viewed as two parts of a major literary composition.

Juel spends three chapters summarizing the highlights of Luke and Acts. Throughout this summary Juel stresses that Luke's intention was not to write an essay on the moral life, nor to provide a commentary on the life of Jesus, but simply to write a history.

In chapter 4, Juel examines four characteristics of Luke's perspective on the life of faith. "Hospitality," "The Problems and Possibilities of Possessions," "Life in the Spirit," and and "Openness to the Future" are themes which Juel suggests run through the Gospel and Acts.

Juel's final two chapters are the most delightful, both in terms of style and content. Juel summarizes recent Lukan scholarship, and sets forth his own interpretation.

There are two major themes which underlie Juel's analysis of Luke-Acts. First, Juel argues throughout that "Luke's history is about continuity." The Christian message is not to be torn from its Jewish roots, nor should Christianity be a rejection of Israel, nor is Luke-Acts about the birth of a new religion. Concerning the mission to the Gentiles, Luke's question is not whether the Gentiles will be saved, but under what circumstances. Juel argues that all Israel (Christians included) need to keep the law, although an exception is made for non-Jews in that they need not be circumcised. This theme calls us to examine how we interpret the continuity of the Testaments.

Juel's second theme is that life makes sense. "We cannot live with chaos." Luke's audience was wondering how to handle life now that their temple had been destroyed. Their identity as the people of God had to be confirmed, and their confidence needed to be nurtured. The Gospel is therefore "crisis literature." Within this context Luke ". . . provided a framework in which they could locate themselves and in which they could find meaning." God will bring order out of chaos and God will make sense, as God always does.

This book deserves reading. It is clearly written and serves as an excellent summary and innovative approach to the promise of history of Luke and Acts.

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POLITICAL ISSUES IN LUKE-ACTS. Edited by Richard J. Cassidy and Philip J. Scharper. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1983. 180 pages. Paper. $9.95.

Back in 1978 Orbis published Cassidy's book *Jesus, Politics and Society.* Orbis editor Philip Scharper and author Cassidy, encouraged by discussion generated by that book, invited a number of scholars to contribute essays on the general topic of Jesus' social ethics and political stance. The results are gathered in the present volume of ten essays.

Robert O'Toole writes ("Luke's Position on Politics and Society in Luke-Acts") that Luke advocates neither violence nor the courting of martyrdom. Luke would have his readers imitate Jesus in his humility and service, his ministering to the poor and the sick, his openness to Gentiles and women.

Willard Swartley, studying "Politics or Peace (Eirēnē) in Luke's Gospel," raises the question of how the theme of peace, which for Luke expresses the heart of the gospel, is related to the views of Conzelmann, Cassidy, and Yoder on Jesus' social and political stance. He misconstrues Conzelmann (as Cassidy also does), imagining that Conzelmann portrays Luke and Luke's Jesus as uncritically pro-Roman, unable to distinguish between the peace of the Christian Gospel and the Pax Romana. Furthermore, he is a Mennonite, so it is not surprising that he sides with Cassidy and Yoder against Conzelmann. He nicely interprets the eirēnē texts as displaying a variety of themes, embracing nearly the whole of life, and showing the inadequacy of existing political and religious alternatives (whether Zealotic, Pharisaic, Sadducean, Essenic, or Roman).

J. Duncan M. Derrett analyzes the very

difficult matter of "Luke's Perspective on Tribute to Caesar."

Frederick Danker demonstrates how Hellenistic rhetorical patterns have penetrated Luke's description of proceedings at the Jerusalem Conference in his essay on "Reciprocity in the Ancient World and in Acts 15:23-29."

Quentin Quesnell would have us believe that "The Women (were) at Luke's (Last/Lord's) Supper."

J. Massyngbaerde Ford shows how important are the themes of "Reconciliation of Forgiveness" in Luke's Gospel, examining especially Jesus' dealings with tax collectors and Samaritans. (She develops these themes in her most recent book, *My Enemy Is My Guest.)*

Charles Talbert in his reflections on "Martyrdom in Luke-Acts and the Lukan Social Ethic" disagrees with Cassidy's view that Jesus adopted a Ghandi-like stance of nonviolent resistance and concludes that the Lukan Jesus and his followers had as their chief concern the proper ordering of the life of God's people in the power of the Spirit and under the lordship of Jesus.

