Old Testament Lections for Epiphany
Harrell F. Beck

Freeing God from the Holocaust
A. Roy Eckardt

Family Ministries Across Cultures
Taylor and June McConnell

Distinctive Tasks of the Ordained
Andrew Gilman

Book Reviews on the Question of God
Robert T. Osborn
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Falling within the purview of the journal are articles and reviews on biblical, theological, ethical, and ecclesiastical questions; homiletics, pastoral counseling, church education, sacred music, worship, evangelism, mission, and church management; ecumenical issues; cultural and social issues where their salience to the practice of ministry can be demonstrated; and the general ministry of Christians, as part of the church’s understanding of its nature and mission.

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EDITORIAL

Quote to What End?

"Radiation leaks are made by fools like me, but only God can make a nuclear reactor that is 93 million miles from the neighborhood elementary school."

When you run across a statement like that, you tend to preserve it so you can pass it along to someone else. The quote is from college graffiti collected by Richard B. Hammerstrom, who has published several books on the subject. Since I am as intrigued as anyone by such apothegmatic statements, I began to reflect on the art of quotation.

Luckily a wonderful article fell into my hands, an article by a French professor on the use of quotations in art. Jean Weisberger is the professor, and he calls attention to the constructive use of quotations. Noting that a tremendous amount of the world’s art and serious literature imitates previous work, he claims that 90 percent of the books published are about other books. M. Weisberger must be close to the mark in this claim, which is probably unprovable. It makes us wonder if anything can really be written without quoting someone else.

The negative aspects of quotation are well known. Many quotes are for display purposes only, or are meant to entertain, somewhat like embellishment in music. This practice is more widespread in public speaking than in writing, probably. And we are all familiar with the plagiarist—the one in ourselves as well as in others. Very few writers and speakers have escaped the feeling they borrowed an idea or argument from someone else, if only they could remember who it was.

The only thing worse than an uncited source is a citation that is overlong. Writers who quote endless amounts of material make one wonder why we should read them—just give us a bibliography and we could look up the material ourselves.
Accuracy is another problem. Quotations are a device for communicating that another person has said or written something. Yet nowadays we see quotations being used for what we hoped someone might have said, or what we intend them to have said, whether they did or not. That is why well-meaning writers have ancient people, or even nineteenth-century people, speaking with "he and she" and other nonsexist devices. The whole field of sexist language is rife with problems, but this much can be said about quotations: let the original source speak with as much accuracy as possible.

By referring to accuracy I really mean to call attention to misquotations. William Safire has written about Edmund Burke's famous statement, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." Apparently Burke did not say it, or if he did, no one can prove that he did. Safire reports that a person challenged Bartlett's source and Safire could never track it down satisfactorily. (See William Safire on Language, "Quotation Demolishers, Inc.," for the whole anecdote.) This incident raises unpleasant questions. If Bartlett's can be wrong, whom can we trust?

The authenticity of translations is another matter, entirely, but I should think a respectable speaker or writer would try to avoid making Jesus into an American or something equally as silly. It surely is wrong to have Jesus saying, "Happy are the utterly sincere, for they will see God!" as J. B. Phillips did. Once you have gone this far you might as well descend completely into banality and have Jesus saying that if only you believe, you can do anything.

This discussion concerns actual quoted matter and not the punctuation device known as quotations. A word needs to be said, however, about quotation marks. Today they are being used fairly indiscriminately by journalists, and the intent is not always clear. The ironic use has become rampant. In polemics it is now common to refer to one's opposition by quotation marks. Thus one might refer to "president" Ronald Reagan. The suggestion is that Reagan is not actually president, that he is only a mouthpiece for certain interests, or that his way of serving as president is no president at all. Like others, I enjoy the
humorous use of such quotations—a 1976 Nova that our family calls a “car,” a weedpatch that we refer to as our “lawn,” and when my son and I cook for ourselves, something undefinable we call “dinner.” It is only when one moves beyond obvious humor that this use of quotation marks becomes questionable.

What is the point of substantial quotations, though? Ostensibly the quotation of any authority lends weight to what the writer or speaker is saying. Too many quotations, though, seem to be chosen whimsically or superficially without regard to the nature of the source. It really does not help to quote Whitehead if (a) most of your readers or listeners are not familiar with Whitehead, or (b) most of them would disagree with Whitehead if they knew what he stood for. So why quote Whitehead? I have done this myself and therefore feel some trepidation at even raising the question. I suppose many people feel they are doing the audience or readership a favor by providing a succinct quote.

These little sayings and metaphors are more appropriate in oral speech than in written. When writing it is more desirable to use quotations to interest a reader in the source itself. Quotations have an educative purpose, and literature points beyond itself to other thinking on the same question or theme.

Weisberger wrote: “As quotations open out the text into the outside world, they make it more accessible to the public. If the general reader is able to pick up the reference, which implies the existence of an established tradition, understanding has been achieved. Once run to earth, the source serves as an explanation, a compensation for the obscurity of the individual message.”

In speaking, in contrast, one may have to quote briefly and even repeat a quotation so the audience can let it sink in.

Here then are some suggestions for quoting well:

Go to a source that is as close to the original as possible. Many writers quote someone quoted in secondary literature. This hardly lends authority to their writing.

Quote people only when you can be sure of what they said. “As Mr. X said somewhere,” is a self-defeating phrase.

Use quotations to build up to or summarize what you are
saying. This may offer an air of hubris, as if one were saying, "John Dewey and I agree on this." Yet a quotation that is part of a sequence of thought is more authentic than one that pops in without relation to the surrounding text.

Choose the amount of quoted material with care. For writers this means just enough material to be fair to someone's thought. For speakers it means just enough to enable the audience to grasp what you are saying.

Avoid cliché in quotations. It is no longer amusing or enlightening to quote Lincoln on fooling some of the people all the time and so forth.

Do not quote yourself unless your narcissism is so out of control that you are working with your psychiatrist on the problem.

When quoting esoteric sources, do so with care. You will either make others wonder who the source is or you will be forced to show off by implying you are familiar with arcane authorities.

But then, I may have lost my credibility by quoting someone named Jean Weisberger. I do so only because, as someone thought Burke once said, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of a deadline is for an editor to have nothing to say."

—CHARLES E. COLE
HOMILETICAL RESOURCES:
OLD TESTAMENT LECTIONS FOR EPIPHANY

HARRELL F. BECK

SUNDAY, JANUARY 2 (EPIPHANY SUNDAY)

Isaiah 60:1-9

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you (Isa. 60:1).

These singing verses peal forth like the introit to a new era in Israel’s life. They stand at the head of chapters 60–62, the songs of one who has returned from exile to a ravaged Jerusalem. The purpose of these songs is to encourage the exiles to return and rebuild the ancient center.

Chapters 60–62 are in many respects the heart of Isaiah 56–66 and are very similar in spirit and vocabulary to Isaiah 50–55.

The central theme of these songs is a vision of the impending restoration of the wealth and glory of Jerusalem. The great homecoming of the exiles is about to take place. Sorrow is to be turned into delight. Good news awaits the afflicted. The brokenhearted are to be healed, captives liberated, the bound released. Forsaken Jerusalem is about to become the delight of the Lord. The promises of Isaiah 54 are on the verge of fulfillment.

For a brief moment I forsook you, but with great compassion I will gather you.
In overflowing wrath for a moment
I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says the Lord, your Redeemer (Isa. 54:7-8).

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The danger of the exile was that, amid dislocation and suffering, the people would lose any sense of a meaningful future, any genuine hope. It was a frightening moment when the exiles cried out, “How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?” (Psalm 137:4). Not even stragglers who remained in Jerusalem were likely to sing amid the ruins of temple and city. Where there is no hope people perish, because despair and meaninglessness do not sustain relationships.

Against the background of a time when singers had gone mute, the artist who wrote 60:1-6 proclaimed a new possibility in which he ardently believed. Apparently he saw that hope is a psychological necessity without which there can be no mental health. Hope is also a social necessity without which there can be no meaningful criticism or thoughtful reform and rebuilding. It is also a theological hope; even material prosperity cannot escape disappointment and emptiness. Persons need a hopeful philosophy, a framework of values, visions and dreams, as much as they need calcium, sunshine, and love.

For this poet, Israel’s hope is grounded in the divine will. God has willed that Jerusalem shall be restored. Her sons and daughters shall return. Wealth will come to her. And in Jerusalem both Israel and the nations shall “proclaim the praise of the Lord” (60:6).

The nationalism that prevails in this chapter must simply be acknowledged. Yet there is here also the keen desire that Judah should prosper as one among the nations. As the nations recognize Judah they will have opportunity to recognize and serve the God Judah worships, the God who guarantees Judah’s life and future.

All healthy religion is future-oriented. The poet who wrote these verses is also a prophet. In dreaming dreams and seeing visions for others, a spirit of hope came into his own heart. Surely it remains true that respect for persons is the basis of hope.

In Isaiah 60-62 we have a series of songs celebrating the glory of the New Jerusalem, the return of the captives, and the bright future that lies before the people of God. Many contemporary scholars see these three chapters as the nucleus around which
the warnings and promises of Isaiah 56–66 have been gathered. Both the spirit and vocabulary of these songs remind us of Isaiah 40–55, a fact that leads some scholars to the conclusion that 40–55 and 56–66 were written by the same author.

Chapters 60–62 would seem to be the work of one author who has a message of salvation to proclaim, a message that is rather complete in itself. The lyrical description of the new Zion was probably the work of a prophet who was active among the returned exiles. The new community that is described in Isaiah 40–55 is here seen as being on the verge of appearing (60). Having proclaimed the glory of the new Zion and the return of the exiles, the prophet introduces himself as the messenger whom God has sent to proclaim the salvation of Zion (may critics who accept a Deutero-Isaian authorship for 56–66 regard 61:1-3 as the fifth Servant Song). In 62:1 the author again suggests his own role in the restoration. Taken together these three chapters are a proclamation of salvation, a message of promise and hope without any threat of judgment (60:12 is probably an addition).

Since the nineteenth century it has been a commonplace among critical scholars that Isaiah 40–66 was written by someone other than Isaiah of Jerusalem. On the basis of differing historical contexts, literary characteristics and theological emphases, these chapters would seem to have been written during and following the last days of the Babylonian Exile by an unknown author. In the eighth century, Isaiah of Jerusalem (about whom we know a good deal) addresses Judah with words of judgment and doom. The author of Isaiah 40 ff. (whom we cannot even name) brings words of consolation and hope to exiles who know that Jerusalem lies in ruins and long for its reconstruction (42:26-28; 49:14-23). This author announces that a majestic and caring Lord will build the new Jerusalem (42:12–48:22).

The Exile is the historical context for other theological emphases in Second Isaiah. As Yahweh had brought judgment upon a self-indulgent and rebellious people, now the Unknown Prophet announces divine consolation for a suffering people, and the promise that the only true God (44:6-8), Lord of creation and of history, will intervene as Redeemer. Cyrus, the Persian
emperor, is called "the anointed" of God through whom Israel's salvation will be furthered (45). The foreign nations themselves will be brought to salvation. The impending restoration ("Behold your God is at hand," 40:9) will come about through the power of the Word of God, a theme that permeates chaps. 40-55.

"For as the rain and snow come down from heaven, and return not thither but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it" (Isa. 55:10-11).

The God who created order out of chaos in the beginning (Gen. 1:1-2) will bring order again into the life of Israel. This redemption is God's will for Israel and the nations. Included in Isaiah 40-55 are four Songs of the Suffering Servant. This divine, redemptive intention is to prosper through the Servant, who shall even "take away the sins of many" (53:12). (Questions about the relationship between the Servant Songs and the rest of Second Isaiah are included in the next lection, Isa. 42:1-9.)

Considerable diversity of judgment continues about the relationship between Isaiah 40-55 and 56-66. Can we speak of a Third Isaiah as a literary unit with a common authorship? While we recognize the unity of 60-62, there are many other strands in these chapters. Perhaps these strands, a collection of warnings and promises, were gathered around 60-62. This nucleus was written after the exiles had been given permission to return (538 B.C.), though apparently only a small number did so. The hard circumstances of those who returned (and those who did not) will soon turn to brightness and salvation.

The author of chapters 60-62, familiar with Second Isaiah, was a disciple schooled in that theologian-poet's thought (compare 60 with 47, 49, 53, 54-55). The disciple offers a distinctive message but one that has clear connections with the earlier prophet. The message of salvation that the teacher had
proclaimed may have been disregarded under the stress of economic and political hardship and spiritual anguish. The new salvation, which Second Isaiah proclaimed as God's plan, the disciple now sees as beginning to take place. While there are differences of emphasis, both anticipate God's salvation with joy and singing. For both, God's plan of redemption is concerned with life here on earth. Both could have joined with the psalmist: “I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living!” (Ps. 27:13).

Isaiah 60-62 was probably written a few years after Cyrus's edict freeing the exiles. The later strands that were added are difficult to date, but we may assume that 56-66 had been brought together by the middle of the fifth century B.C.

Isa. 60:1-3. Chapter 60 proclaims and celebrates the impending salvation of Zion. It is the first of three songs of joy that are directly preceded and followed by laments (59, 63). God's great act of salvation in redeeming and restoring Jerusalem warrants the imperatives that the poet sings forth (note the frequent use of such imperatives in Second Isaiah):

“Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.” (60:1).

“Lift up your eyes round about, and see…” (60:4; quoted verbatim from 49:16).

The light of the Lord, the glory of Israel's God, is coming upon Zion. When it does, the nations will in turn come to Zion. There is a strong eschatological note in these interrelated movements. The presence of God in Jerusalem, among the people, will prove an illuminating and transforming radiance. The command that the people should “arise” and “shine” is both an anticipation of Yahweh's coming and a popular response to it. Zion is invited to accept the message of salvation.

“Light” and “the glory of the Lord” are here used in a kind of parallelism. The coming of Yahweh is the coming of salvation (cf. 56:1; 59:11; 62:11). The glory of the Lord suggests the weighty decisiveness of the divine will: the way of the Lord will prevail. This advent theme reminds one of Isa. 9:2:
The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
on them has light shined.

The coming of the light and the time of its coming are simply a matter of the divine pleasure. For Third Isaiah this transforming advent is not tied to any historical event. It is not dependent upon the return to Zion of those living in exile but rather will make their homecoming possible. This proclamation of salvation and its consequences give Zion reason to arise from defeat and tiredness and let the glory of God shine in their faces.

Isa. 60:2-3. Two synonymous parallelisms are used to contrast the darkness that covers the nations with the brightness that comes to Zion. When they see the darkness that covers the nations, nations and kings will wish to “come to the light.” (According to Rev. 21:24, the light of Zion is expected to attract the kings to it and the nations will walk in that light.) The universalism of this song matches that of Second Isaiah: the coming of the Lord of salvation to Zion portends the salvation of the nations.

Isa. 60:4-9. “Lift up your eyes round about, and see...” This imperative (again cf. 49:18, 22) heralds a momentous event that no one in Zion should miss. God has come to Zion and the people have seen the brightness of Zion’s future (rising). The very sight makes observers radiant and sets hearts to rejoicing (vs. 5).

A plan of universal salvation has been set in motion, and vss. 4-9 describe the trek of the nations to Zion, the place of salvation. This plan is the central message of this whole song.

The distinctive power and awesomeness of this miraculous event can be appreciated only if we see it in the context of the tragedy of the Exile. The destruction of Zion and the Temple, the scattering of priesthood and people, the sufferings of captivity must have seemed like the end of any vital covenant relationship between Israel and Yahweh (Jer. 31:31-34 warns that the Sinai covenant is finished). In exile, Israel had to live with the
consequences of sin and betrayal and the humiliation of submission to Babylonian rule. The exiles asked, "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" (Ps. 137:4). Many must also have asked, "Can we even worship the Lord in Zion? Is there any future there?" Those who remained faithful in exile endured poverty and violence. Jerusalem itself became a place of bloodshed and of despair. For decades after the decree of Cyrus it remained a desolate place to which only a small number of exiles returned.

Isa. 60:4-5a. But now revolutionary changes are about to occur. The light has come upon Zion; "the glory of the Lord" has risen upon it. The nations have seen that light and will soon be streaming toward Zion, not as armies or because they have to do so, but because they want to come. With them they bring Zion's richest treasure, its sons and daughters in exile (note this same priority in 4b and 9b). The Gentiles have a place in the plan of salvation which enriches their lives and the future of Zion. Seeing all this, present residents of Zion have reason to be radiant. What greater thrill or cause for rejoicing could come to them? (Verse 5a suggests a great deal about the spirit and theology of the author of the song.)

Isa. 60:5b. Beyond the return of the exiles the nations shall bring treasures to Zion, a kind of freewill offering, presumably as an expression of gratitude for the salvation that has come to them.

Isa. 60:6. Caravans shall come by land from Midian and Ephah and Sheba, places of the descendants of Abraham (Gen. 25:1-4). They not only bring gifts but they also participate in the worship of the God of Abraham, thus claiming and fulfilling their own heritage. (Cf. both 60:3 and 6 with themes in Matthew's narrative of Jesus' birth, 2:3 and 10-11.) Caravans also come, bringing flocks from Kedar and Nebaioth in northern Arabia. These too are descendants of Abraham (Gen. 25:13). These flocks provide suitable offerings for the altar of Yahweh. In accepting them as sacrifices God bestows honor and greatness upon the Temple.

Isa. 60:8-9. As caravans and flocks come by land so fleets of ships come by sea. Far distant the white-masted ships ("that fly
like a cloud”) can be seen coming toward Zion. The first line of vs. 9 is variously emended. The basic meaning is probably that the people of the coastlands wait for, that is, have their hope in, the God of Zion. (Cf. 51:5b:

. . . the coastlands wait for me,
and for my arm they hope.)

Tarshish, a Phoenician colony in southern Spain (Jonah 1:3), comes first, perhaps to suggest that the farthest place comes quickly, perhaps because it has fast, well-rigged sailing vessels. These vessels bring both the exiles from Zion and precious wares.

This rich stream of people and gifts to Zion glorifies the name of the Lord (name as the honor and glory of God—see 56:6; 59:19; 60:9). The nations come glorifying the God who has glorified Zion. In redeeming both Zion and the nations the Lord brings glory upon himself, a theme that is prominent in the proclamation of salvation.

According to Third Isaiah the new day of the salvation of Zion is at hand. The time of miraculous transformation has come. For Zion exile will turn into homecoming:

darkness into light;
vioce into security;
wraith into mercy;
humiliation into rejoicing;
poverty into prosperity;
Gentiles into servants of Yahweh.

This salvation will have tangible, down-to-earth consequences. But however earthly those consequences, the coming of this phenomenal transformation is not tied to a historical event (here Second and Third Isaiah differ). It will come in God’s own good time. For the author of Isaiah 60, “the acceptable year of the Lord” (61:2) is at hand. God’s pleasure is that salvation should come both to Zion and to the nations. The author’s enthusiasm for this proclamation is not simply that of an interested messenger. In 61:1 and again in 62:1 he introduces himself as one who both proclaims salvation and participates in its work.
Third Isaiah's proclamation of salvation was not fulfilled though he may have been instrumental in keeping faith and hope alive in the post-exilic community. And yet this poet holds a significant place in the history of the people of God. Elements of the proclamation of salvation that we have in chapters 60-62 persist in both Judaism and Christianity. The experience by which Third Isaiah felt himself commissioned to proclaim salvation, and his summary of that proclamation, were used by Jesus of Nazareth half a millennium later as authorization for his own ministry:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." (Luke 4:18-19).

SUNDAY, JANUARY 9 (FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY)


The quiet, almost melancholy Servant Songs of Isaiah provide a kind of "job description," setting forth the finest characteristics of faithful Israel and her noblest leaders. The Servant is "the chosen one" (like Moses, David, and Israel herself) who combines the roles of Davidic and Messianic king with the role of the prophet. The overarching commission of the Servant is "to bring forth justice to the nations" (Isa. 42:1, 3, 4). Thus the task of kings and prophets falls to the Servant, whose ironic methods provide a startling contrast to the ways of Cyrus and the violent spirit of exilic times ("a bruised reed he will not break").

