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Review of Books on Apocalyptic Literature
John G. Gammie
A scholarly journal for reflection on ministry, Quarterly Review seeks to encourage discussion and debate on matters critical to the practice of ministry. 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

Conversations

The candy shop offered white pieces of candy on a plate. I asked, "Is that divinity?"
"What's divinity?" responded the wizened candymaker, a mere wisp of a man several centuries old.
"It's soft, white candy," I said.
"What is in it?" he persisted.
"I don't know. It's a very sweet, white candy."
"All candy is sweet," he observed.

He had me stumped. I resolved to go home and look up the recipe for divinity. But by then it would be too late to continue the conversation; alas, the ancient confectioner would have to remain unenlightened. Our exchange had one good effect, however. It kept me thinking, which is a mark of a good conversation.

You, in reading these words, may be waiting to see if there will be a byplay on the word divinity. No, there will not, but even your curiosity so aroused reveals another dimension of good conversation. The innuendoes, connotations, potential meanings, and imputations we constantly make when we are talking with others—these are all characteristics of interesting and worthwhile conversation.

Few people seem to be good conversationalists, myself included, and we would all be better off if we honed our word-tools and exercised our body-language symbols. Conversation comes about through much more than words, of course, and words—their abundance or their paucity—can be conversation killers. I will not turn this conversation into a dreary recital of the sins of poor conversation but will merely pause to note some of the sinners: the interrupter, the autocrat, the inchoate interlocutor (teenagers must be the abiding example), the banalist (bus partners), the overwrought sesquipedalian, the unrelenting
one-upper, the dominator, the incomplete-sentence mongerer, the 
mumbler, the cussor, the thwarted counselor, and so on and on.

You know all this. And you, perhaps, have mastered the art of 
conversation so that I do not need dwell on the various iniquities to 
which we are subjected. If you have, no doubt you are also aware 
of the positive principles underlying vigorous, stimulating 
conversation: the good conversationalist listens, responds to what 
the other person actually says (as well as the way it is said), 
Attempts to build on what has been said and to spiral upward 
instead of maintaining things on a uniform plane, answers 
questions when asked, does not gossip or criticize, etc., etc.

But ours should be more than a graduate-school conversation 
and therefore I want to do more than review conventional wisdom. 
Rather, I pose for your consideration certain perplexities con­ 
fronting serious conversationalists in order that we can investigate 
the propriety and the desirability of responding to these situations 
in particular ways.

For example, what about the conversation in which you 
unintentionally and perhaps unfortunately become involved? I 
recently found myself in that sort of situation. I was standing at the 
counter in a car-repair shop (let me tell you about my car—on the 
other hand, do not let me) awaiting word from the mechanic, 
when the manager said to the young woman who handled the 
bills, “We were $223 short yesterday.”

To this she responded by raising her eyebrows.

“That cash drawer is not safe,” he continued. “Anyone can walk 
in there.”

“But it stays locked.”

“That doesn’t matter,” he said. “Everyone knows where the key 
is.”

At this I started to ask where they kept the key myself, since I run 
short a few dollars every now and then, but discretion restrained 
me. The manager went on, “I’m going to the bank to get some 
money.”

The young woman remained silent, and after he left she peered 
thoughtfully at some papers that were before her.

I shouldn’t have heard this, of course. It was a conversation that 
should have taken place back in the office with the door closed. 
(And I had quite naturally begun to have second thoughts about
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the competence of the place of business, too.) But there I was, faced with the dilemma: to acknowledge having heard the conversation or not. And this dilemma actually became a conundrum when I realized the choices were several, but none of them very comfortable. Should I say something about the embarrassingly frank conversation—make a joke about burglars, for example? Or turn around and walk away, pretending I had not heard? Or simply remain mute, standing there? I decided on yet another course and asked about the fate of my car, leaving it to the young woman to comprehend whether I had overheard the shop talk or not.

These conversations differ from those you merely overhear, although those can be difficult enough. A relative of mine reported flying across the Cascades in a puddle-jumper which had no door between the cockpit and the passenger section. The passengers could overhear the pilot's conversation with the control tower, and on this occasion ground fog was keeping the plane from landing. After being frustrated for several minutes, the pilot finally told ground control, "I'm coming in to land. I only have two or three passengers anyway."

Is this the same type of person who cuts a sermon short when only two or three show up for worship? If so, let us roundly condemn them both. But it hardly answers the question of what to do upon overhearing such a conversation. I suppose the assertiveness school would have us jump out of our seats and scream at the pilot, "Oh, no, you don't. Either land this plane safely or give me a refund right now!" Somehow even assertiveness does not seem to be enough on such occasions. Would prayer be in order? Not unless you are one of those folk whose experience with prayer is so debilitated that you think it is only for use in crisis situations. Of course, many passengers in these grasshopper-type of airplanes pray regularly, and then a petition might be entirely consistent. Somehow flying in small aircraft and praying seem to go together.

When to remain silent and when to speak? An enduring dilemma. One day on the city bus a passenger did not have the exact change he needed for the fare. "Anyone here change a five-dollar bill?" he asked. No one could, so in desperation he turned and stuffed the bill into the hopper. "Hey, you should ask
the driver to give you a form to mail in for the change,’’ another passenger said. But when the man turned to the driver, the driver said, “You just ruined the machine. If you want me to turn your name in, I will, but it will cost $75 to take the machine apart.” At that the passenger sat down, content that his 65-cent ride was only costing him $4.35 too much and not $74.35.

Shouldn’t someone have said something when the passenger turned to put the bill in the box? Shouldn’t the driver? But no one did. Of course, some bus riders seem preternaturally careful to observe the principle of never talking to strangers. But it is possible to be too silent, just as it is to be too talkative.

Unless this principle is practiced in moderation, however, one can become dispirited and lose heart in the conversational enterprise. An example involving William Faulkner and Albert Einstein comes to mind. Saxe Commins, who was a New York book editor, reported that he once got these two brilliant men together at Princeton. Despite Einstein’s efforts to converse with Faulkner, the latter remained silent during the course of tea. Finally, as Commins and Faulkner were leaving together, Commins asked his friend why he had not engaged Einstein in conversation. “What could I say to this great man that could possibly have any significance?” Faulkner replied.

You may not share with me the conviction that Faulkner was a literary genius, but I daresay you would agree that his humilitias went to extremes. So, you silent ones who constantly ask after others but never say much about yourself, take heed. A good conversationalist is not normally asking us for brilliant ideas but for give-and-take, for mutual criticisms and observations, for wondering about things and alternatively brooding and laughing over them.

Those who say little in conversation, however, may well have one advantage over the more loquacious among us, in that their fantasies may be richer. Our conversations with ourselves surely contribute to the quality of our experience, adding an unseen and unheard dialogue to those we actually take part in orally. The classic case of the fictional conversation remains what we would have said to someone if only we had thought of it in time. Sometimes we can “write” several endings to the “script.” These replays often become so imprinted in our minds that we report as...
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fact what was only a fantasy. Such revisionism may work as long as no one else heard the actual conversation and can contradict us. In the same way, we may rehearse a conversation before heading to the front office to ask for a raise, or before introducing ourselves to a VIP, or when needing to make an excuse but in a truthful way.

These embellishments seem to serve somewhat the same purpose as the chitchat that precedes important discussions, in that they enrich a seemingly barren wordscape. Who would think of calling an attorney friend or a professional colleague to ask a favor without a preliminary exchange of meaningless palaver? You ask about the family and the weather, how the vacation was, and so on, and these informalities have the effect of a prelude easing the way to the main performance. To launch right in seems to reduce a potentially important tête-à-tête to a mere business call.

Sometimes in reporting an actual conversation, adding a few extra words helps to give weight to the punch line, too. Billy Wilder, the movie producer, tells one of those anecdotes about meeting a Great Man that remain abiding favorites. "Tell us about your interview with Freud," the interviewer asks. And Wilder, casually waving a cigar, explains how he was a young journalist in Vienna back in the twenties, how he was assigned an interview with Sigmund Freud, how he took the trolley out to Freud's large residence—some details here about why the office was in the residence—and how when he arrived the butler took his card. "I could smell the aroma of food," Wilder says. After a few minutes, the Great Man appeared at the doorway of the dining room, looking at Wilder's card.

"Herr Wilder?" he asked.
"Ja."

"Die Tür," Freud said, pointing to the door.

And that was Wilder's famous interview with Freud. But what if upon being asked to tell his story, Wilder had said, "Well, I gave Freud my card and he looked at it and pointed to the door"? That would have been no fun at all. The story improves with color, exaggeration, and improvisation.

Readers of this edition of QR will note the many different idioms used by the authors. These writings seem to go off in many odd directions, being held together only by the cover of the journal. We assume that these pieces will not only be conversation-starters, but
that you will bring your own contribution to the table. We hope that the ideas and questions and proposals that fill these pages will send some alpha-particles scudding across your brain, and that the subsequent dialogue, whether interior to your own mind or shared with others, will be one of those that leave you thinking long afterward of what you would have said to the author.

—Charles E. Cole
A faith without foundations is needed in the contemporary world, and Buddhism and process theology can contribute to its emergence.

In the twentieth century in the West, it has frequently been argued that there are no absolute foundations on which to rest human convictions. An absolute foundation would be a principle that is self-evident, indubitable, and immutable. It would be a ground on which to build an edifice of secure knowledge, and a point of departure from which to proceed amidst discourse and inquiry with unshakable certainty. In previous centuries various principles, some ontological and others epistemological, have functioned as grounds of this sort. Many theists have approached God as a ground, many in the Cartesian tradition have approached the self as a ground, many empiricists have approached sense-perception as a ground, and many rationalists have approached logic as a ground. Within organized religion, many biblicists have approached Scripture as a ground, and many traditionalists have approached creeds as a ground. The contemporary argument, posed in different ways by thinkers as diverse as Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Whitehead, is that there are no indubitable grounds on which to stand. If we are to live authentically, we must learn to live without the illusion of absolute foundations.

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The aim of this essay is to discuss what this critique of foundationalism might mean for Christian faith. My suggestion is that the critique invites the development of a distinctive kind of faith in God—a faith without foundations. In this context "foundationalism" involves both thought and feeling. At the level of thought, it involves the view that there are indubitable grounds for religious belief, conceptual underpinnings of which one can be unflinchingly certain. At the level of feeling, it involves a generalized inclination to approach God or the world as an object of clinging—as a static substance that can be grasped and permanently owned amidst the flow of time. A faith without foundations will involve a transcendence of foundationalism at both levels. It will be a faith that is accepting of uncertainty even with respect to deeply held religious beliefs, and it will be a faith that is unclinging even in relation to God. Nevertheless it will be a faith that is profoundly open to the world as a subject of compassion, and open to God as the subject of ultimate concern.

Is a faith without foundations new or old from a historical perspective? In certain respects it is old. For example, the seeds of a nonfoundational faith can be found in traditional injunctions against idolatry within Judaism and Christianity. An idol is something fixed and static to which one clings. The world can be approached as an idol in this sense, and so can God. The early Jewish reluctance to speak God's name represents a recognition that even God can be objectified and therein approached as an idol to be grasped by the mind. The true God, so the Jews realized, is beyond such possessability, and therein beyond idolization. One can love God as a partner in ongoing dialogue, but one cannot own God as an object to be possessed.

Nevertheless there are senses in which a faith without foundations is new. Historically, Christians have often approached God as a foundation at the level either of thought or of feeling. An approach of this sort has been fueled by the Hellenistic, though not

If we are to live authentically, we must learn to live without the illusion of absolute foundations.
necessarily biblical, notion that God is a changeless substance. Such a substance—an unmoved mover from Aristotle's perspective—is precisely the kind of reality that is conducive to intellectual or emotional possession. This God is static and therefore graspable. A faith without foundations represents a return to the dynamic God of the Bible, a God who is not an object of static fixation, but rather a subject by whom even the faithful can be continually surprised.

There are several forms of contemporary Christian theology that point in the direction of a faith without foundations. Many forms of biblical theology influenced by the prophetic heritage—liberation theologies, for example—point toward a nonfoundational approach to God. These theologies point to a God who is in process along with the world, suffering with those who suffer and responding to their suffering by availing possibilities for creative response and hope relative to each situation. Such a God is lovable and capable of evoking committed response, but this God is not "clingable," not an object to be held onto.

In addition, many forms of philosophical theology that are influenced by an awareness of epistemological and ontological relativism—the post-Kantian perspectives of Gordon Kaufmann and David Tracy, for example—point toward a nonfoundational approach to religious beliefs. Beliefs can be adhered to, so we learn from these thinkers, but beliefs cannot be absolutized. Religious beliefs, like all beliefs, are conditioned by the cultures in which they emerge. They should not be approached as objects of dogmatic craving. In the contemporary setting, then, there are several paths toward a nonfoundational faith.

The path that I choose is deeply indebted to forms of biblical theology and philosophical theology such as those just noted. Yet it is even more indebted to a new and challenging dialogue between West and East: that between process theology and Buddhism. In my view this dialogue points toward a particularly fruitful type of nonfoundational faith. The nature of such faith has recently been highlighted by John B. Cobb, Jr., in Beyond Dialogue: Toward a Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism (Fortress Press, 1982). The "faith without attachment" of which Cobb speaks is analogous to the faith without foundations of which I shall speak. Such faith represents one way in which Christians from the West
can be creatively transformed as they encounter the East, and one way in which Buddhists from the East might be creatively transformed as they encounter the West. From a process perspective, it is in and through such creative transformation that the spirit of God—the Logos or the living Christ—is potentially at work in the world.

The essay is divided into three sections. In the first I note the social importance of transcending foundationalism. In the second I show how the encounter of process theology and Buddhism can have a special role to play in the cultivation of a nonfoundational faith. And in the third I discuss the faith itself.

THE NEED TO TRANSCEND FOUNDATIONALISM

Philosophical critics of foundationalism do not argue that humans can learn to live without premises and presuppositions. Rather they argue that humans can realize that their premises and presuppositions are products of historical conditioning and social contexts. Premises do not enter human history from afar, they emerge from within; and they are not revealed, they are chosen. To live without the illusion of absolute foundations is to take responsibility for the premises that are chosen, to be willing to defend them in the domain of public discourse, to be willing to modify them when they appear faulty, and to realize that, even if certain premises and presuppositions seem provisionally valid, no certainty is possible with respect to their ultimate validity.

The quest for certainty represents a deep-seated and destructive will-to-power in the Western psyche.

It is to realize, in the words of Whitehead, that "the merest hint of dogmatic certainty as to finality of statement is an exhibition of folly."2

It has further been argued, especially by those influenced by Heidegger, that the very quest for certainty, so characteristic of philosophy since Descartes, represents a deep-seated and destructive impulse in the Western psyche.3 That impulse is the will-to-
power. It is the tendency to dominate and subjugate the world, if not by brute force then at least by brute thought. All too often the pursuit of absolute foundations has involved, and still involves, a quest for manipulative power under the aegis of knowledge. Once the alleged foundation is arrived at, the world becomes an object over which the knower assumes cognitive dominance. Worldly beings are approached exclusively in terms of their properties that fit into the paradigm, or in terms of their attributes that can be subjected to the method. Whether human or nonhuman, organic or inorganic, mundane or divine, these beings are denied their ability to surprise, enchant, provoke awe, and inspire a sense of kinship. They become bare objects with instrumental value and that alone, rather than living subjects with intrinsic value.

Thus there are at least two reasons why, in the view of some, a transcendence of foundationalism is desirable. Such transcendence can promote intellectual honesty, which is a recognition of the finitude of all claims to knowledge. And it can encourage a sense of wonder, which is an appreciation of the mystery and value of all that is actual, human or nonhuman. A conjunction of these two interests—the promotion of honesty and the encouragement of wonder—is expressed in the later Wittgenstein, with his Zen-like appreciation of everyday forms of human life; in the later Heidegger, with his poetic openness to the being of beings; and in the later Whitehead, with his intuitive feelings of the world as an interconnected whole. None of these philosophers claimed to have arrived at a final system by which reality can be grasped. And yet each in his own way arrived at a perspective by which foundationalism can be transcended, and honesty and openness thereby encouraged. It is no accident that the thought of each has been appropriated by succeeding generations as potentially therapeutic for certain modern Western ills.

While sympathetic to the concerns of such thinkers, however, the globally conscious Christian and anyone else with global awareness is nevertheless led to ask: To whom are these concerns relevant? It can be claimed that they are relevant, at least for the most part, only to the privileged class, to the one-quarter of the world's people, many of whom are Western, who enjoy adequate food, clothing, shelter, health care, and freedom, and who have the luxury of being preoccupied with honesty and wonder. And in
some respects, of course, this claim is true. The interests of philosophers are often reflective of the social classes from which they stem. In other respects, however, the claim may be problematic.

Clearly the gospel of nonfoundationalism is relevant to those in the West and elsewhere whose lives are impoverished by an excessive preoccupation with manipulative power. Yet it may also be relevant to the interests of those in and outside the West who are subjected to manipulation. Perhaps manipulated people cannot be freed from exploitation, and an exploited earth cannot be freed from domination, until both are freed from being mere objects in the minds of those who consciously or subconsciously oppress them. In this sense a transcendence of foundationalism may be important, not simply because it facilitates honesty and openness among the powerful, but because, when combined with liberating praxis, it can promote an end to the domination of the powerless. At least this is a line of thought to which the criticism of foundationalism can ultimately lead, and one that I will presuppose in this essay. My aim is to suggest that a transcendence of foundationalism is one way in which many humans today, and many Christians in particular, can participate in the quest for a world that is more socially just and ecologically sustainable.

As contemporary liberation and political theologies attest, the hope for a just and sustainable world is one that is deeply Christian as well as deeply human. From the perspective of many within the contemporary Christian community, justice and sustainability, along with honesty and wonder, are ends toward which the Christian rightly strives in the interests of what Jesus called “the kingdom of God.”* In this instance, the kingdom of God is not simply an otherworldly reality to be entered upon death: it is a reality to be provisionally enjoyed by all humans (and their fellow creatures) in this life. To be Christian is to be hopeful for a state of affairs in which honesty, wonder, justice, and ecological balance are maximized, and to participate in the process by which this maximization occurs. It is to work for the coming, if not of the kingdom itself, then at least of meaningful approximations.

And yet to be Christian is also, for many, to be foundationalist. Perhaps it is not to treat Scripture or creeds as foundations, since
such treatment would constitute idolatry. And perhaps it is not to treat Jesus as a foundation, since Jesus often pointed away from himself toward God. But often it is to treat God as a foundation. At an epistemological level it is to think of God as a lawgiver and judge whose commands are indubitable and immutable, and at an ontological level it is to think of God as a metaphysical ground on which earthly existents are utterly and unequivocally dependent. Logically, these epistemological and ontological assumptions are separable. It is possible to think of God as a ground of being without deeming God the source of indubitable revelation; and it is possible to think of God as the source of indubitable revelation without deeming God the ground of being. Historically, however, the perspectives have often been deeply intertwined. In traditional Christian consciousness, it has often been presupposed that God is both a metaphysical absolute and a source of infallible revelation, and that these ontological and epistemological affirmations are essential to Christian self-understanding.

It is in the name of God as thus envisioned that Christians have often striven, and still strive, for the kingdom. Often the kingdom has been sought, not necessarily because its realization would fulfill the needs of earthly beings, but because its realization would fulfill the requirements of a metaphysical absolute. At worst, social action is then carried out in the name of the Absolute and in service to that Absolute. The world becomes a mere means to the end of metaphysical conviction, a mere object in the consciousness of the believer. Consciously or unconsciously, the dream of the kingdom becomes a tool for dogmatism, and the dream itself is lost.

Of course there is nothing new in criticizing the image of God as an absolute foundation. The image has been criticized by many in the modern world, ranging from Nietzsche in the late nineteenth century through death-of-God theologies in the twentieth. Within mainstream Christianity, however, the image prevails, along with the temptations toward dogmatism mentioned above. Taking the critique of foundationalism seriously means that the image itself must be transcended if Christians are to join the process by which their own dreams—the “kingdom of God”—can be approximated. The foundationalist mode of consciousness obstructs the very possibility of approximating the dream.
The transcendence of foundationalism must involve at least two developments within Christianity. The first is a cultivation on the part of Christians of some propensity for detachment from ideas and actualities which have heretofore functioned as grounds. The second is a realization that God is not a ground on which to stand, but rather a call into ungrounded faith. In the contemporary theological setting, there are at least two movements that point in these directions. One is the encounter of Christianity with Buddhism, and the other is the emergence of a process understanding of God.

The encounter with Buddhism is in its initial phases. While some theologians in the nineteenth century dealt peripherally with Buddhism in their attempts to interpret Christian faith, it has not been until the twentieth century that perspectives from the East have become generally accessible to the Christian. Even today, of course, the number of Christians who interpret faith in light of an encounter with Buddhism and other Eastern traditions is relatively small. Yet developments in technology and communication suggest that, in the future, numbers will increase. The global village naturally induces interaction among world faiths.

Buddhism provides a particularly fruitful resource for Christians, not because in it they find a religion that is so similar to their own, but rather because in it they find a religion that is so different. Whereas the general thrust of traditional Christianity has emphasized an attitude of clinging to a personal God, the general thrust of Buddhism has emphasized liberation from clinging, including clinging to divine beings. Even nirvana, so the Buddhist insists, is not an object to which to cling, or even a subject that does the clinging. Nirvana is a way of living amidst the realization that there are no substances—no immutable and independent realities—to which to cling, and no subject that does the clinging.

