

# Touchstone

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## **Editorial**

### **SIGNPOSTS FOR THE BIBLE**

We have all read about a man — it always seems to be a male who is involved — sitting in a lonely hotel room, in deep spiritual depression, who reaches into a bedside drawer and pulls out a copy of the Gideon Bible. The result is a wonderful conversion. The Bible leads him to the church.

For most of us, however, it's the other way round. The church leads us to the Bible. And the church gives us tools to understand the Bible. For the Bible is a collection of books of great diversity, and we all need help to make our way in it.

This was recognized in the early days of the church. The community spawned all sorts of hair-brained notions concerning the content of Christian theology. To keep people within faithful parameters the bishops, seen to be successors to the apostles, were looked to as the chief guides. But additional devices were developed to assist them. On the one side there were the special commemorative days, instituted not only to allow the community to celebrate the main moments in the life of Christ, but to remind people of what was important. On the other side there were faith statements that summarized the essentials. For awhile there were a good many such statements, which were remarkably similar, mainly outlining the high points of the Christ event, as is done in the present text of the Apostles' Creed. These creeds were used in the preparation of people for baptism. They were not seen as substitutes for engagement with what was in the Bible, but as guides in its interpretation. As Roberta Bondi says:

Many people today seem to think either that the truth of scripture has to be clear and literal... or that everything is just my opinions against yours. Early Christians held neither opinion.... Scripture is indeed the word of God, they

believed, but not a private word.... For them, the Bible is the book of the church.... [People] had to be taught the basic principles for reading scripture as well as the proper interpretation of key passages.<sup>1</sup>

In due course the church in the West came to rely upon four affirmations as its chief extra-biblical mentors, the Nicene, Apostles', and Athanasian creeds, and the Definition produced at the Council of Chalcedon. And this continued to be true in the churches of the Protestant Reformation. Whatever challenge the Reformation offered to the teaching of the medieval church, rejection of the three creeds, or of the Chalcedonian Definition, was definitely not part of it.

It was 1550 years ago this year, 451 A.D., that the Council of Chalcedon met. Even the ministerial readers of *Touchstone* may have only vague recollections, from their courses in church history or theology, that there was such a council, and perhaps even vaguer memories about what the council accomplished. Our lay readers are likely never to have heard the name, which is not surprising since the faith statement that came out of that council was not designed to be used liturgically. But in the article that follows this editorial all readers will find Professor Frances Russell of Birmingham, England, giving us a sense of what the council was about and why the results of its deliberations are significant for the church to the present day. And in the article subsequent to hers one of our own ministers, Don Schweitzer, takes up questions concerning how we today should think about Jesus Christ, and throughout his piece he discusses the Definition that came out of Chalcedon.

We rightly desire to be a biblical people. To follow the twists and turns in the paths of the Bible, however, we need signposts. Read on to see how some very helpful signposts were produced at the gathering that came together 1550 years ago, the Council of Chalcedon.

— A.M.W.

<sup>1</sup> Roberta Bondi, "Continuing Education", *The Christian Century*, April 19-26, 2000, p. 474.

## **THE COUNCIL OF CHALCEDON 1550 YEARS LATER**

**by Frances Young**

Some churches still recite the Nicene Creed at the eucharist, but the “Definition” that came out of the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. has never been incorporated into liturgy. It is hardly surprising, then, that few church people are aware of it. Yet the ecumenical council which agreed on the Definition was, and is, of fundamental importance for the Christian faith. For the Orthodox churches who are in communion with Constantinople, and for the churches of the West, post-Reformation denominations as well as the Roman Catholic Church, it has been for 1550 years the criterion of christological orthodoxy to which persistent appeal is made in debates about the person of Christ. Modern theologians have repeatedly sought to account for it historically and philosophically, and also to interpret it for our thought-world. The 1550<sup>th</sup> anniversary should not go unmarked!

A long doctrinal dispute lies behind the council and the Definition it produced. The historical process was dogged by non-theological factors, politics and personalities. Rather than getting caught up in all the intricacies, or indeed the different reconstructions favoured by historians, I propose to present the Definition, sketch the key issues in the background, and then offer some explanatory commentary upon it. This should clarify the historical reasons for its wording. I will then discuss some of the theological issues raised, issues which recur in different guise in other circumstances and other historical periods, including our own.

### **An Overview of the Text**

The first thing the Council did was to reaffirm the creed of the 318 bishops who met at Nicaea in 325 A.D., and endorse the creed of the 150 bishops who met in Constantinople in 381 A.D.: the latter is the one we now know as the Nicene Creed. The Defi-

nition of Chalcedon quotes both of these creeds in full, declaring that their teaching is authoritative for the church..

The next section spells out some of the contentious issues which have arisen since those creeds were formulated. Clearly their interpretation was hotly disputed. So they canonized certain letters of Cyril, once bishop of Alexandria, along with a letter from Pope Leo of Rome, indicating in each case the heresies against which they provided safeguards. The text then reads as follows:

The synod is opposed to those who presume to rend asunder the mystery of the Incarnation into a double Sonship, and it deposes from the priesthood those who dare say that the Godhead of the Only-begotten is passible; and it withstands those who image a mixing or confusion of the two natures of Christ; and it drives away those who erroneously teach that the form of a servant which he took from us was of a heavenly or some other substance; and it anathematizes those who feign that the Lord had two natures before the union, but that these were fashioned into one after the union.