Daryl Schmidt "Luke's 'Innocent' Jesus: A Scriptural Apologetic") agrees substantially with Cassidy's verdict that Jesus was no quietist but wants to show that the charges against Jesus (perverting the nation and stirring up the people) are not as false as Cassidy thought. Jesus really did alienate he people from their governing authorities, as prophets always have. He was guilty as charged and yet innocent as God's righteous one.

E. Jane Via ("According to Luke, Who Put Jesus to Death?") examines Cassidy's argument regarding Luke's and/or Jesus' relationship to political and ecclesiastical authorities, criticizes many details (including Cassidy's reading of Conzelmann), agrees with Cassidy's basic conclusion about Jesus' stance (Jesus did not defer to religious or political authorities), but insists that Luke has written in such a way as to undermine rationales for Roman persecution of Christians.

Cassidy in a final essay should have summarized the discussion, modified his original position, sharpened remaining questions, and projected lines of future research. Instead he offers an essay on "Luke's Audience, the Chief Priests, and the Motive for Jesus' Death." He says Luke wrote so that Gentiles would understand that the chief priests sought Jesus' death because Jesus had challenged their authority. This climax to the volume is an anti-climax in a book that touches vital questions raised by Cassidy in his original work.

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BASIC TYPES OF PASTORAL CARE AND COUNSELING. By Howard Clinebell. Nashville: Abingdon, 1984. 463 pages. Cloth. $17.95.

In the first edition of this book in 1966, Clinebell set forth a variety of counseling approaches (e.g. educational guidance, marriage preparation, supportive counseling with the aged), all of which viewed counseling from a growth perspective or as educative for life.

This "completely revised and enlarged" edition is really a new book. Still aimed at the pastoral setting, it includes chapters on a holistic liberation-growth model of counseling, on the biblical and theological foundations for pastoral care, on facilitating spiritual wholeness, on ethics and value clarification, and on counseling for crises, bereavement, marriage and family enrichment, and on training lay people for caring ministries.

Liberation for holistic growth forms the book's central theme. Hospital chaplains do not just bring anxiety-reduction and comfort to patients; they enable healing and empower growth toward wholeness in at least six aspects of life: enlivening the mind, revitalizing one's body, renewing and enriching intimate relationships, deepening the relationship with nature, growth in relationship to the significant institutions of life, and deepening one's relationship with God.

The author believes that the gospel is experienced as good news whenever it frees and empowers people to live out God's intention that they have life in all its fulness. The gospel provides the freedom to become all that one has the possibility of becoming.

New to this edition is a perception of

how the maleness of our religious images contributes to the spiritual impoverishment of men and women and alienates us from the feminine side of our spirits and of God. He challenges pastors to empower people to participate in the organizations and institutions of society, thus transcending the one-on-one fixation which is the bane of much counseling. He urges a move beyond narcissism toward humane relationships with the many cultures of the world.

This very challenging book is an excellent textbook for seminaries and a most useful guide for in-service pastoral training.

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SEX, DATING AND LOVE. By Ray E. Short. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984. 144 pages. Paper. $3.75.

The blurb on the back of the book says: "So if you're wondering, 'How can I know when I've found the right one?' 'What's an easy way to say "get lost"?' or 'We've had sex, but now have doubts; what should we do?' — read this book for answers!"

And Ray E. Short provides them — 77 in all — both from a biblical and pragmatic point of view, including the stances of varied church bodies on different issues.

His approach is open, blunt, and quite readable.

This is well worth putting into the hands of both youth *and* the parents who are still not giving their offspring the help they need in sex education (and who didn't get it themselves).

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PREACHING AND LEADING WORSHIP. By William H. Willimon. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984. 116 pages. Paper. $7.95.