This kingly office of the Servant is combined with the role of the teacher: Israel (and the nations) must be helped to recognize their blindness and imprisonment before they can be freed from them (see Isa. 6:9-10).

God who created at the beginning can recreate a new Israel out of the tragedy of the Exile. The creator-redeemer God of
Genesis 1 and 2 continues to turn darkness into light. Israel is the first to benefit from this redemptive work of God (42:6a), but with privilege comes demanding responsibility (42:6b-7). God has given Israel as "a covenant to the people, a light to the nations" that the blind may see, the imprisoned may be freed, and those who sit in darkness may come to the light.

Here is an emphatic reminder that greatness in the kingdom of God is grounded in servanthood. This mandate takes as its corollary the principle of voluntary, vicarious suffering: your hurt in my heart.

God’s wish that Israel should be “a light to the nations” (42:6) may appropriately be coupled with 49:6.

“It is too light a thing that you should be my servant
to raise up the tribes of Jacob
and to restore the preserved of Israel:
I will give you as a light to the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

If the faithful seek only their own salvation they will get enmeshed in self-defeating introspection, self-centeredness, and pride. They will also be denying the universality of God’s love for the whole world. Concern for the salvation of the nations is both a theological mandate and a political and economic essential.

This intercessory office is vitalized not by human ingenuity and might, but by the Spirit of the Lord who chooses to uphold the Servant. The Servant has glimpsed “the new things” that God declares and that will come to pass. Change is seen as the grace of God moving in history with purposiveness. The Servant demonstrates the fact that the very hopes of God depend upon the ability of a breed of men and women to believe in a world that has not yet come. The soul of God delights in such persons, and the Spirit of God empowers them (42:1).

New Testament writers used the poems of the Suffering Servant in Second Isaiah extensively in their accounts of Jesus of Nazareth, lifting up the importance of voluntary or vicarious
suffering in the way of life of the faithful. Jesus himself seems to have given warrant for such use. An allusion to Isaiah 53 seems obvious in the saying, "For the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). And in Luke 22:37 a direct reference to Isaiah 53 is purportedly made by Jesus: "For I tell you that this scripture must be fulfilled in me, 'And he was reckoned with transgressors'; for what is written about me has its fulfillment." The identification of a suffering Messiah is a combination of ideas which is unknown in earlier or contemporary Judaic thought. We have no reason to deny that it was central in Jesus' self-consciousness. It was at once an original and productive feature of his life and teaching.

Isa. 42:1 ff. is the first of four Servant Songs which were first isolated by Duhm in 1892. He held that these poems (42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12) were not from Second Isaiah but a later author (about 450 B.C.). Many critics, for example von Rad, argue that we have no reason to think the author of Isaiah 40-55 did not write these songs. This view of a common authorship does not seem to deal adequately with certain facts: (1) the removal of the songs does not interfere with the continuity and flow of the rest of 40-55; (2) there are stylistic differences between the poems and the rest of 40-55; (3) the idea of the Servant is found only in these songs.

In light of these considerations a number of modern critics (Westermann, John McKenzie) regard the songs as a special strand within Second Isaiah and later than their context. Such scholars generally find that the Servant Songs form a literary unit. However distinctive, the songs in some sense owe their origin to the unknown Second Isaiah, one or more of them (surely the fourth) being the work of a disciple.

We are here confronted with rather overwhelming anonymity: Second Isaiah is unknown; the author of the songs open to question; and the identity of the Suffering Servant a matter of conjecture.

There is no consensus about the identification of the Servant, though unnumbered suggestions have been made, especially of personages in the history of Israel. Some have argued that it is
Second Isaiah, in which case it seems unlikely that he would have been the author of the first three poems and impossible that he would have written the fourth, which portrays the martyrdom of the Servant. Others hold that the Servant is Israel or a faithful remnant therein who have survived the Exile. For such critics, references to an individual allude to a personification of the covenant community. C. R. North holds to a fluid interpretation in which the Servant is now an individual acting on behalf of the community, now the community of the faithful. John McKenzie offers a similar and very helpful view of the Servant as a historical individual with idealized elements of future promise woven into the portrayal.

The Servant is considered as an individual figure but he is the figure who recapitulates in himself all the religious gifts and the religious mission of Israel. . . . The Servant belongs to the future, for he is what Israel must become. But he also belongs to the past, for his character is formed by reflection on Israel's history and on the character of her leaders. ("Second Isaiah," Anchor Bible, pp. liii, lv)

The impact of the Servant poems should be seen in light of the historical context of the larger document in which they stand. Isaiah 40-55 is distinguished from the work of the eighth-century Isaiah by matters of style, vocabulary, historical context, and theological emphases. Isaiah of Jerusalem preaches oracles of strong judgment and doom against Judah. Repentance and trust in God alone can save Israel from internal injustice, political and religious corruption, and misleading foreign alliance. (Such repentance did not come, and doom did.)

Isaiah 40-55, in contrast, addresses a people who have been defeated by the Babylonians who subsequently carried the best of the defeated population into exile (from 587 B.C.). They are a people who do not need to be warned about impending judgment, but for whom there seems to be little hope for any meaningful future. These chapters were probably written in Babylon at the time when Cyrus the Persian, who had conquered Babylon at the time when Cyrus the Persian, who had conquered Babylon, encouraged the exiles to return home (ca. 539 B.C.).

The themes of Second Isaiah form an amazing credo: the God
who created of old will re-create; order can be brought out of chaos. God the Creator is also Lord of history and Redeemer. Comfort is at hand. The God of stern judgment is also a God of loving mercy. A new Israel is about to come into being. An eschatological note pervades Second Isaiah as well as the Servant poems.

Poet and prophet meet in the author of the Servant poems. As a prophet the author would lead the people away from a preoccupation with the Exile and with their own reestablishment. It is too light a thing that they should simply seek their own salvation. Israel’s salvation involves her willingness to be “a light to the nations,” her voluntary concern for others even when it involves suffering, and her recognition of the universality of God’s love for all peoples of the earth. The teaching of the poet is not only theologically and spiritually astute; it is also characterized by a note of political reality.

This prophetic message is put in a poetic form that is appropriate to the impassioned spirit of the prophet. Form and purpose are combined to define the mission of Israel in a new era. As with Second Isaiah, so here literary skill is an integral dimension of the gospel of salvation which is memorably proclaimed.

The purpose of the first of the Servant Songs (42:1-9) is to identify the office of the servant: “Behold, my servant.” The divine appointment is emphasized in the synonymous parallelism of 1a:

Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights.

God designates the servant for whom empowerment is promised (“I have put my Spirit upon him . . .”). The work of the servant is underscored by repetition:

1b “he will bring forth justice to the nations”
3b “he will faithfully bring forth justice”
4b “till he has established justice in the earth”

From the very beginning we must recognize that exegesis cannot provide data that the poet does not include. We are not
told who the servant is, nor do we have a precise "job
description." We know something of the era in which the poem
was written and something of the problems of a community
moving from the scars of exile toward restoration. Perhaps it is a
part of the intention of the author that his meanings should be
somewhat veiled. The model on whom the poems are based is
not simply to be admired but to be imitated, by a variety of
persons in a variety of circumstances.

1) The servant is called to bring justice to the nations, to serve
the Lord in every place of human need. While the suffering of
the servant is not a prominent theme in this first song, a
thoughtful reading cannot preclude such a possibility, which is
drawn out more fully in the subsequent poems. Thus the
principle of voluntary suffering (your hurt in my heart; your
legitimate need as my vocation; who would be great among you
shall be the servant) is lifted up.

2) A reliable search for justice among the nations is an
expression of respect and love for them (justice as love
activated). In such work the servant will be empowered by the
dynamic relationship which will evolve among the Lord, the
servant, and those to whom light and justice come.

Isa. 42:1. The servant portrayed in these songs embodies the
noblest qualities of Israel and her leaders. The Servant is "the
chosen one," like Moses, David, and Israel herself (Isa. 41:8).
Reasons for the choice are not provided. It is simply an
expression of the pleasure of the Lord who will guarantee the
servant's success. Vs.42:1 is reflected in Mark's account (1:11) of
the designation of Jesus. According to Matthew 3:13-17, Jesus is
also equipped with the spirit, a gift necessary to any redemptive
mission (cf. Isa. 11:1; 61:1).

The task of the servant is to bring forth justice across the
world. Here justice or judgment means that the Servant is to
proclaim and participate in the execution of the divine will. In
the larger context of Second Isaiah this centers on the tenet that
Yahweh alone is Lord and Yahweh's will alone is to prevail (the
Gentile gods are as nothing; see 41:1-5, 22-29).

Isa. 42:3. The tactics that the servant is to employ are very
different from the military ways of those who have recently
ruled over Israel (and from those which Israel has tried, however unsuccessfully). The gentle, quiet ways of the servant are designed, not to force people into compliance, but to produce an enlightened and obedient heart (cf. Jer. 31:31-34). The Servant “will not cry or lift up his voice” “a bruised reed he will not break” “a dimly burning wick he will not quench.”

In oriental style a new king often reenacted the law and had it loudly proclaimed in the streets. Not so the servant. The proclamation of divine justice is not to be strident or harsh. Those who are broken or whose faith is barely alight or flickering will be not condemned but encouraged (perhaps especially) by the gentle servant. Westermann sees a limited parallel between these verses and 40:6-8. In that passage the prophetic word of comfort brings hope to a bruised and weakened Israel. So here the servant will bring new life to a broken and needy populace.

Isa. 42:4. Nor shall the servant himself fail (burn dimly) or be discouraged (be bruised or broken) until the task has been accomplished. This verse anticipates the difficulties that the Servant will encounter, perhaps even some of the suffering (though not the martyrdom) that is prominent in the fourth song (Isa. 52:13-53:12). The coastlands, the far places of the Gentiles, anxiously await the coming of divine justice, which the servant will establish. Israel in exile longed for new life; the servant will fulfill their hopes and those of the Gentiles.

Isa. 42:5-9. From the terse style of 42:1-4 we move into a lyrical hymn of praise (42:5-9). The passage has an obvious unity, but it raises questions. In vs. 5 God’s creative power is celebrated. Vs. 6 is a call to service, the implications of which are spelled out in vs. 7. Clearly the Lord is the speaker, but who is the addressee? Many commentators assume that the servant of 42:1-4 is still being addressed in vs. 6, a view that is not bothersome but neither is the evidence for it conclusive. Other commentators hold that Israel or perhaps even Cyrus is being addressed.

Isa. 42:5. The introductory formula includes the term “the God Yahweh,” the only use of that term in all of Second Isaiah. (Perhaps the term is too closely identified with Israel to suit a
universalistic emphasis.) There follow several clauses that praise the creative power of God, who made heaven and earth and gave breath and spirit to man and woman. The phrase "heaven and earth" is used often in Second Isaiah (40:22, 42:5, 44:23 f.), as in Gen. 1:1 (P). It refers to the whole of creation. Here breath (and spirit) is given not simply to one man (as in Genesis 1 and 2), but to all the people of the earth, the whole human race (cf. 45:12). Again, God the creator has brought the whole world into being, and the mission of the Servant is to parallel that inclusiveness. In creation Israel and the nations were given light and life; this creative and redemptive power of God is still active.

Isa. 42:6. A historical note is introduced; it refers to Israel’s election and has a parallel in Isa. 41:9:

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you whom I took from the ends of the earth,
and called from its farthest corners,
saying to you, “You are my servant,
I have chosen you and not cast you off . . .”
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The parallel suggests that 42:6 refers to Israel as the servant whom God has elected. Indeed, vss. 5 and 6 taken together effectively link God’s creation of the heavens and the earth and the creation of humankind with the historic election of Israel—all the great works of God.

But vs. 6 is more than a historical note. Israel is now appointed to a new dimension of servanthood, which is expressed in 6b: through Israel the salvation that comes in covenant relationship with God is extended to humanity. Through the servant Israel the nations are to see salvation (light). God, who has provided breath and spirit for all, now makes provision for the salvation of all.

Isa. 42:7. Human extremity is God’s opportunity. The nations must acknowledge their blindness and servitude before they can be free. God, through the servant, and the servant, empowered by God, will bring light and salvation to all. Here, as in the familiar Isa. 6:1 ff., the description of the servant’s work may be
intentionally ambiguous. The establishment of justice involves the healing of blindness and release from imprisonment as well as the even more fundamental illumination and liberation that characterize covenant salvation. Healing and proclamation are closely associated. We may infer here a relationship that is explicitly stated in 49:6: Israel's salvation is contingent upon her concern for the nations.

Isa. 42:8. The authority of the Lord guarantees the work of salvation; the work of salvation attests Yahweh's unique authority. While the verse is not a categorical statement of monotheism, it reminds one of such a statement in Isa. 44:6-8. The glory and praise of God will not be shared. The Lord of all creation is also the Savior of all. Thus vs. 8 reminds the reader of the affirmation in vs. 5, and vss. 5-8 have an obvious unity and completeness.

Isa. 42:9. God proclaims the newness, the almost cosmic significance, of what is about to happen. Perhaps "the former things" or "the earlier things" is a reference to such saving events as the Exodus, perhaps even the whole covenant relationship between the Lord and pre-exilic Israel. But a new order is about to spring forth. C. R. North suggests that "new things" may be a reference to Cyrus, the anointed of God (45:1), who has granted the Jews freedom to return, to rebuild the Temple, and to establish life again in Jerusalem. But all that is hardly possible or worth mentioning unless Israel reestablishes an effective covenant relationship with the Lord. The conditions of such a relationship are proclaimed in this poem and comprise the vital "newness" that is now about to occur.

The new day of salvation will "spring forth," apparently surprising even the faithful. The authority of God is attested by foreknowledge of the event; the love of God by declaration of the events before they happen.

Thus, vss. 5-9, in which Israel is clearly the servant, expand the theme of 42:1-4, providing further description of the salvation that Israel will bring to the nations. Salvation is coming. And that is the reason "a new song of redemption" follows in 42:10-17.
Followers of Christ are called to be not simply a New Testament people, but a biblical people. The denigration of Law (often by persons who erroneously equate law and legalism) suggest that both God and Israel endured a very long time before getting on to the authentic revelation we have in the New Testament. Such thinking, of course, loses sight of the fact that Old Testament writings provide norms for faith and conduct and a source of edification for Christian congregations and individuals, as well as being a primary source for the origins of basic doctrines in Judaism and Christianity—monotheism, revelation, inspired Scripture, revealed moral law, the kingdom of God, atonement, salvation, and so on. It is worth noting that neither Jesus nor Paul ever called for written documents beyond the Old Testament. A deep love for the New Testament need not lead us to disparage the very documents to which the New Testament appeals as having unique authority.

Apparently it was a part of God's wisdom that both Law and Gospel should be taken seriously. Law that is not reviewed by the Gospel becomes legalism; but Gospel that does not lead to mandates for faith and conduct is often sentimentality.

Lessons like Nehemiah 8 help us to see the devotion to God, and love for the community of the faithful, which motivated those who compiled and taught Torah. Here we have the initial verses in the account of the promulgation of the Torah which, according to tradition, Ezra brought back from Exile in Babylon. For a century and a half after 586 B.C Priestly writers worked to put this Torah in order.

In Nehemiah 8 we have an account of Ezra's concern that the people of Jerusalem should hear and understand writings, parts of which had considerable authority among them already. The book was opened and read "in the sight of all the people." The reading, an act of worship and of education, led to weeping (because they had violated the Law), and of celebration (because they had the Law). Despite the severity of the Law the people
were admonished to stop weeping and to celebrate for now they were "the people of the Book."

The idea of holy writings, or norms, is important. At best God's word is not to be seen simplistically as a mandate imposed from on high, to be obeyed or else. True, God's word will not be mocked; but true, also, fear is not a good teacher. God prefers to be persuasive, not coercive. How much better to see the Bible as a gift of God's grace, the authority of which must be discovered through study if it is to be believed and practiced creatively.

The Holy Spirit has been and is the guide, teacher, and inspirer of the faithful, including those from whose hands we have the Scriptures. The Old and New Testaments are a vital part, but only a part, of the Spirit's teaching. God's gift of the Word, celebrated by Ezra and the faithful in Jerusalem, attests God's care and direction. For Christians the coming of Jesus Christ and the writing of the New Testament attest the flowering of God's love. And yet the revelation of God continues in our own time. Serious, devout people, confronted with circumstances that neither Israel nor the early church faced, are asking, "Any word from the Lord?" To deny the legitimacy of their question is to deny Jesus' promise that the Spirit of truth will guide us into all truth (John 16:12-15).

Old and New Testament canons provide the foundations and fundamentals of our faith, our historic identity. But the Spirit as Counselor and Teacher continues to manifest God's word, sometimes with startling newness.

Nehemiah 8 is a landmark in Israel's literary history and in our understanding of ways in which the Jews became "a people of the Book." This public reading of what has traditionally been regarded as the Law of Moses (the Pentateuch) in the square before the Water Gate evokes historical interests in the thoughtful biblical student. Principal among these are (1) the remarkable literary consequences of the Babylonian exile; (2) the theology of the Word as a means of divine revelation; and (3) the process by which the Old Testament was canonized, that is, accepted by a community as having authority for its faith and practice.

25
This informative if misplaced chapter is a part of the story of the work of Ezra (Ezra 7–10; Nehemiah 8–10) who, according to Ezra 7, led a band of exiles back to Jerusalem (7:6-10). The historicity and date of Ezra’s return is a matter of considerable conjecture. Many scholars regard 398 B.C. as the year of this reading in Jerusalem. Since his central concern was to introduce the Law, we may assume that the events recounted in Nehemiah 8 occurred shortly after Ezra’s arrival (Ezra 7:9).

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah are a single volume in the Hebrew Bible. With Chronicles they are an important source of information for our knowledge of post-exilic Israel.

Supposedly Ezra was the author of his own memoirs (Ezra 7–10; Nehemiah 8–10). He is named a priest and a scribe who came from Babylon with God’s Torah in hand. As the person who reestablished Judaism he is regarded as a second Moses, a characterization which is a bit puzzling since we know almost nothing else about him from the Bible. Some have even questioned whether he was a historical figure. (The Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah literature raises complicated questions of authorship, dates, and interrelationships which cannot be considered in this article.) Many early rabbis and church fathers regarded Ezra as the Chronicler. A number of modern critics hold the Chronicler wrote some time after the events attributed to Ezra, in the fourth or perhaps third century B.C.

In addition to the story of the promulgation of the Law, Ezra’s memoirs provide us with an account of his return with a band of exiles to Jerusalem (Ezra 7:1–8:31) and a description of the situation they found in Jerusalem. Ezra 8 includes a list of the returning exiles and of the Temple vessels and treasure which were carried from Babylon to Jerusalem. Ezra was sharply critical of mixed marriages between Jewish men and non-Jewish women. Following Ezra’s confession of the sins of the people (Ezra 9:6-15), the people repented and the mixed marriages were ordered to be dissolved (10:1-17). According to 10:18-44 men who had married foreign wives were named and such men “put away” both their foreign wives and the children of such marriages.

Our account of Ezra’s reading of the Law is set between
Nehemiah’s major work in Jerusalem (Neh. 1:1–7:72) and his final ministry there (10:1–13:30).

Whatever the critical problems confronted in this account, the promulgation of the Law reminds us of the phenomenal literary consequences of the Exile. That event was the impulse or catalyst that led priests and scribes in Israel to extraordinary measures of literary activity. The loss of homeland, Temple and cult, and the scattering of the Judeans must have led many persons to wonder how a religious identity was to be maintained. In such circumstances what did it mean to be a Judean?

However ancient and authoritative some of the traditions and legal codes, there came the need for some instrument, an anthology, which would help the faithful to remember their traditions and aid them in teaching the young. Jewish tradition has long regarded the Law that Ezra read and that was promulgated by the people gathered in Jerusalem as the Law of Moses, the Pentateuch, the Torah, a uniquely authoritative compendium of Israel’s laws and traditions from creation through the time of Moses.

Similarly it may be supposed that the Exile led to the gathering of prophetic materials that people had in great part ignored. The Exile demonstrated the validity of many of the warnings that the prophets had pronounced. Once Jerusalem was reestablished there must have been keen interest in heeding those prophetic counsels lest disobedience lead again to destruction and exile. (Halford Luccock once styled the prophets “twice-stoned men.” They were stoned to death for their judgments; later they were memorialized with monuments of stone because their warnings had proved valid.)