Wherefore, following the holy Fathers, we all with one voice confess our Lord Jesus Christ one and the same Son, the same perfect in Godhead, the same perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man, the same consisting of a reasonable soul and body, of one substance with the Father as touching the Godhead, the same of one substance with us as touching the manhood, *like us in all things apart from sin* (Heb. 4:15); begotten of the Father before the ages as touching the Godhead, the same in the last days, for us and for our salvation, born from the Virgin Mary, the *Theotokos*, as touching the manhood, one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way abolished because of the union, but rather the characteristic property of each nature being preserved, and concurring into one Person and one subsistence (*hypostasis*), not as if Christ were parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son and only-begotten God, Word, Lord, Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from the beginning, spoke concerning him, and our Lord Jesus Christ instructed us, and the Creed of the Fathers handed down to us.

The final paragraph affirms this statement and anathematizes any who hold any other teaching or presume to compose another creed.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This English translation of the Definition is quoted from *Creeds, Councils, and Controversies* (Documents illustrative of the history of the Church, A.D. 337-461) edited by J. Stevenson (London: SPCK, 1966) pp. 334-337.

### Historical Background

The text as quoted is bound to leave any reader with a number of questions: Why did they reaffirm old creeds instead of formulating another? Who are the people opposed and why? What's all this about a "double" Sonship? Why should "passibility" be an issue? What's the story about mixture and confusion? What on earth is all this about *Theotokos* and *hypostasis*? And so on.... Some attempt to grasp the historical situation seems vital even to begin to comprehend. As always in real life situations, the whole thing was very complex, and there's a danger of oversimplifying and stereotyping. But let's attempt a sketch which focuses on the issues rather than the details.

We begin with Arius, the presbyter from Alexandria in the early part of the fourth century, often regarded as the arch-heretic. The term in the Nicene creed, *homousios* (the Son was of one substance with the Father), together with the anathemas appended to that creed (325 version), was supposed to ensure that Arius and his teaching were excluded. Whatever he actually taught, his role in the story was to force the church into affirming that what was incarnate in Jesus was God in the same sense as God the Father was God.

The biblical term "Son of God", and even "Logos (Word) of God", had proven to be ambiguous. Indeed, until the reaction against Arius, it could be said that the general approach to christology was to portray Christ as mediator in a hierarchy or ladder reaching down from the transcendent Father God to lowly creatures. Arius forced the issue: there was only one God, as the Bible said; but there was also one Lord, the visible aspect of the invisible, the one who reflected God's glory, but who could also suffer (as the transcendent, unchangeable, impassible God most certainly could not). This was the Son of the Father, who derived his being from God, but Arius maintained was not really God — rather a creature. True, he was the first and greatest of the creatures, the preexistent wisdom through whom God created the universe (Prov. 8:22ff), but still a creature.

Arius' contemporary in Alexandria, Athanasius, exposed the difficulties with this position. The Logos of Arius was a kind of secondary being, divine but not the same as God. But only God could save; the Arian theology would not do. What happened, then, was that by facing the implications of the Arian position, the church abandoned the hierarchical approach. The Nicene creed affirmed that the Son of God was "of one being" (*homoousios*) with the Father. But this left substantial puzzles about how the incarnation could have happened at all. To say that the unchangeable God was born, was hungry and thirsty, wept and suffered, even died, was highly problematic; yet the Gospel narratives showed that he shared the life of creaturely human beings in precisely that way. Arius had been able to exploit all this to show that, however divine and pre-existent, the Word of God was a creature and changeable, that temptation might have destroyed his innocence. In reply Athanasius, and others, got a bit tied up in knots asserting that these experiences properly belonged to his flesh, though it was *his* flesh, and so the incarnate Logos was not disjunct from it all.

About a century after the Council of Nicaea in 325, and 25 years before Chalcedon, a controversy arose which exposed deep differences in interpreting this anti-Arian legacy. It began with Nestorius, bishop of Constantinople, calling into question the honouring of Mary with the title *Theotokos*, the one who gave birth to God: Mary was most certainly not responsible for bringing God into existence! She gave birth to the man the Logos took. But this challenge touched nerves, and Cyril, bishop of Alexandria, leapt into action: if he is Emmanuel, God with us, then as far as the incarnation is concerned Mary did give birth to God. To each side the other appeared to be heretical, and it is instructive to look at the reasons why. For in fact they held a great deal in common, including a respect for the great Athanasius.

Cyril accused his opponents of dividing the Christ, of talking about "two Sons", the Son of David and the Son of God, with precious little connection between them. He thought their position tantamount to saying that God the Word chose a good man as



a kind of instrument for his purposes, so this was effectively no different from the case of any old prophet. Cyril dragged up the names of notorious heretics of the past who held ideas about “adoption”, and used them as labels to condemn.

Those on the side of Nestorius, however, thought Cyril insufficiently sensitive to the proper distinction between God the Creator, by this time acknowledged as Trinity, and the creatures which came into being from nothing. That, for them, was the important thing that had been clarified by the Arian controversy. Whatever you said about the incarnation, it could not mean a kind of “mixture” of Godhead and humanity — otherwise you had a hybrid, like a centaur in pagan myths, half human and half horse. That sort of thing had been suggested by Apollinarius a generation earlier, and they suspected that Cyril had not really taken the objections to it to heart. In fact it’s likely that Cyril unconsciously took his key formula, “one nature of the Word enfleshed”, from Apollinarian treatises which were circulating under false names. So they may have had a point.