To say that there are no substances to which to cling is not to say that the public world of rocks and trees, or the private world of thoughts and feelings, is mere illusion. It is to say, however, that rocks, trees, thoughts, and feelings are part of a beginningless and endless process of interrelated events—a cosmic process that is empty of being and yet full of becoming, empty of foundations and
yet full of connections. This cosmic process is that which is ultimately real. It is not grounded in a supreme substance, a supreme being, that transcends it. Rather it is that groundless process of which all beings—even a supreme being—are expressions. In Mahayana Buddhism it is called Emptiness.\footnote{6}

The suggestion that ultimate reality is Emptiness—and hence that ultimate reality is "empty" of qualities that make it clingable—presents a challenge to the Christian at both an affective and a conceptual level. At an affective level, the doctrine challenges the Christian to transcend that emotional stance of clinging or craving which so often accompanies the idea of God as an absolute foundation. When God is conceived as a foundation, Christians are often inclined to seek this foundation as a substance to be "grasped" or "held onto" amidst the vicissitudes of time. Consciously or unconsciously, God becomes an object to be possessed, an invisible substance to be grasped, a rock of ages on which to lean. This attitude is problematic, in part, because it yields the dogmatic posture mentioned earlier, a posture in which the world, too, becomes an object to be possessed. From the Buddhist perspective, however, the attitude is problematic for additional reasons. It engenders a great deal of suffering in the one who embodies it, and it is rooted in an illusion. In fact, says the Buddhist, there are no "things," divine or otherwise, to be grasped. There are no objects to be permanently owned, there are only actualities-in-process. Reality is a dynamic no-thing-ness, an Emptiness in which all beings are becomings. To the extent that the Christian internalizes this Buddhist insight, then, the Christian is freed from clinging to immutable grounds, including clinging to God as a ground. The first prerequisite for the emergence of a faith without foundations—detachment from ideas and actualities which have heretofore functioned as grounds—is on its way toward being realized.

The second prerequisite—a realization that God is not a ground on which to stand but rather a call into groundlessness— Involves a conceptual response to the doctrine of Emptiness. As the doctrine of Emptiness is internalized, the Christian is challenged to think of God in a new way. Immediately two options emerge.

The first is to revise the very meaning of the word God so that it refers to Emptiness itself. In this instance God would be identified
with that beginningless and endless process of interrelated events, in itself containing both good and evil, of which all actualities are expressions. God would be identified, for example, with Francis of Assisi as he feeds the birds and with the Nazi storm trooper as he murders the Jew. Stated simply, God would be everything that happens as it happens—becoming itself.

The problem for the Christian with this first option is that it denies the teleological character of divine existence. The God who is Emptiness itself is not a being who calls toward justice, sustainability, honesty, or wonder. Indeed this God is not a being at all. This God is no-thing-ness itself, exemplified anywhere and everywhere as the sheer becoming of what becomes.

A second option is to distinguish God from Emptiness, and then to recognize that God, while teleological, is a particular form or expression of Emptiness, albeit the supreme form. This is to envision God in a more biblical manner—as a being among beings, continually aware of and responsive to events as they occur, availing the world of possibilities for wholeness at an individual and social level relative to circumstance. To say that God is a being among beings is not to say that God is located in a particular region of space or has a temporal beginning and end. God can well be envisioned as coextensive with the beginninglessness and endlessness of the universe. It is to say, however, that God is a reality rather than ultimate reality. God would be the supreme instance of actuality-in-process, not the only instance.

In the contemporary theological setting, the school of thought which has done the most to develop the second option is process theology. Drawing as it does from the philosophy of Whitehead as well as from biblical perspectives, process thinkers such as John B. Cobb, Jr., have suggested that God and Emptiness are real and yet different. Whitehead’s distinction between creativity (as the ultimate reality analogous to Emptiness) and God (as the primordial expression of creativity) offers the Christian an opportunity to affirm the truth of Emptiness and the truth of God. In the words of Cobb: "The direction is to accept without hesitation or embarrassment the distinction between ultimate reality and God, and to recognize that the God of the Bible ... is a manifestation of ultimate reality—not the name of that reality."

At first glance, the idea that there is a difference between
To say that God is not ultimate reality is to say, among other things, that worldly actualities embody a power of becoming—a creativity—that transcends even God. If by sovereignty, however, one means omnibenevolence rather than omnipotence, then God is in fact sovereign from the process perspective. God is that reality by virtue of which world is, or can be, drawn toward fulfillment, its own realization of its deepest potential. Thus God is a being around whom ultimate concern and hope can rightly be oriented, even as one is awakened to Emptiness. As the supreme actuality-in-process, God, not Emptiness, is the appropriate subject of faith.

What is it like, then, to be open to a God who, though not an ontological foundation, is nevertheless the supreme terminus of faith? What is it like to have a faith that has been "Buddhized," and that is therefore a faith without foundations? It is to these questions that we turn.

All living faiths, including a faith without foundations, involve two aspects, one objective and the other subjective. The objective aspect is the reality to which there is openness and commitment. The subjective aspect consists of those thoughts, feelings, and attitudes that are appropriately responsive to this reality, and that rightly issue in observable forms of behavior. Neither of these aspects can be understood apart from the other, and both are essential to the dynamics of faith.

In a theistic faith, whether foundational or foundationless, the object aspect is the divine itself: God. In a foundational faith, God

ultimate reality and God can seem to challenge the sovereignty of God. And indeed, if by sovereignty is meant omnipotence in the classical sense, the process perspective does in fact challenge sovereignty. To say that God is not ultimate reality is to say, among other things, that worldly actualities embody a power of becoming—a creativity—that transcends even God. If by sovereignty, however, one means omnibenevolence rather than omnipotence, then God is in fact sovereign from the process perspective. God is that reality by virtue of which world is, or can be, drawn toward fulfillment, its own realization of its deepest potential. Thus God is a being around whom ultimate concern and hope can rightly be oriented, even as one is awakened to Emptiness. As the supreme actuality-in-process, God, not Emptiness, is the appropriate subject of faith.

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In a theistic faith, whether foundational or foundationless, the object aspect is the divine itself: God. In a foundational faith, God
is understood as changeless and static, whereas in a foundationless faith God is understood as flowing and ongoing. Yet this "objectivity" of God as understood from a nonfoundational perspective can only fully be understood if, to begin with, three connotations of the word *objective* are quickly dismissed.

In the first place, the word *objective* can sometimes connote a reality that is known in a manner exempt from human interpretation. For a faith without foundations, by contrast, God is not objective in this sense, because all knowledge, including knowledge of God, is assumed to be socially contingent, historically conditioned, and thereby limited in scope and perspective. As Martin Luther well understood, and as Kierkegaard reiterated three centuries later, human knowledge of God is always *a knowledge of God "for us."* If the claim that God is objective is a claim that the divine can be known "in itself" rather than "*for us,‟* then God is not objective.

In the second place, the word *objective* can sometimes connote a datum of external sense-perception, particularly visual perception, that is observed from a distance by uninvolved observers. For a faith without foundations, by contrast, God is not understood as a particular datum of sense-perception localized in space and time. Instead God is understood as a datum of inward feeling, vaguely discerned and yet ultimately important, to which one feels drawn and by which one feels called toward the fullness of life. If the word *objective* connotes something external to the body or captured in sense-perception, then, again, God is not objective.

In the third place, the word *objective* can sometimes connote an inert or lifeless reality without inwardness or life of its own. For a faith without foundations, by contrast, God is understood as a living subject—an actuality-in-process—with subjectivity and inwardness of God's own. In prayer and other forms of piety, God is experienced as a Thou rather than an It, and indeed as the supreme Thou. If to be objective is to be an It devoid of Thou-ness, then, here as well, God is not objective.

Yet there is a fourth connotation of *objective* that does in fact capture a feature of God's reality as understood by the nonfoundationalist. The word *objective* can sometimes connote a datum that, from the point of view of the individual experiencer, is given for experience rather than projected by experience. For the
nonfoundationalist, God is objective in this sense. Within the depths of human experience, so the nonfoundationalist suggests, there is a reality of ultimate importance—a supreme actuality—that is discovered rather than projected, and that potentially inspires ultimate concern and commitment. This reality is "God," the object—or better, the subject—of a faith without foundations.

Even with this sense of objective, of course, certain qualifications must be made. To say that God is given as an object within human experience is not to say that God is exempt from interpretation. Even as God is given for experience, God is interpreted by experience. The objective givenness of God is inevitably accompanied by a subjective appropriation of that givenness, and the appropriation involves interpretation through imagery, language, and emotion. This is the case with all objects that are disclosed within the immediacy of experience, including other people, the natural world, remembered events, and abstract ideas. Hence God's objectivity within human experience, while different in quality, is not different in kind from that of other objects. It is the objectivity of something that is interpreted even as it is discovered.

The question that divides the foundationalist and the nonfoundationalist concerns not the reality of divine immanence as given within experience, but rather the nature of that immanence. From the point of view of the foundationalist, God is immanent as a ground—that is, as a foundation on which to build an edifice of secure knowledge, as a point of departure from which to proceed with unshakable certainty, and as a metaphysical absolute. The tendency of this line of thought is to suggest that God is immanent without being interpreted. From the point of view of the nonfoundationalist, on the other hand, God is immanent as an inwardly felt goal, or lure, toward which one may be deeply and continuously drawn, but which is never grasped in isolated purity. Within the depths of human experience, so it is suggested, God is immanent, not as an uninterpreted ground of being, but rather as an ever-interpreted lure for becoming.

The word lure comes from process theology, particularly from Whitehead's understanding of the "primordial nature" of God. The word is meant to connote not enticement or inveiglement, but rather attractiveness and drawing power. To say that God is
experienced as a lure within ordinary experience is to say that God is felt as a goal rather than a goad, as a pull from ahead rather than a push from behind, as a final cause rather than an efficient cause, as the call of what can be rather than the compulsion of what has been. The presence of God is that of unrealized possibilities which, if actualized, yield maximum fulfillment, relative to what is possible and preferable in the circumstances at hand. These possibilities are for harmony in relation to the surrounding world and for intensity in the enjoyment of that harmony. While they vary from circumstance to circumstance in a given person’s life, they are continuous in their ongoing presence and constant in their life-nourishing nature. They are for wisdom and compassion, not self-deception and hatred; for hope and creativity, not despair and stagnation; for openness and freedom, not inflexibility and enslavement; for peace and justice, not violence and oppression. They are, to use a single phrase, for the “fullness of life.” To feel called toward the fullness of life relative to circumstance is to be called by God. To respond to the call is to enable God to become incarnate in the world. It is, in traditional Christian terminology, to enable the “kingdom of God” to come, a kingdom in which “thy will is done on earth as it is in heaven.”

Whereas the call of God toward the kingdom is the objective side of foundationless faith, one’s authentic response to this call is the subjective side. In traditional terminology, this response is an act of conversion—moment by moment, and situation by situation. While the response inevitably risks misconstrual of the nature of the call, it is, at best, conformal to, rather than distortive of, the lure toward life’s fullness. Misconstrual is partially avoided if it is realized, to begin with, that whatever the particularities of the call at a given moment, the very nature of the call inspires the cultivation of at least four attitudes.

In the first place, the subjective side involves a commitment to life. This commitment can be expressed through an intuitive reverence for all living things, a reverence that naturally issues into a concern for their survival and well-being. The commitment can also be expressed through a reflective consideration of ways in which, given the inevitable trade-offs that enter into ethical decision-making, life on the planet can best be enhanced in its unity and diversity. And it can be expressed in the translation of
such thought into practice, manifest in concrete efforts aimed at social justice and ecological sustainability. Those who live a faith without foundations may disagree on the means by which life is enhanced, but they will agree that it is life and the fullness thereof that deserves commitment. To be committed to life is to be committed to God since God is the lure toward life.

In the second place, the subjective response to God involves nonattachment to life. At face value, this may seem to contradict commitment, but at an experiential level it need not. For a faith without foundations is informed by the insight, characteristic of both Buddhism and process theology, that life itself is an ongoing process rather than a settled fact. To be committed to life is to be committed to the process of life—a process which, at the level of the individual organism, the society, and biological evolution itself, can be appreciated but not possessed. The fact that life is a process requires that one be able to "let go" or "renounce" life, even as one is committed to it. In the words of a Zen Buddhist master, "Renunciation is not giving up the things of this world, it is accepting that they go away." In a foundationless faith, such renunciation applies even to God. God does not "go away," but the presence of God as a lure is changing with each circumstance. Sometimes God is a call toward truth, sometimes toward goodness, and sometimes toward beauty. To be open to God is to be accepting of divine change, and thereby to be nonattached, even to God.

In the third place, the subjective side of a nonfoundational faith involves trust. To be open to divine change requires confidence that the change itself is in the interests of life's fullness, and that the lure of God, whatever its particular content, is in the interests of self and world. In a foundationless faith this confidence is inspired by the lure itself and by memories of previous realizations of the lure. For the Christian, such memories include a recollection of the promises of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, including a recollection of the Resurrection of Jesus. To recall these events is to recall resources for trust in the presence of the lure, and thereby to recall resources for hope in the future.

Hope is the fourth quality characteristic of the subjective side of a foundationless faith. Such hope can be expressed in one or both of two ways: as a hope for the welfare of life on the planet earth, or as
Thus there are four qualities that characterize the subjective side of a foundationless faith: commitment to life, nonattachment, trust, and hope.

Commitment, trust, and hope point to the active side of this faith, particularly to its ethical dimension. A faith without foundations is one in which individuals and groups within the Christian church work for peace where there is war and the threat of nuclear destruction; for justice where there is economic deprivation and political repression; and for ecological well-being where there is a plundering of the earth and an exploitation of nonhuman forms of life. The ethic of this faith calls for “the liberation of life,” to quote the title of the recent work in process/liberation theology by John B. Cobb, Jr., and Charles Birch (Cambridge University Press, 1981).

The quality of nonattachment is that which prevents this liberation ethic from becoming what an activist faith can so often become—a mere will to power. When either the world or God is approached as a static object of potential attachment, its integrity as ongoing process is forgotten. It becomes a static “thing” to be permanently owned, rather than a dynamic “no-thing” that is

A remembrance of the Resurrection yields hope, not certainty.
allowed to exist in its own right. A faith without foundations knows how to let things become on their own terms, when such is required. It is nonattached in relation to the earth, not in the sense of being indifferent to the fate of the earth, but in being able, when love requires, to let the earth evolve on its own terms as an ongoing process rather than a settled fact. And it is nonattached in relation to God, not in the sense of being indifferent to God's will, but rather in the sense of being able to let God be God's self, one who divinely adapts to changing circumstances and whose will can change in the interests of compassion. The quality of nonattachment helps assure that, amidst a living and active faith, neither the world nor God becomes an object of mere dominance, so that both can be subjects of appreciative concern.

In many respects, each of the four qualities—commitment, trust, hope and nonattachment—can be found in the life of faith as expressed in New Testament literature. This is not to suggest that a contemporary faith without foundations duplicates with exactitude the perspective of the earliest Christians. This would be impossible, since their own perspectives were diverse and not always consistent from one community to the next. Nor would it be desirable, since Christianity, too, is an ongoing process capable of growth and change. The observation of continuity with some features of early Christianity is meant to suggest, however, that a contemporary faith without foundations may be more biblical than might at first be imagined. The evolution of a faith without foundations may be a development out of, rather than a divergence from, certain forms of early Christian existence.

The argument of this essay has been that the development of such a faith is needed in the contemporary world, and that process theology and Buddhism can contribute to its emergence. Whether such faith will emerge, however, is a different question. Certain trends in Christianity, such as the emergence of historical and pluralistic consciousness, suggest that it may. Yet other trends, such as the advance of fundamentalism, suggest the contrary. In all probability, the future of Christianity will see manifold expressions of faith, some foundational and some foundationless. This is what one would expect in a pluralistic age. The criterion by which each should be evaluated, in the last analysis, is the fullness of life. To the extent that a form of faith contributes to the unity and
diversity of living beings, it may well be authentically responsive to God, all protestations of its critics to the contrary. To the extent that it does not so contribute, it is problematic. The final criterion, as vaguely and as dimly discernible as it may often be, is the lure toward life. A faith without foundations, so I have argued, is responsive to this lure.

NOTES

1. The critique of foundationalism has been described in depth by Richard Rorty in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979). Rorty chooses the philosophy of Dewey as an American representative of the critique. I have mentioned Whitehead instead, partly because I use Whitehead's thought in subsequent sections of this paper.


5. Historical examples include the Crusades, the Inquisition, the Peasant's War, the Puritan Revolution, the Thirty Years War, and the conquest and cultural subjugation of India, Africa, China, and the indigenous civilizations of North and South America. More recent examples in the United States include the Moral Majority. While not all the historical examples have involved the symbol of "kingdom" as the guiding motif, the commitment to foundationalist principles remains the same. In most instances the guiding principle is "the will of God," understood as a revealed absolute. For a recent criticism of the tendency toward absolutism in liberation theologies, particularly that of James Cone, see Peter Hodgson's "Alienation and Reconciliation in Hegelian and Post-Hegelian Perspective" in *Trinity University Studies in Religion* 11 (1982): 112-13. For a criticism of this tendency within political theology, see John B. Cobb, Jr., *Process Theology as Political Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), pp. 135-54.


How does a pastor overcome the anxiety to be useful?

Shoulder to shoulder at university, Crispin and I suffered the icy blasts and wintry chills of Greek A and Biological Sciences 1. For preaching practicums in seminary we shamelessly pillaged annual volumes of "Best Sermons (prot. ed.)." And incredulously we were graduated together in both arts and theology.

I am chaplain at the hospital to which, many years later, Crispin was unexpectedly admitted. Ill at ease, I shuffled around his bed. I was suave and superficial, overly hearty and rather too loud. I was apprehensive and fearful. My competence (doing) and confidence (being) were about to be paraded for inspection. I visualized Crispin, my professional peer—a watchful, brooding critic—industriously logging my pastoral performance and later retailing its more grisly omissions and commissions. I knew very well the solutions to my dilemma. To be wholly myself and permit Crispin to be Crispin. And yet . . . .

I failed to respond to Crispin’s clear signals of difficulty with what J. H. van den Berg has called “the task for which he is least prepared: the confrontation with the vulnerability of his body and the transience of his life” (The Psychology of the Sickbed, Humanities Press, 1972, p. 50). I stubbornly engaged him in general and genial chitchat. This meandered through what Ambrose Bierce terms “minor mental commodities.” One afternoon, Crispin impatiently interrupted my witty recital of the diocesan synod’s more hilarious moments. In a strained and weary voice he said, “When are you going to do something pastoral?”
It surely is not unreasonable for the consumer to expect the helping professional to know his or her tools, when and how to use them.

unreasonable for the consumer to expect the helping professional to know his or her tools, when and how to use them. Seminarian: "Shall I pray?" Patient: "If you need to."

Pastors, of course, should also be wary of others' agendas for them with which they feel uncomfortable and for which they are unprepared. David was suited up in Saul's own armor preparatory to meeting Goliath in battle. David "tried in vain to go, for he was not used to them." Yet he was neither overly awed nor intimidated by the expression of royal patronage. He concluded: "I cannot go with these; for I am not used to them" (I Sam. 17:39 RSV). Merle Allison Johnson, in How to Be Happy in the Electronic Church (Abingdon, 1979, p. 42), comments: "The Sauls are always wanting to load their armor on the little Davids. The little Davids are foolish if they buy chunks of it."

Jesus experienced similar rapacity. "And one of the company said unto him, 'Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me.' And he said unto him, 'Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?'" (Luke 12:13-14 KJV). Thus Jesus reflects mastery acquired by his own resolved limitations (see also John 2:4).

2. I might loftily have reminded Crispin that pastoral care, surely he knows, neither consists in nor is determined by the abundance of things done.
Pastoral care neither consists in nor is determined by the abundance of things done.

A corollary is Simon Peter's blunt survival query: "And just what are we getting out of going into the church?" (see Matt. 19:27). It, too, is a natural enough question, asked by seminarian and seasoned pastor alike. Frequently it is judged as both irrelevant and irreverent.

3. I might have replied to Crispin: "I try to be pastoral, functionally or implicitly, whenever I visit you!"

*Functional* pastoral care I define as doing the classical pastoral acts, e.g., Eucharist, Bible, prayer, anointing, absolution, pastoral counseling, spiritual direction, etc. These the conventional wisdom as readily identifies with the church's pastors as it associates them with "baptizing babies," "reading things out of a book," and "preaching sermons." The contexts of functional pastoral care are both the routine and the extraordinary, traumatic situations. Emergencies and issues of the moment are identified, clarified, interpreted, explored, and reflected upon, as are the accompanying feelings of those involved.

*Implicit* pastoral care is, I believe, also person-oriented. It is empathic, friendly visiting. Within a low-key, relaxed atmosphere of mutual attraction, enjoyment, and affection occurs helpful
conversation. Ponderous, weighty issues are avoided. There is relatively little self-disclosure. Yet the visitor is much more than an impotent, baffled, though sympathetic onlooker. ("Compassion," said Fulton Sheen, "is sympathy in the active voice.") Sanctified imagination here is more important than knowledge. A hospital patient has been informed she has inoperable, terminal cancer. An elderly cleaner enters the room, senses the situation, puts down her mop and embraces the patient warmly. Both, as my mother would say, "had a good cry." This is implicit pastoral care.

The pastor is led to or leads from one level of pastoral care to the other, back and forth. It is similar to a canal lock system. People are raised, lowered by others or by themselves to and from both levels. Consider this example:

My initial visit with Anne was a "bicycle" call. I wheeled in, introduced myself, expressed care and concern, exchanged pleasantries and departed (implicit care). I sensed that, at this time, this was what she needed.

Now, I have discovered much may happen in the patient's mind between the first and the subsequent visits. There is time for second thoughts upon first impressions. The former, observed Euripides, are ever wiser. So Anne ruminates: "Well, that wasn't so bad! Quite a nice young man really! Not like that clown who rushed through mother's funeral service as if he was reading off a shopping list. I swore off all reverends after that!" (Note that a specific "bad scene" with a pastor invariably leads to such a generalization as this.) "He was so easy to talk to!" (Better easy and free than free and easy.) "I'm sure he'd really listen and help me if I told him about Penny's marriage and my Bob's drinking. I hope he returns." I do return. Anne leads me into functional pastoral care.

Should I fail to reappear, Anne may desperately request functional pastoral care, e.g., Bible, Eucharist, literature, in order to procure the specific ministry that will meet her need. (How the adrenalin flows, trumpets sound, heart pounds, and pulse races when a chaplain is asked to fetch and carry, to do something for somebody!)

Consider also a seminarian's verbatim extract of a visit to Crispin. "I'll tell Pete and Joan I've seen you. They were asking about you after chapel this morning." (Implicit.) Pause. "You will
DO SOMETHING PASTORAL!

let David know any time you'd like communion, won't you?"

(Functional.)

Now plainly I need to be capable of more than functional care. I am reminded of Father James in Graham Greene's "The Living Room." Every time he opens his mouth his "tongue is heavy with the . . . catechism." I can just recall a music hall comedian's burlesque of a minister. He peered out upon his audience over steel-rimmed spectacles and intoned solemnly: "Thursday evening, the Men's Boxing Club. I shall not be present! Saturday afternoon, the Women's Guild Spring Tea. I shall, of course, be present!" Do I mouth expected, empty things? Am I without benefit of conversational small change? Is my piety fashion, infirmity, or intemperate passion?

