Homiletical Resources for the Dog Days
William H. Wiltimon

An Incarnational Model for Church Education
Robert W. Wingard

Misreadings of the Hebrew Bible
Walter Harrelson

Reading the Gospel of Mark Whole
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Reviews of Marty, Muggeridge, and Metz
James E. Will
QUARTERLY REVIEW
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Sacred texts never cease to be fascinating. Christians, Moslems, Marxists, humanists—all seem to be obsessed with primary documents, authoritative teachings, original writings of geniuses and of movements. Professionals in the church may become so inured to the meaning of holy writ that they fail to recognize how all-pervasive is its influence. Some in the church admit to a feeling of uselessness because their knowledge is “only” of the Bible. This feeling seems odd when it is clear that artists, politicians, multinational executives, reformers, journalists, and others religiously quote their favorite gurus.

Artists, in particular, seem to have gone straight to sacred texts at the same time the church has become self-conscious about their alleged irrelevance. A favorite artistic device is taking a biblical or religious image and transporting it into an entirely different setting, throwing light on one aspect of reality by borrowing from another. In *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, by Walter M. Miller, Jr., we are treated to the world in the thirty-second century, after it has been devastated by nuclear war. Among the survivors is a crypto-Christian cult whose special saint is one I. E. Leibowitz. We learn that Leibowitz was a twentieth-century scientist who had protested the use of nuclear weapons and had been killed in the war that ruined the planet. The brothers of the cult are of course anxious to learn as much as possible about their patron. There is great joy, then, when one of the monks stumbles across a ruined fallout shelter that holds some artifacts from the twentieth century. One of these items is a handwritten note on which is
scrawled in archaic English, "Pound pastrami, can kraut, six bagels—bring home for Emma." Another note reads "Pick up Form 1040—Uncle Revenue." These notes become part of the revered relics of the Order of St. Leibowitz.

This kind of literary playfulness amuses us, but its effects often seem less than humorous. Last year I heard a representative of the Moral Majority use Exodus 21:22-24 to support his view that abortion is wrong. Although you may have instant recall of this (and all other) biblical texts, let me quote the relevant parts of that passage for the forgetful among us: "When men strive together, and hurt a woman with child, so that there is a miscarriage, and yet no harm follows, the one who hurt her shall be fined." The speaker contended that the Scripture clearly indicated that any intervention in pregnancy was morally wrong. Without checking the commentaries on the passage I sensed that his interpretation was questionable; and yet now I wonder if his making that connection was any worse than quoting Jesus on love of enemies when we want to oppose nuclear war. Aren't both interpretations very much like revering a husband's grocery notes because we revere the writer?

Walter Harrelson urges us not to commit the sin of eisegesis. In this issue, Harrelson asks us to take the Hebrew Bible in all seriousness and to avoid importing our own Christian predilections. This concern is also raised by other writers who ask us to treat biblical texts objectively. Robert Tannehill and William Willimon see the text as standing "over against us." Although we may not welcome what the text says, we are obligated to listen to it. This understanding of hermeneutics is very close to that described by Michael Fishbane in Text and Texture: Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts, a well-written book that urges us to "allow the voice of the text to speak on its terms." To do otherwise is "to subjectivize a text irresponsibly." Fishbane wants us to work for the "rescued meaning" of texts, and he provides several imaginative examples in his book.

This approach seems to have similarities with and differences from the extreme view of Susan Sontag, who
opposes interpretation altogether. The similarity is that Sontag also wants to let a work of art stand on its own, without supposing that an intermediary is needed to tell viewers or listeners what it means. Interpretation, she writes, has been called the compliment that mediocrity pays to genius; yet it is more. It is the modern way of viewing things. She calls for nonintervention to allow art to modify consciousness and refine our sensibilities.

The difference between Sontag and most of us biblical interpreters is that we are not willing to stand aside and let the text speak solely for itself. Our anxiety over nonintervention springs as much from the ruins of history as it does from the zaniness of those who read the Bible and hear strange voices and confuse the two. We remember all too well how we thought the clear meaning of the Scriptures was that some humans ought to be slaves to others. We had no sooner corrected this error than we realized we were subject to other errors: that the Jews killed God, that God is only male, and so on. Our reaction against Sontagism springs not only from a fastidious preoccupation with accuracy; it extends into the realm of history and ontology.

Lately another school of critics has been organizing around a "structuralist" method, and they may or may not be linked philosophically to Sontag and her mentors. Their discontent seems to be with the encrustations of critical method, too. They want to get beyond the subject-object bifurcation. Instead of standing outside the text we are asked to enter into it, to "deconstruct" it, so that we avoid the problem of interpretation altogether. David Lodge, a professor in England who has analyzed structuralism, writes that for the structuralists, "the meaning of a literary text in the same perspective is not a message sent by the author and decoded by the reader, but is produced by the entry of the reader into the text." Then, "when we read a book properly we allow the author to think himself in us." The result is that we should be freed to find all kinds of contrasts and unpredictable meanings.

I cannot tell whether this program is anything like those of homiletical and biblical authorities who keep telling us to
"listen" to the text and also to "listen" to the congregation. There seem to be some affinities in the effort to gain involvement and to be imaginative in understanding texts.

On the other hand, Protestants have experienced some undesirable effects from flights of imagination, a bit like the pounding head that results from getting too much good stuff into our system. We think of all those people who keep trying to draw a parallel between Armageddon and the most recent Arab-Israeli conflict, or those who find an obscure text like one on handling snakes and make it the summum bonum of the church.

We come back to criticism, then, and the need to find limits to imagination before it turns into weird fantasy. Edward John Carnell and other Fundamentalists found out at Harvard that the medicine went down smoother than they thought it would (see the article in this issue). The question in that case is, What happens when technique is employed without meaning—without theology or faith commitments?

We are left with more questions, too, about the relative status of sacred texts in our world. Barth's statement that he tried to read the Bible in relation to the newspaper is one that most professional ministers find agreeable. Today translate "newspaper" as congressional reports, policy statements, scientific research, scholarly animadversions, and novels and other art forms. True, they are not sacred texts in the same way the Bible is, but they constitute authoritative canons for many who appeal to them for support in their programs of action and reflection. We ourselves have to seek continually to understand these sources, and we also have to determine which of them are consonant with our own Bible.

Nor should we ignore the sources that in our time appear on tape and celluloid rather than on paper. Certain movies, recordings, and television and radio reports or programs may be as decisive in shaping our perceptions of reality as books and printed materials. "The media" has become a category for sources of interpretive perspectives, and the alleged power of these media to distort, inform, and shape our thinking is very great. When we have to select which of these sources (say
EDITORIAL

High Noon or 2001: A Space Odyssey), we find it extremely difficult for several reasons. These materials have been produced recently and we do not have the benefit of historical distance. They are not as accessible as some print media. They have technical and aesthetic qualities to which we may react as strongly as we do their content. The result is that we still must decide how to interpret them, but the role of all “sacred texts” as themselves interpreters of reality is more baldly apparent in these media and therefore we argue as much over their form as their substance.

Perhaps the largest question, however, is not whether we can understand all these “writings” and fit them into our own view of reality but whether anyone in the real world is at all interested in the sacred texts of the Hebrew and Christian communities. What the culture sees as a way of relating the Bible to reality is often a preoccupation with pastrami and bagels (form 1040 of Uncle Revenue is something else again—there we are getting close to the Things That Matter). When we read the Bible in the congregation and when we interpret it to the world, can it become a true and lively Word? That question seems quite appropriate in a church afflicted with an inferiority complex and in a culture with suicidal tendencies.

—CHARLES E. COLE
HOMILETICAL RESOURCES:
PREPARING TO PREACH FROM
EPHESIANS TO NORTHSIDE CHURCH

WILLIAM H. WILLIMON

The first task of Christian preaching is to take the biblical text seriously. The second task is to take the congregational context with equal seriousness.¹

Where is the meeting point between our textual criticism and our textual proclamation? Where is the tie between the meaning of the ancient text in its originating context and its meaning for our day? I agree with Leander E. Keck that meaning is not found solely in the past via biblical criticism—it grows at the intersection between the ancient text and the modern congregation.² After all, it is our text, the product and critic of synagogue and church—not a cadaver to be dissected in a comparative religion class. The Bible was written by us, for us, against us. It makes little sense outside the gathered, worshipping, self-critical community of faith.³

The necessary difficult, hermeneutical intersection between text and church is the preacher. The preacher is ordained to engage in what Keck calls “priestly listening.” The preacher works with the text as the congregation’s representative listener. The main value of all those hours of exegesis is that they help us to be better listeners. The preacher listens to a text and asks questions like: How does my congregation fit into this text? Who is being addressed here and why? How do we look like or unlike them? What is it that the text wants to say to us? Is it saying something that we do not want to hear? What would need to occur for us to hear what is being said?

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² Lections in these homiletical studies are taken from Seasons of the Gospel: Resources for the Christian Year (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979).
I say this in hopes of justifying what I do here. Unlike writers of previous "Homiletical Resources" in Quarterly Review, I am not going to give detailed exegeses of selected texts. Rather, I shall attempt to underscore what I have said about the preacher as the interpretive intersection between text and sermon by reconstructing the way I move from text to sermon as practicing homiletician. I am going to talk about the text in context. A report of my own exegetical work will be included, but only as one part of the larger process of sermon preparation in the context of a local church.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE CONTEXT

Northside Church began its life twenty-five years ago on the north end of Greenville, South Carolina, and became a fast-growing congregation. Greenville is an exploding former textile town, consistent friend of the J. P. Stevens Company and the foe of organized labor, home of fundamentalist Bob Jones University and a born-again, Bible-believing, P.T.L. Club-watching Baptist church on every corner. Northside has spent its past ten years experiencing the same decline which has plagued many other mainline, postsuburban churches, moving from nine hundred members in the early sixties to about five hundred and fifty today. New churches closer to the growing edge of the suburbs, disagreement with some of the social principles of the United Methodist Church and former pastors, and congregational self-doubt all took their toll at Northside. While we have turned the corner on our membership attrition problem and finances have never been better, the congregation is still haunted by memories of a once-great youth program where we now have next to none, the specter of empty Sunday school rooms, and the inarticulate but ever-present fear that in spite of recent progress, we may be dying.

The people of Northside are, on the whole, solid, uncomplicated, decent, hard working, white, middle aged, and middle class. They inhabit a world of southern gentility, formica and linoleum kitchens, biweekly paychecks, moder-
ately well-adjusted children, Clemson football games, taunts by hard-shell Fundamentalists at the office, and vacations in rented houses at the beach. A little better than a third of them are in church each Sunday and nearly all of them give money to the church; some give sacrificially. Yes, they love their church but are quick to add, “Religion is mostly an individual thing, a relationship with Jesus.” For many of them, the church is their social life, the source of their best friends, and a major part of the interlocking pieces of the picture of being Christian in Greenville. They call the pastor when they go to the hospital and expect him to visit in their homes at least once a year. Some read their Bibles regularly. While 80 percent of them recently responded that preaching was the most important activity of the church, music by the choir was the “most meaningful” activity in Sunday worship for the majority. Most voted for Ronald Reagan and most of them think that the United Methodist Church should “stick to religion and stay out of politics.”

Pentecost at Northside begins with the preacher being welcomed back from annual conference. The church lay-leader (a woman) and the chairperson of the administrative board (a woman) say a few words of appreciation for the prospect of another year with the same preacher and then lay hands upon his head with a prayer. Then the summer begins. Heat—slowly rising in intensity until the suffocating, deadening, humid intensity of late July—is ever present. There will be one-week vacations, watermelon cuttings, a 30 percent drop in attendance, and an absence of the choir during August. It is too hot to get excited about anything. Sunday school classes will doggedly try to keep going throughout the summer doldrums—without much response. Worship will be notable mostly for empty pews and the roar of an inadequate air-conditioner. Church life will consist of hand-to-mouth financial reports and too few teachers for the annual vacation church school. Now, more than at any time in the church year, we could use some sermonic encouragement rather than discouragement. It would be nice to hear a little good news to help us make it through another week. It would
be good to know under what terms this poor struggling, friendly, ordinary group of Christians is the church. These are the dog days of Pentecost, the Sunday-to-Sunday summer limping along into fall which characterizes this season at Northside Church, 435 Summit Drive, with a $60,000 mortgage, next to Beth Israel Synagogue, and only a short drive from the suburbs.

This is the congregation to whom these sermons must be addressed. How close to Ephesus is 435 Summit Drive?

AN OVERVIEW OF THE TEXTS

The Epistle lections for these four Sundays after Pentecost, 1982, are from Ephesians. Immediately I feel uneasy. Before I know anything specific about Ephesians, I know that here I will be fighting people’s unfamiliarity with the Epistles. They may know bits and pieces from Romans or I Corinthians, but it is unlikely that they know Ephesians. More disconcerting, they may not only be unfamiliar with the text, they may have an innate suspicion of any epistle. The Gospels, so my listeners imagine, are at least the words and deeds of Jesus—we all know these are important. But the Epistles often sound like third-hand information, irrelevant, inhouse communication about somebody else’s problems, theological mumbo jumbo, far removed from the good, solid narrative stuff of the Gospels. Yes, I shall have an uphill battle in a sermon from this epistle.

And yet, all is not dark in my preliminary assessment. The Epistles, more so than the Gospels, are explicitly ecclesial documents. We may not know how to answer the Bob Jones student’s street-corner question, “Are you saved?” but we know that we are members of Northside Church. While we think of ourselves more as individuals than as a body, we have chosen to practice the faith here with a group rather than with Oral or Jerry in front of the TV. We are, whatever else we are, the church. The Epistles are speaking to people somewhere whose address is close to ours. Like the Romans or the Corinthians, we are people who relate to specific
issues, specific problems, specific instances of good and bad behavior, right and wrong. We are Greenvillians simply trying to be Christian in a place and at a time. The administrative board meets next week to vote on next year's budget, Mrs. Brown is on my back again about teaching Sunday school, and my neighbor who left her husband for another man showed up last Sunday at our church. So, if the Bible has anything specific to say about how we are to live the Gospel, I'm all ears. Ephesians begins to look more promising.

A few weeks before the first sermon in this series of texts, I read Ephesians in one sitting. It is a short book, so this is no problem. In this first reading, I try to discipline myself to keep as open-minded, relaxed, and nonutilitarian as possible. I'm not thinking about what to preach; I'm just passing through, getting the larger picture first, looking over the whole forest, not stopping to examine any particular tree.

I jot down a few first impressions on the book as a whole: Textual variant in 1:1 suggests that the letter was not simply addressed to one specific congregation, but to the church or a group of churches in general. Chapter 1 seems lyrical, full of superlatives and rich mystical images. Much talk of praise, almost like a hymn. There is great metaphorical contrast in chapter 2 between the old life as Gentiles and the new life as Christians: death/life, far/near, hostility/peace, strangers/citizens. Evidently, the writer is addressing those (gentile Christians?) who have been changed. Chapter 3 begins with talk of mystery and ends with something like a hymn or doxology. This chapter ends ("Amen") with a crescendo. Here Ephesians stops saying or doing one thing and begins something else. The "therefore" which begins chapter 4 is a tipoff, a typical Pauline pivot. Evidently, we are now beginning something (ethical exhortation?) which is the result or the implication of chapters 1-3. Who is this message directed to? So far, the audience is clearly the church. Unity seems to be the main concern of this section. There must be trouble with divisions in the church. Chapter 5 is much more difficult to summarize. Here ethical injunctions tumble over
one another in near-random fashion. This string of do's and don't's continues in 6: husbands-wives, children-parents, slaves-masters—I wonder what situations occasioned all this? “Finally” (6:10) there is a fascinating closing section on Christian armament. Someone is trying to strengthen someone else for combat. Who is fighting whom? Must have gotten rough. Throughout, the tone of this letter is upbeat, encouraging, positive. Even the ethical portions are not argumentive, angry, or sarcastic—as are the ethical admonitions in some Pauline Epistles. There is a lyrical quality which characterizes the opening chapters and which even bubbles to the surface in the later portions. A strange letter this is, full of strange, lofty language and strings of ethical admonitions; a jumble of images, exhortations, and metaphors.

I will not want to bury these first impressions later in a mass of exegesis. First impressions of a text often are more accurate, particularly in regard to the feel or tone of a text, than later, more detailed familiarity.

Now I move to commentaries for background issues and information related to Ephesians. I begin with Nils Dahl, who confirms my first impression that Ephesians is a mosaic, a patchwork of bits and pieces, albeit a beautifully constructed mosaic. Much of the material is liturgical in nature—early Christian hymns and prayers. Some think the book may also draw upon early Christian teaching and catechetical formulas which were given before or after baptism. Dahl confirms my observation that the work falls into two major parts: 1:3-3:21 (which he calls “a panegyric that recounts the implications of God’s call, the working of his power, the privileges bestowed upon former Gentiles and the special grace given to Paul”). This is the kerygmatic portion. Then there is 4:1-6:20, the ethical or parenetic part, in which the recipients are urged to live up to their calling in baptism by recalling what they have been taught. The date of the book: later than A.D. 61 but before A.D. 150, depending on whether or not one thinks that Paul is the author. Major themes: unity in the church and the need for Christians to grow in Christ.

I already knew that the Pauline authorship of Ephesians
was in doubt. The long drawn-out sentences in Ephesians (no wonder I had difficulty in my translation attempt) and the so-called non-Pauline ideas and expressions have led many interpreters to doubt that Paul wrote the book. Large portions of Ephesians appear to have been lifted straight out of Colossians (or vice versa). Many think that Ephesians draws upon a larger liturgical tradition than Paul had. While Paul makes use of liturgical fragments in his letters, nowhere does he use liturgical materials as extensively as they appear in Ephesians. The parts of the letter which deal with the church and its ministry suggest that we are dealing with a later and a more "institutionalized" ecclesiology than we have in epistles like 1 Corinthians and Romans. Rather than dealing with the problems of specific congregations like those in Corinth or Rome, Ephesians seems to be speaking to a group of churches (a circular letter?) or the church as a whole. Compared to earlier Pauline letters, eschatology seems to have faded somewhat in Ephesians; no expected return of Christ is mentioned. The church is no longer a temporary phenomenon.

Scholars are split on the question of authorship. Paul was either the author of Ephesians or Colossians; or he was the author of neither. If Paul was not the author of Ephesians or Colossians, Ephesians was written by someone very close to Paul in thought patterns, theology, and method. If Paul did not write the letter, someone of "Pauline" conviction wrote it as a legitimate extension or application of Pauline principles to the church in the early Catholic period.

Ernst Käsemann suggests that Ephesians is addressed to a gentile Christian church which was consolidating itself internally, carefully defining itself against the pluralistic environment in which it lived, developing its own distinct metaphors and ideology. In Ephesians, "the church more and more becomes the content of theology." Problems of ecclesial identity are pressing upon the faithful. The author, whom Käsemann assumes to be a Jewish Christian, sees the amazing unity of Jews and Gentiles in the church as one of the indelible identifying marks of the church. Obviously, all is not
well with the former Jews and former Gentiles. If it were, this letter would not have been needed. For the writer of Ephesians, religious antagonism must be overcome for the church to be the church.

The Anchor Bible commentary contains an overview of scholarship on the purpose of Ephesians: defense of Paul against those heretics who attempted to discredit him, refutation of Gnosticism, instruction in the meaning of baptism, promotion of unity in a church composed of Jews and Gentiles, and strengthening of missionary involvement. The letter is not prompted by a specific need or occasion in a church. The author does not personally know those to whom he or she is speaking (Eph. 1:15; 3:2-3; 4:21). Among the Epistles, Ephesians is unique as a sort of intercessory prayer, an epistle couched in the language of prayer, an intercession for a group of Christians whom the author does not know.

The ecclesial nature of Ephesians makes the book not only relevant but also difficult to preach at Northside Church. We, like many other contemporary Christians, think of ourselves more as individuals than as the church. We do not worry much about the church; we're too concerned about our own little garden.

My denomination has, in the past few decades, implied that we are to be out “in the world” and that the church’s real business is anywhere but in the church. Therefore, in my sermons, I usually go for the grand and great ethical themes: the racism, sexism, nationalism—not the little sins of unkindness to those at home, patience with those next to me in the pew, and unity in the church. Has my reaction against pietistic, individualized morality become overreaction?