But it’s never fair to interpret someone’s views from what the opposition says about them. So what were Cyril’s concerns? Three features of his theology stand out: Firstly, he repeatedly appeals to the *kenosis*, the self-emptying, of God the Word, picking up the language of Philippians 2:5-11. For him the narrative of descent and ascent is vital for our salvation. To attribute the human experiences to the humanity of Christ, and so insulate the divinity from them, shattered the coherence of the story. Secondly, he constantly argues that the creed must be taken as a whole, and the different clauses must not be split up and assigned to one or other of the “two natures”. Thirdly, he seems profoundly concerned about the eucharist, and the need for our flesh to feed on the flesh of the divine Word of God to receive transformation.

In other words, the one nature of the Word enfleshed is not understood in terms of a “hybrid”: rather it is the voluntary self-humiliation of God the Word on our behalf, so that by his becoming human in every respect as we are, we might become divine. In

fact, for Cyril, the true Godhead and full humanity of Christ is vital, but he would rather not express it in terms of “two natures”. Rather it is two stages or states of being of the one nature of the Logos.

But there lies the rub for his opponents: this means the Logos changes, and that will never do since it violates his true Godhead. For them the full reality of each nature is vital, otherwise humanity is not saved. “What is not assumed is not healed”, had been the slogan used against Apollinarius: Christ had to have full humanity, body, mind, and soul, not half-baked humanity with the Word of God replacing the mind or soul. Humanity is wholly restored by the Logos when the obedience of “his man” reverses the disobedience of Adam. But only God could restore and re-create. So it is the fully divine Word of God which saves in Christ, and no careless talk should compromise that full divinity. The Word of God could not begin existence by being born of Mary, nor could the immortal suffer and die; but through “his man” he participated in the human struggle and brought redemption. As God he remained “impassible”.

To avoid misunderstanding I should perhaps digress a little to comment upon this concern. In reaction against pagan myths, philosophers had scorned gods subject to bribery and corruption, and had affirmed the importance of the idea that the divine being is above being affected by external influences. The word for “suffering” or “passion” implied weakness, not being in control, easily swayed, emotional, inconsistent, not autonomous, dependent on reaction to others, not fully perfect, for if subject to change for the better perfection was not there, and if for the worse, well....

For Christians this was reinforced by the insistence in the Bible that God is faithful and consistent, impartial and changeless. It is sometimes suggested that impassibility was an abstract philosophical concept which we should now abandon, but given this background we should not do so without very careful thought about the implications. There were good reasons for insisting that God was unchangeable and impassible. But it led to some delicate foot-

work when it came to affirming both the full Godhead of the Word and the incarnation.

For us the equivalent sharp question might be how could the immortal God die. For Cyril the story that God died was vital; for Nestorius *et al* this compromised the Godness of God.

### **Commentary on the Definition**

With this historical sketch in mind let us return to the Chalcedonian Definition. The first thing to note is that there is no attempt to produce a new creed. It is recognized that the controversy was about the proper interpretation of already agreed-upon creeds. The previous century had seen council after council trying to improve on the creed of Nicaea without achieving consensus. So sensibly the common starting-point in the creeds of Nicaea and Constantinople is acknowledged at Chalcedon. For one side the authority of Cyril is recognized by canonizing two of his letters; the other side has its approach endorsed in the canonization of Pope Leo's documents. Then there is an attempt to spell out succinctly a common statement, beginning with unacceptable views — the extremes suspected of each side.

It should now be clear why the first clause we quoted refers to a “double Sonship”, and why it is immediately balanced by care to preserve impassibility. The next warning (about mixing and confusing) refers to Apollinarian teaching as it was perceived by all concerned, and the following one (about the humanity coming from heaven) to the more recent development of a somewhat similar approach by one Eutyches.

The final statement about the Lord having two natures before the union and one after is concerned with a formula which would remain in use among some of the churches and led to their eventual rejection of Chalcedon. Following Cyril they affirmed one nature after the union, but acknowledged it was a union of two natures by speaking of one nature “out of” two. The objection to their way of formulating it was that it suggested pre-existent humanity, where most would agree that the humanity came from Mary

and only belonged to the incarnation. Later controversy focused on whether you should talk of “out of (*ek*) two natures” or “in (*en*) two natures”, which was objected to because it implies their persistence after the union. This divided the Eastern church, though there has been agreement very recently between the Copts and Constantinople over this one small but key preposition.

The major observation to make about the positive statement that follows is that it’s so carefully balanced, conceding one point to each side all the way through. This is typified by the four famous adverbs about the two natures, translated as “without confusion, without change, without division, without separation”. These capture the fears and objections of each side with respect to the other. But the upshot of this balancing act is that many have dismissed Chalcedon as a compromise which promulgates no positive christology at all, and produces an impossibility as logically incoherent as squaring a circle. Later I shall attempt to meet that criticism in considering what Chalcedon might mean for contemporary theology.