And conversely am I capable of more than implicit pastoral care? Am I a cheerful Charlie with the high-beam and wide-scan missionary grin? Does my carpet bag contain only merry quips and cheap, untested and untried park-bench philosophizings? But recall Horace, "A jest often decides matters of importance more effectually and happily than seriousness."

Most pastoral styles accommodate, as occasion indicates, both implicit and explicit pastoral care. Style, wrote Jonathan Swift in 1720 to a young clergyman, consists in "proper words in proper places." Yet the pastor may (and here I struck out the words just and merely) stay put and stand by.

Pastoral care's bottom line is, I believe, on a ticket stub I found in my pocket a few minutes ago.

It reads, "No good if detached."
THE CHURCH AND
THE SEXUAL REVOLUTION

RAYMOND J. LAWRENCE

An examination of the history of the church’s attitude toward sex reveals a radical reorientation around the fourth century and suggests we can learn something about sexual morality from our Judaic roots.

The sexual revolution which has been taking place in the Western world since World War II has created a profound crisis for all Christian churches, a crisis grave enough to threaten their very existence. That ours is a sex-obsessed culture seems beyond dispute. Superficially it would appear that the church is a significant bulwark against the obsession with sex, but in reality the church unwittingly generates and perpetuates this obsession. By claiming sexual innocence and purity as prime values, the church has tempted generations of humankind to abstain from sexual experience in the name of religious commitment. It therefore follows as night follows day that the element in life one ought most to give up becomes quite ineluctably the one for which one wishes most.

Prior to World War II, the middle class in the Western world was for the most part in conformity at least publicly with the church’s ideal of sexual purity. Since World War II, some think as a result of the invention of the contraceptive pill, this alliance between church and the middle class has collapsed. Sexual purity, abstinence, and sex, extramarital sex, and homosexuality are acknowledged openly and increasingly so in middle-class circles. Sexual experience and sexual fulfillment have supplanted sexual purity as publicly acknowledged values for a large part, if not the majority,

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The churches are in danger of evolving into havens for the sexually suppressed, or worse, communities of profound hypocrisy.

The real truth is that the churches are burdened with seventeen hundred years of history that plague them like a nightmare. Catholic and Protestant alike stumble in a sexual wilderness. As the crisis deepens decade by decade, councils and assemblies generally pass anemic or archaic resolutions. And the Vatican attempts to stem the tide of sexual toleration and permissiveness by appealing to what Edward Schillebeeckx calls "a view of sexuality based on an antiquated anthropology" (Ministry: Leadership in the Community of Jesus Christ, Crossroad, 1970, p. 88).

In the face of the sexual revolution, the churches are in retreat, fighting a rearguard action and from all appearances not fully understanding what they are fighting. The sexual revolution directly challenges the cornerstone of modern Christian ethics, but the churches seem immobilized by the assault. The best in leadership positions seem willing to acknowledge certain values inherent in the sexual revolution, but even they seem swept along by cultural changes, and what is more puzzling, they seem unaware of the profound ambivalence within the Judeo-Christian tradition on issues of sexuality when that tradition is viewed as a whole.

Paul Moore, the Episcopal bishop of New York, is a living illustration of how the problem arises for many in leadership positions in the church. He is considered one of the leading and most respected bishops of the Episcopal Church. He is progressive and liberal. In 1979 he published Take a Bishop Like Me (Harper &
Row), which was an autobiographical account, for the most part, of his own wrestling with the aspects of the sexual revolution. Specifically, two developments pressed Moore for critical ethical decisions. There arose in his diocese the question of whether to ordain a self-confessed and unrepenting homosexual. There arose also the question of how to respond to the obvious premarital sexual practices of his own children. In each case, and after considerable personal struggle, Moore sided with the values of the sexual revolution and against the venerable traditions of centuries of Christian practice. It is notable, in the case of the homosexual ordination, that both the bishop and his advisory council faced the issue unflinchingly and squarely. An easy way out of the dilemma, to which other bishops have resorted, would have been to draw a distinction between homosexual orientation and homosexual practice. By such a distinction they might have washed their hands of the issue, implicitly requiring sexual abstinence of the ordinand. They did not. They ordained to the priesthood the self-confessed homosexual without requiring sexual abstinence or celibacy.

The conflict with the values of the sexual revolution was more sharply personalized for Moore when his children brought their lovers home for overnight visits. His initial response to his children was exactly what one would expect of a typical clergyman. Under his roof there was to be no sharing of beds with overnight guests in spite of the fact that these same progeny of his were openly cohabiting elsewhere. This commitment to traditional Christian values ultimately eroded at a vacation cabin, however, where strict sleeping arrangements were more difficult to structure. The children arrived at the cabin first and set up the sleeping arrangements according to their own wishes, so the bishop was then faced with the dilemma of whether or not to exercise the same authority and enforce the same rule he had enforced at home. The vacation cabin sleeping arrangement was the episode that permitted Moore to acknowledge to himself and to the world that he was no longer sure, as he put it, "that the old way was better or even more moral than the new way."

Bishop Moore, clearly a man of personal courage and intuitiveness, has placed himself in the vacuum between traditional Christian values and the values promoted by the sexual
The time has come to acknowledge that the church in the fourth century made an erroneous turn on the issue of sex, a turn that has had a powerful and destructive effect on the church ever since.

The Bible itself does not support the modern tradition. Virginity, sexual purity, and innocence are values alien to the Old Testament. Monogamy itself is never specifically required in the Old Testament, nor was it universally practiced by the Jews in Jesus’ time. When one reflects upon the subsequent developing attitudes of the churches toward sexual matters, what emerges as truly remarkable and distinctive about the Old Testament is its relative indifference to what subsequently came to be known as sexual sins. Furthermore, with the exception of the ritual cleanliness practice of the Levitical priesthood tradition, there does not seem to be a single condemnation of heterosexual intercourse in itself except in cases where the woman was another man’s
property. Even prostitution fails to get a clear and unambiguous denunciation. On the other hand, Talmudic interpretations of Jewish law hold that sexual fulfillment is a basic necessity of life for both men and women.

Nor does the New Testament provide much support for the modern tradition. There is simply no clear documentation of the sexual ethics of Jesus, Paul, or the early church, if indeed there was one. In Paul we do have the first traces of an anti-erotic bias within the Judeo-Christian mainstream. He says quite boldly that it is good for a man not to touch a woman (I Cor. 7:1). As commentators point out, this preference is related to Paul's sense of urgency at being at the end of history. Nevertheless, sexual fulfillment is clearly viewed by him as an unnecessary distraction, and in that he is quite surprisingly un-Jewish in his view. Certainly a trace of the anti-erotic crept into Christianity very early, beginning at least with Paul. But it did not become full-blown until much later in the church's history.

Efforts on the part of English-speaking people to understand sexual issues in the New Testament have been bedeviled from the start by the frequent mistranslation of *pornea* as "fornication." The root meaning of the Greek word *pornea* is "prostitution," whereas fornication in modern English denotes any manner of sexual relations outside the bonds of matrimony. It may well be that *pornea* had accrued by the beginning of the Christian Era a more inclusive meaning than simply prostitution narrowly understood. But it is not clear exactly what the boundaries of meaning might have been. Bruce Malina says that among the Jews *pornea* came to mean any unlawful conduct, that is, any conduct prohibited by the Torah. But the Torah does not prohibit fornication. To equate first-century usage of *pornea* with twentieth-century use of "fornication" is to make an equation that cannot be substantiated. (See Bruce Malina, "Does *Pornea* Mean Fornication?" *Novum Testamentum* 14 (1972): 10-17; also Francis Firth, "Catholic Sexual Morality in the Patristic and Medieval Periods," *Human Sexuality and Personhood*, Pope John Center, St. Louis, 1981, pp. 36-52.)

Sexual purity has its roots somewhere other than in Israel. Greek culture was infused with it. The Athenian Parthenon, the temple to the virgin Athena, could not have been built in Jerusalem. Plato
maintained in the *Republic* that sexual desire was the diseased aspect of the personality, a notion repugnant to Jewish tradition. While the complexity and creativity of Plato's thought does not deserve any cavalier oversimplification, it is nevertheless true that Greek and Roman body/soul dualism resulted in a demeaning of the body and sex that intensified in the Neoplatonism and Stoicism of later antiquity and had considerable impact on the life and thought of the early church.

The preserved ecclesiastical documents of the first four centuries of the church's existence reveal clearly the tragic transformation of an essentially Jewish valuation of sexuality into a valuation similar to that of the Neoplatonists and Stoics of the late Greco-Roman world. The peculiar impetus to this transformation is essentially what Samuel Laeuchli calls a flight from heterosexuality (*Power and Sexuality*, Temple University Press, 1972, p. 104).

This remarkable and remarkably quiet revolution took place gradually and was complete in the fourth century. It was a revolution that has profoundly and negatively shaped the life of the church ever since. This revolution established sexual purity as the primary identifying mark of the Christian moral life from thenceforth.

The early Christian churches began their lives as simple extensions of Judaism. Very early, as we see in the New Testament itself, the churches moved to separate themselves from Judaism in their bid for universalism. This independent thrust strengthened the universal claims and attractiveness of the church in the empire, but it also subjected the church to the powerful influence of the dominant Roman imperial religion, apparently a mixture of nationalism, Neoplatonism, and Stoicism, but marked by ideals of sexual purity and a hatred of the body. It is ironic but was predictable that during the first three centuries of the church's life intermittent persecutions of Christians erupted in the empire, but that, even while this was taking place, the mainstream of the church was gradually taking on more and more the coloration of its persecutors.

The church's earliest documents, like the New Testament itself, manifest minimal interest in matters of sexual behavior. But by late in the second century evidence of a change is quite apparent.
Tertullian (ca. 150-ca. 225), next to Augustine the pre-eminent theologian of the patristic period, clearly presages what is to come. He writes extensively about matters of sex and marriage. On the one hand, he condemns radical Christian groups like the Marcionites, who repudiate marriage. Tertullian is holding the line against the infusion of sexual asceticism into the church. But paradoxically Tertullian is powerfully attracted to that same asceticism. He does verbal battle with the "Catholics," that is, the mainstream of the church, on the issue of remarriage after the death of a spouse. Tertullian opposed such remarriage, whereas the official church permitted it. For that reason he attacked the Catholics, calling them "sensualists" and accusing them of "being given to wantonness." Tertullian, for all his affirmation of marriage against the antimarriage sects, actually affirmed only one marriage for life, and even then preferably one in which husband and wife by mutual agreement decide to abstain from sexual intercourse for the sake of sanctification.

What comes through with astonishing clarity in Tertullian's writings is his great admiration for the sexual asceticism of the pagan cults. He writes admiringly of the "monogamy" (meaning here one marriage per lifetime) of the Pontifex Maximus, the supreme spiritual head of the Roman imperial religion. He also eloquently praises the exemplary sexual purity of the flamen, the vestal virgins, and the priests who serve the Egyptian bull and points out that their example stands as a judgment against the infirmity of Christians. Very likely Tertullian felt stung by criticism of the church for its lack of sexual purity. Certainly he knew of Tacitus and Pliny, who had attacked the church on that very basis.

At that particular period in the church's life the "sensualists," as Tertullian called them, remained in control of the church's mainstream. Tertullian himself eventually separated himself from the Catholic mainstream and spawned the "Tertullianists," a brand of Montanism itself characterized by rigorous sexual asceticism. This splinter group eventually died out, but what in fact occurred was that the mainstream of the church, ironically and tragically, became in the fourth century more Tertullianist than Tertullian himself.

Whatever else may have hurt their cause, the mainstream Catholic sensualists were radically undermined by the Constantinian
adoption of Christianity as the new imperial religion early in the fourth century. As Laeuchli points out, idolatry was the cohesive focus of the pre-Constantinian church, a focus profoundly rooted in the Bible itself. The issue was: Who is Lord of the world? Caesar? Or Jesus of Nazareth?

Idolatry was the major evil against which the church fought in its early history, specifically idolatry vis-à-vis the Roman imperial religion and its rites. The refusal to pay homage to the religion of the empire was treasonous and resulted in sporadic eruptions of state persecution. However, with the imperial adoption of the church, idolatry evaporated as a critical issue. The idols were replaced by the cross, at least officially. Church and empire were one, but as a result the church was in peril of losing its identity. At that juncture, according to Laeuchli, the church seized upon sexual purity, a value already well appreciated by the pagan "religious" of imperial Rome and various heretical groups, as its new instrument and symbol of identity and control.

The basis for Laeuchli's conclusions is his detailed study of the canons of the Council of Elvira in Spain. The actual date of these canons is still under debate. Laeuchli argues for a date early in the fourth century. But the very existence of the canons at whatever date illustrates how far the mainstream of the Spanish church had drifted toward the adoption of sexual purity as the new norm for Christian moral life.

At the Council of Elvira, sexual purity was unambiguously established as the mark of the Christian life.

At the Council of Elvira, sexual purity was unambiguously established as the mark of the Christian life. Almost half of the eighty-one canons of the Council of Elvira legislated on sexual matters, in itself a remarkable development. In these were included prohibitions on premarital as well as extramarital sex of any kind, including sex in youth and widowhood as well. For example, Canon 30 proscribes from ordination those who have sinned sexually in their youth. The intensity of emphasis on this new morality of sexual purity manifests itself startlingly when one
compares the variety of penalties in the various canons of Elvira. Canon 5, for example, reads: “If a woman overcome with rage whips her maidservant so badly that she dies within 3 days . . . she shall not be readmitted to communion for seven years.” Canon 13 reads: “Virgins consecrated to God who break their vow shall not receive communion at the end. However, if they have intercourse only once and do penance for the rest of their lives, they may receive communion at the end.” For the laity the new rule of sexual purity meant coitus only within the bonds of marriage. But for the clergy the sexual purity standard meant total abstinence from sex. In this period of the church’s history the clerical celibacy rule had not yet been established. The council did not order it. It simply proscribed clerical coitus. Married clergy—and presumably most were married—were required in Canon 33 to abstain from sex with their wives. If they fathered children with their wives, they were to be defrocked. It is doubtful this legislation was widely enforced. The council itself had limited authority. But it was clearly an adumbration of the future.

In the same vein Schillebeeckx contends that the sexual abstinence required of clergy at this time was the consequence of the church’s mimicking the pagan cultic rule of the day: “Anyone who approaches the altar must not have enjoyed the pleasures of Venus the night before” (Ministry, p. 86). Schillebeeckx also points out that the observance of this rule by Christian clergy converged with the fourth-century innovation of daily Eucharist, and the result was de facto celibacy in the Western church. Celibacy as such was not required until the Second Lateran Council of 1139. In the Eastern church, where daily Eucharist was not practiced, celibacy was never required of priests, but only of bishops. East and West were alike, however, in the adoption of the sexual purity norm for Christian moral life.

Augustine (354–430) provided the crowning blow for any remnants of the earlier mainstream Catholic sensualist tradition. Like Tertullian, Augustine on the one hand fought against those in the church who contended that marriage was evil, in this case the Manichean party. But on the other hand he was even more rigorous than Tertullian in equating the highest religious life with sexual abstinence. When he converted to Christianity he gave up his beloved mistress because it was his judgment that coitus was...
anathema to the highest Christian life. In his view coitus was a sin except for the purpose of procreation. He defended the polygamy of the Hebrew patriarchs against Manichean attacks on them by arguing, hardly convincingly, that the patriarchs made use of many wives solely for procreative and not for “wanton” purposes.

The seemingly quiet revolution that occurred in the church, reaching its zenith with Augustine, met at least some resistance. Jovinianus (d. 405) was condemned by the synods of Rome and Milan late in the fourth century. A monk himself, he was condemned for denying that virginity as such was a higher state than marriage, or that abstaining from food was as such better than thoughtful eating. Helvidius was another of the same period who was condemned by Jerome for arguing that Mary and Joseph sired children subsequent to Jesus’ birth and therefore that Mary was not a perpetual virgin, an argument with solid biblical support. These fourth-century remnants of the Catholic sensualist tradition were buried by the juggernaut of the sexual purity ideal and are now names known only by the documents which condemn them. Augustine himself joined in the attack on Jovinianus and Jovinians. Against them he argued that marriage is good because it provides companionship and because it allows wicked carnal desire to be redeemed when intended for procreation. But perpetual virginity is the better way. The church had by this time moved far from its Jewish roots.

In the seventh century Gregory the Great surpassed even Augustine by identifying the peculiar evil of sexuality as the pleasure that accompanies it. With Gregory, sex and sin are made synonymous.

Sexual purity rooted itself in the church through the centuries of the so-called Dark Ages, nurtured by the monastic life which flourished during this period. In a significant shift in nomenclature, these monastics themselves ultimately became known as the “religious.” The final victory of the celibacy rule for clergy in the twelfth century was paralleled by a widespread flowering of unabashed homosexuality. (See John Boswell, Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality, University of Chicago Press, 1980, p. 243.) This development is not surprising in light of Laeuchli’s earlier interpretation of the drive for sexual purity as a flight from heterosexuality.
The Reformation brought the first significant challenge to the then firmly established norm of sexual purity. Clerical marriage and the abolition of monastic life were major items of the Protestant agenda. Each dramatically undermined the ideal of sexual purity. But as the various and varied Protestant movements institutionalized themselves into churches, none quite laid the axe to the root of the tree on the sexual purity norm. These movements radicalized the authority structure in the new institutions in contrast to the Roman system from which they had defected. But the sexual purity norm was not radicalized. The most that could be said is that marital sex came out from under a cloud. Some of the reformers were as reactionary in sexual matters as they were radical in others. What began with the Protestants was a process or erosion or slippage of the sexual purity norm, a process which continues into the present.

Of the two major Protestant reformers, Luther was closer to restoring a Jewish valuation of sexuality than Calvin. Calvin maintained the pre-Reformation view that virginity was morally superior to marriage, and he condemned the polygamy of the Hebrew patriarchs. But Luther was quite profoundly Jewish in his valuation of sexuality. He gave permission for bigamy to Philip of Hesse, concluding that there was no divine injunction against it, pointing in particular to the polygamy of the Hebrew patriarchs. His advice to a woman with an impotent husband was to get her husband’s permission to take a lover. (Luther’s Works, vol. 36, Word and Sacrament II, Abdel R. Wentz & Helmut T. Lehmann, eds., Fortress Press, 1959, p. 103.) To Wolfgang Reissenbusch, who was hesitating over his marriage, Luther wrote: “Why should you delay? . . . It must, should and will happen in any case. Stop thinking about it and go to it right merrily. Your body demands it. God wills it and drives you to it. There is nothing you can do about it.” (Derrick Sherwin Bailey, Sexual Relations in Christian Thought, Harper & Bros., 1959, p. 170.) But regrettably Luther never worked through clearly and systematically the implications of the sexual purity norm as it had ascended in the church’s history. As a result, his earthiness, his love of body, and his zesty full-blooded sexuality, so reminiscent of Jewish sexuality, was lost in the subsequent generations of institutional Lutheranism.
Only in recent decades have the churches experienced further significant erosion of their sexual purity ideal. There have been notable efforts recently to face the churches with the reality of the sexual revolution, perhaps the most significant being Anthony Kosnik's *Human Sexuality: New Directions in American Catholic Thought* (Paulist Press, 1977). And the Presbyterians, for example, have produced a study for their members that questions the credibility of the ideal of premarital virginity. But none have directly challenged the seventeen-hundred-year-old Neoplatonist/Christian ideal of sexual purity. And some, like the Episcopal Church in a recent national convention, in a paroxysm of reaction to the sexual revolution, have "reaffirmed tradition," seemingly unaware of the conflict lying within tradition itself.

Jews, on the other hand, are far better prepared by their tradition to affirm some of the emerging values of the sexual revolution. From the time, and even before, when Jephthah's daughter mourned her virginity, sexual innocence has not been held in high esteem in Jewish tradition. Both marriage and coitus are consistently viewed as obligatory in Jewish tradition. The Talmud levies financial penalties on spouses, both husband and wife, who refuse to consent to coitus. It even schedules minimal coital frequency for various occupations; e.g., twice a week for laborers, once a month for camel drivers, every day for the unemployed, etc. It also spells out minimal sexual obligations owed to respective wives in a polygamous marriage. Marriage is to be entered into even when no procreation is possible. The Talmud says that a man, presumably a widower, may desist from further procreation if he has children, but not from further marriage. The unmarried as well as the abstemious are viewed with suspicion and even penalized. In 1749 the city of Jerusalem issued an ordinance barring all unmarried men between the ages of twenty and sixty from living within the precincts of that Holy City. Much earlier the Mishna had proscribed unmarried men from becoming teachers of children.

Coitus is not only affirmed in Jewish tradition. It is regarded, with food and clothing, as a basic human necessity and an obligation. It is what God has ordered for humans. It is what man and woman owe each other. Nor is it restricted within monogamy. In thirteenth-century Spain, Nahmanides declared explicitly what is implicit elsewhere in Jewish tradition, that relations with an
unattached woman are permissible. Sex is a sin only in the context of a broken promise, a betrayal of covenant, or an act of aggression or self-aggrandizement. Its purposes are not limited to procreation. Sheer human pleasure is its divine purpose.

The extent to which Christianity has separated itself from its Jewish roots is both remarkable and regrettable. David Feldman, in *Marital Relations, Birth Control and Abortion in Jewish Law* (Schocken Books, 1974), illustrates the divergence rather pointedly by contrasting the medieval Jewish “Epistle of Holiness” of the school of Nahmanides with Peter Lombard of the same period. Lombard maintained that the Holy Spirit stayed absent from the room of married folk performing the act even for generation alone. Christians during this era were encouraged to honor sexual abstinence on Thursdays in memory of the arrest of Jesus, on Fridays in memory of his death, on Saturdays in honor of the Virgin Mary, on Sundays commemorating the Resurrection, and on Mondays in commemoration of departed souls. The “Epistle of Holiness,” on the other hand, maintains that pious Jews prefer the Sabbath for their marital love because it is “holy unto the Lord” (p. 100).

Friedrich Nietzsche observed that Christianity had given Eros poison to drink. She didn’t die, he said, she degenerated into Vice.

On the issues of sexual ethics, Christians could be led by the Jews out of seventeen hundred years of wandering in the wilderness.