This handbook speaks to pastors and addresses worship and preaching from a thoughtful Protestant stance. Because Protestantism influences many Lutherans, these perspectives deserve review.

Willimon asserts the centrality of Baptism and the Lord's Supper in Christian worship — and candidly confesses Protestant failure to restore the weekly celebration of the supper. While he also extols the ecumenical lectionary and encourages recognition of the church year, his accent is on intellectual education. The book warns against irrelevant expository sermons, but equates the Word with "the Bible which comes alive" with the preacher's interpretation. It is unclear that preaching the Word means preaching Christ. Though Willimon insists Word and Table are normative to Christian worship, his recommendation of "at least once a month," diminishes the urgency of restoring this central gift.

Willimon correctly concludes that the Eucharist is not understood because it has been isolated with "make-believe bread" and a cold formality. But to wait for re-education before returning to consistent celebration of the Eucharist on every Lord's day presumes that the power of the living presence of Christ depends upon our educational work. There is a place for education to develop appreciative use of the gifts we already possess — not to make God's will acceptable to the people of God. Willimon touches on this when he encourages frequent well-led celebrations.

This "handbook" displays laudable concerns for pastoral sensitivity and for the participation of the laity. It offers some helpful, sensible suggestions to overcome resistance and reaction. But it tends to replace simple obedience to the Lord's command with a Protestant version of sacramentalism: the Eucharist controlled by well-intentioned procedural administration. It is a subtle sort of priestly process, interposed between Christ and the people of Christ. It is, unfortunately, not unknown in Lutheran practice. This is most sadly true of those who know — with Willimon — that the Supper is the center of Christian worship. Perhaps we need handbooks, but let them breathe pastoral obedience to Christ and to the call which he utters through the Scriptures. Let such guides encourage pastoral leadership which is directed, emboldened, and compelled to offer nothing less than the totality of God's gifts.

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SOCIAL JUSTICE MINISTRY. By Paul Steidl-Meier, S. J. New York: LeJacq, 1984. 325 pages. Cloth. $24.00; Paper. $19.00.

Social justice ministry is central to the ministry and mission of the church. Yet it presumes so many theological, philosophical, sociological, economic, and political foundations, that it is difficult to gain, much less teach, a comprehensive understanding of what is involved. Paul Steidl-Meier takes on the difficult task of doing just that (part one), as well as systematizing general principles (from within his own Roman Catholic tradition) for addressing a variety of contemporary social concerns (part two). The categories, distinctions, and typologies he develops provide helpful clarity in an area where confusion and unreflective rhetoric sometimes prevail.

For him, social justice ministry involves a radical transformation of the self — a social conversion. It is "a ministry to human development in the social sphere, and it calls on people in society to transform social relations into incarnate expressions of the wisdom and grace of the Spirit." He is intent to move beyond a theological anthropology that is disincarnated or privatized, to one where social relations are intrinsic in what it means to be persons and are the focal point of conversion and salvation. "Life in God amounts to a metapolitics." Not only is the church in the world, but the world is in the church. Thus, striving for justice must be combined with "enculturation," which is a critique and transformation of the very culture in which we live, i.e., reading the signs of the times in terms of the fullness of time.

To be about these tasks we need, first of all, a method or model for understanding social reality. He discusses three generic methods (empirical-behaviorist, narrative-historical, and critical-rational), emphasizing the link between the latter two. His chapter on "Understanding the Social" is helpful for those lacking sociological background. In it he defines the goal of social ministry as change in social relations (in institutions, structures and social systems) that necessarily involves change in social power. He spends another chapter surveying the notion of social justice, as a means of evaluating social experience. One of the more interesting chapters is his discussion of a "social spirituality" of social justice ministry.