It is curious that we have spent so much effort of late in speaking to the world, telling it what it ought to do, when the world has given us every indication that it is not listening. Perhaps now is the time to take seriously texts like those in Ephesians and speak again specifically to the church. Perhaps we should talk less about the need for the church to serve the community and talk more about how community happens in the church. The first great ethical, social task of the
church is to be the church. Ephesians makes that contention. Whether or not it will preach at Northside is another matter.

Having sketched the broad lines of Ephesians, having picked up a few of its contrasts, lights, and shadows with the help of the commentaries, I am now ready to engage in more detailed study of the specific lections from which I am to preach.

SUNDAY, JULY 25, 1982

Exegesis and Exposition of Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16

The initial goal is to understand what this text said in its original context.

A. First I must establish the text. What words did the original writer write? In 4:6 "all" (panton) need not be limited to the church, otherwise, the more exclusive word pantes would have been used. The "us" which some manuscripts add is an explanatory gloss, so I shall translate "of all" rather than RSV "of us all."

What are the boundaries of my lection? This rather difficult question is due to the eclectic nature of the epistle. Nevertheless, it is important to establish the proper boundaries, lest I abuse my text by cutting it out of its setting.

The omission of verses 8-10 in the lectionary is probably justified for homiletical reasons. These verses appear to be an aside which would be difficult to interpret in the context. Some believe that 9-10 may be a later addition. (Compare with I Peter 3:19.) I shall not add 8-10 to my text for preaching.

The rest of the verses seem to be clear of variants or glosses.

B. Now I am ready for more detailed word study of the text to make sure I know what the text meant. Commentaries and lexicons are helpful here.

Vs. 1a: "therefore." A standard Pauline convention (I Thess. 3:1; Rom. 12:1) signaling a transition, usually from a dogmatic section to one which treats the practical, ethical implications of the previous affirmation. Relates, I assume, to
all of chapter 1-3, not just the immediately preceding verse. Note that chapters 1-3 are kerygmatic or doxological rather than purely dogmatic. Ethics is arising out of liturgy here.

Vs. 1c: “calling.” An estate resulting from God’s call. Probably this is baptismal talk.

Vs. 2a: “lowliness and meekness.” When compared with other Pauline contexts (I Cor. 4:21) it suggests an attitude toward others which has its roots in submission to God. Compare also with Rom. 12:10.

Vs. 2b: “patience.” Perhaps “forebearance” is more to the point here.

Vs. 3a: “eager.” Seems weak in RSV. “Diligently” is better.

Vs. 3b: “unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” RSV seems correct in capitalizing “Spirit.” *Pneuma* in vs. 4 is obviously the baptismally bestowed Holy Spirit, not the warm-hearted *animorum concordia*, the spirit of fellowship. Unity of the church is a gift of the Spirit, not a human achievement of warm feelings toward one another. In my interpretation of this unity, I must be clear that it is not a result of subjective human striving but an objective result of the bestowal of the Spirit.

Vs. 4: “(There is) one body and one Spirit.” The parallelism in vss. 4-6 suggests that this is a liturgical fragment, perhaps a baptismal creed or hymn inserted here to justify the foregoing ethical injunctions. I found some commentators supplying “You must become” before verse 4, but this destroys its force. Unity is an objective result of the objective fact of “your call” (in baptism? vs. 5).14

Vs. 5: Continued parallelism. Why is the other sacrament not mentioned, particularly in the light of I Cor. 10-12, which sees the Lord’s Supper as the basis for unity? Perhaps it is assumed. The writer quotes from a baptismally derived liturgical fragment, so there is no suggestion of the Lord’s Supper.

Vs. 6a: “of all.” I have previously discussed the variant here. Stress on the sovereignty of God is typical of this epistle.

Vs. 6b: “through” and “in.” Precise meaning unclear.

Vs. 7: “Grace was given to each of us.” The stress is upon
the grace which each believer has received. Why was this gift given to each of us? Read on in vss. 11 ff.

Vs. 11: Much discussion in commentaries about who these people were and what they did in the church. The speculation is not justified by the text. These offices are listed only for the purpose of underscoring verse 12. Verse 11 is unconcerned to legitimate these offices. Shows a more established, institutional view of the church than is apparent in earlier epistles.

Vs. 12a: "for the equipment of the saints" (my translation). Word study suggests "upbuilding" or "mending" as synonyms for this "equipping." Here we see why the various leaders were given to the church—for the edification of the church.

Vs. 12b: "for the work of ministry." Where does the comma belong? Can only be determined by looking at whole context. Better to omit the comma after "saints." The laity are not mere consumers of the clergy's gifts. The test for the effectiveness of the leader's gifts is how well these gifts equip all saints for ministry. No reason to assume that "the work of the ministry" is the sole possession of the leaders. I prefer the NEB "for work in his service" in order to make clear to the laos (people) that the diakonia (service) which is being done here is theirs too. Implication of 12a and 12b: leaders are divinely given gifts to equip the laos for diakonia.

Vs. 12c: "for building up the body of Christ." Here we return to earlier theme of vss. 4:1-7. Developing unity and building up the church are among the chief things leaders do in the church.

Vs. 13a: "we all." All of us in the church, not all people in general. "The saints" (vs. 12) is the object here.

Vs. 13b: "maturity." In contrast to childishness (vs. 14). Is disunity a mark of Christian immaturity?

Vs. 14: Verses 14-16 are one long sentence in the Greek. Verses 14-15 suggest that the letter is addressed to those who have become the victims of false, divisive teaching. Perhaps this is a key to the purpose of the epistle. No attempt to combat or argue with the deceitful doctrines.

Vs. 15: "speaking the truth." This RSV translation of
aletheuontes is open to question: "walking in the truth" or "living by truth" are better options, particularly in light of the use of "truth" in this epistle (compare 4:1, 4:5).

Vs. 16: The growth of the whole is emphasized here, not individual members. "Joined and knit together" (16b) suggests the early baptismal image of the initiate being joined to Christ, grafted into the church. I prefer the NEB’s "the whole frame grows through the due activity of each part, and builds itself up in love." Christ upbuilds and strengthens the church in love.

C. I now read the entire text again, with an eye toward its general thrust. I make the following assumptions: A divided church is being addressed. In general terms, the writer urges these Christians to be who they are: those who are made one in Jesus Christ by being baptized into the body of Christ. The writer's injunctions are based, it seems, upon reference to a familiar baptismal creed or hymn. The church is graciously given the gifts it needs to be unified: the Spirit, moral behavior, various leaders, and the truth.

Now is the time to make decisions about the sermon. My study of the text has suggested that the central matter is the source and nature of the unity of the church. I will bypass considerations about the nature of Christian ministry (4:11-13), or standing firm in the face of false doctrine (4:14-15), or Christian maturity (4:15), except as these themes underscore or enrich the theme of unity.

This decision is justified, I believe, on the basis of the text and my congregation. My exegesis shows unity the central, recurring melody amidst a number of derivative or supporting interludes. My assessment of my congregation shows that unity amidst diversity is as big a problem at 435 Summit Drive as anywhere. In the sermon, I will search for those ways in which our situation in disunity might be analogous to their situation. The text will be generalized to move the theme from the initial context to my congregational context. I find it helpful to be as honest and intentional as possible about the transition. Thus I must ask myself questions like: Is this a fair generalization to make about this text? What cultural,
historical, and theological differences between them and us are being overlooked in order to make this transition? This hermeneutical “jump” is a particularly dangerous, but utterly essential, step in preaching.16

The drama of this text, the pivot, is 4:4–6—the liturgical fragment which becomes the basis for the ethical injunctions toward unity. Here is the perspective from which I can move back from Ephesus (or wherever) to Northside—the early church (or churches) to whom this letter was addressed had problems “keeping it all together.” The writer calls it to be the unified body which it is meant to be, reminding it of its “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (4:5) origins.

D. I still find helpful the time-honored practice of attempting to state the theme of a proposed sermon in one sentence. Here is the substance, the “what,” of my message. Of course, the danger of this device is that it encourages me to think of my text as an abstract, generalized idea which has been distilled from the text. This may tempt me to preach an idea or mere information, rather than to enable my congregation to experience the message. The folk at Northside Church do not need more interesting religious information. They need, and they seek, confrontation with and experience of the living Word. In spite of these pitfalls, I don’t know where I am going in writing a sermon until I can clearly state a theme.

Here is my proposed theme: Remembrance of our baptism can enable a divided church to become one.

E. Having determined what I shall say, how I shall say it?17 I am learning to pay as much attention to the form of a text as to its context. William A. Beardslee’s Literary Criticism of the New Testament18 has been helpful in enabling me to identify the form of a text. Beardslee examines how literary forms “worked” for the church. We ask, “What is this language trying to do to the listeners?” In order to reduplicate the original impact of a text upon today’s listeners, one must attempt to use the same literary form, employing it in much the same way as it originally worked. Thus we create the same salvific occasion in their lives that was created in the primitive church.
Ephesians is an "inhouse" publication. It clearly intends to rally the knowing about the known in their midst. Its source is the liturgy; even its form has a liturgical quality about it. If I could sing it, perhaps I would. Here are ecclesial doctrine and ethics rooted in the church's worship. How can today's church hear this as the first church heard it? Of course, I must take care that my form clarifies rather than obscures the one-sentence theme which I have stated.

I decided to preach Eph. 4:1-7, 11-16 as a baptismal sermon. One thing we share with the Ephesians—all of us have been baptized. We, like them, are still living out the meaning of that event. There is always someone, young or old, in the process of baptismal preparation. If possible, such persons should be asked to plan to be baptized on this Sunday. I will view the sermon not only as a time to instruct the newly baptized and their sponsors but also as a time for the rest of us to remember our baptism, to reflect upon the significance of our baptism as a sign and source of the unity of the church.

My denomination has a relatively new Service of Baptism and Baptismal Renewal. It would be appropriate to include this service as response to the sermon.

A SERMON SYNOPSIS

(I will give a thumbnail sketch of what I propose to do in the sermon in hopes that the reader will be able to feel the basic form and context of my sermon, even if most of my illustrative material is eliminated.)

In a short time, we will participate in a baptism. You will be asked to remember your own baptism. That's where you got yoked to the church, where you were adopted, brought into the family. How amazing is this faith which makes relatives of perfect strangers!

How strange is the church, black and white, red and yellow. In a world fragmented into caucus groups, private interests, clubs, fraternities, subcultures, pressure groups—how remarkable that the church attempts such unity amidst such diversity. Admittedly, we in this congregation are a
rather homogenous lot. But of all the human institutions of
which I am a part, there is more diversity here than elsewhere:
young, old, rich, poor, whole, and infirm. It's not easy to get it
together or keep it together at Northside. In our congrega­tional
disagreements, we fight hard for what we believe. How
are we still able to worship on Sunday morning with people
with whom we had such sharp disagreements at the board
meeting last Wednesday night?

The mark of the true church: pure doctrine? Success at
raising money? A flashy preacher? Good Bible preaching?
Today's text is clear—the mark of the true church is its unity. "See
how they love one another," the outsiders said of the first
churches.

But how could I be united with you? I hardly know you. I
am white, male, college educated, thirty-five—already the
walls start to form. With so many important differences, what
could make us one? How do I know I can trust you? Can you
trust me? In the arguments, disagreements, and misunder­standings of life together—what on earth could make us one?

I feel fine enough about you now, but just let you challenge
my cherished prejudices, my ways of doing things, my
values, and there goes the fellowship. My brotherly-sisterly
warm feelings are not enough for me to self-sustain love for
you (and I know that you could never have enough good will
to love me always!).

What brings us together or keeps us together? It must be
something, someone greater than ourselves, some great
cosmic wholeness, someone who is the source of who we are
and are meant to be.

Here, at the font, multitudes of strangers gather. Amaz­
ingly, their differences seem to fade in these waters. We're all
babies here—everybody a beginner, everybody wet, every­
body crying and ready to be fed. Everybody needing someone
else in order to survive. The old distinctions—male, female,
black, white, rich, poor—don't seem to work any more as one
comes up dripping from the waters. Here we are, people still
being born, still being cleansed of our separations, people
with no earthly reason for being able to live together without
cutting each other's throat, except that we have each heard the same call, answered to the same name, come forth from the same font to follow the same Lord. Baptism says this: We're all in this together.

"One Lord, one faith, one baptism. . . ."

*Other homiletical possibilities.* The preachers may want to develop another theme. The purpose of the church and its ministry, or the relationship of the ordained ministry to the ministry of the laity are legitimate possibilities. Sanctification, the lifelong process of growth to Christian maturity (4:15), has been a neglected theme in much of American evangelical Christianity. A mature, cultivated faith which is able to withstand the "winds of (false) doctrine" continues to be a major concern for the church and is a concern throughout this passage.

SUNDAY, AUGUST 8, 1982

*Exegesis and Exposition of Ephesians 4:25-5:2*

A. *Establish the text.* In 4:28, "doing honest work with his hands." Among the seven variant readings of this phrase, some give emphasis to *idiais* ("his own"), others add to *agathon* ("the good"). Some of the variants seem to be omissions in the interest of lessening verbosity. The RSV translation is therefore adequate. Is 4:32b to be translated as "you" or "us"? Perhaps, say some commentators, the third-person plural relates to the origin of this phrase in a hymn. I choose "God has forgiven you" because it parallels the preceding clauses. Again in 5:2b, there are variants between "you" and "us." The external evidence supporting either reading is evenly balanced. The "us" seems preferable here. The author is probably quoting from an early hymn or liturgical fragment, therefore the third-person plural seems appropriate. On the whole, the variants are of minor significance, so our text stands as it is.

While there is something to be said for considering 5:1-2 as an integral part of the thought unit, not of 4:25-32 but of
5:1-20, it can also be seen as a doxological summation of 4:25-32 rather than a doxological preface to 5:3-20. The lection can thus be accepted as it is appointed for the day.

B. Detailed study of the text. Vs. 25a: “putting away.” An aorist, that is, action done in the past with continuing significance in the present. Relates to 4:22a, “put off your old nature.” I prefer the NEB “lay aside” or possibly “strip off,” since it is likely that this metaphor is baptismal in origin. In early baptismal practice, much was made of stripping off old clothing in order to put on a new identity. vs. 25c: “for” or “because.” The preposition implies that we should do these things because we are joined together as “members one of another.” We can “speak the truth” because we are in one body.

Vs. 27: “devil.” Diabolo is not a typical Pauline term. It is found only here (Eph. 6:11) and in the Pastorals.

Vs. 28a: See earlier notes on the variants in A. Thieves in the church? How shocking.

Vs. 28d: “to give to those in need.” No need to limit this to needy in the church (unlike Rom. 15:26).

Vs. 29a: “evil talk.” What explicitly is being said here? The lexicon says that the word could be “rotten” or “worthless” talk. Not sure what type of speech is being condemned.

Vs. 29d: “that it may impart grace.” Our talk should be edifying to the church, but in what precise way it is gracious and edifying cannot be determined here.

Vs. 30b: “in whom you were sealed.” Baptism is the “seal of the Spirit” (compare Eph. 1:13, II Cor. 1:22). Once again, as in the preceding text (Eph. 4:3-7), the motive and source for our behavior is baptismal. Note of objectivity and comfort here in this sealing until the day of redemption (Eph. 4:30c). No implication that the Spirit may or may not be present in the baptized or that they might lose it.

Vss. 31-32: This section sounds like a moralistic catalogue of Christian do’s and don’t’s. The key to it is in the opening “therefore” (4:25a) and in the concluding “as God in Christ forgave you” in 4:32d. These good things have been done for
you by Christ, therefore you do good to those whom Christ loves. Ethics rooted in the kerygma.

Vs. 5:1a: “be imitators of God.” Relates to the forgiveness theme of 4:32? We are to forgive as God forgives.

Vs. 5:1b: “as beloved children.” Our imitation arises out of our being children. Children copy their parents. Since baptism is our adoption as children, our birth into the family, I once again claim a baptismal rootage for this injunction.

Vs. 5:2c: “a fragrant offering.” This “sacrifice” of Christ is not as atonement for sin (substitutionary atonement). The emphasis is upon the complete, unreserved self-giving of Christ; a self-giving which elicits our gratitude and self-giving. This is a striking image of ethics as “a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” I think of a liturgical fragment from my own tradition, Isaac Watt’s hymn, “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross.” The rather extravagant liturgical language fits the extravagance of the gift and the response.

Some general observations: 4:25-32 shows a recurring pattern of prohibition—commandment—motivation in dealing with ethical concerns. Suggests that these verses were part of early (baptismal?) catechetical formulas. Perhaps they took this form for ease of memorization. Once again, we are dealing with ecclesial ethics arising out of and referring back to liturgical and catechetical data.

C. I read the text again. Again I am impressed by this rather tiring string of ethical injunctions in 4:25-32. These can be categorized as rules for behavior in the church—rules in order to keep a potentially divided church unified. General admonitions rather than rules in reference to a specific situation. The baptismal thread runs throughout, in the background, cropping up (possibly) in 4:30, 32, and 5:1 and 2.

Nothing in this text seizes me until I arrive at 5:1-2. “Imitators of God,” “beloved children,” and “a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” are the poetic phrases which hit me. I will focus my sermon here. The preceding ethical injunctions, if allowed to form the sermon, could turn into simplistic moralism or irrelevant scolding, discouraging
rather than encouraging. I do not get that impression from reading the text. The original hearers were being urged to do these things as “beloved children,” not as bickering brats. It is not a matter of “catching more flies with honey, than vinegar” it is a matter of imperative flowing from indicative. We are called by the gospel to be, before we are called to be good.

Therefore, instead of using the string of ethical injunctions to urge the folk at Northside to be good, I will let my sermon be guided by 5:1-2 and urge them to be who they already are—beloved, adopted children of God who are encouraged here to be imitative of God the parent.

For the Ephesians, to offer themselves to God, to be imitators of God meant to refrain from anger, stealing, evil talk (whatever that is), bitterness, and malice. What might the imitation of God—doing for each other in the church that which God did for us in Christ—mean for us at Northside?

D. I now state the theme of the proposed sermon in one sentence: 
As Christians, we are called to behave like God’s children because we have become God’s children. Baptism is the act which initiates us into the church, forms us into the family, and signifies our adoption as God’s own people. Therefore, once again, I may begin with baptism as the source of our identity and therefore the source of our behavior in the church.

E. How shall I say it? I have decided that the text begins with a list of ethical injunctions. This string of admonitions sounds like a simplistic list of duties for becoming good little boys and girls. But by the end, at 4:32 and 5:1-2, we see that the injunctions are rooted in the ontological transformation which has occurred to these Christians in their baptism. They are to behave like this, not to get into God’s good graces. They are to behave properly because, in baptism, they are in God’s good graces.

My sermon will therefore attempt to match the movement of the text, moving from a rather tiring and dismaying catalogue of good behavior to a more poetic affirmation of the source and goal of that behavior.
It has come to my attention in recent days that many of you here at Northside are not behaving like Christians. Your behavior is embarrassing. This is a church and you ought to be acting like people in the church. Here are some things I want you to do: stop smoking, be faithful to your marriage vows, don't cheat on your income tax, be kind to your children, don't talk dirty, don't get angry with one another, love everybody, volunteer to teach a Sunday school class, and enjoy mopping the kitchen floor.

You see, you're Christians and you people ought to act like Christians. Is this too much to ask?

This is a typical line of reasoning. In one way or another, you have heard this line before in sermons: You people try hard to act like Christians so that you can be Christians. In fact, most people think that this is what sermons are for—to give you instruction on how you are supposed to straighten up and fly right so that you can become Christians.

The trouble with this line, as reasonable as it may sound, is that it gets the whole thing backwards. It is really reversed from the reasoning in today's Scripture. In this passage from the Letter to the Ephesians, the writer urges readers to do many good things. That sounds like my sermon, doesn’t it? But this writer urges them to do good things not to become Christian but because they are Christian. He or she doesn’t say to them (as I am often guilty of implying in sermons), “You pagans ought to do these things so that you can be good enough for God.” He or she says, “Do these good things because God has made you good.”

We're at the heart of the gospel now, so listen carefully. When a father sits his son down and urges him, "Make something out of yourself," the father implies that the son is not worth much in his present state. Another way is to sit the boy down and tell him that you believe in him, that you love him, that you have high hopes for him, and that you know that he is capable of the best. That second way is more like the way of this text.
This text says not, "You ought to act like somebody." It says, "You are somebody, so act like it!"

