FOCUS ON REVIEWS

Introductions to Theology
Charles E. Cole

New Testament Ethics
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Liberation Theology
Robert McAfee Brown

Study Bibles
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Stanley Hauerwas’s Theological Ethics
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Homiletical Resources on John’s Gospel
Sharon R. Ringe
Quarterly Review
A Scholarly Journal for Reflection on Ministry

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Index to Volume 6
Introductions to theology date from the fourth century at least, when Augustine wrote Enchiridion, or a manual for Christians, to answer certain basic questions of faith. We must be facing some sort of similar situation, judging by the spate of introductions to theology that have emerged in recent years.

The recent antecedents include J. S. Whale, Christian Doctrine (1941), an outline in which poetry mingled with straight explanations of traditional doctrines. Karl Barth, Dogmatics in Outline, published in both English and German in 1947, conveniently condensed the dogmas without contaminating the reader with the disease of theology—at least so Dr. Barth insisted. William E. Hordern, A Layman's Guide to Protestant Theology (1955), surveyed types of theology, as did a similar work by S. Paul Schilling a decade later. Gerhard Ebeling, The Nature of Faith (English edition, 1961), emphasized faith in a Lutheran perspective as the key to theology and contemporary life. John A. T. Robinson, Honest to God (1963), raised a storm of controversy by baldly setting forth the claims of contemporary theology—largely existentialist theology, including heavy doses of the thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Paul Tillich, and Joseph Fletcher.

More recent attempts have illustrated the problem of what an introduction is and how it should be carried out. Most are apologetic by their very definition, and yet the writers inevitably make distinctive statements of their own. The result is that what
appears to be a distillation of the thought of others—an interpretation of an interpretation—becomes an example of its own kind of theology. Consider, for example, a Roman Catholic version of Robinson: Walter Kasper of Tubingen, whose *Introduction to Christian Faith*, trans. V. Green (New York: Paulist, 1980; first German edition, 1972), was developed from lectures to priests, teachers of religion, catechetics, and students in systematic theology. Kasper consciously intended the book "as an introduction to essential questions of systematic theology" (ix). [This book, like the others reviewed here, is still in print.]

Formally, the book resembles Ebeling's, because each chapter is tagged with a phrase relating to faith. Substantially it follows Robinson more closely, however, in that Kasper attempts to interpret the results of contemporary theology. In doing so he recalls philosophy since the Enlightenment and the reaction of theology to philosophy. His understanding of the "situation of faith" is that the Enlightenment produced an awareness of human emancipation that undercut traditional faith. He believes we are in a "second Enlightenment," in which the first one is itself being criticized. This phase is more "prudent and reserved" and is exploring the "conditions of freedom" (14, 15). He sounds very much like Robinson in saying that Jesus Christ reveals our full humanity, that the content of faith exists only in concrete historical forms, and that salvation "is the new creation which enables us to have a new history." History, in fact, constitutes the underlying motif of Kasper's thought, which means that in the midst of relativities and ambiguities, freedom is found in venturing forward into mystery, with only the love and loyalty of God as revealed in Christ as our support.

This nicely written and translated interpretation of recent theology thus becomes a statement of its own, and nothing is more revealing of a theologian's true position than an attempt to simplify. But some introductions make only a bow in the direction of explanation and launch directly into an exposition couched in terms of that theologian's own special vocabulary. Such is the nature of Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1978), which Rahner means as an introduction only in the sense
that it is limited. (Was Rahner thinking *Theological Investigations* was "unlimited"? Possibly so, since it runs to several volumes and the rumor is that Rahner, like Barth, has continued to write more volumes in the hereafter—a postlogue, as it were.) *Foundations* does expound some fundamental Rahnerian themes, like the unthematic and anonymous knowledge of God, but actually it is a primary work in theology and could and should be taken as such. This description does not mean the book is not worth reading; it is, but a reader who seeks an overview of historical or contemporary theology will be disappointed.

Yet a third kind of introduction in which the attempt to introduce shades into a serious, distinctive theological exercise is one that presents an apology, not for theology, but for one kind of theology. Stephen Sykes, *The Identity of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), argues for the validity of the essence-of-Christianity approach. Subtitled *Theologians and the Essence of Christianity from Schleiermacher to Barth*, the book contains an interpretation of theology as revolving around this fundamental question of essence. Sykes points out that because of the disrepute into which "essence of Christianity" had fallen, many works originally styled that way in German were translated into other titles in English. Among them: Ebeling, *Nature of Faith*, titled *Das Wesen des Christlichen Glaubens* in German, and Adolph Harnack, *What Is Christianity?* which began as *Das Wesen des Christentums*.

Basically, Sykes’s defense of the notion of an essence of Christianity takes three forms. The first is that even before Christianity became known by that name (only in the second century, according to Sykes, and then the name was given by pagans), Christians have been asking what makes Christianity Christianity. The fact that there were controversies over fundamental questions does not obscure the truth that "contained diversity is . . . what unity amounts to" (11). "The Christian movement was the cause of its own dissensions" (17) because early Christians were trying to understand "what was Jesus trying to do?" (18). Jesus had transformed Judaism, he had offered "a universalizable and transforming vision of the nature and acts of God" (19), and this transformation "necessary
entailed ambiguity" (19). Sykes agrees with Schleiermacher, who wrote that "Christianity . . . is polemical through and through" (23). If so, then why worry about the "essence of Christianity"? Because one can be misled, and, according to Sykes, "it is by no means easy to perceive the right way and . . . God is judge of those who apostatize" (24). These matters involve moral action as well as faith, and "Christian discipleship . . . thrusts believers into a position of difficulty and danger where there is need both of guidance and of a power of discrimination" (25-26).

The second form of Sykes's argument is that major theologians since Schleiermacher have been concerned with the essence of Christianity in one way or another. This argument consumes the major portion of the book and includes attention to John Henry Newman, Adolph Harnack, A. Loisy, Ernst Troeltsch, and Barth. Although Sykes succeeds in showing the place of concern with "essence" in Schleiermacher, Harnack, Loisy, and Troeltsch, he is only marginally successful with Newman and Barth. It is interesting, though, to see how, by taking only this facet of contemporary theology and then working it through the thought of theologians, one gets an intriguing introduction to their thought.

The third way in which Sykes argues gives him an opportunity to display beautifully a rare congruence of style and content. Sykes is concerned about "the responsibility of the Christian theologian in his exercise of power in the Church," a power which resides in the ability to communicate. "Essence of Christianity," he argues, became caricatured as a reductionism, especially in Harnack, when in fact Harnack was guilty only of a "vulnerable clarity" (as opposed to Loisy's failure, and that of many others, we imagine, which was "invulnerable inclarity"). Not only did Harnack employ metaphors, such as the husk and the kernel, and the sap and the bark of the tree, he was attempting to locate the gospel in its "original force" and communicate it. This is the power of the theologian: to comment on or discern and interpret the shape of Christianity for the present and future. Any interpretation has three intentions, Sykes writes:
First, it summarizes a large mass of material in a brief and easily memorable form. Secondly, it creates a hierarchy of levels within the available texts, establishing the point at which certain considerations lie in relation to the heart of the matter. And, thirdly, it conveniently generalizes the conflict in such a way that similar problems can be picked out in other circumstances. (126)

Is this not what any successful employment of power does? Power and communication are closely related, if not the same thing. Why do pastors who have received degrees in theology read introductions to theology? Ostensibly for teaching the laity; but is it not true that most pastors and professionals other than teachers of religion receive only one course in theology? Usually the course is a survey. When the student becomes a professional, some help is needed in interpreting theology. And while pastors like to joke about adults who get more out of the children's sermon than they do from the regular sermon, they themselves often benefit more from introductions to theology than "real theology," whatever that is. Is it not also true that all professionals, including teachers of theology, appreciate lecturers and writers who can do precisely what Sykes says—summarize, create hierarchies of relationships, and generalize? Sykes witnesses to his own faith by writing a book that is a pleasure to read and establishes his own power in contemporary circles.

Why, though, does someone not tackle the subject straightforwardly and explain what the "essence of theology" is? At least two writers have tried to do this in recent years. Schubert Ogden wrote an essay, "What Is Theology?" (Journal of Religion [January 1972]), that set forth the scope and method of contemporary theology. This essay has been reprinted in a slightly truncated form in the Hodgson and King sourcebook described farther on. Other efforts have been made in books to address the same question in more detail, one of them being Maurice Wiles, What Is Theology? (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Pr., 1976). Wiles calls his effort "a discussion of the issues that arise when one tries to reflect on what is involved in doing theology" (vii). Although Wiles does not review the history of Christian thought, he interprets traditional themes, such as biblical studies, church history, doctrine, and philosophy of religion.
Even with an additional chapter on the relation of theology to science and the social sciences, the book is hardly more than an essay itself (111 pages). And Wiles does not really answer succinctly the question posed in the title, although he seems to be saying theology comprises questions about human existence that arise from an Enlightenment perspective. Eventually, though, we are required to answer those questions from a post-Enlightenment perspective, because that is where we are. Yet Wiles's book would be useful for laity, particularly, because of its summary of scholarship on traditional concerns and its brevity.

Explaining theology may encompass more than giving criteria or describing how theology has been done historically. For as strange as some may find it to think of theology outside the usual categories of reason, it does express itself as an act of the imagination. That is the thesis of Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., in Introduction to Theology: An Invitation to Reflection upon the Christian Mythos (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976). Jennings declares in the first sentence that his purpose is also to answer the question, what is theology? The short answer to the question is that theology is "reflection upon the Christian mythos," and this term is defined as "that set of symbols, rituals, narratives and assertions which, taken together, announce and mediate the presence of the sacred so as to represent, orient, communicate, and transform existence in the world for a community of persons" (2). As this definition implies, the meaning of theology for Jennings can be provided by exploring the literature on symbolism, beginning with Ernst Cassirer and Susanne Langer, and proceeding to works by Mircea Eliade, Paul Ricoeur, and numerous contemporary theologians. The result is an intriguing way of relating reflection to reality through symbols. Jennings neatly summarizes contemporary thought on hermeneutics up to the date of publication, and his analysis of Bultmann exemplifies the dilemma of theologians who must not only apply critical tools but provide a substantive interpretation. Beyond this part of the book, Jennings becomes more conventional in developing polarities of past and present, and so on, that seem less innovative. But as an introduction to theology, the book succeeds in showing us not only what
theology is—its content—but also that it is—the underlying formal premises that take us into the realm of conviction and the mythos.

If, as many of these writers say, Christian theology must pay attention not just to the existential questions but also to the traditional answers, why does someone not develop an introduction that begins with tradition and then considers its relation to the contemporary world? The question is hardly out of our word processors when voila! Wolfhart Pannenberg, *The Apostles' Creed in the Light of Today's Questions*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), comes to hand. Originally delivered as faculty lectures (presumably at the University of Munich), the book uses the creed as a framework because “the facts of redemption listed in its articles seem to have no relation to—or even seem to contradict—reality as it is experienced today” (9). The creed predisposes the work toward christology: one chapter on belief, two on God as creator and father, seven on Christ, and one each on Holy Spirit, church, forgiveness of sins, and resurrection/everlasting life.

Using the creed also means the writer must work around the articular structure. Can the articles be taken separately? Not really, and yet the framework requires it. Not that tradition or structure poses much of a handicap to a theologian like Pannenberg. He has his say, regardless of tradition, and he argues once again for history as the sphere where God becomes real: nature plays no part in our understanding of God because “God is conceived of from the starting point of man, not from the starting point of the world” (22). Similarly, we no longer worry about the two natures of Jesus Christ. Jesus' life “was decisively stamped by the expectation of the imminent coming of the rule of God” (50). Jesus' resurrection gives us an “eschatological hope,” and the Holy Spirit “is the present reality of God,” “the unlimited power of God determining the present” (140). Thus the cultural question referred to in the subtitle of the book really boils down to a historical question, an anthropological question, and all other elements are subsumed to it. This is an introduction to a theology of history.

Langdon Gilkey reverses the order of question and answer but uses the basic format of the creed in *Message and Existence: An*
Introduction to Christian Theology (Minneapolis: Seabury, 1979). For Gilkey, following Tillich, the cultural question receives a religious answer. Calling his book "a simple, reflective statement about the content of Christian faith" (2), Gilkey defines theology as "an explication of common experience from the perspective of a religious tradition" (7). And although the book is organized under headings of "I believe/in God the Father almighty/and in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord/and in the Holy Spirit," Gilkey believes the two greatest influences since the Enlightenment have been the domination of science and the rise of historical consciousness. Thus these realities pose the questions that challenge traditional religious faith. Even though he expounds a position that relies on process theology as well as Tillich's thought, Gilkey does consider resurrection and eternal life. Eugene TeSelle pointed out that Gilkey seems to have undue faith in "essential structures," which leads to an understanding of evil as human, not natural. An introduction, yes, but once again to one theologian's thought, in this case a cultural theologian.

It might be possible to introduce theology from tradition in yet another way. One of the stories about the legendary Barth had him telling students who were bored with his lectures on angels that "when you understand angelology you understand all of theology." What would happen if you took one problem and worked it through the historical material? We can gauge the results in Brian Hebblethwaite, The Christian Hope (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1984). After two compact chapters on the biblical background, Hebblethwaite reviews Christian history up to the Enlightenment, instructing or reminding us not only of the disputes of the early Christians over resurrection and eternal life, but also of Aquinas's work in developing purgatory, a reality that had an enormous impact on Christian practice, and the many forms of millenarianism. Hebblethwaite summarizes the thought of numerous thinkers well, but reduces major figures to minor ones by devoting only a single paragraph to nearly all. Joachim of Flore, who proposed dividing history into the ages of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, receives only one long paragraph, along with Emanuel Swedenborg and J. W. Darby. And as good as he is at condensing, the writer sometimes condenses too much to be fair and accurate.
Nevertheless, we receive five chapters on Christian thought since the Enlightenment, plus a concluding chapter giving the writer's own views. In the process we are exposed to an enormous variety of thought on death, life, the resurrection, hope, eternal life, the Parousia, eschatology, and apocalypse. In a high number of cases, the views of thinkers on these subjects surprisingly reveal their assumptions and major themes. Barth, then, may have been right. (Unfortunately, however, Hebblethwaite does not enlighten us on angels.) In trying to understand hope, we are led to understand theology itself.

A similar effort but much shorter is Dermot A. Lane, *The Experience of God: An Invitation to Do Theology* (Ramsey, N.J.: Paulist, 1981). Declaring that “the question of God is the ultimate question of life,” Lane believes the contemporary problem is “the possibility of experiencing God in the world” (v, vi). In writing that is clear and coherent, Lane proceeds to review the criteria for evaluating an experience of God, the way God’s revelation comes in and through experience, and how faith can reflect a personal response to God. The advantages of a 104-page book on experience do not have to be explained to pastors in the Methodist tradition.

What occurs to many who think of introducing people to theology is exposure to the classics. Peter C. Hodgson and Robert H. King undertook just such a project in editing *Christian Theology: An Introduction to Its Traditions and Tasks* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 2nd ed., 1985), which has a companion volume, *Readings in Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985). The first book is an anthology with fifteen original essays on aspects of theology. David Tracy discusses the “new paradigm” and the correlation method. Hodgson and Edward Farley review the “Scripture principle.” Other chapters include Gilkey on God, George Stroup on revelation, David Kelsey on anthropology, Robert R. Williams on sin and evil, Walter Lowe on Christ and salvation, Hodgson and Robert C. Williams on the church, Sykes on the sacraments, David Burrell on Christian life, Carl E. Braaten on the kingdom and life everlasting, John Cobb on world religions, and Sallie McFague on models and paradigms of theology. The finest chapter in the book comes from Julian Hartt, who reviews creation and providence in crisp writing that
flows from a lifetime of reflection on the subject. Each chapter includes a historical review and an analysis of issues as well as a bibliography.

The Readings reflect the same structure and include under each heading from five to eight selections from classical and contemporary thinkers. Both volumes were designed to introduce students to theology, presumably seminary students, but possibly also undergraduates. If the purpose of an introduction is to expose students to the full historical range of thought, these books serve admirably. They function less well to focus on what theology is in distinction from dogmatics, philosophy of religion, and doctrine. Furthermore, the omissions are interesting: no Protestant conservatives, Orthodox thinkers, or Jewish theologians are included in Christian Theology. The Holy Spirit, feminist theology, and aesthetics receive minimal attention in both volumes. These works represent today's theological establishment at work.

Slightly on the fringes is Ronnie Littlejohn, ed., Exploring Christian Theology (Lanham, Md.: Univ. Pr. of America, 1985), which combines excursus with an anthology in one volume. The book has only thirty selections under seven rubrics: method, God, creation and providence, human being and sin, Christ and salvation, church and Christian life, and kingdom and life everlasting. Littlejohn includes the conservatives: C. W. Christian on Scriptures and Carl Henry on creation. Three selections from John Hick would seem to be a bit much. The editor's introductions to each section, plus short introductions to each writer, plus retrospectives on each section, explain too much, mix banalities with philosophical analysis, and are rife with solecisms. Printed in typewritten pages, the book could be useful to those who have never been conditioned to typesetting.

—CHARLES E. COLE
Recently, while addressing an adult education forum in a local church, I ventured the opinion that the Protestant tradition has made a mistake by failing to honor celibacy as an authentic vocational possibility for Christians. The pastor of the congregation, displeased with my suggestion, protested by exclaiming, "The Bible never recommends celibacy!"

Of course, the pastor was overlooking texts such as Matt. 19:11-12 and 1 Cor. 7:25-35. The incident was noteworthy, however, not because it demonstrated lamentable ignorance of the content of the New Testament by a person engaged in the work of parish ministry (such demonstrations are no longer necessarily surprising), but because it illustrates the extent to which an appeal to Scripture may still carry putative force in moral argument even among Christians who rarely read the Bible. Even those who do not subscribe to a formally "high" doctrine of scriptural authority often feel compelled to assert that their ethical positions are in some way authorized by the New Testament. The claim is made across the theological spectrum, and it is often made most fervently with regard to issues not addressed explicitly by Scripture at all, such as abortion or nuclear arms policy.

In such circumstances, we are tempted to shrug and say, as my grandmother often did, "The Devil can cite Scripture to his
purpose." If interpretations are hopelessly plural, the Bible can hardly provide meaningful guidance; we would need, in that case, to look elsewhere for contemporary ethical norms. The intuition of the faithful, however, has always been otherwise: we cannot shake the conviction that Scripture will provide moral guidance if only we can read it aright. But how to do that? There's the rub.

Precisely at this point yawns the widest gulf between the academic study of the Bible in seminaries and the use of the Bible in the church. The New Testament courses taught in seminary prepare the student to understand, say, the historical context of Matthew's teaching or the contours of Pauline theology, but rarely do they satisfactorily address the equally crucial and much more difficult tasks of hermeneutical synthesis: does Matthew's demand for a righteousness more exacting than the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees contradict Paul's gospel of the justification of the ungodly? How do these disparate voices within the canon inform our ethical reflection?

Recently, scholars working in the disciplines of ethics and biblical studies have produced a number of works that seek to construct bridges enabling some commerce between ancient texts and modern application. This essay will survey some of the more important efforts.

SURVEYS OF NEW TESTAMENT ETHICS

The label "New Testament ethics" should be discarded as a category confusion, according to Wayne Meeks, the Yale religious studies professor noted for his widely acclaimed sociohistorical study, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Pr., 1983). His newest book, *The Moral World of the First Christians* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), approaches the New Testament with questions and sensibilities shaped by the sociology of knowledge (compare Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*) and by the symbolic anthropology of Clifford Geertz. Meeks is convinced that our understanding of the New Testament will be badly skewed if we read it apart from a clear picture of the social realities out of which it emerged; for this
reason, he devotes nearly half of his book to sketching the social setting of the Roman Empire and "the great traditions" of ethical teaching in Greco-Roman philosophy and in Israel. Anyone looking for a refresher course on New Testament backgrounds could hardly do better than to read carefully through this material, marshalled by Meeks with a judicious simplicity that is the harvest of profound erudition.

Against this background, Meeks profiles the social ethos of several early Christian communities, concentrating on the ways in which their members were resocialized into a new symbolic world. Rather than surveying all the New Testament writings, he focuses on the communities of Paul, Matthew, and Revelation, as well as the communities depicted in the Didache and the writings of Irenaeus. All these texts are treated as sources for historical understanding about the shape of the early Christian communities and the processes of moral formation within those communities.