Out of those messages of judgment (and hope) came the post-exilic phenomenon of apocalyptic, a specialized form of written prophecy in which hope was encouraged in rich new literary and thought forms (see Ezekiel 33–48; Isaiah 24–27; Daniel 7).

Concurrently ancient traditions of psalmody and wisdom would seem to have “come into their own” in this post-exilic period. The Psalter, an anthology of anthologies, was arranged
in five books as though in imitation of the five books or scrolls of the Torah. With uncommon liturgical insight editors realized that poetic statements of theology, set to chant and song, could become the prayers, songs, and affirmations of the faithful, whether literate or not.

The fact that a third of the Psalter is made up of psalms of lamentation, individual and corporate, is clue enough to deep human need in post-exilic Jerusalem. These psalms, many of them pre-exilic, are a reminder that members of the post-exilic community still had faith enough in God that they dared lament to God. Predictably these psalms of lamentation, which begin with an honest statement of anger, doubt, and disappointment, end with a renewed and invigorated relationship with God (a matter of importance for persons who have any interest in Formgeschichte).

In a similar manner the ancient wisdom tradition, that admixture of faith and skepticism which dared ask honest questions, was revived and found a place in Judean literature. Ecclesiastes and Job, for example, reflect Judean dilemmas. Why do the beautiful weep? Why must the innocent suffer? Is there any meaning in the enervating round of human existence? As one looks at human experience is there any way to argue that God is just? (Experiences which defy meaningful interpretation—exiles, illnesses, suffering—produce confusion and even separation, an unhappy development for covenant faith.)

It is a provocative fact that the Old Testament canon includes wisdom writings that ask questions for which there are no clear answers. Perhaps that was a part of the impulse that led the wisdom tradition to seek for some mediating principle so that the ways of the God of the heavens, holy, perfect, and remote, could be known among the people, sinful, earth-bound, and perplexed. The movement toward the personification or hypostatization of Wisdom/the Word/Spirit in post-exilic Judaism was to prove a matter of theological consequence (see Prov. 8:1-9:6; the apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon 6-9, especially chap. 7).

The role of the wisdom tradition in determining the shape of the canon merits continuing investigation as we become more
interested in what biblical documents meant, not just at the time of writing (what did this mean when Amos preached it?), but when they were included in the canon (what did it mean five hundred years later to those who decided to include it in the canon?). It is perhaps more than poetic that Magi (wise men, and foreigners at that) went to Bethlehem, that Jesus was called rabbi (teacher) by his disciples, that he was a wonderfully wise storyteller, and that such wisdom words as “blessed” should have been prominent in his teaching.

The literary consequences of the Exile were, then, very great, and Nehemiah 8 is the record of a major and decisive step in a process that had earlier roots (for example, Josiah’s reading of the Book of the Law—II Kings 22–23). This notion of canon is grounded in the theology of the Word, the belief that the word of God ("And God said . . . ") declares and effects the divine will and act. This theology is richly elaborated in Deuteronomy, the theological textbook of Judaism and Christianity; it is fundamental to the notion of Torah and to Christology (the Word become flesh). How gracious of God to give us the Word, said the ancient rabbis. But it was even more gracious of God to let us know we have it (see Deut. 30:11–14).

Nehemiah 8 recounts a historic step in the formalization process by which such literature was canonized, that is, was understood by the people to be a gift from God which they accept and to which they swear obedience.

Neh. 8:1–2. Notwithstanding problems relating to the identity and date of Ezra, his prime mission was to introduce the Law to the people (Ezra 7:14, 25–26). This introduction took the form of a public reading. It is a bit difficult to believe that the people were gathered “as one man” without some previous signal. The account is intended to show the absolute freedom of the people. They cannot be expected to be obedient to a book that has been accepted under coercion. Such a spirit would certainly be in sharp contrast to the prolonged foreign tyranny that had plagued Jerusalem and finally sent the Judeans into exile. Cyrus’ edict freeing the captives (Ezra 1:1–10) gave the faithful an opportunity to establish a religious commonwealth, but was by no means a political magna carta. Any promise of freedom and
redemption would have to be experienced in the religious and not the political realm.

The first day of the seventh month was New Year's day, a special and holy day when life for the ensuing year was thought to be set. Perhaps the people were already gathered in Jerusalem for that autumnal celebration. We cannot be sure whether the Water Gate was in the Temple area (so Josephus) or elsewhere in the city.

Again, the event is portrayed as a popular one in the best sense of that word. Men, women, all who can hear (surely this included many youths) are included in the audience. Ezra is called both scribe and priest. As scribe he was concerned in special ways with the codification and preservation of law (Ezra 7:10, 21); as priest, with people's obedience to it.

A strong note of reformation pervades the account. As typically, reformation arises out of reaction, out of attempts to recapture the roots of a rich heritage. The people's call for the reading the Law was grounded in a centuries-long tradition of teaching and learning, of covenantal loyalty and betrayal, of acknowledgment and repudiation of God's word.

Varied attempts have been made to identify the Law which Ezra brought into the assembly (presumably from Babylon; see Ezra 7:14, 25 ff.). The account clearly leaves the reader with the impression that the Law according to Moses, the material in the first five books of the Old Testament, was read and accepted.

Neh. 8:3-4a. The reading of the Law lasted from early morning (Masoretic text, "from the light") until noon. According to verse 3, Ezra did the reading, while verse 8 suggests that the leaders who stood with him participated. Again, the eagerness of the people is reflected in their attentiveness.

Ezra stood on a pulpit, a platform that had been made for the occasion. It was large enough for several persons to stand with him. Since the people had called for the reading of the Law we may assume that the persons named with Ezra on the platform were lay persons of some stature or merit. They are not otherwise identifiable. There is general agreement among the MT and the versions about the names of the six men on Ezra's right; there is some confusion about those on the left. The
apocryphal I Esdras 9:44 omits Meshullam (some interpreters regard that name as a corruption of the Hebrew "on the left hand").

Neh. 8:5-6. A kind of liturgy ensues, perhaps one generally followed when scripture was read. Ezra, visible to the assembly, unrolled the scroll "in the sight of all the people." As he opened it all the people stood up, from sitting or crouching positions common in the Middle East for centuries. Their standing was, of course, a sign of respect for the Law.

The reading is initiated with a blessing of "the great God" led by Ezra. The use of the title "the great God" (see Neh. 9:32; Deut. 10:17; Jer. 32:18; Ezra 5:8) suggests a Babylonian influence where Marduk is sometimes referred to as "the great Lord." Again, all the people participate by responding "Amen and Amen," and with lifting up their hands (see Ezra 9:5). Movement, from bowing the head to prostration on the ground, is an act of humble obedience quite appropriate to the ensuing reading. We do not know why the prayer was omitted from this account, perhaps because prayers before reading scripture were traditional (a fact for which the Talmud in turn makes provision). The "Amen," repeated for emphasis, and the bowing and prostration suggest popular eagerness to hear the Law.

Neh. 8:8. The reading of the scroll is begun. Our understanding of "they read from the book" depends in part on our interpretation of vs. 7, which some regard as out of place. Vs. 7 refers to the interpretation of the Hebrew text by Levites into Aramaic, the popular language of the people. Various reasons have been provided for the inclusion of the Levites, who were probably recognized teachers of the law. Perhaps a later editor thought they would or should have been present at such auspicious an occasion. Like the scribes, they would have been adept in the use both of the Hebrew of the text (which many in Jerusalem would have forgotten or been able to use in only a limited way), and of the popular Aramaic.

As vs. 8 now stands, "they read" refers to the Levites who read from the scroll clearly, that is, translated it at sight and gave the sense of it so the people could understand. (See clearly as a technical term as used in Ezra 4:18.) If vs. 7 is out of place,
then the readers would have been Ezra and his companions on the platform, vs. 8 following directly upon vs. 6.

Neh. 8:9. Here as often we find similarities between this reading of the law and the Chronicler's account of Josiah's presentation of the Deuteronomic Code to the elders of Jerusalem and Judah (II Chron. 34:1-35:27). Josiah rent his clothes upon hearing the reading of the code; here the people mourned and wept when they heard the Law. The reading apparently produced among the people an awareness of their need for repentance of their sins and perhaps also a fear of impending judgment.

Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites urge the people to celebrate Torah, which has been largely forgotten but is now known among the people. The Law has been reestablished in Jerusalem. A spirit of joy and celebration is in order and is to characterize the feast of Booths, described in Neh. 8:13-18.

The Masoretic text includes Nehemiah here, but he is only named. It is probably an insertion by an editor who puts chaps. 8-10 here, thus seeming to make Ezra and Nehemiah contemporaries. It is hard to believe that Nehemiah would have had no other part in the service, had he been present.

Neh. 8:10. Celebration is in order. Rich food and sweet wine, and the giving of gifts of food are a part of the order of the holy day. As God has been hospitable to his people, so they should be to others, especially friends and relatives who have not been able to prepare for the feast, some of them perhaps from distant places. It is a time not for grief about the past, but for expectation and faithfulness in the future. The joy of the Lord is grounded in the renewed loyalty of the people, and that bond, reaffirmed, is the people's strength. The spirit of joy and thanksgiving commended here is very much like that described so often in Deuteronomy (12:12; 14:26; 16:11; 26:11; 27:7).

SUNDAY, JANUARY 30 (FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY)

Jeremiah 1:4-10. The Call of Jeremiah

The theme of Jeremiah 1 is the prophet's account of his call to prophetic ministry. Though the account stands at the beginning
of the book many scholars feel that it was revised, perhaps
several times, during the course of Jeremiah's life, and
represents his mature understanding of an unforgettable
teen-age experience.

Many of us, ordained and laity, have heard unnumbered
arguments about the nature of an authentic call to the religious
life. It is a subject of such importance that some people, certain
that they know the criteria of an authentic call, become dogmatic
about those criteria, even unkindly criticizing persons who have
come to the faith through other kinds of experiences. Still others
avoid the subject, assuming a supercilious casualness about the
importance of such "personal" matters.

But one cannot avoid the fact that the heart of biblical faith is a
covenant relationship with God (for Christians, through Christ).
As in any covenant relationship, our relationship with God is
grounded in a mature yes, an unqualified response to the divine
bidding, "I will be your God; will you stand among my people?"
Surely the hearing of that invitation and our personal response
to it is the heart of any call to faith.

Perhaps instead of arguing about the nature of an authentic
call to belief we should encourage one another to provide an
account of the experience (or experiences) through which we
have come under conviction. Jeremiah did that and thus
provided us with certain guidelines.

1. However ineffable, a very personal sense of the divine
presence characterizes such experiences and confirms a new
relationship. (God with me.)

2. The call to commitment includes a bid to minister to others
on God's behalf. Can God possibly use us for saving someone
else? However memorable and glorious, the experience of a call
is not an idolatrous end in itself.

3. A newfound sense of vocation gives meaning to one's
whole life, even one's birth. Far from resenting any imposition
on his freedom, Jeremiah felt that his prenatal consecration
("For this I was born") provided a vocation in which freedom
could be exercised with meaning and consequence. His life
could make a difference.
4. God will provide the energy and the spoken word necessary to the task, even when the opposition is fierce.
5. Effective spokespersons for God combine words of judgment (there is sin in the world) and hope (God has plans for the world). Such words must be informed. Being informed is almost the first moral mandate for effective witness.
6. The called believe that the word and will of God will prevail and act in light of that guarantee of victory. (We may fail momentarily, but the will of God will prevail eternally.)

The old evangelist's words still ring true: "I don't care how high you jumped the night you were converted. What I want to know is, How straight did you walk after you landed?" By their fruits shall you know the faithful.

The depth and urgency of Jeremiah's call to be a prophet to the nations stands in sharp contrast to the apostasy of Judah. The call and the dialogue that is involved introduce us to a prophet about whose life—psychological, devotional, theological, and political—we know more than we do for any other Old Testament prophet. During a lifetime that involved bewildering political and social upheavals, rejection by family and friends, arrest and persecution, and periods of loneliness and despair, the vitality of this call must have confirmed Jeremiah's faith both in his vocation and, occasionally, in his sanity. Undoubtedly the call became increasingly meaningful and empowering as the prophet's life became more demanding and Judah's exile more imminent. We have some literary reason to assume that the event was often recounted and that it may have been put in its present form toward the end of his life.

Jeremiah's times. The call to be "a prophet to the nations" was received in the turbulent context of the fall of the Assyrian empire and the rise of the Babylonian. Judah, ruled by kings most of whom were incompetent and pawns in the international scene, suffered defeat and exile by resisting the vastly superior forces of Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah portrayed the Babylonian as the instrument of God's judgment upon a decadent Judah. Gross moral and religious decadence had characterized Judah's life during the seventh century into which Jeremiah was born. Under Manasseh (687-645 B.C.) Judah had been a vassal of
Assyria. Idolatry and apostasy, especially in the form of Mesopotamian astral cults and Canaanite fertility practices, flourished in the Temple precincts. Even child sacrifice was practiced.

These practices continued for a time under Josiah (640-609 B.C.), Manasseh's son. In 621 Josiah led a reform in Judah based on the Book of the Law which had been discovered in the Temple (II Kings 22-23). Declining Assyrian power and the support of a Judean party which had remained faithful to Yahwism made reform under Josiah possible. The reform aimed toward religious purification and political independence. These so-called Deuteronomic reforms (based on the newly discovered Book of the Law) led to the removal or destruction of the idolatrous shrines. Jerusalem was established as the only legitimate place for sacrifice.

Apparently the reforms were effective for a time. But Josiah was killed at Megiddo in 609 as he sought to halt the northward advance of the Egyptian pharaoh, who was on his way to Haran to join forces with the Assyrian king and save that empire from total defeat (the capital of Assyria had fallen in 612). That defeat came at Haran in 605, and the Babylonian empire rose to a position of dominance in the Middle East.

Jeremiah's silence about the Josianic reforms remains a puzzle, especially for those who date the beginning of his ministry in 627-626, the eighteenth year of his life. A small minority of scholars, for example Hyatt and Holladay, date Jeremiah's birth in that year (called before birth), and the further call to ministry in 609, thus obviating Jeremiah's need to say much about a good reform that had died with the death of its royal patron.

A deplorable succession of vassal Judean kings was to be the burden and bane of Jeremiah's ministry.

1. The Egyptians removed Jehoahaz, Josiah's successor, and put Jehoiakim (609-598) on the throne. Under him Judah returned to many of the idolatrous religious practices that Josiah had outlawed. Jehoiakim was succeeded by Jehoiachin who, like his father, was subject to Egyptian authority. Instead of
independence, Jehoiachin’s resistance to the rising Babylonian empire brought subjection.

2. In 597 Jerusalem submitted to Nebuchadnezzar, and many Judeans, including the deposed Jehoiachin, were exiled to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar put Zedekiah (597–587) on the Judean throne.

3. Zedekiah was weak and vacillated between those who, like Jeremiah, urged submission to the superior Babylonian forces, and those who urged alliance with Egypt and with small, rebellious neighboring kingdoms as a prelude to military resistance against the Babylonian overlord. Zedekiah finally chose to resist Nebuchadnezzar, and in 588–587 Jerusalem was defeated and razed. Zedekiah and many of his people, especially the ruling classes, landholders, and artisans, were carried into exile.

4. Nebuchadnezzar now established Judah as a province in the Babylonian empire (prior to this Judah had been a tributary). Gedaliah, a Judean, was appointed governor with the new administrative center in Mizpah. Within two months Gedaliah was assassinated. A band of Judeans, fearful of Babylonian revenge, fled to Egypt, taking Jeremiah with them quite against his will.

Jeremiah’s ministry. Three contributions stand out in the memorable and consequential ministry of Jeremiah:

1. Following Hosea, Jeremiah perceived and proclaimed the depth and breadth of Yahweh’s love for the people and the response that such love could rightly expect from a people bound to Yahweh in covenant. Jeremiah’s sensitivity at this point led to a number of oracles about true religion. The God whom Jeremiah knows is a God of steadfast love, justice, and righteousness (9:24-25). Deviations from true religion—rebellion, moral corruption, idolatry, mistrust—are cause for prophetic denunciation and divine punishment. Yahweh has a lawsuit against Judah (chap. 2) because of divine love for the people. In the face of the massive sinfulness of Judah, Jeremiah finally concludes that the people cannot change; Yahweh must change their hearts, their wills. A New Covenant, a covenant of
love, written upon their hearts, will bind the people and their God forever (31:31-34).

2. This love of Yahweh for Judah includes judgment, war, and exile at the hand of Babylon, who serves the purposes of Yahweh. Thus Jeremiah finds meaning in the midst of political upheaval and counsels surrender. Defeat and exile will purify the people from their sins and bring the bright new day of a New Covenant, a loyal relationship with God.

3. Often in the book of Jeremiah, and especially in such sections as 15:10-20:18, the lamentations or meditations of Jeremiah, we have unusual and detailed evidences of the prophet's weariness as he wrestled with the office to which he had been called, his anguish at preaching condemnation to a people whom he loved dearly, his response to plots against his life, his isolation from family and friends, even his anger with the Lord and the cursing of the day of his own birth. But we also see that he could not turn away from the prophetic office (20:9). The honest details of Jeremiah's spiritual autobiography has provided solace and encouragement, a sustaining sense of spiritual companionship, to countless other believers. Such passages, like many of the Psalms, help us to explore "the anatomy" of our own souls and to carry on.

The Call. The call to Jeremiah (1:4-19) stands at the beginning of a collection of oracles of divine judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem. (Chaps. 1-25 are sometimes titled "the words of Jeremiah," and 26-45, "the life of Jeremiah." ) The call takes the form of a dialogue between Yahweh and the budding prophet (4-10, 17-19). That dialogue centers on the commissioning and empowering of Jeremiah. (Vss. 11-16, an account of two visions the prophet has, have been inserted into the dialogue and deal quite specifically with events in which the prophet is shortly to be involved.)

Jer. 1:4. The Hebrew term for word also means action or event. The coming of the Word of the Lord is itself an event that presages significant historical actions, in this case in the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Judah (cf. Isa. 61:1 ff.).

Jer. 1:5. I formed you. The primary use of the Hebrew word is
connected with the shaping of pottery. In passages like Amos 4:13, Isa. 45:18 and Ps. 95:5 it is a technical (theological) term meaning "to create." Subsequent uses of the term in Jeremiah (18:1-12) underscore the freedom of the potter to shape and reshape the clay as he pleases, the clay conforming to the potter's will and pleasure.

The phrase in the womb must have been startling for some readers and hearers who, then as now, had trouble regarding bodily processes, perhaps especially of women, as divinely ordained and pure. (The idea that they are so ordained is expressed, dramatically and beautifully, in Ps. 139:13-16.) As author of life from its very beginning, God has unqualified authority over it.

I knew you. Out of origins that all men and women have in common (from the very beginning God knows us), we here get a sense of an uncommonly intimate relationship between the Creator and Jeremiah. The verb to know is commonly used in the Old Testament to suggest sexual intimacy between a man and a woman. The intimacy of God's relationship with Jeremiah points toward a particular vocation.

Before you were born I consecrated you. A superficial reading might seem to suggest that 5a and 5b are a parallelism, but there is a progression. The verb meaning to be consecrated or dedicated suggests that Jeremiah is to be separated or singled out for a special service or mission on behalf of God.

The act of consecration suggests not only the notion of selection but (as vs. 9 indicates) a gift of power for the fulfillment of the office. The verb root used here is a denominative from the noun meaning apartness, sacredness; the adjective means sacred or holy (as of God, in Isa. 6:1 ft.). The state of consecration or holiness is the state of being or doing what one agrees, with covenant partners, one will be or do. In this sense Jeremiah is thus committed to "holy orders."

Jeremiah is appointed to be a prophet to the nations, a spokesperson for God to nations and about nations. In a time of unusually turbulent international relationships this far-reaching commission was important and very demanding. But Jeremiah was not the first prophet to be concerned with the surrounding
nations. Israel and Judah's histories had long been intertwined with developments in other countries. But there is a distinctive aspect to this inclusiveness in the appointment of Jeremiah as a prophet to the nations: Yahweh is the God of all history and Lord of the universe. Even Babylon is subject to God's will and use; that empire will serve as an instrument of divine judgment upon Judah.