It is not without significance that in English the word *venereal*, pertaining to Venus, the Roman goddess of love, has developed an exclusively pejorative connotation. Since the fourth century, the church has given Venus over to the devil. The sexual revolution now taking place calls for the rehabilitation of Venus, the redemption of the venereal. The church, which claims to know much about redemption, could play a great part in that process. It could do so if it would give attention to its own Jewish roots. Herman Wouk tells us this: “What in other cultures has been a deed of shame, or of comedy, or of orgy, or of physical necessity,
or of high romance, has been in Judaism one of the main things God wants man to do. If it turns out to be the keenest pleasure in life, that is no surprise to a people eternally sure God is good." (This Is My God, tr. Richard Strahan, Doubleday, 1959, p. 155).

On the issues of sexual ethics, Christians could be led by the Jews out of seventeen hundred years of wandering in the wilderness. On the other hand, if the churches continue to prop up the old goddess of sexual purity, they will destine themselves to become select clubs for the sexually suppressed. The French Roman Catholic theologian Jean-Marie Pohier says it would be sad if men and women of our time passed by Christianity on the assumption that the church wasn’t even aware of the oddness of its attitude toward the pleasure of sexuality. (See “Pleasure and Christianity,” Concilium: Religion in the Seventies, vol. 100, Sexuality in Contemporary Catholicism, Franz Bockle and J. M. Pohier, eds., Seabury Press, 1976, p. 109.) Pohier’s fears are to some extent already confirmed. The Protestant theologian D. S. Bailey has written that no task is more noble or more urgent than to rescue the sacred gift of sexuality from the degradation to which it has come (Sexual Relations, p. 257). In this nuclear age there is much more at stake in the survival of our own species and the habitability of this good green planet earth. But if we can manage to survive, certainly Bailey is correct.

RESPONSES FROM READERS

Lawrence raises more questions than he answers in his article. He does not define sexual purity, and I really do not know whether he means celibacy, monogamy, heterosexuality, or total abstinence. He looks at a plethora of ideas, but all in absence of a definite framework. Nor does he define sexual revolution. So it is difficult to know what is revolutionary. He concludes that we need to “rescue the sacred gift of sexuality from the degradation to which it has come,” but he fails to define the nature of the degradation.

I am a pastoral psychotherapist and many of my clients are struggling with issues of sexuality. Some have been promiscuous, some are concerned about sexual identity, and some have problems of sexual dysfunction. Some have been raped, some are
victims of incest, and some wonder about the unspeakable joy they are supposed to experience, but never have. Therefore I approached the Lawrence article eagerly. I turned the pages rapidly, then reread them and as I did so my eagerness not only abated, it died. Thus the relevance to my ministry is almost nil.

Guilt and sex and the church are almost synonymous; yet, little attention is given to this issue in the article. Part of the ministry of pastoral psychotherapy is to help people distinguish neurotic guilt from real guilt. Unfortunately, many people learned their neurotic guilt from the church. While real guilt can be a moving, motivating force that pushes people to be all that God created them to be, neurotic guilt traps persons in a sticky morass of feelings that is not productive. Dealing with this issue would be relevant.

The advent of contraception is mentioned only in passing; yet if we talk of sexual revolution this is vital. My clients have more freedom sexually, and likewise they have more responsibility. Parenthood is now a choice, not a coercion. In the past the fear of pregnancy has been the deciding factor in sexual relations, but now a moral choice must be made and lived with. Some clients long for the "good ol' days" when you knew sex was only to be in marriage and you did not decide to have children, you just had them. Contraceptives have given more freedom for smaller families, made careers for women a reality, created more career choices for men, but they bring increased moral responsibility, not only for right and wrong, but for better or best choices.

Doris M. Jones
Director, Samaritan Counseling Center
Louisville, Kentucky

Lawrence establishes the Council of Elvira and its canons on sexual matters as the boundary line between the Old Testament's relaxed values regarding heterosexual activity and the restrictive views on sex of the Christian church since the fourth century. He advocates the judgment of the current sexual revolution "by the tradition prior to the fourth century" and the acknowledgment by the church of its erroneous turn on the issue of sex.

The solution to the church's dilemma is not simple and perhaps we open up more questions in trying to suggest answers. A few factors are worth considering, however:
1. The ethical code of the Old Testament on matters of sex is based primarily on culture and nation. Because religion was at the heart of that culture, it follows that Old Testament sexuality would place primary emphasis on the perpetuation of the Hebrew stock and not on sexual abstinence.

2. There exists today a wide scope of genuine Christian postures on matters of sexual expression, ranging from the semimystics to the most relaxed, sexually active Christians. This variety of stances should be recognized and respected by the church.

3. The important place that human dignity holds in the Christian understanding of sexuality is basic to our faith. Whether the church is erroneous or not in its current sexual code of ethics, the fact remains that the God-created man and the God-created woman are not objects to be mutually used. The restrictions imposed by the Council of Elvira may or may not disappear in the years to come. However, the church will have to continue upholding a truth as old as Christianity and one which transcends councils and sexual codes: the respect toward the worth of the human being. After all, that is what separates us from the lower animals!

Jose P. Bove
Diaconal minister of education
St. Luke United Methodist Church
Columbus, Georgia

The author's reference to Bishop Paul Moore's dilemma is helpful. It could provide a good format for discussion at ministers' meetings under the heading, "What Would You Do?" However, Lawrence does not attempt to deal with both homosexual and heterosexual behavior and centers on the latter, which is just as well, in light of his research.

To refer to the Jewish position on sexuality as preferred to Christian tradition could result in a good debate. I am not so sure that Lawrence makes a good case for returning to an Old Testament perspective. Biblically, there is need for further searching on the part of all who proclaim the gospel as a way of life. Let us not be proof-texting in our responses, but rather proceed in the Spirit of Christ, who at once both liberates us from ourselves
and bonds us to him in a covenant requiring the highest standards of morality.

Perhaps a current survey among clergy on their attitudes toward sex might reveal fewer restrictions and more fulfillment than the author imagines. I for one would speak a word for the beauty and goodness of sex within the bonds of marriage. I doubt it can be surpassed!

Warren R. Ebinger
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Frederick District, UMC, Maryland
What has happened to the influential Iona Community in recent years? An update shows that the community still espouses the ideals that enabled it to stimulate the church renewal of three decades ago.

The Iona Community began in 1938 when the Rev. George F. MacLeod, shocked by the grinding poverty in Scotland during the depression and aware of the necessity for the Church of Scotland to have a serious impact on men and women caught in the middle of economic disaster, resigned his pulpit in Glasgow and brought together ministers and laymen from their regular work to form a renewal community at Iona to rebuild the dormitory and abbey. MacLeod envisioned the task of rebuilding the abbey as a tangible sign of the necessary unity and integration of worship and work, church and industry, prayer and politics, the spiritual and the material.

Why Iona? This tiny island of the Scottish Hebrides has historically maintained a significant impact on the spiritual traditions influencing Scotland and the world beyond. Identified as an early center of the Druids, the island was settled by Columba in c.563 and used as a home for his Christian missionary efforts which fanned out through north and west Scotland, and eventually through Britain to Europe as far as eastern Russia. There is strong evidence to suggest that the Ionan monks took with

This article was written as a result of the author's visits to Iona in 1975 and, more recently in 1982, his conversations with Lord George MacLeod in Edinburgh and with Ron Ferguson on Iona, and in response to Ferguson's comments in The Coracle, the newspaper of the Iona Community. Robert Gustafson is professor and chairman of the Philosophy and Religion Department of Pembroke State University of the University of North Carolina system, Pembroke, North Carolina.
them from Iona what is known as the Book of Kells, one of the most famous illuminated Gospel manuscripts in the world. Later a nunnery was established. The 1½-by-3½-mile island has held a special place in the spiritual history of Scotland, evidenced by its selection as the burial site for more than sixty kings (forty of whom were from Scotland, including Macbeth and Duncan). George MacLeod recognized Iona as a "very thin place, just a piece of tissue paper between things spiritual and things material."

Through his twenty-nine years of persuasive leadership, Iona became anew a spiritual center for a religious community. It grew into an ecumenical community of men and women from around the world, seeking new ways of living the gospel. The impact of Iona had been felt beyond Scotland in similar communities sharing a common discipline of prayer and Bible study, economic sharing, planning of time, meeting together and working for peace. Kirkridge in Pennsylvania reflected that influence under the leadership of John Oliver Nelson.

George Docherty, a former minister of the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C., and now retired in St. Andrews, Scotland, reflected, "I believe George is the most important and influential churchman in Scotland in the twentieth century. He brought a new emphasis to ministry and worship long overdue. Ministry in the inner cities was valued as were innovations in worship and liturgy."

With the rebuilding of the abbey completed in 1967, George MacLeod, now the Very Reverend Lord MacLeod of Fuinary, relinquished leadership of the community. The dynamic MacLeod, who will be ninety this year, is a statesman currently serving in the House of Lords and working on a manuscript of his views of the times through which he has lived and worked. Active in the affairs of the Church of Scotland, MacLeod has penned and distributed to the clergy and laity a plea to the church to take a stand against nuclear arms. Even while extending warm and friendly hospitality in his home with humor and wit, MacLeod asserts that age is no excuse from taking part in the political and ecclesiastical affairs of Great Britain. His eyes flashed as he pronounced: "It is tragic to see how many men and women are unemployed and who have no prospect for employment. They take it too personally, blaming themselves, when it is the system's fault and not their own."

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Something must be done about who controls the finances and economic power in the world. Too few people have too much power." MacLeod is directing his energies into efforts in the House of Lords to turn around the financial and economic power structures of Britain.

The Rev. Ron Ferguson is the fourth and present leader of the Iona Community, following the Rev. Ian Reid (1967–74) and the Rev. Grame Brown (1974–82). He sees the community currently in a period of transition and sees as essential his task to forge new directions. His style and orientation are very different from MacLeod's. Entering the ministry after seven years as a journalist, Ferguson sees himself not as a charismatic leader; MacLeod carried this description with his commanding physical presence.

Ferguson, who rejects the role of authoritarian leader, did not seek to become the leader of Iona, although he was deputy warden of the abbey from 1980 to 1982. He came to the abbey from Glasgow, where, from 1971 to 1979, he was community minister in Easterhouse, a big public housing area. It had been his first ministry following his education at St. Andrews, Edinburgh, and Duke. His eloquence as a writer was recognized through his work for the *Edinburgh Evening News* and his brilliant biography of Geof Shaw, inner-city minister turned political leader. A tall man, but shorter than MacLeod, Ferguson's features and voice are softer than MacLeod's. There is a gentle but deep intensity in his eyes and voice which has been described as the "wee voice of the Western Scots." The differences between Ferguson and MacLeod are accepted and respected by both men, with Ferguson crediting his acceptance of the challenge to give new directions to Iona to MacLeod's persuasion. Ferguson, himself a twelve-year member of the community, started coming to Iona in 1964 when it was under MacLeod's leadership. He shares a deep commitment to what the Iona Community represents. "I know that the problems we and the community are facing ... are world problems and not just ours. Perhaps we may have something to offer others."

Ferguson, like MacLeod, does not claim to be neutral. He shares his strong commitment: "In theology I am a mildly reconstructed MacLeodian. ... As for politics, having been brought up in a West Fife mining town which has provided most of the Scottish miners' leaders, I inhaled socialism with the coal dust. ... I stand on the
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broad left of the Labour Party.” Ferguson’s approach, however, is based less on political theory and more on his belief in incarnational theology: “What stirs the imagination in the Iona Community story is not an idea about theology, but an incarnated sign in the form of a building prayerfully... put together, stone by stone.” There is no more radical statement than “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

“What stirs the imagination in the Iona Community story is not an idea about theology, but an incarnated sign in the form of a building prayerfully... put together, stone by stone.” There is no more radical statement than “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

When George MacLeod sent out a call to rebuild the abbey, it was to those who would join the community and enact the parable of the unity between worship and work. Ferguson is sending out a call to the community to rebuild hope: hope for the cessation of war and restoration of justice; hope for the establishment of a life ethic to replace the work ethic; and hope in community-making and celebration.

How can the community help forge new images of the Jesus-life over against the dominant success models being paraded today and to which the contemporary church has too much acclimated itself? This is the challenge Iona now faces: to present radical alternatives to our present state of affairs within the churches and the world. For Iona to provide leadership it must continue to be a source of spiritual power, empowering its members and friends to embody in their lives the strength of incarnational theology and ethics, in shops and businesses, factories and schools, sanctuaries and political centers. In short, the community must challenge secular assumptions about the gospel and the increasing privatism of Christians who would retreat to a narrowly circumscribed articulation of the place of Christianity.

Ferguson’s faith in the survival of Iona and the radical alternatives it must provide is related to the success and results of the work of three recently organized task forces, addressing issues
of (1) peace and justice, (2) work and the economic order, and (3) community and celebration.

(1) Peace and justice: The immediacy of the resolution of the peace issue, made urgent by the threat not only to civilization but to the earth itself by new nuclear programs and missile capabilities, has led the community to employ a full-time worker for peace and justice, Helen Steven. Ferguson believes that peace is linked to justice for the obvious reason that financial instability in the world is related to the fact that so many resources of the world are being controlled or used up by a relatively few nations and that injustice and militarism go hand in hand. How are Christians to respond to this staggering problem? Ferguson states: "The Iona Community believes that if we are to be true to the Gospel of Jesus Christ we must say no to the arms race and be prepared to disarm unilaterally. We must also work for peace by prayer, protest, study, nonviolent demonstrations, education, reconciliation, training in nonviolent and political action towards a more just world. This means a redistribution of the world's resources in favor of the poor and hungry."

Through the untiring efforts of MacLeod over the last forty years and the support of the Iona Community and others, the Church of Scotland faced and, with the support of a number of conservative churchmen joining with moderates and liberals, passed a resolution, proposed by Reid and seconded by Doig, both former moderators, calling for the Church of Scotland to oppose the use of nuclear power for warlike purposes, to join with the rapidly growing millions in other countries and in other places who equally renounce the use of nuclear power for warlike purposes, and to press for the immediate cessation of the further manufacture of such armaments. This is a strong statement for the Church of Scotland to make, but as Ferguson remarked, a stand whose logic was so fierce that almost no other action could be taken. I must add that my conversations with those in the community and outside of the community reveal a genuine fear of a nuclear holocaust precipitated by the two superpowers.

(2) Work and the new economic order: Ferguson recognized that the current economic situation differed from that of the 1930s when people could look forward to future employment and to a better economic system. "Men and women today face the prospect that
unemployment is a permanent feature, not just a temporary dislocation. Work is not going to be available. People are not profitable anymore, machines are." For so long, people have grown up believing that a person's worth was connected with work.

This task force must examine different ways of valuing people and find alternative kinds of work. Many different questions must be faced. Can we change from a work ethic to a life ethic? Can the resident structures at the abbey—where everybody works, receives an allowance keep and holiday pay—be translated into a practical urban environment? Can hope be rebuilt as easily as the stones rebuilt the abbey? Will the impact of the work of the task force be relevant for the rest of the Western world as well as for Scotland?

(3) Community and celebration: The Iona Community was founded in the belief that we cannot be Christians as individuals. We need one another. Community is not easy, and any romantic notions of the Christian life are soon dispelled within the Iona Community. What happens on Iona is not complete until it is translated into the inner city and housing units with joy and celebration. How difficult it is for people to celebrate, to enjoy life and God. Celebrate and enjoy they did last year when the play *Macbeth* was staged on Iona using a group from Glasgow and participants from Iona and elsewhere.

This task force is also concerned with efforts to adapt contemporary theology to worship and drama. The Iona Abbey Services found Protestants and Catholics joining together in worship services characterized by meaningfully innovative liturgies. It was obvious from talking with the youth on Iona and elsewhere in Scotland that Iona was reaching them. Iona's past impact in ministry and new forms of Christian service are now a matter of record. The future impact revolves around the reception of the recommendations not only by the Church of Scotland but other religious groups facing similar challenges.

Iona has an appeal that draws as many as 100,000 people every year to the island and the abbey. The membership of the community, numbering 151, is enhanced by 700 associates and friends, who are scattered throughout the world from Britain, Africa, New Zealand, India, Australia, Europe, and America. Iona
NEW DIRECTIONS FOR IONA

is still a special place for renewal and commitment to mission. As Ferguson has stated, "Iona is a place of inspiration. It is a holy place." Felix Mendelssohn, the famous composer, sensed the uniqueness of Iona and, after an 1829 visit, wrote, "When in some future time I shall sit in a madly crowded assembly with music dancing around me, and the wish arises to retire into the loneliest loneliness, I shall think of Iona." Samuel Johnson attested to the spiritual power of Iona: "That man is little to be envied whose piety would not grow warmer among the ruins of Iona." William Thompson in Passages About Earth considered Iona, along with Lindisfarne, Glastonbury, and Stonehenge, to be a "power point" or "power center" where energies from two or more dimensions converge.

The hope continues that the abiding spiritual power of Iona will energize those men and women committed to the work of the task forces and that they will experience the challenge of Iona, which MacLeod called "just a piece of tissue paper between things spiritual and things material."

Why should American Christians be interested in Iona, the Iona Community, and its new directions? Iona is more than a footnote in the history of Christianity. There is something of value for American churches and Christians. My remarks will be limited to considering (1) the relevance for American churches of the model of relations between the Iona Community and the Church of Scotland; (2) the potential vitality for American Christians of the triad of incarnational theology, shared discipline, and worship; (3) the freedom to begin new methods of outreach in times of crisis; and (4) the stimulus for renewal provided by such a community.

(1) The institutional model warrants serious consideration in this country. The Iona Community, as an ecumenical community comprising laity and clergy, comes under the jurisdiction of the Church of Scotland, but the community maintains a responsible level of independence that permits it to develop and pursue ideas to plans, plans to programs, with a directness and timeliness not always possible in a structured denominational system. It is often quite difficult for such systems to maintain a persistent position on critical issues in the absence of an effective advocate. One example from Iona's recent past will illustrate this statement. For a number of years, the community's position on peace and nuclear arms has
been known. Over the years it has argued its position with vigor, so much so that one board member in a conversation with Lord MacLeod expressed "concern" over the strong advocacy of the community in these areas. The community's diligence was rewarded when the Church of Scotland passed its resolution on nuclear weapons.

It would not be possible to have an exact replica of Iona in this country, but ecumenical communities can be established which have similar relationships and commitments. Has this been done already in this country? I doubt it, at least not to the extent that should be considered. Is there a danger of such a community being a church within a church, an elite among the elect? That possibility always exists and does so now within existing denominational structures. A more hopeful attitude will welcome and encourage new efforts by such a community and its members to provide new insights, programs, challenges. It is time to challenge Christians in America in ways they have never been challenged before.

The theology of the Iona Community commits its members to an obedience to Jesus Christ in which prayer and political action, directed toward changing the world into a more just place, are equally important.

(2) We can benefit from and adapt (copy?) the way in which the Iona Community integrates its theology, shared discipline, and approach to worship. The idealism inherent in this triad is potent, and people, starved for ideals that have impact on lives, will be rewarded. The root theology of Iona ought to be congenial to biblically based American Christians. This incarnational theology, the conviction that God became human in Jesus Christ, means that there can be no false division between the spiritual and the material, prayer and politics, worship and work. For Iona and any similar communities in this country, this theology commits its members to an obedience to Jesus Christ in which prayer and political action, directed toward changing the world into a more just place, are equally important.
Secondly, American Christians may very well respond to a common discipline which for Iona involves a fivefold rule of prayer and Bible study, economic sharing, planning of time, and working for peace. A casual perusal of bookstore shelves will reveal a number of books dedicated to one or all of these topics, and they are being bought by people.

Thirdly, American Christians are showing keen interest in worship. Worship has been at the heart of Iona, and five things should be noted about worship as practiced by the community: (1) It is daily worship rather than only Sunday worship. Each weekday begins and ends with worship. (2) Daily worship is set in the pattern of daily work. (3) It is public worship. All services are open to anyone who wants to come. (4) It is corporate worship in which responses are used, and corporate praises and unison prayers are woven into each service. (5) It is creaturely worship; the senses are brought into worship services in a variety of ways, including motion.

Incarnational theology, a discipline, and worship provide for members of the Iona Community the bonds of strength and a sense of meaning. I believe American Christians are ready for similar challenges and opportunities.

(3) American churches can benefit from the community's most recent initiative in urban missions in establishing a number of "Columban Houses." These houses will consist of little communities of people sharing life together in one or several homes in an area, and witnessing to the Iona Community's central concern of peace and justice, work and the new economic order, and community and celebration. These groups will share worship together and will follow at least part of the rule of the Iona Community. There is no particular pattern, but the community, while inviting participants to find their own model of shared life, does offer some suggestions as to how employed and unemployed can live in areas of high unemployment in housing areas or in inner-city areas. The community is seeking not only to help people find places to live, it is trying to help them find new ways to live the gospel today. The common thread will be that these Columban houses, named after Columba, who saw Iona as an inspiring base for missions, will have the declared aim of expressing the concerns of the Iona Community.
What initiatives similar to the Columban Houses are in existence today or are in the planning stages—by churches or groups similar to the Iona Community? What organizations are facing now the staggering tasks of offering tangible aid and Christian nurture to the ever-mounting number of unemployed? What Iona is doing can be done by Christians who care and are empowered to act.

(4) Perhaps the most telling reasons for having communities patterned after the Iona Community is that their existence is a stimulus to renewal. It is obvious to the point of being trite to state that mainline denominations need renewal. Budgets may have been increased, but memberships have decreased in recent years.

With the inspiration of John Gardner's *Self-Renewal* in mind, we are reminded that the renewal of societies and organizations (this includes churches) can go forward only if someone cares. Apathy and lowered motivation are the most widely noted characteristics of a civilization (churches?) on the downward path. Apathetic people accomplish nothing. People who believe in nothing change nothing for the better. A church is never finished. We cannot build it and then leave it standing as the Pharaohs did the pyramids. A church has to be built and rebuilt. It has to be recreated in each generation by believing, caring men and women. There is no one way to renew a church or a denomination, but the existence of a community like Iona ought to be a strong stimulus for renewal.