The resulting sketch of "the grammar of early Christian morals" is tantalizingly brief but sprinkled with fascinating insights. For instance, Meeks contrasts 1 Thess. 4:9-12 with Plutarch's treatise, "On Love of Brothers" (an essay on obligations among blood relatives), and comments on the "deep resocialization" that occurred as natural family ties were supplanted among Christians by conversion and ritual initiation into the new family of God (129). Or again, observing the breathtakingly paradoxical metaphors of Revelation, Meeks comments:

The business of this writing is to stand things on their heads in the perceptions of its audience, to rob the established order of the most fundamental power of all: its sheer facticity. The moral strategy of the apocalypse, therefore, is to destroy common sense as a guide for life. (145)

It may be doubted whether the New Testament texts really provide sufficient data for what Geertz calls a "thick description" of their social and symbolic worlds (and there lies the greatest potential weakness of the book), but no one can doubt that Meeks's questions open up illuminating new perspectives on the texts.
Meeks neither treats ethical issues under topical headings (divorce, possessions, etc.) nor offers any reflection about whether we can or should, as he puts it, "make the ethos and ethics of the first Christians our own." That is why his book is not about New Testament ethics in the usual sense: operating in the mode of social description, Meeks makes no normative proposals whatever. Anyone who dares, however, to undertake the synthetic task of using the New Testament to frame normative ethical judgments would do well to take account of Meeks's work. Few readers will come away from this book without an enhanced appreciation of how greatly the social world of the early Christian communities differs from the world in which we live. That appreciation should, in turn, alert us to the acute hermeneutical difficulties involved in appropriating New Testament teachings for our moral guidance.

One writer willing to confront those difficulties is Allen Verhey, whose book The Great Reversal: Ethics and the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984) is the closest thing we have to a comprehensive survey of New Testament ethics that also grapples with hermeneutical issues. Among the competing introductory texts in the field, this is the winner by a wide margin. Verhey begins with a historical reconstruction of the ethic of Jesus (difficulties with this strategy are discussed below), moves (still in a historical mode) to an analysis of the formation of moral teaching traditions in the Christian community prior to the composition of the New Testament writings, and then, shifting gears, deftly sketches out the moral perspective of each of the major New Testament texts, including individual treatments of each of the Gospels. At virtually every point, the discussion is grounded in solid critical scholarship.

In the final chapter of the book, Verhey discusses how the New Testament is to be used in ethical reflection: what sorts of appeals to the text are legitimate, and what constraints will govern the way in which the texts are interpreted? (The influence of David Kelsey’s The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology is evident throughout this chapter.) Verhey structures this part of the book as a report on the proposals made by previous scholars. Unfortunately, the scope of the work does not allow him to enter into sustained dialogue with the positions that he
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summarizes; consequently, the discussion is rather disjointed. In the end, Verhey offers his own guidelines for appropriating the New Testament in ethics: we should appeal to the New Testament to authorize "claims concerning Christian moral identity and integrity" (177) and to discover general principles, not concrete moral rules. The resurrection of Jesus is to function as the hermeneutical key that unlocks the ethical significance of the New Testament for us. In making these claims, Verhey speaks—in contrast to Meeks's neutral stance within the academy—as a theologian standing within a confessional community, seeking clarity about how the authority of Scripture might shape the lives of Christian believers. Regrettably, Verhey offers very little demonstration of how his guidelines might work in practice. Still, Verhey's work provides a double service of no small significance: he gives us a sensitive description of the varieties of ethical teaching in the New Testament, and at the same time he provides a theoretical framework for debate about how to employ these texts in the actual doing of ethics.

Taken together, Meeks and Verhey provide an excellent introduction to the range of basic issues that must be addressed in thinking about the ethics of the New Testament. Other introductory survey works now in print are less satisfactory for various reasons.

J. L. Houlden's Ethics and the New Testament (New York: Oxford Univ. Pr., 1973), though well-conceived in the structure of its presentation, is too skimpy in its execution to be of much help; Verhey's much richer discussions offer more reliable exegesis and more imaginative sympathy with the texts. Because of its concern to contrast New Testament ethics to "autonomous" ethics (i.e., ethics formulated without reference to religious warrants), Houlden's book might be useful as an introduction for readers not predisposed to think about ethical matters within the framework provided by the New Testament; however, Meeks has now found a much better way to accomplish that same purpose.

We would do well, though, to be instructed by Houlden's caution against appealing to "the moral teaching of Jesus" as the basis of New Testament ethics. Even if we restrict our attention to the canonical texts, we are confronted by diverse portrayals of
Jesus. Because the New Testament writings bear primary witness to the thoughts and customs of writers living a generation or more after Jesus, we can reconstruct Jesus’ own ethical teaching only indirectly and tentatively: “Jesus . . . is to be found at the end not at the beginning” of an inquiry into New Testament ethics (p. 4, in a critique of Rudolf Schnackenburg’s *The Moral Teaching of the New Testament*). The primary task of New Testament ethics is to describe the ethical perspectives of the texts as they stand rather than to speculate about what lies behind them.

R. E. O. White’s *Biblical Ethics* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1979) demonstrates some of the problems that can arise when Houlden’s warnings are not heeded. This devout and irenic work—whose author is principal of the Baptist Theological College of Scotland—argues that amidst the apparent diversity of ethical teaching in the Bible, “the imitation of Christ remains the heart of the Christian ethic” (109). Although this appeal to a classical motif has some merit, White fails to reckon sufficiently with the difficulty of defining the character of the “Christ” who is to be imitated. White’s Christ is a romantic figure who seems to have stepped out of the pages of an old Sunday school picture book, radiating a new religious experience of assurance and joy, striding through “the desert of legalism” (i.e., Judaism! [52]) and proclaiming a new inward spiritual kingdom. The portrait is an imaginative amalgam selectively created out of the four Gospels with no visible attempt to employ critical methods to distinguish between the different writings or between the Jesus of history and the Jesus of Protestant piety. Although White’s book was published in 1979, his dialogue in text and footnotes is with critical works published prior to 1950. This gives the book a curiously dated tone and no doubt explains White’s failure to grapple with recent critical developments, such as scholarship’s enhanced appreciation for the integrity of Judaism and for the centrality of apocalyptic thought in the New Testament.

A more felicitous attempt to deal with biblical ethics as a unity is offered by Birger Gerhardsson in a stimulating little monograph called *The Ethos of the Bible*, trans. Stephen Westerholm (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981). Rather than presenting a comprehensive account of biblical ethics, Gerhardsson
seeks to show, through representative portraits of Matthew, Paul, and John, that the ethos of early Christianity carries forward the ethical imperative expressed in Israel’s Shema (Deut. 6:4-5). Gerhardsson avoids the problems entailed in constructing a historical Jesus, and his work displays sympathetic respect for Israel’s moral traditions. In some ways, the design of the book may be compared to that by Meeks, with its emphasis on describing the ethos of selected New Testament texts. The descriptive categories used, however, are more theological than social, and the whole work drives toward theological synthesis in the final chapter. The synthetic move is deeply problematical, however, because it forces Gerhardsson to obscure the lines of his carefully drawn depictions of the individual witnesses by imposing the Shema upon all of them as a structuring device. Thus, in the end, Gerhardsson’s book is of more value as a goad to theological reflection on unity and diversity in New Testament ethics than as a balanced survey of the content of the texts.

METHOD: USING THE NEW TESTAMENT IN ETHICAL REFLECTION

Verhey’s preliminary sketch of the task of using the Bible in ethics pinpoints crucial issues that have been addressed in greater detail by several recent studies. These works are concerned not so much with describing the content of the New Testament’s ethical teaching as with the problem of spanning the gulf between the New Testament and the contemporary situation: how do we construct the bridge and how much freight can we carry across?

James Gustafson’s seminal 1970 essay, “The Place of Scripture in Christian Ethics: A Methodological Study” (Interpretation 24 [1970]: 430-55; reprinted in his Theology and Christian Ethics [Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1974], pp. 121-45), focused the questions and defined categories that remain helpful. Bruce Birch and Larry Rasmussen, a Hebrew Bible scholar and an ethicist both then teaching at Wesley Seminary, probed further into the issues in their collaborative study Bible and Ethics in the Christian Life (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976), which stressed the role of Scripture in character formation and the role of the church.
as a tradition-bearing community that shapes the moral identity of a people. These themes have increasingly come to prominence in recent discussion (see the comments on Stanley Hauerwas below). Birch and Rasmussen's book, like Gustafson's essay, has a programmatic intent: it defines procedures that would be appropriate in using the Bible in ethics, but it does not attempt to carry out the constructive task to which it points. What it does do is give us serviceable analytical tools for evaluating the work of others who have sought to perform the task.

_The Politics of Jesus_, by John Howard Yoder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), is by any account one of the most important ventures in New Testament ethics of the past generation. In vigorous conversation with biblical scholarship, Yoder argues _exegetically_ that the New Testament consistently bears witness to Jesus' renunciation of coercive power as a paradigm of obedience to God. In reaction to the Niebuhrian "Christian realism" which has dominated recent Protestant ethics, Yoder argues _normatively_ that the example of Jesus is directly relevant and binding for the life of the Christian community. Yoder's proposal allows him to display an impressive theological unity within the New Testament: in a series of trenchant chapters, he contends that not only the synoptic Gospels but also the Pauline letters, the deutero-Pauline and Catholic epistles, and Revelation bear witness to a vision of discipleship that entails following Jesus in the way of radical obedience and self-sacrificing, nonviolent love. Jesus is paradigmatic for Christian ethics precisely in his choice to go to the cross rather than take up arms against evil.

Yoder has been challenged on various particulars: his critics charge him with holding a naively optimistic anthropology, with a sectarian outlook, with overestimating the importance of "the option of a Zealot-like kingship" (57) as a temptation in Jesus' historical situation, and so forth. The Hebrew Bible, of course, does not lend itself either to christocentric exegesis or to arguments for pacifism; Yoder's chapter on the holy war tradition is perhaps the least convincing portion of the book. Still, Yoder has set forth a cogent case that effectively places the burden of proof on anyone who would seek to justify violence
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on the basis of the New Testament. In the long run, the most important challenges to Yoder are not exegetical in character but hermeneutical, disputing Yoder’s espousal of the example of Jesus as directly normative for Christian ethics.

Now, Yoder’s most recent book, a collection of essays under the title *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Univ. of Notre Dame Pr., 1984) offers an articulate defense of his hermeneutical procedures against the charge of sectarianism. Particularly important here is the volume’s introductory essay, “The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood.” The book is essential reading for those who want to follow the continuing debate sparked by Yoder’s provocative work.

One ethicist who has been profoundly influenced by Yoder is his former colleague at Notre Dame, Stanley Hauerwas, now of Duke Divinity School. The influence is most evident in Hauerwas’s most systematic formulation of his approach to the ethical task, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Univ. of Notre Dame Pr., 1983). Hauerwas, who champions character formation as the central concern of ethics, stresses the role of narrative in forming Christian convictions; consequently, the story of Jesus, in whom the kingdom of God is disclosed, plays a crucial role in teaching us about our identity and vocation as the people of God. But what is “the story of Jesus”? Hauerwas interacts only minimally with biblical scholarship and rarely offers any close exegesis of the New Testament texts themselves; his account of the contours of Jesus’ story is heavily indebted to Yoder. (See especially *Peaceable Kingdom*, pp. 72-95; also *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* [Notre Dame, Ind.: Univ. of Notre Dame Pr., 1981], pp. 36-52.)

Hauerwas’s fullest statement on how Scripture functions in ethics is to be found in his essay “The Moral Authority of Scripture: The Politics and Ethics of Remembering” (*Community of Character*, pp. 53-71). The ascription of moral authority to Scripture, according to Hauerwas, is nothing other than “the testimony of the church that this book provides the resources necessary for the church to be a community sufficiently truthful so that our conversation with one another and God can continue across generations” (63-64). The community lives by remem-
bering the story, and the story forms the community: “By attending closely to the example of those who have given us our scripture, we learn how to be a people morally capable of forgiveness and thus worthy of continuing to carry the story of God we find authorized by scripture” (69).

The vision is a compelling one, but it offers no methodological guarantees of faithfulness. Because Hauerwas is such a forceful and imaginative reader, we might hope that he would favor us in his future work with a more sustained grappling with the Gospel stories, providing more guidance than he has so far offered about how to allow stories as different as the Gospels of Luke and John, for instance, to form the character of our communities. The lingering suspicion that Hauerwas’s approach might give carte blanche to undisciplined intuition can be allayed only by walking with him through his reading of Scripture and of the contemporary situation.

Hauerwas and Yoder, in their slightly different ways, have found that a recovery of the centrality of the New Testament in Christian ethics has led them to a position athwart the American Protestant mainstream. This is hardly surprising. The New Testament texts were written in and for minority communities. The more conscientiously we seek to live within their symbolic world, the more we are likely to perceive ourselves as “strangers and exiles,” living uncomfortably in a broken world, sustained by a countercultural vision of the kingdom of God. But is this sectarian stance an inevitable result of grounding ethics in the New Testament, or is it an avoidable consequence of the particular methods that Hauerwas and Yoder use to move from text to ethic? Several important recent works seek to interpret the ethical implications of the New Testament in a way that sponsors a more constructive relationship between the church and the wider social world.

Readers perturbed by the apparent lack of methodological precision in Hauerwas’s work will likely revel in Thomas W. Ogletree’s *The Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983). Ogletree, dean of the Theological School at Drew University, has composed one of the most impeccably structured methodological treatises ever written on his topic. At the same time, however, readers unacquainted with phenom-
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enology and Hans-Georg Gadamer’s hermeneutics may find the content of this book dense and difficult.

Ogletree’s introductory chapter lays out a theory of language and interpretation that is fundamental to his enterprise. Interpretation is a dialogic process in which we encounter the biblical texts as pointers to elements of human experience that may illuminate our own historical experience.

There is a surplus of meaning in texts beyond what is explicitly uttered. . . . Interpretation, therefore, does not consist simply in the exposition of original meanings. . . . To capture what the texts are saying, we cannot simply repeat or paraphrase their explicit utterances. . . . We must rather generate new utterances, new accounts of the subject matter of the texts, which also make sense to us. Here we come up against a basic paradox: to say the same thing as the texts, we must say something different. (2-3)

The goal of interpretation, then, is a “fusion of horizons” (Gadamer’s phrase) between the world of the text and our world. This goal sets the agenda for the rest of the book: Chapter 2, by sketching a typology of “preunderstandings of the moral life,” clarifies the categories of ethical understanding that Ogletree brings from his “life world” to the Bible. In chapters 3-5, Ogletree carries out “encounters” with legal and prophetic traditions from the Hebrew Bible, with the synoptic Gospels, and with the Pauline letters, employing the typology of the second chapter to analyze the moral visions embodied in these texts. A final chapter sums up the results of the dialogue and proposes “constructive suggestions toward a fusion in contemporary life and thought of these two worlds of meaning” (4).

Ogletree concludes that Christian ethics must find ways to “revision” the understanding of temporality that comes to expression in the dialektical eschatology of the biblical texts, and he focuses attention on the church as a prophetic community in which the eschatological vision of the New Testament may be embodied. Thus, in the emphasis placed on the distinctive community of the faithful, Ogletree comes by his own route to a stance apparently parallel to that of Hauerwas.
This parallelism, however, should not obscure their very significant differences. Hauerwas's concentration on the formation of character in the community represents just one of Ogletree's four basic models for the preunderstanding of the moral life: the "perfectionist" model, centered on the cultivation of virtues. (It is no accident that Ogletree finds the Gospels and Paul also to represent this same model; the formal structure of Hauerwas's ethic recapitulates this feature of the New Testament texts precisely because he has consciously acknowledged their authority.) Ogletree, on the other hand, opts for the model of "historical contextualism," which embraces the other three models of moral understanding (consequentialist, deontological, and perfectionist) and allows for Christians to work for "morally significant social change" in social institutions beyond the church (190).

A second difference, equally significant, is the virtual absence of christology from Ogletree's ethical scheme, in contrast to Hauerwas's strongly christocentric account of the Christian story. The reason for this difference is not far to seek. Ogletree has scrutinized the New Testament texts through the lens of phenomenological categories derived from allegedly universal features of human experience; consequently, he sees in the New Testament not the particular story of God's unique act in Christ but rather more generalizable aspects of human religious experience. Thus, in this one respect, the divergence between these distinguished United Methodist ethicists may be understood as a reenactment of a familiar debate, with Hauerwas playing Barth to Ogletree's Bultmann. In any case, Ogletree has not only mapped the methodological problem with enviable rigor but also explored the biblical texts themselves in a fashion that compels serious attention from New Testament critics. Those who would recommend other approaches must earn the right to do so by working with the texts with the same persistence and sophistication that characterize Ogletree's efforts.

A different strategy altogether is at work in Stephen Charles Mott's *Biblical Ethics and Social Change* (New York: Oxford Univ. Pr., 1982). Mott, a professor of social ethics at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, undertakes the task of constructing a
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"biblical basis for implementing social change" (vii). The work reads like an implicit apology addressed to an evangelical constituency that reverences the Bible and distrusts political efforts to achieve justice. Unlike Hauerwas and Ogletree, Mott spends no time laboring over whether or how the Bible is to be construed as authoritative. He simply assumes that it is authoritative for the community of faith and then proceeds in the first part of the book to develop "a biblical theology of social involvement," which draws on a wide spectrum of biblical texts to argue that God's grace compels us to respond in love towards others, a love that must be expressed through practical efforts to achieve justice in society. Through such efforts the present claim of "the Reign of God" is made manifest. Mott treats the canon as a vast theological unity and offers no extended sketches of the ethics of the different New Testament writers; nonetheless, he treats the texts with exegetical sensitivity. His reading is "down close" to the actual language of the text, and he frequently appeals tellingly to the Hebrew and Greek to make his points. In many ways, he is carrying out Hauerwas's prescription by living resolutely within the Bible's story and discerning the requirements of Christian faithfulness within that story; yet his perception of the shape of that story differs radically from the shape that Hauerwas discerns. This is matter for reflection.

The second half of the book ("Paths to Justice") is a discussion of the means to be employed in seeking the ends defined in the first half. Here Mott considers a series of particular ethical issues, including civil disobedience, revolutionary violence, and the uses of political reform, concluding that all of these tactics may be employed by Christians under various circumstances.

Mott should be read in counterpoint with Yoder, with whom he shares a straightforward confidence in the Bible's perspicuity and authority. Mott challenges Yoder's exegesis of the pertinent New Testament texts dealing with Jesus' death, arguing that these texts neither teach nor imply an ethic of nonviolence: "Jesus surrenders to death because it is his destiny in God's plan of salvation, rather than in obedience to a principle of nonviolence" (180). The fundamental imperatives of love and justice, according to Mott, will sometimes require the use of arms to defend the oppressed and to resist evil. The differences
between Mott and Yoder turn on the issue of how the figure of Jesus is normative for Christian ethics: Mott sees in Jesus not a pattern to be emulated but an expression of the love of God, which must be continually actualized anew in historical experience through our efforts to seek justice. In many respects, Mott’s argument is a restatement of Reinhold Niebuhr’s social ethic, bolstered by much more detailed biblical exegesis and modified by a slightly more optimistic assessment of human capacity to achieve justice through social institutions. (Mott, also a Methodist, appeals at several points to John Wesley as an exemplar of the Christian vision for justice in the social order.)

A weakness of the book is its neglect of the hermeneutical problem: is “the Reign of God” a symbol that we can appropriate as easily and directly as Mott supposes? Still, for its target audience, this is a powerful book that eloquently pleads the biblical case for a particular posture of the church as agent of justice in society.

Several other worthwhile recent books confront the problem of how the New Testament should inform ethical reflection. Richard Longenecker’s *New Testament Social Ethics for Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984) is a clearly written essay on the hermeneutical problem of using the New Testament in social ethics; Longenecker, a professor of New Testament at Wycliffe College, University of Toronto, argues for a “developmental hermeneutic” that treats the New Testament as a source of principles to be applied creatively in new historical situations. He then illustrates his proposal with an extended discussion of Gal. 3:28. The argument, if not particularly revolutionary, is unusually lucid. This book makes an excellent companion to Mott, being directed at the same readership and articulating a hermeneutic very similar to that implicit in Mott’s work.

Other significant contributions to the field are *Christian Biblical Ethics: From Biblical Revelation to Contemporary Christian Praxis: Method and Content*, ed. Robert J. Daly (New York: Paulist, 1984), and Willard M. Swartley, *Slavery, Sabbath, War, and Women: Case Issues in Biblical Interpretation* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald, 1983). The Daly volume is a collaborative collection of essays emerging from a task force of the Catholic Biblical Association; while it reads very much like committee work in progress, it provides
useful insights into the state of the methodological discussion among American Catholic scholars. Swartley's book, as indicated by its title, takes a case study approach to four issues historically debated in Christian ethics and analyzes the hermeneutical assumptions and methods of the disputants. Fairly summarizing an enormous quantity of material, Swartley compels the reader to recognize how complicated the appeal to the authority of the Bible really is in ethical argumentation. This book might prove useful fare for an ambitious adult study group.