Although his bias is with liberation and political theological approaches, he provides a critical edge to such discussions. He identifies the tension between a providential and a liberation understanding of history, and has a clarifying discussion of social praxis, which begins with the conversion of people in their social givens. In the organizing of social ministry, his critique of the neo-Christendom and neo-liberal models is to be expected, but he also prods the liberation and social transformation model for what may become a too heavy reliance on categories of Marxism. The Marxist social ideal is community, but the vision cannot be sustained. Materialist ideology cannot support voluntarist claims to solidarity, but instead lapses into collectivism. (Here and elsewhere he falls into some questionable generalizations, e.g., regarding Marxism's purported objectivity, and its inability to offer anything today besides a critique of individualism.) Instead he urges the forging of a theologically-grounded "solidarity" that goes beyond the individual self-interest of liberalism and the collectivism of Marxism. Furthermore, he calls for (although never really develops) new cultural paradigms which can better articulate a notion of complete human development, with justice as the norm for society and public policy.

Engagement in social justice ministry is an eclectic and inclusive task. However, in his attempt to be comprehensive, the question is whether Steidl-Meier tries to cover and do too many things. For example, in the "Afterword" he states that such a study, focused as it is on the question of meaning, "must encompass no less than all of reality." Unless one is already conversant with the understandings and categories that he moves through in the course of the book, one may easily get lost or remark "so what?" Yet there is a consistency in his project because it is his own framework which he is here developing. I am not sure that he convincingly carries it off (some of his own proposals need further development), but I am deeply sympathetic with his attempt to do so.

More such attempts are very much needed, especially ones which are more concrete or experientially-based (he never explicitly refers to his own considerable Third World agricultural experience), and which do so from especially a Lutheran perspective.

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CHOICES. Guides for Today's Woman. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984.

Four of twelve volumes reviewed:
IDENTITY. By Ruth Tiffany Barnhouse. 120 pages. Paper. $6.95.
NURTURE. By Elaine Donelson. 116 pages. Paper. $6.95.
OTHER PEOPLE. By Mary Jo Meadow. 119 pages. Paper. $6.95.
SEXUALITY. By Letha Dawson Scanzoni. 113 pages. Paper. $6.95.

Westminster, with the advice of Virginia Mollenkott, Arlene Swidler, Phyllis Trible, and Ann Ulanov is publishing a 12-book series for women "as they face shifting values in a rapidly changing world." While uniform in size and style of language, there is a range in feminist perspective as seen even among the four books reviewed here. Other titles in the series are Emotions, Work and Career, Roles, Singleness, Health and Beauty, Commitment, Self and Family, and Children.

Professor of Psychiatry Ruth Barnhouse in *Identity* writes that in a time when people are no longer assigned a station in life, identity cannot be easily established. She believes women do know who they are and that liberation means having a choice. "You can't choose in any meaningful sense of that term, unless you really know who is doing the choosing." Many women, she says, waste time and energy trying to figure out "Who should I be?" rather than asking "Who am I?" A helpful book at many levels, the book's impact is hindered by the author's reluctance to fully appreciate the very feminists whose struggle has made possible the choices of which she speaks.

Elaine Donelson's *Nurture* is actually more about "helping" than nurture. This Professor of Psychology has some very helpful material on how to know ourselves and others, and how to care effectively so that the result is not merely, "Oh, she meant well." Donelson writes so exclusively in the vernacular that the book gets a bit thin in the middle chapters. Her readers are ready for a bit more "meat." Nevertheless it is a fine book. The chapter "Women Supporting Women" is simply excellent. Men would do well to read some books in this series, for self-understanding and for growth in skills of support and care.

Mary Jo Meadow, an Associate Professor of Psychology and Religious Studies, writes simply about *Other People.* This book clearly expresses psychological principles with examples and suggestions on how to get along with those around us, including different and difficult people. It's about relationships with people with whom we don't establish intimate ties. She helps the reader look at anger and fear, to understand basic differences in life approach and styles so that one is not

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always merely adapting but actually interacting in healthy ways.

After a slow beginning which made this appear like simply another book on *Sexuality,* Letha Dawson Scanzoni's work turns into an outstanding book on this subject. A gentle, but not unaware volume by this full-time professional writer and lecturer, the chapter on "Our Sexual Anxieties and Longing for Intimacy" is particularly good. "Sex in our day may be easier to find than intimacy." The sections on sexual expression and sexual abuse are sensitive and helpful. Her chapter on "Our Sexual Theological Heritage" is a succinct and readable piece including, in a few pages, everything from the "Church Fathers" to Phyllis Tribble. This volume is highly recommended.