Ron Ferguson, in words appropriate to American Christians and their denominations, realistically appraises the challenge facing the community: "Our very weakness can be one of strength at a time when the church must learn to live again as a stranger in the Empire. We must find ourselves as a radical community again, but with a new and streamlined style, and a lighter touch. Our vocation is prophetic action rooted in prayer: our theology and life is incarnational. . . . Well, it's make or break time, isn't it?"
PERSONAL LIBRARY—PUBLIC RESOURCE

DALE GOLDSMITH

Sharing books is too often overlooked as a part of the ministry of counseling and teaching.

A pastor who is professionally trained and who has spent much time in theological bookstores (buying!) and libraries has a reservoir of experience and books which could well serve many laypersons in weathering life's crises and in theological growth. We should consider the ministry of sharing our books. I do not mean wholesale forcing of books on everyone who crosses our path, but the judicious and timely use of resources that have been personally helpful to us in the face of whatever life has thrown at us. How do we carry out this ministry? Some examples:

A parishioner-friend had presented me with a book for my opinion; he subsequently gave me another (longer!) book to read. The theme of the second was much the same as that of the first: God rewards those whose actions are faithful. My friend had expressed interests to me, both in conversation and through the sharing of his reading material. It was clear that this was an individual who was interested in a crucial question: the relation of man's good or evil behavior to God's grace. Here was a reader. He was intelligent and ought not to be confined to hearing only the pastor's point of view. He should be given solid food, not milk (I Cor. 3:2).

My plan was to give him a copy of a work by Martin Luther, "The Treatise on Christian Liberty." In this thirty-page document, Luther sets forth the role of salvation (it is not dependent upon our

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good works) and the role of Christian service (we owe such to all people). Luther makes it clear that salvation and the receipt of God's blessings are not controlled by our works. My intentions fell awry when the document could not be found. (The lesson to learn here: never promise what you cannot deliver.) I fell back on a second "classic" which had been meaningful to me in understanding the nature of evil: C. S. Lewis's *Screwtape Letters*. In this way I could share my own insights as well as open some previously unenjoyed experience to a parishioner.

A similar situation arose with a young friend with whom I had had earnest but sporadic discussions of his passionate interest—Marxism—for some time. Having demonstrated my interest in the topic—but clearly in over my own head—I suggested—and he agreed—that he read John Kavanaugh's *Following Christ in a Consumer Society*. The book was able to do what I had been unable to do: describe Christianity to someone who usually looked at the world in totally different terms.

Another approach is to use a time of crisis as an opportunity to exercise this resource. Often people will read anything they can on the subject when they are in trouble. One frequent situation is that of divorce. On one occasion, one of the parties was convinced that the act of divorce would prompt God to withdraw grace from the person. I suggested a brief passage on the topic of divorce from Barth's *Church Dogmatics*. (We did not need to struggle with the whole eight thousand pages; the four to five pages I had in mind were available in a thin pamphlet.) In that section, Barth argues that for a marriage which patently does not enjoy God's grace, the most Christian response is divorce. In fact, divorce may be gospel—God's grace at work—in that difficult situation.

My reasoning in sharing such material with a parishioner was that here Barth offered a well-worked-out understanding of one of life's experiences in light of a comprehensive thinking-through of his own faith. This reader could then share with Barth a discussion of a topic that was intensely familiar and vitally important, and could have the benefit of the thoughts of a deep thinker at a point and in a way that would be meaningful and helpful. This person's growth and potential helpfulness to others in the same predicament could be enhanced and deepened.
I am not arguing here for the views of Luther, Lewis, Kavanaugh, or Barth—although they have all been most meaningful to me. I omit bibliographic details to these works, also. I have written to encourage (and illustrate) the use of a resource we keep hidden. Perhaps we underestimate the abilities of the nonprofessional; perhaps this kind of individualized pastoral/teaching activity seems too time-consuming. I have found it to be most helpful to others as well as stimulating and satisfying to myself. Let's go public with our heretofore private resources.
For those of us who wrestle with the threefold task of preacher, pastor, and theologian, Paul’s letters to the church at Corinth are a profound source of instruction and comfort. They instruct, in that Paul held these three roles in appropriate tension. He came to Corinth as preacher, with the avowed purpose of proclaiming the gospel in its essentials. The foundation of this church would be the good news of Jesus Christ, crucified under Pontius Pilate, and raised by God from the dead while Pilate still governed. Its faith would rest, not in human wisdom, but in the power of God (I Cor. 2:1-4).

Yet as the letters make abundantly clear, this was not enough. The congregation needed constant nurture, guidance, and correction. The anguish of a pastor is evident in Paul’s dealings with their problems: factions formed around different leaders (I Cor. 1:11 ff.); abuses of the Lord’s Supper (I Cor. 11:18-22); loose morality (I Cor. 5:1-5; 6:12-20); rejection of the doctrine of the resurrection (I Cor. 15:12); and perhaps the most painful pastoral experience of all, their rejection of Paul as one whose apostolic authority was suspect (I Cor. 4:3, 15; 9:1 ff).

It is all the more instructive, therefore, to note that Paul fought for his authority with sound theology. If he was to be judged by the Corinthian church, he was determined that its judgment should be based on the proper criteria. As he himself put it, the milk of the gospel could not be a permanent spiritual diet (I Cor. 3:2). Without the meat of solid doctrine, the body would not, could not, be
healthy. This is why the Corinthian letters, the epistle to the Romans notwithstanding, give us Pauline theology at its best. He is writing to stretch a living congregation in its faith, and in so doing is not only establishing his authority as an apostle, but is instructing every minister of the gospel who has followed him in pastoral leadership.

Herein also is the comfort of the Corinthian letters. They reassure those of us who serve today as preachers, pastors, and theologians that the threefold task remains authentic in the apostolic tradition. Preaching is still the proclamation of the essentials of the gospel message, centered on the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Likewise the pastoral office remains the nurture, guidance, and building up of the people of God as they live out the implications of the evangel. The pastor cannot merely tend the flock where it is, but in the power of the Holy Spirit must lead it to new pastures through a deeper understanding of the Christian life. And for this, theological expertise is the basic tool. It is easy to forget that Paul addressed his letters to people whose intellectual capacity was in no way extraordinary. Members of the contemporary church are just as able to grasp the deep truths of the faith—and further, are willing and able to use the vocabulary that goes with them.

When this threefold task is not kept in tension, however, pastoral leaders come to rely on substitute forms of authority which are ultimately found wanting. The minister who exercises pastoral skills alone, for example, finds it difficult to avoid the consumerist role of personal priest to people who come to expect this sort of service. True pastoral authority is thus subverted by the techniques of community building or personal counseling. Not that these are unimportant skills per se; but nor are they the stuff of the body of Christ in mission to the world. Likewise the minister who takes to the pulpit without sound doctrine finds it increasingly difficult to avoid the platitudes of folk religion, in which the proclamation of the Word becomes tailored more to the preferences of the congregation than the essentials of the tradition. All of which is not without some irony; for it is when pastoral priorities are determined according to the responsiveness of church members rather than the imperatives of the gospel that the members' needs are least addressed. The great teachings of the
chuch then become obscure, because their context has been sabotaged. By contrast, the word of comfort and challenge from the Corinthian letters is that theology can and should be undertaken with zest and application. It does feed the laos, and it does authenticate true pastoral authority.

The lections for this study are rich in all of the dimensions of this Pauline task. There is the central proclamation of Jesus Christ in the fullness of the apostolic tradition. There is the pastoral office, ranging from guidance in the implications of the atonement to the nuts and bolts of ecclesial finances. And, permeating the whole, there is the doctrine of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, presented theologically as the wellspring of the gospel and the bedrock of the church.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE RESURRECTION

Precisely because Paul regarded the Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth as the wellspring of the gospel, it is important to be clear what this means for kerygmatic preaching. Our lections indicate that in his earlier letter (I Corinthians 15) he seems to have resolved the dispute over the doctrine at Corinth: at least, he regards it as no longer in question. But the Corinthians had rightly sensed that this was the intellectual offense of the evangel—the core of the tradition which would require the most searching response. The life and death of Jesus was one thing. Whatever theological inferences might be drawn from his ministry and his suffering, the existence of this human being was readily verifiable by the early church. After all, Pilate had ordered his execution. It was another thing, however, to proclaim that he was raised from the dead. This perforce placed the weight of verification on the witnesses to whom he had appeared, rendering the historicity of the event as much a question as its theology.

It remains so to this day. And any preacher who has not wrestled with the question has probably opted for one of two kerygmatic errors: the preaching of a dogma which fails to take into account its theological implications; or a philosophical interpretation which fails to take into account the veracity of the tradition.

To begin with the tradition itself, it is vitally important that we take it at its word: the Resurrection was something which took
place when Pilate was still governor of Judea. Of course, we have no record of the actual happening. The scriptural accounts are of Christ’s post-Resurrection appearances, not the Resurrection itself. But the language of the narratives is that of sight and hearing, e.g., Matt. 28:9 ff.; Mark 16:9 ff.; Luke 24:13 ff.; John 20:11 ff.; Acts 9:3 ff. Christ spoke to those to whom he appeared, or else he would not have been recognized as the one who was crucified. Moreover, the Resurrection did not take place as the disciples had been expecting it. The contemporary resurrection belief, which they may or may not have assimilated into their understanding of Christ’s ministry, was in a general resurrection. This resurrection was of Christ alone. In addition, the current apocalyptic belief held that the resurrection would herald the end of time, and clearly this did not come to pass.  

Unfortunately, the historical-critical method has given the Resurrection every possible interpretation except what the early church said it was—something which happened to Jesus, and not to the disciples. The reason for this quickly emerges from the inventory of theories which have been put forward: the urge to explain what is essentially a gift of faith. Attempts to view the Resurrection as anything other than the event as described in the tradition usually begin with presuppositions which, as Richard R. Niebuhr has perpectively observed, hold the content of the early church’s faith to be normative, but mistrust its mental processes.  

The fundamental confusion is a failure to distinguish between the tradition and its theological significance. We accept the tradition in faith, we affirm it, and we proclaim it. We also reflect on it theologically. But we should not confuse these tasks. For when theological reflection takes the place of proclaimation of the gospel, the message is disempowered, and we break faith with the faithful.  

What Paul handed over to the Corinthian church, and what has been handed on to us across the centuries, is the message which we too must proclaim to the world in which we live: namely, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen
asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. (1 Cor. 15:3-8)

Then, and only then, does the question become one of theological interpretation.

To distinguish between proclamation of the Resurrection and its theological significance, however, is in no way to diminish the importance of the latter. If we proclaim that the Nazarene was raised from the dead, we should also ask the theological question of what this means for the world and the church.

For any theology to be meaningful, it must address the dominant mood of its time. And in the late twentieth century, the pressing question is that of the future. This is due in large part to the influence of Marxian philosophy, in which the human race is seen to be striving for what lies ahead, for dreams not yet realized, for a future not yet consummated. As expressed by Ernst Bloch, whose philosophy incorporated much of the language of the early church—its messianism and its apocalypticism—this is no mere renewal of the human race. "For renewal implies recourse to what has been (however inimical it may be to what has since come to be); whereas the new life implies advance towards what has as yet never appeared (however much it may still rely on the dialectics of history)."

This interface between Marxian and Christian thinking has been the inspiration of much of the theology of hope, which more than anything else in our time has "fashioned the instrumentation with which to tie a dominant twentieth century mood to earliest Christianity." Its leading exponent has long been acknowledged to be Jürgen Moltmann, whose first major work, Theology of Hope, brilliantly reinstated eschatology at the center of Christian proclamation. Not least because it was forged in dialogue, the book evinces a sensitivity to the dangers of false polarities in eschatological thought: on the part of Christians, a tendency towards a spiritualized apocalyptic; on the part of Marxists, the danger of "presumptive utopias." The early church was a community of hope, expecting its Lord to return, and preparing for the imminent realization of the future. But this hope must not be adapted to a transcendent eschatology divorced from history, nor yet to a saving plan of history which substitutes for God.
Even more important, as Moltmann has acknowledged in his later work, a theology which beckons us to God's future cannot, must not, ignore the reality of God's present. Injustice, torture, disease, and starvation are sufficiently pervasive in our time to render a facile proclamation of the kingdom immediately suspect. To put it bluntly, if we are to trust in God's promises, God has much for which to answer.

Moltmann addresses these questions with a strong christology, the focal point for which is the Resurrection. He views this event as God's ultimate eschatological promise, placing it first of all in the context of the Hebrew Bible. It is the God who fulfilled promises to Abraham and Isaac, and who led the people of Israel out of Egypt, who also raised Jesus Christ from the dead. But in Christ, God did not just renew promises made to a chosen people. A new promise was made, and this time to the whole human race. Jesus of Nazareth, crucified and abandoned, would be the firstfruits of those to be raised from the dead (1 Cor. 15:20).

This was the core of Paul's ministry, and the true evangel of the primitive church. The Resurrection of Jesus was the eschatological promise of a God who was already known for keeping promises and giving new hope. The raising of Christ from the dead was the ultimate warrant of God's saving righteousness.

The divine word in Christ is new solely because its fulfillment can no longer be endangered or abolished, as once was the case, but has become incontestable; and it is unique, despite all its varied earthly movement and manifold testimony and despite its prolepsis in the Old Testament, because in Christ it not only reveals anew the one eschatological salvation, but in addition also conclusively guarantees the realizing of that salvation. As such it is already present and apprehensible in history, yet solely in the form of promise, i.e., as pointing and directing us towards a still outstanding future.

The Resurrection therefore becomes meaningful in a demythologized and secular world precisely because it can be proclaimed as eschatological promise. As such, it belies any notion that the Resurrection of Jesus has already fulfilled God's salvation. For when history becomes merely the "field in which the heavenly lordship of Christ is disclosed in Church and sacrament," then interest wanes in the theological significance of the cross. History loses its eschatological direction, and is no longer "the realm in
which men suffer and hope, groaning and travelling in expectation of Christ's future for the world."

God's eschatological promise, by contrast, takes the trials, the contradictions and the godlessness of this world seriously in a meaningful way, because it makes faith and obedience possible in the world not by regarding the contradictions as of no account, but by enabling us to believe and obey on the ground of our hope in the overcoming of these contradictions by God. Faith does not come to its own in becoming radically unworldly, but by hopeful outgoing into the world it becomes a benefit to the world. By accepting the cross, the suffering and the death of Christ, by taking upon it the trials and struggles of obedience in the body and surrendering itself to the pain of love, it proclaims in the everyday world the future of the resurrection, of life and the righteousness of God."

This is why the Easter appearances of Christ are above all a call to discipleship. For to know the Risen Christ is inexorably to share at one and the same time in his cross and Resurrection, in the birthpangs of the new creation (Rom. 8:14-25). We share in the coming of the New Age to the extent that we share in the sufferings of the present. The Christian will thus be involved where the Lord of the New Age is at work—in the world, among the homeless and the oppressed, among the sinners and the sinned against. For the sake of the crucified One, the true disciples will live out their present resurrection in the power of present suffering, knowing that Christ's promises will surely come to pass.

And how do we know?
God raised him from the dead on the third day.

A NOTE ON SERMON CONTENT AND STRUCTURE

In discussing how the lections might afford a proclamation of the gospel, we shall adopt the sermon typology of the late W. E. Sangster. His volume, *The Craft of the Sermon*, is unfortunately out of print and somewhat dated. But his categories remain conspicuously fresh—the mark of a classic treatment—and prove readily adaptable to a contemporary context. He identifies six types of sermon according to subject matter, or content: (1) biblical interpretation; (2) ethical and devotional; (3) doctrinal; (4) philosophic
HOMILETICAL RESOURCES

and apologetic; (5) social; (6) evangelistic. He further identifies five types of sermon structure, the "central architecture" of what is preached: (1) exposition; (2) argument; (3) faceting; (4) categorizing; (5) analogy.

While this approach may seem unduly technical, and even restrictive, we shall see that it can in fact serve to emphasize the freedom of the pulpit in proclaiming the gospel entrusted to the church. By pointing to the many options a preacher has in forging a contemporary proclamation from the originative witness of the Scriptures, it enriches the application of the gospel to contemporary Christian living, and draws on the full range of a congregation's experience in the world.

Before commenting on each lection, therefore, a word will be said about the type of sermon to which it seems to lend itself most readily as a text. It should be stressed that these are only suggestions. The classifications are of course wholly interchangeable.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

II Corinthians 4:13-5:1

Sangster's first classification of sermon content is biblical interpretation—which immediately raises the question of why this should be a separate category at all, since every sermon should surely be in harmony with the Scriptures. Sangster's reply is disarmingly simple: for the most part, this was not how Jesus preached. Even though references to the Hebrew Bible in the Gospels are myriad, and even though he consciously announced his ministry in the words of prophecy (Luke 4:18 ff; Isa. 61:1 ff.), the substance of his proclamation was to give new meaning to ordinary human existence in the light of God's new promises. Jesus is remembered more for his parables than for detailed interpretation of the Pentateuch.

This is not to diminish the importance of biblical interpretation in the preaching of the gospel. Its purpose is to enable those who are of the household of faith better to understand and appropriate the tradition. While the Scriptures can of course be the means of reaching those beyond the church, the value of exegetical
preaching is more likely to be the edification of those who perceive
that the Bible is the book of the church and the originative witness
to their faith; and in the hands of a competent preacher this is
precisely what is affirmed. Attempts to make all sermons
exegetical, however, can lead on the one hand to obscuring the
immediacy of the gospel with the details of hermeneutics—
precisely the reason why Jesus met with resistance from the scribes
and Pharisees in his own day—and on the other hand to invoking
the authority of the biblical witness for pronouncements on
contemporary issues of discipleship which the Scriptures were
never meant to address in this direct fashion.

Homiletic freedom from the text is as important as faithful
exegesis of the text. And both should be done with a clear
understanding of their distinctive functions.

The structure which Sangster recommends for this type of
sermon is exposition—a sequential explanation of the text. And
this presents a further need for caution. To take the critical tools of
exegesis and subordinate them to a central proclamation of the
gospel can be at once illuminating and motivating for a
congregation. But biblical scholarship which is not subordinated to
the evangel can discourage the layperson from reading the Bible at
all—especially the sort of biblical scholarship which implies that
nothing less than an expert reading of the text can fathom its
meaning. There is nothing more calculated to disempower a pulpit
message than the importuning of a congregation to accept the
status of second-class exegetes.

Quite apart from the fact that this breaks a cardinal rule of
preaching—that one should never substitute one's own faith
explorations for the gospel—it overlooks the great heritage of the
Protestant tradition. All fears to the contrary notwithstanding, our
spiritual forebears pronounced that the Scriptures were an open
book. They had the temerity to affirm that, irrespective of a
person's level of expertise, spiritual insight was the key to
hermeneutics. Needless to say, scholarship must serve as a
safeguard against the presumption of using Scripture merely to
support preconceptions. But when all scholarship has been
exercised, the meaning of a text is ultimately imparted by the Holy
Spirit in the immediacy of present faith.

The wellspring of the gospel is the Risen Christ, the flaming
center of the kerygma present through the indwelling Spirit. This center cannot be imprisoned by the technics of exegesis.

Turning to the passage, it must first of all be placed in context. A brief history of the city, available in any commentary, will refer to the destruction of old Corinth in 143 BCE by the Romans and its resettlement from various parts of the empire. As a result, it was not a particularly Greek city. It was very cosmopolitan and included a Jewish community (Acts 18:4). It also had a reputation for immorality, though this has probably been exaggerated. In all likelihood, Corinth was “little better and little worse than any other great sea port and commercial centre of the age.”

Paul’s relationships with the Christian community at Corinth should also be researched, and the place which II Corinthians occupies in his correspondence. There are many questions still in dispute about the literary form of the letter, the chief of which is the disjunction between 9:15 and 10:1, indicating that in all probability chapters 1-9 and 10-13 are from different letters. Indeed, there may have been as many as five letters which Paul wrote to the Corinthians, each of them dealing in one way or another with the tensions of doctrine, ethics, and Paul’s apostolic authority.

These literary questions need not be stressed from the pulpit; unless, of course, a message is prepared from the various hypotheses to show how, time and again, Paul’s dealings with the church left him no recourse but to rely on the grace of God. Three general inferences can be drawn, however, as background for any sermon on the lections:

(a) The task of being the true church has been fraught with difficulty from the very beginning. The faithful witness to the tradition of the gospel demands plain hard work.

(b) Paul’s central message of justification by faith was honed against vigorous opposition, especially from Judaizing Christians, who seem to have been the occasion of the letter comprising II Cor. 10–13.

(c) Paul affirmed his apostolic authority by drawing on his theological training as well as his conviction that the Risen Christ had commissioned him to take the gospel to the Gentiles.

Exposition of the passage should then take into account its particular context in II Corinthians. Verses 7-12 of chapter 4 have stressed Paul’s understanding of his apostolic ministry, in which
he has contrasted the fallible humanity of the bearers of the gospel with the power of the message entrusted to them by God. Indeed, this is why they are able to withstand the afflictions and persecutions which their mission occasions at every turn. The life of the Risen Christ is present in their own lives, which means that the work they do now is for the kingdom of God, the New Age to be brought to its fulfillment at the Parousia. Their present afflictions are a sign of the new life to come.

Paul goes further. In experiencing these afflictions, Christians are all the more identified with the crucified Jesus. The process of "being done to death" for Jesus' sake is part of a Christian's discipleship, just as is the sharing of new life in Christ. The finality of death is yet to come, as is the fullness of resurrection. But to the extent that the believer identifies with Christ, death and resurrection are both experienced now by anticipation. And all of this is worthwhile, because the spirit of faith which has inspired true faith across the centuries, including that of the Psalmist (116:10), has given Paul and his helpers the assurance of their final resurrection with Jesus (vs. 14).

It is vitally important to stress that these anticipatory experiences of death and resurrection are not a substitute for the death and resurrection which come to all of us at the end of this earthly life. Of course we cannot plumb the mystery of death, nor do we know how our resurrection will take place. In fact, Paul is quite impatient in dealing with inquisitive questions in this regard (I Cor. 15:35 ff.). But the mystery of resurrection should not obscure its distinctive hope. It is the promise of a wholly new and transformed life, the passage to which lies through a death which is as real as the grave. As we have noted, to reduce this central hope of the gospel message to existential categories in the present life is to disempower the evang and subject the doctrine of the resurrection to philosophical presuppositions.