No wonder people act irresponsibly, immaturely, and worthlessly—how many times in sermons have they been told that they are irresponsible, immature, and worthless?

Today's text says it differently. It says: You people are somebody. You are the ones whom God has loved, the ones for whom Christ has died. You people are not homeless, unloved, wayward nobodies; you are nothing less than royalty. Now, become who you are.

I wish I could preach that message every Sunday. I wish I could convey that word to my children, my friends, my associates. Alas, I usually get it backwards, implying that somehow they have to make the grade with me and God, rather than announcing to them that they have already made the grade. The rest is simply response to who they already are.

It's hard being a disciple, a Christian. It's hard to do good things, act well toward others, and live together in love in the church. But the difficulty of the Christian life arises not because we're nobodies trying to be somebodies; the difficulty is in being kings and queens, God's own royal children, and trying, as all good children do, to imitate our Father.

It would be impossible, if not downright crazy, for us to try to imitate the love, the forgiveness, the grace of God in our little lives were it not that we happen to be the loved, forgiven, graced children of God. And so we are.

Other homiletical possibilities. Just as the text develops a number of ways in which Christians are called to be "imitators of God," so the preacher might investigate other specifics of this time. The mention in this passage of Christian anger (4:26) is interesting: "Keep your anger, but do not sin." Is there a place for divine and therefore Christian wrath? (Compare with 4:31.) How can Christians be legitimately angry over sin and injustice and not be led into sin by their indignation?

Evidently, the writer believes that the Christian life is not
easy. It requires the constant attentiveness and self-examina-
tion which come from the emulation of Christ. We preachers
ought not to imply that the way is easier than it is.

SUNDAY, AUGUST 15, 1982

Exegesis and Exposition of Ephesians 5:14-20

A. Establish the text. I am unhappy about this fragmentary
portion of the text. The oun ("therefore," "in sum") connects
the ethical instruction and a preceding theological affirma-
tion; 5:15-20 seems related to the talk about being "children of
light" (5:9) in the preceding section. Perhaps the inclusion of
5:14 in the lection would help, or even 5:1-2. At any rate, I will
view my text as beginning 5:14 or earlier for purposes of
interpretation.

Variants in 5:15a shift the position of "carefully," either to
the beginning of the clause or to the end. It refers to the earlier
discussion (5:11 ff.) about proper conduct. "Spiritual songs"
(5:19) seems to have been inadvertently omitted in a few
manuscripts. No decisive variants can be noted in the text.

B. Detailed study of the text. Vs. 14b: "Awake" or "up" is the
imperative of egeire, possibly part of a baptismal hymn. I shall
include 5:14 in my text as a hymnic beginning for the
following ethical imperatives.

Vs. 15a: "therefore," oun, is the link between the opening
hymn and the succeeding verses.

Vs. 15b: The talk about "wisdom" implies that wisdom is
one of the gifts of (baptismal?) enlightenment. The early
fathers sometimes speak of baptism as photismos, "enlighten-
ment." In baptism we wake up, open our eyes, and see true
wisdom.

Vs. 16a: "redeem the time" (my translation). Use time
rather than lose time (compare Col. 4:5); keep time as
Christians because "the days are evil."

Vs. 18: "do not get drunk with wine." Curious, sudden
reference to alcohol abuse with no apparent antecedent. Is
this in reference to a specific problem at Ephesus? Perhaps
this refers to the cultic use of wine (like that of the Dionysian rites). We do not know. We are to be filled with the (Holy) Spirit (vs. 18c) rather than alcoholic spirits. Once again, these ethical injunctions are related to preceding indicatives. We are to do these things because we are those who are enlightened and raised from the dead (5:14), those who are now on God’s time.

Vs. 19: Not sure about the precise nature of some of this congregational singing. Hymns are mentioned in places like Acts 2:46-47 and 1 Cor. 14:26. This fits the lyrical, hymnic quality of Ephesians.

Vs. 20: “for everything giving thanks.” Or hyper panton could mean “for all men.” The RSV translation is probably appropriate. Accept all things with doxological, eucharistic gratitude. Note that stereotypical liturgical ending of this verse.

General observations: There is not a great deal of material to work with in 5:14-20 if one is looking for general ideas. It is a string of detached injunctions beginning and ending in pure praise.

C. I read the text again. The passage begins with a shout, like a cheer at a football game, “Awake, O sleeper.” Then it tells us to be wise, make the most of time, be filled with the Spirit rather than drunk with wine, and be filled with music and songs. I don’t want to turn this into a moralistic diatribe. How can I keep the rhythm and beat of the text in a twenty-minute sermon?

My text is full of hymns and talk about hymns. The ethical imperatives here imply that there is some relationship between a Christian’s singing and a Christian’s behavior. How can that be? Can ethics arise out of hymnody? Is there such a thing as a “hymnic lifestyle” (5:19)? “Making the most of the time,” (16a) rings in my ears. Can our Sunday morning experience of joyous singing be seen as a model for how we are to make “the most of the time” by “making melody to the Lord with all your heart” Monday through Saturday?

D. The theme of the sermon in one sentence: Christians are those
who see this time as God's time and who therefore live their time with thanksgiving.

E. How shall I say it? Like the text, I shall begin with the evidence that "the days are evil." What is evil about the ways we spend our days? Then I shall pick up the beat, ending in a more hymnic, lyrical, doxological note. My purpose will be not so much to argue or to reason as to proclaim, to sing, to affirm what is there, to enlighten. The hymn fragment of 5:14 will be my concluding doxological assertion. The point: Our time is redeemed when our eyes are opened and we see that God is present in our time.

A SERMON SYNOPSIS

Ephesians 5:14-20

"The days are evil." And what else is new? I'm not talking about spectacular, cosmic evil. The writer of Ephesians seems to have in mind a more banal, unimaginative brand of evil: drunkenness, debauchery, fornication (5:3). This is the petty, bit-by-bit self-destruction in which we indulge—a hardening liver, a swimming head, a grubby little affair on the side and a weekend escapade. These are symptoms of a deeper malaise. Our lives are a confused, disordered, pointless reeling from one mistake to the next. It's not that we are intentionally bad; we're just foolish. Such is the time in which we live.

"Make the most of time," says today's text. And what does that mean? Keep busy and move fast? We middle-class, Protestant work ethic, upward mobility achievers know all about that. Drunkenness and debauchery are not our particular brands of sin. For many of us, we are "drunk" with activities, busyness, things to do and places to be, carpools with the kids, meetings and more. That's our way of "making the most of time"—fill time, use time, kill time, keep moving, don't stop, don't look back. The clock keeps ticking and we keep plodding on.

How many of you are not really here at this moment, but
have already, in your mind, moved on to Monday morning at the office and the lists of things to do next week? Why waste these precious minutes in anything so pointless as worship? Keep moving, don’t stop, don’t think, don’t let time catch you.

Therefore, “making the most of time” in these “evil days” often means falling prey to the very evil we deplore: foolishly filling our days with harried, meaningless busyness, crowding our boring time with chatter, loud music, humming machines, and the sounds of our quickening footsteps racing down empty corridors leading—where?

What’s needed, I suppose, is some way not simply to fill time or to kill time these days but to fulfill time, to redeem time. “Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”

What is the will of the Lord for these days, these humdrum, harried, evil days? What are we supposed to do? More to the point of this passage, what is the Lord doing with this time?

These past few Sundays, we’ve looked with the writer of Ephesians at God’s work in the world. It’s a bold, cosmic vision that’s presented here. In our time, in our place, in this dark, foolish, debauched creation, God has come, says Ephesians. Now there is light entering darkness, now walls are crashing down, now nobodies are becoming somebodies, now the song, now the shout: In Christ, our time is now God’s time, God’s good time.

Our days need not be frantically filled with our busyness, our self-help techniques for salvation, our attempts to make time count for something. This world is the place of God’s redemptive work. This time is God’s.

These days are evil and pointless only insofar as we are blind to God’s presence among us. So in these days, we’ve got to get wise. We’ve got to take care how we walk, make the most of our time by keeping time with God. Here, in our poor little church, in our ordinary town, among everyday folk like you and me, God is present. That changes everything.

So what are we to do? How are we to make the most of God’s present time? That’s a question which can be answered
in each of our lives only by looking at how we now live our lives, by asking, “How am I wasting, or killing, God's time?” You may then decide to order your days differently, you may decide to live your life this Monday morning in a different way. You may decide to stop allowing the unimportant things to crowd out the really important times in your life. Surely that would be wisdom indeed, for us all.

But for now, for this hour of worship, perhaps the best we could do is simply to join with these brothers and sisters of the past and sing; to defy this sad, cynical world by daring to "make melody to the Lord with all your heart," to give a shout of thanks for God's saving presence in our time, even ours.

On a humdrum ordinary day like this one, with headlines like the ones in this morning's Greenville News, with all the foolish ways we mess up our lives, you'd be surprised at the difference a doxology could make. In the midst of praising God and giving thanks for this time, we find our time redeemed, transformed.

So there you are, with a list of twenty things to do before noon, and the phone ringing off the hook, and somebody needing an order yesterday that you don't have today. . . .

Or there you are with soggy cornflakes at breakfast and all your chores done by nine and the whole day before you with not one thing important to be done. . . .

Or there you are, sitting in church, quiet moments filling with a thousand suppressed thoughts, guilt feelings rushing in upon you, so filling your head that you can't half-worship for being reminded of what a mess your life is in. . . .

And you sing. You dare, in spite of your time, you dare to see this world as God is making it to be. God is here. You see yourself as somehow caught up in the mystery of it all. You give thanks for that near presence and in so doing you wake up, arise, get wise, light floods in, you become filled with the Spirit. On that day, in that time, your time becomes God's time.

Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light.
HOMILETICAL RESOURCES

Other homiletical possibilities. Whatever the preacher does with this text, it is important that he take it as a whole rather than seizing upon an individual verse and preaching it out of context. The ethical injunctions must be preached as implications of (baptismal?) enlightenment (5:14).

A preacher might reach back into 5:3-14 and develop the "children of light" motif if the doxological motif appears to be unpromising.

SUNDAY, AUGUST 29, 1982

Exegesis and Exposition of Ephesians 6:10-20

A. Establish the text. The division of the text in the lectionary appears logical, beginning with "Finally" (6:10). In verse 12a we again confront the variation between manuscripts on whether it is to be "we" or "you." "We" is probably the original reading, pointing to a possible liturgical origin of this portion of the text. "We" is to be preferred as the more difficult reading. "Of the gospel" in 6:19b is not found in some key manuscripts, but most translators agree that it probably belongs to the original text. There being no other significant variants, we can accept the text as it is. Perhaps the text is better divided as 6:10-18, and yet 19-20 uses Paul as an example of one who was armed and one who endured in the manner being urged by 10-18.

B. Detailed study of the text. Vs. 10: "remaining time," or "finally." Perhaps the author has a limited period of time in mind, an eschatological perspective. Or perhaps this is simply a final summary at the end of the book. Could be "from now on," which would suggest a prolonged battle.

Vs. 10: "be strong." (Compare Eph. 3:16, Col. 1:11, Phil. 4:13.) Suggests that power and fortification come from the outside rather than from inner resources.

Vs. 11a: "whole armor." Markus Barth argues that panoplia should be rendered "splendid armor" or "radiant," even "terrifying," rather than simply "whole" or "complete."
Vs. 11b: "that you may be able to stand." The word *dynamia* implies the presence of power to do something.

Vs. 12a: "contend against" or "wrestle." A word derived from hand-to-hand combat.

Vs. 12b: "principalities, against the powers." Principalities and powers are the tangible, institutional, social structures of the world which are subject to the death and Resurrection of Christ. They seem invincible, but they are not. A frequent Pauline theme.

Vs. 13c: "and having done all, to stand." Is the author talking about preparation for combat or the actual victory? Probably the former.

Vs. 14b: "girded." Can mean both protected by a sword and to buckle on a sword.

Vs. 15b: "the gospel of peace." How paradoxical is this mention of peace in the midst of preparations for combat! Commentators speculate that it is the peace of the Christ which enables the saints to resist the principalities and powers.

Vs. 17: Exactly what is meant by "salvation" (future hope or present possession?) and how the word of God is the "sword of the Spirit" cannot be determined in this context. Must resist the temptation to allegorize this passage further.

Some general observations after study of this text: I detect three main parts here: (11-13) description of God's power to arm us in order that we may contend against the principalities and powers (14-17), listing of the six armaments which compose the armor of God (note that they are mostly defensive armaments), and a final warning to be vigilant in prayer and bold in proclamation (18-20).

My modern sensibilities are a bit offended by the use of military images to defend the "gospel of peace." The image is one of Caesar's soldiers putting on armor for combat. And yet, in Matt. 12:22-32 and elsewhere, Jesus is depicted as bringing not peace but a sword. It may be important to note that Ephesians uses the martial image in a mostly defensive role. The soldiers here are not crusaders, not participants in a holy war; they are given gifts to enable them to hold their
ground. Paul's own imprisonment is given as an example of this defensive tactic. (6:20).

There is no call for a church victory or righteous crusade. Nor is there a call to summon up personal, inner strength. God is the victor, not the church. And yet, Ephesians would certainly contend, based on this text, that strong resistance against evil is one of the marks of the church.

C. Read the text again. We are obviously dealing with a church against the world, a church fighting for its survival in the midst of external hostility. How can that be related to a church full of solid citizens and two members of the city council?

“For we are not contending against flesh and blood” (vs. 12). The foes of the church are stronger, more subversive, more organized and invincible than mere people. It is as if the foes were universal, even cosmic in their power. So we need to be honest about what we’re up against and get ready to defend our ground.

I can see the text preached in El Salvador or Chile. But to preach it in Greenville, South Carolina, could either lead to deceit or delusion. Who is attacking us anymore? Who has been put in chains around here lately? In what ways do the saints at Northside Church need to persevere and against whom?

Some type of hermeneutical “jump” must be made. We are not the same church to which these words were addressed. Christians are fighting for their lives elsewhere in the world, but not here. Perhaps this text, by implication, shows how complacent and accommodating our church has become. Perhaps, but that is not its main intention. Its intention, as I see it, is to be honest about what early Christians were up against and to urge them to be equipped to withstand the hostile forces. It was written, the author wants to say, by someone who, even then, was in chains.

D. The theme of the sermon in one sentence: To be in the church is to be in the middle of a kind of war; therefore, we must allow God to strengthen us so that we will be able to stand firm in the battle.

E. How shall I say it? I decide to follow the central metaphor
of the text and risk using the martial imagery in my sermon. I will be guided by the question which I asked in my reading of the text: In what ways do the saints at Northside Church need to persevere and against whom? I begin my preparation for the actual writing of the sermon by listing all the ways we might be defeated, lose heart, and give up in our life as the church today. My hermeneutical assumption is that every church which tries to be the church is "persecuted," in some form or another—even though the brand of persecution we suffer may be subtle, indirect and quiet. It is rough to be led to jail for what you believe. But we know from firsthand experience that it is also rough to be ignored or ridiculed for what you believe. The purpose of the sermon is to strengthen the saints to endure whatever kinds of persecution contemporary "principalities and powers" may offer them.

A SERMON SYNOPSIS

There you are. Sunday morning and you drag out of bed. The kids are scolded and then dressed. You finally get everyone in the car and head to church. On your way you see neighbors in their bathrobes scurrying out from their Sunday cocoons to retrieve the newspaper, then return to their beds. Other, more adventurous neighbors are hitching up their boats and trailers, putting the finishing touches on their camping gear, or preparing their hang gliders, parachutes, dirt bikes, backpacks, elephant rifles, or whatever else it is that active people do on Sundays. But one thing you notice as you drive to church this Sunday—more and more of your neighbors are sitting this one out. Even in your neighborhood, even in "In God we trust" America, you are beginning to feel more like a member of a minority faith. Even here at Northside, in our fancy, air-conditioned sanctuary, even on a lazy summer Sunday like this one, you get the odd feeling that we're becoming a countercultural group, this church. Thumb through a magazine, go to a movie, switch on the TV, chat with your next-door neighbors as they head for their condominium at
the beach, and you get the impression that the world is marching to a different drummer, buying a different set of goods. Let the church dare to question national policy, or our economic system, or the life-style of the stars in People magazine, and the church quickly finds who is running the show. And it's not Jesus.

I do not mean to say that we North American Christians are in any way suffering the persecution which our Christian brothers and sisters may be suffering elsewhere. None of us is paying in blood for this faith. And yet, even here, there is a price. The materialism, narcissism, militarism, commercialism—a host of "principalities and powers"—tempt us, mock us, sometimes subdue us. We're not fighting the same battle as the Ephesians—no totalitarian Caesar is on our backs, no bloody persecutions for us. And yet, we are locked in a sort of struggle. It's tough to pay for one's faith in blood. And yet it's also tough to be ignored, ridiculed, dismissed by one's culture, a culture which is not, on the whole, willfully unbelieving. It's simply too self-consumed, too jaded to make the effort to believe or disbelieve.

I was talking with my friend, the rabbi. He was telling me how tough it is to be a Jew in Greenville. "We don't trust this place," he said. "We don't expect any support or favors. If our kids are going to grow up Jewish, we'll have to make them into Jews; nobody will do it for us. So we're always saying to our kid, 'That's fine for everybody else, but not for you. You're a Jew.'"

I told him he wouldn't believe me, but as I talk to many of you who have young children, I increasingly hear the same thing. Increasingly we tell our children, "That's fine for everybody else, but not for you. You're a Christian."

The world is giving us fewer and fewer breaks. There will be no government subsidies for the church, no engraved invitations to important state dinners, no free passes to the all-star game. We're not in control anymore—if we ever really were.

Now we're just trying to hold on, stand firm, keep our story straight, keep our values clear. We shall have to be more
intentional about who we are, more careful to give people the equipment they need to discern true from false, light from darkness, death from life. The world will defeat or co-opt the weak ones, the ones who have no compelling vision, no armor. So pray for us. And pray for me, that I may be bold in proclaiming the gospel, faithful in equipping you saints.

Other homiletical possibilities. The way of Christ is not for the fainthearted. Paul's own ministry proved this. But God gives us the gifts we need for the fight. The preacher may wish to approach the martial image a bit differently than I do in my sermon. Some commentators believe that the "whole armor" includes offensive as well as defensive arms. How does the word of God encourage us to fight the forces of evil actively? In a rather passive period, when the church appears to be withdrawing into itself, does this text suggest a more activist posture than I have portrayed?

PASTORAL APPLICATION

Throughout my study and proclamation of the foregoing texts, I hope the reader sensed the continuous dialogue between a pastor and the Scripture. No effective pastor draws lines between when he or she is a pastor and a preacher. But perhaps a few specific suggestions are in order concerning ways these Epistle lections might relate to aspects of ministry other than preaching.

As I mentioned, although all Scripture is implicitly ecclesial—that is for the church—Ephesians is explicitly so. Here is a word to the church about a faith which is primarily a way of life together among Christ's cherished ones. How this word challenges many of our current notions of being Christian!

For many, pastoral care is one-to-one, psychologically oriented, value-neutral, emotion-centered counseling. Documents like Ephesians remind me that one of the unique gifts which the church brings to the task of caring for troubled or growing persons is the church itself. The support we offer is
not primarily individual, situational, or professionally ministerial. We offer the resources of the Body.25

Modern pop therapies urge people to develop a “positive self-image.” But the church proclaims a way of life where one is made royalty by the action of God in Christ. The pastoral concern of Ephesians is to support these chosen ones in their vocation. It knows that an individual Christian’s maturity (4:13-14) is the gift of the shared ministry of the church as a whole.

Ephesians 4:11-16 leads me to ask, “How might my church look, what structures might we develop, to enable all the saints to use their gifts in the task of mutual edification and support?” Is the pastor the only one engaged in pastoral care?

If the pastoral concern of Ephesians is basically ecclesial in scope, so is its ethics. (See note 12.) Lately, we have not heard much about falsehood, anger, stealing, evil talk, and slander in our church (4:25-32). These basic, everyday, communal virtues are no less important because they are out of fashion. As we liberal, mainline churches tackle the great systematic, societal sins, Ephesians reminds us that our public evil begins at home. The first, tough ethical task of the church is to discipline itself and cultivate those virtues in its life whereby the world might see the power of Christ’s saving work in the quality of our life together.