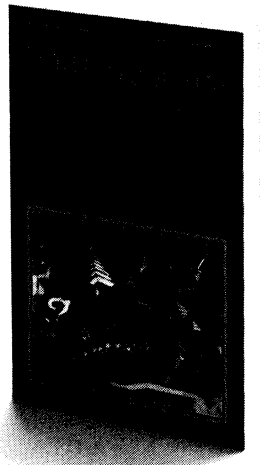
Norma Everist
Wartburg Theological Seminary
Dubuque, IA

Sharing Jesus
In the Two Thirds World
Edited by Vinay Samuel & Chris Sugden

✓ **Two thirds of the world's population live in situations of poverty, powerlessness, and oppression. What does it mean to proclaim Jesus Christ in this "Two Thirds World?" It was this question that was the focus for the First Conference of Evangelical Mission Theologians, held in Bangkok in 1982.**

✓ This book contains the fourteen papers presented at the conference along with a record of some of the discussion that followed each. With twenty-five participants drawn from twenty-two countries, the conference provided more than just a forum to present papers; it was a fellowship of persons, testing and affirming insights gained from diverse cultural and theological backgrounds to deepen their understanding of Christ.

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Briefly Noted

Geschichte des Volkes Israels und seiner Nachbarn in Grundzügen. By Herbert Donner (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, DM 29, 80). This treatment of the essential apsects of the history of Israel and her neighbors will eventually come to two volumes and continue the history until the second Jewish revolt against Rome, though the present volume ends with Solomon. D., now at Kiel, always gives a fair summary of current options on controverted questions before stating his own opinion. He views the "conquest" as a result of the gradual transformation of mountain-dwelling nomads, recently withdrawn from the cities, into settled farmers *and* the immigration of groups from the eastern and southern wilderness, who brought with them traditions of the Exodus and covenant at Sinai. His review of the patriarchal history is far more positive than the recent monographs by Thompson and Van Seters though he holds that P's attributing Abraham's origins to Ur (rather than to Northern Mesopotamia) may result from an attempt to have him start from the area where the primeval history ended. Babylonian exiles among whom P was drafted also took courage from the fact that Abraham made it all the way to the promised land from their place of deportation.

Old Testament Introduction. By Werner H. Schmidt. (Crossroad/Continuum, $27.50). My rave review of the German original (in the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly)* is worth quoting: "Schmidt strives to present the majority views or the predominant hypotheses, supporting them wherever possible with sound argumentation. One can only marvel at his success in achieving three goals: communication of basic information, brevity, and intelligibility for a wide audience . . . So many introductions translated from German to English are dated, uneven, untheological, and so often boring. These faults Schmidt almost completely avoids." I am happy to report that extensive English bibliography has been added for his excellent translation. In my judgment, this is now the best available introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures.

De Septuaginta: Studies in Honour of John William Wevers on his Sixty-Fifth Birthday. Edited by Albert Pietersma and Claude Cox (Benben Publications, $45.00). The sixteen essays in this jubilee volume are dedicated to Wevers, who has edited the text of the Greek Pentateuch for the Göttingen Septuagint. Noted scholars survey the present state of Septuagint studies, the relationships between the Greek and Hebrew texts, linguistic and translation aspects of the Septuagint (e.g. the substitution of *kyrios* (Lord) for Yahweh was present in the original translation of the Pentateuch), and transmission of the Septuagint (e.g. the Lucianic recension, the Armenian translation of the Greek, etc.).