There’s an old saying that a camel is a horse produced by a committee! The Definition is, of course, a “committee product”, and it shouts “compromise” at us as soon as we realize what lay behind its production. Nevertheless, it has had an important function in Christian theology down the centuries among those churches which have acknowledged it. It has produced a yardstick for measuring attempts to articulate christological doctrine, a set of parameters within which an “orthodox” approach to christology must take place. There are no short cuts when Christian theologians want to spell out who Jesus Christ is: somehow they must take account of the “fully God, fully human” declaration, however difficult that is to conceive.

### **Does it Make Any Sense?**

At first sight the Definition poses an impossible conundrum. The trouble is that all analogies fail, as they discovered in ancient debates about it.

There are different ways of combining two things. If you mix wine and water you get diluted wine — effectively neither is fully present any more. If you combine flour and sugar, however, you could at least in theory separate out each grain, and both “substances” are still there, distinguishable. But neither kind of analogy is much good in this context.

Discussion inevitably moved from such material substances to questions about “soul” and “mind”, and much later on to “will”. One of Apollinarius’ problems seems to have been the notion that if there were two centres of consciousness in Christ, human and divine, they would be bound to conflict — or to use an anachronistic way of putting it, Christ would be schizophrenic. On the other hand, if you replace the human mind with the Logos of God in this unique instance, then humanity is not restored: sin belongs to the mind and will and not just to the flesh! So on the one hand, human consciousness must be involved if the Christ is to be fully human and to reverse Adam’s disobedience through his obedience; but if the saving story is about Emmanuel, God with us, about God emptying the divine self so as to take and save human nature, then the Logos of God must also be fully present.

I make this point to sharpen up the issues. Some have suggested that if we were to abandon the “substance” language of ancient philosophy we might get a bit further. It’s true that the Chalcedonian Definition is hung up about “nature” or “substance”, and some of the controversy arose because different sides were using terms expressing this (in Greek, terms such as *hypostasis*, *ousia*, *physis*) in different ways. But if you get to grips with the philosophical discussions about “substance” in antiquity you discover they were really concerned about the question of what a thing really is — in other words, we may approach the matter through different kinds of categories but in the end we cannot escape the questions. The discussion about consciousness makes that clear.

So now we get to the heart of the matter. All the analogies we use come from relating two created beings. Two different created things may combine in a variety of ways, such as, by one dominat-

## THINKING ABOUT THE PERSON OF CHRIST

by Don Schweitzer

Until the Enlightenment the doctrinal definitions of early church councils concerning the person of Christ, councils such as Nicaea (325 A.D.), Constantinople (381), and Chalcedon (451), informed Christian theology. They were taken for granted in the thought of most theologians for 1300 years. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century they began vigorously to be criticized, to decline in influence in the church, and to lose their ready intelligibility in Western culture. It was in the same era that the “quest for the historical Jesus” began. The questioning and frequent denunciation of the christologies of the ancient creedal statements has continued ever since. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, the creedal statements have also sparked creative theological developments, and taken on new life. The doctrine of the Trinity affirmed at Nicaea and Constantinople has become a focus of theological discussion. The Chalcedonian Definition of Jesus Christ as truly God and truly human, the two natures united in one person, has been taken up as the key to a critically liberating and specifically Christian doctrine of God.

The question of how to relate present discussions to past formulations arose while Chalcedon was still being framed. Writing to Nestorius in November of 430, Cyril of Alexandria argued that one should seek to understand Jesus by attending to the doctrinal affirmations of early church creeds, for these are like “the king’s highway”.<sup>1</sup> Following them is the best way to understand who Jesus is and what he means for the world. I want to argue that

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Editor’s Note: In its original form this was a presentation at the Touchstone Consultation held in Nanaimo, June 2000.

<sup>1</sup> “Following in every particular the confessions of the holy Fathers, which they have drawn up under the guidance of the Holy Spirit speaking in them, and keeping close to the meaning which they had in view, and journeying, so to speak, along the king’s highway, ...” B.J. Kidd, ed., *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Church*, Vol. II (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938) p.257.

ing the other, by one displacing another, by the two at bottom sitting side by side, or by the two forming something new which is a hybrid. But in the case of Christ we are not attempting to conceive such a union. This union is of a quite different order if we take seriously what God is.

God is utterly other than the creation. God is Creator. God is transcendent, beyond creation; God is immanent in creation. God is everywhere. God and something created are not necessarily mutually exclusive — they can, as it were, occupy the same space. As soon as we begin to talk like this, we realize that bringing God into the discussion explodes the limited categories of human thought and our limited experiences of possible unions. Who are we to say that God cannot co-exist with, within, or as a fully human person, if that is what God chooses to do?

What Chalcedon does is to explode all over-simplifying attempts to dissolve the mystery that humbles us. Jesus is not simply a human being inspired by the Spirit, like any other prophet. The Son of God was not some lesser divine being who dressed up as human like the gods of Greek myths sometimes did. Nor is God like Proteus, a god who kept changing his form and you never knew what he would do next. Chalcedon forces us to go on wrestling with the mystery.

Cyril was right and, in relation to my purposes in this article, particularly with reference to the Chalcedonian Definition. Even in our very different age and contexts, taking the Chalcedonian Definition of Jesus Christ as “one Person made known in two natures” is the best way to understand who he was and what he means, and through him, the nature of God, Christian hope and calling.