Perhaps the most distinctive aspect of the call of Jeremiah is the predestination of the prophet to his vocation; that predestination is a part of Yahweh's plan for the covenant people (cf. the Servant in Isa. 49:1-2 and Paul in Gal. 1:15-16). Whatever philosophical questions this distinctive idea may raise with regard to the prophet's freedom, the notion of predestination is clearly affirmed. Perhaps it could be argued that the prophet felt he had been impelled but not compelled to take up his vocation. If, in fact, this account of the call came into its present form in the mature years of Jeremiah's life then the notion of predestination may not only reflect the mandate of God but also the unqualified response of the prophet: "For this I was born."

Jer. 1:6-8. Like Moses (a priestly ancestor?) Jeremiah initially protested youthfulness, which left him unqualified to bear the word of God to the people (a reminder of Moses in Exod. 4:10-15, 7:1 ff., though Jeremiah did not have a speech difficulty). How can he know enough to speak the Word of God to the elders of Judah and Jerusalem? What authority has a youth from Anathoth in such matters?

In response Yahweh rejects all excuses. Yahweh is to be the author of the message and of every mission. The amazing intimacy of the Lord and the prophet at conception and birth continues now in full force. The prophet goes forth under orders from God. The message will be provided. The messenger will be sustained. There is no reason to be frightened: the Provider will also act as Protector. This is God's commitment to the committed servant. God's word and honor with the prophet.

Jer. 1:9. Here is the pivotal transaction: called to be a messenger of the Word, Jeremiah now receives the Word. The heart of the promise made in vs. 7 is immediately fulfilled. The
symbolic action of the Lord in touching the mouth of the young prophet is immediately explained: “Behold, I have put my words in your mouth” (cf. Isa. 6:7; Ezek. 2:8 f.; Dan. 10:16).

Jer. 1:10. Jeremiah’s office as spokesperson for Yahweh to the nations is further defined. Some scholars omit “to destroy and to overthrow,” thus providing greater balance:

to pluck up and break down, . . .
to build and to plant.

These pairs of opposite verbs summarize basic aspects of the prophetic ministry. Jeremiah is to uproot and raze corrupted ways in Judah ad Jerusalem; this will involve sharp denunciation and stern judgment. But the prophet is also to strengthen and build on the foundations of faith and goodness which are already there and to bring new life—a vocation of renewal and of new possibilities.

The Word of God is filled with divine energy and will accomplish the purposes for which it is sent (cf. Isa. 55:10-11). It can destroy (5:14, 23:29), but it can also restore and redeem.

In vss. 17-19, Jeremiah is encouraged to take up his vocation without fear. These verses continue the thought in vss. 4-10 and provide both a warning and encouragement to the prophet (both would seem to be in order in light of the visions the prophet has in vss. 11-16). With these verses the account of the call of Jeremiah is brought to a matchless series of promises. The prophet is given fair warning of the opposition he will encounter as messenger of God. Kings, princes, priests, and people—all will contend against him. But they shall not prevail. If Jeremiah will do his part, so will the Lord.

The prophet is to gird up his loins, that is, he is to prepare for battle and get to the battleline, belts and garments tightened for action. Promptness and readiness are expected. Such preparation and confrontation are a matter of acting in faith. If the prophet has such faith and speaks the full word of the Lord to the people, he will discover the steadfast strength and protection that faith affords and will become a fortified city, an iron pillar, like bronze walls—he will stand fast (cf. Ezek. 3:8 f.).
Critics and enemies will contend; Jeremiah will prevail; and the Lord will save the prophet.

Jeremiah's call and commissioning have much in common with the memorable calls of other servants of God, especially other Old Testament prophets. Yet there are distinctive aspects in this account:

1. The predestination of Jeremiah to the prophetic office even before he had been formed in the womb of his mother is striking and became influential in such accounts as the commissioning of the Servant in Isa. 49:1 f. Here the unusual birth story is more a spiritual than physical phenomenon.

2. The fact that this call is experienced and expressed in the form of a dialogue suggests an unusual quality of intimacy. This characterized the relationship between Yahweh and the prophet right across Jeremiah’s career. Such dialogue is fundamental to covenant religion: the words of God to men and women, that is revelation; the words of women and men to God, that is prayer. As noted above, both the praise and the honest lamentation of Jeremiah remind us of the Psalms, and we realize that the words of men and women to God also have a place in the Bible. Perhaps a major meaning of the notion in Genesis that we are created “in the image of God” (1:26-27) is that communication is possible; revelation, meditation, and prayer are all spiritual realities.

The fact that Jeremiah can be angry with God and lament boldly and loudly (see 20:7-18, for example), attests the depth of his trust and the creativity of such intimacy. At several points in his career, isolated and persecuted, rejected by friends and family, dubious about his vocation, Jeremiah would seem to have survived and remained sane because of this intimate relationship.

3. Finally, the experience of Jeremiah reminds us that response to the call of God is essential to meaningful faith and growth. Call and response may be experienced in a variety of modes but no covenant relationship, whether marriage, ministry, or friendship, is likely to have integrity or promise until covenant partners make a serious commitment, a response to one another. Jeremiah’s yes to the call of God was the
A haunting solitude pervades this account of the death of Moses. His leadership ("all the great and terrible deeds which Moses wrought") had been exercised "in the sight of all Israel." He had led a very public life. But here at the end he is alone on the mountain with the Lord. We are reminded of the solitude of his first encounter with the Divine Presence in the experience of the burning bush at Sinai (Exodus 3). And yet even these times of solitude have a very corporate dimension. In both Exodus 3 and Deuteronomy 34 the Lord reminds Moses that he is being addressed by the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, suggesting that the past has a future and that the present and the future are rooted in the past. To be religious is to remember. An awareness of where we have been (our roots) informs the directions in which we are expected to go (our fruits).

The mysterious circumstances of the death of Moses have led to an extensive literature about his fate, the nature and place of his burial, the manner in which death came to one whose natural force was unabated, and so forth. Considerable attention could be given to the fact that Moses, like almost all Old Testament heroes, had a flaw, an imperfection (none is good save God). Or to the fact that Moses wisely selected and blessed a successor, an evidence of his obedience to God and his devotion to Israel.

But the final verse of this last chapter of the Pentateuch is a key to our appreciation of the unique contribution Moses made to Israel. Taken together the great and terrible deeds he wrought were, and remain, a "drama of liberation" for oppressed people. Liberation theology (actually a redundant term since all biblical
theology is intended to make persons free) finds its paradigm in Moses and the Exodus.

1. Moses recognized and refused to accept the suffering and bondage of his people.
2. He provided leadership for an exodus from the place of bondage.
3. At Sinai he received and proclaimed the new law for a people on their way to freedom.
4. In the wilderness the dream was kept alive as Israel moved from the clutches of the past into a promised but precarious future.
5. Moses led his people to the edge of the promised land, surveyed it from Mount Nebo (a kind of claim to it), and provided leadership for the new day.

We may be critical of aspects of the methods that Moses used (such as killing the Egyptian overseer, invading Canaan). But in the account of his death we are reminded of the ways in which he gave life to his people.

In our own day we cannot avoid the fact that liberation of the oppressed is a necessary prelude to the reconciliation of the family of God.

Deuteronomy 34 is the concluding narrative of Deuteronomy and of the Pentateuch. It tells us of the death of Moses and provides an authenticating link to the charismatic leadership of Joshua as successor to Moses. The narrative about the death of Moses is a continuation of 32:48-52.

Many scholars regard parts of this narrative as the work of P (vss. 1, 7-9), the Priestly editors' version of JE, the old historical sources that are basic to Genesis-Numbers. One might expect that the JE account of the death of Moses would come at the end of Numbers, an appropriate and perhaps the original context. But the Priestly editors have put it here at the end of Moses' final, lengthy addresses to Israel. Vss. 11-12 are thought by many to be the work of the Deuteronomist (stylistic differences between vs. 10 and vss. 11-12 are obvious). The ban against Moses' entry into the promised land and the emphasis on the charismatic succession of Joshua are important themes in the Deuteronomic history (1:37-38; 3:21-22, 25-29; 32:48-52; 34:9).
Parts of Deuteronomy have been identified with “the Book of the Law” found in the Temple by Hilkiah during the reign of Josiah (640-609), materials that became the basis for Josiah’s sweeping movement toward religious reform and political independence from 621. Conclusions about the dating of Deuteronomy have varied widely. Even if it is seen as a program for seventh-century attempts at reform under Hezekiah or Manasseh, Deuteronomy would seem to include materials from much earlier periods, possibly even from the age of the Judges and the time of the early monarchy. It is probably close to the truth if the variety of legal and narrative materials in Deuteronomy are seen as the result of a lengthy process of formation lasting from early times to the period after the Exile when the materials in the Pentateuch underwent extensive editing. Some scholars, for example von Rad, understand Deuteronomy as a part of a predominantly northern tradition, developed across several centuries, and edited for use in Judah after the fall of Samaria in 721. Successive editings of Deuteronomy thus reflect the further influences of the prophets and Israel’s great emphasis on written law.

For many reasons Deuteronomy may be entitled “the theological textbook of Judaism and Christianity.” The understanding of history found in Deuteronomy provided the basis or outlook from which the historical books (the Former Prophets) were edited. Wisdom books like Job and Ecclesiastes are, to some degree, protests against that outlook. But for our present interests a theology of the Word of God is perhaps the central interest of the Deuteronomic material.

“For this commandment which I command you this day is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will go up for us to heaven, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will go over the sea for us, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ But the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it” (Deut. 30:11-14).

According to this Deuteronomic understanding of revelation the Word of God is at hand and is epitomized in Law, of which
Deuteronomy is a homiletical, hortatory expansion (Deuteron­omy is presented as three addresses by Moses). The purpose of the Word is to portray, renew, and empower the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel (4:32-40; 6:1-19; 10:1-22; 11:1-32).

Structurally Deuteronomy (from Sinai to Moab) follows the pattern of Exodus (from Egypt to Sinai); both are concerned with covenant expectations and with liturgical renewal of the covenant relationship.

In Deuteronomy the Word addresses the community in its liturgical (12:1-14, the place of worship; 6:20-25, etc., the meaning of Passover) and moral life (5:1-22, the “Ten Words”). Yahweh’s self-revelation establishes Israel’s unique vocation as response. That demanding response is defined in the shema’ (6:4-9, “Hear, O Israel”).

The use of Deuteronomy in the New Testament, especially in Matthew and Hebrews, is well known. The shema’ is quoted by Jesus as the first and greatest of all the commandments (Matt. 22:37-38). Each of Jesus’ responses in the temptation scene (Matt. 4:4-10) is a quotation from Deuteronomy (8:3; 6:16; 6:13).

Parallels between Moses and Jesus (as the new Moses, and as the prophet whom God had promised—Deut. 18:15-18) are often drawn (Matt. 11:3; 21:11; Luke 2:25-34; John 4:19, 25; 6:14; Acts 3:22; Heb. 3:1-11). The importance of the Sermon on the Mount near the beginning of Matthew is significant in this regard.

Deut. 34:1. Exodus details the movement of Israel under Moses from Egypt to Sinai and the events there (1-18). Deuteronomy details Israel’s movements from Sinai to the encampment on the plains of Moab whence Israel is to be led into the promised land (1:1-4:43). In both, the covenant relationship and the ten commandments (Exod. 19:1-20:21, Deut. 4:44-5:22) are followed by major legal collections (Exod. 20:22-23:33, the Book of the Covenant; Deuteronomy 12-26, the Deuteronomic Code). In both, Moses is the prophetic leader and priestly intercessor through whom God’s will for the covenant people is made known.

Deuteronomy 34 is a kind of journey’s end for Moses. In
bringing Israel to the plain of Moab he has fulfilled his commission. It is to be the place of his death and burial.

The plains of Moab lie immediately north of the Dead Sea on the eastern side of the Jordan valley. Nebo and Pisgah may be taken as two names for the same mountain, east of the Jordan plain (see Deut. 3:27). Some interpreters attribute Nebo to P, Pisgah to E.

From the top of Mt. Nebo, some twenty-six hundred feet above sea level, Moses could look across the Jordan and see a broad survey of the land of Canaan, toward the Mediterranean to the west; north toward Dan, the northernmost part of the land; south to the Negeb where the promised land blends off into desert; and in front of him, the plain on either side of the Jordan. The detailed description provides a kind of visual survey and legal claim to the territory (on which Moses was forbidden to set foot; cf. Gen. 13:14 f. for an interesting parallel).

The mention of Abraham recalls Genesis 23, a classic example of astute and gracious bargaining, in which P records Abraham's clear title to a plot of land in Canaan, and Exod. 33:1, in which God's promise to give Canaan to Abraham and his descendants is recalled.

There is pathos in the fact that Moses is forbidden to enter the promised land. His unique leadership had brought the children of Israel to this climactic point. The disappointment is anticipated in Deut. 1:37; 3:25-27; 4:21-22; and 32:48-52 (note that this last passage leads directly into 34:1 ff.).

Moses' sin at Meribah (Num. 20:2-13), the punishment for which excluded him from entry into the promised land, is said in Num. 20:12 to have been a lack of faith and in 20:24 to have been rebellion against the command of God (the parallel story in Exod. 17:1-7 does not mention such punishment). The text in Numbers simply does not provide clear information about either charge. We are left to speculate about the specific sin which is said to have led to so serious a proscription. (Both Deut. 1:37 and 4:21 suggest that Moses was denied entry because of the sins of the people.)

Nevertheless the rumor of sin and the penalty remind us that even leaders who are appointed and ordained to high office may
be tempted to error. So many of the stalwart leaders in Israel's history, tall as they stand, are shown sooner or later to have clay feet, some tragic flaw which, by contrast, heightens our awareness of the holiness of God and everyone's dependence on divine grace.

Perhaps the depth of Moses' obedience and devotion to Yahweh is made even more evident by the fact that the story does not have a happy ending in which Moses leads the people triumphantly across the Jordan. For even after the painful verdict at Meribah, Moses continues to lead the people and to serve God. His disappointment did not weaken his commitment.

Deut. 34:5-6. The death and burial of a prince of the faith in an arid place like Moab is somehow extraordinarily woeful. Born and reared in Egypt, trained in court schools, Moses was a child of one of the great civilizations of his time, a place of renowned culture. In due course his life was committed to leading a wandering and oppressed people into a land of milk and honey, promised of God to be a place of covenant and security for the descendants of Abraham. And now he is to be buried in a remote and unpromising place and in an unmarked grave.

But neither Moses' exclusion from Canaan nor the fact that his burial place was unknown detracted from the importance of his leadership or the devotion and gratitude with which he is remembered in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

And he buried him. A strictly grammatical reading of the text suggests that God buried Moses (as some rabbis say). It has also been argued that Moses buried himself (Rashi). Some versions read "he was buried" (American Standard). According to rabbinic tradition the grave of Moses was in readiness for him from creation. Surely the death of Moses would have been attended as much by the presence of God as were those of Enoch and Elijah. Moses was buried in the valley near Beth-peor where he had delivered his final address to the people. The circumstances of Moses' death and burial increased a sense of mystery about it which led to an extensive literature (see, for example, Jude 9).

Deut. 34:7. Vs. 7 suggests a noteworthy rhythm, energy, and
completeness in the 120 years of Moses' life, a kind of biography in three acts. (1) According to Acts 7:23 Moses was forty years old when he left the Egyptian court to visit his fellow Israelites (Exod. 2:11 does not suggest his age). (2) At eighty his leadership of the Exodus from Egypt is underway (Exod. 7:7). (3) At 120 his mission has been accomplished—he had brought his people to the promised land (Deut. 34:7). The fullness of the prophet's life is further attested by comments about the state of his health: his vision was unimpaired, his "natural force" unabated. The Hebrew noun for natural force is not elsewhere used in the Old Testament. A cognate is used in Ugaritic passages where Albright suggests the meaning "life-force" as opposed to physical weakness in old age. The related Hebrew adjective means moist, fresh, in describing fruit and trees (Gen. 30:37, Ezek. 17:24, 21:3, Numb. 6:3), and new when writing of the cords (perhaps animal sinews) with which Samson was bound (Judges 16:7-8). The term suggests that Moses was still mentally and physically vigorous and carries the possible suggestion of virility.

The people of Israel mourned the death of Moses for thirty days—that long and no longer. We see more and more the value of such counsels and practices in the law of ancient Israel. Community and individual mourning at a time of loss is essential both to a sense of integrity and to emotional health. But mourning that goes on and on may allow grief to turn into bitterness. The former is legitimate, the latter destructive.

Deut. 34:9. The reference to Joshua's charisma and his office reminds us of Numb. 27:18-23, in which Moses is directed by the Lord to commission his successor. Joshua had already been ordained to the office by the laying on of Moses' hands. According to Deut. 3:27 Moses had "encouraged and strengthen-ened" Joshua to carry on the task which Moses himself was not allowed to complete. (How ironic obedience can be!)

The spirit of wisdom which characterized Joshua had been demonstrated to a large degree in the exemplary leadership of Moses. It included a sense of the divine presence, the ability to hear and speak the word of God, and to serve as administrator of
the community's life. Such wisdom is clearly a gift of God and essential to the leadership Joshua was to provide. Thus the closing chapter of the whole Pentateuch provides evidence of God's continuing concern for Israel: The leader is dead; long live the leader. The people mourned for Moses, and they submitted to the leadership of Joshua.

Deut. 34:10-12. Whether or not the title prophet would have been used for or appreciated by Moses in his own time, the Deuteronomist did not find it inappropriate to use a term that had been defined by the lives and teachings of the eighth-to-sixth-century prophets. By the Deuteronomist's time, prophecy was seen as a major mode of revelation from deity to the people. These verses suggest the unique greatness of Moses: the Lord and Moses met face to face (see Exod. 33-34; also Deut. 5:4-5). One rabbinic tradition suggests that Moses spoke with God whenever he wished.

The Deuteronomist's addition of verses 11 and 12 served to remind Israel of the great liberation that God the Redeemer had effected through Moses. For exilic Israel there must have been a parallel between Deut. 34:11-12, with which Torah closes, and Genesis 1, which stands at its beginning. The Genesis story reminded Israel that a God who had brought order out of chaos once (at creation) could do it again in times of exile and dispersion. Not only can a God who has created re-create, but the Lord of the beginning-time will also be the Lord of the end-time. And leadership will be provided between the two times. So here the redemptive event that God achieved through his servant in the Exodus bespeaks similar possibilities to exilic and post-exilic Israel. Great acts are remembered; great acts may be anticipated.

Moses is mentioned in many Old Testament books and in twelve books of the New Testament. In a thoughtful appraisal of his greatness a number of characteristics come to the fore.

Chief among these was Moses' ability to perceive (receive) and interpret the will of God, and then to act upon it with courage. Apparently it was this quality which led Deuteronomy to name him the greatest of the prophets. (18:15-22; Num.
Later the writing prophets were to regard him as the fountainhead of their office. Reformers though they were, the great prophets were also "reactionaries," calling Israel back (return, come back) to definitions of covenant life long since proclaimed, ancient teachings that the informed tradition found it appropriate to attribute to Moses, fountainhead of Torah. Underlying all this was the sense that Moses' relationship with God informed him and empowered his great deeds.

This sense of the divine presence was combined with uncommon natural talents. The traditional recognition of Moses as prophet, priest, judge, and community leader, a model for the key offices of the covenant community, is in part based upon accruing legend. But the historic fact of his leadership stands: he took a willful people who had been in subservience for four hundred years and, despite the harshness of desert life and survival, brought a nation into vigorous being. The memory of that accomplishment remains vital in the theological and liturgical life of Judaism.

All this attests unusual qualities of character such as meekness ("more than all men that were on the face of the earth"—Num. 12:3), and a passionate, sometimes self-consuming love for the people and for God (a persuasive example of the love whith the shema' extols). He could plead and argue for the people before God, and he could burst into rage and words of sharp criticism to the people when they fell short of duty and possibility. His were the contributions made by persons of deep commitment, unusual skills, simple virtue, and high expectation.