II Samuel. Anchor Bible 9. By P. Kyle McCarter, Jr. (Doubleday, $18.00). M. here continues the excellent text-critical and historical exposition previously demonstrated in his Anchor Bible commentary on I Samuel. As in his earlier commentary, he detects a prophetic edition and two subsequent deuteronomistic redactions, one of which preceded the exile. Among pro-Davidic sources he lists the story of David's rise to power (1 Sam 16:14-2 Sam. 5:10); the story of Absalom's revolt (2 Sam. 13-20); and the story of the Gibeonites' revenge and David's patronage of Meribbaal (2 Sam 21:1-14 and 9:1-13). He departs from the idea of a succession narrative or court history (2 Sam. 9-20; 1 Kgs 1-2), so prominent in recent handbooks, and holds that the pro-Solomonic succession narrative proper includes only 1 Kgs 1-2. As noted in the August, 1984, issue of *Currents,* this is clearly the best available commentary on 2 Samuel.

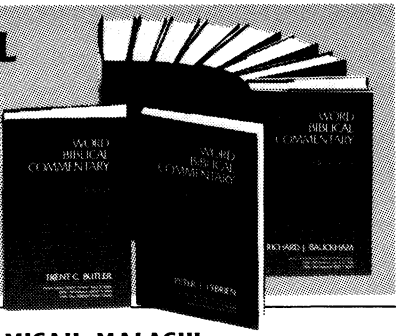
Micah-Malachi. Word Biblical Commentary 32. By Ralph L. Smith (Word Books, $18.95). With the exception of Micah there has been very little quality commentary fare for the latter half of the Minor Prophets. Smith provides an admirable, fair, and almost exhaustive survey of recent proposals for interpreting these seven books. Occasionally he would have been better advised to risk more by choosing decisively among the several options, but his cautious competence will enable many to understand these often obscure books from a perch atop the best of previous scholarship.

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Chronological and Background Charts of the Old Testament. By John H. Walton. (Zondervan, $25.00) Anyone with access to an overhead projector can use these twenty-four charts dealing with such things as weights and measures, genealogies, military conflicts, the kings of Syria, Assyria and Babylonia, and especially chronology. One chart compares various modern chronological reconstructions though in general view is not from the critical perspective (Daniel is listed in the 6th century and Second Isaiah is nowhere to be found).

I and II Chronicles. By J. G. McConville (Westminster, $7.95) and **Twelve Prophets. Volume 1.** By Peter C. Craigie (Westminster, $7.95). These are the latest two volumes in the excellent Daily Study Bible Series, which combines the most important results of modern Old Testament study with suggestions for Christian meditation.

Isaiah 1-39. By Joseph Jensen, O. S. B. and **Ezekiel.** By Aelred Cody, O. S. B. (Michael Glazier, each $9.95). These high-level popularizations comprise volumes 8 and 11 in Old Testament Message, a Roman Catholic biblical-theological commentary series.

The Balaam Text from Deir 'Alla. By Jo Ann Hackett (Scholars Press, $11.95; $7.50 for members of SBL). This is an exhaustive study of an inscription discovered in the Jordan valley in 1967. Dating from the early 7th century B. C. E. and written in South Canaanite, the text reports a prophecy of Balaam ben Beor, which he received from the Divine Council, in which the gods express their displeasure over affairs on earth. This somewhat obscure Transjordanian inscription, written by a non-Israelite group, features the same Balaam who, according to the Bible, lived in the same area some six centuries earlier. No one can quite fill in the missing historical pieces yet, but it seems clear that Balak hired a very well known seer in his attempt to curse Israel.

Evangelical Dictionary of Theology. Edited by Walter A. Elwell. (Baker, $29.95). This evangelical/conservative dictionary contains some 1,200 entries (pared down from an original list of 8,000), written in popular language, and focusing on theological aspects rather than on mere history or information. Articles on mainline denominations, such as Lutherans, theologica crucis/gloriae or the like, are written by representatives of these positions (e.g. by conservative Lutherans), but a more polemical stance occurs in such entries as Church of Christ, Scientist, Evolution, or Abortion. Even here, however, there is an openness about the different positions or strategies among evangelicals. Naturally, there are a spate of articles on inerrancy, infallibility, inspiration, plenary inspiration, and verbal inspiration, but there is also an entry on the Social Implications of the Gospel that hails the prophetic voice of Carl F. H. Henry and the Chicago Declaration of 1973. It concludes: "The challenge is to translate love and justice into meaningful strategies so that proclamation becomes demonstration (of the gospel)."