Recently at Northside Church, a meeting was held to discuss our church’s support of a number of charitable projects in our city. As far as I could tell, people were in favor of the projects. But the discussion that night was so full of cynical remarks, accusations, and petty innuendo that the chairperson was on the verge of tears. We had gone about the task of charity in a most uncharitable manner. Honesty is a fine virtue (4:25), but so are kindness and graciousness (4:31-32).

Ephesians, with all of its concern for getting along well in the church, reminds me that charity does begin at home. While Christian ethics is more than a simple matter of kindness and respect for one another. It includes such simple acts as learning to act like brothers and sisters in the church. It
may be tougher to love the person next to me in the pew than the person across the ocean. If I can’t love those whom I have seen, how shall I love those whom I have not seen?

The church has little right to speak to the outside world unless our world in the church is ordered according to our convictions. How does Northside Church honor the poor and the powerless? How well do we speak the truth in love? As Stanley Hauerwas says (in unfortunately sexist language) “the church’s primary responsibility, her first political act, is to be herself. . . . The church does not have a social ethic, but rather is a social ethic. That is, she is a social ethic inasmuch as she functions as a criteriological institution—that is, an institution that has learned to embody the form of truth that is charity as revealed in the person and work of Christ.”

Finally, Ephesians believes that the church must know who it is before it can tell the world what it is. As suggested in the last sermon in the series, the contemporary American church increasingly finds itself in a defensive posture—against the world.

As a pastor of a local church, I hear more folk asking questions of Christian identity. Who are we? Where are the necessary lines between the church and the world? How can we live in the world without being taken captive by the world? In answering these questions, Christian education must have more substance than polite, middle-class liberal values. In a practical sense, in our congregation this has meant that we must take more care in our pre- and postbaptismal training. We have decided that we must be intentional about making Christians. The world will not do it for us. Matters so mundane as how we manage our time, how we guide our children in watching television, how we guard against waste and overconsumption in our homes have all become matters of concern for our congregation in recent days. We find that we must increasingly discipline ourselves in accordance with explicitly Christian values. We must do more careful thinking about what it means to be Christians here and now. We will either equip the saints here, or they will lose their way amidst the world.
So in a great sense, Ephesians is a "Pastoral Epistle." Present pastoral concerns are increasingly close to the major concerns of this letter. Come, let the preacher be bold in speaking these words of encouragement and discipline to the contemporary church so that the pastor might equip the saints as they grow in every way into Christ.

NOTES

1. This was a major theme of my Integrative Preaching: The Pulpit at the Center (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981).
4. I am indebted to a number of interpreters for this method, though they may not recognize themselves in it. James Sanders' "Hermeneutics," Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Supplementary Volume (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976), pp. 406 ff. and God Has a Story Too (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979) started me on the road to taking the audience of a text more seriously. Fred Craddock's "inductive method" of preaching, which he describes in As One without Authority (Abingdon Press, 1971) and Overhearing the Gospel (Abingdon Press, 1979), was most helpful to me. I was pleased to see that my approach to the text and context closely parallels Craddock's article "Occasion-Text-Sermon," in Interpretation 35 (January 1981): 59-71.
6. John C. Kirby, Ephesians, Baptism, and Pentecost (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1968). Among those works which examine the problem of authorship of Ephesians are: F. C. Synge, St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians (London: S.T.C.K., 1941), where the author claims that Ephesians was written by Paul; Colossians was not.
7. Markus Barth, Ephesians (The Anchor Bible), vols. 34 and 34A (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1974), states the belief that Paul wrote the epistle toward the end of his life. It thus represents his mature thought addressing the gentle Christians in Ephesus. The strange diction occasionally found in Ephesians stems from the numerous hymns and catechetical materials which he quotes more extensively here than in his earlier writings (vol. 34, pp. 3-50). Edgar J. Goodspeed, The Meaning of Ephesians (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1933) and C. L. Mitton, The Epistle to the Ephesians (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951) put forth a detailed case against Pauline authorship. Kirby shows that the case against Pauline authorship is not as convincing as was once thought. Contemporary preachers can profit from a reading of John Calvin's Sermons on the Epistle to the Ephesians (Edinburgh: Banner and Truth Trust, 1973). It is fascinating to watch Calvin struggle with the great themes of the epistle.
8. Kirby says that the greater part of Ephesians 4-6 is "A Manual of Discipline for Christian Communities." P. 143.
10. Unfortunately, when William Barclay comments on Ephesians, he universalizes the whole epistle and thus ignores its specific audience: "Let us again remind ourselves of the central thought of the whole letter. In this world there is nothing but discord, disharmony and disunity. Nation is divided against nation, and man against man, class is divided against class, and in man himself there goes on an inner and an

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unceasing battle between the higher and the lower part of his nature." This is true, but it is not the truth of Ephesians. This letter is addressed to the church, not the world or humanity in general. The Letters to the Galatians and the Ephesians (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958), p. 161.

12. A. C. Kingsley warns: "In spite of the lofty doctrine and the great claims that it makes for the gospel, in spite of the vision of a unified mankind that we find in chapters 1-3, it would not be difficult for a group that practiced the ethical teaching of Ephesians, and nothing beyond it, to degenerate into a mutual adoration society with little or no responsibility to or for the world around it" (Ephesians, p. 142). In our preaching from Ephesians, we must take this warning seriously. At the same time we must also take seriously the present context in which there has been little interest in "in house," ecclesial identity or ethics in recent theology and preaching.

Bruce M. Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament (New York: United Bible Societies, 1971), was helpful in this stage of my study.

I therefore disagree with the commentator in the Interpreter's Bible, vol. 10, p. 666, who, in discussing verse 5, says that "Faith is the inward disposition of the heart, baptism the outward sign." Where is that implied here? The writer of Ephesians shows little interest in "inward disposition" except as the result, consequence, or gift of objective acts like our call and our baptism. Let us resist the modern penchant to subjectivize our sacraments, our faith, and our ethics.

See Barth, Ephesians, vol. 34A, pp. 478-84 for a discussion of the problem of punctuation in 4:12.

I am indebted to Fred Craddock's "Occasion-Text-Sermon," p. 66, for reminding me again of the importance of achieving a congruence between not only what the sermon says and what the text said, but also how the sermon says it and how the text says it.

(Portland: Fortress Press, 1970). To some degree Craddock also develops this attention to form in Overhearing the Gospel and As One Without Authority. "Preaching is truly biblical when (a) the Bible governs the context of the sermon and when (b) the function of the sermon is analogous to that of the text." Kock, The Bible in the Pulpit, p. 106 (emphasis added).


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See Baets' discussion of the stripping off of clothing metaphor in Ephesians, vol. 34A, pp. 560-63.


AN INCARNATIONAL MODEL
FOR TEACHING IN THE CHURCH

ROBERT W. WINGARD

Education is not merely an adjunct to ministry but is integral to the church's very nature. And teachers are asked to embody the Christian revelation as well as reflect on it.

The teaching ministry of the church is, like counseling or preaching or any other function of ministry, broad and general in scope. It occurs not just in the structured setting of a classroom, but in everything the Christian community does. How, then, are we to define and evaluate the teaching ministry of the church so that it can be made more effective? How are we to understand what is happening so that we can be more intentional about our teaching and learning? Can we develop a model for teaching in the church that is theologically sound and pedagogically effective?

Whatever the setting, certain elements need to be present in an authentic ministry of teaching. We can call attention to these elements by describing an incarnational model for teaching in the church.

First, there must be a teacher. Someone must function in the role of teacher whether the setting is a classroom or simply a shared experience. It will become clear why this is so as we describe an incarnational model.

The teacher in the Christian church has a twofold function: the transmission of the tradition and the edification of the...
believer. There is therefore a dual focus: the content of the lesson and the personhood of the student. The teacher seeks to bring about an encounter between the two so that not only is the student informed by the lesson, but also the lesson is informed by the student. Christian education breaks down when either of these is neglected. If the focus becomes solely the lesson, dogmatism sets in and the dangers of unreality and irrelevance arise. If the focus becomes solely the student, the integrity of the Christian revelation tends to become compromised and eventually diluted to the point of powerlessness.

The teacher in the local church functions much like a theologian. The theologian seeks to correlate contemporary life and the revealed truth of the Christian faith.

It is not the task of theology, not even of dogmatic theology, to tell people what they must believe or to impose by sleight of hand an ancient world view or an arcane language upon an unwary public. Theological pronouncements derive neither from Olympus nor from Sinai as thunderbolts from heaven but rather proceed from the earnest and open inquiry of perplexed human beings who operate on the assumption that decisive clues to the meaning of our life on this earth are present in the Christian mythos.¹

The theological task in the local church is to provide an awareness of the backdrop of the Christian “mythos” against which contemporary life can be examined and understood.

Mythos is used here to designate that set of symbols, rituals, narratives, and assertions which, taken together, announce and mediate the presence of the sacred so as to represent, orient, communicate, and transform existence in the world for a community of persons.²

Effective Christian education involves doing theology. The teacher makes possible the description and expression and interpretation of the inherent meaning in the activities and concerns of the Christian community. Teacher and students become theologians as they bring together the data of present experience with the record of the Christian revelation. The
task of teaching in the local church is fundamentally a theological task.

We have mentioned two essential elements in an incarnational model for teaching in the church: a Christian teacher and the Christian mythos. In an incarnational model these two are bound inseparably together. Incarnational theology calls for the teacher to embody the tradition, to be what he or she teaches, at least for purposes of the role-playing dynamics of the learning process. It is difficult for a person to respond to an abstract idea or an unembodied concept of a static record of revelation. The most meaningful interaction, and therefore the greatest potential for learning, takes place between person and person.

Education is not primarily ministry because of what is taught but because of the nature of the education process itself. Perhaps we have paid too much attention to the content of teaching without realizing that the teaching relationship is the most important factor in the ministry of teaching.¹

It must be noted, however, that personal interaction does not itself constitute effective Christian education. Incarnational theology does not imply that the truth of God is simply broadcast into the world. The incarnate presence of God in the world retains its identity by focusing itself in a specific participant in the world: namely, Jesus of Nazareth as an individual and subsequently the church as the corporate body of Christ. The experiences, adventures, words, actions, and encounters—that is, the personal history—of first Jesus and then the church become the identifiable focus of the presence of God in the world. The interaction of the persons in a classroom situation with the Word of God is therefore accomplished, not by just any kind of personal interaction, but specifically by personal interaction in which one or more of the persons is being the body of Christ.

The critical factor by which we are to evaluate both the content and the process of an education experience in the church is the Christian revelation itself. In Christian education we are not left at the mercy of the loudest, the
longest, or the most logical-sounding speaker. We have a reference point that is not so much “the last word” as it is the compass that keeps our conversational journey more or less on course as the learning experience proceeds.

See to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily (Col. 2:8, 9).

Although the critical reference point in Christian teaching is not simply the Bible, any consideration of the teaching function in ministry must come to grips with Scripture. What are we to do with the Bible? How is the Bible to be understood and interpreted?

There are those in the church who adopt a hermeneutical principle of divine dictation that amounts to biblicism. Such persons, in an act of spiritual violence, exalt the Bible to the position of a divine book to be worshipped and obeyed, thus creating an idol of it. They stand not under the Bible to be instructed by it, but on the Bible to be supported by it. Standing on the Bible means claiming divine authority for one’s own beliefs by quoting Scripture to support those beliefs. Standing under the Bible means remaining open to the possibility that God might redirect one’s belief and decisions by coming to him or her in the words of Scripture.

The hermeneutical principle that seems to serve best for an incarnational model of teaching is “freedom.” Ernst Käsemann is a leading proponent of a hermeneutical principle of freedom for interpreting Scripture in the church today. Käsemann suggests that freedom is the heart of the religious faith of Jesus and his church.

Where freedom is not growing, Jesus has not yet arrived on the scene . . . where freedom is not growing the Church is not really present even if the Bible is being defended with horns and teeth. . . . The whole Gospel can be summed up like this: Jesus brought freedom wherever he came.

Käsemann argues that the historical Jesus was “both devout and liberal.” He was “devout” because his commit-
ment to obedience to God and his participation in a personal relationship to God were obvious to friends and enemies alike. But he was "liberal" because he dealt with the law with common sense and reason, and because he put love for persons ahead of religious considerations, doctrines, acts, and rituals.

He was a "liberal" because in the name of God and in the power of the Holy Spirit he interpreted Moses, the Scripture, and dogmatics from the point of view of love, and thereby allowed devout people to remain human and even reasonable.6

It is in this light that we are to understand that Pauline distinction between pneuma (spirit) and gramma (letter). By gramma Paul does not mean simply the formal words of Scripture, but the basic attitude that "the divine law is the sum of its individual injunctions."6 Pneuma, on the other hand, is to know God's will as a child knows the heart and will of its father and therefore hears his words in the enlightening context of love. Granna produces a piety of merit and achievement; pneuma produces "the righteousness of faith."

A hermeneutic of freedom looks upon the Bible as an earthly book, just as Jesus was an earthly man, speaking to us as earthlings about earthly concerns. Its divinity and its ultimacy are to be understood incarnationally. God is "hidden" in it and reveals himself in surprising ways through it. A very earthly story about a woman searching for a lost coin becomes a profound statement about the nature of a caring God. The rescue of a woman about to be stoned to death for the sin of adultery becomes an incarnation event of the grace of God. Again and again we are surprised that God can be present in the most ordinary human experience without substantially altering its earthly character. The ultimate experienced in the ordinary—this is incarnation, and this is the mode in which God appears to us in Jesus, in the Scriptures, and in the church.

A hermeneutic of freedom translates into a concern for liberation in human life. The Scriptures describe a liberating God delivering the Israelites from Egypt, delivering them
from hunger, from homelessness, from nothingness, from fear, and from all the other enslavements common to human beings everywhere in every generation. The Scriptures describe an incarnate God in Jesus liberating individuals from sin and death, from guilt and despair, from hostility and alienation. The Scriptures are therefore to be understood and interpreted in the light of a concern for liberation and freedom.

Because the Scriptures describe this kind of common human experience interpreted in the light of the Christian mythos in the first generation of the Christian community, they can become meaningful to us in the present generation of that same community.

... what undergirds both text and interpretation is a kind of human experience of life (Dilthey), which provides the basis for the possibility of mutuality of meaning. Whatever its antiquity and peculiarity, the text is authored by another human being and brings that person's experience of life and world to expression. While the horizon of meaning in which the text stands and which it brings to expression may be more or less remote from our own, it still stems from the experience of a life and world which, as human, must be in some respects akin to our own.

The Scriptures become the authoritative base for grounding all Christian teaching because the Scriptures describe the nature and substance of the Christian revelation in its incarnational expression in the first generation of the Christian community. That substance is love and hope. The presence of the incarnate God means the presence of love and hope in human life.

An incarnational model for teaching in the church involves, then, a third essential element: concern for freedom and liberation in contemporary life. Many contemporary theologians point to Jesus as a liberator, a man for others, a revolutionary who identified with the poor and the oppressed, one who overturned power structures by refusing to accept their authority over him as a human being. Liberation
theologians argue that the very essence of the gospel is this liberating work of Christ.

Christianity begins and ends with the man Jesus—his life, death and resurrection. . . . Christology is made the point of departure.9

Jesus' work is essentially one of liberation. Becoming a slave himself, he opens realities of human existence formerly closed to man.10

In Christ, God enters human affairs and takes sides with the oppressed. Their suffering becomes his; their despair, divine despair.11

The task of the teacher in an incarnational model is to focus the student's attention upon the questions: "What is God doing in the world today? Where is God to be found and followed in contemporary life?" Light is shed on this question for us by the answer which Jesus gave to the disciples of John the Baptist when they asked if he were the Christ, or should they look for another. Jesus answered:

"Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the poor have good news preached to them" (Luke 7:22).

Where is God to be found in contemporary life? The teacher should focus upon those places where freedom and liberation are being found, or perhaps more precisely where these things are being sought.

There is a tendency on the part of reverent and well-meaning Christian believers to abort the incarnation by limiting God's self-emptying into human existence. We somehow feel it inappropriate and almost blasphemous that God should suffer and bleed and die. We therefore use a variety of logical and philosophical methods to soften and limit the stark reality of God's death on the cross. Jürgen Moltmann argues that in so doing we cut the very heart out of the Christian gospel. The good news is first of all that God is love, not omnipotent or all-glorious or any other such object of exaltation above the world.
For a God who is incapable of suffering is a being who cannot be involved. Suffering and injustice do not affect him. And because he is so completely insensitive, he cannot weep, for he has no tears. But the one who cannot suffer cannot love either. So he is also a loveless being.

The crucified God is a God who abandons exemptions and plunges completely into the morass of human life. God experiences not only the fact of physical death, but also the apprehensions and fears and feelings of utter helplessness and despair that accompany the fact of death. God whose very essence is love expresses that love by deciding to participate fully in our lives as one of us. That participation, which is what we mean by “incarnation,” is at the point of utmost humanness, which is the limitation of human life expressed in sin and death.

The focus upon liberation and freedom in contemporary life is thus an essential element in an incarnational model for Christian teaching. This element has both a social and a personal dimension. The social dimension is seen in such matters as social problems and politics. How are we to understand and deal with the issues of the day? This is an essential part of the curriculum for Christian education. The pietistic tendency to separate religious concerns from general human concerns is a form of resistance to an incarnational understanding of the gospel.

We have said that God is love and that the gospel centers upon love when God becomes involved in the limitations of human life. We must now assert that God is also hope. By hope we do not mean an innocuous kind of wishful thinking. Christian hope is realistic. Those who hope accept the hard facts of reality, yet believe in the future. God comes to the Christian, not out of the past as one who once helped others, nor out of the present as one who sympathizes with us in our plight, but out of the future as one who promises that the kingdom is at hand. Justice and peace and brotherhood already exist in God's future, a future that belongs to us but is not yet possessed by us except in preliminary form. God's future is presented to us in the form of “impossible
possibilities” (Reinhold Niebuhr) or fragmentary suggestions. We lay hold of that future by faith, and according to our faith it is given to us. We experience a fragmentary moment of mercy or kindness, and we believe that in God’s future, mercy and kindness are realistic possibilities. We see through a glass darkly, and we know that clear vision of the kingdom is already a reality in that future out of which God comes to us. This faith in the future as the mode of God’s being makes it possible to say, “God is hope,” in the same sense in which it is true to say, “God is love.”

God is not present in the same way that the things in the world are at hand. God, like his kingdom, is coming and only as the coming one, the future, is he already present. . . . Understood as the coming one and as the power of the future, God is experienced as the ground of liberation, and not as the enemy of freedom.14

Moltmann develops what he calls “political theology.”15 By this he means a strategy for receiving the kingdom, a means of rendering the present structures of society as “not yet” the kingdom, and a call to participate in preliminary ways in the kingdom that is coming. Political theology calls for a clear understanding of the social concerns of contemporary life and a passionate commitment to the arrival of the kingdom of God with regard to these concerns.

One cannot grasp freedom in faith without hearing simultaneously the categorical imperative: One must serve through bodily, social, and political obedience the liberation of the suffering creation out of real affliction.16

This brings us to a fourth and final essential element for an incarnational model of teaching in the church. We have mentioned the personhood of the teacher, the integrity of the Christian mythos, and the concern for the issues and currents of contemporary life. The fourth element is the personhood of the student or students.

What is the content of the Christian faith that is to be taught? Is it the Bible, church history, dogma and doctrine? Yes, but incarnational theology takes seriously the notion that
God is really present in the lives of human persons. While the focus of God's presence is in the body of Christ (Jesus and the church), the reality of that presence is everywhere in human experience. The reality of the presence is not limited to its focus, which means for Christian teaching that the experience and thoughts and feelings of the student are part of the curriculum for Christian education. The teacher should seek not only to pour the Christian revelation into the student, but also to draw the Christian revelation out of the student. The student is a well that taps the very same groundwater that the Bible and the church tap—that is, the groundwater of the incarnate presence of God. When the student talks about his or her own experience of hope and love, what is being talked about may be in fact the Christian faith.

An incarnational model for teaching seems to offer solutions to certain basic theological problems that exist in almost every local congregation of Christians today. We shall mention two of the perennial problems and indicate briefly how an incarnational model for teaching deals with each of them.