When Paul declared to the Corinthians that, if their hope in Christ had significance for this life only, then of all people he and they were most to be pitied (I Cor. 15:19), he was not trying to convince them of the resurrection by argument. He was quite simply declaring the truth—that he had gone to too much trouble and endured too many hardships merely to offer them a better life here and now. And in vs. 15 of our present lection, he repeats the
theme. All that he and his coworkers have endured has been for the sake of the Corinthians, that they might grasp the truth and the significance of God's eschatological promise, and thereby grow in grace to the glory of God.

Even so, resurrection remains a divine mystery. Paul's final word is that we must trust God completely. Resurrection is not a continuation of this present life through some spiritual disembodiment. The death which comes to us at the end of our present life is spiritual as well as physical, because our resurrection is a wholly new life. To trust in God for this new gift, we must let go of everything we know as present life. Indeed, attempts to explain life after death merely impoverish our present life: they distract us from our discipleship.

Thus, in verses 16-18, there is no dualism implied between an "outer" or "inner" nature, between body and soul, nor yet material and spiritual being. Paul's statement rather is eschatological: that our inner or new nature is being prepared for the New Age, renewed day by day even as our outer or old nature is wasting away. This renewal will come to a glorious fulfillment. The struggle will have an ending, and victory will be complete. And precisely because this victory is yet to come, we should in no way count what we have here and now as its fulfillment, assuring though the anticipatory signs might be (compare Rom. 8:24-25).

The passage comes to its triumphant closing statement in 5:1; though we must be careful not to read too much into Paul's use of the word tent. Yes, it is an appropriate expression of the transitory nature of our present existence; and yes, Paul continues in verses 2 ff. to express a Jewish abhorrence at any idea of nakedness in the life to come. But this is not his real purpose in using the metaphor. Once again, his thought is eschatological. He is anticipating the Parousia, when the new life embodied in the Risen Christ will come to fulfillment in the New Age—a fulfillment he confidently expected in his lifetime. Should anyone die before that event, they should not worry about having their present earthly home destroyed. An eternal body awaits them, pending the fullness of the New Age.

The final word, therefore, is one of assurance. The Parousia, as we know, did not come as the early church expected it. Nor, indeed, has it yet come. But those who labor in the service of its Sovereign experience it by anticipation as a present death and
resurrection. Its fulfillment, when we shall all inherit the eternal bodies which await us, renders all present afflictions not only relative, but affirming. If God raised Jesus from the dead, and through him has given us the firstfruits of that which is to come, then our present suffering with Christ is ultimately our assurance. For as long as there is suffering in the world, Christ suffers. And as long as Christ suffers, so do his disciples.

Returning to Sangster's typology, this lection might also be the occasion of what he describes as a philosophic or apologetic sermon. Such sermons are crucial for the secularized world of the late twentieth century, because their purpose is to address the honest questions of those whose discipleship does not begin with the assurance of faith.

A word of caution is in order, however, for this approach to the text may also prove to be a pitfall. The reason lies in the pedagogical method of critical reflection, dating from the Enlightenment, which still prevails in mainline Protestant seminaries and schools of theology. Most of us would have to admit that our ministerial training has equipped us to raise questions about the Christian tradition with far more penetration and skill than to proclaim its truths. In addressing the honest doubts of our present church members, therefore, we must be careful not to overstate the case. And most certainly we should not make this type of sermon too frequent a component of the preaching cycle. If apologetics becomes the staple of the pulpit, not only will people who are wrestling with these questions tend to prolong their struggles unnecessarily; what is worse, committed disciples will be robbed of the spiritual food they need week by week.

This said, it must be readily acknowledged that the philosophical questions which face the church today are urgent and pressing. We have already identified them as predominantly those of future hope and present injustice and suffering in the world—questions to which the theological responses are those of eschatology and theodicy. To address these deep mysteries and still articulate a message of hope which radically challenges the present world order gives people fresh strength for their daily struggle, and reassures them in their discipleship.

For the purposes of such a sermon, Sangster's structural
classification of argument is the most effective. This may seem to render the Scriptures merely the starting-point of the exercise, but that is no handicap, for there is something at once exhilarating and satisfying about leading a congregation step by step to a point at which the gospel is a logical option for mindset and life-style. Sangster identifies two forms of argument: deductive, proceeding from the general, or universal, to the particular; and inductive argument, proceeding from the particular to the universal. We shall adopt the latter in this instance, because the consciousness of most people in the North American context, albeit numbed by the pressures of technocracy and consumerism, is not insensitive to the reality of suffering in the world. By drawing on the particulars of this consciousness, we can proceed inductively to the mystery of theodicy, and thence to the universal argument of eschatological hope. Only in the promise which God offers us in the Resurrection of Jesus do we have any word that brings assurance in the face of the realities of worldly suffering. All other arguments pale into sophisms beside this glorious and triumphant vindication of the Nazarene's ministry on earth.

There are two inductive arguments we might use, and the first is the mystery of death. What happens when a person dies? Why should people have to die? Why should I have to die? Our narcissistic culture has made this a major preoccupation. Death and dying have become a technical contingency of an enriched life-style. Documented accounts of those who have experienced clinical death are readily available. Television programs are broadcast on the very day their stars have committed suicide. The death penalty has been re-introduced, attended by a morbid fascination and a chilling indifference to its reality. Moreover, for those who are bereaved, grief has become a major pastoral emphasis. We are now taught to “work with our grief” (whatever happened to plain grieving?), even while the process of death itself is all too often robbed of any dignity.

Perhaps most seriously, an ill-defined belief in the immortality of the soul substitutes in many churches for the doctrine of the resurrection, which is rarely given proper instruction. And coupled with this is a worldview which, on the basis of ill-informed exegesis and gross soteriological chauvinism, surrenders the
tension of future hope to a spiritualized Armageddon—always at
the expense of planet earth.

Apart from the fact that none of these cultural preoccupations
does anything to resolve the finality or the mystery of death, they
lack any sense of priority. There is something almost obscene
about afterlife speculations, personal or global, when hunger,
torture, injustice, and oppression still prevail in the world as
it is. Moreover, those who toil close to the earth, who labor with
their hands, know that their bodies are at once the source and
expression of their souls and spirits. Too much suffering in the
world has continued because those who harbor the idea of
immortality of the soul have become alienated from the world in
which they live and the human beings who are their neighbors.

Our faith, on the contrary, is boldly incarnational. Jesus was a
Jew. He sweated Jewish sweat. He shed Jewish blood. The Word
was made flesh (John 1:14) to pronounce once and for all that
human beings will never be disembodied souls. Jesus was not
immortal. He died, and was raised from the dead because he let
go of life and trusted in God. So must we—body, soul, and
spirit.

If we turn to the mystery of suffering and evil in the world, once
again we have a strong inductive argument. It begins with the
proposition, familiar to all of us, that since God has created
humankind with a freedom to exist, a natural consequence of this
"letting be" is a degree of suffering commensurate with the
potential of our freedom. The world is a creation in which human
beings have been given the high privilege of learning how to live
with self-determination. They must learn to do so, therefore, with
a growing maturity in their environment.

For the Christian, however, there are two basic flaws in this
argument. In the first instance, the horrendous suffering of human
beings throughout history, including the present, belies any such
rationalization. Is it, for example, a meaningful answer to give to
those who starve to death at the rate of fifty thousand each day?
Does it comfort the families of those who die early deaths from
cancer?

The overwhelming response to the great natural disasters of
human history remains one of pained confusion and outrage,
most especially from those to whom God is a loving parent. If, that is, the God revealed to us in Jesus Christ can indeed be called *Abba*. 

In the second place, even if the problems of natural suffering could be explained with a degree of rationality, there would still be the problem of human sin. Unnecessary suffering and injustice in the world are far more than a question of human immaturity. They are a disease, rampant and lethal. And for those who sin and are sinned against, the disease remains deeply mysterious. The cry from an Auschwitz or a Birmingham jail is more, much more, than a plea for the human race to grow up. It is a primal scream against the God whose creation made this even a remote possibility.19

The problem with some philosophical treatments of human sin and suffering is that they speak more to those who have the time and comfort to wrestle with these problems than to those who find themselves in the midst of suffering and injustice. Abstract reflections on theodicy will never make sense of what first and foremost is an eschatological mystery.

This is why Paul’s words ultimately provide the most powerful insight into present pain and suffering. He accepts the mystery for precisely what it is, but then gives an authoritative word of hope: that the world will not always be the way it is; that God was in Christ, presenting impeccable credentials, identifying with the mystery of human sin and suffering; that God chose this form and fashion for our sake, to share with us the very stuff of life—human joy, human pain, the best and the worst of human existence; and that God went to the uttermost limit, accepting in human form the finality of human death.

But this same human being, Jesus of Nazareth, was raised from the dead by God to inaugurate a New Age for this planet, in which pain and suffering and death will be no more. We do not yet see this New Age in its fullness, but we know it is coming. The world is being made ready for it. The New Age has dawned, and we share in its firstfruits by hope, knowing that we shall be raised with Christ in its fulfillment.

The Christian message doesn’t try to explain the world the way it is. It announces the way the world will be.
THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

II Corinthians 5:6-10, 14-17

This lection patently invites an ethical treatment, and it is significant that Sangster's classification aligns ethics with personal devotion and spirituality. He reminds us that the gospel is authenticated in changed lives; and, in a memorable phrase, observes that if the Christian "wanders from justice, it is only into generosity, never into meanness."20 But it is the Spirit of God who must guide and empower our conduct, personal and social. The proclamation of Christian morality can never be an empty or negative demand. It must always be a liberating offer of the power of God for new life.

Sangster rightly draws on Wesley to stress the importance of ethical preaching. It is not always remembered that, in the heat of the eighteenth-century revival, Wesley's Methodist societies were by no means the only manifestation of evangelical religion. There were many other preachers "in the field" who were quick to discern the sort of message which would evoke quick and impressive results, but which lacked the depth to root people in an authentic discipleship. Wesley scornfully referred to this as "gospel preaching," and had little time for those who offered people "sweetmeats" which merely "spoiled their appetite."21 Needless to say, the problem has not disappeared.

The structure of an ethical sermon should probably be what Sangster described as faceting. Just as a jeweller will facet a precious stone so that its hidden brilliance might be revealed from every possible perspective, so a sermon can hold up a "gem of truth" and then present its various facets in "the white light of God." The key to this type of sermon is not to lose the central truth in the process of revealing it. It is always a temptation for the preacher to be attracted more to a particular insight of a sermon than to its central focus. A well-crafted sermon, however, will leave with the congregation a significant new illumination which subsumes its various facets.

The central truth of this lection is that when we are in Christ, we are new creatures. While the fullness of this new creation remains an eschatological mystery, it has already begun here and now.

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Those who have accepted the new covenant with God in Christ have a foretaste of the coming New Age, and are thereby committed to its hope and its demands.

The faceting question is: “What does this mean for a Christian?” If our faith is indeed the beginning of a new life, one which can no longer be viewed from a “human point of view,” how does it affect the daily routine of Christians who must still live in the world?

1. **It means a permanent state of disorientation.**
   
   Once the vision of the New Age has been revealed, those who are “in Christ” can never be satisfied with the world as it is. This is not to imply a permanent dissatisfaction with life, for the obedience of Christian discipleship engenders a deep peace. But it means a constant striving to live by and press for the marks of the New Age—love, justice, peace, and an end to suffering.

2. **It means a permanent state of readiness.**
   
   The Christian who is committed to an active discipleship in the world will never know how and where the call of Christ will next come. For the Christian is “on call” at all times—not invariably doing religious things, for much of a Christian’s life is as worldly (and God-given) as that of the next person—but in a constant state of active expectancy, ready to do the will of the One who commissions and sends. As John Wesley’s Covenant Service states it:

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   Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt; put me to doing, put me to suffering; let me be employed for thee, or laid aside for thee, exalted for thee, or brought low for thee; let me be full, let me be empty; let me have all things, let me have nothing; I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal.
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3. **It means a range of new relationships.**
   
   Because of the covenant relationship with Christ, the Christian finds that human relationships are formed on a different basis. Love for others, empowered by the Spirit of Christ, may foster love in return. But it may also foster resentment, and for two reasons.

   First, the indwelling Spirit of Christ gives a Christian new discernment into other people’s lives—a spiritual gift for evangelism and pastoral guidance. It is a gift, however, which requires practice; and at first it is easy to misuse it in judging rather than encouraging others. People are quick to sense this, and will
respond accordingly. Second, and more often, this new love will spark the resistance of others to the grace of Christ already at work preveniently in their lives. Human sin resists grace instinctively; and even though the power of God's grace wears down that resistance, it is not without cost to those who may be its channels. We know this supremely in the cross.

4. It means obedience to the Risen Christ.

The ethic of love which governs the life of a Christian disciple is not a human concept. It is the power of agape, which empowers all other loves, a "Love divine, all loves excelling, Joy of heaven, to earth come down. . . ." To the extent that this ethic is empowered by the presence of Christ in our lives, it cannot be defined by theories of virtue or obligation, important though these are for the world as it is. Nor yet is it a striving for a perfection of love, important though this is as a mark of Christian maturity. It is rather an obedience to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, an ethic which at once fulfills and supersedes all other principles.

In other words, the life of the Christian becomes increasingly Christ-centered. If Jesus of Nazareth, crucified, dead, and buried, was raised from the dead, then disciples of the late twentieth century must seek his will no less than those who sought to serve him when he walked the streets of Capernaum and Bethany. The relationship remains that of leadership and obedience.

It renders the Christian more loving, more trustworthy, more discerning and more sympathetic—what Leslie Weatherhead called the transforming friendship. But because it is a living relationship, it has a degree of unpredictability which can be unsettling to those around us whose lives are ordered by other criteria. Our discipleship is often more costly to those who are close to us than to ourselves (Luke 14:26).

5. It means accountability.

In verse 10 we are reminded that the Resurrection of Jesus holds not only a promise, but a warning. The warrant for our transforming friendship is the assurance that we are already being raised to new life with Christ, to be fulfilled in our resurrection at the Parousia. But for those of us who are disciples, this carries the further warrant that our present accountability to Christ will likewise be brought to fulfillment in a final reckoning.
(Matt. 25:10,19,32). The awesome dimensions of God’s eschatological salvation should not obscure the specificity of the directive that we too must give an account.

We will be raised: that’s the sobering thought.

Those of us with much to account for should thus take care, lest the resurrection become threat rather than promise.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

II Corinthians 5:18-6:2

This passage lends itself to two classifications of sermon in Sangster’s typology: the doctrinal, or theological, and the evangelistic.

We have already suggested that the preacher who remains committed to the faithful proclamation of the gospel finds rich reward in theological study. It should further be stated that the deeper the theology brought to the tradition, the more simple and powerful the gospel becomes in proclamation. When congregations may well include specialists in the technology of personal computers, the psychology of interpersonal relationships, educational development, or socio-cultural groupings, to say nothing of the expertise which must now go into farming, engineering, automobile service, building construction, and child-rearing, the great doctrines of the Christian tradition are precisely what they need to hear from the pulpit. The only prerequisite is that the preacher should grasp them first.

The structure which gives a doctrinal sermon most force is what Sangster termed “categorizing.” This is not the same as faceting, the illumination of a central truth by looking at it from various perspectives. Rather it is the careful consideration of a theme—in this instance a doctrine—through identification of its various implications. And the doctrine which this passage most clearly presents is that of the atonement, God’s gracious initiative to the human race of forgiveness and reconciliation in Jesus Christ.

The occasion of this doctrine is the correlative doctrine of human sin. Indeed, sin is properly the prior, if not the pivotal, doctrine of the Christian faith, since it is the fundamental human condition. Most especially does this need to be stressed in the context of
contemporary North America, where for the most part we seem to have counseled our way out of it. If we were to ask, for example, whether anyone in our churches seriously believes that he or she has ever done, or left undone, anything which would merit the execution of another human being, we would quickly find a need for urgent theological homework.

How can people whose basic inference from the Christ event is an enriched life-style perceive the crucified Nazarene at the center of their faith?

But when sin is viewed in its proper perspective, as a human condition in which we all share, a rebellious rejection of the God who made us to the scale of eternity, and a profound alienation from the rest of creation, including each other, one thing becomes patently clear: Sin is a condition for which personal culpability is by no means an adequate diagnosis. Any doctrine therefore which describes God's response to this condition must be expounded in this light. The implications are as follows:

1. The atonement and our self-understanding.

The doctrine of the atonement changes the ultimate identity question from "Who am I?" to the God-centered question, "With whom am I ultimately in dialogue?" Authentic self-understanding begins with the acceptance that we are constantly the subjects of God's gracious initiatives. The God who became human in Jesus of Nazareth wants to reach us, to communicate with us, to love us. Our sin makes us instinctively resistant, but once we begin to listen, we hear these overtures more and more until we finally cease to resist: "His love is mighty to compel; His conqu'ring love consent to feel; Yield to his love's resistless power; And fight against your God no more."23 The invitation is made supremely from the cross. In order to reach us with God's message of forgiveness and reconciliation, Christ makes the ultimate sacrifice. If ever human sin was in doubt, the cross confirmed the diagnosis once and for all.

2. The atonement and our understanding of the world.

The doctrine of the atonement makes us aware of the global scope of God's salvific work. Our Protestant heritage has made us extremely individualistic in our view of salvation, which is why the centrality of the atonement has been so seriously weakened in a post-Freudian world. We quite legitimately ask the question,
“Saved from what?” Our anxiety? Our broken relationships? Our consumerist captivities? Our pain and illnesses? These are all misfortunes we might be glad to have alleviated—but they somehow fail to carry the weight of eternal salvation through the life and death of Jesus Christ.

Give sin its proper global dimensions, however, and the atonement resumes its rightful place. When six million Jews died in the Holocaust, the death of another Jew becomes more understandable—even the Son of God. When thousands are being tortured in jails from Brazil to Iran, a Roman flogging becomes more contemporary.

Sin is a condition in which we share corporately and globally. And for this Christ died. He was certainly the victim of political sin, the cold amorality of power systems mirrored today across the planet. He was the victim of religious sin, the blindness to human virtue inherent in dogma and bigotry. He was the victim of social sin, the insensitivity to human suffering and injustice. By dying as the victim of these sins, Christ exposed them for what they were—and are.

3. The atonement and our understanding of God.

The key to the whole passage comes in verse 21. For our sake, God made Christ sin, who knew no sin. He was rejected, wounded, bruised, chastised (Isa. 53:3, 5). He too was alienated from God; abandoned, crying out in anguish with the Psalmist, “My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?” (Ps. 22:1).

The meaning is at once shattering and conclusive: God on the cross accepts ultimate responsibility for human sin. The deepest message of the cross has never been how a righteous God deals with human guilt. It has always been how a God of saving righteousness enters empathetically into creaturely existence. The cross is thus God’s ultimate self-disclosure. In the Crucifixion, God identifies not only with human sin, but with the mystery of human sin. The God whose creation allows for human sin does not shrink from becoming human sin.

It is not that we are reconciled to God by rescue from our present condition. We are reconciled because God comes to join us in it.

4. The atonement and Christian discipleship.

This insight has profound implications for how we respond to the gracious initiative of the cross. This is gospel "meat" which
presumes a degree of maturity on the part of the hearers, and therefore a mature response. If God on the cross is accepting responsibility for human sin, the invitation made from the cross is to cooperate in effecting the cure. The mystery of sin may remain, but the task is now clear, and the promise of the cure is assured.

This is the great paradox of Christian discipleship—an invitation to share in a mystery. " 'You are my friends,' said Jesus, 'if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you' " (John 15:14 ff.). Yet not even Jesus knew the time of fulfillment (Matt. 24:36). We are privileged to know what God is doing to bring the world into the New Age. But the fullness of this salvation is still God's eschatological mystery. Therefore our response to Christ, in friendship, is to be obedient until all things are revealed. Our call to this obedience comes from the cross. The assurance of our response comes in the Resurrection of the One who asks us to trust him.

When we approach this lection for its evangelistic content, we are reminded of the question raised about biblical interpretation. Just as all sermons should be scriptural, should they not also be evangelistic? The proclamation of the gospel as good news and the invitation to respond in repentance and discipleship are surely a mark of all kerygmatic preaching.

Yet once again the eschatological tension of the gospel and human history makes us pause. For if the preaching of the gospel had met with the sort of response which good news might be expected to evoke, the kingdom of God would have come in its fullness a long time ago. The mystery is why this particular message of good news—that God's initiative in Jesus of Nazareth is the means of salvation for the world—is taking so long to prevail. It is not enough to argue that this is due to a failure of Christian witness: there have been many saints and too many martyrs. The fact remains that though Jesus announced the New Age, two thousand years later we are still awaiting its fulfillment.

This renders evangelism above all else an eschatological mystery, and evangelistic sermons only one of a number of forms of preaching. The delay of the Parousia, as we know, forced a
major adjustment in the early church. But we are perhaps less aware that it has continued to subject the eschatology of the early church to misinterpretation, or, more often to neglect, across the centuries. We profoundly misunderstand the gospel if we do not retain its tension of hope and promise; and when the church has been faithful, this has always been the cutting edge of its evangel.

We must also take into account, however, that the eschatological delay of the Parousia has obliged the church to engage in a twofold task in its proclamation of the gospel: the handing over of the good news to the world, and the handing on of the tradition within the community of faith. And, as with all twofold tasks to be held in tension, the church has tended to opt for one part of the task or the other. At times, the task of handing on the gospel within the community of faith has taken precedence over evangelistic proclamation, with a resultant ecclesial inertia. At other times, though far less often, in carrying out the task of handing over the gospel to the world the church has ignored the importance of proclamation within its own community, with a resultant ecclesial triumphalism.

In our present North American context, versions of both these polarizations continue to impede the life and work of the church. Most especially in mainline churches, it results in the virtual disregard of evangelistic preaching as part of the regular cycle. "What point is there in trying to convert the converted?" the argument goes. The witness of the church as a whole is surely doing this in all of the manifestations of its mission and ministry.

The answer is that evangelistic preaching, by condensing the gospel to its essentials and extending the invitation to Christian commitment, is fulfilling two vital functions of the church. First, it is presenting the claim of the Risen Christ that God wishes all human beings to be reconciled into the familial relationship they were created to enjoy. As long as there is one human being alienated from this family, those of us who are called Christians are commissioned to extend that invitation over and over again, a thousand times if need be. Second, it announces the imminence of the New Age in its fullness, pointing to God's gracious initiatives in human history, and calling all people—those who are ready and those who are not—to prepare for the coming of the kingdom of God.
The evangel is exactly what the word implies: glad tidings of great joy. And the most important aspect of God's salvific work in the world is that it is always newsworthy, to be discerned, defined, and interpreted by those with eyes to see and ears to hear for announcement to as many as possible, as often as possible, in as many ways as possible.