APPLICATION: SELECTED TEXTS AND ISSUES

Finally, some note should be made of books that approach problems of New Testament ethics through careful investigation of particular New Testament writings or chosen ethical issues. The roll of such works is very long, but I would like to single out four of them here as exemplary.

A first-rate example of making the fruits of scholarship available to the church is provided by Victor Paul Furnish's *The Moral Teaching of Paul: Selected Issues* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2nd rev. ed., 1985). Furnish, professor of New Testament at the Perkins School of Theology, addresses four key ethical issues on which the authority of Paul is often cited: marriage and divorce, homosexuality, the role of women in the church, and the relation of Christians to government. With regard to each topic, Furnish patiently sorts out misconceptions and offers lucid explanations of the passages in light of rigorous historical-critical exegesis. Throughout, Furnish seeks to demonstrate how to handle the Pauline letters in a way that treats them neither as "sacred cow" nor as "white elephant" but as demonstrations of the forms taken by "faith being enacted in love" in concrete historical situations.

If this splendid little book has any shortcoming, it lies in its avoidance of the issues surrounding the normative status of the deuto-Pauline and Pastoral Epistles. It is all very well to show that Paul's ethic for male-female relationships was fundamentally egalitarian and that the subordinationist teaching traditionally attributed to Paul in fact appears primarily in later
pseudonymous letters or in interpolations to authentic ones, but the Pastorals remain in the canon. Somehow the church must decide what to do with the ethical teachings found in these writings, and Furnish gives us no help on this question. To raise this criticism, however, borders on ingratitude in the face of a study as finely executed and useful as the one that Furnish has given us. This is the best place to look for balanced treatment of Paul's teaching on the issues addressed; readers who want to pursue further investigations can consult the select bibliographies that Furnish supplies, or they can turn back to Furnish's own earlier and more comprehensive work, *Theology and Ethics in Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968).

Some of the same texts and issues that Furnish treats are placed in a wider framework of ethical deliberation by Lisa Sowle Cahill in *Between the Sexes: Foundations for a Christian Ethics of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress; New York: Paulist, 1985). Cahill, a Roman Catholic ethicist at Boston College, sees Scripture as one of four "reference points" for Christian ethics; the other three are Christian "foundational texts," normative philosophical accounts of the human, and descriptive empirical accounts of the human (5). (Readers of this journal will notice, as does Cahill, the similarity of these factors to the Wesleyan "quadrilateral.") Within the matrix bounded by these reference points, Cahill develops a carefully reasoned method that allows Scripture to inform moral judgment without necessarily determining it. Although she is willing in the end to propose two criteria for the normative evaluation of sexual relations (commitment and procreative responsibility), she insists—primarily on the basis of the New Testament itself—that moral norms and criteria can never become a static ahistorical code. Rather, "the community itself, and the experience of its members in the Spirit, is the primary reference of moral evaluation, and also the primary basis from which moral discernment proceeds" (150). Cahill's emphasis on the role of the community in moral discernment is congruent with major themes in Ogletree and Hauerwas, but the texture of her argumentation is distinctive in its thorough and evenhanded attention to all four of her specified reference points. The book's strength lies not in its originality but in its judicious modelling of how Scripture functions in the formation of an ethical stance.
In *Sharing Possessions: Mandate and Symbol of Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), Luke Timothy Johnson examines the way in which the New Testament addresses another issue of fundamental moral significance: the ownership and disposition of material goods. Does the New Testament offer a clear set of guidelines? Through a survey of Luke-Acts, Johnson demonstrates that even this single narrative provides no consistent teaching on possessions. We find instead at least three different responses commended: radical renunciation, almsgiving, and community of goods. Rather than seeking some casuistic means of harmonization, Johnson argues, we should see in this diversity a clue to a deeper mystery: possessions are extensions and symbolizations of the self, and our use of them figures forth our relation to God. This insight allows Johnson to draw together a wide range of biblical materials in support of a basic mandate: if we love and trust God, we will share our possessions with fellow humans in need. How we are to do that cannot be prescribed a priori; it is a matter to be discerned in “the obedience of faith.” So formulated, the argument sounds disarmingly simple, but Johnson’s exposition is wide-ranging and astute in its unmasking of the subtle ways in which we turn possessions into occasions for idolatry. Through his supple prose and discerning pastoral insight, Johnson has given us the gift of a well-wrought demonstration of the use of the Bible in ethics.

Finally, an approach of quite a different sort is exemplified by Dan O. Via, Jr., in his recent study, *The Ethics of Mark’s Gospel—In the Middle of Time* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985). Via, cultivating Amos Wilder’s seminal suggestion that “the road to a moral judgment is by way of the imagination” (quoted on page 12), concentrates not primarily on the ethical teachings contained in Mark’s Gospel—which are in any case not extensive—but draws attention instead to the way in which Mark’s plot construction creates a particular perception of temporality. The narrative form of Mark’s presentation creates a symbolic life world within which existence is perceived: “By preserving the movement or flow of time into the future, by representing discipleship as movement along a way, Mark provides a narrative basis for the kind of psychological and
existential posture that is requisite for ethical responsibility.” (65). In the heart of the book, Via works through Mark 10, illustrating Mark’s vision of discipleship as existence “in the middle of time.” While he would contend that his demythologized phenomenological reading of Markan apocalyptic as a form of temporal sensibility does have the effect of making this New Testament text “available . . . for use in contemporary ethical reflection” (7), Via does not undertake the constructive ethical task in this book. Readers will have to carry forward the task of application for themselves.

Of the four books mentioned here, Via’s is by far the most difficult to read, because of its extensive interaction with literary criticism and philosophical hermeneutics. Precisely these features of the book, however, will enable those who choose to take up the challenge to draw some fascinating connections and contrasts with the work of Ogletree and of Via’s colleague at Duke, Hauerwas. Furnish and Johnson offer the most immediate practical help in answering questions of the “What does the New Testament say about X?” form. Cahill offers the most careful explanation of how New Testament teachings on a particular issue must be related to a wider range of considerations in theological ethics.

In summary, the recent outpouring of works on various aspects of New Testament ethics bears witness to the church’s urgent need to render some coherent account of how Scripture informs the life of the community of faith. Only if such an account can be given will we be able to respond intelligently to Paul’s admonition: “Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ” (Phil. 1:27).
It is now common knowledge that not every new theological idea must be spawned in Europe, preferably in Germany, in order to be taken seriously. Within the last two decades the most challenging theologies in the Christian world have come from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, areas we usually refer to as the third world. What is even more significant is that these theologies, to which the adjective "liberation" is usually applied, have not been born in centers of learning and have not been the creations of highly trained academics. Instead they have come from "the underside of history," nurtured out of the experiences of lay people, most of them materially poor, politically oppressed, and economically exploited.

To be sure, "liberation theology," as we read it, comes to us in books, written for the most part by people with impressive academic credentials. But, as the authors themselves would be the first to insist, it is not they who have created liberation theology. Having been in the midst of the struggle with the downtrodden (a rather unusual place for theologians to be), they have, in effect, been taking notes on what is going on, notes which they pass on to us in the form of books. Liberation theology is genuinely a "people's theology," a theology from

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the perspective of the poor, for whom "liberation" is not a cerebral concern but a matter, often quite literally, of life and death.

Since a brief review cannot do justice to the many facets of this worldwide liberation concern, we will use the writings of Latin American Christians as a kind of case study, issuing the reminder that analogous movements are found in the rest of the world as well, including such North American expressions as black theology and feminist theology, both extensive enough to merit full-length treatment of their own.

INITIAL EXPOSURE

Since this is a "people's theology," growing out of specific cultural and socioeconomic situations, it is appropriate to begin with an example of the people's own expression of their faith. A stunning example can be found in the relatively inexpensive volume ($10.95) edited by Philip and Sally Scharper, The Gospel in Art by the Peasants of Solentiname (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1984). Solentiname was a lay Christian community in Nicaragua founded by Ernesto Cardenal, presently minister of culture in Nicaragua, and destroyed by Somoza's troops before his fall. Its inhabitants, not highly educated, spent much of their time trying to relate the gospel story to their own situation. They did this through discussions of the Bible (to be noted later), and some of them, though without professional training, did it through art. The book contains thirty-one paintings of events in the life of Jesus, with appropriate excerpts from the people's own discussion of the events on facing pages. The setting is the Nicaraguan countryside, with indigenous architecture, clothing, topography, and so forth, thus exemplifying a consistent theme of liberation theology—that the biblical story is also a contemporary story. The liberating power that Jesus brought back then is also liberating power available today. For those with eyes to see, the paintings also provide pertinent social commentary: Herod's banquet table, in the scene where the head of John the Baptist is displayed, features Coca Cola, an indication of where imperialist power lines up in the biblical
drama, and the soldiers’ uniforms in the episode of the slaughter of the innocents are combat fatigues, courtesy of the United States Army.

Verbal equivalents of these trenchant paintings are found in Ernesto Cardenal, *The Gospel in Solentiname*, trans. Donald D. Walsh (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1976-1982), a series of four volumes that display “people’s theology” at work. Instead of offering a homily at the mass in Solentiname after reading the Gospel lesson, Father Cardenal would ask the peasants to share aloud what it said to their situation. The four volumes are transcriptions of these exchanges. Reading them is the best way to get a “feel” for liberation theology.

The experience in Solentiname, of people engaging in Bible study on Sunday in order to figure out what to do on Monday, is characteristic of the *comunidades de base*, the base communities, or “grassroots communities,” that have been the creative edge and nerve center of liberation theology. A number of studies of the base communities have now appeared. The most recent and fullest account is Guillermo Cook, *The Expectation of the Poor: Latin American Base Ecclesial Communities in Protestant Perspective* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1985), a careful analysis of the base communities, concentrating on their expression in Brazil. Cook deals with the historical, cultural, economic, ideological, and theological dimensions of the communities. The author, who has impeccable North American evangelical credentials (Bob Jones University and Fuller Theological Seminary), has provided a model of involved scholarship. Although replete with facts, information, charts, and extensive bibliography, the book nevertheless manages to capture not only the flavor of the base communities but also their challenge. In Cook’s judgment Latin American evangelicalism is in danger of becoming too establishment-oriented and comfortable, and he is able to employ the model of the base communities to suggest ways for Protestants as well as Catholics to avoid the sellouts to culture, country, and church that always tempt groups enamored of, and beginning to taste, success.

Another mode of entrance into liberation theology available to North Americans is biography. Liberation theology is not theory found in books but commitment expressed in lives—and deaths.
Whenever men and women begin to live the meaning of the gospel in an oppressive situation, those persons are in for trouble. The costs and the joys of discipleship are mirrored in their lives and deaths. Until we have information on the thousands of nameless ones, we must learn from those whose names we know, and of those who have paid the price of martyrdom, one story that comes through with special power is that of Oscar Romero, archbishop of San Salvador. A routinely conservative priest who was made archbishop (perhaps because he was routinely conservative), Romero went through a conversion experience, realized that the gospel called him to side with the poor, and realized further that to side with the poor meant to side against the military junta. James Brockman, in The Word Remains: A Life of Oscar Romero (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1982), captures the flavor of Romero's life, with a detailed account of the events that made it a foregone conclusion that the junta would murder him. The important thing is that Romero was typical of many of his generation—priests or lay people whose conventionality was challenged by brutal abuses of power, demanding from them a new life dedicated to identifying with the poor and oppressed. What is even more important is that for every Romero we know about, there are hundreds, perhaps thousands, who have likewise been changed, and that the powers of hell, even those embodied in cruel and inhuman dictatorships, will not finally be able to prevail against them.

OVERALL APPRAISALS

It is through the experiences of the people, then, that we make our initial foray into the role of theology in Latin America. Once we have done that, we can turn to some overall survey material. If, out of living intensely in great danger, within small communities that empower one another, a new way of doing theology emerges, what will that theology be like? The best single volume by which to answer the question is still one of the earliest—the book that brought liberation theology to the attention of the rest of the world—Gustavo Gutiérrez, A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation, trans. and ed. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1972).
Gutiérrez is a mestizo who grew up in Peru, received a "classical" theological education as a priest in Louvain, Lyons, and Rome, and had to start learning all over again when he returned to the slums of Lima to work with the poor. His book, a masterpiece of clear and well-ordered argument, situates liberation theology in the context of ongoing Catholic thought, provides an arsenal of materials from the Bible and church tradition, lays out the various levels of liberation, and deals extensively with the role of the church. No other single book approaches it for comprehensiveness and intelligibility. To it should be added a recent book by Gutiérrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1984), which expounds a "spirituality of liberation" and helpfully develops what is contained within that phrase. Since liberation theology is often accused (falsely) of being too "materialistic," concerned only with politics, or nothing but a thin veneer disguising a Marxist worldview, *We Drink from Our Own Wells* is an important antidote. Not only does Gutiérrez lay such charges to rest, but he provides a helpful manual for all Christians seeking to deepen the roots of their spiritual life while living and working in the strident world of the here and now.

Two other books of overall interpretation, one small and one large, are especially helpful to the new reader. The small book is Edward Cleary, *Crisis and Change: The Church in Latin America Today* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1985). Illustrating his thesis that crises lead to change, the author conducts the reader on a journey, described in nontechnical language, through the vicissitudes of the last twenty to thirty years. He describes the emergence of new leadership, the developing concept of the church (from Medellín to Puebla), the role of liberation theology, the place of the base communities, the emergence of the laity, and the grim story of increasing conflict between the church and the military.

The large book, Philip Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion: Christians in Central American Revolutions* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1984), deals with Central America and tells in exciting detail (such a story is never dull) how the church becomes (to use the "in" neologism) "conscienticized" to the task of making a "preferential option for the poor," and what this entails in terms
of commitment, risk, the struggle with the issue of violence, and so on. Berryman provides sufficient detail so that the careful reader receives a comprehensive overview of the major issues that dominate United States policy toward Central America. The best refutation of the "Reagan doctrine" is facts, and Berryman provides a basketful.

Some of the same territory is covered, from a different perspective, by the Cornell historian, Walter LaFeber, in *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America* (New York: Norton, expanded ed., 1984). The broad sweep of American foreign policy in Central America over the last century is portrayed with consummate clarity. If people wonder why the United States is not loved by Central Americans, a review of the dreary story of imperialistic diplomacy will put the perplexity to rest. The need for liberation from such oppression is painfully clear after reading LaFeber's sober and responsible chronicle.

One other history, the most massive of all, is an important reference work for the whole of Latin America, and particularly for the role played by the church. This is Enrique Dussel, *A History of the Church in Latin America: Colonialism to Liberation (1492–1980)* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981). Dussel, a Catholic lay historian who was forced to leave his native Argentina after attempts on his life, is one of the most prolific writers on liberation theology, and here he brings his wide learning to bear on understanding the role of the church throughout the history of Latin America. The story of its contemporary emergence on the side of the victims is fascinating, particularly when one has traced, with Dussel, the baleful history of a church that until recently was on the side of the well-to-do. The 360 large pages carry the story up through the meetings of the Latin American bishops at Puebla in 1979.

**THE BIBLICAL CONTRIBUTION**

If the experience of oppression and the desire to overcome it has been one polar reality in the rise of liberation theology, the other has been the importance of Scripture. One is tempted to point to a "rediscovery" of Scripture as a key to understanding liberation commitments, but a more appropriate term may
simply be the "discovery" of Scripture. The Bible did not loom large in Catholic thought and life until shortly before Vatican II, so that to many contemporary Catholics the Bible is a brand new book to which they have never really been exposed before. If Protestants had tamed the Bible into a bland document supporting the status quo, Catholics had simply ignored it. But with the advent of biblical studies in Catholic institutions and the unleashing of the Bible in the lives of members of the laity, Scripture has had a directness and freshness that has led to its being taken seriously not only for understanding the world but for changing it. Lay people have begun to see the Bible as a book for oppressed people written by oppressed people. Certain passages have had an overwhelming impact on Latin Americans, most notably, perhaps, the story of the Exodus and the story of Jesus preaching at Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30), with such passages as Jer. 22:13-17 and Matt. 25:31-46 (the story of the Last Judgment) crowding in for attention too.

One of the most extensive biblical explorations is another early book, José Miranda, *Marx and the Bible: A Critique of the Philosophy of Oppression*, trans. John Eagleson (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1974). Since the title is likely to scare away North American readers, it should be noted that the book has relatively little to say about Marx and an extraordinary amount about the Bible. Miranda brings together, with meticulous exegesis, the passages that most powerfully illustrate the themes of liberation and justice. One cannot read this book without being shaken by the centrality of the Bible as a catalyst for social revolution, and the ease with which for centuries the church has been able to hide this fact.

J. Severino Croatto, in *Exodus: A Hermeneutics of Freedom*, trans. Salvator Attanasio (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1981), deals in detail with the paradigmatic liberation story of the Bible and then shows how its liberation theme is carried through the prophets, the Synoptics, and the Pauline writings. Croatto and Miranda demonstrate conclusively the biblical roots of the liberation struggle.

Another helpful biblical study, containing much more than its slim format would suggest, is Elsa Tamez, *Bible of the Oppressed*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1982). A fusion
of two small books originally published in Spanish, *Bible of the Oppressed* takes two central biblical themes, “oppression” in Part I and “the good news of liberation” in Part II, and subjects them to exegetical scrutiny. The care exhibited in this book lays to rest the occasional canard that liberation theologians are biblical dilettantes. Professor Tamez can hold her own with the best of the exeges, and her book can not only help people under oppression discover a biblical basis for opposition but also help the rest of us to re-examine the comfortable middle-class biases we bring to the biblical materials. It is important that a woman now plays a significant role in relating Bible study to liberation theology, for the Latin culture as well as the Latin church—not to mention our own—has a long way to go in acknowledging the contribution of those who are “triply oppressed.”

A multivolume series of biblical studies has been launched by Juan Louis Segundo, who earlier did a post-Vatican II /pre-liberation theology series on the church subtitled *A Theology for Artisans of a New Humanity*. (Segundo has also written a seminal volume, *The Liberation of Theology*, trans. John Drury [Maryknoll: Orbis, 1976], which argues that what is new about liberation theology is not its content but its method.) The overall title of the five-volume series on which he is presently embarked is “Jesus of Nazareth Yesterday and Today,” and Volume II, *The Historical Jesus of the Synoptics*, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1985), can be singled out for special attention, not only because it deals with the place of Jesus in liberation theology, but also because it speaks directly to North Americans who are themselves trying to rethink “the historical Jesus of the Synoptics.” Segundo sees “the political key” as central to an understanding of his subject matter, and the book is rich in providing ways of looking at Jesus’ life and teaching that will be new to most North Americans. His treatment of the political dimension of Jesus’ ministry, the consequent new ways of looking at teaching about the kingdom of God, and a recasting of the prophetic dimension of Jesus’ ministry, suggest many new insights. Appendices on “The Resurrected Jesus” and “More on the Political Key” are further exegetical studies that lead the reader in unexpected directions.
LIBERATION THEOLOGY

THE REALITY OF CONTROVERSY

The controversies occasioned by liberation theology between its exponents and the Vatican have been front-page news in the secular as well as religious press. At the time of writing (just after Cardinal Ratzinger’s conciliatory second statement on liberation theology has appeared) we can hope that some of the rancor will disappear. The issues in the controversy, however, are central, and a helpful understanding of them can be attained by reading Leonardo Boff’s *Church: Charism and Power—Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church*, trans. John W. Diercksmeier (New York: Crossroad, 1985), the subtitle of which, in the original Portuguese, was *Essays in Militant Ecclesiology*. “Militant” they are, and this is the book that occasioned Boff’s being silenced for a period of eleven months, chastisement for stepping over the line of what Rome thought was appropriate.

The book is a collection of essays originally published over several years. A number of the essays are gems of clarity and conciseness, offering new models for a church that takes seriously the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the emphasis that worried the hierarchy in Rome, for not even a powerful hierarchy has full control over the Holy Spirit, and the essays suggesting that the power of the Spirit is at work in the base communities ruffled Roman beards. This issue of authority, rather than occasional references to Marxism, was clearly the source of official disquiet. (It should be added that a few of Boff’s pointed comments about parallels between ecclesiastical investigations and star chamber proceedings in the Soviet Union surely helped to fan the flames.) The book is important for at least three reasons: as a primary source for detecting tensions between Rome and liberation thinkers; as an example of fresh creativity in Roman Catholic thought; and as a message for anyone, Catholic or otherwise, who wants, in Boff’s words, “to nourish faith in the strength of the Spirit that is capable of awakening the dormant heart of the institutional Church” (48).

The fact that Rome relented and shortened the length of Boff’s silencing suggests that his views are not quite so out of line as the Curia was originally contending. Good news for Boff,
surely, but equally good news for the rest of us who can look forward to further contributions from his prolific pen.