Taken together the life and work of Moses continue to provide a part of the foundation on which Jews and Christians stand, as we work out our own salvation and struggle to perceive the divine will for our own times.

At the Transfiguration, a kind of preview of the kingdom of God already come in power (Mark 9:1 ff.), Moses was one of those whom the three disciples saw in association with Jesus. Their vision was historically informed. The fulfillment that Jesus proclaimed was surely grounded in the work of God's ancient spokesman.
HOMILETICAL RESOURCES

NOTES


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Ha'Shoah AS CHRISTIAN REVOLUTION:
TOWARD THE LIBERATION OF
THE DIVINE RIGHTEOUSNESS

A. ROY ECKARDT

The ravaged face, covered with ashes, was no longer his own. There was a time, in Europe, when Jews were forbidden to possess a body.
—Elie Wiesel, The Gates of the Forest

The freedom towards God of the human being whom God desires and loves is as unbounded as God's capacity for passion and for patience.
—Jürgen Moltmann, The Trinity and the Kingdom

MARIA
Long live theater . . . What's theater?
BERISH
When you do something without doing it, when you say something without saying it, while thinking that you did say, and you did do something—anything—that's theater.
—Elie Wiesel, The Trial of God (a play)

According to a survivor of Auschwitz, a certain story was told in that camp of death about a Hasidic rebe who argued with a disciple in this wise: "You know, it is possible that the rebbino

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The Rebbe answered, "If the Rebbe shel olam should open his window now and look down here and see Auschwitz, he would close the window again and say, 'I did not do this.' And that would be a lie."  

But why would it be a lie? Does not the blame for Auschwitz fall upon human beings? Rabbi Eliezer Berkovits of today's Jerusalem supplies a different answer, in a single sentence: "God is responsible for having created a world in which man is free to make history." This answer is unanswerable, is it not? For no human being ever asked to be born. The rabbi's judgment is thus a strictly ontological one. But that fact cuts in more than one way. For could not this same declaration have been made before the Holocaust (Ha'Shoah), and therefore independent of the Holocaust, precisely because it is an ontological judgment (rather than a merely historical one)? I shall try to grapple with the latter question; the substance of the present essay is no more than a poor midrash upon Rabbi Berkovits's searing affirmation.

If sin remains a primordial factor within human suffering (of course, not the sole factor), must not a like state of affairs be applied to the suffering of God? Yet we have to remember that this question was raised much before the Holocaust. Did not the Hasidic rabbis of earlier centuries sometimes bring God to trial for permitting unjustified anguish to afflict his people? Often they ruled that God stood guilty. Such unusual behavior had biblical precedents. Thus Abraham dared put the question to God: "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?" Our patriarch perceived that it would be immoral for God to slay the righteous indiscriminately with the wicked (Gen. 18:22-25).

I am going to submit five comments. Each of them assumes the standpoint of human righteousness in the presence of kteyakhol, the divine sin. (In some Jewish thinking the qualification kteyakhol, "so to speak," is included whenever the issue of the divine attributes is introduced. Here is a linguistic barrier to the idolatries of theology. The expression may also suggest one theological origin of Jewish humor.)
(1) The philosopher Emil L. Fackenheim makes the somewhat
cynical but truthful observation, “Rather than face Auschwitz,
men everywhere seek refuge in generalities.” I take this
judgment to mean that the Holocaust ought to be faced as the
Holocaust, from within itself and its own horrible dimension and
extremity, and not through some abstract or general treatment
of the question of evil.

(2) There is no consolation for the Holocaust. It is to no avail to
argue that not all the people of God were destroyed in the Shoah
and that Israel still lives. Again I cite Professor Fackenheim:

The pious men . . . in the Lodz Ghetto spent a whole day fasting,
praying, saying psalms, and then, having opened the holy ark,
convoked a solemn din Torah [legal hearing], and forbade God to
punish his people any further. (Elsewhere God was put on trial—and
found guilty.) And in the Warsaw Ghetto a handful of Jews, ragged,
alone, poorly armed, carried out the first uprising against the
Holocaust Kingdom in all of Europe. The rabbis showed religious piety
when, rather than excuse God or curse him, they cited his own
promises against him. The fighters showed secular piety when, rather
than surrender to the Satanic Kingdom, they took up arms against it.
The common element in these two responses was not hope but rather
despair. To the rabbis who found him guilty, the God who had broken
his promises in the Holocaust could no longer be trusted to keep any
promise, the messianic included. And precisely when hope had come
to an end, the fighters took to arms—in a rebellion that had no hope of
succeeding.

Fackenheim then proposes what I think is the only conclusion
possible: “Every explanatory connection between the Holocaust
and the state of Israel has broken down, the causal historical
kind in part, the teleological religious kind entirely, and even the
hope connecting the one with the other competes with despair.”
Does this mean that no bond is to be found between the two
realities? No, there is such a bond, and it is unbreakable. But it is
not a causal bond, nor is it a bond of meaning. The bond is
present in and through the human response to the Shoah, only
there, yet necessarily there. “It is necessary because the heart of
every authentic response to the Holocaust—religious and secularist, Jewish and non-Jewish—is a commitment to the autonomy and security of the state of Israel." Nevertheless, there remains no consolation for the Holocaust, for the simple, transcendently bleak reason that the infants, the children, the women, the men, the old people are dead. "Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are not" (Jer. 31:15). To interject that the Lord of the universe looked upon the anguish of his people in Treblinka or Maidanek and resolved to return some of them to the land of Israel contains an obscenity. The people are dead. There is no consolation for that. Is not Israel to be grasped instead as sublime defiance on the part of the piteous remnant from the kingdom of night7 who resolved to take Jewish life into their own hands? We are met here with what Rabbi Irving Greenberg calls "the third era of Jewish history,"8 which stands for the absolutely essential rebirth of political power to replace the hell that grew inevitably out of powerlessness. In the world after the Shoah an awesome yet reassuring paradox challenges us: To leave everything to God is to betray God; to do everything ourselves (even against God) is to serve God.

(3) Does not the nature of the Holocaust's intention bear tellingly upon kteyakhhoi, the complicity of God? I couch the point in rhetorical form because this issue appears even more debatable than the other debatable matters in which we are here involved. I am aware of what is being labeled these days "Holocaust myopia." The charge is made that for some Jews and Christians the Holocaust has become an obsession chopped off from the history of Jewish and other suffering.9

We are already caught up in the question of the relation between faith and history, but now we must go much deeper into that question. The Endlosung is profoundly paradoxical: on the one hand, it was not something entirely new (the hatred of Jews for their representation of God10 is a very old story); on the other hand, it was wholly new (every Jew was supposed to die). The latter fact helps to explain how just before his suicide Adolf Hitler had to write a remorseful letter apologizing for having failed to exterminate the Jews. Six million were dead, yet Hitler
knew he had failed. Enough Jews were left to ensure a fresh metastasizing of the cancer of Jewishness. In principle, a single remaining Jew would quite suffice for this. As Hitler said, “The Jews have inflicted two wounds on mankind—circumcision on its body and ‘conscience’ on its soul. They are Jewish inventions. The war for domination of the world is waged only between the two of us, between these two camps alone—the Germans and the Jews. Everything else is but deception.”¹¹ The transcending uniqueness of the Holocaust centers in its intention: to annihilate every last Jew.¹²

I agree with Clark M. Williamson (who also speaks from a Christian point of view) that the transcending uniqueness of an event is what constitutes the basis for theological reflection upon that event. Professor Williamson calls attention to what he considers a helpful statement in Alfred North Whitehead’s *Religion in the Making*: “Rational religion appeals to the direct intuition of special occasions [= particular historical events], and to the elucidative power of its concepts for all occasions.”¹³ Williamson continues: “The criterion suggested has to do with whether the concepts generated by an event in those struck, grasped, or rapt by it can indeed illuminate all other occasions, whether they can provide a theoretical and practical framework adequate for ordering all of life.” He concludes that he finds the Holocaust to be, in this sense, such an event, and further that the way Irving Greenberg talks about the Holocaust tends to convince him of this judgment, i.e., “all other, non-Holocaust perspectives are called into radical question, while reflection on the Holocaust provides both new theoretical and practical decisions. Hence, one can say that this event, but not another . . . is crucial for theological understanding.”¹⁴

I have myself written in a similar way, contending that the discipline of theology stands midway between science and history. For theology is grasped by a given, uniquely unique event, and then it applies that event to the adventure of universal understanding.¹⁵ As H. Richard Niebuhr explains (in a Christian frame of reference), “revelation means this intelligible event [Jesus Christ] which makes all other events intelligible.”¹⁶ Irving Greenberg points out that were we “to ignore or deny all
significance to the Holocaust-event, we would be repudiating a fundamental affirmation of the Sinai-covenant, namely, "that history is meaningful, and that ultimate liberation and relationship to God will take place in the realm of human events." Now of course anyone may reject out of hand the entire notion of uniquely unique, transcendingly decisive heilsgeschichtliche events. The argument would then cease. But if the rejection of the decisiveness of the Holocaust comes from someone who affirms heilsgeschichtliche response to other events (Exodus, Sinai, Crucifixion, Resurrection, the Second Temple's destruction) but not to the Holocaust, we are forced to respond, as a German saying has it: "Ein Esel schilt den andern Langohr" ("The one ass is calling the other ass 'Longears' ").

In sum, it appears most difficult to rule out revelatory and perhaps even supersessionary meaning within the Shoah—this upon the primordial ground that the intentionality of that event can scarcely be dissociated from what it was that made the event fatefully possible in the first place, namely, the Covenant, the setting apart of Jews as "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod. 19:6). Presumably, God is anything but uncaring of the future, and ought to be able to foresee the consequences of his own methods and decisions. God is identifiable as the culprit behind all Jewish suffering, but the Shoah remains unique as a most monstrous, eschatological incarnation of that suffering. In Eli Wiesel's Beggar in Jerusalem a young madman, one of only three survivors who had escaped the deportation, asks: "How does God justify Himself in His own eyes, let alone in ours? If the real and the imaginary both culminate in the same scream, in the same laugh, what is creation's purpose, what is its stake?"

(4) An appeal to the Crucifixion and the Resurrection appears to be blocked. The liberation of the divine righteousness is intertwined, I believe, with the uncompromising honesty that Kierkegaard coveted so painfully. Accordingly, we cannot attribute to God a redemption that has not taken place.

Ulrich Simon of King's College, London has turned to the crucified and risen Christ for an answer to, or a means of reckoning with, the horror of the Holocaust. Simon writes: "The pattern of Christ's sacrifice, which summarizes all agonies" is
"the reality behind Auschwitz."20 Robert E. Willis of Hamline University points up the unknowing irresponsibility and hence the irony in this kind of theologizing when he responds: The problem in applying the model of Christ's death and Resurrection to the Holocaust is that it was the very development of the church's official Christology . . . that provided the charge of deicide levelled against the Jewish people with at least quasi-official credentials. . . . One cannot simply proceed as though the passion of Christ provided a symbolically innocent vehicle for coping with the Holocaust. Symbolically, it has become part of the very evil it seeks to illuminate.21

Differing degrees of support for Willis' reaction are forthcoming within a growing legion of contemporary historiographical works by Christians. I select but one citation, from the United Methodist historian Franklin H. Littell, a passage that encapsulates nineteen hundred years of relevant church history:

The cornerstone of Christian antisemitism is the superseding or displacement myth, which already rings with the genocidal note. This is the myth that the mission of the Jewish people was finished with the coming of Jesus, that "the old Israel" was written off with the appearance of "the new Israel." To teach that a people's mission in God's providence is finished, that they have been relegated to the limbo of history, has murderous implications which murderers will in time spell out.22

Again, the issue has been raised by Emil Fackenheim of whether in one or another of the camps of death Jesus of Nazareth could have become a Mussulman. ("Mussulman" was camp-slang for an all-to-familiar, spectral figure, described by Gerald Reilliner as "a walking skeleton wrapped in a bit of blanket."23 If the answer is that Jesus could not have been turned into a Mussulman, then the reputed incarnation of God in Jesus is fatefully unrelated to the human condition. And if the answer is that Jesus could have become a Mussulman, it is thereby out of the question to maintain that any redemption has taken place.24

Within our own epoch of history, the traditional Christological claims of the church have been subjected to a severe crisis.
They are beset by huge mounds of torn human bodies and their ashes. A message resounds in and through the shrieks of the silent dead: “There is no redemption in this world.” Do we not have here a stern lesson of the Shoah, that if there is to be any redemption, it must lie wholly within some tomorrow?

However, there remains the question of the Resurrection. The challenge to the proclamation of Jesus as raised from the dead by a special act of God is quite a different one from that confronting the message of the Cross. Yet this other challenge already lies implicit in Professor Littell’s allusion to the Christian myth of supersession as comprising the cornerstone of a potentially genocidal antisemitism. The other challenge presents itself in particularly stark form in the work of Wolfhart Pannenberg of Munich University. In his book Jesus—God and Man, as elsewhere, Pannenberg argues that since Jesus has in truth been raised from the dead by God, Jesus’ claim to an authority that supersedes Judaism was “visibly and unambiguously confirmed by the God of Israel.” Note the level upon which the case is put: Controversies between Christianity and Judaism are more than simple human conflicts. God himself is a protagonist, and his very truth is at stake. The Resurrection teaching purports to convey something absolute concerning the real history of God. God himself has intervened within human history to prove once and for all that the Christian faith is divinely true, and that, correspondingly, the faith of Judaism is false or displaced. In the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, God has definitively and finally acted—here we are being summoned not to reason “kiveyakhol”—to show that he is for Christianity and Christians, and against Judaism and Jews.

There is special irony in this state of affairs because Wolfhart Pannenberg is a theologian of Germany. (I speak now, in a way, ad hominem.) A question to be addressed to him is: How can the Resurrection of Jesus be proclaimed as a special act of God without the Christian triumphalism that paved the road to Belzec and Sobibor? To my knowledge, no Christian theologian has answered, or even sought to answer, this question. In the meanwhile, Christian supersessionist thinking, preaching, and behavior go forward, keeping alive, in effect, the Christian...
aspect of the foundation of the Nazi ideology and program. Christian supersessionist thinking is a carrier. It carries the germs of genocide, the genocide only of Jews.

Perhaps we can express this matter a little more objectively. In The Trinity and the Kingdom Jürgen Moltmann, another influential German thinker, contends that on the date of Jesus' Resurrection "the eschatological era" began. But if it is the case, as the American Catholic theologian Rosemary Ruether argues, that the basic trespass of the Christian church vis-à-vis Judaism and the Jewish people is the attempt to historicize the eschatological dimension, how then are we to continue to affirm the Resurrection of Jesus as an actual event realized by God without at the same time perpetuating this basic sin?

(5) A final comment in behalf of the norm of human righteousness and justice has to do with whether a measure of moral integrity is to be found within apparent sacrilege. I restrict myself to what might be called the unforgivability of forgiveness.

Elie Wiesel thus describes the genesis of his play The Trial of God: "Inside the Kingdom of night, I witnessed a strange trial. Three rabbis—all erudite and pious men—decided one winter evening to indict God for allowing his children to be massacred. I remember: I was there, and I felt like crying. But there nobody cried." As the play moves along, only a single individual can be found who is ready and willing to serve as defense attorney. For the sake of those who have not yet read the play, I shan't reveal that party's true identity. I tell you only his name. It is Sam. The burden of Sam's argument is this: While the events are not to be disputed, they are irrelevant. For who is to blame for them? Human beings, and human beings alone. Why implicate God? God's ways are just and beyond reproach. Our duty is simple: to glorify him, to love him—in spite of ourselves. However, the prosecutor argues that if our truth is not God's as well, then he is beneath contempt—for giving us the taste and passion of truth without apprising us that such truth is in fact false. He may very well persist in his destructive ways. This does not mean that we have to give our approval. "Let Him crush me, I won't say Kaddish. Let Him kill me, let Him kill us all, I shall shout and
shout that it’s His fault.” Let the priests chatter on about God’s suffering. He is big enough to take care of himself. We do better to pity other human beings.  

It is not a historical accident that the “death of God” thinking succeeded the Holocaust. Rabbi Berkovits concludes that within the dimension of time and history, the ways of God are simply unforgivable. If convincing, this finding demands an inversion of various biblical passages. Of Amos 3:2: “You only have we known of all the reputed gods of earth; therefore, we will punish you for all your iniquities.” Of Hosea 1:9: “You are not our God and we will not be your people.” Of Hosea 14:1: “Return, O God, to Israel your people, for you have fallen by your iniquity.” Jesus said: “If you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Matt. 5:23-24). Marvelous!—except when we have murdered our brother, in which case there is no longer a way to be reconciled to him. And God? Forgiveness for God may be possible if he can still somehow manage to leave his gifts at the altar and go and be reconciled to his human children. He has sinned against life, and life can only be vindicated through life. God has one chance left—kiyeyakhel?—to be saved. He must do two things: seek human forgiveness, and act to redeem himself. In Wiesel’s work Souls on Fire Rabbi Levi-Yitzhak reminds God that he had better ask forgiveness for the hardships he has inflicted upon his children. This is why, so the tale goes, the phrase Yom Kippur appears also in the plural, Yom Kippurim: “the request for pardon is reciprocal.” Second, God is obligated—no, he is commanded—to redeem the victims of the Shoah by raising them to eternal life with him. This tells us that the final disposition of the trial of God rests upon the future of God. In the meanwhile, as a teacher of Wiesel once said to him, “Only the Jew knows that he may oppose God, so long as he does so in defense of God’s creation.” (Perhaps the Christian is eligible for parallel duty. For only the Christian knows that he may oppose Jesus Christ, so long as he does so in defense of Jesus’ own people.)
What am I to do now? I am unsure. I do know that I had better find a way to conclude this essay. I have composed scores of essays; one more ending ought not be beyond execution. But I remain unsure of what I am to do. . . .

(How does a man go about finishing out a lifetime?)

In his powerful œuvre upon the Holocaust, Arthur A. Cohen brings honor to those who are aware of the abyss of the tremendum in all its horror, yet whose own being "is elsewhere—on the bridge, in fact, over the abyss." The complication is that bridges point in different directions. Which direction is to be mine?

Permit me to start us out in one direction. For all at once it has come back to me that The Trial of God is set on the Feast of Purim, an occasion when, as the innkeeper Berish observes (the very fellow who plays the role of prosecutor), "everything goes." And we are all to wear masks on the journey, since Purim is a day for fools, children, and beggars. Perhaps, then, we can still play together. Here is one gem for along the way, from The Big Book of Jewish Humor, my currently favorite work in theology:

A rabbinical student is about to leave Europe for a position in the New World. He goes to his rabbi for advice, and the rabbi, a great Talmud scholar, offers an adage which, he assures the younger man, will guide him throughout his life: "Life is a fountain."

The young rabbi is deeply impressed by the profundity of his teacher's remarks, and departs for a successful career in America. Thirty years later, hearing that his mentor is dying, the younger man returns for a final visit.

"Rabbi," he says to his old teacher, "I have one question. For thirty years, every time I have been sad or confused I have thought of the phrase you passed on to me before I left for America. It has helped me through the most difficult of times. But to be perfectly honest with you, rabbi, I have never fully understood the meaning of it. And now that you are about to enter the World of Truth, perhaps you would be so kind as to tell me what these words really mean. Rabbi, why is life like a fountain?"

Wearily, the old man replies, "All right, so it's not like a fountain!"

Yet in The Gates of the Forest the dancing and singing of a certain
Hasid remain his way of telling God: "You don't want me to
dance; too bad. I'll dance anyhow. You've taken away every
reason for singing, but I shall sing. I shall sing of the deceit that
walks by day and the truth that walks by night, yes, and of the
silence of dusk as well. You didn't expect my joy, but here it is;
yes, my joy will rise up; it will submerge you.”