Evangelistic sermons, therefore, should be a regular component of the preaching cycle. Their purpose is to present the gospel as a direct call to Christian commitment, a fundamental changing of the human will. This change is not brought about by human persuasion, nor yet by argument. Indeed, it is not so much a change in the will as a surrender of the will—a submission to God's gracious initiative. The truly evangelistic sermon allows the Spirit of God to work with maximum freedom, and the preacher endeavors to remain as anonymous as possible, presenting what is first and foremost an invitation which comes directly from God.

Nor should it be forgotten that Christian discipleship is a journey, traveled at ever-deepening stages of understanding and commitment. For those who have been on this journey for some time, no less than for those about to begin it, there comes a time of critical challenge, when the call to commitment comes with fresh power and new insight. If it is assumed that the converted do not need to hear this challenge, there are many whose spiritual pilgrimage will lose direction, and whose discipleship will take on that worst of characteristics—the deep cynicism of those who once dreamed of the New Age, but have failed to keep tryst with God's promises.

The structural form we shall adopt in this instance is what Sangster termed "analogy." This should be used very sparingly, he warned, because, of all forms of preaching, it tends to carry the highest authority. The sermon is structured around a root metaphor, and since the mystery of the gospel ultimately leaves us with no other way of grasping its deepest truths, analogies must be carefully chosen. They quickly, and often irrevocably, leave a profound impression on a person's faith.

Remembering that the purpose of an evangelistic sermon is to present the gospel in its essentials as an invitation to Christian commitment, the congregation should be informed at the beginning of the message just how this initiation is to be extended.
Some of us may harbor a diffidence toward incorporating such a procedure into our preaching, perhaps on the basis of youthful exposure to emotional manipulation. Not to offer any opportunity for a visible and concrete response to an evangelistic message, however, is to stifle the working of the Holy Spirit, and seriously to impede the spiritual growth of those who are ready to respond. The invitation to commitment should therefore be firmly identified for what it is: a response to God’s act of salvation in Christ. Whether a person is making a commitment for the first time, or is deepening an existing commitment, the invitation is to Christian discipleship—a new relationship with God through Christ, but a relationship with a purpose.

This being made clear, the sermon can proceed to Paul’s analogy. In what ways are Christians ambassadors for Christ? And how can this be brought to a point of challenge for the congregation?

1. **Ambassadors are commissioned.**
   This passage should always be read in conjunction with the “great commission” of Matt. 28:19-20, usually cited as the most important text for evangelistic outreach. And both passages should be read in light of four thousand years of Judeo-Christian history. It then becomes clear that the role of the Christian as ambassador/evangelist is to be Christ’s ongoing representative. It is a commission to present the gospel faithfully and consistently, regardless of the response which it evokes. The motivation to evangelize cannot and must not be to save people from their sin. That is to usurp the role of the One whom we represent. Our motive is at once more simple and more sure: to be obedient envoys because Christ has made us his friends and chosen us for service.

2. **Ambassadors are entrusted with a message.**
   While exercising appropriate initiatives in communicating the gospel, evangelists must always take care not to substitute their own interpretations for the message itself. This is a given for any ambassador, but it is a common evangelistic error nonetheless. It usually stems from an understandable impatience to make the message more persuasive after experiencing frequent rejection—another good reason to establish that friendship with Christ is the
motive for evangelism rather than expectation of any sort of result or response.

3. **Ambassadors are discreet.**

   In many ways, ambassadors are most effective when they are least noticeable. The purpose of their presence in any situation is to facilitate communication between the country they represent and the country to which they are sent. When this communication is effected, their role is, and should be, peripheral.

   So it is with the evangelist. Once the gospel is received and accepted in grateful response, communication with God is direct, and the evangelist can melt into the background.

4. **Ambassadors are persistent.**

   Until such communication is effected, however, ambassadors must persist with their message. This often means lonely assignments, with little reward and little to show for their labor. But they are obliged to remain at their post at all times. So must the evangelist. Indeed, it is often when least expected that a person will turn for direction and advice in Christian discipleship. The faithful evangelist will be ready.

5. **Ambassadors must take risks.**

   This goes without saying, but it must be the right sort of Christian involvement. Christians do not have a monopoly on good works, nor yet on God's grace. But they do have a monopoly on the task of announcing the good news of God's salvation in Jesus Christ. The proper risks to take, therefore, are those which stem from their faithful performance of this task. They will come quickly enough.

6. **Ambassadors are subject to recall.**

   Just as important as the commission to go into the world, a Christian must be ready to respond to recall from active service. The strategy of the coming New Age belongs to God no less than its vision, and the evangelist must be sensitive to the promptings of the Spirit in all things, including the surrender of a task to others—perhaps especially at such times.

7. **Ambassadors are known as persons of integrity.**

   One of the chief reasons for the practice of diplomatic immunity is that diplomatic personnel are perceived as personifications of
the countries they represent. They will take risks, but they will also enjoy profound respect from a host country which instinctively knows their mission. So it is with the evangelist in the world.

Those who lack this respect have usually ceased to be true representatives of the kingdom of God, the New Age. The people of the present age sense it immediately, and react accordingly, whether the evangelist is an individual or an entire congregation.

8. What, then, is the message entrusted to us?

At this point, the gospel should be presented in its essentials: that God was in Christ, offering forgiveness and reconciliation, the hope of eternal life, and the assurance of a New Age. It is when the gospel is articulated as a message that one of the most important evangelistic errors is exposed—the preaching of faith rather than the preaching of Christ. If we are ambassadors, we will instinctively focus our message on the One who sent us.


In making the invitation, it should be stressed that this role of ambassador for Christ can be commissioned only by Christ himself in the power of the Holy Spirit. If, as the task has been outlined, people have sensed that this is what God is calling them to do, then they should be invited to come forward and join with the preacher in a prayer of commitment: those who have not yet made a Christian commitment, and those who have perceived their Christian discipleship in a new way, should each be given a clear and direct invitation to respond.

Be an ambassador for Christ.

Take the message of salvation to a world desperate to hear it—a message of hope, of promise, of forgiveness, of reconciliation.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

II Corinthians 8:7-15

The subject matter of this passage is what Sangster termed "social," and what we would prefer to define as social ethics. It presents an opportunity for the preacher, and also a pitfall. The opportunity is to proclaim the gospel in its fullness: that God's salvific work in Christ has social, indeed global, dimensions; that
the New Age of love and justice announced by Christ will prevail; that the prayer which Jesus taught his disciples will be answered in the doing of God's will on earth as in heaven. The pitfall is the tendency to make this vision a burden for the congregation rather than a possibility.

As we have already noted, the New Age is an eschatological mystery, enfolded in two thousand years of Christian history. The question for the preacher, therefore, is how to proclaim a message of hope which remains persistently, agonizingly unfulfilled. It is tempting to take one's theological frustrations out on a congregation, waxing loud and long on the social issues of our time, denouncing poverty and injustice and oppression. Of course these issues have a place in the evangel. But the question is how to make them kerygmatic for the people who sit in our pews. There is a real danger in any social sermon that we will fall to touch people at the point of their Christian discipleship—that the poor and the oppressed will be left nameless and unreachable.

The question, as it has been so often in these lections, is theological: whether we can enable our people to perceive the social obligations of their discipleship in the context of their faith. Sermons on social ethics miss the point completely if they merely expound the issues and confront people with the challenge of what ought to be done. Listeners will then probably fall into one of three categories: those who know only too well what ought to be done and are sincerely trying to do it; those who agree with what ought to be done, but regard it as an impossible task given the world as it is; and those who disagree with the position of the preacher, and therefore dismiss the sermon as irrelevant to their Christian life. To none of these will the issues per se speak with power.

In light of this situation it is fundamental to proclaim the social obligations of discipleship as a word from the Risen Christ, a word which it is possible to obey in the freedom of justification by faith. When the word comes with this authority, as a call to obedience from the One who embodied his message of love and justice and peace, it ceases to be a demand to change the world—as often as not overnight—and instead becomes a pressing invitation to join the Risen Christ in the ongoing task of preparing for the New Age. We have much to learn in this regard from Wesley's sermons, and especially those preached in the middle and later years of his
ministry, in which he reminds us time and again that good works are necessary for a living faith. But it is even more important to note the focus of these sermons. They are wholly Christ-centered. They affirm that good works and faith alike spring from Christ, proclaimed as prophet no less than priest. It is Christ who alone can empower the life to which he calls us in the Spirit.

Proclaimed as an invitation to obedient discipleship, the immediacy of what can be done here and now, right on our doorstep, takes precedence over the magnitude of what ought to be done worldwide. The invitation thus has power, because it has possibility. And in the doing of what can be done right where they are, people catch the larger vision of what remains to be done worldwide and their part in that task. The eschatological mystery is thus kept in tension with the eschatological reality. We wait for the fullness of the New Age as God’s gracious gift. But we wait in active anticipation, doing the best we can, and knowing that our best is good enough for God.

It will be readily apparent from the lection that this was precisely Paul’s approach to the Corinthians. The “gracious work” in verse 7 refers to the financial collection which the Gentile churches had agreed to contribute to the poor in Judea. It seems to have been a significant factor in Paul’s pastoral work, being mentioned specifically at the Jerusalem conference (Gal. 2:10) and elsewhere in his letters (Rom. 15:25–32; 1 Cor. 16:1–4; compare Acts 11:27–30). It is possible to view the passage in the light of a kenotic theology (vs. 9), and draw a spiritual inference from Paul’s use of the word “equality” (vs. 14). But we can agree with Barrett that, for the purposes of contemporary social ethics, Paul was merely asking for “common sense and Christian charity.” He saw the collection as a gesture of goodwill from the wealthier Gentile congregations to the poorer Christians in Jerusalem—a gesture which helped to maintain cordiality in a relationship which was by no means without its tensions. We can further observe that Paul did not demand of the Corinthians more than they could give, nor yet did he ask them to give irrationally. He merely asked them to do the best they could—and gave them the example of Christ as a paradigm.

Sangster’s structural category of deductive argument will serve us well here, progressing from the general to the particular, as did
Paul. This collection was a valid Christian work because it embodied the shape of Christ's own ministry. He became poor, not only in human form, but also in social status, so that the Corinthians might become rich in grace. As disciples of the Risen Christ, they had to be ready to do likewise.

Using the same argument, we can present the various implications of the collection for obedient discipleship in our own time. Of course, in a capitalist culture, it is an argument which will require persuasive presentation, and it might therefore be as well to be reminded of some of the contextual factors which make this so. We should not forget, for example, that many of the people who constitute the contemporary leadership of North American churches either grew up in the Depression, or were greatly influenced by it. They were taught self-sufficiency the hard way and have a basic mistrust of enforced sharing. It must also be remembered that for those who have grown up in the past three decades, consumerism has been a prevailing social ethos. Community sharing has become much less desirable than personal ownership.

This is not to endorse such social criteria, but rather to suggest that if the central argument of this lection is to be heard by a congregation—that those of us who follow the Risen Christ must be willing to surrender some of our plenty as long as there are others in need—then the call to obedient discipleship must touch people at the point of these criteria. To the extent that wealth is viewed in our culture as personal possession, we must present Christ's example as a personal challenge from which the social obligations can proceed deductively. If we present the claims of discipleship as social criteria per se, we will in all likelihood deprive ourselves of a hearing.

What, then, is the significance for Christian social witness of this collection for the church in Jerusalem? Why should we give out of our abundance to those who are in need?

1. It is good manners.

One of the great myths about poverty is that the basic problem is the poor. Needless to say, very few people choose poverty; but those who find themselves in that position are usually very astute in coming to terms with their plight. The offense of poverty is
rather the mindset of those who have plenty. To know that people are in need is an immediate source of offense to anyone with a sensitive spirit. To share with the poor is nothing more than good manners.

This means that those with plenty who tolerate poverty have had to harden their hearts. They have formed stereotypes of poverty and the poor—"It's their own fault," "It's an imperfect world," "What can I do about it?"—in order to have peace of mind.

2. It is good neighborliness.

Paul's citing of the Hebrew Bible is significant in this regard. His reference in verse 15 to Exodus 16:18 is quite specific. In the gathering of manna in the wilderness, the whole enterprise was corporate. The people of Israel were in the same situation. All were gathering, but some were able to gather less than others. Since the manna was good to eat only on the day of its gathering, to share one's plenty with a neighbor made good sense. The next day's gathering might easily have reversed the position; besides which, no one could store what they had gathered.

Today, more than ever before, it is clear that we are neighbors on the planet earth. We have seen it from outer space. We have a new sense of our fragile environment. We are increasingly aware of the needs of others. If we can but see other human beings as our neighbors, it instinctively becomes a neighborly act to share our abundance to meet their need. Good neighbors do not prey on one another, nor do they covet one another's abundance. They share.

3. It is good discipleship.

The most important reason to share with one another, however, is the teaching and example of Jesus of Nazareth. It is in his service we do these things. Not to do them is to reject our discipleship and deny our faith. Put differently, if we do not work out our salvation, we lose it. Discipleship is the sine qua non of salvation.

Which is why the call to good manners and good neighborliness is ultimately a call to obedience. Failure to answer this call is a negation of our covenant with Christ, and by default a turning to false gods—for a servant cannot be loyal to two masters (Matt. 6:24). The idols in our midst proliferate because we disobey Christ's directive to share with the poor. Economic systems, be
they capitalism, socialism, or communism, become more impor-
tant than the simple command of the carpenter from Nazareth.
Nationalisms become more important than the vision of the Prince
of Peace. Yet the warning is clear: the barns built to hoard rather
than to share were dismissed as monuments to a fool (Luke 12:20).
As long as there is one of Christ's little ones to be helped, our
idolatrous systems must be cast aside. Nothing should stand in the
way of the obedience of those who are committed to following the
Risen One.

NOTES

1. On this see Victor Paul Furnish, "Theology and Ministry in the Pauline Letters," in A
Biblical Basis for Ministry, ed. Earl E. Shelp and Ronald Sunderland (Philadelphia:
2. For a full treatment of this material, see C. F. Evans, Resurrection and the New Testament
Forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 1979). Both of these studies are well-documented. That of
O'Collins is perhaps more readable.
4. Richard R. Niebuhr, Resurrection and Historical Reason (New York: Charles Scribner's
5. This is not to deny the importance of contemporary scholarship, most especially that
of Will Marxsen. But see Philip E. Devenish, "The So-called Resurrection of Jesus and
Explicit Christian Faith: Wittgenstein's Philosophy and Marxsen's Exegesis as Linguistic
 lucidly argued, but its title exposes at once the presuppositions and the kerygmatic
 handicaps of this field of research.
definitive introduction to Moltmann's thought, see M. Douglas Meeks, Origins of the
11. Moltmann, Theology, p. 148. See also Religion, Revelation and the Future (New York:
12. Moltmann, Theology, p. 156.
13. Moltmann, Theology, p. 163. A good introduction to New Testament eschatology,
suitable for lay study groups, can be found in Isaac C. Rottenberg, The Promise and the
Presence: Toward a Theology of the Kingdom of God (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans,
1980).
29-102.
15. See, for example, "The Westminster Confession of Faith, ch. 164" in Philip Schaff,
The Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical Notes, Vol. 3. The Evangelical Protestant
16. This phrase has had wide circulation in ecumenical dialogue, most notably in the
writings of K. E. Skydsgaard. See for example, "The Flaming Center, or The Core of
John DeGhettner, Levoy T. Howes, and Klaus Perzel (New York: Oxford University Press,
1979), pp. 3-22.


19. On this, see the seminal article by Walter A. Brueggemann, “Covenanting as Human Vocation: A Discussion of the Relation of the Bible and Pastoral Care,” *Interpretation* 33 (April 1979): 115-29. Whenever I assigned this article during my years of seminary teaching, it was invariably recommended by students as required reading for all—a tribute rarely bestowed.


22. Vernard Eller has described this tension well in *The Outward Bound: Caravaning as the Style of the Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1980), which contrasts the church as caravan with the church as commissary. As the former, it properly moves towards God’s New Age; as the latter, it stays firmly in the present age, dispensing divine blessings through ecclesial franchises.


BOOK REVIEW

RECENT BOOKS AND EMERGING ISSUES IN THE STUDY OF APOCALYPTIC

John G. Gammie

The phenomenon of apocalyptic is at once a composite literary genre, a complex of ideas, and possibly also a movement. No matter which way one views it, the phenomenon of apocalyptic has been the object of intense study in the past four decades. The present essay will seek to introduce the reader to works on apocalyptic that are mostly recent.

It is helpful to recall that one entire book each from the Hebrew Bible (Daniel), from the New Testament (Revelation), and from the Apocrypha (II Esdras) belong to the apocalyptic literature. The name apocalyptic is derived from the Greek title of the Book of Revelation, namely, apocalypsis (lit., "unveiling, uncovering or revelation"). Other portions of both testaments have been classified as apocalyptic, and a whole body of literature which scholars have classified as pseudepigrapha (lit., "false [pseudonymous] writings") and apocalyptic has come to light in the past hundred years from the so-called intertestamental period of ca. 150 BCE-50 CE. The apocalyptic books thus reveal or uncover heavenly or future events which are hidden from ordinary human eyes. This literature is extremely interesting in its own right and also for the deeper understanding it makes possible of the biblical writings. When the biblical symbolism, angels, periodization, heavenly visions, and judgment scenes are read in the light of the same type of literature, the distinctive biblical message comes through all the more clearly. Accordingly, in Part II that follows, a glance will be taken at one past and two recent publications of the extrabiblical apocalyptic texts themselves. Part II will conclude with a review of a recent introduction to

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the intertestamental literature. Part III will survey a recent anthology of essays on the study of apocalyptic, and Part IV will discuss three more specialized studies, two of which focus on apocalyptic eschatology (one favorably, one unfavorably), and the third of which convincingly argues that eschatology is not essential to apocalyptic at all!

I

Several outstanding older works may still be read with profit. H. H. Rowley's *Relevance of Apocalyptic: A Study of Jewish and Christian Apocalypses from Daniel to Revelation* (Attic Press, 1980) was first published forty years ago and was revised in 1963 with an added section on the Dead Sea Scrolls. Rowley puts forward a positive assessment of apocalyptic and closes with a section, "The Enduring Message of Apocalyptic." Second on my list of older, recommended books on apocalyptic I would place Joshua Bloch's *On the Apocalyptic in Judaism*, *Jewish Quarterly Review Monograph Series*, No. 2 (Dropsie College, 1952). This book, like Rowley's, is highly readable. It introduces the reader in nontechnical language to rabbinic apocalyptic speculation on "The Work of Creation" and "The Work of the Chariot." Bloch documents the pervasive influence of apocalyptic on the prayers and hymns of the synagogue and its near demise following the Second (Bar Kochba) Revolt of 135 CE. It may be supplemented by the superb, but sometimes overlooked, essay by W. D. Davies, "Apocalyptic and Pharisaism" (first published in 1948 but available in *Christian Origins and Judaism* [Westminster Press, 1962], pp. 19-30). Davies lists some nine points of similarity between the rabbis and the apocalyptists with respect to eschatological beliefs and four with respect to noneschatological matters.

Three other older works may be consulted to gain some helpful background on recent discussion. *The Journal for Theology and the Church*, vol. 6, *Apocalypticism*; ed. Robert W. Funk (Herder and Herder, 1969) is especially important for those interested in apocalyptic in the New Testament. It contains Ernst Käsemann's seminal essay (wherein he argues: "apocalyptic is the real beginning of primitive Christian theology"); two responses to it; Käsemann's defense; and four other essays on apocalyptic in Hellenism, the Hebrew Bible, New Testament research, and the theology of the Pannenberg group. Käsemann holds that because of its dealing in epochs, "it was apocalyptic that first made historical thinking possible within the realm of Christianity" (34)! Whereas Jesus preached "the immediate nearness of God," apocalyptic "waited the coming Son of man, the restoration of the twelve tribes in the messianic kingdom, and therewith the dawn of the parousia" (40). Käsemann's work presupposes that apocalyptic grew out of groups of "Christian prophets"—a subject which has recently been thoroughly explored by two scholars in this country:

II

No amount of reading about apocalyptic can substitute for reading the apocalyptic texts themselves. For seventy years the extrabiblical pseudepigraphical and apocalyptic texts were only available in English in the weighty tomes by R. H. Charles, ed., *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament,* 2 vols., (Oxford University Press, 1913). These have become increasingly expensive but are still valuable for their introductions and notes. Two years ago an important milestone in the study of the apocalyptic literature was reached with the publication of the first volume of James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha,* Vol. 1, *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (Doubleday, 1983). This volume, with two exceptions, contains new translations, introductions, and notes to all of the works found in volume two of the older anthology plus many, many more from, during, and after the intertestamental period. (Only the rabbinic "Sayings of the Fathers" and the Qumranic "Fragments of a Zadokite Work" have not been retranslated.) Here at last the texts of the rich apocalyptic literature have been made readily accessible in English, many of them for the first time. Not least of the many positive features of this new anthology is that despite its additional texts and length (more than one thousand pages) it is not nearly as cumbersome to hold as the older volumes by R. H. Charles. Related biblical passages are frequently, but not always, noted in the margin. Many of the introductions, e.g., on the fifth-sixth century, rabbinic III Enoch, are highly informative and constitute first-rate pieces of scholarship. Some of the introductions, however, are disappointingly brief and presuppose a knowledge of and accessibility to Charles, e.g., on the important I Enoch. Insofar as I have been able to ascertain, only one of the contributors to this volume has also contributed to another comparable publication of extrabiblical texts in another language. In 1976 the work of A. J. J. Klijn of the Netherlands on II Baruch appeared in the series, *Die Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit* (Gerd Mohn,
1973). Klijn's helpful introduction in the Charlesworth volume is entirely new but briefer than the one in the German series. To get the full flavor of apocalyptic, I would especially commend the reading of I Enoch, Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, II Baruch, and the Testament of Abraham.