### **The Chalcedonian Definition**

Cyril argued, as I say, that the early church creeds are like the king’s highway. This was during the debate leading to the Council of Chalcedon, where the participants sought to define the relationship of divine and human natures in Christ. The preceding Arian controversy over the relationship of Christ to God had led to the convening of the Council of Nicaea, which affirmed that Christ was of “one being with the Father”, and that God was three in one. Attention subsequently shifted to Jesus’ person. If he was fully divine, a member of the Godhead, was he also fully human? If so how did his divine and human natures relate to each other?

Three christological traditions vied with each other here, that of Antioch, Alexandria and the Latin tradition of the West. All agreed that as the incarnate Son of God Jesus had decisive saving significance. The conflict was over understanding how the divine and human natures were united in him.

Cyril of Alexandria held that salvation lay in being united to God. He and others in the Alexandrian tradition stressed that in the incarnation the divine Logos, the second person of the Trinity, had united human nature to itself, overcoming the gulf between God and humanity and enabling people to receive salvation. The axiom that only God can redeem fallen humanity led the Alexandrians to see the divine Logos as the active subject in the person of Jesus. They were not so interested in Jesus’ unique individual humanity, and put the emphasis on the eternal Logos uniting human nature as such to itself. Jesus’ humanity was seen as representative of humanity *per se*. While their position emphasized that in the work of Christ God is the reconciler, it had diffi-



culty making sense of New Testament passages that speak of Jesus' growth and struggle as a person.

The tradition of Antioch focused more on the individuality of Jesus' person, stressing that he made moral choices and struggled to follow God. Here Jesus was understood as the second Adam, who inaugurates a new beginning in salvation history by succeeding in obedience to God where the first Adam failed.<sup>2</sup> Jesus was able to do this because of his close fellowship with the Logos. Once again God is the one who redeems, but the school of Antioch emphasized that this happened through the moral life and obedience of a real individual in whom the Logos indwelled.

One can hear echoes of these two positions in the twentieth century. The emphasis in Karl Barth's christology on the unity of Jesus with God resembles the Alexandrian position that the Logos is the divine subject in the person of Jesus. Recent proposals of a Spirit Christology echo the Antiochian understanding of Jesus as the second Adam.<sup>3</sup>

The Council of Chalcedon set the terms of christology for years to come with its Definition, which described Jesus Christ as

complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, ... recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person ....<sup>4</sup>

### **The Legitimacy of the Definition of Chalcedon**

Since the Enlightenment the legitimacy of this statement has been questioned, partly because of the shift that occurred between it and Jesus' preaching. The latter focused on the coming Kingdom of God; the Definition of Chalcedon focuses on Jesus' person. There is a discontinuity between the two. Jesus did not speak

<sup>2</sup> R.V. Sellars, *Two Ancient Christologies* (London: SPCK, 1954) pp.189-190.

<sup>3</sup> Roger Haight, *Jesus: Symbol of God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999) p.462.

<sup>4</sup> Henry Bettenson, ed., *Documents of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1963) p.51. The full text of the Definition can be found here.

of himself as the incarnate Son of God in the way the Definition of Chalcedon does.

This discontinuity is played up in contemporary approaches to the “historical Jesus”, which interpret the Gospels in a way that discounts actual claims present in his teachings for the uniqueness of his person. In these approaches Jesus is often portrayed as a teacher, a wise man or sage, whose significance lies solely in what he taught. This may make Jesus more accessible to modern Western readers but it overlooks much of what he shared with the Judaism of his day.<sup>5</sup> When one attends to his Jewish background it becomes apparent that implicit in Jesus’ proclamation of the Kingdom, and his interpretation of Torah, is a claim about the unique significance of his own person.<sup>6</sup> This claim was intensified by his death and resurrection, which raised the question of his identity in a new way, and gave birth to a number of christologies making claims about his saving significance. These claims developed along various trajectories, or disappeared, as the young church moved from being a Jewish sect to a faith that embraced Gentiles. These early christologies left their traces right in the writings of the New Testament. As these writings became canonical documents of the church they in turn helped give rise to further christological developments, such as those affirmed at Nicaea, Constantinople<sup>7</sup> and Chalcedon.

Central to most of these earliest christologies was the faith that Jesus — who had proclaimed the coming of God’s Kingdom, and been crucified — had been vindicated by God in the resurrection, and exalted to a uniquely transcendent position of honour and authority.<sup>8</sup> The messenger now became a part of the message, and

<sup>5</sup> Gerd Theissen, *The Shadow of the Galilean* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987) p.135-141.

<sup>6</sup> Representative of many who note this is John Meier, *A Marginal Jew* Vol. II (New York: Doubleday, 1994) p.144, 438.

<sup>7</sup> Some readers may need to be reminded that the creed that came out of the Council of Nicaea was modified and expanded at the Council of Constantinople. It is the latter that has been known since as the “Nicene Creed”.

<sup>8</sup> James Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977) p.57.

the faith of the early church became what is sometimes called “binitarian”, in that it included Jesus in devotion offered to God.<sup>9</sup> Paul and other early church members saw Jesus and God as being inextricably linked. They recognized both a unity and a distinction between God and Jesus Christ. This and their experience of the Holy Spirit — in the context of encountering Hellenistic philosophy and culture — created a religious outlook that set in motion the doctrinal development leading to Nicaea, Constantinople and Chalcedon.