Out of that already prolific production, one book in particular deserves special mention since it, like Gutiérrez's We Drink from Our Own Wells, affirms the inalienable affinities between spirituality and the concern for justice that is at the heart of liberation theology. This is Way of the Cross—Way of Justice, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1980), a series of meditations in blank verse on the Stations of the Cross (Boff adds a fifteenth station, the Resurrection, to round out the story). In compelling and vivid language he describes the meaning of each station "Then," and follows it with a section dealing with its meaning "Now." It is Boff's way of demonstrating that theology has "two eyes": one eye looks to the past, and the other to the present, and using them both is the only way to avoid theological myopia. The book has the added virtue that since many of the characters in the original "devotion" are women, their role is highlighted in a way that has not been characteristic of theology in the past, whether liberation or other.

THE TASK OF EDUCATION

The struggle for liberation is not only a matter of experiencing, acting, and reflecting, it is also a matter of educating—of finding ways to "conscienticize" people, to make them aware of their true situation so that they will organize in order to change it. No one has done more to develop a "pedagogy of the oppressed" (to cite the title of his earliest book) than Paulo Freire, a Brazilian layman who developed methods of overcoming illiteracy that were (rightly) recognized as revolutionary, so that he was (wrongly) expelled from both Brazil and Chile. Pedagogy of the Oppressed remains a key work, but since parts of it are difficult to read, it may not be the best place to start, though all roads to Freire finally lead through it. A good beginning place for exposure to this challenging thinker is a recent collection of essays and interviews, The Politics of Education: Culture, Power, and Liberation, trans. Donaldo Macedo (South Hadley, Mass.: Bergin & Garvey, 1985). While there is inevitably some repetition in any collection, all the material is extremely
readable, and Freire has been well served by his translator. “The Adult Literacy Process as Cultural Action for Freedom” is a basic chapter, and “Education, Liberation and the Church” will be of special interest to readers of this article, with its distinctions between the traditional church, the modernizing church, and the prophetic church.

THE MESSAGE TO US

What kinds of writing can help to relate the power of liberation theology to our own situation? It is one thing to study a movement somewhere else; in the case of liberation theology, to do no more than that is a moral cop-out. For liberation theology says at least two things to us. The first is that a major cause of third world oppression is United States foreign policy and the activities of the multinational corporations, whose profits do not stay in the “underdeveloped” countries but return to the United States or Europe to make the rich richer while the poor simultaneously become poorer. The second thing we learn is that if liberation is truly central to the gospel it must have meaning for us as well.

A book that brings these concerns together is Richard Shaull, *Heralds of a New Reformation: The Poor of South and North America* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1984). Shaull lived many years in Brazil and in recent years has been spending part of each year in Latin America and part in North America, so he is singularly well-equipped to communicate across high cultural barriers. His book, working out of a biblical context of Israel, the prophets, and Jesus, challenges us with “Looking at the World from Below,” after which he deals with adopting new perspectives, changing our lifestyles, working for a new economic order, and engaging in our own counterparts of the base communities. He helps to bring the concerns home to us, so that we will not only see oppression far away but also near at hand, realize that we are implicated in the ongoing injustice, and be forced to confront the fact that the issue is genuinely conversion, turning about, making a fresh start.

A different, but also powerful, “first world” response is a recent book by Georges Casalis, a French Reformed pastor and
A scholar, that has not yet gotten sufficient attention, Correct Ideas Don't Fall from the Skies: Elements for an "Inductive Theology," trans. Sister Jeanne Marie Lyons and Michael John (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1984), is a plea for an inductive theology, i.e., a theology that arises out of experience rather than "falling from the skies" in the form of timeless truths. The chapters entitled "The Writing of History" and "The Four Dimensions of Hermeneutics," while not easy going, are powerful critiques of our "classical" ways of doing theology. Casalis insists that to be a Christian is to be a "militant" and to take a partisan stand against injustice. Casalis offers stronger meat than many North Americans will voluntarily chew, which is an excellent reason why the book should be read, marked, and inwardly digested.

A WORD OF THANKS

It would be ungracious to conclude this survey without calling attention to an important fact: the great bulk of the books noted here come from a single publishing house, Orbis Books of Maryknoll, New York. The theological world owes an unpayable debt to Orbis for deciding, back in the early 1970s when it was an extremely risky thing to do, to provide in English the best of third world theology. It has been done so ever since. One of its founders, Philip Scharper, a distinguished Catholic man of letters, devoted himself unstintingly to getting the venture started, so much so that he suffered a fatal stroke just months before retirement. Another of the founders was a Maryknoll priest, Fr. Miguel d'Escoto, the present minister of state in Nicaragua. Leaving safety and security of life in the United States behind, Father d'Escoto returned to his native Nicaragua while the United States-backed dictator Somoza was still in power, and worked with the people before, during, and after the military overthrow of Somoza in 1979. His is an acted-out liberation theology, and his single-minded commitment to the liberation of his own people has earned him the opprobrium of both the Vatican and the White House. Perhaps liberation theology will have arrived only when its proponents are no longer primary targets of both church and state. On that day, it will be church and state that have changed.
When I was asked by the editor of *Quarterly Review* to compare the major study Bibles, it was with reluctance and humility that I agreed to do so. I say "reluctance" because I realized that an evaluation of even one such volume would require much preparation, to say nothing of reviewing perhaps a dozen of them. I say "humility" because of an awareness of the vast amount of time, knowledge, and piety that had gone into the production of such volumes: years, and even decades in some cases. Upon viewing, for example, the monumental amount of information which the fourth edition of the Thompson Chain-Reference Bible contains, and considering the time it took to assemble it ("thirty-one years of intense Bible study on the part of the author . . . and his faithful wife"), one can only stand in awe! A sensitive reviewer, therefore, realizes that the task is out of the ordinary and that those whose work is to be reviewed may be more touchy about it than if it were an article which had been prepared over a short period of time for publication in a professional journal.

Consequently, I have decided to approach the task in three stages, the first two of which are meant to be self-standing. They should be of value to the reader as descriptions, apart from the

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more evaluative remainder: (1) a chart by means of which one may quickly compare the features of the various Bibles; (2) a general discussion of various of the features; (3) reflections upon the strengths or weaknesses of selected features.

Study Bibles have been reviewed with surprising infrequency, and especially rare is an article which compares their features in detail. A noteworthy exception is Robert Bratcher, "Study Bibles," in The Word of God: A Guide to English Versions of the Bible, ed. Lloyd R. Bailey (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), pp. 168-182. To it the reader may turn for detailed remarks on The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha; The New English Bible with Apocrypha; The Jerusalem Bible; The New Scofield Reference Bible (KJV); Thompson's The New Chain-Reference Bible; and The Ryrie Study Bible. Only a few of these are included in the present article.

The volumes which I have chosen for description and comparison are these:

Criswell Study Bible. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1979. King James Version. Edited by W. A. Criswell, with the assistance of several others at the Criswell Center for Biblical Studies, Dallas, Texas. The foreword places its effort within "the evangelical world."


Open Bible. New American Standard Bible. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1979. The list of editors and contributors is wide-ranging, including academicians (the majority from Talbot Seminary), clergy, radio evangelists, and an attorney.

Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha (RSV). Revised Standard Version. New York: Oxford Univ. Pr., 1965. Edited by Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger. For the more recent and expanded edition, see Bratcher's article.


A review of so many Bibles, in such short scope, necessitates that comparison be at selected points only. One thus runs the risk that the selections will not be representative. I have felt it important, therefore, that random selection be done "blind" rather than to search for certain types of response (e.g., my selection of the topic "marriage" for the subject indexes).

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE FEATURES

Introductions. The amount of information is fairly uniform from one study Bible to the next: approximately a half-page at the beginning of each book of the Bible (sometimes double that amount in Open Bible and in Criswell). The exception is NJB, whose general introductions give twelve pages to the Pentateuch, eleven pages to Joshua through Kings, thirty-three pages to the Prophets, ten pages to the synoptic Gospels, etc.

Ordinarily, such introductions were supplied at the time of translation rather than by a later study Bible committee. The exceptions are Criswell, Open Bible, Ryrie, Scofield, and
## FEATURES OF STUDY BIBLES

(N = No: feature not included; Y = Yes: feature included)

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NOTES TO THE FEATURES CHART


b. Not placed before each book of the Bible but part of the introductions to larger sections of Scripture, e.g., "Introduction to the Pentateuch."

c. By "annotations" is meant substantial comment at the bottom of each page of text, concerning matters of content and form. Mere footnotes (giving, e.g., alternative translations, evidence of the ancient versions, etc.) do not qualify for this designation.

d. Quantity of annotation, based upon linear inch of text vs. linear inch of annotation, as evident in Genesis 1-15, II Kings 1-10, and Isaiah 40-55. The combined percentage is given first, with the three constituent parts beneath it in parentheses.

e. The overall percentage for Scofield and Criswell has been inflated by measurement of notes from the early chapters of Genesis. Both editions give unusually long attention to Genesis 1-11: Scofield in order to outline an overall scheme for understanding the Bible, and Criswell in order to refute alternative explanations. Furthermore, the abundant footnotes of the NIV translators have been interwoven with Scofield's annotations, increasing the quantity of the measured product.

f. A few such references are provided in footnotes to the text.

g. Although such references were provided by regular editions of the RSV, they were deleted in the Annotated Bible edition.

h. The references are placed at the end of verses rather than in the margins.

i. Some maps cover multiple pages, while other single-page maps have a number of smaller inset maps. Thus, I have decided to list pages, rather than total maps.

j. In addition to the stated number of colored maps at the end of the volume, there are a large number of black-and-white sketches in the volume.

k. The index is a cross-referenced list to the detailed "Condensed Cyclopedia of Topics and Texts" (166 pp.).

l. For the Hebrew Bible only; one page is identical with Criswell.

m. Tucked away in the "Condensed Cyclopedia" section (no. 4222b, pp. 188f.), under the title "Periods of Old Testament History" and "Interval Between the Old and the New Testaments."

n. Open Bible's article is identical to that in Criswell. The latter attributes it to Merrill F. Unger and William White.

o. Open Bible's article is identical to that in Criswell.

p. Includes a long section on "Literary Forms of the Bible," which is unique among the various Bibles.

q. Limited to the Twelve Apostles.

r. Limited to the Hebrew Bible.

s. Open Bible's article, save for an occasional word, is identical to that in Criswell, but less one of Criswell's entries (Ps. 69:21; Matt. 27:34).

t. Contains the text of the Deuterocanonicals (Apocrypha), with annotations.

u. Includes brief discussion of the literature itself.

v. Among them: "Synopsis of Bible Doctrine," "The Miracles of Jesus," "Through the Bible in a Year."


x. Among them: "Special Bible Readings," "Portraits of Christ," and a variety of "Life Trees."

y. Among them: "Glossary" (unique), "The Bible: A Book of Destiny."

Thompson. Content ranges from an outline of the book (Thompson), to mention of the book's historical setting and a summary of its ideas (most of them), to a review of alternative opinions about date and authorship (Criswell, Open Bible, Ryrie). The NJB subheadings for the Pentateuch are: titles, divisions, contents; how the Pentateuch came to be written; relation of the narratives to history; the laws; and religious significance.

Some of the volumes are very explicit that "the Bible is God's infallible, inerrantly inspired Word. There are no mistakes in the Bible" (Open Bible, p. 19: compare Criswell, p. xviii; Ryrie, pp. 1955-1958). Although the inspiration of the Bible would not be denied by any of the committees, there are apparent differences of opinion as to what that means in detail. Not all of the committees would agree that infallibility applies to the realm of the sciences (in contrast to the apparent position of Open Bible in its introduction to Genesis). "Mainline," middle-of-the-road critical scholarship is reflected in the introductions in NEB, RSV, NAB, and NJB.

Annotations. Scripture may be discussed atomistically or holistically. That is, it may be examined a word, phrase, and verse at a time, or it may be examined by larger complete thought-units (comparable to the modern paragraph). Obviously, it is not a matter of one or the other, since larger ideas depend upon words and phrases and since words and phrases take their meaning from the larger context. It is, however, a matter of what one emphasizes as the "intention" of the text. Is there a central idea which the biblical speaker seeks to convey in a chapter (or comparable thought-unit)? Or is there an independent idea in each atomistic part, from which a scriptural truth may be derived?

For example: If one decided that Gen. 1:1-2:4 is holistic, presenting a major idea, one might then say that the text's agenda is to emphasize the importance of the Sabbath by pointing to its divine origin (NEB). On the other hand, if one decided that the verses (or parts thereof) are the primary bearers of meaning, then one might say that Genesis 1 depicts a geological and biological history of the young earth (see Criswell). It is a matter of importance, therefore, for Scofield
whether Gen. 1:2 states that "the earth was formless" (as the various translations do) or whether it might be translated "the earth became formless." The latter case could be taken to imply that the perfect earth of verse 1 became corrupt (because of the activity of Satan?) and fell under divine judgment, leading to a re-creation at an unspecified later time (v. 2). Scofield seems to favor this interpretation (notes to Gen. 1:2; Isa. 45:18). Such a possibility is quickly rejected by Ryrie but left open by Criswell. None of the other Bibles mentions such a possibility.

The approach of Criswell, Ryrie, and Scofield tends to be atomistic, although topical divisions within the biblical text itself may guide the reader toward a more holistic reading. This is true of the text used by Ryrie (NAS) and Scofield (NIV), but not of Criswell's (KJV). A holistic approach is formally evident in NEB and RSV, where annotation to each thought-unit is preceded by a definition of boundaries (chapter and verses) and by title, in boldface type.

Where does one turn in order to shed light on the meaning of a given passage, be it a phrase, sentence (verse), or complete thought-unit? On the one hand, if one assumes that the biblical speaker had primarily a contemporary audience in mind, then one might seek comparison with what this speaker has said elsewhere, give priority to parallels with his nearest contemporaries (who share the same assumptions and situation), and treat extrabiblical evidence as an independent authority. On the other hand, if one assumes that the biblical speaker had the believing community at all times and places in mind, and that the entire Bible forms an integrated system of thought, then one could illuminate any one part of the Bible by any other and evaluate extrabiblical data in the light of the Bible.

Scofield, holding the latter point of view, can thus note that Satan was cast from heaven (Luke 10:18) and trust that other texts, however obliquely, may shed light on when that happened. Might there be an allusion to it in Gen. 1:2 (if translated "the earth became formless . . . ")? Thus, when Isaiah remarks that God did not create the earth to be "empty" (45:18), he is referring to the same event, as he is when he speaks of someone who has "been cast down to the earth" (14:12).

Open Bible and Ryrie, also taking the latter point of view on
the matter of interpretation, turn to the thorny problem of the
date of the Exodus. Archaeological evidence is complex, but the
vast majority of destruction-levels in the mounds of Palestine
belong to the thirteenth century, B.C.E. This, along with other
evidence (including biblical texts), has led a great variety of
interpreters to place the Exodus during this century (NEB, NJB,
RSV, and in all likelihood NAB, although I did not spot a specific
date). Ryrie, however, points out that according to 1 Kings 6:1
the Exodus occurred 480 years before King Solomon (962–922
B.C.E.) began to build the temple in his fourth year. That would
yield the date 1447 for the Exodus, and that is the date (with
some minor adjustments) accepted by Ryrie (1445–1440),
Scofield (1447), Open Bible (1446), Thompson (1491, quoting
Archbishop Ussher, with the note that his dates "are no longer
accepted as accurate by most scholars"), and Criswell (1445). No
mention is made of the questions that have been raised, on
biblical grounds, about the figure in 1 Kings. As for the
troublesome archaeological data, Open Bible remarks: "All of
this data may be harmonized with a 1446 B.C. date." Ryrie
summarizes: "Thus there is no compelling reason not to accept
the earlier date, particularly in view of Scripture evidence."

It is Scofield's annotations which reflect the most elaborate
scheme for overall interpretation of the Bible. They reflect a
system of thought commonly called "dispensationalism," first
worked out by an Irish Anglican named John Nelson Darby
about 1829. Its underlying assumptions (not systematically
spelled out) seem to include the following: (1) the entirety of the
Bible is an integrated system of thought, conveyed from the
divine mind; (2) every prophetic expectation ("prediction")
must be literally fulfilled; (3) thus, prophetic expectation of an
ideal age for Israel, not fulfilled in the post-exilic age, must
literally come to pass in the future; (4) the church was not
anticipated by the prophets and therefore cannot claim to fulfill
the prophet's expectations for Israel; (5) the "rapture" is
necessary in order to remove the church from the sphere of
history so that God's promise of a thousand-year Davidic reign
can come to pass; this is the seventh dispensation, "the
Kingdom Age." As a consequence of assumptions 1 and 2, one
would conclude that the New Testament portraits of the end-
time, when they vary as they do, cannot be interpreted
poetically and cannot overlap: they must be disentangled and
rearranged in a linear chronological scheme. Thus, the portrait
in Revelation 20 may be expanded (with the aid of other texts) to
include the Tribulation, the Rapture, Armageddon, and so on.
(For full analysis, see James M. Efird, End-Times: Rapture,
Antichrist, Millennium: What the Bible Says [Nashville: Abingdon,
1986].)

NAB and NJB have a Roman Catholic readership in mind, and
thus their annotations occasionally refer to traditional inter­
pretations. A fine balance is struck between the intention of the
biblical speaker and later understandings of it. NAB at Gen. 3:15
(concerning the woman and the serpent in the garden) is typical:
“Later theology saw in this passage more than unending
hostility between snakes and men. The serpent was regarded as
the devil.” In view of such identification “the passage can be
understood as the first promise of a Redeemer for fallen
mankind.” (Contrast Ryrie: “He: . . . namely, Christ, will deal a
death blow to Satan’s head at the cross, while Satan (you) will
bruise Christ’s heel [cause Him to suffer].”)

Marginal Cross-references. This aid is ordinarily prepared at
the translation stage (NAB, NEB). Those of NIV (Wide Margin
Reference Edition) are new, resulting from a massive collation
and evaluation “of all the cross references from the best available
study Bibles.” Ryrie’s volume uses the text (complete with
cross-references) of NAS (but not its marginal notes). The
margins of NJB are a revision of those in the original Jerusalem
Bible, done at the same time as the new translation. Such aids in
Scofield and Thompson are the later product of the study Bible
stage. Criswell’s references closely conform to those of KJV, but
not entirely with the edition on my shelf (1611 edition).

The concerns of cross-reference and annotation may overlap,
and for this reason some study Bibles have greatly reduced the
scope of the former or even incorporated them into the
annotations (RSV, NEB). Conversely, they become much more
important in those volumes which do not have annotations
(NIV, Thompson).

Cross-references may have a number of purposes, among
them the following: (1) To clarify a particular word or phrase in
the verse. Presumably, this is the purpose of NIV's note to the
phrase "separated the water under the expanse from the water
above it." What is this water "above"?, one might ask, and be
referred to (among other places) Gen. 7:11, where the
"floodgates of the heavens were opened" at the time of the
flood. (2) To show that a particular word or phrase is used
elsewhere. In relation to the word "us" in Gen. 1:26 ("Let Us
make man in Our image . . . "), Ryrie refers to Gen. 3:22 and
11:7, where the same plural pronoun occurs. (3) To specify the
historical event to which a text alludes. Hosea speaks of Israel's
wickedness at Gibeah (10:9), and NAB's note directs the reader
to Judges 20. (4) To point to New Testament fulfillment of a
Hebrew Bible text. Sometimes the New Testament itself will
make such claim (Criswell at Micah 5:2, citing Matt. 2:6), and
sometimes not (Scofield at Gen. 3:15 ["enmity between you and
the woman, and between your offspring and hers"], citing Matt.
1:18, 25 [the genealogy of Jesus]). (5) To demonstrate that
material is a quotation from elsewhere, or is elsewhere quoted.
Thus NJB, at Matt. 27:46, puts Jesus' words in italics (denoting a
quote) and then indicates the source in the margin (Ps. 22:1). At
Ps. 22:1 we are referred, among other locations, to Matt. 27:46
(which alone has the special emblem to denote a quote). NJB is
unique in this regard. (6) To suggest how a passage of Scripture
fits into an overall scheme for understanding the Bible,
especially when the text itself is not explicit. For example, who is
the king of Tyre to whom Ezekiel refers at 28:11-15? Scofield's
note identifies the figure with Satan and cites Zech. 3:1; Gen. 3:1;
and Rev. 20:10. The annotation tells us that this is Satan in his
"unfallen state" and refers to the note on Rev. 20:10, where we
are told that the time-reference is to the gap between Gen.1:1
and Gen. 1:2 (a re-creation of the earth).

The format of the cross-references varies widely:
NJ: set in the margin adjacent to the text, with no indication
of the particular word or phrase to which each applies.
Sometimes a group of references will apply to several verses,
intensifying the imprecision.