First, there is the problem of theological pluralism. It is to be expected that in a society that is culturally, politically, and ideologically pluralistic, any Christian congregation will be pluralistic theologically. I did a study of my own congregation, which I suspect typifies most mainline Protestant congregations, and found theological pluralism to be a fact. Not only did the sum total of all four adult Sunday school classes surveyed show the full spectrum of beliefs from "fundamentalist" to "liberal" but also each of the four classes showed the full spectrum. It seems obvious to even the casual observer that pluralism is a fact.

Is pluralism a problem or is it an asset to Christian teaching in the church? In a didactic approach to teaching it is a problem because it makes it difficult to settle on the particular propositions and beliefs out of the Christian mythos that can be taught acceptably. On one hand the didactic teacher feels it necessary to be dogmatic and uncompromising; on the other hand the didactic teacher tends to reduce the mythos to its
lowest and least offensive form, simply omitting the particular dogmas or doctrines that will not be universally received by all members of the class.

In an incarnational approach to teaching, pluralism becomes not a problem but an asset. The style of incarnational theology is inductive and experiential. The greater the variety of thought and experience, the more exciting and helpful the learning event. An incarnational approach changes the theologizing process in the church from propositional theology to "doing theology." Students are encouraged to discover the presence of God, and therefore its inherent meaning, in the experiences and happenings of their own lives. Theology becomes not a body of traditions, but a style of thinking and an approach to life.

Second, there is the problem of theological hypocrisy. In every Christian congregation some degree of discrepancy exists between professed theology and operative theology. People tend to believe one thing and do another in the life of the church. Lip service and even mind service are paid to certain traditional beliefs, while actions suggest that this is not at all what is existentially believed. A classic example is the congregation that professes a belief in the "fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man" but excludes certain ethnic or cultural groups from its own fellowship.

One form of this problem is the attempt on the part of the church to separate itself from the world. There always seems to be sharp controversy in the church over "the social gospel versus the personal gospel." The church has a tendency to relate itself to one aspect of life only: the religious aspect. The didactic teacher then has the task of trying to bridge the gap between church and world. He or she must find some way to convince the student that the gospel is relevant to the issues and concerns of contemporary living. The teacher must deal adequately with what is sometimes called "the identity-involvement crisis." He or she must ask, "How can the church minister to the world without losing its own sense of special identity?"

These kinds of problems become less troublesome when an
incarnational model for teaching is employed. Gospel and contemporary life, church and world are brought together in one package as the curriculum for Christian education. We are asked to discover what we believe by examining what we do, and to cast our discoveries against the backdrop of Christian tradition. Coming at the process of teaching from the experiential end rather than the propositional end—in other words, doing theology—eliminates much of the problem of theological hypocrisy. It narrows the gap between professed theology and operative theology by reversing the flow of thought between the two. It develops sensitivity to the nature of the relationship between doing and believing.

The function of teaching has been a significant role of the Christian minister since the earliest days of the church. The ministry of teaching is carried out by laypersons toward each other in many ways in the life of the church. It is often the pastor, however, who must fulfill the role of primary teacher in the congregation. He or she has been given the theological training, the technical skills, and the ordained authority to be the resident theologian in the local church. He or she must see to it that the tradition is transmitted and the believer is edified. What shall we teach? An incarnational model seems to provide the best approach to the task of teaching in the contemporary church.

NOTES

2. Jennings, Theology, p. 2.
10. Cone, Black Theology, p. 351.
AN INCARNATIONAL MODEL

11. Cone, Black Theology, p. 36.


17. Jurgen Moltmann in The Crucified God, pp. 7-26, has an excellent discussion of the identity-involvement dilemma. He describes how several modern theologies have attempted to demonstrate the relevance of faith to the problems of society. Moltmann argues that when Christianity is understood as identification with the crucified Christ, identity and involvement become not contradictory but complementary.

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CHRISTIAN MISREADINGS OF BASIC THEMES IN THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES

WALTER HARRELSON

Religious faith "never ceases to be promise on the way to consummation, but it also never ceases to be promise still awaiting consummation."

This paper deals with a few basic themes in the Hebrew Bible that have often been misread by Christian interpreters. There is, of course, no single correct reading of the basic themes of the Bible, with any departure from the correct reading to be called a "misreading." However, some of the central understandings of what we Christians call the Old Testament seem to me often to have been subtly twisted and misinterpreted. The misreadings have rather frequently served polemical purposes within the Christian community, although they have not necessarily been malicious in their intent. These misreadings may have persisted because they were useful to Christian apologetics but should not be difficult to shed.1

GOD'S JUDGMENT ON ISRAEL

I have often thought of the probable effect upon Christian children of hearing Sunday after Sunday, in the Old Testament lessons, about the terrible acts of apostasy committed by the people of Israel. There never seems to have

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been a time when the people was not under assault for its gross iniquities, its ingratitude to a just, loving, and patient God, its blind persistence in whoring after other gods, and its apparent incapacity to hold fast to the covenant so graciously made between the community and God.

Scholars have pointed out the special nature of the prophetic attacks upon faithless Israel, showing that, although such assaults on a religious community by its own leaders are not unique to Israel, they are distinctive of Israel and are not to be found to the same extent or intensity in the literature of any other ancient Near Eastern people. One of the acknowledged glories of biblical religion is its insistence that the requirement of the covenant faith be adhered to in the whole of life. Amos sums it up memorably, showing that just because Israel is the people of God it must suffer more severely for its apostasy (3:2). Other prophets, narrators, and collectors of tradition expound the same theme. The history of Israel is written as a history of apostasy, with God continuing to come to the rescue of the people despite this persistence in sin.

Christian scholars know well that this is a theological judgment. Compared with its neighbors, Israel was certainly not such a reprehensible community. Quite the contrary is indicated by the legal material that is known from ancient times, the narratives portraying the restrictions on kingship, the overall concern for public righteousness, and the fact that the prophets had a forum within the community from which to speak. Empirically, the ancient Israelite community was not a bad community, and we know without doubt that the prophets were too sweeping in their indictments, if we think of the mere facts in the case. They spoke in such sweeping terms because they had such an exalted notion of the vocation of God's people in the world.

So much depended, for the health of Israel and of the nations, upon the righteousness and faithfulness of God's people. Various prophets put the matter in different ways, but there was wide agreement that it was catastrophic for Israel to betray the God of the covenant. They saw that the
renewal of life that came through the cult would not suffice adequately to renew the life of Israel, God's partner in covenant. Nothing would suffice except public and private justice. When historical blows fell, many persons found this testimony of history impressive and said so.

The prophets themselves, however, tended not to take pleasure in the realization of their prophecies. More often than not, they now turned to the question of how to make it possible for the people to bear the judgment of God. But they never ceased issuing reminders of God's just requirements, to which the people never measured up. In much of the literature, we can note the refusal of the people and its leaders to be cowed by the prophetic denunciations. Even God is called to account for the injustices suffered by God's people and for God's apparent indifference to its fate. There is one overarching theme through all of this, from the prophetic point of view: God's people may be relatively faithful to the covenant, but that will not suffice. The Israelites must be genuinely faithful. Like Abraham, they must be tam (complete, perfect).

Christians have often taken this theological summons and turned it into a flat, empirical judgment. Israel, they say, was from the very first disobedient to the divine law. While the Ten Commandments were being given atop the mountain, down in the valley the community was busy breaking them. Given a good land, Israel rejected God time after time for the gods of the land. Though they had fine judges, the Israelites insisted upon having a king. Never content with God's gifts, they became proud and ungovernable. God warned them and sent judgments upon them, including the scourge of warfare, and still they would not "shape up." And so it went on.

When we recognize that this is a flat misreading, we draw back. Actually, one of the abiding glories of the Hebrew Bible lies in its refusal to let the injustice of those within the community be ignored while the injustice of others is underscored. But Christian misreading is especially damaging because it tends to place this judgment of God upon them,
not on us. The people of the old covenant are seen as those who so persistently and perversely betrayed the covenant.

The result can well be that the Israelites' history comes to be read as one of failure: God tried to make a faithful people of them but failed. Theologically, of course, in such a perspective, every people, every individual, has failed God. When the matter is sketched simply, the distortion is obvious. How then can such a misreading persist? Perhaps it is because of other misreadings not unrelated to this one.

**THE RETURN TO JUDAH FROM BABYLON**

A second great theme, portrayed vividly in advance of the fact by the Second Isaiah, is Israel's return to the homeland from Babylonian captivity. Here, too, the reading of the record flatly and without reflection has resulted in a misreading. This whole extraordinary event and its aftermath came through as an anticlimax in much interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures, especially (but not exclusively) by Christians. The longing for Zion is known, but who believes that the returning exiles actually greeted Zion with joy? Second Isaiah could describe such joy in advance, but where are the interpreters who help to correct the false impression that the returning exiles were a joyless lot, not really a community within which much of religious significance would occur?

Zechariah speaks of a "day of small things" (4:10), and we believe him. Ezra the scribe sets out to give Torah afresh and to demand that the mixed marriages be annulled and the people of the covenant purify its life. It is assumed that Ezra’s spirit was the dominant one within this community. Haggai seems ready to fix glorious hopes upon Zerubbabel and to honor this descendant of David with a messianic title much too grand for him or for his times. The temple is held up for ridicule by some who remember the former one, and we all too readily join in the scoffing.⁴

All this may appear harmless enough, but once again this flat reading of the story can blind our eyes to the real import of
the Exile and the return from Exile. When the exiles returned they brought with them, almost certainly, the written story of Israel's pilgrimage under God's guidance, shaped and reshaped, collected and set down, pondered and repondered. Those who remained in Judah had not been idle either. There, the Book of Job may have been completed, the Book of Lamentations composed and edited, and perhaps a version of the so-called Deuteronomistic history and of the Book of Isaiah put together. And the exiles who returned brought their literary treasures, their hopes, their readiness to risk their very lives as they made their way back, entering a land still under foreign dominion, where their own claims would surely be disputed by those whose parents and grandparents had not gone into Exile.

Developments in the Second Temple periods up to the Christian era are viewed in the light of this flat reading of the early life of those returning from captivity. Ezra's action is presented one-sidedly as the imposition of a Torah as mere book, or as mere law upon the people. The law, according to Martin Noth, had become for postexilic Judaism an independent entity, loosed from its moorings in the previous vital cultic life centered in Judah and Jerusalem, where the role of the king and the hopes kept alive by the prophets had all worked together to make Torah a good and vital thing, rooted in the covenant faith. In the postexilic period there was a new concern for Sabbath observance and for separation from the peoples of the nations, lending itself to narrow separatism and legalism. The evidence to the contrary is not ignored by scholars, but it is often treated as a series of exceptions to the general situation. The books of Ruth and Jonah, often dated to this period, obviously tried but failed to penetrate the tendency to a narrow nationalism. Zechariah's and Second Zechariah's openness to foreigners (Zech. 2:11; 8:22-23; 14:16-21) stand also as exceptions, as do the remarkable series of images in Isaiah 56-66 and the almost incredible picture of Israel in Isaiah 19:23-25.

The postexilic period, in short, is understood as a time of serious spiritual decline. No great prophets speak, for
prophecy has declined or ceased (that despite the passages just mentioned or such a passage as Isaiah 58). Psalms composed during this and subsequent periods are inferior to the great psalms of the pre-exilic period. Some writers indeed show a great and almost mystic love for Torah (Psalms 1, 19b, 119), but they are clearly the exceptions.

This misunderstanding is serious. It is not without its reasons, for there are unmistakable indications of narrowness of outlook in some of the literature. On occasions, the future of Israel is portrayed chauvinistically (Israel reaps the benefits of faith in God at the expense of the hated foreign nations; God plunders the earth for the benefit of the people; the foreigners cringe before Israel or fawn upon it, etc.). However, there is no scholarly reason whatever to let those passages characterize the period, while all evidence on the other side is considered an exception. To do so is to misread one of the great themes of biblical religion: God’s gracious provision for the people’s return from Exile. God had chastened, but God had also begun to restore the fortunes of God’s own people, Israel.

It is wrong to say that the great prophets were no longer speaking when we know that at precisely this time their words were being sifted and edited, and the final collection was being made. It is also erroneous to suppose that the creative imagination was blunted at the time when the psalms of our Psalter were being revised, rearranged, and prepared for use both within the cult and beyond its narrow bounds.

The most serious effect of such a misreading is the subtle way in which it enables Christians to see a continuous decline in Israelite life and spirituality. Christianity then can be seen to enter the picture as Judaism “fails”—as though Christianity had not itself failed as well, and indeed as though every religion were not in its particular way a failure.

THE PROMISES OF THE PROPHETS

A third misreading has to do with the prophetic pictures of the Last Day and the way in which they have been
understood. This glorious series of pictures or visions of the consummation of God's work upon the earth are inexhaustible in their power and capacity to engender hope in generation after generation. These passages (such as Isa. 9:1-7; 11:1-9; 2:2-4; Mic. 5:1-5; 4:1-4; Zech. 9:9-12; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36 and 37; and the so-called Servant poems of Second Isaiah) challenge the interpreter and elude, I believe, any neat exposition.

The misreading centers not so much upon the content as upon the existential import that the texts probably had for those who believed that God was preparing the way for the consummation portrayed. When a substantial number of hearers believed in a new Exodus and re-entrance into the land of the promise; in a transfigured and glorified Zion of the last day; in a righteous and faithful ruler over all the earth; in a new covenant, a new heart and spirit, or a new heaven and earth, then such a belief itself became a part of the quality of the life of the believing community.

Christians have tended not to understand this existential dimension in the eschatology of Israel's prophets. Rudolf Bultmann wrote that the Israelite fixation upon historical fulfillment, the land of the promise, the cultic center in Jerusalem, and the covenant with a particular people doomed the religion of Israel to inescapable failure as a religion. Christianity, in contrast, is freed of these misplaced commitments to time and space and thus can become a universal religion.

I see a very fundamental difference between Judaism and Christianity in these particulars, but what seems a serious Christian misreading is the disposition to suppose that these images functioned only historically for the community of Israel. I believe that the new Exodus, the new ruler, the new Zion, the new covenant, etc., all bear the same kind of existential drawing power as the New Testament's portrayal of the coming reign of Christ. In advance of the consummation, there is already a consummation that is taking possession of the community committed to the truth of these visions. Unlike the Christian community, the community of
Israel does not claim that this day has dawned—but it is awaited, and as awaited reaches into the present and takes possession of us, and that is very much akin to what happens in the Christian community, for we certainly have to acknowledge that the rule of God on earth over all the powers of earth and heaven is coming about, not that it has come about for all eyes to see. The level and extent of the discerned anticipation of the end of the age differs within Judaism and Christianity, but both communities certainly know the reality of the consummation before the day of consummation. The longing for the messianic age is the deeper and the more bitter because we already taste its sweetness. The imperfections of life are the more dreadful because we are enabled to view life in its intended wholeness and savor something of its reality.

The result of leaving the eschatology of the Hebrew Scriptures entirely in the realm of the unfulfilled is that the Christian community almost inevitably claims too much for the fulfillment that it discerns in Jesus as the Christ. When the Hebrew Scriptures are left as the Book of the Promise and the New Testament becomes the Book of the Consummation, we know that something is fundamentally wrong. Is the faith of ancient Israel only anticipatory? Has it no standing other than as preparation for the faith of the Christian community? I take it as one important negative indication that we have misunderstood the Hebrew Scriptures if Christians claim that these Scriptures can only be understood in their intention by Christians. We cannot as Christians simply take the Bible of the Jews from their hands and say, "Sorry."

Religious faith of the biblical sort is always at once anticipatory and a claim about life in the divine presence already brought about. It never ceases to be promise on the way to consummation, but it also never ceases to be promise still awaiting consummation—otherwise, we enter either an apocalyptic or a thoroughly mystical religious world, where the two ages are either entirely successive or entirely disjoined. Biblical religion will not have either. The consummation is already changing the present age, for God is drawing us into that age to be, even as the coming age presses
backwards in time, out of the future, to seize the present day. Misreading of the eschatology of the Hebrew prophets can lead Christians to lose the sense of urgency that lies in that eschatology. I leave it for others to say whether the Jewish community might now and again, at least, have misread the intention of those glorious and mysterious texts. If the misreadings I have described were to be eliminated the millennium would probably not immediately come; but a good deal of fresh opportunity would have been opened up for Jews and Christians to discover together and at greater depth than now what distinguishes them from each other and what they hold in common.

NOTES
1. The most important recent literature dealing with the subject of the paper is reviewed by Dr. Eugene J. Fisher, secretariat for Catholic-Jewish relations of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. See his "Seminary Papers" of March 1981 under the title, "Priestly Formation and Catholic-Jewish Relations." The brochure is available from the National Catholic Educational Association, Suite 350, One Dupont Circle, Washington, DC 20036.
4. Note Psalm 44 for a particularly vivid instance.
Narrative methods reveal that Mark's story "is a weapon for tearing apart and tearing open our comfortable assurance that we are adequate disciples."

Both professors and preachers fragment the Gospels. The preacher preaches on a pericope, an isolated scene or parable or saying, and usually assumes that there is no need to look further than this pericope and its immediate context in order to do responsible biblical preaching. Biblical scholarship seems to support this assumption. Since the Gospels were composed of units of tradition which originally circulated separately, the original parts seem more important than the subsequent whole. To be sure, the Gospel writers have been recognized as theological interpreters of the Gospel tradition. To some extent each of them has a unified theological perspective. However, unity of theological perspective is something different from the unity of story. We are only beginning to rediscover each Gospel as a story which, like any other story, is meant to be read as a whole.¹

The preacher can profit from this rediscovery. When a story element is isolated from the story as a whole, it loses power and significance. Correspondingly, the rediscovery of the relation of the story element to the total story is a discovery of power and significance previously unrecognized. This

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discovery about the text permits it to contribute more powerfully to the sermon.

I will not attempt to demonstrate how one might move from text to sermon, viewing the text in this new way. I will simply illustrate the process of discovery as we begin to understand the text as a contributing part of the whole story. I begin with the question: What is the function of Mark 8:34-35 in Mark's story? If we can answer this question, we should discover that the significance of these verses expands as we are able to relate them to more and more of Mark's narrative. This does not work equally well with all passages in a Gospel, but with key passages such as this one it can be quite illuminating.

In Mark 8:34-35 we read, "If anyone wants to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will destroy it, and whoever destroys his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it."

For our present purposes it is important to note a few features of these words that will prove significant as we move on. First, both sentences begin in nearly the same way: either with "If anyone wants to," or with "Whoever wants to" (in Greek ei tis thelei plus infinitive or hos ean thele plus infinitive). Second, 8:34 speaks of the requirements of discipleship, understood as following Jesus. Discipleship as following is defined by the way which Jesus chooses for himself. Since Jesus is now moving toward crucifixion (see 8:31), disciples are required to take up their crosses. Third, the saying about saving and destroying one's life is constructed from contrasting words combined in paradoxical fashion. This paradox is repeated in both halves of the sentence: the attempt to save one's life will destroy it; destroying one's life will save it. Elsewhere I have called this form of speech an antithetical aphorism. An antithetical aphorism is a brief and pointed saying which makes a strong, unqualified statement containing a sharp contrast. The contrast is expressed in a wordplay, using the same words in negative and positive form or using antithetical words. In Mark 8:35 the antithetical terms (save/destroy) express the conflict between Jesus' call and the human desire for security, a basic motive in our lives.
The temptation for the interpreter is to reduce this paradox to a commonplace in order to make it seem reasonable. Then 8:35 seems to say that sacrifice now will bring a reward later, a statement which contains little surprise or tension. But the speaker’s choice of words in 8:35 shows that he wishes to be paradoxical. He wishes to force his hearers to face the conflict between his requirement and the normal and reasonable concern to preserve one’s own life. If this antithetical aphorism is to have its intended power, it is necessary to feel (and help the congregation to feel) the grating conflict between these challenging words and normal assumptions of what is good and necessary.

The sayings in 8:34-35 are supported by 8:36-9:1, for 8:34-9:1 form a chain of sayings with a common purpose: to show to disciples and prospective disciples that they must let loose of their lives, for discipleship is likely to lead to suffering and death.

As we begin to move beyond 8:34-35 to ask about the function of these words in the total narrative, we should note, first of all, that they follow Jesus’ first announcement of his coming Passion in 8:31 and Peter’s rejection of this announcement, which calls forth Jesus’ harsh rebuke. Furthermore, a similar sequence of events follows each of the three Passion announcements which occur about a chapter apart in this section of Mark. Three times Jesus announces his coming Passion (8:31, 9:31, 10:32-34). Three times this is followed by outright resistance or by behavior contrary to Jesus on the part of the disciples (8:32-33, 9:33-34, 10:35-41).