There is then a discernible continuity between the preaching of Jesus, the early church’s belief that he was risen from the dead, and the Chalcedonian Definition of Jesus as fully human and fully divine. A claim about the uniqueness of Jesus’ person and relationship to God was present in his own preaching, which claim was reinforced and re-interpreted in light of his death and resurrection. The doctrinal development culminating in the Chalcedonian Definition took up this claim and clarified its meaning in carefully enunciated terms. Thus while the Chalcedonian Definition marks a shift in emphasis from the Kingdom Jesus proclaimed to his person, it is continuous with the claim about himself implicit in his own preaching.

But the legitimacy of the Chalcedonian Definition is not dependent solely on its continuity with what can be known about the “historical Jesus”. It also depends on the credibility in the present of the early church’s witness to his resurrection, for it was his resurrection that vindicated his claim about his person in the face of his death. That witness, and that claim, have been vigorously questioned since the Enlightenment, and are still being questioned.

This questioning can itself be critiqued. I want to suggest that it is part of the attempt of the modern Western mind to domesticate the radical otherness of God. The resurrection of the martyr Jesus who was crucified by the leading institutions of his society now appears as the otherness of God appearing in history as a source of

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<sup>9</sup> Larry Hurtado, *One God, One Lord* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988) p.118.

empowering hope for the oppressed. The power of the resurrection to inspire hope and resistance against evil is a warrant<sup>10</sup> for its credibility. It can also be demonstrated that the resurrection cannot be reduced to something going on in the imagination of the apostles. Those first witnesses point to an event outside of their heads and hearts.<sup>11</sup>

The Enlightenment questioning of the resurrection is a part of the trial about its truth. In one sense such challenging is not new, as the reality of the resurrection has always been questioned. And it also needs to be noted that challenges from outside can lead to a deeper understanding of the faith. The theological development leading to the Chalcedonian Definition can be seen as happening in the context of such challenges. Questions arose that led to the development of a new understanding of God as trinitarian, and a clarification of the church's understanding of Jesus as fully human and fully divine. The challenges posed by the Enlightenment have also helped lead the Church to a renewed and deeper understanding of what the resurrection reveals.

The Chalcedonian Definition, while going beyond what is explicitly stated in the New Testament, is the culmination of a doctrinal development continuous with the ministry of Jesus. It expresses more about the truth of Jesus as the Christ than had been previously recognized.<sup>12</sup>

### **Chalcedon as an Interpretive Key**

It was agreed at the Council that to reconcile a fallen creation to God, Jesus must participate in creation, i.e., be fully human. At the same time he must be truly divine, for only God can reconcile to God. What the Council meant to affirm in the Definition was

<sup>10</sup> Francis Schussler Fiorenza, *Foundational Theology: Jesus and the Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1986) pp.306-307.

<sup>11</sup> See Reginald Fuller and PHEME PERKINS, *Who Is This Christ?* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983) pp.35-36.

<sup>12</sup> The same can be said about Johannine christology in relation to that of the Synoptic gospels; Rudolf Schnackenberg, *Jesus in the Gospels: A Biblical Christology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1995) p.297.

that, while there is a real distinction between the two natures, they are united in his one person.<sup>13</sup> Jesus was not two personas existing in one body, nor was he a strange entity that was half divine and half created. He was fully human and fully divine, and the two natures are united in his one person. It was this unity in his one person that enabled him to reconcile humanity and that makes him the ground of hope for the fullness of redemption.

The terms used to express this “had no one set of agreed meanings”.<sup>14</sup> The Definition did not attempt to establish any one understanding of personhood, or of divine and human nature, as final. It offers instead “a definition of the normative form of any statement about Christ”.<sup>15</sup> It states that in any christology both the humanity and the deity of Jesus, and the unity or oneness of his person, must be preserved, without stipulating the conceptual terms that a christology must make use of. Thus the Definition does not offer a fully worked out christology, but rather a set of “rules” for developing one. These rules are seen to arise from the basic experiences of salvation in Jesus’ name. They make plain the logic implicit in earlier traditions about Jesus and his saving significance.<sup>16</sup> To take the Chalcedonian Definition as an interpretive key to understanding Jesus as the Christ is thus in line with the intention that underlay it.

To use the Chalcedonian definition in this way does not require knowledge of patristic texts and their intricate terminology. Afro-American theologians point out that historically in the Black church, “Jesus was understood to be God incarnate”.<sup>17</sup> This belief was the warrant in the Black church for a sophisticated hermeneutic

<sup>13</sup> Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965) p.486.

<sup>14</sup> R.A. Norris, Jr., “Toward a Contemporary Interpretation of the Chalcedonian Definition,” in *Lux in Lumine* ed. by R.A. Norris, Jr., (New York: Seabury Press, 1966) p.64; Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, p.486.

<sup>15</sup> Norris, Jr., “Toward a Contemporary Interpretation of the Chalcedonian Definition,” pp.76-77.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p.76.

<sup>17</sup> Jacquelyn Grant, *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus* (Atlanta, GA: Scholar's Press, 1989) p.212.

that operated without the technical terms of Chalcedon but to the same effect. In Jesus' teaching and healing Black people saw God's compassion for them. In his death on the cross they saw that God knew their sufferings and was with them in their plight. In the resurrection they saw Jesus' divinity, which inspired "active hope in the struggle for resurrected, liberated existence".<sup>18</sup> Understood in this way, Jesus presented a message of hope and inspiration that Black people could not derive from their own circumstances. This did not require a sacrifice of their intellect, but rather sparked and sustained a critical imagination that helped them endure terrible oppression and inspired them to work for their freedom as opportunities arose.