Open Bible and Criswell: in small type at the end of each
verse, each reference keyed to the proper word in the text by a
superscript "R."
STUDY BIBLES

NIV and Ryrie: grouped under a chapter and verse heading, adjacent to the text if possible, each keyed to the proper word in that text by a superscript letter of the alphabet (beginning with “a” in every verse).

NAB: grouped on each page by chapter and verse; each verse that has a cross-reference entry is marked at its beginning with an asterisk. There is thus no indication of whether the reference is to the entire verse or only to a part thereof.

Scofield: located in the center column, with each reference keyed to the proper part of a verse by a superscript letter of the alphabet. Each page begins with an “a” and continues across chapter divisions, with the reference note not necessarily adjacent to its verse.

At any given verse, the number of cross-references, their content, and the reason for which they have been chosen may vary widely from Bible to Bible. Annotations, if any, will often clarify the rationale for the cross-reference. The following is an illustration of diversity, based upon the references at Gen. 3:1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NIV</th>
<th>NAB</th>
<th>Ryrie</th>
<th>Scofield</th>
<th>KJV</th>
<th>Criswell</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job 1:7</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>II Cor. 11:9</td>
<td>Gen. 3:1,2,3,4,13,14</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II Cor. 11:3</td>
<td>Rev. 12:9</td>
<td>Gen. 22:1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rev. 20:2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gen. 2:17</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

It is Thompson who has, by far, the most elaborate marginal system. By means of various types of reference chain, 100,000 references have been connected “directly, or indirectly.” The connections are not merely by specific wording of the text but by topic. At Gen. 3:1, for example, one is told that a parallel text is Rev. 12:9, and then the topic “Satan’s Work” is listed as available under the “pilot number” 3151. Reference is thereby made to an entry in the “Condensed Cyclopedia of Topics and Texts,” which runs for 189 pages (continued by other kinds of aids such as “Outline Studies,” similarly numbered). The “Cyclopedia” is arranged in alphabetical order, with the large heading “Satan—Evil Spirits” beginning with entry 3148. Subentry 3151 is titled
"The Malignant Work of," under which, with appropriate titles, the motif is traced through the order of the books of the Bible, each citation being quoted in full (Gen. 3:1; 3:4; I Chron. 21:1; Job 1:9-11; 2:7; Zech. 3:1; Matt. 4:1; 13:19; 13:38-39; Luke 9:42; John 8:44; 13:2; 1 Pet. 5:8). Cross-reference is occasionally made to other chains and related texts. The adjacent subheadings (under "Satan—Evil Spirits") are "Tower of" (3150) and "Humbled" (3152).

Far more modest claims of a "chain" system are found in NIV and in Scofield. The latter provides a detailed summary note at the end of each "chain."

Maps. The study Bibles differ not only in the number of maps they contain but also in the amount of detail which the maps provide (sites, boundaries, geographical features, roads, elevations, whether a site has been excavated, etc.). In most cases, the maps have not been created especially for the volume, but rather are those otherwise available from the publishing house. Sometimes this results in discontinuities between the map and articles in the volume. For example, NEB notes refer to texts from Mari and Nuzi, but the maps do not show those sites; "Nuzi" in Criswell's text, but "Nuzu" on the map. Thompson's "Archaeological Supplement" discusses a number of sites that are not shown on the maps (Mari, Nuzi, Qumran, Ugarit).

Concordance. This tool for locating chapter and verse by the words contained in it must of necessity be abridged. Page size and type size vary from one Bible to the next, making it impossible to correlate number of pages with the number of entries (that is, to make size an indication of usefulness). Thus, while the content of NIV's concordance is identical to that of Scofield's, the latter consumes 27 more pages. The introduction (found with the former) states that it contains more than 35,000 references (of a total of 250,000 in a complete NIV concordance), making it "the largest concordance ever bound together with an English Bible." Thompson's is more extensive than the page total suggests, since it is in three columns per page, with very small type. (I counted 112 references to a column, which would yield a total of about 26,300 references.)

Comparison is complicated by the Open Bible. In addition to its concordance (for NAS), it has a separate "Biblical Cyclopedic
Index” arranged in concordance form. It is a topical arrangement and thus not limited to texts which contain the specified word. Under the heading “Aaron,” for example, section “D” is “Sins of,” followed by such specifications as: “Tolerates idolatry, Ex. 32:1-4,” and then citation to page 81 (where that text in Exodus is actually to be found). Such a tool allows for subject headings which are not explicitly phrased in the biblical text, and thus it functions basically as an index.

Index of Subjects. In some cases the index is limited to selected persons, places, and themes in the biblical text itself, the last of these taking it beyond the function of a concordance (NEB, Open Bible, Ryrie, Scofield). In other cases, it is the annotations and introductions which are indexed (NJB, RSV; Criswell also falls here, limited however to those notes which contain “major discussions of doctrinal and practical matters”). The small number of pages in Thompson’s index is deceptive: it merely refers one, by numbered entry, to the far more extensive “Condensed Cyclopedia of Topics and Texts” (see above, under “Marginal cross-references”).

For purpose of comparison, I have chosen the topic “Marriage,” with the following results:

Ryrie: the entry contains quotation of two biblical texts and the citation of four more.

Scofield: the entry contains subheadings “of the Lamb” and “symbolical meanings,” citing one location for each topic.

Open Bible: subheadings are: “Described as,” “Prohibitions concerning,” “Arrangements for,” “Ceremonies of,” “Purposes of,” “Denial of,” and “Figurative of.” Each then has a number of smaller headings, with citation of the location of biblical evidence. For example, under the subheading “Purposes of” is listed: “Man’s happiness,” “Continuance of the race,” “Godly offspring,” “Prevention of immoral behavior,” and “Complete satisfaction.” (The total index is said to contain “over 8,000 subjects.”)

NEB: the entry is followed by ten citations to Scripture, followed by cross-reference to the entry “Levirate Marriage.” There is also an entry “Marriage, Mixed” (with four citations).

Thompson: subheadings are “Commended,” “Obligations of,” “With the Heathen Forbidden,” “Figurative,” “Of Kins-
man's Widow," and "Sacred." Following each is a reference number to the "Condensed Cyclopaedia." For example, at the latter aid (no. 1620, "Commended") one finds four biblical texts quoted, plus a cross-reference to the entry "Celibacy, 3210."


RSV: no entry.

Criswell: note to Gen. 2:24.

Chronology Charts. This aid varies not only in detail (number of pages) but also in range of coverage and assigned dates (both of which indicate assumptions about the nature of the Bible).

Ryrie: from Creation to the Emperor Trajan (no date given for the former, but the biblical evidence cited would yield about 4050 B.C.E.; Trajan at 100 C.E.); the patriarchal period begins about 2100; the Exodus from Egypt is 1450; the Pentateuch (Genesis through Deuteronomy) is of Mosaic origin, save for Deuteronomy 34 (from the introduction to Genesis).

Open Bible: from Adam to Malachi (the former belongs to an "undatable past"); the patriarchs are 2166-1876; the Exodus is about 1446; and the pentateuchal books are from the 1400s.

Thompson: from the "Fall" to the Emperor Domitian (404 B.C.E.-96 C.E.); Abraham's call is 1921 (yet, the "Patriarchal Period" begins at 2438); the Exodus is 1491; the pentateuchal books are "commonly accepted as Mosaic in origin" (from the "Outline Studies" section).

NJB: from the beginnings of human culture (homo habilis) to "the new Christian community" (2,000,000 B.C.E.-155 C.E.); Abraham arrives in Canaan about 1850; the Exodus is 1250; the Pentateuch "grew by a series of stages.... The process itself lasted for at least six hundred years" (from introduction to the Pentateuch).

RSV: from Saul (the beginning of monarchy) to the Procurator Gessius Florus (1020 B.C.E.-66 C.E.); the patriarchal era begins.
about 1700 (from general articles and annotations); the Exodus occurs during the reign of Pharaoh Rameses II (1290-1224 B.C.E.); the Pentateuch took shape during the period 950-500 B.C.E.

Criswell: from monarchy to Domitian (973 B.C.E.-96 C.E.). Although the other study Bibles do not have chronology charts, data may be derived from their annotations and general articles:

NIV: no data.

NAB: general discussion suggests agreement with NJB, NEB, RSV.

Scofield: "Scripture does not reveal the exact date of Adam's creation" (note to Gen. 3:3); Abraham is about 2100 (notes to Gen. 11:27); the Exodus is 1447 (note to Exod. 1:8); the Pentateuch was written by Moses, 1450-1410 (headings to each book).

NEB: Abraham belongs to "the early second millennium" (note to Gen. 12:1-9); the Exodus probably took place during the reign of Rameses II (1290-1224; so p. 27 of "Sketch of History"); the pentateuchal documents took their present shape during the period 950-500 (so introduction to the Pentateuch).

In general, one position on historicity, authorship, and dates is reflected in Open Bible, Ryrie, Thompson, Scofield, and Criswell; another in NAB, NJB, NEB, and RSV.

Discussion of Archaeology. The articles vary widely in their focus, detail, and currentness:

Ryrie's presentation is entitled "Archaeology and the Bible." Subheadings are: "Nature and Purpose of Biblical Archaeology," "Function of Biblical Archaeology," "Why Ancient Cities and Civilizations Disappeared," "Excavating a Mound," and "Archaeology and the Text of the Bible." Thus, there is no discussion of specific sites or finds (with the exception of Oxyrhynchus Papyri and the Dead Sea Scrolls, under "... Text of the Bible"). In general, the tone of the article (by Howard F. Vos, from Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia, 1975) is that archaeology "helps confirm the accuracy of biblical texts and contents." Although it has "created numerous problems" as well, "to date there has not been an instance of archaeology conclusively demonstrating the Bible to be in error!"

Open Bible's article (identical with Criswell's) is entitled "The Greatest Archaeological Discoveries of the Twentieth Century"
and Their Effects on the Bible.” Focus is largely upon literary remains: the Law Code of Hammurabi, Elephantine Papyri, Ras Shamra (Ugaritic) Texts, Nuzi Texts, Mari Texts, and the Dead Sea Scrolls. In addition, considerable attention is given to the city of Ur, hometown of the biblical patriarchs. In general, the article seeks to inform the reader concerning the results of archaeology, with occasional polemics concerning the defense of the Bible against its “critics.”

Thompson’s “Archaeological Supplement,” containing 109 entries, was first added to this study Bible in the 1964 edition. Addenda, comprising twenty-two entries, appear in the present (1982) edition. Their focus is upon individual sites and many of them are illustrated. Most are less than a column (small print), but some are a page or more. Usually, the role of the site in biblical history is reviewed, followed by a summary of the excavation(s). Sites include nonbiblical ones (e.g., Amarna, Kish, Mari) and ones at which no excavation is reported (Lydda, Tyre, Jamnia). In general, the tone of the article is of a straightforward discussion of the role of each site in biblical history and of the objects that have come to light there.

RSV: description of a typical Canaanite city as revealed by excavations.

EVALUATION OF SELECTED FEATURES

It is obvious that the study Bibles vary widely in views of how the Bible came to be, what its agendas are, and how one is to interpret it in the present. Readers of the present article will not be much helped by learning that the reviewer does, or does not, share this or that assumption about Scripture. Nor is there time to examine, at meaningful length, the strengths and problems of the assumptions which underlie various interpretations. (See, for example, the description of Scofield’s annotations, above.) Rather, my evaluations will focus much more narrowly upon statements of fact concerning some matters and upon the fact of silence concerning other matters. In no case, however, would I desire that negative evaluation detract from my appreciation for the labor, learning, and piety that is evident in each of these volumes.
Annotations. What was the function of a prophet in ancient Israel, and what is their value within the believing community today? Were they essentially predictors of the remote future, or were they speakers for God concerning issues in their own time (with implications for our own identity and behavior)? Must the inspiration of the prophets guarantee that their every expectation has come true, or will yet come true? This issue separates the study Bibles into two groups.

Is the former point of view one that is demanded by the text itself, or is it one that has been brought to the text by prior assumption? I will not argue the point either way. Rather, I will select a single text and let the reader see how various study Bibles have treated it, relying on the following criterion: Has the biblical evidence been accepted and thus the text allowed to speak for itself and inform the interpreter?

Ezekiel, speaking of Nebuchadnezzar’s campaign into Syro-Palestine (26:1-14; 586 B.C.E.), announces in God’s name that the island city (“in the midst of the sea”) of Tyre will be destroyed by this Babylonian monarch: “I will make you a bare rock; . . . you shall never be rebuilt” (v. 14). In actuality, the city surrendered, intact but drained of its resources, thirteen years later. The prophet, realizing that God’s agenda had changed, remarked that God will now give Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar as a consolation prize (29:17-20). This adjustment in the prophet’s expectations, this realization that the deity’s activities in history are larger than any human power to comprehend (as was the case with Jonah’s expectation for Nineveh), is confessed without embarrassment and obviously has not detracted from Ezekiel’s stature as a prophet. After all, there it is, undisguised in the text for all to see. Tyre continued to be inhabited, indeed became a fortress again, until destroyed by Alexander of Greece about 332 B.C.E. It was rebuilt and continues as a flourishing city to the present day.

Ezekiel’s misperception of God’s activity, considered no problem by those who handed down his words, is likewise no problem for the understanding of prophecy in NAB, NEB, NJB, and RSV. Here is how it is treated in the annotation of some of the others:

Ryrie: “Nebuchadnezzar . . . destroyed it. In 332 Alex-
ander . . . captured it. The city was rebuilt . . . " (note to 26:3-14). [In actuality, the city surrendered. No further indication of a problem; honest restatement that the city continued, however.]

Scofield: "The fate predicted for Tyre . . . has been remarkably fulfilled. At the time of Ezekiel, Tyre was on the coast. . . . Nebuchadnezzar conquered and destroyed the city. He had no reason, however, to fulfill v. 12 by casting its ruins into the sea. Some of the people . . . escaped to an island and built a new city there. Three hundred years later Alexander the Great . . . threw all the remains of ancient Tyre into the sea, fulfilling Ezek. 26:12. The old city of Tyre has never been rebuilt, but has remained like the top of a rock" (note to 26:14). [The note seeks to avoid evidence that is fatal to Scofield's entire view of prophecy by shifting the location of the city from the island to the mainland, by describing surrender intact as destruction, and by a most interesting exercise in phonetics. One is reminded of George Bernard Shaw's tongue-in-cheek demonstration of the inconsistency of English pronunciation: the word ghoti is to be pronounced "fish" because of the parallels: rough, women, and nation. I assume, in Scofield's phonetics, that Neb-u-chad-nezzar is actually to be pronounced: Ñ-ig-zän-der, but he doesn't give the parallels!]

Criswell: The notes pass over the problem in silence.

Marginal Cross-references: Judicious use of such material, plus the fact that sigla are used to indicate what their purpose is, makes NJB a desirable edition. However, the format (no indication of the part of the verse, or even several verses to which the reference applies) is a limitation. In terms of availability of material, of course, nothing can match Thompson. His purpose, however, is not so much to clarify the present passage as it is to link the ideas of the text with those of the larger Bible.

Index of Subjects. That of Open Bible is easy to use and has perhaps the most extensive number of subheadings.

Chronology Charts. NJB, both in its scope and detail, leads the field.

Discussion of Archaeology. Open Bible's article is a clearly
written and substantial discussion, even if limited to the "greatest" discoveries. This means that a number of sites over which debate has raged concerning stratigraphy (and thus about the historicity of biblical accounts) are not discussed. The spelling of names from cuneiform sources is curiously outmoded for such a recently written article (e.g., Bar-Sin instead of Amar-Sin, Dungi instead of Shulgi, etc.). More up-to-date is the nonidentification of the "Benjaminites" (now regarded as a questionable reading of the cuneiform texts) of the Mari texts with the group of that name in the Hebrew Bible. Correctly, the word *dawidum* (in the same texts) is rejected as the proper name David. It remains a puzzle how Nahor, "who figures prominently in the patriarchal narratives (Gen. 24:10), is mentioned quite often in the Mari Letters," especially when the example cited is to a place name.

The editors, I presume, rather than the author, are culpable in the case of reference to archaeologist "Pierre de Vaux," instead of to Père Roland de Vaux.

The section on the Dead Sea Scrolls is informative. Its overall tone is that the scrolls have confirmed traditional beliefs as opposed to recent "radical views." While the author does not repeat the early claim that the scrolls attest to the fidelity of the transmission of the biblical text, he is also curiously silent about the implications of the materials from caves IV and XI. They attest to a multiplicity of types of text prior to an apparent move toward standardization by the end of the first century of the Common Era. The author's silence, like that experienced by Elijah at Horeb, is so conspicuous that it may be heard. (For an excellent introduction see "Text, Hebrew, History of," in The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Supplementary Volume, pp. 878-84.)

Thompson: Although well written and nicely illustrated, the text is often quite out of date, despite the fact that this section was added to the volume in 1964. Addenda were added in 1982, but the prior section was retained without update. Thus, sites are discussed from the point of view of antiquated excavations. For example, Dan is described as an undisturbed mound, whereas it has been excavated over the last two decades. Gezer is discussed in terms of Macalister's work (1902-1909), with no
mention of a decade of work in the 1960s. The vast excavations in Jerusalem, done in the last decade, are not mentioned. Garstang’s conclusions about Jericho are reported in detail (supporting an early date of the Exodus, in keeping with biblical chronology), with not a hint of how he was misled by the jumbled stratigraphy of the place such that his results are now a textbook case of error with no standing among archaeologists. It is amazing that the author claims that the “most significant find for Bible students” at Ur was the thick water-laid stratum. The excavator is quoted to the effect that the stratum is related to “the Flood of Sumerian history and legend—the Flood on which is based the story of Noah.” The excavator may well be right, but in that case does the biblical story relate a local flood which it has exaggerated into a worldwide catastrophe? The stratum at Ur does not even cover the entirety of the mound, and thus the article in Open Bible properly makes no mention of it.

The addenda were unfortunately done at the time when exaggerated (and apparently erroneous) claims were being made about the recently discovered texts from Ebla. The author thus cannot be faulted for the misleading contents of this section.

The discussion of the Dead Sea Scrolls suffers from the same weakness as that in Open Bible. It relates that the St. Mark’s Isaiah Scroll “agrees in almost every respect with our traditional Hebrew texts, as used in the translation of the King James Version of our Bible.” True enough, but entirely misleading about the full significance of the scrolls (as well as about the up-to-dateness of KJV). The scrolls show that, in reality, a uniform text goes back only to the turn of the era, laying to rest forever the hope of approximating an “autograph”—if in fact such a thing ever existed. (A similar failure to describe the evidence of the scrolls is to be noticed in Ryrie, p. 1962.)

The publisher ought to give Thompson’s prodigious work proper honor by redoing this entire article immediately.

Prophecies of Jesus as Messiah. Evaluation of these claims must be done carefully and fairly. There are wide differences of opinion about what the terms prophecy and fulfillment mean, and thus I will refrain from discussion of passages where that is the issue. (For example, did the prophet really have Jesus in mind at
Isa. 7:14?) Rather, I will use the New Testament's own process of selection: for the "prophecies" listed in the study Bibles, does the New Testament itself legitimize the claim? If not, then the claim resides with the presuppositions of the modern interpreter and not with the Bible. A number of the proposed texts in fact do not have a prophetic form, nor refer to a messianic figure, nor have New Testament claim of fulfillment. Among them:

Open Bible: Gen. 3:15; 12:3; 17:19; and a large number of citations from the Psalms (e.g., 22:1, 7; 49:15; 109:4).

Thompson: Some of the texts proposed by Open Bible are not recognized here (Gen. 12:3; Ps. 22:1; 49:15). Thompson then proposes yet others which the New Testament does not (Gen. 18:18; Ps. 69:4).

Ryrie: No claim of fulfillment is made for Gen. 17:19; 18:18; Ps. 22:1, 7; 49:15; 109:4. In some places he speaks carefully of "Messianic implications" rather than of "prophecy" (e.g., Ps. 69:4).

Scofield's list includes Gen. 3:15; 12:3; Ps. 22:1, 7; 69:4.

NJB acknowledges (with delicate equivocation) Gen. 3:15.

NAB, NEB, and RSV do not acknowledge any of the texts thus far mentioned, although NAB walks a fine line between intention and tradition in the case of Gen. 3:15 and Psalm 22 (see also note to Psalm 69).

Given these differences of opinion about texts which exceed the claim of the Bible itself, the caution evident in NEB and RSV would seem to be in order.
What has Christian faith to do with ethical behavior? What has the church to do with the moral reformation of society? What implications do Christian convictions have for the moral concerns that bear down upon us? These questions have been at the heart of the work of Stanley Hauerwas, a moral theologian who has spent the greater part of his professional career at Notre Dame and has more recently joined the faculty at Duke Divinity School. Hauerwas, an ordained United Methodist minister, is widely recognized to have introduced a perspective into Christian ethics that has altered, at the very least, and perhaps shaped present discussions about Christian faith and the moral life.