The one direction of the bridge thus ends in a blind alley. The
playing, the singing, the dancing, the joking—none can any
longer be done for the sake of joy but only in behalf of outrage, of
defiance. As Julian Green said, “after Auschwitz, only tears can
have meaning.” The rebe who tells the story of the singing and
dancing Hasid admits that the song merely cloaks “a dagger, an
outcry.” The humor and the joy fall upon their own swords.
And, worse, the Feast of Purim is powerless before the ice-hot
awareness that should the unforgivability of forgiveness ever
become the final word, despair will in a single moment gain
dominion over all things. The visit by the character Gregor to the
storytelling rebe climaxes in a piteous request, “Rabbi, make me
able to cry.”

Reinhold Niebuhr knew well that while laughter
may be heard “in the outer courts of religion,” there is no mirth
“in the holy of holies.”

But yet, laughter can manage at least to get us to the door that
leads to forgiveness. As Cullen Hightower has written, “There
are people who can talk sensibly about a controversial issue
without taking sides; they are called humorists.” In authentic
humor we all, in a way, stand forgiven. Let us, therefore, not
wholly abandon the way of Purim:

Rabbi Abraham J. Heschel has spoken of the “overwhelming
sympathy with the divine pathos” that the prophet Isaiah
developed. Why do we not don the mask of Isaiah? The play’s
the thing: no one will stop us. Contrary to Berish the prosecutor,
to be sorry for God and for human beings is never an either/or:
the two sustain each other. For me, the penultimate height of
faith—not the final height, for that would be redemption, the
reconciliation of humankind and God—the penultimate height
of faith is to find oneself genuinely sorry for God. In the Woody
Allen film Love and Death Boris Grushenko claimed that the worst
thing we can say theologically is that God is an underachiever.
Boris failed to go far enough. The worst thing we can say (and, for that very reason, as well as in the name of Auschwitz, we have to say it) is that God is a klutz—the ultimate klutz—so much so that he has got himself strung out upon a cross that is never going to be taken down. He would have to go make himself a world! Now he is stuck with it, and with us, and he is left with no choice but to keep on undergoing the agony of it. For no divine sin is possible without human beings (just as no human sin could ever eventuate apart from God). And by revealing and making normative for humankind certain apodictic requirements, God has only opened the way to being held strictly to account by the identical requirements. If all this is not the height of klutzyness, I do not know what is. The Creator of all the universes made radically vulnerable—and under his very own sponsorship!

Is there anybody around who is willing to attend to the anguish of God, and to give him comfort there upon his cross? We humans may not amount to very much, and we are tiny nothings in all the terrifying vastness, but we can at least manage that. Someone ought to go to the side of the eternal victim. If no one will come forward, all of existence is just a dreadful thing.

So God is unforgiveable all right—and we forgive him. Bonhoeffer taught that God does not appreciate “cheap grace.” Yet maybe we do—or we can—when it comes to God. Does that make us inferior to God? Well, it does not make us superior: it is not we who originated forgiveness. Forgiveness is a gift of God. And if it is so that on Purim our grace is forced to go for cheap, to go, indeed for no price at all, it is because all the available currency has been consumed in the flames of the Shoah.

Why are we to forgive the unforgivable God, and without any price and without any conditions? For no reason. Were there a reason, the Feast would be spoiled, the party would be over. And besides, there can be no reason to forgive God, not after the Shoah. However, there can be justification for doing so: Does not God yearn that we be free? As Tillich has it, a person experiences an unconditional demand only from another person. The demand becomes concrete in the “I-Thou” encounter. The
content of the demand is therefore that the “thou” be accorded the same dignity as the “I” [and, we add, that the “I” be accorded the same dignity as the “thou”]; this is the dignity of being free. . . . This recognition of the equal dignity of the “Thou” and the “I” is justice. . . . Justice is the true power of being.46

Or—can we not substitute?—“love is the true power of being,” for at this place love and justice appear as one, within the praxis of a most strange equality.

The very prophet who knew sorrow for God claimed that “the holy God proves himself holy by righteousness” (Isa. 5:16). On the assumption that the imago dei and the imitatio dei somehow converge here, human beings too prove themselves holy by righteousness. But righteousness never comes finally into its own until it is forgiven, until everyone begins to smile and then breaks out laughing. Thus is the righteousness of God itself set free. Love between God and humankind is always having to say we are sorry. In this way we are empowered to do a last inversion of Scripture. Hosea 11:8: “How can we give you up, O God!” And Psalm 130:34:

If thou, O humanity, shouldst mark iniquities,
    Humanity, who could stand?
But there is forgiveness with thee. . . .

    I have heard it said that at the conclusion of one of the many trials of God, after the accused had been adjudged guilty as charged a certain Hasid stood before the assembly and said: “Let us pray.” And it is told, at the close of The Gates of the Forest, that Gregor, whose real identity was that of Gavriel but whose faith had been carried off in the transports to the East, came to pray. He prayed for, among others, the soul of his father, and he prayed as well for the soul of God.41

NOTES

At present, some ten thousand communities across North America observe Yom Ha'Shoah, the Day of Remembrance of the Holocaust. This figure is supplied by Donald W. McEvoy of the National Conference of Christians and Jews. See McEvoy, A Holocaust Memorial Service for Christians, Yom Ha'Shoah (New York: National Conference of Christians and Jews, 1979); and McEvoy, ed., Christians Confront the Holocaust: A Collection of Sermons (NCCJ, 1980). There are at present more than seven hundred courses on the Holocaust in American universities and theological schools.

On the question of God’s suffering as such, see Jurgen Moltmann, The Trinity and the Kingdom; The Doctrine of God (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), chap. 2 and passim.


As far as I know, Elie Wiesel was the first to speak of the Shoah as the “kingdom of night.” See his Night, trans. Stella Rodwa (New York: Hill and Wang, 1960).


R. David Freedman identifies one book on the Holocaust as afflicted with “Holocaust-myopia,” a phenomenon that, so he alleges, “leads to impatience with the millennia-old standard Jewish theology.” Freedman claims that once only the suffering is seen, the meaning of “covenant,” “innocence,” and “injustice” is distorted (review of Byron L. Sherwin and Susan G. Amori, eds., Encountering the Holocaust, in Journal of Ecumenical Studies 17 [1980]: 692).


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27. Rosemary Ruether, Faith and Fraticide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism (New York: Seabury Press, 1974). Ruether is not consistent on this matter, maintaining as she herself has subsequently done that Christians can hold on “to the memory of Jesus’ resurrection from the cross” as the basis for their refusal “to take evil as the last word” and their hope “that God will win in the end” (To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Critique [New York: Crossroad, 1981], p. 42).
29. Ibid., pp. 128, 157, 127, 133.
32. Arthur A. Cohen, The Tremonium: A Theological Interpretation of the Holocaust (New York: Crossroad, 1961), p. 82. One immense value of this study is its dialectic of the universal and the particular: The Holocaust affects all of human history; yet the author offers a grand revivification of the sixteenth-century Jewish Kabbala.
35. Ibid., p. 197.

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Responses to “Ha’Shoah as Christian Revolution”

Roy Eckardt works hard to convince us that the Holocaust is a unique event in the history of human horror. He seems to
believe if this uniqueness can be established, then we can draw some greater insight from it than if it were simply one example among many. I have no quarrel with Dr. Eckardt's contention that the Holocaust was a human tragedy of unparalleled proportions, but I am not sure that it was actually different in essence from a number of other terrifying events in our collective memory. To be sure, the Holocaust was on a much larger scale and, therefore, the effects of it were felt by a greater number of people and with a terrifying cumulative intensity. However, my own experience tells me that there is a germ of that anguish in every tragic event and that the questions raised by the murder of six million Jews in the concentration camps of Germany are the same questions that are raised when a child is raped and murdered in a secluded woods or an old man is bludgeoned to death in an alley.

In May, 1981, my younger son was struck by a car and killed. It was an accident. The driver most certainly did not intend for it to happen, and yet because of a combination of natural and human factors, it did happen. Even though the perpetrators of the Holocaust knew full well what they were doing and did it with fierce intentionality, the Holocaust and my son's death still raise some of the same questions. Why did God allow it to happen? Why do the righteous suffer?

In my own life and in my own ministry I come again and again to the position of Job. We don't have the answers.

Dr. Eckardt has some interesting comments on the idea of God's culpability for the existence of evil. He suggests that God may need to be forgiven for his part in the whole bloody mess.

In my own mind the enormity of the horror of the Holocaust calls me to a painful admission of our human potential for evil. I do not attempt to lay the blame on God's doorstep, except to the extent that in allowing for human freedom God opened the door to all sorts of abuses of that freedom. It should be noted that that same freedom also grants us the potential to be truly loving and caring.

I find Dr. Eckardt's description of God as "the ultimate klutz" to be both offensive and grotesque. There seems to be little respect for the holiness and the awesomeness of God.
I did appreciate Dr. Eckardt's willingness to enter into a no-holds-barred confrontation with the Almighty. Unless we are prepared to ask the difficult questions and grapple with the painful realities, we have little hope of ministering effectively to the people in our care.

However, even after we have engaged in such a confrontation, much remains in the shadowy area of the unknown. At the beginning of Part III of the essay Dr. Eckardt acknowledges his uncertainty about how to conclude. I think that uncertainty is natural and points to the author's integrity as a scholar and as a theologian. There are some questions that we simply cannot answer. Part of our ability to maintain some degree of sanity in the midst of chaos is due, not only to our tolerance for ambiguity, but also to our willingness to admit that some things that happen really do not make sense.

Sarah S. Miller

A. Roy Eckardt's article is profound and theological, both in research and questioning. So, for the pastor concerned with the eternal problem, "Why suffering?" a response along similar lines is offered. How much research, how much questioning of God and our human race, by both parishioner and pastor, how much time and thought need we give to this matter in such a rapidly changing world of thought and yet one in which the same basic human needs and problems arise again and again.

Among the people of my region, the matter of the Holocaust is not well remembered, much less thought about, especially by the post-World War II generation(s). It has been observed that one main difference between pre- and post-WW II persons is that the former still have a hope for better things to come while the latter often seem to live and act out a condition of hopelessness. I would propose that it may well be, in a significant part, that the subliminal effect of the Holocaust is causative in both generations. If so, we would do well to continue discussions and study, on a practical everyday living level, about the Holocaust, with both pre- and post-WW II people.
To Eckardt's five comments these observations are submitted. First, the uniqueness of the Holocaust, its causes, its tragic facts and also the survival and growth of a new political people, (not just in Israel)—these are affirmed. But again, all do point, with great trauma, to our human non-understanding of one of the great questions of life, "Why suffering?" As the reference to Whitehead notes, this "special occasion (Holocaust)" appeals to our intuition concerning suffering. I never say to my congregation that I believe anything, much less suffering, is the direct loving, or condemning, act of God's will. Still, I do witness to the people that in the mystery of such as suffering or even death, God's presence does give us the hope of living and re-creating our lives of the future to even greater fulfillment of our given potential. Sharing personally such thoughts can, as Williamson suggests, illuminate all other occasions. While we can never fully know what the other is suffering inside, still in talk, we can share with him and discover in part, what suffering is all about. Thus the value of reliving, as best we can, the Holocaust.

Second, to the comment that there is no consolation in the fact that Israel still lives; I think this in incorrect. Despite the Fackenheim reference that "hope has come to an end," I glimpse a bit of hope. I have lived and worked with many pre-WW II Jewish people; also visited modern Israel and participated in an Aspen seminar on the Jewish experience in America today. I found there is hope, for the future, in Jewish people and in their stated need for a continuing reaffirmation to their God who made that first covenant promise, the one who, even in the Holocaust, used other people to help save enough of his people that "Israel" may live. I believe the Greenberg quote is crucial to this point and that every pastor needs to find a way to affirm that to her or his people.

Third, regarding the "complicity of God." As I see it, God commits no direct-will acts (above), but the "divine" is involved! On such matters of faith, hope and love, we do need to admit both mystery and the presence of God's grace. The pre-WW II audience somehow has been given that confession, in spite of anything. To our post-WW II groups, to develop, to instill the aliveness of God is our difficult but vital responsibility. One
current debate comes to mind: Do Jews go to Heaven? And the answer after some evasion by some, was, yes! I believe, as the world grows ever smaller and closer in communication, as we meet more and more people of other faiths, that it will be helpful in talk with the younger generation to help them realize the God of hope is for all his people.

Fourth, I think we can appeal to the redemption act of Jesus as evidence of the fact that hope survives. From the cross he asked for forgiveness of his enemies; at least one of them asked Jesus for the same. As a result, both were received into Paradise. Thus Jesus, a Jew, helps us understand the kingdom is of those who ask for, and who give, forgiveness. It is possible no survivor of the Holocaust would be able to forgive, or to ask for forgiveness of those involved. Yet in modern Israel, as well as among both Christians and non-Christians who took no action against the events in Germany in the early 1930s, still there is, I believe, an honest and hopeful recognition of redemption ( = new life) through this matter of forgiveness. Speak to the Winds by Kofi Asare Opoku has these key proverbs from pagan Africa which speak to me concerning the matter of human conduct in response to others' actions: “If you do not forgive a crime, you commit a crime.” and “If you see wrong-doing or evil and say nothing against it, you become its victim.”

These ancient proverbs of mankind help me to final comments concerning “the unforgivability of forgiveness” and having God say to us, “So sorry!” Such is not my understanding of the nature of God, who I believe to be above any such foolishness as accepting responsibility for the way we have used God’s gift of freedom, given us to continue to re-create or to destroy our world. It is I who need to say, “I am sorry, God” for even daring to think I can avoid my responsibility for my brothers and sisters, and my acts towards them. To deny that the total divine nature is above our realities would, for me, indeed lead to the “unforgivability of forgiveness” and, as suggested, “despair would rule.”

As a Christian and as a pastor, I affirm what I perceive may be a very universal understanding, if not a doctrine. For many, many of this world there is in their very being a conviction that
forgiveness has a meaning and purpose. It leads to hope! Whether the Holocaust was of God (and I say, No!) or by works of God's people, it has a purpose of teaching and a call to the sharing of the horrors of unforgiveness, especially of any and all types of supersessionary thinking and acting.

Thus, the Holocaust was and is unique. It has the continuing need of review, research and questioning with the current generation of the hopeless, by and with those who, coming through that trauma, still have hope.

Robert B. Fortenbaugh
Pastor, Calhan and Rush United Methodist Churches
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For many, the family is no longer a source of support but a source of stress. By stepping out of our own environment, we can learn from families of other cultures how to do a better job, at certain significant points, in dealing with the problems that currently affect families.

Families in North America today are attracting much attention. The media, the churches, various professional organizations and governmental agencies have focused upon trends and indicators that they see as alarming. Ministers are deeply concerned about the growing problems they perceive. But because many of the suggestions that come to them are of the “try harder” variety, they understandably grow weary. Perhaps some new approaches to family, leading to insights concerning more effective forms of ministry, would provide both relief and new excitement for the challenge. The cross-cultural method described in this essay is one such effort to generate new and more fruitful ways of proceeding.

Sensationalized attempts are made to depict the end of the family as we know it. And while the family as social institution is probably an extremely tough structure to demolish, it neverthe-
less seems to be under great attack and may be in the process of changing form.

An outline of several problem areas demonstrates the linkage among them. Not a sociological analysis, this is a survey of factors that currently impinge damagingly upon families and thus suggest the need for some changes.

1. The first problem is that the family no longer seems capable of fulfilling its role as a source of stability and strength in a time of rapid change. Love, affection and dependability are words that are traditionally linked with family. We traditionally fantasize escape from the troubles and turmoil of the world into the security and tranquility of the bosom of the family. Perhaps this has always been a fantasy for women, with the reality of it limited to the experience of an occasional fortunate man.

But now increasing evidence points to the family itself as the major source of conflict and friction in the lives of many people. Whereas we used to run from the world to the family in search of tranquility, now we find many people having to run from the family to the world in search of that same tranquility. Our frontier mentality hasn't geared us to stay there and work it through. Instead in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries we learned how to escape from it. And although the frontiers then were physical, and now are social, we are still running today.

2. The second of these problems is that individualism in this country has been pushed to the point of diminishing returns. Loneliness is one of the results of this, deep down in our psyche. We then attempt to push toward a greater expression of individuality for fulfillment, but find that this, counterproductively, drives us more deeply into alienation, anomie, and isolation.

Walter Brueggemann, in his book *The Land*, elaborates on the meaning of land and home to the Israelites. He feels that this is poignantly relevant for us today. For we too are a rootless people. We too have been so concerned about space that we have forgotten what it means to have place. We, like the sojourners of the Old Testament, are resident aliens in our own land, never knowing at what moment the company is going to transfer us, or the urban program is going to remove us. The
meaninglessness of our lives often centers in our rootlessness, which means not knowing who we come from as well as where we come from. And individualism, elevated to the sacredness of a cult, exacerbates this problem.

3. The third problem relating to families is the decline of the melting pot theory in American society. Only a few years have passed since people were trying rather desperately to fit into the designs of the great white middle-class norm. But various eruptions have driven many of these same people into a deeper examination of their motives; increasingly people are persuaded not only that it is impossible to become this kind of person, but that they don’t want to become like these others.

As North American society moves toward some kind of pluralism, instead of toward a melting pot, we need to ask about the cohesive force, the glue, that will bind American society together. As we become increasingly diverse, racially and linguistically, does this mean that we disintegrate into warring factions?

This question impinges upon families everywhere. The cohesive forces of a society must relate to the primary social structures—including family. Large differences exist between developed societies composed of effective families and neighborhoods, and atomized, individualistic, mass society with weak primary groups.

As the melting pot dream dies, it is not only the families of ethnic minorities that are shifting their priorities. Families from the mainstream are now called upon to examine their structures and values. If they are no longer the norm, but one among many patterns, how do they cherish and identify that which they wish to transmit to their children?

4. The fourth problem is the decrease of the availability of fossil fuels—the energy problem. And we should really expand it to include all of the earth’s resources.

The American family has been honed into the world’s most wasteful consuming unit. When it places consumption at the upper end of its values, it makes children of adults. That is, the consumer role is essentially an infantile role we now expect adults to play enthusiastically. The North American family over
the past two generations has moved from a unit of production to a unit of consumption. And this impacts the energy problem at a number of points:

Our dietary preference for meat instead of grain demands that we burn approximately ten calories of fossil fuel to produce one calorie of human food in the United States. (In some countries of the world, one calorie of fuel produces ten calories of food).

Individuation has driven us over the edge in the use of fuels, as for example when the Los Angeles freeways are packed with automobiles that carry an average of four empty seats. This consumer mentality, fostered by today's family, challenges seriously other values in our society. When working people can't afford the gasoline to get to work, but more affluent adults and youth can pay the high prices in order to use their recreation vehicles without restraint, then some clear symptoms of this clash of values can be seen.

A little thought reveals the extent to which the four problems are linked: Shortages of fossil fuels relate to individualism in an intricate fashion. We can't keep the individual automobile if there is no fuel for it. We who have been trained to overcome loneliness and seek happiness through the burning of fuels to power our dirt bikes, our dune buggies, snowmobiles, ski lifts, powerboats and water skis, our campers and motorhomes, balloons, planes and skydives will have to shift our base of self-worth or else fight the world for the fuels necessary for these pleasures.

Both individualism and the energy shortage relate to aspects of the melting-pot decline. Both village life and the pseudovillage of the suburb were designs which kept strange people and customs at a distance. If we have neither the fuel for private transportation nor the temperament to use public transportation, the suburb will fade, to be replaced by more heterogeneous urban housing arrangements.

And all three of these then relate to the first problem—family now being a major source of pain and distress. For running from those disagreeable relationships becomes more difficult if we can't escape in our fuelless camper for a weekend, and keep running into people who refuse to melt into the kind of person with whom we are comfortable. In short, mobility of many kinds
is likely to decrease in the near future, and the families that are the product of current North American value systems are ill-equipped to deal with that.

These four problems taken together suggest the need for some major examination of the forms of ministry by which churches attempt to support and strengthen Christian families. But since the problems are challenging the basic values which underlie family life, new forms of ministry which are casually devised and administered are as likely to harm as to help. Serious research at the root level of values is called for.