As this demonstrates, the technical language of the Chalcedonian definition need not be a barrier to using its affirmations as an interpretive key to understanding Jesus Christ. The conceptual intricacies and seemingly alien language of the Chalcedonian Definition have tempted some, who insist on remaining chained to contemporary common sense notions of personhood, to dismiss it as an archaic mystification. But typically these common sense notions themselves crumble under critical questioning. Any faith in Jesus as the Christ must attempt to say what it is about him that enables him to mediate salvation and so eventually arrive at the kinds of questions to which the Definition is an answer. That the Chalcedonian Definition remains a challenge to technical rationality does not prevent what it expresses from grasping reason,<sup>19</sup> and its affirmations from functioning as an interpretive guide to who Jesus is in a way that brings liberating hope into daily life.

Accepting the Chalcedonian Definition as an interpretive key to understanding Jesus as the Christ does not trap one in the past. The Definition is part of "the king's highway", but not a destination at which one stops. In formulating its Definition the Council followed the creeds of previous councils. In this sense Chalcedon

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.217.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* Vol. I (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951) p.53.

acknowledged these creeds and sought to extend what they stated. But there was a dialectical element in this. Though Chalcedon followed the creeds of earlier councils it did not hesitate to correct at certain points the previous Council of Ephesus. In following the king's highway there is room for a "no" to the tradition as well as a "yes", room to look at the creeds of the past as interpretive guides under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who plays a creative and sometimes corrective revelatory role in interpretation.

As the Chalcedonian Definition became a methodological doctrine guiding the theological thinking of 20<sup>th</sup> century theologians like Rahner, Barth, and others, it gave the biblical witness renewed critical power in relation both to present experience and to church tradition. The identification of Jesus as the Christ became a warrant for re-thinking long assumed notions of God in light of the particularities of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. What Jesus did in healing the sick, feeding the hungry, forgiving sinners, and the parables he told, reveal who God is and what God does.

Furthermore, the affirmations of Chalcedon enable one to ask, what must God be like if God is able to enter into history in this way? At the time the Chalcedonian Definition was framed it was axiomatic that God was immutable, incapable of suffering, essentially unaffected by the world and salvation history. This understanding was in the end incompatible with belief in Jesus as fully human and fully divine, and it helped give rise to modern Western atheism. In the hands of Rahner, Barth and others, the Chalcedonian Definition became the basis for calling this notion of God's immutability into question. The God who is unchanging in any way is effectively dead.<sup>20</sup> But the God revealed in Jesus Christ is alive. Retrieval of the Chalcedonian Definition was what paved the way for correcting these notions that were deeply entrenched in the Church's doctrine of God. If Jesus is one person revealed in two natures, fully human and fully divine, then God is not immutable

<sup>20</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics II/1*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1957) p.494.

in a static sense. God is capable of suffering. God is able to enter into human history and to take human history into the divine life. God is able to give to creation and also to receive from it.

As an interpretive key, the Chalcedonian Definition also makes christology a permanent resource for criticizing the human tendency to become self-enclosed, assuming a God who is remote, basically non-interfering in human affairs and no source of hope in affliction. Chalcedon confesses that in Christ God is not distant but with us and for us, acquainted with our human condition, sharing in its burdens, sorrows and joys. It also prevents the collapse of Christian thought into talk of Jesus only as a teacher, and in the domestication of God as being with us but lacking any real infinity, otherness and power to save. It indicates that Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection are to be understood as events in which the otherness of God have been concretely revealed. That is, it demands that the church understand God in terms of Jesus Christ, and not Jesus Christ in terms of some vague, idolatrous concept of God.

### How We Should Take This Route

The Chalcedonian Definition is only an interpretive key; a means to the end of understanding Jesus' person and significance. It is not the end itself. While it opens up a new world of meaning as a point of departure for interpreting the Gospel narratives in relation to the present, it is insufficient in itself as a christology. It does not answer the question "who is Jesus Christ for us today?" If this route for understanding Jesus is taken, it must be enriched in at least two ways.

First, "[w]hat we find in classical Christology is a dissolution of all other aspects of Jesus' historical particularity, his Jewishness and his first century cultural setting."<sup>21</sup> The concreteness of his encounters with the rich and poor, the sick and healthy, men and

<sup>21</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether "Can Christology be liberated from patriarchy?" in *Reconstructing the Christ Symbol: Essays in Feminist Christology* ed. by Maryanne Stevens (New York: Paulist Press, 1993) p.23.



women, children, Gentiles, prostitutes, tax collectors and disciples is lacking here. While the Chalcedonian Definition charges all this with meaning, it is missing from the statement itself. Taking the Chalcedonian statement about Jesus' full humanity seriously requires paying attention to the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life, death and resurrection in all their concreteness.