Hauerwas's work has been characterized by a response to the prevailing interests of those in Christian ethics, tempered with a concern about the role of the church in such considerations. The result is a corpus (seven substantive books at this writing) that gives Christian convictions a central place in questions about the moral life. That Hauerwas's position seems so radical is a testament to the state of the discipline, as well as to the clarity of his argument. In this essay I hope to outline a few of the major

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elements in Hauerwas's proposal for a new way of understanding Christian ethics; then I will offer a brief assessment of the critical reactions to his position; and finally I hope to support the conclusion that his work is fruitful for those who envision the local parish as the context for developing a Christian ethics.

THE NARRATIVE THAT SHAPES US

Hauerwas's writings are characterized by his contention that the Christian faith is apprehended by men and women in the form of a narrative or story. He does not make the modest claim that the biblical stories are the vehicles for instruction into the faith; rather, he contends that narrative is necessary for speaking about God and the moral life: "My contention is that the narrative mode is neither incidental nor accidental to Christian belief. There is no more fundamental way to talk of God than in a story." Narrative is of importance for Hauerwas for three reasons: first, the narrative teaches us that we are creatures dependent upon God; second, the narrative forces us to admit our historicity; third, in the narrative we learn of God's self-revelation to us in Israel and in Jesus.

There are, of course, problems with Hauerwas's position in granting such a central place to narrative in Christian reflection. Why does he emphasize narrative and not some other literary form—poetry, for example, or creed, or doctrinal construction? Hauerwas contends that the very way in which we know God (our epistemology) is by nature narrative in form. And yet he does not want to be thrown in with those who would want a "narrative theology" or a "theology of story."

Hauerwas's emphasis upon narrative can be best understood against the background of his criticism of moral systems. He is critical of those ethicists who attempt to build systems that are intended to provide universal interpretations of morality; instead, he maintains, "Christian ethics reflects a particular people's history" (PK, 17). He sees the influence of Immanuel Kant behind those who would insist upon a universal human morality. Such a universal interpretation ignores the particularity of traditions, the contingencies of history, and is, in the end, coercive, he suggests. Ironically, philosophers and theologians
are most insistent upon such a universal account of moral existence at the precise time when there are great questions about the absolute value of ethical norms.

Against the idea of a moral system that might incorporate the claims of differing religious traditions on the basis of a common ground or a higher principle, Hauerwas argues for the narrative structure of Christian theological ethics. The story cannot be broken down into principles or systems, for the following reason: if one understands the moral life as one dependent upon a system or set of principles, then "ethics becomes a branch of decision theory." Indeed, it is likely that most of the books in the field of Christian ethics standing on the shelves of seminary-trained pastors today stress the act of decision, or include the word decision in their titles.

If, however, one sees Christian morality from the perspective of the narrative that has formed us (the story of Israel, Christ, and his church), then one can give attention to a different type of moral theorizing: character, the virtues, the kinds of people we are. Put another way, the horse is once again placed before the cart, with the church, worship, and the Scriptures shaping and influencing how we make decisions and, at times, our judgment whether or not we are confronted by a dilemma at all.

THE COMMUNAL CONTEXT OF ETHICAL ACTIVITY

If the Christian faith shapes our lives through the form of a narrative, we experience this narrative or story within a particular community, the church. This is so, Hauerwas suggests, because it is within the Christian community that we are formed by the story of Christ. He claims that "the church is where people faithfully carry out the task of being a witness to the reality of God's Kingdom." Hauerwas's insistence that the community is prior to the individual in understanding ethical (and particularly Christian ethical) behavior is based not only on the social character of selfhood, but also upon the meaning of salvation: justification and sanctification describe our new state when we are initiated into "the new community made possible by Jesus' death and resurrection" (PK, 94).
What then is the task of this new community, the church? According to Hauerwas, it is to witness to the kingdom of God, which sets the standard for the life of the church (as) the life of the kingdom is broader than that of the church. For the church does not possess Christ; his presence is not confined to the church. Rather it is in the church that we learn to recognize Christ's presence in the world. (PK, 97)

We as Christians experience the Christian story within the community of other believers; in fact, Hauerwas contends, "You cannot tell the story of God without including within it the story of Israel and the Church" (PK, 98). Scripture and tradition (community) are interdependent and interrelated in his theological method. The authority of Scripture is understood by Hauerwas primarily in political and communal terms; the Scriptures are normative for the community of faith and are derived from that community's ability to remember and reinterpret its history. The Scriptures are morally challenging to the community in that the texts "nurture and reform the community's self-identity as well as the personal character of its members" (CC, 55). The Scriptures, by way of their prophetic character, interpret the tradition and possess a moral claim over the community.

We come to know the truth of the gospel through a narrative that we hear and see embodied in the church; this is Hauerwas's understanding of the relationship between the individual believer and the community. But Hauerwas is also concerned with a second, perhaps more provocative relationship, namely, that between church and world. In the context of this question he has stated that "the church does not have a social ethic; the church is a social ethic" (PK, 99). If the church is to offer the world anything unique or worthwhile, it has simply to be itself, i.e., "to set its own agenda." This agenda includes acknowledging that "God has in fact redeemed the world" (PK, 101) and having the patience to live amidst the world's stubborn refusal to accept this redemption. Thus we are called to be before we are called to do, and we are challenged to understand before acting, for we affirm the sufficiency of God's activity in history. This
affirmation and trust in God's sovereignty allow and enable us to nurture the virtues of hope, patience, and, most importantly, peaceableness.

Hauerwas reserves his sharpest criticisms, therefore, for those (within and without the church) who would attempt to construct a morality devoid of these virtues. He sees the liberal political tradition (both in society and within the church) as the chief culprit in denying the importance of the communal character of moral behavior. Liberalism would give primacy to individual autonomy over membership and participation in a narrative-based community. The church errs in trying to articulate an ethics for the general society, i.e., in attempting to establish minimal ground rules for the moral life, without acknowledging the need for a historical and contingent understanding of human nature. Thus our Christian social ethics has often seemed, when all is said and done, to be but a variation of liberal or conservative political positions. Hauerwas is arguing for the distinctiveness of the Christian vision, one that "stands as a political alternative to every nation" (CC, 12).

Many have been quick to label Hauerwas's understanding of the church/world relationship as sectarian in Troeltsch's usage of the term. Since Hauerwas espouses a kind of radical witness against the world, they might say, his position is really "sectarian." Such a position, given Troeltsch's perspective, is somehow deficient in light of the Christian's responsibility toward the world; this judgment is reinforced by H. Richard Niebuhr's categories, according to which Christ was more apt to be the transformer of culture than one over and against culture. Troeltsch, Niebuhr, and many natural law ethicists have assumed a "continuity" between church and world. Such a continuity, Hauerwas insists, is not possible in light of the radical character of the Christian story, which requires that we be a servant people on a journey toward the peaceable kingdom.

A PEACEABLE PEOPLE: OUR CHARACTER AS CHRISTIANS

Hauerwas contends that "being is prior to doing" (CC, 113). Thus he is more interested in articulating the nature of the moral self than guidelines for moral decisions. One's character is
simply "the type of person that one is," and such a character is the result of participation in a historical narrative, apprehended within a particular community. Hauerwas defines character as "the qualification or determination of our self-agency, formed by our having certain intentions (and beliefs) rather than others" (PK, 39). He resists the idea that a person's character is somehow ahistorical, freed from the contingencies of life; character is necessarily the result of our having been shaped by a story-formed community.

Character understood in this way poses two problems: first, how are we to be held responsible for our actions if we do not have the capacity to transcend our histories by moral choices or actions? In other words, how can we be held accountable if we do not have the freedom to act morally? Hauerwas defines freedom as being "more like having power than having a choice" (CC, 114); freedom is the power by which we are able to make our lives and our decisions our own, i.e., a part of our own narratives (or our participation in a narrative).

One searches in vain, Hauerwas would argue, for a character that is ahistorical, transcendent, or neutral. To have Christian character is to acknowledge one's place in a community of the faithful who have also been formed by the stories of Israel and the church. Such a community calls us away from narratives which deny the graciousness of God and the givenness of existence, and toward a participation in a kingdom defined by trust and peace. Because we hold the conviction that the Christian story is truthful, and since this story is characterized by trust in a God who encounters us through a crucified and resurrected Lord, we can live in the knowledge that God has brought about peace and redemption. As persons of Christian character we are called to be truthful to such a story, even though such an orientation might seem impractical or dangerous, for in the end to do anything less is a sign of unbelief.

CRITICAL REACTION TO HAUERWAS'S POSITION

A chief criticism of Hauerwas's interpretation of Christian ethics comes from those who would place greater weight on the
need for rules and principles in the moral life. There are those who argue that Hauerwas places too much emphasis on being and too little on doing; thus Hauerwas’s work has been either criticized as withdrawn from the arena of daily decisions, or appreciated as a descriptive ethics that nevertheless has little bearing upon the normative moral life.

Hauerwas’s primary contention, in forging an ethics of virtue as opposed to one of decision making, has been that moralists have attempted to lead men and women into making ethical decisions without requiring that they themselves be ethical persons; in other words, there has been a separation between the act done and the acting person. Those who would stress the neutrality of ethical decision making have ignored the fundamental importance of character; Hauerwas contends that morality proceeds from our identity as persons formed by the Christian story. He is interested not so much in our ability to discover rules and principles that might underwrite moral living; rather, Hauerwas argues for the priority of Christian virtue, of “the sorts of people that we are”; thus, “integrity, not obligation, is the hallmark of the moral life” (TT, 41).

Hauerwas’s response to those who would hold a greater regard for rules and principles in the moral life issues from a perspective that has also been criticized. Hauerwas has been labeled by some as “sectarian,”5 and as advocating the “Christ against Culture” model.6 These critics, along with others, argue that Hauerwas makes a very compelling case for those within the Christian community, but what of those outside? Hauerwas would indeed insist that the church’s definitive task is not to transform the world, but to be itself. Yet, he would add, only in this way does the church have the means to transform the world:

> The church does not let the world set its agenda about what constitutes a “social ethic,” but a church of peace and justice must set its own agenda. . . . By being that kind of community we see that the church helps the world understand what it means to be the world. For the world has no way of knowing it is world without the church pointing to the reality of God’s kingdom. (FK, 100)

This insistence, that the church set its own agenda, was the central thesis in an influential article published in Christian
There Hauerwas and William Willimon delineated several main theses in contrast to prevailing theological emphases of the past few years: the intrinsic value of the church; the need for formation in this church, which is in ways alien to culture; and the integrity of the theological task. The responses to their proposal were varied. John Cobb, while agreeing that Christians often develop programs and plans "as if God does not exist," wondered whether Hauerwas and Willimon were attempting to confine God's activity to the sphere of the Christian community; if so, Cobb argued, they are limiting their vision of God to "the interior life of the congregation." Richard John Neuhaus claims, in opposition to Hauerwas and Willimon, that the church "has a great stake in and responsibility for the democratic idea." The Christian task is not that of forming a virtuous and holy people, but one of discerning God's activity in "transforming the world."

In a sense, one's critical reaction to Hauerwas depends in part on how the dangers of the moral life are perceived. Hauerwas has called Christians to re-examine their being and doing as moral persons; he notes our tendency to accommodate the prevailing cultural attitudes and convictions, whether they be liberal or conservative. Thus his position has been characterized as "conservative" by some and "radical" by others. In response, Hauerwas would likely argue that a Christian theologian is called simply to be faithful to the stories of Israel and Christ.

A second key ingredient in Hauerwas's moral theology is his belief in the presence and activity of God in human affairs. The Christian is summoned to the life of patience and witness, knowing that God in the end will work out the affairs of history. Human contingency and particularity is finally grounded in a peaceable and redemptive God.

THE LIFE OF THE LOCAL PARISH

As James Gustafson has noted, the recent work of most theologians (and ethicists) has been addressed to three audiences: the academy in general (and thus the interest in methodological rigor and purity); the specific guild that comprises others interested in the same questions (a necessarily
smaller group of persons); and finally ministers, seminarians, and a few intelligent lay persons. While he confesses that this third classification is a proper audience to which theology ought to address itself, he admits, with Alasdair Maclntyre, that "theologians are often more interested in other theologians than they are about God." 

There are, it seems, two problems with much recent Christian ethics, at least from the perspective of a parish minister. First, many ethicists and moral theologians are indeed more interested in the intricacies of academic debate than in wrestling with moral questions. Thus a book advertised as a treatment on a particular issue may be long on analysis and method and short on normative engagement with the topic at hand. Methodology is essential to Christian ethics done properly, but excessive attention to methodology, to the exclusion of Christian moral concerns, indicates the intramural character of the work. Put simply, many Christian ethicists simply do not write for the parish minister.

A second problem with much recent work in Christian ethics lies in the area of context. As Thomas Ogletree asserted in his 1984 presidential address to the Society of Christian Ethics, most Christian ethicists do not see the local parish as the proper locus of moral action; having given up on the local church as an agency for social change, most Christian ethicists are in dialogue instead with the centers of power in our society (note the intense interest in professional ethics, with much of the better work being done by Christian ethicists). Much of the more important work done in recent Christian ethics has simply ignored the role of the church in the moral life of men and women.

Stanley Hauerwas's contribution to Christian ethics (and to the church) has consisted in his insistence upon (1) the importance of the local congregation in Christian moral life and (2) the essential and fundamental role of theological convictions in Christian ethics and morality. That such a contribution might seem so profoundly important is indicative of the prevailing understanding of the task of the Christian ethicist.

How specifically might Hauerwas's ethics speak to the everyday task of the parish pastor? First, Hauerwas insists that men and women are called to participate in the Christian story,
as told and embodied by the Christian community. As Hauerwas often asserts, "the church is a social ethic," and the pastor's responsibility is to initiate, form, and sustain a people through the power of the Christian story.

This forming of a people takes place primarily as men and women learn to imitate others who have lived with faithfulness and fidelity to the Christian story—we have traditionally called these persons "saints." Chiefly, we look to the life, death, and resurrection of Christ as the one who was the incarnation of God's kingdom. We are called to "locate our lives in relation to his" life (PK, 74), and in so doing we find ourselves within the ongoing story of God's people.

This process of initiation, formation, and imitation assumes as its context a worshiping and serving people. Thus the sacraments, the Scriptures, and prayer all have constitutive roles in the Christian moral life, rather than merely "thematic" or "motivational" ones. The moral person is one who is faithful to the story of Jesus and to the community that tells and lives that story; rather than pursuing autonomy as the goal of moral development, the Christian progresses through confession, forgiveness, and conversion.

Such an ethics is one that places great importance upon a truthful telling, through word and sacrament, of the claims of God upon us. Such an ethics has as its end a people who are able—who are enabled—to exhibit this story in their life together. Stanley Hauerwas has indeed challenged the Christian community to live morally by living faithfully, to strive not for goodness but for sainthood, to hear not only a word from the world but the word of the Lord. If we were to hear such a word, we might truly be God's instruments for love and justice in the world.

NOTES

1. Stanley Hauerwas, The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Pr., 1983), p. 25. Further references to this work will be indicated in the text by "PK," followed by the page number.


The good news of the triumph of God’s grace and limitless love in a world built on contrary values and standards of success is always an incarnate gospel, a word of healing in and to a particular situation. Just as we say, by faith, that we know this gospel most fully in the life, death, and resurrection of the particular human being Jesus from Nazareth, so also the terms by which that gospel is related are always firmly grounded in a particular time and place. When the context into which the gospel is proclaimed and interpreted is one of pain, that word brings healing in the form of comfort, assurance, and strength. When the hearers of the gospel are succeeding so well that they trust not in God’s grace but in their own power, the same healing word troubles, goads, and chastises in order that love and life might win the day. It is not that God is fickle—with one truth for some people and another for others—or that God’s yearning for humankind ever changes, but rather that for us to know the depth and all-inclusiveness of that love we must hear it in language appropriate to our own context.
Even though all of that seems obvious, we must recognize that it presents us with an enormous problem when we turn to the biblical Gospels to learn about that gospel that is Jesus Christ. Not only was each of the four Gospels written to a community with needs and questions and concerns different from all others, but all four of those contexts were different from that in which we live as North American Christians at the end of the twentieth century. Our reading of any of the Gospels, then, must involve not just the words on the page, but also a reading from context to context, attentive always to the incarnation of the good news both then and now.

In these homiletical resources, then, four steps are necessary if our reading of John is to occasion the healing originally intended by the Gospel writer. First, we must probe the historical, social, and religious circumstances of John’s community in order to understand the particular context which that Gospel was intended to address. Second, we must listen to how the Gospel writer shapes, reclaims, reforms, and accents the good news for that context. Third, we must look honestly at our own situation in order to recognize both where it is similar to that of John and where and how it differs. Finally, we can begin to explore hermeneutical keys which will allow us to translate the gospel from the Johannine context to our own as a truly healing word.

Johannine Context. Let us begin by entering the context of the Fourth Gospel. The time is near the end of the first century of the Common Era. The place is the Jewish section of a city in the Dispersion. Imagine that you are on the governing council of a synagogue. The Roman occupation is weighing heavily on the members of the synagogue in your charge, and to make matters worse, those in your midst who are called “Christians” have acquired a reputation as troublemakers. The Romans do not always distinguish carefully between them and the rest of the congregation, and surveillance and harassment of all Jews has increased. Furthermore, those Christians have strayed from the faith of the ancestors by breaking bread with Gentiles and even welcoming Samaritans into their community. You and your colleagues reluctantly reach the conclusion that the directives from the council assembled at Jamnia must be implemented in
order to weed out the troublemakers and to protect the rest of the people—even to protect the faith itself. Guided by the decisions made at Jamnia, you recognize that it is important to separate those who confess Jesus as the Christ from the rest of the synagogue. The prayer service itself is the place where the lines are to be drawn. The beloved “Eighteen Benedictions” have been amended so that the twelfth benediction, the one against the heretics or “Minim,” contains a special curse against Christians. Men suspected of being Christians or of having Christian families are to be invited to lead that particular prayer during the synagogue service. If they refuse or stumble on the crucial portion, they can be declared to be “put out of the congregation” (apostagogoi, John 9:22). It is a harsh sentence, for it means not only the personal pain and loss of such an expulsion, but also the loss of even the minimal expression of religious freedom which the Jews enjoyed under Roman administration. However, as Caiaphas himself was reputed to have remarked when Jesus was arrested, sometimes one person—or in this case a few people—must be sacrificed for the good of the rest (John 18:14). The pastoral urgency of the situation is clear.

But imagine for a minute being on the other side of that decision. You are one of those alleged to be Christians. You are also a good Jew. In the largely Gentile city you naturally live in the Jewish quarter. You have grown up knowing that you are part of the covenant people, and while this brought no guarantee of blanket immunity from God’s judgment (as the Law and the Prophets make abundantly clear), it has given you the assurance of the covenant itself and of a way to live in the context of God’s grace. What you have learned of Jesus of Nazareth leads you to affirm that in him we have come to know even more about this God whom we have worshiped for generations. But now you are being forced to choose between the new expression of faith and the traditional ways. Is Jesus alone enough?

To continue to confess Jesus now means to risk being cut off from the entire religious tradition from which you have come. It means also being considered as good as dead by those in your family and among your friends who continue in the faith of their ancestors and do not recognize Jesus as the awaited messiah.
Can the stories told about Jesus continue to hold life together under this pressure? "Good news" though they be, how can they be good enough to bear the whole weight of life, death, and all eternity? What if you have the story wrong? Christians from other places tell the stories of Jesus a bit differently. They trace their faith to Peter or another of those closest to Jesus who became leaders in the emerging church, or to Paul, whose life was turned around by an experience of the risen Christ. What authorizes your version as true? But most urgent, can you be sure that it will be enough to make the center of your life hold?

From John's Context to Our Own. Persons who ask such questions really want to know if the ground under their feet will support them, or if that on which they have staked their lives will give way under life's weight. Those questions come from experiences of deepest human pain, and as such they are not unique to any historical situation. Rather, they are the companions of grief, life-threatening illness, family crisis, sudden or chronic poverty, terrors of the soul, natural disasters, social upheaval, political chaos, and public terrorism.

For most of us in the churches of North America—particularly those of us who are white and middle-class—such questions are rare visitors, and they mark especially personal times of crisis. In those circumstances of pain the immediate relevance of John's Gospel is clear. It is no accident that the Gospel of John figures so prominently in funerals and memorial services and that its words of comfort and assurance—the intimate indwelling of Christ in God and in the life of the believer described in the "Farewell Discourse" of Jesus in John 14-17—come to the mind of many a pastor who is called upon to say something at a time of crisis.