Such research demands a base that is theoretically sound. In this section, an effort will be made to lay out the formulations by which known theoretical assumptions systematically can be brought to bear upon these problems. These assumptions at least tentatively guide the designing of procedures:

1. If one is to understand one's own environment or culture, one must step outside of it in order to examine it. The procedures and thought processes that we are exposed to every day of our lives seem to us to be completely normal. Only when this perception is challenged by an obviously-different point of view are we able to think about the assumptions we have taken for granted. Not merely a matter of holding up differing perspectives, this method probably causes us for the very first time to be conscious of the assumptions we have made. The homely analogy is found in the life of a fish that is totally unaware of the wetness of water—until deprived of it.

This process of stepping outside usual environments, often used in cultural anthropology, should serve with equal effectiveness in other human enterprises. In theology, or in Christian education, for example, we have in the past tended to talk only “with our own kind.” In accepting this assumption from cultural anthropology, we are hoping to escape the tyranny of our own culture-bound assumptions.

2. A second assumption, flowing directly out of the first, is that our society in the United States needs to give attention to its many strands—not simply to the “mainstream” of middle-class, Anglo-Saxon people. Even though most of us think of family as singular in design, actually a large number of types can be seen
within the various cultures of this country. Most of these family forms have emerged with rich and deep histories that provide a workable and moral design for enhancing quality of life of their members. Thus, instead of being forced to work only with a single pattern, we have the luxury of a pluralism. We can choose and adapt from a number of possibilities, each of which has demonstrated its power to lift levels of human interaction.

One easily can note how much minorities need the majority. But we should pay equal attention to the parallel truth, that the majority needs the minorities. For they are the wells out of which come the potential for survival of us all. There is a curious parallel here to the field of biological ecology. If all the varieties of wheat (or corn or potatoes) are allowed to disappear because one strain is so eminently superior, then we invite disaster. For a blight or virus might appear that is superbly designed to wipe out this one variety of wheat. Only through the presence of other varieties that are not susceptible to the blight is the human race able to assure future availability of wheat. In the same way, if we advocate and support one design of family living (coming from the dominant culture), and allow or encourage the destruction of other forms of family and household, we may be inviting disaster. For new conditions may make that one pattern's usefulness disappear. Some say that this is happening in the United States today, with the traditional nuclear family under great strain because of new conditions that it does not tolerate well.

In this sense, the majority may be desperately dependent upon the patterns of seemingly insignificant minorities if chaos is to be avoided.

3. The third assumption is that families flourish more in the presence of diversity than in its absence. This assumption is built upon small group research. It has been demonstrated that in small groups, heterogeneity of membership, bringing in a range of backgrounds and skills, results in a group that is more fruitful and productive. This hypothesis was empirically tested with two different simulations involving both homogeneous groups and heterogeneous groups. The heterogeneous groups were more creative, more inventive, more able to reach an
FAMILY MINISTRIES

informed consensus. In general they were more productive, at least in areas involving the mental solution of problems.

Families are small groups, so some of this same dynamic functions with them. To the extent that they allow diversity to flourish, they are more able to thresh out issues and arrive at mutually-agreeable consensus than are more rigid, authoritarian families.

Research might be designed in which we bring families of various cultural backgrounds together to work on common issues and needs. The assumption is that the diversity of these heterogeneous families will lead to more productive problem-solving and will contribute more to the emergence of insight than would an assemblage of families that are homogeneous in background.

This principle is true only within limits, however. In small groups one can find differences that are simply unbridgeable. It is also true that we must not confuse productivity with attractiveness. As Homans first demonstrated in 1950, attractiveness of people to each other in groups leads toward homogeneity of thought and action. But this attraction, while valuable, is not the major value sought. In other words, the hope is for these groups of families to produce useful insights, knowledge, and attitudes. A heterogeneous group (as long as that diversity is not too broad) is more likely to produce these results than is a homogeneous group.

4. The fourth assumption emerges directly from the third: These families will need training in the techniques of existing and thriving in the midst of diversity. However, the resources are at hand for this. Generations of families have gone to the mission field, and individuals have moved into the Peace Corps, with considerable knowledge at their disposal for not becoming "ugly Americans."

5. Attitudes and behaviors can change for the good as a result of experiences and new information. (An obvious assumption, but one that should be stated.)

6. Cultural analysis, we assume, includes the religious dimension. Or perhaps this assumption could better be stated: Theological assumptions may be testable in a real-life proving
ground. While this would not be true of all theological perceptions, it should be demonstrable of the effects on people of certain insights and considerations.

John S. Dunne has been developing a religious process he terms “passing over.” This concept illuminates theologically the research here being visualized. In his book *The Way of All the Earth: Experiments in Truth and Religion*, Dunne describes passing over in this fashion:

Passing over is a shifting of standpoint, a going over to the standpoint of another culture, another way of life, another religion. It is followed by an equal and opposite process we might call “coming back,” coming back with new insight to one’s own culture, one’s own way of life, one’s own religion. The holy man of our time, it seems, is... a figure like Gandhi, a man who passes over by sympathetic understanding from his own religion to other religions and comes back again with new insight to his own. Passing over and coming back, it seems, is the spiritual adventure of our time.

The passing over is not done with the image of converting or being converted. Nor does one pass over as a disinterested, objective scientist, but as a movement “of the whole heart and mind and soul,” in response to a question that will give us no rest.

It is not a quest, a one-way adventure, nor is it quite a journey, for that speaks of discovery of something over there, not the discovery of something in one’s own homeland. Dunne settles on the word *odyssey* as that which best describes passing over. For this word implies the completion of the journey with the return. It “starts from the homeland of a man’s own religion, goes through the wonderland of other religions, and ends in the homeland of his own.”

But it is not simply a purposeless and circular trip. Rather one discovers that the knowledge and compassion gained have transformed one’s homeland.

To use Dunne’s description, we proceed on the assumption that people can develop the desire and the ability to pass over into other cultures in order to find those insights that illuminate their own problems and possibilities. We believe they can be trained in that suspension of judgment, that emptying of one’s
own mind, that makes possible the compassionate entering into another's experience and autobiography.

7. Another assumption we are making is that the subjects involved in action research can have a hand in the designing of the techniques for carrying out the research. This is essential if people of their cultures are to benefit from the project.

8. We also assume that it is possible, in action research of forms of ministry, for the ones performing the ministry to engage also in researching the relevance and quality of the ministry. This hypothesis would not be acceptable in empirical research. But in action research some aspects can be shown objectively to have resulted from the ministries; e.g., changed behavior or statements from participants about new insights.

9. And finally, we assume that the skills and knowledge gained will have relevance for other cross-cultural settings.

With these assumptions at least tentatively in place, we turn to the objectives that provide direction for the research. Two major objectives emerge, each incorporating several more specific goals.

The first objective of such research is to demonstrate that cultural interaction among families of various cultures can add to the strength and viability of each of these families.

For the "mainstream" families, then, one would demonstrate the achievement of this objective if the families make progress in relation to each of the needs stated at the beginning of this paper: that is, if they achieve greater stability and tranquility; if they depend less on mobility as a means of escape from relational problems; if they learn to live more comfortably with people who are not willing to become like them; and if they lower their dependence upon fossil fuels and other of the earth's resources as means for achieving happiness.

For the families of different cultures involved in such research groups, a different set of goals must be specified, each linked to needs experienced by families in such cultures.

Paolo Freire spells out some of the elements involved in this first objective. He has a great range of experience with people whose cultures have been submerged by other, more dominant groups. His work in Brazil was essentially an action research
placed in the midst of a thoroughly historical context and designed to create social change through a new unity of theory and praxis. His success he believes was achieved because he erased distinctions between teacher and student, and made all adults the teachers of each other. He demonstrated that every human being is capable of looking critically at his or her world in a dialogic encounter with others.

Freire termed his method a "pedagogy of the oppressed," a pedagogy he was certain must be designed with, not for, oppressed people. He demonstrated also that true reflection leads to action, and that action, if it is worthy of the term praxis, becomes in turn the object of critical reflection. If we sacrifice the action, it equals only verbalism; if we sacrifice the reflection it is only activism. Only when it is action and reflection does the word equal work, and that is praxis.*

Therefore, one of the marks of the achievement of this objective is the emergence of a praxis of action and reflection in the families involved.

Most ministry aims at strengthening the in-group of those who believe. Most religious and cultural celebrations, celebrate our uniqueness. If, through the procedures being outlined in this research, people learn to celebrate other people's differences and to find the gift hidden in the other group's history, then we will have another indicator of the achievement of the first objective.

This may sound like something that only a full-time researcher could work at. But actually, the pastor, director of Christian education or chaplain has the platform from which to launch such work with even greater effectiveness. Virtually every community has some cultural diversity within it. This enables church leaders to start with some old tried-and-true designs such as having congregations share meals of their ethnic origin, or worship and conduct seasonal celebration from their heritage, with other congregations of different background. Other possibilities start to emerge: Caucasian congregations might find immensely stimulating the description of Asian Christians of the way in which they help their children maintain discipline and honor for their elders. Anglos might enjoy some
intergenerational groupings with Hispanics to learn from them how they build such powerful linkages of love and mutual respect between grandchildren and their grandparents. Native Americans might find quite illuminating the study of the patterns by which people of European background produce such vital independence in their children. And Hispanic couples may wish to form a group with Anglo couples to learn how to build greater equality into the roles of husband and wife.

Perhaps no one has greater opportunity for discovering the "gift hidden in the other group's history" than congregations of different ethnic groups that share the same building.

Probably the most significant key to the success of any such undertaking is the ability of the person initiating the contact to do so with no sense of superiority or inferiority in the relationship. Gifts can emerge only as the people discover that they can both give and receive as equals.

The second objective is strongly related to the first. It is to create an ecumenical network of people across the United States and Canada who have the will to work through cultural barriers for the sake of family life. There are dozens of culture groups on the North American continent. And researchers vary widely in their personal history and characteristics. Illuminating insights and breakthroughs could emerge from any point in such a network.

The term "researcher" can be applied to a broad group of persons and is not only for the academic on a full-time assignment. It can with equal accuracy be used to denote any leader of a congregation who tries experimentally to increase the capacity of his or her group to enhance the quality of life in the neighborhood by stimulating mutual interaction with people who are "different." This exploratory effort, honestly pursued and evaluated, can provide the framework for new forms of ministry that are urgently needed in our time.

At first glance, it might appear that no work could be directed toward the achieving of this objective until some results were emerging in reference to the first objective. But why wait? The purpose of a network is not simply to replicate research that one person is conducting. Its purpose is rather to permit independent researchers to advance jointly on a number of fronts. In this
fashion, they enhance and illuminate the work that each of them is doing.

Action research of the type outlined above places unique requirements on the directors of the project:

First of all these requirements is that they perceive themselves as validly engaged in ministry. No cold, analytic stance will do. They should possess the capacity to encourage participation of strong, articulate people from each culture. And have the emotional willingness to "sit at the feet" of others and be the willing learners.

They should themselves be willing—in Dunne’s terms—to "pass over," and not simply leave this difficult assignment to others. This need speaks to the quality of empathy with which they are endowed, and indicates also the humility with which they can introspectively observe and record the changes that occur with their own being. As John Hinkle notes, "Introspection is a method long utilized in the discipline of scientific psychology." This merging of the knower and known—the researcher and researched—makes them one. It also exacts severe personal demands in terms of humility and objectivity.

The researchers must also permit the ministry to be defined by others. That is, they may not describe something as ministry until others have experienced the reality of being ministered to. And this leads into a further requirement:

The researchers must let people of the different cultures help shape the design of the ministry. Otherwise our cultural biases will blind us to the varying shapes of ministry called for.

And finally, the researchers must not become so absorbed in the functions of ministry as to neglect the various aspects of the research. They must go on with the analytic task.

The value of investigating various forms of ministry lies in usefulness. Tangible results of this research will reside in the experiences of the various people, the groups, the families and the cultures involved.

Furthermore, on a personal level, such investigation has the capacity to "bring on board" a growing network of readers and move them toward their own odyssey.

And this would be further cause for celebration!
Response to “Researching Family Ministries”

As a pastor who increasingly sees the family in all its diverse forms as the focus of the church mission, I appreciate the McConnells’ call for a “major examination of the forms of ministry by which churches attempt to support and strengthen families.” I agree that “serious research” is needed, and cross-cultural studies provide a helpful lens through which to view families in our society. It is my belief that when an understanding of ways of life very different from one’s own is gained, abstractions and generalizations about cultural values, social structure, institutional patterns, and other universal categories of human social behavior become meaningful. I further believe that as United Methodists, we are uniquely called, through our tradition, to embrace the strengths of families in all their pluralism. To do so, however, will require a prophetic voice in a day when so many forces are attempting to
make too narrow what are appropriate and/or “Christian”
expressions of life, family, faith.

I wish the McConnells had chosen a term other than
“researching” family ministries. I fear the term is too
value-laden and has too long-standing a tradition in science to
be received as the McConnells would define it. Though I believe
most pastors could carry out an “action-reflection” method of
exploration, few pastors are equipped properly to do research.
Having said that, professional researchers would do well to
heed the basic assumptions underlying the McConnells’
approach to “research,” especially their emphasis on exploring
“with” and not “for” those persons and families from which
they would draw new insights.

I agree that most of the forces and values seeking to fragment
the family are external, and would add unemployment, an
unjust income tax system, and the threat of a nuclear holocaust.
It means that if we are serious about strengthening families, we
must confront the social structures and policies that threaten
them. I disagree that “the family no longer seems capable of
fulfilling its role as a source of stability and strength in a time of
rapid change.” Granted, too many families are incompetent, but
strong families abound. I would call your attention to the body
of research emerging around family strengths.

Finally, I believe the church can teach family strengths
through a family life education program designed to address the
“generally predictable” turning points and crises of family life. I
can generally predict that my daughters will “leave home,” that
my parents will increasingly rely on me for support, and I’ll face
retirement, etc. The point being that if I can anticipate such
transitions, I can better prepare for them so that they will bring
more possibility and less pitfall. It’s just to such a family life
program of preventive and creative maintenance the church is
called, so that families can be freed to be in mission.
Kelly Byron Bender
Pastor, Countryside United Methodist Church
Topeka, Kansas
How can we say ordained ministers are “set apart” when their work overlaps with that of the laity? The answer lies in finding the “areas of uncertainty” over which ordained ministers claim control.

Ordination sets ministers apart. That is clear. As the Consultation on Church Union said recently in its statement on ministry, while all Christians are called to be ministers, some are appointed to carry out special needs and purposes. “There are distinctions of function, but no distinctions of dignity.” There is a division between ordained clergy and the laity. The church sets apart men and women for special roles in the community of faith.

Unfortunately, clarity seems to end with statements like these and confusion sets in. While it is clear that ministers are set apart by ordination, it is not at all clear just what they are set apart for. It is obvious that ordained ministers are different from lay ministers, but it is not obvious precisely how. Defining the special roles and ministries occupied by those ordained is a difficult and frustrating task. There is an almost demonic ambiguity about the ordained ministry.

Everybody suffers in this situation. Confusion generates stress and frustration, both for the pastor and for the parishioners. A situation that does not identify and demand competence has the effect of encouraging incompetence, and no

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one likes to be associated with incompetence, either as a provider or as a client. There should be clarity, if not for the sake of the calling, then certainly for the sakes of those called.

What is the meaning of ordination? Just how are ordained ministers different. What are their special tasks? Is it possible to describe their role in a way that is both useful to the professionals and respectful of the profession? I think so.

One way to describe professions is by describing the areas of uncertainty over which they claim control. Doctors, for example, have control over the uncertainty of my physical health, and auto mechanics have control over the uncertainty of my car’s transmission. Control may be too strong a word, especially in the case of my transmission. But in both instances these people are the ones whom I consult, on whose opinions I rely, whom I expect to have expertise, and to whom I will defer.

I suggest that ordination delineates a cluster of five areas of uncertainty over which the pastor has control—areas in which the minister is expected to have expertise, where his or her opinions count, where he or she is consulted and perhaps even deferred to. These areas are the search for meaning, the support of values, the sense of personal worth, the identification of the mission of the institutional church, and provision of access to the larger society. For each of these areas there is a task which ordination calls pastors to perform: for meaning there is the task of interpreting. For values there is the task of legitimating. For personal worth there is the task of affirming. For institutional mission there is the task of initiating, and for social access there is the task of connecting. These tasks can be briefly described.

Interpreting. The church is a community of meaning. It seeks to nurture understanding and to promote awareness. It tries to answer parishioners’ questions, especially their Big Questions. In order to do this, the church has a special language, special symbols, and special traditions. The church’s calendar, the Bible, the various confessions of faith—these are all instruments the church uses to express the Meaning of Things. However, if these expressions are to have any significance, they need to be interpreted. Otherwise they quickly become anachronistic, archaic, or merely cute. It is not enough to gather and sing,
"holy, holy, holy." For that to be a substantive experience, people need to discuss what holiness means, where it can be encountered, what is an appropriate response, and so forth.

The task of interpreting can be carried out through preaching. Ministers often feel that this is their best opportunity to explain and expound. However, listeners may be more likely to appreciate the preacher than to remember the sermon. While they can recollect perfectly the pastor's facial expression, they may have a hard time with the three points that were made. This is not a criticism of the preacher. It is rather a reminder that the messenger is always more important to parishioners than the message.

Probably the minister interprets as powerfully out of the pulpit as in it. When people talk about practicing what one preaches, they are indicating where they learn, when they pick up signals. The immediate response a pastor makes to a crisis, such as a death, will probably carry more weight than his or her reasoned reaction. The point is that any occasion where the pastor can relate theological affirmation to the lived situations of his or her parishioners is an occasion for interpreting.

Legitimating. The pastor's attitude toward issues and concerns is an important touchstone for parishioners. It is not that members of the flock want to echo the pastor's sentiments. Far from it! But they want to know where he or she stands, so that they can have some perspective on their own values. What the pastor endorses, where the minister's passions are engaged, what causes are espoused, what moral tone is given off, will form a significant environment for church people.

Legitimating includes a wide range of issues. On the one hand it applies to personal issues such as gambling or the use of alcohol. On the other it refers to social issues such as civil rights for homosexuals or the needs of third-world peoples. Jeffrey Hadden, who identifies the work of ministry as "value creating, value carrying, value legitimating," had in mind the social issues of the early 1960s, especially the civil rights issues. But the phrase applies as well to the field of individual needs and concerns such as sexual morals and life-style evaluation. In each instance, the task of the minister is to give off signals about what
is "okay" from a theological perspective. The pastor will not necessarily convince his or her parishioners, but the minister's view will provide an important point of reference for those in the parish.

Affirming. In a world increasingly impersonal, where individuals tend to be treated as customers and clients, the importance of personal attention grows. To speak of a personal emphasis may conjure up images of deadly afternoon teas in which endless hours are consumed discussing the unpredictability of the weather, but the task is more substantial and worthwhile than that. Pastoring, in this context, consists of nourishing and sustaining a person-to-person relationship between pastor and parishioner. The basic commodity is concern and the job of the minister is affirming the worth of parishioners; communicating their value as persons, caring about them. When parishioners come to the pastor with problems they do not necessarily expect their difficulties to be resolved. Such a resolution may take place, especially if the pastor is one who has added counseling skills to the arsenal. But the more usual expectation is that the pastor will comfort them, will be concerned about them. In such cases parishioners are asking for nothing less than respect and demand little from the pastor except for the self-discipline to listen.

Writing about the field of social work, one author described what he called "encounters." Encounters are contacts between the worker and the client that are unscheduled and occur in neutral territory. Such encounters take place in office halls, in bus lines, at social events, and so on. The encounter is unplanned and often seems to be a coincidence. Nevertheless, there is a discipline involved for the social worker and it is one of listening. Such encounters serve chiefly to highlight "where the client is." Their key task is building trust and keeping open communication.

This is a good description of the task of affirming. Pastors come across parishioners in supermarkets, at gas stations, and many other places, and the parishioner will give off clues about concerns and distresses. Sometimes the clues are subtle, as in a slight pause before answering the conventional question, "How
are you?" with the equally conventional answer, "Fine." Sometimes the clues are more direct: "Would you pray for my father? They just took him to the hospital." In either case, parishioners are primarily seeking to tell the pastor about themselves. More than specific assistance, laypersons want a sensitivity to their hurt. In the minister they expect to find someone to whom their experience will make a difference. Parishioners want to be listened to and known. Ministers face the task of affirming.