For those who wish to start with excerpts from the apocalyptic and other intertestamental literature, the volume edited by George W. E. Nicklesburg and Michael E. Stone is ideal: Faith and Piety in Early Judaism: Texts and Documents (Fortress Press, 1983). This anthology has been ably designed for nonspecialists. Excerpts from rabbinic, Qumranic, Hebrew Bible, intertestamental, and New Testament materials are introduced and arranged under six topical headings: Sects and Parties; Temple and Cult; Ideals of Piety; Deliverance, Judgment, and Vindication; Agents of Divine Deliverance; and Lady Wisdom and Israel. I learned much from this volume and I commend it highly as an excellent place to begin the study of the intertestamental literature, much of which, of course, is apocalyptic.

A fourth volume will, in my judgment, become a standard introductory guide to the intertestamental literature for many years to come. I refer to George W. E. Nicklesburg, Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah: A Historical and Literary Introduction (Fortress Press, 1981). Jewish Literature, like the companion volume Nicklesburg edited with Stone, is at once readable and redolent with mature insights. The author has struck a happy balance for beginners and more advanced scholars. This book will serve as a helpful supplement to the aforementioned three anthologies and to all major intertestamental and apocalyptic texts (including Qumranic) up to about 200 C.E. Works, and parts of works, are discussed chronologically and each major historical period is briefly described before books are introduced. The last work in English, to my knowledge, which even approximated the contents of this volume as a systematic introduction to the intertestamental and apocryphal literature was R. H. Pfeiffer's History of New Testament Times: With an Introduction to the Apocrypha (Harper and Brothers, 1949). Since Pfeiffer's time, of course, the Qumran Scrolls have been published and both they and other intertestamental literature have been the objects of intensive research. Nicklesburg's work now replaces Pfeiffer's. Rabbinic works are not included in this introduction (for the study of which see the works of Bloch and Davies referred to in section I, and of Rowland in section IV and n. 5). Nicklesburg's introductions contain a happy blend of description of content and form-critical analysis.

The most recent anthology of essays on the study of apocalyptic for the general reader is Paul D. Hanson, ed., Visionaries and Their Apocalypses
Hanson, whose influential *Dawn of Apocalyptic* will be reviewed in the next section, has written the introductory essay and has selected eight relatively recent assessments of apocalyptic in both testaments as well as in intertestamental books. Part of the appeal of this fine anthology is the variety of scholarly insights it sets forth on the indebtedness of apocalyptic literature to prophecy, to wisdom, and to a specific kind of social background.

The first essay by Klaus Koch, "What Is Apocalyptic? An Attempt at Preliminary Definition," is taken from Koch's book *The Rediscovery of Apocalyptic*, mentioned in section I. In this essay Koch lays the groundwork for a scientifically acceptable definition of apocalyptic. He systematically lists six common characteristics of the apocalypse: cycles of discourse with an angel, spiritual turmoil, hortatory discourses, pseudonymity, mythical images rich in symbolism, and composite character. To these mostly literary features he adds eight largely ideational and eschatological motifs in the apocalypses of what we may think of as an apocalyptic movement: urgent expectations of the overthrow of earthly conditions in the immediate future, pessimism in foreseeing the end as a cosmic catastrophe, periodization of time, belief in armies of angels and demons, belief that salvation of a paradisal character lies beyond the catastrophe, the ascent of the divine being to his throne (the consequence of which is that the kingdom of God becomes visible on earth), the role of an eschatological mediator with royal titles and functions, and an altogether glorious future state. It is important to note that Koch's definition includes a list of both literary and ideational features which must be present in some measure if a work is to be rightly labelled apocalypse or apocalyptic. Koch's endeavor to solve the problem of definition has continued to exert a centripetal effect on scholarly discussion since its first appearance in German in 1970.

The next two essays focus on apocalyptic eschatology. The first, by Hanson, "Old Testament Apocalyptic Re-examined," is at once a digest and an expansion of the theses set forth by Hanson in his book. "The 'taproot' of apocalyptic lies in prophecy" (39), rather than in wisdom, which he sees to be a late contributor. The Book of Daniel, like Trito-Isaiah, originated from the pen of a disenfranchised visionary who found repose in "the timeless realm of the vision of myth" rather than in history (58). John J. Collins, in his essay, "Apocalyptic Eschatology as the Transcendence of Death," registers agreement with Hanson's and Koch's acknowledgment of the mythic dimensions in apocalyptic. He argues, however, that the contrast between prophetic eschatology and apocalyptic eschatology has not been drawn altogether properly by Hanson. "It is [this] hope for the transcendence of death which is the distinctive character of a apocalyptic over against prophecy" (68). Collins thus sees an important link between two
seemingly disparate parts of apocalyptic (heavenly journeys and concern with life after death). "If the future hope of the apocalyptist was to be elevated to a heavenly life, then any information about the heavenly regions where such life is most fully lived is relevant to hope" (74).

Michael E. Stone, in two essays taken from his book *Scripture, Sects and Visions* (Collins, 1980), points out that eschatological speculation is present in the important apocalyptic work I Enoch, but is hardly dominant. On the basis of paleographic evidence of the sizable portions of I Enoch found at Qumran, Stone dates this composition in the third century B.C.E.—at least a half-century before the apocalyptic parts of Daniel. With the appearance of the latter an important shift takes place toward a focus on eschatology. Another important shift takes place after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. toward a focus on theodicy. Stone is skeptical about scholarly ability to identify the groups that produced the apocalyptic writings but he does make two important observations: (1) that the "Book of Watchers" (a portion of I Enoch) contains a mythological map of the world most closely associated with Mesopotamian geographic conceptions (94); and (2) that the priestly interest in the sacred calendar and the heavenly Temple is apparent (99). On the basis of the first observation and affinities between apocalyptic and Babylonian astronomical material, he cautiously concludes: "Most recently the possibility has been raised that the apocalypses drew, in this respect, particularly on the widespread mantic or oracular wisdom of ancient Mesopotamia. This was a tradition of learning associated with a particular class of wise men" (99).

The next essay, by Jonathan Z. Smith, "Wisdom and Apocalyptic," takes a unique tack in that it does not examine Jewish and Christian apocalypses directly. Rather, it examines the fragments of the Greco-Syrian historian Berossus, whose historical writings contain a periodization of history, astrological determinism, and final catastrophe reminiscent of apocalyptic. Smith concludes: "It is to [this] scribalism that Berossus directs us for our first clue as to the interrelationship of wisdom and apocalyptic" (103). Examination of Egyptian materials leads him to strengthen his conclusion that both wisdom and apocalyptic are essentially scribal phenomena. Smith's insight serves to alert the skeptics of the high probability that Jewish-Christian apocalyptic also is very much indebted to both Jewish and ancient Near Eastern, scribal and sapiental traditions.

it is shown that three portions of the New Testament in particular manifest "apocalyptic Christianity": the source Q of the Synoptic Gospels, the apocalyptic discourses (Mark 13, Matthew 24, and Luke 21) and the Book of Revelation. These emanated, Perrin argues, as does also Küstenmack and others (see section I above), from circles of Christian prophets. The characteristics of Jewish-Christian apocalyptic on which Perrin focuses are (1) ideational ("a sense of despair about history that bred belief that it was rushing to a foreordained climax, a hope in God that fostered the conviction that he would act in that climactic moment to change things utterly and forever, and a conviction that it would be possible to recognize the sign of that climactic moment" [122]) and (2) literary (use of symbols, pseudonymity, and extensive quotations of previously existing texts). Perrin's essay concludes with an especially helpful citation of modern parallels on the use of myth and symbol in the midst of despair, e.g., the North American Indian vision of Black Elk\(^2\) and a poem from Amos Wilder's experience in the First World War (141-43).

The final essay in the volume, "The Attainment of Millennial Bliss through Myth: The Book of Revelation," is an excerpt from John G. Gager's *Kingdom and Community* (Prentice-Hall, 1975). To the crisis of persecution the author of Revelation offers "consolation not simply as the promise of a happy fate for the martyr in the near future but through mythological enactment of the future in the present" (147). Gager approaches his study through a separation of the symbols of hope and victory (lamb, elders, book of life, New Jerusalem, etc.). "Contrary to initial impressions, the distribution of the two groups of symbols is not random; it follows a definite and recurring order from start to finish" (149). In contrast to psychoanalysis which "leads to an integration of the conflicting poles," "the apocalyptic solution envisages the complete eradication of one pole" (152). Gager finally reminds us that the setting through which the book would have been able to exercise its therapeutic function was "thoroughly liturgical" (153).

Hanson has shown sound judgment in his selection of the essays summarized above. His introductory essay, however, overstates the extent to which Jonathan Z. Smith's contribution supports the notion that the impact of wisdom on apocalyptic is "late." Smith's material rather supports the view that the preservers of apocalyptic astronomical and cosmological speculations were learned circles of scribes. Stone's study in this volume on the date and source of I Enoch also supports such a conclusion. A second issue is related: How exclusive a source of apocalyptic is prophecy? A recent and thorough survey of the current debate by Michael A. Knibb, "Prophecy and the Emergence of the Jewish Apocalypses," also concludes that "the Jewish apocalypses represent a
continuation of Old Testament prophecy’ but also that “other influences, as well as the prophetic, contributed to the emergence of the apocalypses, and in particular the apocalypses have to be seen as learned compositions, standing within a learned tradition” (176).

A third issue which Hanson’s anthology raises is: What sects or groups produced the respective works of apocalyptic literature? This question cannot really be answered unless one undertakes an examination of the extent to which preexilic institutions were transformed in the postexilic era. Joseph Blenkinsopp has addressed this issue in an important book, *Prophecy and Canon* (Notre Dame Press, 1977), which to date has not been sufficiently drawn into current discussion. It is widely recognized how the postexilic prophecies of Zechariah 1–8, Haggai, Malachi, and Ezekiel 40–48 reflect a greater stress on priestly concerns. It is not as widely recognized the vast extent to which the books of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah bear witness to the transformation of postexilic prophecy into more scribal and priestly molds. Blenkinsopp has demonstrated this change convincingly and concludes: “Apocalyptic is the child of prophecy, but prophecy which had already been taken over and transformed by priests and scribes” (138). It thus appears to me certain that as Blenkinsopp’s insights are absorbed more thoroughly, fresh clarity will emerge in the discussion of the matrix of the postexilic apocalyptic literature. One further comment may be made on the identification of the groups that produced respective apocalyptic works. Even though it might be quite legitimate to speak of an apocalyptic movement, as both Koch and Hanson (in his introductory essay) suggest, it would be a mistake to think that diverse groups could not employ the same composite literary genre. Once it is recognized, for example, that we may speak of varying degrees of importance attached to eschatology within the apocalyptic literature (as will become even more apparent in the next and final section of this review), we are no longer under the obligation of finding identical sociological settings for different apocalyptic works.

IV

In this final section, I will review three quite different books which illustrate, among other things, the diversity of scholarly judgment on the relationship of apocalyptic to eschatology. These books have become, or are likely to become, the focus of considerable attention and debate. J. Christiaan Beker’s fairly short and highly readable volume, *Paul’s Apocalyptic Gospel: The Coming Triumph of God* (Fortress Press, 1982), specifically addresses “the question of the application of Paul’s apocalyptic to the contemporary situation” (9). This book builds upon, restates, and sets out to apply Beker’s interpretation of Paul’s apocalyptic
first put forth in *Paul the Apostle* (Fortress Press, 1980). In Beker’s thesis “apocalyptic,” and especially the future expectation of God’s triumph, is given a highly positive and important theoretic function. Beker’s work thus advances the use of “apocalyptic” as a positive label from primitive Christian theology to Paul. On the other hand, Beker is sharply critical of contemporary “neo-apocalypticism” such as that espoused by Hal Lindsey. Our age, he argues, is “apocalyptic,” disillusioned “with technological progress, including the military-industrial complex, and with our inability to control the future” (23). Beker’s objections to Lindsey are that the latter does not view Christians as “redemptive agents in the world, but as ‘Gnostics’ who must attend to God’s timetable” (26) and that “there is no theology of the cross in this apocalyptic” (27). Beker finds the tepid response of mainline Christianity inadequate. Only re-affirmation of a Christian apocalyptic which has been “repressed far too long,” “corresponds to the truth of the Gospel,” and “promises to give it new power” (28).

According to Beker there are four components or motifs in Paul’s apocalyptic: vindication, universalism, (temporal) dualism, and imminence. The self-vindication of the God of Israel is “theo-centric”: God is the One who “in Christ’s death and resurrection has redeemed us from the bondage of sin” (34). There is no elitism or ethnocentricity in this apocalyptic; rather, God’s claim is on the entirety of his created world: “The universal future scope of God’s coming reign, then, accounts for a radical conception of the church for the world” (37). The Christ-event has already “strongly modified the dualistic structure of Jewish apocalyptic thought. Already the powers of the new age are at work in the church” (40). “God’s plan for the world engages the Christian in a battle against the present structures of the world” and motivates “a hope that incarnates itself in a cruciform existence” (44). The end, in Paul’s thought, is imminent: “The Spirit is the agent of the future glory in the present; it is the first down payment or guarantee of the end-time” (46-47). The intensity of hope for this end-time is sustained in Paul because he holds in dynamic tension “the necessity of the end of history and its incalculability” (51). This tension corresponds to a dialectic of patience and impatience in Paul’s apostolic life.

In a chapter of but four and a half pages on “Apocalyptic and Ministry,” Beker underlines how there is an indivisible bond in Paul between his future apocalyptic vision and a this-worldly cruciform activity. He likens the correlation of thought and practice in Paul to the theological method of Third World theologians today who base “theological reflections on the concrete situations of the church in society” (55). The apostle does not simply pronounce the end of the world; his charge is broader “because
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God's coming world envisages the transformation of the world's present structures and not simply their dissolution" (57).

In the remainder of his book, Beker defends and further refines his interpretation of Paul's apocalyptic gospel. Among those who have failed to grasp it properly is a formidable list (Bultmann, Barth, Dodd, Cullmann, Perrin, Pannenberg, Ogden, Beardslee, et al.). In his apologia Beker draws heavily upon the powerful imagery first propounded by Cullmann: that the Crucifixion and Resurrection were decisive battles in the universe and harbingers of the ultimate victory of God over sin and death. He faults Cullmann, however, for allowing "a Christ-centered salvation-history to displace God's coming triumph" (75). Beker thus stresses the ethical dimensions of this gospel in "God's initiative in bringing about his kingdom" (86). "The ethical activity of the Christian then is motivated not only by the power of Christ in the Spirit but also by the beckoning power of God's kingdom" (87).

In his statement of the relevance of Paul's apocalyptic gospel for ministry and mission, Beker has provided an eloquent challenge to mainstream Christianity and a much-needed critique of any quiescent endorsement of "the world's present structures." This challenge, however—nuanced and finely balanced though it is—retains an extremely theoretical air about it. The absence of any detailed or specific analysis of any one "contemporary situation" leaves the reader feeling that Beker's theoretical analysis of Pauline apocalyptic still awaits an interpreter to apply it to concrete, this-worldly activity.

Christopher Rowland, dean of Jesus College, Cambridge University, brings yet another perspective to the understanding of New Testament and other apocalyptic in his revised doctoral dissertation, The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity (Crossroad, 1982). Unlike Beker, Hanson, and many others, Rowland seeks to remove from center stage the relative importance of eschatology for apocalyptic. Apocalyptic is for Rowland above all a religious perspective, the key element of which is not a temporal dualism or a distinctive eschatology but rather a revelation of hidden mysteries and the impartation of secret knowledge (chaps. 1 and 2). He finds in works regarded as apocalyptic no consistent or distinctive type of eschatology. Instead, building his case on the root meaning of the Greek apokalypsis as "uncovering, unveiling, revelation," Rowland explores this religious perspective in Jewish intertestamental, rabbinic, and Christian sources. Apart from Nickelsburg and Stone's Faith and Piety in Early Judaism, this is the only other recent work I know of which considers, in one volume, rabbinic as well as intertestamental and New Testament sources. After devoting two chapters (of seventy-two pages!) to the problem of definition of
"apocalyptic," Rowland examines, in part two, "The Content of the Heavenly Mysteries" according to the following rubric: "What Is Above: The Mysteries of God, the Angels and Astronomy," "What Is Below: Man and His World Below," "What Had Happened Previously: The Interest in Past History in Apocalyptic," and "What Is to Come." This part contains many fascinating forays into the intertestamental, including Qumranic literature. Perhaps two of his most interesting conclusions in this part are, first, that "what most modern discussions of Christology fail to include . . . is discussion of the extent of the influence of angel-christology on primitive Christian doctrine" (112) and, second, that "there are virtually no grounds for supposing that there existed a Jewish Son of Man concept with the coherent outlines which can be sketched of contemporary expectations concerning the descendant of David or a prophet like Moses" (188).

In parts three and four of his work Rowland examines the origins and dating of apocalyptic and rabbinic esotericism. In both parts he probes the conception of apocalyptic visionaries as those who "believed that it was possible for them to pierce the vault of heaven and be shown the most intimate secrets of God and his world" (226). Indeed, in these sections Rowland decides that the apocalyptic seer may be perceived as a "mystic." The work concludes with two chapters on "Apocalyptic in Early Christianity: Reports of Visions in Early Christian Literature to A.D. 200" and "Revelation." In the final chapter Rowland, following Bishop Robinson, argues for an early date of Revelation (66-70 C.E.). As the reader will be able to see from this survey, Rowland's work is not so much an introduction to the study of apocalyptic as an anthology of his own fairly specialized studies about the apocalyptic perspective and apocalyptic works.

Without question Paul D. Hanson's *The Dawn of Apocalyptic: The Historical and Sociological Roots of Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology* (2nd ed.; Fortress, 1979) has had a profound impact on the current study of apocalyptic. The work is difficult and demanding. It displays the intellectual stature of its author in that the detailed analysis of the Hebrew poetry of Isaiah 56-66 and Zechariah 9-14 is placed within an overall historical, sociological, and ideological framework. Hanson thus writes in the tradition of William F. Albright as both philologist and philosopher of history. This strength, however, in this particular work is its weakness. Hanson's understanding of "apocalyptic eschatology" is, to be blunt, pejorative; he defines it as "a religious perspective" focusing on a disclosure which "the visionaries have largely ceased to translate into the terms of plain history, real politics, and human instrumentality due to a pessimistic view of reality" (11). Hanson's analysis is thus conducted on
the basis of a fairly simplistic ideological continuum: prophetic eschatology on one end (where vision and ties with socio-political reality are kept in a dynamic tension) and apocalyptic eschatology on the other (where the visionaries have cut loose their ties). A number of scholars have rightly observed that Hanson’s work may also be seen as an attempt to demonstrate the existence of tension between theocracy and eschatology at an even earlier period than argued by Otto Ploger. Hanson’s historical and sociological reconstruction of the possible backdrop to Isaiah 56-66 and Zechariah 9-12 in the exilic and early postexilic years is brilliant and has won a number of supporters. He makes a most convincing initial case for the plausibility that most of Trito-Isaiah may properly be interpreted in the light of the struggle between disenfranchised visionaries, who increasingly relinquished a prophetic eschatology in favor of an apocalyptic one, and their hierocratic opponents. Hanson’s case on the backdrop of Zechariah 9-14 is less convincing, however, because of his overly heavy reliance on his newly devised method of the classification of Hebrew poetry and his failure to counter strong arguments in favor of a dating of these passages in the Hellenistic era. Nonetheless, The Dawn of Apocalyptic remains an important work for its demonstration of the kind of tensions out of which the Scriptures emerged and for its demonstration that this literature drew liberally on the mythic allusions nurtured in the royal liturgies in Jerusalem. His generalizations on early apocalyptic would have been stronger if he had included an analysis of Isaiah 24-27. Had he done so, however, it would have been harder for him to maintain, as he does (8-9), that the wisdom influences on apocalyptic are late. Perhaps my severest criticism is that the very definition of “apocalyptic eschatology” which Hanson posits is hardly applicable to either part of the Book of Daniel wherein concern for the present historical order remains strong; in chaps. 1-6 the authors remain concerned that religious toleration be granted Jewish citizens; and, in chaps. 7-12 the authors remain concerned that the _tamid_ offerings be re-instituted. If Hanson’s definition is accepted we will arrive at the disconcerting conclusion that Daniel, the apocalyptic book par excellence of the Old Testament, does not conform to Hanson’s understanding of “apocalyptic eschatology”! This academic criticism notwithstanding, Hanson’s scholarly study and his later refinements of his typologies and their application to the church’s proclamation and ministry today remain exciting challenges because even though he uses the term “apocalyptic eschatology” in a clearly pejorative sense, he also eloquently advocates the maintenance of hope, an intense ethical and social responsibility for pragmatic human concerns, and the avoidance of escapism. In these regards Hanson is at one with Beker. In short, even
though Hanson’s typology may be faulted academically, he uses it most forcefully to drive home much-needed lessons for ministry and church.

On the basis of the three books reviewed in this section, it will be apparent that one issue continues to plague the field (the definition of “apocalyptic” itself) and two are emerging (the related questions of the relationship of apocalyptic to eschatology on the one hand and to mysticism on the other). The three issues are interrelated. Paul J. Achtemeier of Union Theological Seminary in Richmond has recently argued, in “An Apocalyptic Shift in Early Christian Tradition,” that within the New Testament there is a shift from an apocalyptic expectation in the earlier writings to a more realized eschatology and understanding of eternal life as a “present reality” in the later writings. Achtemeier thus correctly, in my judgment, sees an inverse relation between a more intense eschatological expectation and a sense of intimate, immediate relationship to God. Curiously, at Qumran the order of shift seems to be in the reverse direction, i.e., from a more intimate sense of relation to God and his angels, as seen in the Manual of Discipline and Thanksgiving Scroll, to an expectation of the coming of the end, as seen in the supplements to the Manual of Discipline and War Scroll. At Qumran, however, the same inverse relation obtains between intensity and eschatological expectation and what also might be called, for want of a better word, mysticism. Rowland’s two chapters on the subject, “The Esoteric Tradition in Early Rabbinic Judaism,” and the studies by Gruenwald and Halperin make it apparent that some rabbis such as Johanan ben Zakkaï (II. 70 c.e.) managed to keep in balance both a fairly intense eschatological expectation and a speculative, esoteric mysticism. The mysticism of the rabbis, however, is not characterized by as intense a sense of communion with the angels as is found at Qumran.

NOTES

1. Professor Collins is a prolific writer in the field of apocalyptic. Especially influential has been John J. Collins, ed., Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre [Semeia 14] (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1979) which contains essays on definition and allows for the inclusion even of gnostic works.
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