Three times Jesus responds with corrective teaching (8:34-9:1, 9:35-37, 10:42-45). Mark 8:34-35 is part of the corrective teaching in the first of these similar sequences of events. This much is commonly recognized in Markan studies today. However, we should also note that the pattern extends to the way in which the corrective teaching is formulated. In all three cases an antithetical aphorism has a key role in the corrective teaching, an antithetical aphorism which brings out the paradoxical difference between Jesus’ way for himself and his disciples and common assumptions of how things work.
Following the second Passion announcement, the disciples are discussing who among them is the greatest. Jesus responds (beginning with the same phrase as in 8:34: *eis thelei* plus infinitive), "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all" (9:35). Again we have an antithetical aphorism. First and last are linked together in paradoxical fashion. Following the third Passion announcement, James and John ask for positions of preference in the coming glory.

This leads to the words of Jesus in 10:42-45, which are an expanded antithetical aphorism. First Jesus calls attention to the normal pattern of rule in the political world. The disciples must behave quite differently: "Whoever wants to become great among you [hos an thele plus infinitive] shall be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you shall be slave of all." Here the antithetical aphorism is doubled, the repetition adding emphasis, and the most emphatic formulation is used as a climax: "slave of all." Then a reference to Jesus' own servant role is attached: "For the Son of man also did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many." The servant role and death are linked in this verse, while previous announcements of Jesus' death have been followed by the call to give up one's life and become a servant. Furthermore, verses 10:43-45 correspond to 8:34, the saying about taking up one's cross, because both passages emphasize the parallel between the way of Jesus and the way of the disciple. Thus at the beginning and at the end of the corrective teaching within the threefold pattern which I have discussed, the Gospel links the paradoxical demand of Jesus to Jesus' own choice of the cross. This parallel between Jesus' way and the intended way for disciples is important for understanding other parts of Mark.

The three antithetical aphorisms following the three Passion announcements focus on two human concerns: security in face of death (i.e., saving one's life) and status or domination (i.e., being first). These two basic concerns are challenged, for the call of Jesus conflicts with both. Note that Mark sees Jesus' death as presenting a fundamental challenge
not only to our concern for safety but also to our concern for status and power.

The repeated Passion announcements tell the readers in advance what will happen in Jerusalem. However, the repeated antithetical aphorisms are equally important in Mark's narrative. The Passion announcements disclose the outward course of events. The antithetical aphorisms disclose the inner meaning of these events for the one who suffers and serves. Through their paradoxical promises, they emphasize the conflict of Jesus' way with fundamental human motivations.

I have discussed the relation of Mark 8:34-35 to a major section of the Gospel of Mark; now I must explore its place within the total story. The unity of the Markan narrative is clearer when we consider this common feature of stories: a commission or task, accepted by a story character, results in a unified narrative sequence as the narrator tells us how the character fulfills that commission or fails to fulfill it. The commission provides an overarching purpose or goal, and events of the plot take on meaning because they represent movement toward the goal or obstacles to its realization. Disconnected events do not form a story, but events which move toward or block the fulfillment of a major purpose do. The events of Mark form a unitary story in relation to the commission which Jesus received from God and the commission which the disciples received from Jesus. The story gradually discloses what these commissions require and shows Jesus accepting these requirements and the disciples rejecting them.

Jesus first appears in the baptism scene, which also discloses to the reader Jesus' commission from God, as the voice from heaven says, "You are my beloved Son" (1:11). The brief statement at the baptism does not tell the readers what this special role will require of Jesus. The baptism scene makes clear that Jesus has a commission from God, thus beginning a story line, but the content of that commission—its implications for action—are only disclosed as Jesus begins to act and speak in fulfillment of his commission. One of the
first things that Jesus does is to call four fishermen to follow him. This begins another story line which features the disciples. The content of the disciples' commission is also incompletely disclosed. However, we are told that they are to come "after" Jesus, that is, "follow" him (1:17-18, 20). The commission of the disciples receives special attention in a series of three scenes, spaced at intervals just as the Passion announcements and related material are spaced at intervals. These scenes are the call of the fishermen (1:16-20), the choice of the twelve (3:13-19), and the sending out of the twelve (6:7-13). In these scenes there are a number of indications that the disciples' commission is patterned after the commission of Jesus. They are to "be with" Jesus and to share in his work of preaching and exorcism. However, problems develop in the relation of the disciples to Jesus. These are brought out most clearly in a series of three boat scenes (4:35-41, 6:45-52, 8:13-21), climaxing in a scene in which Jesus berates the disciples for their lack of perception. A major obstacle to the fulfillment of the disciples' commission has appeared.

Peter's confession and Jesus' first announcement of the Passion come soon after the third boat scene. The announcement of the Passion is a new disclosure of Jesus' commission, of what he must do to fulfill his special role. And it is followed by a new statement of the disciples' commission, beginning with the verses with which we began, Mark 8:34-35. The function of the verses, then, is to provide a new disclosure of the disciples' commission, the commission that gives meaning to their whole story. Thus these verses have a key function in the story. They are a program for action. They are meant to be lived out by the disciples in the rest of the narrative, just as Jesus lives out the announcement of the Passion in the Passion story. Just as previous scenes indicated that the disciples were to follow Jesus and do as Jesus was doing, so here they are called to follow him to the cross. The parallel between the way of Jesus and the way of the disciple is maintained.

By the time Jesus announces that he and the disciples must suffer and die, we are halfway through Mark's story. It is remarkable that these central aspects of the commissions of
Jesus and the disciples have not been emphasized until this point. Readers of Mark (here we must try to put ourselves in the position of the naive reader, i.e., the reader who is reading Mark for the first time) have been allowed to form an impression of Jesus and the disciples without this crucial information. The emphasis on giving up one's life as a central requirement comes as a surprise. This heightens the contrast between the author's view and views of Jesus and the disciples in which this requirement is not central, thus helping to focus the decision which the author is presenting to the readers.

The author of Mark has shaped the story by emphasizing certain things through the threefold repetitive patterns that we have noted. An author can also exercise considerable control over the evaluation of characters and events within a story. Judgments of good and bad are influenced by certain norms or standards suggested within a story. These may be expressed through a character who is spokesperson for the author’s values. A character who is given authority because he or she is presented as trustworthy and perceptive may be such a spokesperson. In the Gospel of Mark it is clear that Jesus is the central figure of authority. The author does not wish to cast doubt on Jesus’ words but wishes to affirm them as true and important. Jesus and the author, then, speak with one voice, and the words and deeds of Jesus provide the norms in light of which the actions of other characters should be evaluated. This is particularly true for the disciples, who are called to follow Jesus. The author intends us to judge the behavior of the disciples by whether they are in harmony or conflict with the words and deeds of Jesus. Thus the call to take up one’s cross and destroy one’s own life in 8:34-35 is not only a new statement of the disciples’ commission but also a new statement of the norm by which the disciples are to be judged. Once again we see that these verses have an important function in the total narrative: They state the norm by which the author expects us to judge the disciples’ subsequent behavior.

Both the Passion announcement in 8:31 and the call to
follow by taking up one's cross in 8:34-35 point forward to the Passion story. There we learn that Jesus fulfills his commission but the disciples utterly fail. Jesus is betrayed by one of his inner circle, and the other disciples desert him (14:17-21, 44-50). The disciples reject Jesus' statement that they will all fall away and promise that they will not deny him if it means death (14:26-31). But they turn out to be faithless liars. Peter is the last hope. He is the only one who continues to follow after the arrest, but this ends in the climactic scene of Peter's denial. The focus on Peter at the beginning and the end of the trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrin brings out the contrast between Peter's denial and Jesus' fearless confession (14:53-72), which leads to Jesus' death. The composition of Mark 14 does not play down the disciples' failure; it plays it up. Thus the judgment of the disciples which we reach when we compare their behavior to Jesus' words in 8:34-35 is confirmed by the strong emphasis on discipleship failure in Mark 14.

Jesus fulfills not only the commission to suffer and die, expressed in the Passion announcements, but also the commission in 8:35. Jesus is the one who destroys his life and saves it. Although this verse appears in teaching to others, it applies to Jesus also. It is general in formulation ("Whoever will destroy his life") and it follows a statement which links the disciples' way to the way of Jesus by calling on the disciples to follow Jesus by taking up a cross. "Whoever will destroy his life . . . will save it." This applies to the disciples because it first of all applies to Jesus.

The paradox of these words becomes drama in the Passion story. There the tension which the saying expresses through using contrasting words becomes a dramatic tension in scenes of human conflict. This is especially true of the mocking scenes in the Passion story. Once again, Markan emphasis is shown by the presence of three mocking scenes placed at intervals (14:65, 15:16-20, 15:29-32), in this case after each of the major events following Jesus' arrest (i.e., after the Sanhedrin trial, the Roman trial, and the Crucifixion). The mocking scenes are related to the threefold pattern which dominates 8:31-10:45. The Passion announcements which
initiate that pattern refer not only to Jesus' death but to the rejection of Jesus, and to acts which show contempt for him (see 8:31, 10:33-34). This contemptuous rejection is most forcefully expressed in the mocking. Furthermore, the mocking scenes are ironic, and the ironic tension of these scenes corresponds to the paradoxical tension of the saying about destroying and saving one's life. The scenes are ironic because the words and acts of contempt reveal the truth about Jesus. He is mocked as prophet just as his words of prophecy are coming true. He is mocked as king, and he is the Christ, the king of Israel. He is mocked as temple destroyer and savior, and he is both. What is more, he is prophet, king, and savior as he is condemned and dies. The irony of the mocking scenes preserves the paradox of the antithetical aphorisms in 8:35 and following, holding triumph in tension with degradation and death. And the mocking words at the cross, "Others he saved, himself he cannot save," recall the words of 8:35, "Whoever wants to save his life will destroy it."

The author of Mark has composed the story carefully, and 8:34-35 has a key place in that composition. The story was composed so that the readers would view these events in a particular way and respond to them in a particular way. In other words, the author had a message for the readers which comes through the medium of a story about the past. This message cannot be reduced to simple statements without loss. It depends on a complex process of readers identifying with story characters. I think the author had fairly clear expectations as to how this process would work. The author anticipated that the Christian reader would identify with those called to follow Jesus, the disciples. This identification is encouraged by the positive portrait of the disciples in the early chapters of Mark, suggesting that the disciples best represent the faithful commitment to Jesus which Christian readers tend to see in themselves. For those who begin with this comfortable identification, the developing tension between Jesus and the disciples can produce an uncomfortable tension with the self. The readers discover that those called to follow Jesus are afflicted with a strange blindness, and when there
seems to be a breakthrough with Peter's confession (8:29), the conflict reappears in sharper focus. The story moves on to a devastating climax for the disciples, a climax that leaves a glimmer of hope (see 14:28, 16:7) but records no accomplished resolution of the problem. The resolution awaits a new decision to follow Jesus, one which must begin with the admission of past failure. Thus the story is a weapon for tearing apart and tearing open our comfortable assurance that we are adequate disciples. By involvement in a story we become aware of the gap between what we are called to be and do, represented by Jesus' decisions, and what we actually are, represented by the disciples' false choices.

The contrast between the faithfulness of Jesus and the failure of the disciples leaves a clear decision for the reader. The same decision is posed by 8:35 and by the antithetical aphorisms which link being great and being servant. We might say that these sayings are the aphoristic statement of the Passion, and the Passion story is the dramatic portrayal of these sayings. The Passion story enables the readers to live vicariously through the emotions, conflicts, and decisions implicit in these sayings, thereby preparing the readers for their own decisions.

Starting from two verses in the middle of Mark, we can gain an understanding of the contours and message of the whole story, which also enriches our understanding of the function and significance of these two verses.

The preacher often feels that it is necessary to expand and dramatize the Gospel text in order to attract the interest of the congregation. This may be because we have robbed the text of interest by isolating it from the total story. Unless we are very careful, our attempts at dramatic expansion will import meanings foreign to the Gospel story and shift attention away from the issues which are central there. On the other hand, considering the story as a whole can increase our awareness of those central issues. Even within the confines of a sermon, the preacher can provide a sketch of aspects of the larger story necessary for full appreciation of the text. In the case of Mark 8:34-35, it may be necessary to refer to Jesus' commission of
the disciples in the early chapters of Mark, the developing problem between Jesus and the disciples, the new announcement in 8:31 and the new understanding of discipleship which accompanies it, and the climactic events of the Passion to which 8:31, 34-35 point. This will help the congregation relate to the story and its dramatic conflicts, from which central life issues emerge. This approach will contribute to preaching only if the preacher recognizes that each Gospel is in some respects unique (e.g., the portrayal of the disciples in Mark is significantly different from that of Matthew and Luke) and understands how key parts of each Gospel fit into and contribute to the story as a whole. Past biblical scholarship has not been very helpful with this task. There is a reason to hope that this will change.

NOTES
2. The active voice of ἀπολύμαι can mean "destroy" as well as "lose," and the translation "lose," normally chosen for this text, may weaken the forcefulness of the original Greek. I have retained the masculine singular pronouns of the Greek text, but the general and indefinite reference of these sentences ("anyone," "whoever") suggests that a sexually inclusive translation is appropriate. This can be handled most easily by shifting to the plural: "Let them deny themselves," etc.
4. For further discussion of Mark 8:34-35 see Tannehill, Sword of His Mouth, pp. 98-101; and Mirror for Disciples, pp. 67-70.
5. On 10:42-43 see further Tannehill, Sword of His Mouth, pp. 102-7.
6. If we are reading Mark's story well, we will allow the story to define Jesus' and the disciples' commissions rather than imposing on the story our own preconceived notions of what these commissions were.
8. On Mark's negative attitude toward the temple, see Kelber, Mark's Story of Jesus, pp. 57-70, 82-83.

Why would a promising Fundamentalist student choose to study at that citadel of Liberalism, Harvard Divinity School? The answer to this question suggests that, in theological education, differences in religious ideology do not necessarily pose insurmountable barriers to learning.

In March, 1940, Willard L. Sperry, dean of Harvard Divinity School since 1922, referred in a "Dean's Letter" in the Divinity School Bulletin to the recent appearance at Harvard of a type of student quite new to that institution—"a man who has already had one theological course in a conservative-to-fundamentalist seminary, and who is now anxious to begin all over again another three years of theological re-education." It is not clear exactly how many such students there were. Dean Sperry does number "a half-dozen in the three regular classes" but is vague about those on upper levels ("to say nothing of the Graduate group"). More important, he seems to have some anxiety as to how the divinity school constituency is going to react to this new development. Acknowledging that these men present an academic problem "in that they have seldom had the four years of regular college work, which we technically require for admission here," he points out that some of them have come with an A.B. in theology. And whatever the value of that degree, they do

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have certain qualities which highly commend them: "They already know their way around the major biblical and historical fields and their store of relevant facts-in-advance, awaiting reinterpretation, is much in excess of that of the ordinary college graduate." The experience with these men, he says, has on the whole been encouraging.

It was only the beginning. For whatever reasons, Fundamentalists kept on applying to Harvard Divinity School, and through the 1940s and 1950s the school kept accepting them, giving them what Dean Sperry called a "theological re-education" and sending them out with baccalaureate and graduate degrees. While classification by theological label is always suspect and especially hard to decipher in a rear-view mirror, the number of self-acknowledged Fundamentalists who were granted Th.D.'s or Ph.D.'s from Harvard in the remaining thirteen years of Sperry's deanship was at least twelve. Two others who received their degrees in the 1960s took most of their classwork within that earlier time. In addition, perhaps another ten or twelve men of similar background and conviction were matriculating at the divinity school during this time, working at the master's or bachelor's level or subsequently transferring to other institutions. And although these figures may not at first seem significant, it should be noted that the average number of annual graduates from all programs at the divinity school during the 1940s was less than twenty.

These were not barbarian hordes overrunning the citadel of learning. The roster of Harvard Fundamentalists now reads like an honor roll of mid- to late-twentieth-century American evangelicalism,² including names like Edward John Carnell, philosophical apologist and late president of Fuller Theological Seminary (Th.D., 1948); Kenneth Kantzer, theology professor at several evangelical colleges and seminaries before becoming editor of the movement's unofficial house organ Christianity Today (Ph.D., 1950); Merrill Tenney, long-time dean of Wheaton College Graduate School (Ph.D., 1944); John Gerstner, church historian at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary (Ph.D., 1945); Harold Kuhn, professor of
philosophy of religion at Asbury Theological Seminary since 1944 (Ph.D., 1944). No fewer than three current Fuller Seminary faculty appear on the list: theologian Paul King Jewett, interpreter of the works of Emil Brunner and author of the controversial *Man as Male and Female* (Ph.D., 1951); George Eldon Ladd, author of several books on the kingdom of God and moderate evangelical voice in the sensitive area of New Testament criticism (Ph.D., 1949); and Provost Glenn Barker, a New Testament scholar who was granted his Ph.D. in 1962 but did most of his class work within the period on which we are focusing. The remainder of the list: Burton Goddard, professor and dean emeritus, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (Th.D., 1943); Roger Nicole, professor of theology at Gordon-Conwell (Th.D., 1967); Samuel Schultz, professor of Bible at Wheaton College (Th.D., 1949); George Turner, professor of biblical literature, Asbury Theological Seminary (Ph.D., 1946); J. Harold Groenlee, formerly professor of Greek at Asbury, now with OMS International (Ph.D., 1947); Jack P. Lewis, professor of Bible at Harding Graduate School of Religion (Ph.D., 1953); Lemoine Lewis, professor of Bible and church history at Abilene Christian University (Ph.D. granted in 1959 but all class work done in 1940s).

Almost certainly, the name on this list best known within the framework of American Christianity is Edward John Carnell. Author of eight books, several of which together constitute a major effort toward a conservative Christian apologetic for our time, and president of Fuller Theological Seminary in the crucial five-year period when it gained accreditation, Carnell gained further credibility as a spokesman when in the late 1950s Westminster Press, having conceived the idea of a trilogy of theological books from three different perspectives, selected Carnell to write the book representing conservative theology. And although Carnell was far too much of an individual to be designated as typical, his experience at Harvard does shed light on the experiences of others.

What brought a young man like Carnell to Harvard in the first place? He seemed an unlikely Harvard applicant, as the
son of a midwestern Baptist minister whose only post-high school training was two years at Moody Bible Institute, and as a graduate himself of Wheaton College in Illinois, which, despite its reputation for academic respectability, was a fortress of Fundamentalist theology and moralistic pietism. So too with Kantzer, Tenney, Ladd—all of them unlikely Harvard men. What lay behind this curious symbiotic relationship between students and an institution theologically so far apart?

Let's look at the institution first. Whereas in the minds of most American church people Harvard Divinity School in the 1940s was generally thought to be affiliated with the Unitarians, its denominational status was by that time a thing of the past. In 1879 Dean Francis Greenwood Peabody had argued before the board of overseers for an unsectarian school whose system would be determined by belief in “sound methods, broad knowledge, and quickened interest.” Noting that this kind of school or faculty had long been known in Germany, he felt that Harvard Divinity School should be such a school in the United States. In its undenominational classification, Harvard was to be virtually alone in this country for some time; as Levering Reynolds points out, the New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge in 1911 lists only Harvard as undenominational, “although Union Theological Seminary in New York could have fairly laid claim to the distinction.” More significant, however, is the educational philosophy and methodology that underlay Dean Peabody’s proposal to the board. His stress on “scientific” study essentially meant the historical method, an approach which remained in effect at the divinity school through the era which we are discussing. Of six new faculty appointed between 1880 and 1883, five had studied in Germany. Their influence was decisive in making Harvard Divinity School “the most advanced expression of the liberal religio-historical Protestant scholarship of which Germany was the homeland, but in which most of the leading scholars in all major American Protestant seminaries participated.”