Initiating. Clergy are set apart to exercise leadership in a strange way. Generally, according to the local church's by-laws, the pastor has little official standing. The legal authority of the congregation is lodged in some board of lay people, often with the minister not even having a vote. This is a reflection of the fact that the local congregation is the actual owner of the church and is formally responsible for it.

However, regardless of policies and by-laws, the pastor is the church's leader, at least in certain respects. The pastor is there to bring a special perspective on the affairs of the local church, to indicate what needs to be done, and to describe how it can be accomplished. The minister has been called to articulate possibilities, to indicate priorities, to inspire enthusiasm, and to sustain momentum.

One author describes this as charismatic leadership because it is not conferred by training and involves the bringing of something new to the local organization. That is, this sort of authority is a matter of vision and appeal rather than skill and legal authority. That may be an abuse of the word charisma, but it is helpful in pointing out what is involved in this aspect of ministry.

A minister is there to add a fresh note to the situation. The pastor is the agent of initiative, and even when he or she does not personally generate the new ideas, it is still up to him or her to legitimate them, to develop them, and to push them. The pastor is more than the middle management figure described by H. Richard Niebuhr in The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry. Rather, the pastor is there to produce positive organizational
morale, to define the local church's peculiar mission, and to generate support of it.

To fulfill these purposes is not simply a matter of dreams and word-pictures. In order to produce enthusiasm, the minister must do the necessary homework and be able to produce some results (or convince others that they are possible). In this context, Paul Harrison's description of the rational-pragmatic authority that accrues to pastors who get things done—an authority he labels "illegitimate"—is a proper and above-board part of the pastor's leadership. It is necessary to have some accomplishments in order to generate support. The parish must have confidence in the pastor's ability to deliver before members can invest much of themselves in his or her vision for them. The primary task of ministry, however, is not getting things done but articulating a sense of mission and encouraging the congregation to move toward fulfilling the mission.

Connecting. The minister is a source of social access, information, and contacts. He or she functions almost as a clearinghouse. Many people turn to the pastor in the first moments of a crisis, when they want to sort out options, or when they simply want to find others to help them with various projects. One study, for example, found that of those in distress who sought professional help, 42 percent consulted clergy first. It is also to the pastor that many turn to find out more about social issues, to discover where they can buy religious books, to explore what denominational activities would be suited to their interests, and so on. The pastor is not expected to have all the desired information, but the pastor should know where to find it. This is true whether parishioners' questions have to do with Sunday school materials, welfare services, funeral homes, or audiovisual equipment.

The minister is often the pivotal link in the flow of information, volunteer opportunities, therapeutic services, and global concerns. Through the pastor most denominational communication flows. Through the pastor most community appeals are made. Through the pastor persons needing assistance come to be referred.

Partially this task is a consequence of the minister's own
peculiar position of access. The pastor is almost universally welcome. He or she is well-received in people's homes, regardless of the situation. The pastor is also connected to social institutions in a variety of ways. The result is that he or she is often the link for people, the interface between them and the larger communities in which they live.

This task of connecting becomes the pastor's partially because of his or her credibility. Ministers have been set apart, and they have the aura of disinterest. They seem to be clearly above taking advantage of the situation, or profiting in any way. That this appearance is clear to all is important, because often those seeking information or referrals feel extremely vulnerable and will turn only to those with whom they feel secure. Because of the pastor's credibility, and because also of his or her access to a wide range of situations, the minister has the task of facilitating connections for parishioners.

These five tasks deal with areas of uncertainty for people. Interpreting deals with uncertainty of meaning, with the struggle to appropriate a living tradition. Legitimating deals with the uncertainty of establishing a coherent set of values, an especially tricky business in a pluralistic age such as ours. Affirming deals with the uncertainty of personal worth—a quality under strong pressure in mass society. Initiating refers to the uncertainty of movement and morale in the institutional church. Connecting deals with the uncertainty of access to a large scale social system. The ministry is not, of course, the only occupation which deals with these areas. In contemporary society movie stars can legitimate values, and welfare departments can offer access to social services. The ministry may, quite possibly, be the only profession which has all these areas as a common cluster of concern, but a more important distinction is that for the ministry, these concerns grow out of theological affirmation. Interpreting, legitimating, and the rest are not just tasks that history happens to have thrust into the pastor's lap. They are rooted in the minister's sense of the Gospel, in the way God's love is made incarnate in the world and given human substance. These tasks are ways pastors in this day can live out their faith and assist others in living out their faith. For the
ministry, professional identity proceeds from one's identity as a person of faith.

Describing the ministry in this way offers an understanding of pastoral authority which is neither too high nor too low to be useful. The scale is not so grand and metaphysical that daily realities fade from sight. Nor is it so small that the suggestions made are simply a bunch of practical gimmicks. I think that this description provides a realistic picture of the ministry: a picture of what it is that pastors do that makes pastoring an important thing to do. The tasks mentioned are significant tasks, but they are also the stuff of which weekly schedules are made.

Furthermore, this cluster of tasks is a list of activities that are tangible and objective. Interpreting, affirming, and the rest are made up of skills that can be taught, improved, and evaluated. Describing the ministry in this way liberates it from exclusive subjectivity, in which pastoring is only personal art. Listing areas of uncertainty over which ministers are given control does not eradicate the personal qualities that each pastor brings, but it does highlight objective skills and knowledge which are important in pastoral competence.

Above all, describing the ministry in this way gives a bottom line to the profession, one that is both respectful of the calling and useful to those called. This cluster of tasks indicates what authority is conferred in ordination and what accountability is demanded.

NOTES


6. See also the servant model for the church in Avery Dulles, Models of the Church (Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1978), pp. 95 ff.


Küng asks, does God exist? Mitchell asks, how can one, like Küng, ask and answer that question? Küng's project is presented to him by modern atheism, which "demands an account of our belief in God as it never did in the past" (p. xxii). The challenge is not academic, for at stake, in Küng's judgment, is "the struggle with the . . . insecurity of human existence, which has existed from time immemorial" (p. xxx), and which, with the breakup of the certainties and unity of the Middle Ages at the advent of the Renaissance and the rise of modern science and rationalism, emerged with a new poignancy and urgency in the 17th century. Küng's study will therefore begin with Descartes and Pascal, with the quest for certainty via the cogito of reason and the credo of faith.

Somewhat differently, Mitchell asks whether belief in God's existence as found in "traditional Christian theism" "requires or admits of rational support" (p. 1). Rather than answer the material question raised by Küng, he gives "an account of the sort of reasoning by which a religious position [such as Küng's] is characteristically supported" (p. 2). This is in order to show that a defense of faith need not be, as its British philosophical critics have argued, "logically inconsistent or in some other way logically incoherent through
failing some legitimate test of significance or intelligibility” (p. 7). These differences in the purposes of the two theologians are suggestive of other differences. Mitchell, an Oxford philosopher and theologian, writes a most British book—concise, precise, and logical, addressed to those whose faith and theology have been under attack from British philosophy. It is a relatively brief, tightly reasoned, and excellent analysis of what can count for a rational defense of faith. Künig, on the other hand, is a German professor and theologian. He is also a somewhat forcibly liberated Roman Catholic theologian who finds himself in an immediate confrontation with the modern world. He is obliged, he feels, to defend and make the case for his faith—vis-à-vis his own tradition, against claims of modern scientism and atheism, in the face of a pluralistically religious world and as a citizen of the Christian west. His book is long, often too wordy, but most erudite. While it is certainly an exercise in theological analysis and construction, its immediate subject matter is the history of mainline western philosophical development from the seventeenth century to the present.

A point of obvious agreement between these authors is that the traditional proofs for the existence of God do not work as proofs. In his first two chapters Mitchell concludes that the proofs instead set forth the presuppositions of faith and that, as a matter of fact, “in such a fundamental matter as our entire understanding of life, proof is out of place and we must be content to be guided by presuppositions, which determine for us what shall count as proof” (p. 34). Künig similarly observes, along with Anselm, that the proofs assume faith in the existence of the God whose proof is sought. Without faith these proofs do not work.

However, Künig seeks a rational and responsible answer to the question, Does God exist? If reason cannot prove his existence, does a rational response to the question yet remain? Künig’s answer, which it is the task of the book to develop, is anticipated in his On Being a Christian. In Does God Exist? he traces a history of efforts to deal with the question, through which his own answer emerges—namely, a broadening and extension of Kant’s so-called “moral” proof. This line takes him with great sympathy to Hegel, who, he says, must serve as the “model for further development” (p. 129).

Künig’s premise is an understanding of God as the final and absolute source of the unity and certainty of reality and experience. With the breakup of the medieval synthesis and the rise of modern rationalism and science, that unity (and therefore God’s existence) are in doubt.
Since Kung believes in God, his challenge is primarily theological—namely, how to represent or speak of that divine ground of unity and certainty in such a way that it can answer effectively to modern doubt, atheism, and nihilism.

The question was taken up in the seventeenth century in paradigmatic fashion by Descartes and Pascal. Descartes, having found apparent certainty in his reason, sought to speak on that basis with equal certainty about God. But as Kung says, "conceptual certainty, however methodically thought, is still a long way from existential security" (p. 40). Pascal, finding such rationalism "useless and uncertain" advocated instead of Descartes' rational cogito, a wholistic, passionate leap of the "heart" into the wholly other world of the biblical God. In Kung's judgment Pascal's correlative disparagement of reason as hopelessly sinful and fallen was in error and was to render reason Godless and a "track to atheism." The division and disunity remain—Descartes' cogito on the one hand, Pascal's credo on the other. How are they to be brought together? Kung finds the solution in the philosophical development from Descartes to the German idealists that reached its culmination in the thought of G. F. Hegel and that permitted man "to think of God and particularly the biblical God on a grander scale" (p. 127) than had ever before been possible. Inasmuch as Hegel's thought thus signaled "a turning toward a unity of infinite and finite, divine and human, to a unity of life . . ." (p. 129), a modern recovery of the lost unity and reality and a new vision of God, it is to be the paradigm or "model for further development" (p. 129).

In Kung's judgment, Hegel succeeds. In two specific and important ways. First, Hegel overcame the dualism in which traditional theology had been for so long encrusted. God is no longer to be conceived dualistically as "above" or "beyond" the world, but henceforth "panentheistically" as in the world and the world as in God. Secondly, he overcame the notion of God as a static, lifeless absolute. God is now to be understood as a living, dialectically self-realizing Spirit. This is "the God of the new world picture" (p. 333). In his transcendent immanence he brings together the immanent reason of Descartes and the transcending faith of Pascal. And in his dialectic self-realization all alienation, even the alienation of autonomous, scientific, atheistic, nihilistic reason, is taken up ("aufgehoben" or "sublated") into the dialectical life of absolute spirit. Confident in this division, Kung proceeds to engage modern atheism, nihilism (Nietzsche) and more recent critics of faith. At the outset it was stated that Kung modifies the
Kantian proof. Kant understood God to be a postulate of the practical reason, an idea without which he could not make sense of the moral life. The moral life is categorical and inescapable and therefore as a postulate of that experience, God is also. Kung is persuaded that Kant's argument is too narrow. The challenge to faith from its critics, he says, must be answered "in terms of a God considered in relation to the totality of man and the world." As a postulate of our total experience God and theistic faith make better sense than does atheism or nihilism.

Having rejected traditional proofs, Mitchell ventures a rational defense by what he calls a "cumulative case." Most of Mitchell's book is in defense of the appropriateness of making this kind of case for Christian theism. He makes his point by appealing to analogies from secular argument, which are generally accepted as rational. The question is whether the evidences of religion are comparable to other kinds of evidence. His argument proceeds through stages. The first objection to his analogies is that religion is like metaphysics, and since metaphysics concerns ultimate principles, there is no possibility of rationally settling a dispute at this level. A philosophical determinist will argue that freedom is illusory, regardless of how I experience my so-called "freedom." There appears to be no amount of evidence that can be accumulated to dissuade him of his disbelief in freedom. To this kind of argument Mitchell responds that the same problem exists in science (and other fields) and not just in religion and metaphysics. T. S. Kuhn has shown how scientific reasoning cannot settle the argument between basic scientific visions or paradigms. "Paradigms," says Kuhn, "are not corrigible by normal science at all" (p. 66). The move from one paradigm to another is "revolutionary"; it entails a revelation and conversion. So Mitchell contends that if scientists were irrational when they shifted from a pre-Copernican to a Copernican world view, then so is anyone who moves from disbelief in God to belief in God. Are such moves indeed irrational? He replies that they are not rational in the sense that they are based on rational proof or strict probability. But they are rational insofar as they reflect sound, rational judgment. Mitchell does not want to say that Kuhn is wrong in speaking of revolutions, since specifiable reasons cannot be given for paradigm shifts. Nevertheless, basic rules for judgment can be specified. Michael Polanyi would doubtless speak here of the "tacit dimension."

Finally Kuhn considers those criticisms of the rational defense of faith from the standpoint of faith itself, criticisms which contend that faith and reason are incompatible. Faith, after all, is personal commitment, not rational argument; God is a reality and not merely a
theoretical hypothesis. Acceding to these points, Mitchell holds his ground nevertheless, and demonstrates the place of reason in faith and the need for rational defense.

It is the last form of this kind of criticism to which I would finally direct our consideration of Mitchell. The issue is whether the idea of revelation does not finally preempt the role of reason. Are the analogies earlier employed not invalidated by claims to revelation? His answer is no, the analogies do apply. He draws an analogy to the experience of an outstanding musical performance or being taught by the pupil of a distinguished teacher. In these cases reason does not presume, \textit{a priori}, to judge what would constitute that outstanding performance or what the pupil should have learned from his teacher. But, neither is reason finally excluded; instead it is expanded and illuminated. Developing the analogy of the pupil, Mitchell further argues that it is a reasonable inference from the testimony of the pupil, as well as from the possible change in his life effected by the alleged teacher, that a teacher in fact exists. This is especially the case with the New Testament witnesses, who testify to having been taught and given new lives by God in Christ.

Let me summarize Mitchell's position before returning to K{"u}ng. Mitchell says that a rational defense for "traditional Christian theism" can be made in terms of a cumulative case. That is, theism can be shown to be reasonable insofar as it makes sense of the available, accumulated evidence. However, insofar as we are defending basic paradigms, no amount of evidence will finally prove convincing. If the case wins, it will have appealed in the last analysis not to reason, but to a reasonable or sound judgment. This kind of reasoning is not inimical to revelation, for it does not presume to judge revelation \textit{a priori}, but rather is capable of being opened up to revelation and giving it rational expression. Interestingly Mitchell did not discuss Kant's moral proof directly, for like K{"u}ng he has also adopted a modification of it in which God is postulated to make sense of the cumulated evidence.

K{"u}ng's book is long; so needless to say in such an essay as this we can scarcely give it its full due. There are, however, two issues that need attention before, in a final section, I look at aspects of his argument from Mitchell's perspective.

First, we have seen K{"u}ng postulate God along Hegelian lines as the living immanent and transcendent ground of our unity and experience. God would appear to make sense of the total, cumulative data of experience. The question is whether and how this postulate is
verified. How does the God so postulated demonstrate his truth and experience?

On its surface, reality is uncertain, the evidence is contradictory. Atheists have their point. There is no compelling, extrinsic reason for either faith or non-faith, for a yes or a no to life’s ultimate meaning and unity. Rather, reality confronts us with a choice, with the necessity of a free decision for or against a “fundamental trust” (p. 443). He insists that there is a certain “essential reasonableness” to the affirmative decision, but nevertheless no proof, no determinative argument (p. 445). Yet the decision is not arbitrary or wishful projection, for it can be made and is made only when reality itself manifests its fundamental truth and unity, when reality invites and enables the commitment of trust and gives to it an “intrinsic rationality” (p. 451). And this fundamental trust also provides an autonomous “foundation for all man’s ethical behavior and action in this reality” (p. 471). What more can be said?

Küng’s response is truly puzzling. A problem remains, he claims, inasmuch as “the reality upon which fundamental trust is based seems itself to be without foundation” (p. 477). Kant had agreed that the imperative was categorical, rooted in human nature; his critics were to argue that since the imperative is indeed categorical, postulating God adds nothing to the proof. Similarly here—if reality itself provides a basis for trust and morality, what is added by the God hypothesis? Nevertheless Küng continues to ask about God as the foundation of the foundation, as the postulate of the postulate. Broadly speaking, the evidence which invites the God postulate is traces of “the other dimension” in such non-theists as Ernest Bloch, Heidegger, Horkheimer, and recent linguistic philosophers.

Finally, in a relatively few concluding pages, Küng turns to the God of the religions, to the God of the Bible, and finally to the God of Jesus. He contends here that his philosophical vision of the God of the new world picture must inform and reform our Christian reflection, and that it is in fact the proper expression of it. One has to be impressed that Küng has defined God, made a rational case for God’s existence, and witnessed a confirming revelation and experience of that God without direct reference or appeal to the New Testament. Any student of nineteenth century Protestant theology will have an experience of déja vu working through this book, for it is indeed a contemporary exercise of nineteenth century theological liberalism, to which, strangely, it makes absolutely no significant reference. Particularly missing is Schleiermacher, to whose passion for unity Küng’s is so akin.
Since Mitchell's book is a critical analysis of theological reason and apologetic defenses of the faith in particular, I would in these final paragraphs make three critical observations about Kün's book from my perspective on Mitchell.

A first and fundamental criticism is implied in the difference between the foci of the two books—"traditional Christian theism" in Mitchell's case and God's existence in the case of Kün. Mitchell argues as he does (despite the title which suggests that his arguments could be applied analogously to other religious beliefs) because "there is no such thing as 'religion as such'," because religion as such "would not be what anyone seriously believed" (p. 3). In effect, Kün appears to be violating the integrity of the basic religious vision, the paradigm of faith. He moves from the God(s) of the philosophers, to the God(s) of the religious, to the God(s) of the Bible as if no paradigm shifts were involved. It must be then that he either denies the paradigmatic dimensions of the religions (and philosophy, for that matter) or, (more likely) he is actually making moves within his own paradigm—perhaps the Hegelian vision which he stated was to be his model (paradigm?). In this case he can be viewed as having effectively "sublated" (aufgehoben), overcome, and transformed the paradigms of the religions, including that of Christianity.

Mitchell might also have questions as to whether Kün has honored the Christian claim to revelation. In his last chapter Mitchell agrees with Karl Barth, for instance, that whatever else the notion of revelation means, it certainly suggests that it cannot be submitted a priori to criteria of reason. But Kün's entire book appears to be the development or explication of such criteria. Having devoted almost six hundred pages to developing "a new understanding of God," a new criterion for judging the rationality and truth of the Christian revelation, he is finally in a position to put forth "demands" (p. 594) which the God of the Bible must meet if he is to receive Kün's vote of confidence, his "yes to the Christian God." Can such thinking be regarded as anything but a paradigm violation? He appears either to be reinterpreting ("sublating") the Christian revelation by taking it up into another, or perhaps in tacit ways extending the biblical paradigm in violation of others.

Finally, a question must be asked of Kün in light of Mitchell's claim that the case for theism is determined by its ability to make the greater sense of all the accumulated evidence, in particular the evidence brought against faith by atheism. The most important evidence on the positive side is the testimony and lives of persons of faith. On the
negative side, Mitchell cites "the character and existence of evil" which "tortures the faith of the believers more than any other circumstance and demands a theodicy of some kind" (pp. 44 ff).

The common denominator in these two kinds of data is their concrete historicity and materiality. People, people suffering, people believing and witnessing, are, according to Mitchell, the primary data, of which the defense of faith must make the better sense. While King certainly gives some lip service to this claim, the greater weight and message of his book is rationalistic—his criticisms of Hegel and Descartes to the contrary notwithstanding. He is interacting not so much with lived and living human history, the concrete data and evidence, but with the great minds of and dominant philosophies of our western history. My point is not that these historical voices are unimportant, but they should not be the object of faith's quest of rational justification but instruments of it, as it seeks to engage and render meaningful the historical realities of our own day. It is fair, it seems to me, despite the historical orientation of the book, to question King at this point, because he writes in order to address the challenges which faith and belief in God's existence face today—challenges which insofar as they appear at all in this book remain quite academic.
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