The Gospel of John, however, was written in and to a community for whom such questions were a constant presence and a fact of their common life as Christians, and it is at this point that we must recognize the differences between our context and theirs. We Christians from North America are indeed, like John's community, a tiny minority of a larger minority population in a largely hostile world. However, the power and wealth of the world are on our side. We do not face the agony of learning from week to week who among us will face expulsion from the community of our birth if we confess our faith. Despite
the fact of global interdependence, we do not think of ourselves as at the mercy of others' decisions (except perhaps now in the face of escalating acts of apparently random terrorism). If our survival hangs in jeopardy, it is more the result of our own arrogance than of others' repression.

Christians in other parts of the world know well such contingency, and one ought not be surprised that this Gospel is a favorite among oppressed peoples and among those still persecuted because of their faith. In order for those of us who are among the world's privileged to understand John's Gospel and the social dimension of its underlying questions, we need to ask where we stand among the characters of the Gospel's stories and in its context. Does our social location allow us to stand with the members of John's community when we hear the gospel, or do power and privilege place us with those who persecuted them? The answers to such questions are crucial if we are to avoid reading, with the triumphalism of the powerful, words originally intended as comfort to people who are marginalized and oppressed in their society.

**Hermeneutical Key.** Because of the radical difference between our historical and social circumstances and those in and to which this Gospel was written, there is no simple way of decoding it to make its words of blessing consistently and appropriately applicable to us. In fact, if we read it honestly, it always remains a word from the outside, holding up a harshly revealing mirror to our faces of privilege. But by coming to know John's community and ourselves more honestly, we can begin to discern those places where this Gospel's word of comfort can find a home. We might ask, for example, who are the persons among us, and what are the circumstances in our communities, that can ground John's message of healing so that we can recognize it as truly a word of life and healing? What bridge of common feeling (compassion) can help us to recognize and receive the costly life, what John calls "eternal life," which is both the gift and the vocation of the Gospel?

There could of course be many answers to such questions. I will suggest one answer, partly in order to provide a common pastoral agenda against which to reflect on the gospel revealed in the four passages from John which follow. More importantly,
I hope that the identification of this “hermeneutical key” will encourage the church to take the lead in addressing the crisis of family violence.

Family violence is a relentlessly “ecumenical” crisis in our society. No confessional tradition, no ethnic group, and no economic class is immune. Perpetrators, victims, and those who have lived through their victimization and now know themselves to be “survivors” of child abuse, spouse abuse, incest, and rape sit in all of our churches. The fact that many of them are unknown to pastors, neighbors, and other family members reflects the shame and sense of guilt that surround such experiences, to the point where abusers dare not seek help and those abused are unable to take action to protect themselves or to bring the abusers to justice.

Survivors who speak about their experiences—which in the case of family violence may be a years-long history of pain and terror—tell of feeling isolated, cut off from their very families by the betrayal of trust and by fear of further consequences. They speak of carrying within themselves a sense of unpardonable sin. They hover emotionally and often physically on the edges of the church or other religious community, convinced that neither other people nor even God could accept them. Instead of being a place where healing is found, the religious community is often experienced by them as reinforcing—either implicitly or explicitly—the very family structures, relationships, and moral codes that support the pain. There the “sanctity” and inviolability of marriage are affirmed, and a conspiracy of silence on such matters is supported under the rubric of the privacy of the family. In fact, the church and its leaders are experienced more often as judges of the victims than as their advocates. Inadequate reflection on the ethical and theological implications of this particular expression of violence, a lack of information about legal responsibility and community resources, and a paucity of symbolic or liturgical expressions of penance and forgiveness appropriate to such occasions mean that abusers also look in vain to the church for help.

Of course, the situations of members of John’s community and of people involved in family and sexual violence today are not precisely parallel. There are, however, similar dynamics at
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work in the broken intimacy and trust of families and in the religious dimension of that alienation. There is also a common need for a message of healing that both speaks to the private pain and reintegrates those who suffer into a new community marked by trust and by a sense of connectedness with one another and with God. The model provided by John's Gospel of how the gospel story can be shaped to mediate such healing, and to reclaim the traditions and other once-precious elements of individual and community life, may give us clues for our own hearing and proclaiming of One who is called "way," "truth," and "life" (John 14:6).

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

John 3:1-17

The Christian's relationship with God in Jesus is God's gracious gift which no human institution or decree can take away.

Johannine Context. The story of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus exemplifies John's way of presenting the stories about Jesus so that they address the situation of John's own community. Nicodemus, for example, plays two roles in the narrative. One is played out on the story level in his interaction with Jesus, and the other is the role of someone living in John's city. Several details in the narrative provide clues to the identity of this character and hence to the dual identity of his partners in the two levels of conversation and to the significance of that conversation.

Nicodemus is described as a Pharisee who is one of the rulers of the Jews. It is unlikely that a Pharisee would have served on the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem in Jesus' day, since the Pharisees were a lay movement, and the Sanhedrin was intimately connected to the Temple priesthood. In the time after 70 CE., however, when the Temple and much of Jerusalem had been destroyed, the Pharisees came into the dominant position among Jewish groups. Their authority was linked to their interpretation and updating of the Torah and was not tied to a particular cultic system or piece of real estate. At the council at...
Jamnia, where the Jewish canon was set and crucial policies established for the governance of Diaspora Judaism, the Pharisees were the principal actors. Their policies were promulgated through the ruling councils (also made up of Pharisees) in the various Jewish communities of the Diaspora. Thus, although the conversation which John relates is allegedly between Jesus and one of his contemporaries, Nicodemus in fact represents a contemporary of the Gospel writer.

John portrays Nicodemus as an ambiguous character in his interaction with Jesus and thus implies a similar ambiguity in his contemporary role as well. Nicodemus calls Jesus by the honored title “Rabbi” and exhibits interest in Jesus’ identity and purpose, even to the point of engaging in serious theological discussion. He appears never quite to understand the responses he gets, though, and the conversation is left without resolution.

The setting of the story adds to the ambiguity that surrounds Nicodemus. The story is set in Jerusalem, the place where Jesus’ own importance is revealed, and where opposition to him is most clearly manifest. The season is Passover, making this the first episode in the Gospel in which a Jewish feast is transformed or reinterpreted in light of Jesus’ identity (much as the jars of water for purification become containers of wine, which may prefigure the Christian Eucharist in the first “sign” in 2:1-11). Nicodemus is said to come to Jesus under cover of night, not to meet him in a public place in daylight, which suggests that Nicodemus does not want the visit known.

As the details come together, Nicodemus’s place in John’s community becomes more apparent. He appears to be one of the Jews who, though not openly a believer, is quietly sympathetic—perhaps even a secret believer who has chosen or at least managed to keep that fact hidden from the authorities who would be forced to take action if the truth were known. Such people on the margins of the Christian community were indeed ambiguous characters, since they were not among the openly hostile, but at the same time they were not paying the full price for their faith, as were many of the Christians who were being cast out of the synagogue and undergoing the trauma of the loss of their history, religious community, and often family ties as well.

This ambiguity characterizes Nicodemus in his other two
appearances in the Gospel as well. Although he never compromises his position of leadership, his allegiance to Jesus becomes more open and less hidden. In 7:45-52, for example, the chief priests and Pharisees accuse their own officers of having been led astray because they have not arrested the one judged to be guilty under law. Nicodemus intercedes, asking that the authorities at least find out what Jesus had been doing (7:50), and earns their rebuke and suspicion himself (v. 52). Finally, in 19:39 Nicodemus is said to come with Joseph of Arimathea to care for the body of the crucified Jesus, an act of intimacy and devotion usually reserved for only the closest family members.

If Nicodemus has a place in John’s community and not necessarily in Jesus’ own day, the character represented as Jesus needs to be re-examined in that context also. To whom does this marginal or perhaps secret Christian contemporary of John come? He comes not to someone who can interpret Jesus, but to Jesus himself. The secret believer or almost-believer can ask more of the Christian community of John’s day than to explain its beliefs. According to John’s ecclesiology, one continues to encounter Jesus in the Christian community through the presence of the “other” Paraclete (one who is just like Jesus) in the Christian witness, such that this human witness in fact makes Jesus present again.  

The Gospel in Context. The point of the ensuing conversation which John presents begins to become clear. Nicodemus’s task is not to bend his intellect to the solution of a complex riddle, as he appears to think. Rather his task is to meet Jesus (in the Christian witness), such that in this meeting the Jews’ own confession of faith can be recognized in the Christian confession. There are two parts to the confession. The first addresses the issue of one’s origin, and by implication the means by which one is in relationship with God. The second has to do with the character of that relationship and its connection to the Gospel story of Jesus.

The saying about being born **anothen** ("again" or "from above") is the vehicle by which the issue of origin is set forth. It comes on the heels of Nicodemus’s affirmation that the power he has recognized in Jesus is evidence of God’s presence with him. The word of caution introduced in the saying “unless one is
born *anothen* changes the subject from Jesus’ deeds to the situation of the one who observes them. The word “*anothen*” is the key to Nicodemus’s dilemma. Its meaning in Greek is unclear: it means either “again” or “from above,” with no grammatical clue as to which is intended. The problem is not just that Nicodemus understands it one way, while Jesus is using it with the opposite meaning. The problem is that Nicodemus understands neither the nature of the Paraclete nor the life involved in the realm or sovereignty of God, and thus does not recognize the real identity of the one with whom he is speaking.

In this dialogue, Nicodemus appears to see the problem as the need to resolve the riddle of how one who is grown could undergo a literal second birth. Such a reading misses the point that the life to which one is born is the qualitatively different life in relationship with God, which John often calls “eternal life,” and which is one expression of Jesus’ authority and identity (5:19-29). Such life is “from above,” in that its point of origin is the “Spirit” or Paraclete. At issue is not one’s intellectual understanding, but rather one’s relationship to this one now recognized in the Christian witness, but originally made known in Jesus himself (the implied first Paraclete according to 14:16-17).

For John the key to understanding Jesus correctly—having a correct christology—is always being in relationship with Jesus, a fact which not only outsiders but even members of the community miss when they attempt to codify Jesus’ identity with pat answers (Mary and Martha in chapter 11 and Peter in 13:1-20, for example). The action of the religious authorities in declaring the Christians *apostasinagogoi* thus really does not have the effect of cutting them off from their true origins or from their connectedness with God, as might at first seem to be the case. Their origins are secure in and through the Spirit, which no decree can remove. The pain of loss of identity in the Jewish community, which would have been a major source of the anxiety keeping someone like Nicodemus from making public his confession, is thus addressed by the first half of the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus on the issue of birth or origin.

The conversation continues in a way that makes clear how the Christian’s relationship to God is secured in Jesus, who is not called explicitly the first Paraclete, but rather the Son of man.
Nicodemus is affirmed in his identity as a teacher in Israel and an expert on precisely that truth about God’s grace which he is having trouble recognizing in the present circumstances. As a teacher of the Jews, he ought to be able to understand Jesus’ point about the Son of man, suggests John, because the pattern of God’s action is consistent (3:10-11). The Son of man, whose earthly vocation had its origin in heaven, recalls the early chapters of Ezekiel, where the prophet—addressed as “Son of man”—learns through a heavenly vision the dimensions of his task of bringing indictments and judgments against the people. The consequences of those judgments would be dire: the scroll which the prophet was given to eat bore “words of lamentation and mourning and woe” (Ezek. 2:10).

What Nicodemus ought to recognize, however, is that God’s mercy outdistances God’s judgment, for Torah itself makes that clear. The conversation refers Nicodemus to Num. 21:49, where a plague of “fiery” (poisonous) serpents was the consequence of the people’s grumbling at Moses for having brought them out of Egypt only to die in the wilderness. God’s mercy came in the form of another “fiery” (bronze) serpent which would be the antidote: merely looking at this serpent hoisted high on a pole would counteract the venom.

The puns in John’s development of the analogy are subtle and point to a community (like the Jews of the Diaspora) familiar with Torah in its Greek translation. The Greek word for the pole on which the serpent was lifted up is the word “semeion,” which is also the word for “sign” which Nicodemus has used earlier (3:2). Furthermore, just as the bronze serpent was lifted up on a “semeion,” so also will the Son of man be lifted up in crucifixion—the ultimate “sign” of Jesus’ purpose and identity—and in that lifting up will become no longer the bearer only of condemnation, but also the one in whom life itself is found (3:14-17).

Nicodemus’s problem, then, is not that he is intellectually obtuse, but rather that something—perhaps his position of relative privilege in the Jewish community, or perhaps his own sense of the tenuousness of the security to which he is holding fast—has prevented him from risking open involvement with John’s church. The word of this story is that in the church is
indeed the only real security, not in the anti-Semitic sense of a claim of inherent superiority of institutional Christianity over Judaism, but rather because in the church—as in the Jewish community and everywhere else—one's relationship with God remains God's gracious gift which no human institution or decree can take away.

Contemporary Vocation. Nicodemus's furtive midnight visit provides a point of reference to those caught in family violence, whether as abusers or abused. As unhappy, scary, and dangerous as life has become with the secret that they hold, they still resist exposing it to anyone for fear that the fragile fabric of life will give way entirely. The threat experienced by members of a family torn by violence is the very loss of the family itself—the locus of their shared history and the primary community to which they belong. Like Nicodemus, they face the possibility that revealing the truth about their circumstances will mean being cut off from the community and tradition that have been their primary sources of identity and relationship.

The gospel in this crisis is first of all that God's love and grace outdistance any word of judgment we might expect, and that they meet us in the very midst of human pain. In the Gospel story Jesus makes that point by reminding Nicodemus of the truth borne by his own tradition, namely, that the same God who sent the biting serpents to bring judgment also sent an antidote to the venom for those who could recognize it. That same story then opens up the second aspect of the gospel encountered in the Nicodemus story, namely, that this truth about God receives its paradigmatic expression when Jesus himself is lifted up on the cross. This new event of God's grace makes possible the creation of a new community of life and healing of which we and all Christians are a part. Our vocation is to continue the work of the "other Paraclete," to become a new family to those who are homeless, as we embody the new commandment of love for one another (13:34).

The abuser who comes under cover of night to begin to acknowledge what has happened will find in this new community of God a place where repentance, treatment, restitution for damage done, and a new beginning of life can take place. That new community where life can begin again is

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founded not on human social organization or ephemeral good will. Rather it is empowered by the event of Christ’s death and resurrection, made present in the gathered lives of the witnesses. Recognition of the serious harm and wrong for which the abuser is responsible becomes possible when the “judge” before whom confession is made is recognized as the same One who wills life, who provides for the community of redemption, and from whose love nothing in all creation can finally separate us.

The abused, in turn, also find a new “family” within that new community which will endure even when the present fragile family structure crumbles. In that context, they can begin to let go of agonizing questions like “why did God allow such terrible experiences to befall me?” in the recognition that it is precisely God who is with them in the midst of their pain. Indeed, they can begin to recognize that God has preceded them there through the Christ whose death and rising again are the way we know the limitlessness of God’s love.

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

In Jesus Christ the church finds the source of the living water that is necessary for its daily life.

Johannine Context. The story of Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman unfolds through a series of unusual circumstances and misunderstandings even more striking than those in the story of Nicodemus. People are in places where we least expect them, at the least likely times. Jesus is said to be discussing theology with someone with whom he should not have spoken at all. Instead of conversing, they talk past each other, and as a result of their conversation, the woman with five ex-husbands and one “significant other” becomes the first missionary in John’s Gospel. She is also one of the first people to wrestle with the question of Jesus’ identity to the conclusion of a confession of faith. On the surface this story appears to be John’s answer to the question of how there happen to be both Jews and Samaritans in the church. It also gives us a glimpse into the leadership of women in the early church. On yet another
level we can see that in this story John develops the symbol of "living water" as a vehicle for expressing Jesus' significance for the church.

The story begins with a detail consistent with Jesus' own time: Jesus and the disciples might well have journeyed through Samaria on the way from Galilee to Jerusalem. Despite the enmity between Jews and Samaritans, the imperial highway system and occupation forces usually assured travelers of relative safety as they traveled through each other's territory. A Jew going through Samaria would have been careful to obtain provisions in advance, however, in order to avoid contact with the local populace. The first clue that there is something unusual about this journey is that Jesus and the disciples appear not to have made such provision, and thus to be forced to seek both food and water among the Samaritans.

While the disciples are off looking for food, Jesus is left with the most surprising role: waiting by the well. The problem is twofold. First, Jews and Samaritans did not use any dishes or utensils in common, since both sides feared thereby to violate purity laws, and some utensil would have to be used if water were to be drawn from the well. Second, women were the water-bearers of Palestine, and Samaritan women were regarded by Jews as perpetually unclean according to Lev. 15:19, since they were said to be menstruants from their cradles. The Jewish Christian members of John's community might well have been surprised to find Jesus in a position of exposure to a double likelihood of becoming ritually impure.

The story continues with a combination of what would have struck John's hearers as a blend of the usual and the unexpected. It is indeed a woman who comes to the well, but the time of day at which the story is set is wrong for such a chore. The cool of early morning and late afternoon were the common times for drawing water, but it is in the noonday heat that the woman arrives. No explanation is given for her odd timing, except the hint of her life-style. Her five previous marriages are more than the law allows, and these, together with her present living arrangement, may have made her the object of the scorn of the other women of the village. Coming alone to the well may have become a habit in her life on the fringe of her community. In any
event, she arrives, and her nondialogue with Jesus begins. Like Nicodemus in the preceding chapter, the Samaritan woman seems to be talking in a language different from the one Jesus is using, and the gospel in the story unfolds precisely as she moves about in the midst of the misunderstandings. The conversation falls into two parts. The first part develops the symbol of "living water," and the second is about the age-old differences between Jews and Samaritans.

The Gospel in Context. The woman appears to be more at home in the second part of the dialogue than the first, and indeed John's community would most likely have recognized the immediate relevance of that part of the discussion as well. The church to which John wrote appears to have been a predominantly Jewish-Christian congregation living in the Jewish ghetto of a city in the Diaspora. What would have been unthinkable in Jesus' day—namely, that such a community of Jews would include Samaritans as well—appears in fact to have happened in John's church. On one level, this story explains how and why that was possible. Even though God's saving act in Jesus Christ took place and was first acknowledged among the Jews, the old arguments between Jews and Samaritans about the proper place of worship and the locus of hope have been transcended in the name of the God who would be worshiped in spirit and in truth, and in the Christ who, having come, has shown us all things (4:23-25). The woman's conversation with Jesus takes her, and presumably those in John's congregation who might still not understand, through stages of misunderstanding to some clarity on such issues.

That public interpretation is set up, however, in a more personal and a deeper confrontation of the woman with her own life and with questions of life's source and meaning. The discussion of Jewish and Samaritan patterns of public worship and future hope begins when she attributes Jesus' knowledge about her marital history to his identity as the Taheb, the prophetic messiah awaited by both her people and the Jews (Deut. 18:15).

Similarly, the truth about her life becomes the basis of the message about Jesus which she brings to the others in her village: "He told me everything I ever did." Like an apostle or
missionary, the woman carries the word of her perception of Jesus’ insight about her—and by implication also his acceptance of her—to the people of her village. According to John’s interpretation, this is not simply a matter of Jesus’ generosity of spirit, but a matter of the woman’s becoming a key figure in the life of the church. Her work in that village is described in precisely the same language as is the disciples’ ministry in Jesus’ great prayer on his last evening with them, namely, that people believed through their word (17:20). The mission to Samaria is thus begun and awaits only a later “harvest” (4:35-38). The Samaritans’ position among the faithful is then solidified when their faith no longer is based on her words about Jesus, but rather stems from his “staying” with them (presumably in the person of a Christian witness) and from their recognition that he is “the Savior of the world” (4:42).

The meaning of that confession is explored in the first part of the dialogue between Jesus and the woman, where they talk about the living water. The conversation begins with the woman speaking of the living water of a flowing stream, as opposed to the stale cistern water that was often all that was available in desert regions; Jesus offers to give her living water even though he has nothing with which to draw it. This illogical beginning is transformed into the “God-logic” or theology of God’s promise of salvation.

Water has long been recognized as a basic ingredient in the composition of all living things and as fundamental to survival. For desert peoples, such as those whose experiences and hopes are chronicled in the Bible, the water necessary for life was seen as a sign of God’s (or the gods’) presence and blessing, and drought as a mark of abandonment or punishment. The prophecies of Second Isaiah, for example, point toward the promised time of redemption as a time when the people will walk by springs of water, and when everyone who thirsts can come and drink (Isaiah 49 and 55, for example). Zechariah, too, speaks of the day of the sovereign God as a time when living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem the whole year round (Zech. 14:8), and Jeremiah calls God a “fountain of living waters” (Jer. 2:13). For the rabbis, “living waters” are a metaphor for the Holy Spirit, or even more frequently for the
Torah itself, the core of their religious life, and itself God's gift of life to the people.