Although for a time the institution forged ahead, the
second quarter of the twentieth century proved to be a time of
trouble. For one thing, the president of the university from
1932 to 1953, Dr. James B. Conant, a scientist whose broader
interests were in general education both within the university
and in the society at large, had little interest in and gave little
support to the divinity school, since he believed theology was
a divisive force in education. Another problem was the
depressed state of American religion in general. Historian
Robert Handy has referred to the years 1926 to 1935 as “the
American religious depression,” a period when, in all but the
rural areas of the nation, the Protestant churches had lost
most of their influence. Under the Conant administration,
needing students to justify its very existence, Harvard
Divinity School showed no substantial increase in student
enrollments. Like so many of America’s factories operating at
less than full capacity through the years of economic
depression, the divinity school, with its impressive array of
learned scholar-teachers, was falling far short of its potential
contribution to the university, the church, and society. When
interest in theology did begin to awaken, it was a Barthian or
Niebuhrian Neo-orthodoxy which carried the day, at a
considerable remove from Harvard historicism, and the
seminaries which were more favorably oriented ideologically
to this position tended to attract the growing numbers of
theology students. In short, Harvard Divinity School needed
students. In the lean years of the late thirties and early forties,
applications from a new potential reservoir of students, even
from within the ranks of Fundamentalism, were not to be
dismissed out of hand.

What about those Fundamentalist students? What were
their motives? In one sense we hardly need ask. Young men
who had progressed far enough on the academic ladder to
contemplate seriously graduate education could hardly have
avoided at least thinking of Harvard. Why not the best? Or at
least what they perceived to be the best. Some, like Merrill
Tenney, had additional personal reasons, since Harvard was
conveniently near Gordon College and divinity school, where
Tenney taught. Several found Harvard’s offer of scholarship
money decisive. At a deeper level there had to be mythic overtones—encountering the Beast of Scholarly Unbelief in its own labyrinth and emerging with new confidence and new powers. As Roger Shinn remarked, reviewing a subsequent book by Carnell, "In some circles he is described, somewhat glibly, as one of the new generation of brainy fundamentalists who have studied at Harvard in order to learn the arguments they will spend the rest of their lives attacking." Shinn is correct in his insistence that the description is less than fair, for the mythic truth which underlies the statement has been too easily parodied. But it was a factor. John Gerstner of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary says: "I went there because it was ultraliberal and academically competent, desiring my conservatism to be put to its test." And Samuel Schultz of Wheaton: "Although I was quite fully informed about the perspective in the Harvard Divinity School prior to enrollment, I valued this opportunity of first-hand exposure to a naturalistic viewpoint on the Bible which confronted me with a sincere examination of my approach to biblical scholarship."

There is another, more significant, perfectly sensible reason why young Fundamentalist scholars chose Harvard in the 1940s. The divinity school's thorough dedication to historicism as its educational philosophy and methodology is the decisive fact. The institution's position at the far left of the theological continuum—perhaps better described as a refusal to assume a position—not only was not a deterrent to the prospective student coming all the way from the right end of the continuum but was its most attractive characteristic. The young Fundamentalists were convinced that if they went to the nation's prestigious Liberal and Neo-orthodox schools of religion they would be pressured to conform to a certain theological mold. At Harvard they knew that they could continue to keep the orthodox faith at the same time they devoted themselves to a historically oriented, theologically neutral program of study. All that Harvard would ask of them was academic excellence. It was a fair bargain all around.

In order to bring into sharper focus Edward Carnell's personal decision to attend Harvard and to illuminate what he
did when he got there, it is important to examine a chain of decisions extending back to the summer of 1937, when he sent in his application to Wheaton College in Illinois. Many of Carnell’s classmates at Wheaton chose the college because, within Fundamentalist groups across the entire country, it had the reputation (somewhat overinflated) of providing the very best Christian college education available anywhere. As a member of a Fundamentalist Baptist church in Albion, Michigan, geographically well within Wheaton’s primary range of influence, Carnell knew about that reputation. But as a high school student with a record that was mediocre at best, he simply didn’t care. It was not until he discovered that as the son of a Baptist minister he would be eligible at Wheaton for a partial tuition scholarship that he allowed himself to be persuaded to apply at the last minute.

Getting in proved easier than staying in. Even in those days a hundred-dollar scholarship did not go far, and he found it necessary to work an average of fifty hours a week in the college dining halls. But Carnell found himself intellectually at Wheaton, discovering a love and capacity for learning that set the direction for the rest of his life. The evidence from his Wheaton transcript clearly indicates that it was philosophy which captured his mind. While he was a good enough student to be graduated with honors in 1941, he ranked no higher than forty-eighth in a class of 205. But his grades in philosophy courses were outstanding. The faculty member most responsible for igniting Carnell’s intellectual fires was Gordon Haddon Clark, who had come from the University of Pennsylvania in 1936 as visiting professor of philosophy and joined the permanent faculty the next year. Clark was a powerful force on campus. In a school that often seemed to place more importance on chapel sessions and semi-annual evangelistic campaigns than on academic concerns, Clark held out for the primacy of the classroom. Many Wheaton alumni, even some who in subsequent years have strayed far from Clark’s philosophical rationalism and dogmatic theology, still think of him as the one person most responsible for rousing them from intellectual slumber. In Carnell’s case,
Clark was to remain, in varying ways, a determining influence in his life. Unquestionably, the decision to apply to Harvard—to settle, that is, for nothing less than what he perceived to be the best—was attributable in large part to standards inculcated by Gordon Clark.

But there was also something in Carnell's own nature which made him peculiarly receptive to Clark's rigorous academic ideals—a cluster of traits which add up to a tendency towards perfectionism. Partly this was a reaction against the emotional stigmata of his Fundamentalist background. Having moved during the twenties and thirties from place to place across the Midwest, knowing always that wherever they went his father, with his two years of education at Moody, was at the bottom rung of the local ladder of clerical prestige, Carnell entered college with a strongly negative image of himself as a member of a more or less despised minority. When, under Clark's tutelage, he began to see Christianity as intellectually respectable, he was appalled at the gulf between his new understanding of the historic Christian faith and the severely limited version of it represented by his father. One can easily imagine him convincing himself that he would never get a fair hearing for the Christian faith unless he could display academic credentials second to none. Only some such idealistic vision as that can explain the commitment necessary for Carnell to have earned in succeeding years a doctor of theology degree from Harvard and a doctor of philosophy degree from Boston University.

However, on this academic pilgrimage, before Cambridge and Boston there would be Philadelphia. Before Harvard, there would be Westminster Theological Seminary. During the spring semester vacation of his senior year at Wheaton, Carnell went on a 1700-mile hitchhiking tour which took him to four seminaries on the eastern seaboard: Eastern Baptist, Princeton, Westminster, and Faith. The first two, of course, were affiliated with major denominations; Westminster (in suburban Philadelphia) had split off from Princeton in the late 1920s as a result of internal Fundamentalist-modernist
dissension among the Presbyterians; and Faith Seminary (in Wilmington, Delaware) came into being as a result of still further dissension in that extended separation process.

Carnell’s letter, in late April, 1941, accompanying his application for admission to Westminster, clearly defines goals much more likely to be met at Westminster than at Harvard:

I feel, after sitting in on the classes of the various schools, that you offer the most scholarly defence of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and so I am prepared, if I am accepted, to join with the student body and faculty at Westminster to fight against all forms of anti-Christian systems, and to preach to the world as consistent as possible, the Whole Council (sic) of God.

But Carnell did not feel completely at home in the Westminster atmosphere. It seems evident that he went there hoping to get a thorough grounding in traditional Calvinistic theology, and there is no reason to believe that in that respect he was disappointed. Academically he did well, and was graduated after three years with bachelor’s and master’s degrees in theology and the William Brenton Greene, Jr., prize in apologetics. But along with these came a burden of dissatisfaction with what seemed to him a lifeless orthodoxy. A friend from Wheaton, Jim Tompkins, also a Westminster student, recalls that they both visited and considered transferring to Eastern Baptist.

The warmth and enthusiasm of Wheaton was so noticeably absent at Westminster that we really felt isolated. What we seemed to be searching for was the theological rigor of Calvinism joined to the spiritual exaltation of Fundamentalism. Eastern was theologically superficial; Westminster was spiritually dead. With such a choice, we settled for the corpse.

Even in ideological matters, especially apologetics, Carnell was increasingly disenchanted with Westminster and spoke in later years of having rejected Cornelius Van Til, the seminary’s leading force in theology and apologetics.

In the spring of 1944 he sent a letter to Harvard’s Dean
Sperry outlining an entire Ph.D. program in history and philosophy of religion. It reads in part:

I wish to relate very specifically the question of epistemology to each of the six fields in which I shall engage myself in study. The first three fields, which are required, will provide me with an opportunity to apply methods of epistemology to Christianity and to some other chosen religion through a study of the contents and literary history of each. Also, I shall be able to do research work in the abstract question of the methods of knowledge and truth when related to religion and religious convictions. This probably will constitute my critical study of a phase of Philosophic Thought. The fourth field will be in the field of mysticism, conversion, and religious experience, a branch of epistemology viewed subjectively, a field which has always intrigued me because of the discrepancies in convictions, yet all appealing to objective reality. The fifth field will be in the study of ethics, its demands and relation to religion; yet always I shall tease out the theory of knowledge which each theory appeals to for its basis and verity. The last field will cover the problem of metaphysics involved in a religious view of the world. This, finally, will bring the theory of knowledge into relation with science and other phenomena of reality, and religious convictions to the structure of the objective universe. Thus, through this tentative schedule, I expect to apply my time and talents to this one critical problem as it manifests itself in these six fields of study.

One cannot help but be impressed by the contrast between this letter and the one three years earlier to Westminster. The difference in tone and substance cannot be fully explained by the normal intellectual growth of a graduate student or by an appropriate switch in rhetorical strategy. The writer is like an aircraft about to take off from a carrier deck, its engine at high pitch, waiting for the restraining wires to be released. The admissions committee, however, was not overwhelmed. A letter in Carnell's permanent Harvard file states the committee's agreement that he should be admitted but eased out at the end of the first semester if he did not measure up. There is no evidence to suggest the question was even raised again.

Whereas Harvard was as rigorous academically as the Fundamentalists expected, its atmosphere was more benign than they could have hoped. 'I think the conservative went to
Harvard,” says Jack P. Lewis, “expecting to meet the Devil and instead encountered gentlemen of the highest character who were far kinder to us than we would have been to them had the case been reversed.” More than any other faculty member, Henry J. Cadbury, New Testament scholar and Hollis Professor of Divinity, stands out in their minds as the exemplar of rigor and fairness. Glenn Barker determined early in his own teaching career that he would always want to treat those who differed from his own theological position with the same complete respect showed toward him by Professor Cadbury. Referring to Cadbury as “a man of complete intellectual honesty,” Carnell recalled how he would chide those nonfundamentalists in his class who were handling the Greek text irresponsibly. “We may not agree with Paul,” Cadbury would insist, “but let us at least be honest with what he says.” Cadbury was memorable also for his Socratic teaching method, for which the Fundamentalists were a perfect pedagogical foil. He seemed better able to provoke confrontation with the issues he wanted to pursue if some of them were present in class, and if they were slow to join the interchange he was not the least bit reluctant to ask one of them for the Fundamentalist view on a given question. And he was not above a playful jab now and then. “If you have praying mothers,” he would say at the beginning of a class in which he would be taking a radical position on a sensitive issue, “they’d better be on their knees this morning.”

But this study is concerned with more than nostalgic memories of revered teachers and the usual triumphs and tragedies of graduate school days—sacred detritus lodged permanently in the lore and legends of all alumni of all graduate schools. Something more important was happening to the Harvard Fundamentalists. It must not be overlooked that this group of students inherited all the emotional wounds of the Fundamentalist-modernist wars of the 1920s, one result of which was a tendency in Fundamentalist ranks to discredit the value of the free pursuit of truth in the educational process. These young men were all aware that they were the advance guard of a new interest in education within a
tradition which for a generation or more had been distrustful of it. This realization did not mean, however, that all of them responded identically to their graduate study at Harvard. In the eyes of certain of their nonfundamentalist fellow students, some of them appeared to be interested less in learning than in gaining the prestige that went along with a Harvard degree. It is also true that some of the Fundamentalists began their Harvard programs relatively late, having already settled into an understanding of the Christian faith which satisfied their intellectual demands. And whereas, as previously mentioned, some came to Harvard precisely because they eagerly anticipated the prospect of putting their faith to the test, others majored in areas highly technical rather than philosophical (such as ancient languages) and thus, whatever their personal interests, had less time for an inclination toward the struggle with conceptual problems. Consequently, while the fires of the academic crucible burned hot for some of them, others survived like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, with not a hair of their heads singed. Except for Carnell, the angst level seems to have been surprisingly low. D. Elton Trueblood, who was teaching at the divinity school in the fall of 1944, noted that Carnell had written some poor papers, concluded that he was “greatly inhibited by narrow dogmatism,” and sensed “some emotional disturbance” which he attributed to the theological problems he was facing. There is reason to think Trueblood analyzed the problem correctly, for Carnell told a fellow Fundamentalist student that he had come to Harvard with a sack full of arguments in defense of the faith, only to find to his dismay when he reached into it one day that the sack was empty.

We must balance that remark, however, with other evidence. In 1958, during his tenure as president of Fuller Seminary, speaking at a fund-raising dinner in Chicago, Carnell reflected on some of his reactions at Harvard: “The more I exposed myself to the competing ideologies, the more convinced I became that the Christian world view can be accepted with the consent of all our faculties. A conviction
grew in my mind as I cast myself on the perils of graduate study that any fair-minded individual who is open before the facts, if he pursued a course carefully and with patience, would arrive at the biblical, theistic position."

If we allow for some fraternal exaggeration in the empty sack remark and some presidential rhetoric in the Chicago speech, these two statements are not so far apart as initially they seem, certainly not irreconcilable. What was missing in Carnell’s sack in graduate school was not a confident Christian faith but an apologetic stance. He had been thoroughly immersed for three years in the consistent Calvinism of Van Til at Westminster Seminary but grew to believe that Van Til, in his unwillingness to acknowledge that the unbeliever is capable of arriving at any valid truth, was eliminating every potential point of contact between the believer and the unbeliever, thus undercutting the task of apologetics and leaving the faith without defense. For his own part, Van Til charged that by insisting that faith must have a rational foundation, Carnell was making man autonomous, the creature in effect setting up a standard that the Creator was being forced to meet. The rift between the men was a permanent one. In 1971, four years after Carnell’s death, Van Til said: “Everything he wrote in his first book of apologetics, and in all those to follow, he wrote with full consciousness of the differences which arose between us during his days at Boston.”

But an even more powerful influence in Carnell’s intellectual development was his college philosophy professor, Gordon Haddon Clark. Was there nothing left in the sack of arguments from the formidable Clark? There was indeed. In a 1953 letter to James Tompkins, an old Wheaton and Westminster classmate who had drifted from orthodoxy, Carnell explicitly declared his continuing indebtedness to Clark: “Like yourself, I rejected Van Til; but unlike yourself, graduate studies presented no option superior to that which Clark taught me.”

Then why the remark to his seminary friend that the
Apologetic sack was empty? Because although Carnell never turned his back on the law of contradiction, which was the formal basis of Clark's system of deductive rationalism, he became convinced that Clark, like Van Til, was severely limited in his apologetic usefulness. The law of contradiction was the means by which one could ferret out the inconsistencies and illogicalities of opposing systems—and that, according to Clark, is the main task of apologetics—but Carnell was looking for something more positive. In Clark's view there is no evidence which can certify the God of Calvinistic orthodoxy, for if such evidence existed it would be more foundational than God himself and therefore undermine His status as a first principle. However logical, this point of view struck Carnell (as he took philosophical inventory at Harvard) as unnecessarily constricted, doing justice to neither the full dimensions of human life nor the breadth of Holy Scripture.

So he wrote a book. To be sure, Carnell is not the first graduate student to have published a scholarly volume while still a degree candidate, but not many such books are greeted with quite the acclaim received by Introduction to Christian Apologetics in the spring of 1948. One of fifty manuscripts submitted to the William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company in an Evangelical Book Award contest, it won the first prize of $5,000 and is generally cited as one of the signs of an intellectual shift in Fundamentalism at that time.

 Appearing in the spring just prior to his reception of Harvard's Th.D., Apologetics gave a big boost to Carnell's career. Having established himself as a teacher of some brilliance at Gordon College in Boston for the preceding three years, he was tapped by the new but already prestigious Fuller Seminary as professor of apologetics. But before departing Harvard he ran into some unexpected trouble. In December he had submitted copies of his doctoral thesis to both his adviser, Professor Auer, and the second reader, Prof. Nels F. S. Ferré of Andover-Newton. Johannes Abraham Christoffel Fagginger Auer had come to the divinity school in 1929 and been designated Parkman Professor in 1930. In 1942 he had taken over the responsibility of directing the programs
of graduate students particularly interested in theology. In fact, during his last dozen years on the faculty, he was the only professor of theology, a fact that takes on added significance when one knows that his own theological position was humanism. But he was a warm, genial, fair-minded man, and Levering Reynolds's claim that "he never failed in his respect for other men's opinions, however much he might disagree with them" is substantiated by the group of Fundamentalists.

Carnell's thesis was on Niebuhr—"The Concept of Dialectic in the Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr." Auer approved it, which is not surprising since as adviser he would hardly have allowed Carnell to submit it to the formal academic approval process if he had not. But Ferré did not approve it. On December 30 Ferré wrote Prof. Arthur Darby Nock to the effect that he found the thesis inadequate in historical background, deficient in relating Niebuhr's dialectic to contemporary thought, and therefore unacceptable. He further accused the writer of superficial generalities and of unfairly caricaturing Niebuhr's ideas in order to get the better of an argument. We can get just an inkling of how much of a blow this rejection was to Carnell in a letter he wrote to Dean Sperry on January 10. Emphasizing that he had already talked with Ferré by telephone, he said, in part: "I want you to know that I am so anxious to do things right at Harvard that I will rewrite the entire dissertation with the criticisms of my readers in mind."

He asked Sperry, if possible, to keep the matter confidential, "since there is a certain academic disgrace connected with the experience that is difficult to bear."

Carnell was overreacting a bit perhaps. It is not a disgrace to have to revise a doctoral thesis. As a matter of fact, the revisions required by Ferré cannot have been very extensive, for he signed the completed dissertation later that same semester. But Carnell's reaction in January has to be seen in the context of his emerging career as a Fundamentalist scholar. The agony caused by Ferré's negative response to his thesis was balanced by the ecstasy of hearing that he had won the Eerdmans prize for *Introduction to Christian Apologetics*. 

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After the initial high feeling had worn off, Carnell must have come down hard when he realized what a cruel irony it would be if word got around that the author of this acclaimed book could not even get his doctoral thesis approved. Such a conjecture may have motivated in part his appeal for confidentiality.

A brief critical review of the content of his prize-winning book will bring into better focus the theology and the experience of the Harvard Fundamentalists and provide some support for concluding generalizations. In this earnest inquiry into metaphysical realms, the basic issues are epistemological. How can we know what the truth is? When Carnell says, “Metaphysics and epistemology go together like Scarlatti and the harpsichord,” we recall his letter to Dean Sperry accompanying his Harvard application, a letter which tentatively organized an entire graduate program around the issue of epistemology. I think it is accurate to see Apologetics as a partial fulfillment of that agenda.

What is immediately evident is the grand scope of Carnell’s purpose—nothing less than a demonstration of how conservative Christianity (which he explicitly equates with Fundamentalism) “is able to answer the fundamental questions of life as adequately as, if not more adequately than, any other world-view.” He does not minimize the seriousness of the task, pointing out that “the core of man’s dilemma is the problem of relating his insatiable desire for self-preservation to the realities of a death-doomed body and an impersonal universe.” The stakes are high: five times in the first ten pages it is stated or implied that if the Christian philosophy of life is rejected the only alternatives are either suicide or else an indifference or despair which offers a person no convincing reason for not committing suicide.

For all of its author’s willingness to tackle the tough questions, however, what lingers in the mind of today’s reader is the book’s curious ineffectiveness as apologetics. It may in its day have buttressed the crumbling intellectual defenses of Fundamentalism (the fact that there were four editions by 1952 suggests something of how it was perceived
by its readers), but to the unconvinced it carries little weight of conviction. One reason for this is Carnell’s presuppositional methodology. He goes about the task of showing how, if one presupposes the existence of the God who has revealed himself in the Bible, the Christian religion best fulfills the requirements of “systematic consistency” (i.e., negatively, it does not violate the law of contradiction; positively, it adheres to the facts of experience). There is nothing inherently wrong with presuppositionalism, but Carnell’s use of the method is troublesome. He begins by convincingly portraying the ultimate dilemma of humanity, as if he is going to proceed step by step to show how Christian theism is the answer to this dilemma. But we soon realize that the argument is not developing in this manner; rather we are riding a set of rails which were laid down long before the first words were put on paper. As early as page 47 we are confidently assured that “there is no reality apart from the eternal nature of God Himself and the universe which He has created to display His glory.” Moreover, his assumptions are the ones really worth being troubled about—especially the question of the existence of God—and without confronting them straightforwardly the book comes close to being 359 pages of begging the question. Carnell is adept and sometimes merciless in attacking the assumptions of others but behaves much too charitably toward his own.