Lion Country. Open Heart. Love Feast. Treasure Hunt. By Frederick Buechner (Harper and Row; each $3.95). These are paperback reprints of B.'s The Book of Bebb, a four volume novel dealing with Leo Bebb, an evangelist and operator of a diploma mill called Holy Love, Inc., willing to ordain anybody, or at least anybody male. Though the publisher emphasizes the comedy and laughter contained in these books, I found a good bit of sadness too and much sensitivity to human foibles.

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The Church as Institution and as Movement

Walter M. Stuhr
President, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary

The distinction between the church as institution and the church as movement has fresh application in planning for the new Lutheran church. On the one hand, what is required to establish an institution with the best potential for survival and growth? On the other hand, what is required for the new church to be a faithful steward of the gospel in the last decade of the 20th century and into the 21st?

Lutherans tend to be comfortable with the institutional dimensions of the church. God reigns through structures and the calculated application of reason, as well as through spontaneity and the free expression of faith. Administration is a valid form of vocation, we assert. It is clear, however, that the institution is legitimated solely in terms of its support of the movement. That is the truth that the Commission of 70 must constantly keep in mind as it struggles to formulate recommendations for the new church. (It is hoped that the presence among the 70 of a significant number of persons that have not been a part of the institutional establishment, women and persons of color in particular, will be a salutary force in this respect.)

The location of the national offices of the new church is a case in point. At first consideration this may appear to be one matter that can be dealt with in purely institutional terms. What location is best suited for the offices that must provide central administrative and organizational support services for the new church? Centrality, convenience and economy of access, and adequacy of facilities would seem to be the necessary and sufficient criteria for selection. The identity of the best location, by these criteria, could probably be established by a computer.

However, using only institutional criteria, the headquarters could well be an efficient corporate headquarters, but "worlds away" from ministry as it is done and experienced by the church. Organizational charts and transportation schedules would be more powerful factors in the priorities and lifestyle of those who work there than ministry. Therefore, it seems to me that criteria related specifically to the church as movement ought also to be considered. The following questions suggest such criteria.

Does the location make a strong statement of support for the church's commitments for ministry: cultural and economic, as well as ecumenical inclusiveness; evangelization and social ministry; global and local mission; the ministry of the whole people of God? The location of the church's headquarters can serve both to express and to help shape the commitments and spirit which inform its ministries.

Does the proposed location put the people of the national offices in direct contact with a ministry of the church on a day to day basis, e.g., a "local assembly", an institution or agency of the church? Such contact would provide on-going learning and reality testing not

usually available through contacts that tend to be structured to accommodate a particular office and purpose. Further, it would seem to be just good stewardship to make the considerable experience and talent for ministry present in the national offices available for a particular ministry.

Does the location allow the church to be in touch with the dynamics which move and shape that community? An emerging concern of the uniting churches is "corporate responsibility." One dimension of corporate responsibility is responsible participation in the life of the community in which the corporation is located. The church, as a national organization itself, should be so situated as to give it the opportunity to demonstrate how that objective can be met.

The above considerations have application beyond the location of the church's national offices. They apply equally to the location of regional headquarters and to the establishment of new ministries in the new church. They also provide criteria by which to evaluate the effectiveness with which already established ministries interact with their locations — congregations, hospitals, homes for the aged, and certainly colleges and seminaries.

For example, seminaries also need "reality testing" on a regular basis, and represent a considerable concentration of resources for ministry. Location, as it relates to seminaries, ought not be solely one of the means to institutional ends, but a unique opportunity for letting loose the dynamic of the movement.

The planning and establishing of a new church can divert attention and resources from mission, as some have feared. However, it can also provide a valuable opportunity to study the interaction between the institution and movement dimensions of the church. And to shape and test the interaction in terms of both new and already existing entities of ministry.

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