The great confession toward which John is leading the church in this passage is that Jesus Christ is the one in whom we receive this very gift of God's presence, power, and vitality, "a spring of water welling up to eternal life." On the story level, this assurance comes to the woman in her marginal position in her own community. For John's hearers it stands as another word of assurance in the face of their threatened loss of membership in the community of Israel and thus of their traditional connection to God and to life itself through the Torah.

The woman's struggle to understand on the story level mirrors the struggle of John's community to grasp this new word of assurance and to allow it in fact to bring healing into their lives. In meeting her and them, we meet also the larger human questions and anxieties that accompany this gift. On the story level these questions are expressed as worries about how to obtain the water and what vessel is needed to obtain it. For John's community the questions would take the shape of concerns about criteria for participation in the new church and how the church's life might indeed be adequate in faith and practice to bear the weight now resting upon it. Like the woman who hoped this new and mysterious water might spare her the daily burden of drawing water from the village well, John's community too no doubt longed for a quick and magical solution to its crisis, even as more generally people long for a religious "quick fix" for all troubles.

The perplexing gospel in John's Gospel continues in the lack of answers or resolutions to such confusion and longings. The first part of the conversation is left dangling, while the second begins. The woman is confronted with the truth about her life. The prejudices of her community (and, by implication, of any particular community) are set in the context of God's transcendence. Finally, with her speech only slightly clearer than her understanding, the woman goes out to carry to her neighbors the word of Jesus' identity and saving significance. The implication is that precisely in John's pluralistic and pain-filled community, sufficient security and common ground exist
because of the “living water” which is its source, so that life can go on without magical solutions or easy answers.

Contemporary Vocation. As the story is told about the woman at the well, Christ is the one who accepts her as a person, neither condemning nor varnishing the truth about her situation, and not asking whether her own choices or the actions of others brought her to her present place. On the surface level of the story, it is at the very least a glimpse of a pastoral attitude and style that might enable a person involved in family violence to begin to move through that experience toward healing.

It is clear, however, that what is at stake in this story is not a model of pastoral care, or mere social generosity, or a liberal or compassionate spirit. The series of misunderstandings between Jesus and the woman focus the story instead on the question of the nature and source of life itself. The drama of the story takes us beyond the simple formula of Jesus as the one who gives the “water of life,” to affirm that for John “life” flows out of the sustained relationship to God through Christ, such that one can not only survive but also become a locus of healing, able to touch others as well.

At the heart of the immediate crises which may have pushed those caught in family violence to seek help is often the question of life itself: can it go on, and if so, how? The fracture of the family relationship involves more than simply the absence of a source of support, love, and care that one assumes to be one’s right. It includes the negative energy that is carried in betrayal, confusion, and physical harm and pain. Added to this is the experience of social isolation of both abused and abuser, once the story is known, as though others fear that the pain might somehow be contagious. All of these factors together result in a thirst or a yearning as basic as that for life itself.

John’s audacious claim is that the “life” of connectedness to God which the woman found in relationship with Jesus continues to be carried by the Christian witness or “other Paraclete.” The message of this story thus appears not to be a particular body of concepts or information. Rather, it is the vocation to become oneself a witness who can carry that “life” and thus empower the witness of another.
The church is called to continue Jesus' ministry as a parakletos, or "one called to stand beside" another.

Johannine Context. At the core of this episode is a story of Jesus' healing of someone born blind. The healing story itself, with the details of Jesus' making clay out of his own spittle and the dust of the ground, anointing the patient's eyes, and instructing the one healed to go and wash in the pool (9:6-7), probably goes back to an early tradition about Jesus. The disagreement among the religious authorities about the legitimacy of Jesus' power to heal in light of his breaking of Jewish law may also provide a glimpse into ancient traditions preserved in John's community. These two core accounts of healing and controversy, however, have been developed by the author in such a way that the incident provides a clear glimpse of the situation and mood of crisis that marked that community at the time the Gospel was written.

One clue that more than a historical reminiscence is intended can be found in the shift of pronouns in 9:4. The first person plural instead of the expected first person singular suggests that the work of healing and light-bearing is to be carried on by more than Jesus alone, and that for some reason that work is being impeded in the present "night." A second clue is the subtle way symbols of the Feast of Tabernacles, at which the episode is set, are transformed. The pool of Siloam to which the healed person was sent to wash is no longer simply the pool linked to Jerusalem's observance of that Feast, but becomes the place of confirmation of Jesus' power to bring sight—and light—to one born blind. Light too is associated with the Feast of Tabernacles, but in this story it is not the weak and ephemeral candle flame of the festival ritual which marks the presence of light, but Jesus' own life and the work carried on in his name by the Christian witness.

The most important way in which this story is developed to provide a glimpse not into traditions about Jesus but into the life of the Johannine community is through the reported encounter of the person who was healed and his family with the religious
authorities. The traditional debate among the religious authorities about how one who broke the law could heal (9:16-17) is the point of entry into the larger controversy. That debate, and the attempted resolution of it by questioning whether the person had in fact been healed, provides the dramatic excuse for the authorities to question the one healed and the family members about what had happened. The parents' reluctance to talk (9:20-23) is said explicitly to stem from their fear of "the Jews." Clearly that term does not refer to ethnic Jews, for on the story level all the characters would most likely have been Jews. Rather, the term should be understood as identical to "the Pharisees" mentioned earlier (9:13). The parents' fear is specific, namely, that they would fall under the punishment of expulsion from the synagogue if they confessed Jesus to be the Christ. Indeed, that is precisely what happens when the one healed makes such a confession under interrogation by the authorities (9:34).

This account, then, is really a double story. On the surface it would seem to be an extended reminiscence about Jesus' own healing ministry and the mixed reception it received among his contemporaries. The details of the story give the characters additional roles in the late first-century community of the Gospel writer, as members of that community struggled with literal martyrdom (5:18) and with expulsion from the community of their birth because of their witnessing (martureo) to Jesus as the Christ.

The account concludes with an indictment by the Gospel writer against the religious authorities of his own day. The condition of blindness is not the occasion for the manifestation of God's "works," as it was earlier in the story (9:3), but rather the basis of a charge against the religious leaders (9:39-41). Their failure to recognize Jesus is looked upon as a deliberate offense, precisely because their position of religious leadership ought to allow them to recognize the truth.

The Gospel in Context. The story John tells is a paradigm of comfort and reassurance. The healing power associated with Jesus and manifest in the sight—and insight—of the one born blind is the most obvious dimension of good news in the account, but the message does not stop there.
The discussion among the religious authorities about whether one who breaks the law can be “from God” (9:16) touches on a matter of concern among Jewish Christians as well as a concern contemporaneous with Jesus’ ministry. The law violated in the story is the law against working on the Sabbath (Exod. 23:12), which Jesus breaks by kneading the clay (9:6, 11, 14) and by healing a person of an illness that was not life-threatening. (See also Matt. 12:9-14 and Luke 14:1-6.) From these transgressions of the law some of the authorities draw the conclusion that Jesus cannot be from God. If that conclusion is valid, the confession by John’s community that Jesus is the Christ can be seen as similarly ill-grounded. Put another way, if the religious authorities are not able to deny the legitimacy of the “healing” or “salvation” encountered in Jesus and his witnesses, they have the task of reconciling that evidence of God’s presence with the concomitant violation of holy laws. The author of the story resolves that tension by affirming the validity of the experience of healing and concluding on that basis that Jesus and the community are “from God” (9:30-33).

Reassurance is communicated not only in the resolution of the theological question about Jesus’ origin, but also in the pastoral presence modeled by Jesus and presumably recognized in the Christian witness as well. The one who has been healed does in fact incur the punishment of expulsion from the community because of confessing Jesus (9:34-35). Given the parents’ reticence to make their own confession of Jesus, we can assume that the one who was healed is indeed alone, without the support of either family or religious community. When Jesus seeks out this person, it is not a gesture of idle curiosity. Instead, the questions he asks are a sort of catechesis clarifying the earlier confession which had been based on the evidence of the gift of sight. Now the new believer is led to recognize Jesus as the Son of man, and in so doing to gain not merely the healing manifest in the “sign,” but also eternal life (3:14-15).

Jesus’ ministry is thus literally that of a parakletos, “one called to stand beside” the believer, just as the “other parakletos” incarnate in the Christian witnesses would stand beside those in John’s community who were expelled from their synagogue. This role of “counselor,” which is a good translation of
parakletos, is much like that of a defense attorney who stands by the client through a trial and represents the client before the opponents until the case is resolved. The good news communicated to members of John’s community by this story is that in the midst of their pain and struggle they are not alone, but rather have as their companion and advocate the very One in whom God’s life-giving presence can most clearly be seen.

Contemporary Vocation. What it means to carry out the witness of the “other Paraclete” is further elaborated in the story of the one born blind, and with that elaboration, the gospel is spelled out as the mission of advocacy. In this story the one born blind risks bringing down the wrath of the authorities on his own family if he talks about what has happened. In fact such “betrayal” would appear to leave him completely alone.

The resolution of such impending isolation in John’s community is suggested by the series of interactions between Jesus and the one who has been healed. Jesus seeks him out and stands at his side like a counselor or a defense attorney, reminding him of the strength of his “case,” reinforcing the experience of healing and transformation, and beginning the task of reintegrating him into the community which will become his new family.

Such a style of presence and advocacy suggests a vocation—a sort of enacted sermon—also for the contemporary church in its ministry with persons enmeshed in domestic violence. Two modern expressions of this model suggest themselves. The first is the attorney who stands by a client regardless of the public mood or the arduousness of the trial, so that the client is not left alone in court. The second is the counselor who does not pretend to solve another’s problems, but who provides support, asks the clarifying questions, and generally lets the other person know that, despite the difficulty of the journey, she or he is not alone. Such a vocation, marked by persistent, steadfast, patient presence—literally being someone “called beside” those who suffer—coupled with the nurturing of a community of intimacy, trust, and love that can become a new family for those whose family is gone, is grounded for John in nothing less than the very nature and identity of Christ.
The raising of Lazarus is only a temporary conquest of death, but it points to the eternal life found in Jesus Christ.

Johannine Context. The story of the raising of Lazarus occurs at the pivot point of John's Gospel. It is the seventh and last "sign" of Jesus' public ministry. It not only immediately precedes the passion account but is also identified as both the basis of the crowd's acclamation of Jesus when he enters Jerusalem (12:18) and the last straw that precipitates the religious authorities' actions against him (11:55-57). The story is crucial not only to John's account of Jesus' ministry but also to the life of John's own community, in that it establishes the authority out of which that community lives.

The parenthetical comment in 11:5—"Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus"—provides a verbal clue to the significance of the passage. These three are the only persons who are named and specifically described as being loved by Jesus. The three are thus the primary candidates for identification as the "beloved disciple" so crucial to John's Gospel and to the transmission of the traditions about Jesus which underlie it (see, for example, 13:23; 19:26-27; 20:2-10; 21:20-24).

Of the three, Lazarus is the one most often suggested as the disciple who is not part of the Twelve on whose authority the so-called "Great Church" rests, but who may be the follower of Jesus to whom John's church traces its lineage. The story itself raises the question of whether Martha may not be a stronger candidate for this identification, particularly the conversation between Martha and Jesus just prior to his raising of her brother (11:21-27). The conversation begins with Martha's rebuke of Jesus and a tentative expression of confidence in him (11:21-22), followed by a traditional confession of faith in the resurrection anticipated at the last days (11:24). That confession, in turn, is followed by a major revelation by Jesus of his identity as the resurrection and the life, and as the one in whom the traditional
hopes for the resurrection now reside (11:25-26). Martha’s concluding affirmation, “Yes, kyrie; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world,” closely parallels the paradigmatic confession by Peter in the Synoptic Gospels (Matt. 16:16//Mark 8:29//Luke 9:20). Indeed, Martha’s confession is closest to the Matthean form of Peter’s, which is followed immediately by Jesus’ blessing of Peter and his naming Peter the “Rock” on which the church is built (Matt. 16:17-19). Martha’s faith—like that of Peter—does not prove to be rock-solid, however, for a few verses after the dramatic confession she is portrayed as wondering whether her brother has not been dead too long for Jesus to help him (11:39).

The ensuing assurance from Jesus (11:40), his prayer (11:41-42), and the subsequent healing indicate two additional issues on the agenda for John’s community. First, a continuing relationship with Jesus (often suggested in the Gospel by a reference to Jesus’ “staying” or “abiding” with people) rather than a formal confession is established as the means to know truly who Jesus is. Second, by implication, the community made up of those who have not literally seen and been with Jesus must learn how that “abiding with” Jesus which is the basis of faith can take place in his absence through the “other Paraclete.” Like all “signs” and visible evidence of Jesus’ identity (20:29), even this dramatic episode of the raising of Lazarus remains a preliminary step toward true recognition and confession of Jesus in the Johannine church.

The Gospel in Context. On the most obvious level, the good news of this passage is the giving of life, first in the raising of Lazarus and finally in the revelation of Jesus as himself the resurrection and the life. The raising of Lazarus itself is important not as a prefiguration of the conquest of death in Jesus’ own resurrection, but instead as a “sign” pointing to Jesus, for this overcoming of death is at best only temporary. The authorities are depicted as seeking soon to kill Lazarus again because so many are coming to faith in Jesus on account of what happened to Lazarus (12:10-11). Furthermore, there is no suggestion in the story that Lazarus will not in time die like everyone else. Clearly the main point in the story is Jesus’ self-revelation as the one in whom eternal life is found.
At the core of the story may well be a traditional account of Jesus' raising of someone who has died, similar to such Synoptic accounts as Luke 7:11-17 and Matt. 9:18-26/Mark 5:21-43/Luke 8:40-56. The names provided for the central characters suggest that this story was one of particular importance to John's church. The story proceeds in typical Johannine style, with a series of misunderstandings and plays on words, resulting in conversations taking place on several levels at once. The point of the story is established in words attributed to Jesus (11:4), namely, that the raising of Lazarus is for the glory of God. For John, such a reference to God's glory accentuates the role of the Lazarus episode as sign, by pointing forward to that ultimate sign in the hour of “glory” which is Jesus' crucifixion.

The episode at the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus is hedged around with threats against Jesus from increasingly hostile authorities (10:31-41; 11:8-16). The “lifting up” of Jesus in crucifixion, which is the “hour” toward which all of Jesus' public ministry has pointed (2:4; 12:23; 13:1) and a time of both death and glorification (12:23-25), is the backdrop which dominates the scene. However, it is Jesus' death, and not the miracle of Lazarus's being alive again, that is the key to the “eternal life” which is the real subject of the story.

The story of Lazarus at the culmination of Jesus' public ministry thus stands for John's community as an antidote to the natural human longing for happy endings. The assurance which comes through this story is that resurrection and life are to be found in the crucified and risen Christ. This assurance is not one that provides a magic escape from death, but rather the assurance that though one die, one shall live (11:25). For John's community, living almost two generations after Jesus, and for all communities since, the gospel of life is linked not to the “signs” which marked Jesus' days on earth but to the “sign” which he became. Tenuous as that sign might seem, it was and is enough. For the “life” which is given in the story of Lazarus is not merely a prolongation of the daily life of common experience, but eternal life—life so authentic in the “God-presentness” to which it is transparent, that death itself cannot overcome it.

Contemporary Vocation. On the surface, the story of Lazarus seems to be the story of a quick and miraculous resolution of
potential disaster: he has been dead and is alive again. The story, however, is more subtle. Lazarus is not raised into paradise but into the ambiguities of Palestinian politics. His resurrection appears to be at best temporary, and there is no suggestion that he will be spared eventual death again. Furthermore, Lazarus's recovery to life and health, as wonderful an event as it is, is not the main "sign" to which the story points, but rather it is Jesus' death and resurrection that comes into focus.

It is precisely these subtle twists to what seems to start out as an unambiguous miracle story which allow it to continue to mediate the gospel in situations of family violence where there are rarely neat, simple, happy endings. Even when the immediate crisis has been resolved, those who survive will face literal death and its terrifying prefigurations again. Nightmares will recall the horror. Legal and emotional consequences of the broken relationships will need to be resolved. The pattern of violence will threaten to repeat itself, in that those who have been abused as children often become abusers of children, and those who have had one parent who abused the other often end up in similar relationships themselves.

The gospel in this story is not some kind of "good news/bad news" joke—a setup for a future pratfall. Rather this story reminds us that the paradigm for God's presence is the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. It is this final word of the triumph of God's love and grace over all that humankind can do to oppose them, rather than the beneficial outcomes to which we can penultimately point, which is the only "sign" we have or need. The call of this Gospel is for witnesses who are "called beside" all who suffer, to stand by them, and to make known the abiding presence of God in Christ and Christ in God. This indwelling presence, reflected also in the love of each member of the community for the others, is also that life which John is bold to call "eternal," which is ours in Jesus Christ.

NOTES


**SUGGESTED READINGS**

The following list of resources includes some recent books on the historical background, literary structure, and theological perspectives of the Gospel of John, and a few resources dealing with the issue of family violence. Neither list is exhaustive.

**Gospel of John**

Three recent commentaries on the Fourth Gospel, all of which are available in English, offer varied approaches to this Gospel. The Anchor Bible commentary by Raymond E. Brown (*The Gospel according to John*, vols. 29, 29A [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966-1970]) is accessible to people working from the English text. Important Greek words are transliterated, however, so that one can follow the Greek text as well. This commentary should be used in conjunction with Brown's *Community of the Beloved Disciple* (see below).

The second edition of C. K. Barrett's *The Gospel according to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978) represents a major revision of the 1955 edition and reflects the flourishing of Johannine studies in the intervening years. Ability to work from the Greek text of the Gospel is important for effective use of this commentary.

Rudolf Schnackenburg's three-volume commentary, *The Gospel according to St. John* (New York: Crossroad, 1982) also depends on the Greek text and is important in that it represents recent developments in German scholarship on John.

Raymond E. Brown's *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist, 1979) is a necessary supplement to the Anchor Bible commentary. In it Brown suggests a reconstruction of four periods of the history of the Christian community whose life is reflected in the Gospel and Johannine Epistles. The two appendixes are a particularly valuable part of this book. The first contains a critical review of recent reconstructions of the...
history of the Johannine community, and the second discusses the roles of women in the Fourth Gospel.

In his book *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (rev. ed.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), J. Louis Martyn analyzes the effect of such historical events as the revision of the Jewish "Benediction against the Heretics" and of such theological concerns as the christological and ecclesiological role of the Paraclete in the shaping of that Gospel.


In contrast to Culpepper's analysis of the narrative structure of the Fourth Gospel, Peter F. Ellis, *The Genius of John: A Composition-Critical Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 1984), analyzes the patterns of repetition of words and themes in the Gospel. These patterns seem rather forced, however, and he does not examine this Gospel in the context of John's community.


In an earlier study coming out of the United States (*Liberation Theology: Liberation in the Light of the Fourth Gospel* [New York: Seabury, 1972]), Frederick Herzog interprets the Fourth Gospel as the "interpretive key to liberation history." He claims that in it, "we can almost touch with our hands the first full-fledged theological wrestling with Jesus of Nazareth as liberator" (pp. ix-x).

The Proclamation commentary, *John*, by D. Moody Smith
(Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), presents a discussion of the background and structure of the Gospel and three brief exegetical studies (on 1:1-18 and chapters 9 and 16). Smith also discusses the problems of interpreting a Gospel which is itself an interpretation of Jesus for a particular context in the early church.

In his book *John, the Maverick Gospel* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1976), Robert Kysar discusses the thought and symbolism of the Fourth Gospel (particularly issues of christology, dualism, faith, and eschatology), in the context of the universal religious quest of humanity. The brevity and style of this book and its guides for "Reader's Preparation" would make it a good choice for a lay study group.

**Family Violence**

*Sexual Violence: The Unmentionable Sin*, by Marie Marshall Fortune (New York: Pilgrim, 1983), is an introduction to the issues of family and sexual violence. Statistics and anecdotes from research and from her own work as a counselor are integrated in discussions of ethical and pastoral perspectives on these issues. The Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence (1914 N. 34th Street, Suite 205, Seattle, Wash. 98103), of which Fortune is the executive director, can provide further information.

*Ministries with Women in Crisis: A Resource Packet* has been prepared for the National Program Division by the Mission Education and Cultivation Program Department, General Board of Global Ministries of The United Methodist Church. Included in the packet are reports, reprints of articles, surveys, and other materials. The resource packet may be ordered from: The Service Center, 7820 Reading Road, Cincinnati, Ohio 45237.

Most important, one must become acquainted with local resources such as phone hotlines, shelters, "safe houses," and counseling services to which people and families in crisis can be referred. Some of these offer training for pastors, other church professionals, and volunteers who want to be better prepared to respond to persons in such crises. Many state and local governments also have task forces or agencies working on issues of family violence.
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