A second serious flaw, one with far-reaching implications, is the book’s much too easy bifurcation of thought systems into Christian and non-Christian, a trait which shows up most vividly in Carnell’s discussion of “the problem of common ground.”

The very nature of Christianity demands that there be no common ground between the system of the godly and the system of the ungodly, for a man’s attitude toward what he considers to be the highest logical ultimate in reality determines the validity of his synoptic starting point, his method, and his conclusion.

And because “the reach of metaphysics is absolute,” starting with the wrong assumptions can lead one astray at every
point along the way. This kind of either/or thinking permits Carnell to claim, for example, that only a Christian has the right to make statements and expect to be understood (because only a God whose very nature is the guarantee of meaning can provide the basis for intelligible communication).

With no sovereign God to set the course of reality and to give promises of hope to man, there is a 50/50 chance of anything happening. In five minutes, not only may elephants fly and roots grow up, but doors may have only one side, spinach may grow in patches of square circles, the sun may turn to silk, the moon to mink, up may be down, right may be left, and good may be bad.

The choice is clear: either the Fundamentalist interpretation of historic orthodox Christianity or absurdity and nihilism. We can see the same bifurcation in Carnell's doctoral thesis on Reinhold Niebuhr, the concluding lines of which read as follows:

Niebuhr must either turn to revelation in Scripture seriously, in which case he must go all the way with the problems which attend special revelation; or he must break with the appeal to special revelation and take up empiricism seriously, in which case he must go all the way with the scientific method. There does not seem to the author any stopping point between these two termini.

Finally, it is clear that Carnell perceived these same two options as the only live competing ones available to him in the educational milieu at Harvard: either the Fundamentalism with which he came or the scientific method whose end was nihilism. And whereas the divinity school cannot be blamed for the tendency of Carnell's logic to rule out any middle ground between alternatives, it is a fact that theology was not Harvard's strong suit in these years. The 1947 "Report of the Commission to Study and Make Recommendations with Respect to the Harvard Divinity School" expressed grave concern that Harvard offered a total of only three courses in theology and philosophy of religion and none in Christian ethics, adding that "the tendency to stress the historical
rather than the constructive aspects of theology is in itself a symptom of theological decline."\(^{14}\)

Carnell left Harvard still a Fundamentalist, albeit a more intellectually sophisticated one. And although he later explicitly disowned Fundamentalism and delivered a harsh critique of the movement in *The Case for Orthodox Theology*, his published books and articles reveal that as a thinker he never completely freed himself of much of Fundamentalism's ideological baggage. But there was another side to Carnell. In his inaugural address as president of Fuller Seminary, he developed three characteristics which constitute "the glory of a theological seminary." After resolutely reaffirming the mandate to preserve and propagate faithfully the theological distinctives to which the institution was committed, he went on to expound two further points not historically common to Fundamentalism: (1) that in fulfilling the first objective, the seminary "make a conscientious effort to acquaint its students with all the relevant evidences—damaging as well as supporting—in order that students may be given a reasonable opportunity to exercise their God-given right freely to decide for or against claims to truth"; and (2) "that the seminary inculcate in its students an attitude of tolerance and forgiveness toward individuals whose doctrinal convictions are at variance with those that inhere in the institution itself."

It may be a measure of some kind of progress that even though the inaugural address evoked a serious protest from a sizable segment of the seminary's old guard faculty, and though Charles E. Fuller, the seminary's founder, ordered the impounding of all copies, Fuller Seminary today distributes an elegantly printed twenty-page brochure including the entire text of the address.\(^{15}\) In any case, in fostering an academic atmosphere in which students are encouraged to venture into that ambiguous territory between a simplistic unquestioning acceptance of the faith once delivered and an equally simplistic rejection of that faith, whether in the name of humanism or nihilism, Edward Carnell not only transcended the Fundamentalism of his heritage but left his most enduring legacy.
NOTES


2. It is not my purpose here to explore the subtle distinctions between the terms "Fundamentalist" and "evangelical," but rather to accept the labels by which these men have identified themselves, then and more recently. For an illuminating recent discussion of the subject, see Joel A. Carpenter, "Fundamentalist Institutions and the Rise of Evangelical Protestantism, 1929-1942," Church History 49 (March 1980): 62-75.


5. Williams, pp. 168, 186, 10.


7. Material quoted or cited concerning the Fundamentalist students at Harvard is based on either personal correspondence or interviews, in some cases both.


9. Unpublished notes for address, Fuller Theological Seminary files.


BOOK REVIEWS

MARTY, MUGGERIDGE, AND METZ
ON PUBLIC THEOLOGY

Reviews by James E. Will


Characterizing church theology for whole decades is a risky business. Millions of sermons, lectures, and discussions over a ten-year period are not easily molded into a common shape. Yet there is reason to contend that theology in U.S. churches during the 1960s, in response to civil rights, black power, feminism, and the antiwar movement, took a form that was largely public; while the theology of the 1970s, recovering from the turbulence of the sixties and responding to evangelical and therapeutic recipes for experience, had a private form. Some recent publications raise the issue whether the churches are now ready again to articulate a more public theology for the 1980s.

Despite the naturalness of this rhythmic alternation between public and private, we may dare to hope that the Spirit’s guidance of the churches’ theologies is not entirely bound to this pattern. For few would disagree that adequate Christian theology always requires both of these dimensions: private and public, personal and social, experiential and political. Yet epochs differ, and good theology is or should be sufficiently incarnational to respond appropriately in differing contexts. At best, this is a matter of nuance and emphasis in the interpretation of a rich tradition that retains recognizable continuity. Yet proper emphasis in appropriate

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contexts is crucial to the communication of the churches' gospel. So the question remains: Will the churches give a more public social and political form to their theology in the 1980s?

Two of the volumes chosen for this review essay urge and advise an affirmative answer, though in quite different ways. Martin Marty argues for the religious civility that can capitalize on the Christian and cultural pluralism in North America, while Johann Baptist Metz contends for the emergence of "basic community churches" so that the rich congregations of Central Europe (and by implication, North America) may be converted and reconciled to the poor churches, especially of South America. The other author does not give a directly negative answer to our question, but the focus of his concern implies it. Muggeridge's happiness over his late observation that Christendom has recently come to an end implies a rejection of all political theologies, although his theology continues to resonate with conservative political overtones.

Muggeridge's resistance to public theology is fundamental in several senses of the word. He raises the fundamental theological issue of the relation of Christian faith and community to social and political institutions, and he suggests a "fundamentalist" kind of answer. Unfortunately, his book is more style than substance—though the style is often clever indeed, as one might expect from the former editor of the finest British humor magazine. His main points are that Christendom, defined as "the administrative or power structure, based on the Christian religion and constructed by men" (13), has recently collapsed; but Christians, far from despairing, should lift up their heads, for the light of the Christian revelation shines brightest when proud human institutions are shown their limits (23, 56). This revelation transcends all that is human, yet it is available for our rebirth in a "new world" (54). But what exactly constitutes this new world for Muggeridge is not made entirely clear. There is some suggestion that it could be understood apocalyptically, as the early Christians understood it, since they "had the great advantage of believing that the world would soon come to an end" (56). But after two millennia of continuing history, it appears that even Muggeridge cannot fully share that apocalypticism. His other possibility seems to be Plato's eternal realm of ideal forms. He uses Plato's image of the shadows in a cave to suggest that Christ gives us "eternity, which never begins and never ends and yet is sublimely now" (53-54). As Muggeridge understands it, the unhistorical character of the new world promised to Christians may
be further discerned in that he bases it "on the absolutes of love rather than the relativities of justice, on the universality of brotherhood rather than the particularity of equality" (55, emphasis added).

This understanding of the Christian promise, in my judgment, derives more from a conservative use of Platonic ontology than a Christian use of historical revelation. The key concern here is history and Muggeridge's neglect of it: Judaic history formed and reformed by covenants with Yahweh; Christian history formed by Jesus' Incarnation; and church history formed and reformed by the presence of the Holy Spirit. But Muggeridge is not much interested in any of this history. Indeed, he advises his readers that "they need not bother in any way about history" (9), except to discern the parable that it conveys—a parable discerned more by imagination, he says, than knowledge. I would not want to fault the importance of historical imagination. The metaphorical character of Jesus' parables of the kingdom are enough to convince me of the importance of imagination in receiving Christian revelation. But such imagination does not simply reduce history to a parable of the moving image of eternity. Rather, it allows us to discern the surprising forms of the genuinely historical character of the God who was really present in history in Jesus.

If Muggeridge had paid more attention to the knowledge of church history, he might not have come to the strange conclusion that Christendom is only just now collapsing. Many thoughtful Christians have had several centuries to deal with the implications of the collapse of Christendom for the churches' public theology, resulting in a wisdom that goes beyond Muggeridge's fleeing to the consolations of eternity or savoring the delicious irony of the growth of faith in the officially atheist Soviet Union.

The conservative political nuance of Muggeridge's nonpublic theology can be seen throughout this slim volume in his preoccupation with the fact of continued and renewed faith in the USSR. Many may and should share his joy but not his superficial approach, which is revealed in the fact that he knows almost nothing about the reality he purports to celebrate—another consequence of his utter neglect of history. For instance, he fabricates out of pure imagination the story of Stalin, who during the siege of Moscow in World War II presumably fetched "the patriarch and one or two other prelates from the labor camp where they were
languishing, and brought them to the Kremlin and set them up in
business again” (15). In point of fact, the church by then had no
patriarch to fetch from anywhere! And it did not need any
manipulation from Stalin to express its deep concern for the safety of
its motherland in a form of “public theology.” The Russian
Orthodox Church was then, and is now, both deeply spiritual in its
orthodoxy and profoundly national in its Russianness. On June 21,
1941, the very day that German troops invaded the Soviet frontier,
Metropolitan Sergius of Moscow, the lexam tenens of the patriarchal
office, sent out a pastoral letter to all of the Orthodox Christians of
Russia—about 40 percent of that part of the Soviet population—
urging their true patriotism in the defense of their native land. It was
not until two years later, September, 1943, that Stalin recognized the
service of the church by allowing the holy synod to elect a patriarch
to fill the office vacant since the death of Tikhon in 1925. This is not
esoteric knowledge; it is, for instance, readily available even to a
busy essayist in the work of another equally conservative British
Christian, Michael Bordeaux of Keston College.

The ideological slant of Muggeridge’s celebration of Russian faith
is also revealed in his focusing almost entirely on dissidents and
emigrés like Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Eduard Kuznetsov. Why
does he neglect the equally genuine faith of millions of Christians
who have elected to stay in the Soviet Union? Perhaps because they
do not have a theology so easily bent to Muggeridge’s purely
personal and private intent. And perhaps also because their public
theology inevitably carries nuances of support for the political and
economic system in which they live, reflecting a thousand years of
loyalty to “Mother Russia.”

There is, of course, good reason to be concerned about the
inevitably ideological character of all “public theology”—not only in
the Soviet Union, but also in the United States. Even in the most
enlightened societies, we remain in danger of the “tribalism” that
Martin Marty analyzes so helpfully. He argues convincingly that a
new tribalism has emerged in the last quarter of the twentieth
century, and the nation-states are our most potent tribes (17-18).
We evidently continue to need our tribes for identity and support.
But since this is so, we also desperately need the public theology of a
truly ecumenical church to save our tribalisms from becoming
murderous idolatries.

Nowhere is this more true than in the two states that have become
the superpowers of the latter half of the twentieth century—the
USA and the USSR. Neither of them is a tribe in the old ethnic sense. Even the Russian people are now a minority in the Soviet Union, and the WASPs have long since lost their hegemony in the USA. Both the USSR and the USA face the great difficulty of trying to unite in one state a vast conglomerate of nationalities and ethnic groups. For this reason Communist ideology is so crucial to the "tribal unity" of the Soviet Union, and civil religion plays a similar role in the United States. Nothing else can give tribal identity in so complex a state facing so formidable an adversary in so dangerous an age. And for this reason, both Soviet Communist ideology and American civil religion constitute great dangers as potentially murderous idolatries.

Martin Marty would teach us that the problem is not with tribes as such, but with exaggerated tribalism, with its exclusiveness, belligerence, and messianic millennial and utopian outlook (123-27). He is, I think, substantially correct, especially when he focuses on the smaller ecclesial tribes of the "new Christian Right" in the USA. Though such religious tribes are not as dangerous as state-tribes that have become superpowers, the graver danger of their Fundamentalist tribalism in the USA is precisely its fostering of state tribalism. They seem unable, at least as yet, to differentiate between biblical religion and the civil religion.

Marty unfortunately is less concerned about civil religion, as he tells us, than he is about "civility" in religious manners (103 and 158 ff.). He prefers Benjamin Franklin's notion of "public religion," born at the intersection where churches and political philosophies and movements have something in common (160). He thus focuses helpfully on domestic issues, as one might expect from an American church historian, but not on what I consider the more pressing issues of international economic injustice and an international arms race that threatens to end in nuclear holocaust. Indeed, much of what he discusses under the promising chapter title of "Prophecy and Politics" is internal to the church's life, such as textual criticism and liturgical rites that need to be compromised in pluralistic churches.

Marty's work makes an important contribution at the point of the self-understanding of the "public church" in the USA as a "community of communities," made up of mainline Protestantism, socially conscious evangelicalism, and Roman Catholicism transformed since Vatican Council II. His advice to this public church on how to persuade our new tribalisms toward civility in public discourse should be well taken.
In all this Marty's commitment to the basic American value of pluralism is clear and, I think, on the whole, good. Yet he does not make sufficiently clear just how American, and perhaps Swiss (which is his ethnic background), and maybe also bourgeois this commitment to pluralism is. If he were more concerned in this book about the public theology of the ecumenical church as an international community of communities, he might better have focused on the ideological danger of civil religion, even a pluralistic civil religion whose proponents think it is more pluralistic than it really is.

In my judgment, any adequate public theology for the end of the twentieth century, especially for churches in the two superpowers, must seek more carefully to safeguard itself from the idolatries of ideology and civil religion, so that it may speak a more adequate word to the crucial issues of international economic justice and the horror of the present arms race.

It is just at the point of speaking to these issues that Metz's book makes its greatest contribution. Since it is made up of talks given recently (1978-1980, except for one from 1968) to Catholic and Protestant conferences in West Germany, however, it does not speak very directly to our North American context. Perhaps this is just as well, since his message will be perceived as radical by many North American Christians. It may be read less defensively by those less directly addressed by it. Of the three books reviewed, Metz's gives the most substantial help for the content needed in our public theology for the 1980s.

Marty is most helpful in developing the "civil" form in which a public theology must be communicated in pluralistic America. But Metz speaks repeatedly and even relentlessly to what must be near the heart of the content of this public theology. He defines eloquently the world context for our public theology and the tragic spiritual consequences of the churches' failure adequately to address this world context:

Everyone can see the signs of this looming social apocalypse: the atomic threat, the arms race madness, the destruction of the environment, terrorism, the global struggle of exploitation, or North-South conflict with its attendant danger of a world-wide social war. And yet the catastrophe remains mostly an awareness in the mind, not in the heart. It generates depression but not grief, apathy but not resistance. People seem to be becoming more and more the voyeurs of their own downfall (9).
How do our churches minister spiritually to people caught in the depression and apathy of such social and political voyeurism? This Catholic theologian gives an evangelical answer: by calling people to conversion, to "a change of heart." But Metz's understanding of what in our hearts needs to be changed differs from that of many in North America who call themselves "evangelical." For we are often complacent about rich "hearts" hardened by affluence into a form that Metz calls "bürgerlich," the French call "bourgeois," and we Americans usually call "middle-class." The scandal of this book for most of us middle-class Americans is right here. It urgently calls affluent German (and North American) Christians to repent of their "middle-classness."

This message is conveyed in its very title in German, *Jenseits Bürgerlicher Religion*, or *Beyond Bourgeois Religion*, which the publisher obscured in the American title of *The Emergent Church*—until one reads the subtitle in small print, "The Future of Christianity in a Postbourgeois World." But even this English subtitle obscures Metz's evangelical purpose. It is not only our world that is bourgeois, but also our churches and their theologies. Metz contends that we middle-class Christians resist the conversion that would save us by shaping our faith and our theologies in the following ways: by transforming Christian faith into something purely personal and private (2-3); by creating an eschatology of the reconciliation of all things which speaks no judgment to our injustice (4); by denaturing Jesus' "messianic love" so that it no longer takes sides with the underprivileged (4-5); by making invisible in our parishes the suffering of society so as to preserve the peace of our "purely religious" congregations (45-46 and 63); by practicing a "tactical provincialism" that denies the catholic universality of the church, thereby obscuring our relation in Christ to the poor churches of the less-developed countries (71 and 92); and by subconsciously confusing evangelical freedom given us by the gospel with "bourgeois unapproachability" (88).

To whatever degree these descriptions characterize our congregations, our capacity to proclaim an adequate public theology may well require a prior conversion of our hearts, a radical revision of our personal and parochial priorities. Metz finds in the basic Christien communities (*comunidades de base*) that now exist by the tens of thousands all over South America the model for the church he hopes will emerge in affluent societies like West Germany and the USA. He knows that such basic communities have not been held in very
high esteem by most Christians in Europe or North America. But he thinks the increasing emptiness of our disconnected, socially and politically neutral, "purely religious" congregations may lead to a greater openness to what the Holy Spirit is doing through basic Christian communities in other parts of our world. Given the tribalism that Martin Marty describes and deplores in contemporary North American church life, however, we must be realistic about the difficulty the Holy Spirit will meet in persuading middle-class Christians to go through the "eye of the needle" that will liberate us from the "culture of domination" of which our class is now a part.

Roman Catholics like Metz, precisely because of their Catholicism, have the advantage of being united with the poor churches of Latin America in their misery and oppression (92). Through such structures as the World Council of Churches, the ecumenical church serves Protestant churches in the same way. But recently the affluent middle-class congregations have felt more distant from the World Council of Churches because of its support for liberation movements through its Program to Combat Racism. Marty may be correct that it is only the "public church" that will give the liberation theologies of the basic Christian communities whatever hearing they will get in North America (165). But if these public churches continue to value a middle-class kind of pluralism more than justice for the poor, their public theology will not begin to approximate the power of the praxis of South American basic Christian communities grounded in the very life of the poor. This does not mean that the realm of politics does not have some principles peculiar to it, including the civility and compromise Marty espouses. But it does mean that Christians using these and other political insights must work resolutely for liberation and reconciliation, if they understand Jesus to have revealed God as working in this way.

Thus Metz appeals more directly to God's liberating and reconciling grace in politics. His words are powerful and pertinent to what I think our public theology should be:

We are seeing manifested precisely within the worldwide Catholic Church the beginnings of such an invocation of grace in the liberation of the poor and oppressed human beings and peoples. I am referring to the basic-community churches of liberation and also to the theology of liberation in the poor countries of the world, above all—in the context of Catholicism—to the Latin American church. In this church, energetic attempts are being made to bind together the ideas of redemption with
those of liberation, and to live out and proclaim this emerging configuration of freedom as a precious heritage of the gospel. Of course, everything will depend on whether Catholicism in our countries, in the wealthy countries of this earth, is prepared to recognize the providential reformational mission of the poor churches for the whole church and for the whole of Christianity (58).

To the degree that civil religionists still think of the USA as the last and best hope for the expression of Christian power in the world, let us learn from Muggeridge to bring an end to specious notions of “Christendom.” To the degree that the middle-class limitations hamper our dialogue with God’s poor, let us pray for the change of heart Johann Metz describes. Let civil religion give way to, or be incorporated in, a truer public theology! All of this is with the intent that our “public church” may more fully “emerge” as an ecumenical, international community of faithful communities, capable of converting our personal hearts with a power that reaches to all the dimensions of our social, economic, and political lives.
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