It is therefore no contradiction to say that employing the Chalcedonian definition as an interpretive key re-connects us with the quest for the "historical Jesus"! As Afro-American theologians have argued, the salvific meaning of the incarnation can only be understood from the particularity of Jesus' historical existence.<sup>22</sup> Slave holders who worshiped Jesus as the Christ, but paid little attention to the salvific and ethical meaning of his ministry, felt free to treat their slaves any way they liked.<sup>23</sup> From their oppressed position the black slaves saw more clearly here, and perhaps even more clearly than the framers of the classical creeds, that the ministry of Jesus is an essential revelation of the will and character of God. Christology cannot abstract from this and then claim to be in continuity with Jesus of Nazareth. The never-ending quest for the historical Jesus is theologically necessary. We must understand Jesus in his historical particularity, and discern the continuity of church teaching with his life, death and resurrection.

Attention to this leads to a second, equally important, interpretive key for christology, the eschatological hope of the Old and New Testaments. The neo-orthodox critics of liberal theology appropriated the radical otherness of God expressed in New Testament eschatology and developed a thorough critique of the values, purposes and terms<sup>24</sup> of a capitalism run amok and societies bent on war. The eschatology of the New Testament continues to be appropriated in this way by liberation and political theologians. It can serve this same purpose in relation to the environmental crisis

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<sup>22</sup> Kelly Brown Douglas, *The Black Christ* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994) p.81, 29.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.18-19.

<sup>24</sup> Sharon Welch, *A Feminist Ethic of Risk* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990) p.125.

and the new powers of globalized capital.

The Chalcedonian definition enshrined christology as an expression of the otherness of God. But it did not deal with the historic and substantial dimensions of New Testament eschatology.<sup>25</sup> To restate the meaning of Jesus as the Christ today this needs to be retrieved. One should understand Jesus, his ministry, his cross and resurrection in the light of the hope of the Old and New Testaments. Loss of these horizons means a loss of continuity with the historical Jesus and a break with early church faith in him as the Christ. It also robs the contemporary church of a perspective from which to develop the kind of thorough-going critique of itself and surrounding society that it needs.

### Conclusion

The idea that future lies in the past, that the way ahead can come from behind, that one needs to go back and retrieve in order to go forward, is sometimes greeted with skepticism. Some think the past must be swept aside to make way for the future. The heart of christology, however, is the faith that the future is ultimately linked to a person and events from long ago, whose message of judgment and hope continues to be meaningful in the present. The history of interpretation that lies between Jesus and us can obstruct our access to him and even turn some away from him. But it can also be a productive key to understanding who he is and what he means. The Chalcedonian Definition states why Jesus is meaningful, and suggests how his revelatory and saving significance is to be interpreted. Those who discard it as philosophical mystification, and attempt to discover the real Jesus behind church teaching, typically end up with a watered-down version of Christian faith cast in terms of contemporary generic religion.

The Chalcedonian Definition directs us instead to the otherness of God revealed in Jesus. It makes demands on our thinking but it also opens us to the critical potential of Jesus' life and death. It

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<sup>25</sup> For these see Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (London: SCM Press, 1967) p.119, 136-138.

need not, as some would suggest, chain us to worn-out thoughts from the past or to patriarchal views of God.<sup>26</sup> As an interpretive key to understanding Jesus as the Christ, the Chalcedonian Definition anchors christology in the particularities of Jesus' life, death and resurrection as the concrete source of revelation. But the church also develops its christology under the influence of the Holy Spirit working in the present. Moving within and outside of the church, the Spirit works through movements of protest and renewal, new forms of thought and experience, to lead the church beyond inadequate perceptions to a new understanding of Jesus as the Christ, adequate to the present.<sup>27</sup> Christology is developed through a dialectic of the particularity of revelation in Jesus Christ and the universality of the Holy Spirit that is present in the wisdom of other religions, social movements and philosophic argument.<sup>28</sup> The Chalcedonian Definition identifies Jesus as the concrete source of revelation. The revelatory work of the Holy Spirit enables the church to understand him anew in each new context in which it finds itself. Together the two keep the church's witness faithful to its past and relevant for the present.

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<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth Johnson argues that while christology has the potential to critique patriarchy, the close union of divine and human natures in Jesus affirmed at Chalcedon has been used by some to see God as male; Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is* (New York: Crossroad, 1992) p.35.

<sup>27</sup> For this, see Gregory Baum, *The Credibility of the Church Today* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968) pp.156-175.

<sup>28</sup> For a discussion of this dialectic, see Harold Wells, "The Holy Spirit and theology of the cross: significance for dialogue," in *Theological Studies* Vol. 53 (1992) p.489.

## **THE IMPACT OF NEW COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES ON THE CHURCH**

by **Keith Howard**

### **Introduction**

Ten years ago very few Canadians were connected to the Internet. By 1997, some 5 million were; last year the figure was 13 million. Nearly 50% of Canadian adults now access the Internet. That figure is expected to reach 58% by this fall. Canadians spend an average of 45 minutes using the Internet each day in a typical week.

Across the world, every six months the equivalent of the population of the United Kingdom signs on to the Internet for the first time. The impact of this new communication technology upon the social and ethical climate will prove more significant than the introduction of the automobile.

The mission of the church involves interaction with the culture. If the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ ranks high in mission priorities, appreciation and understanding of the impact of this technology approaches critical importance. It sends tremors through every major Christian doctrine, from creation to eschatology, and will profoundly affect how we go about being church. No safe haven exists from the impact. The church ministers in the culture in which it lives like a fish swims in water. The key question for the fish becomes the state of the water.

In this paper I limit my observations and comments to two major areas: (1) identification of some immediate implications of the new communications technology for congregational ministry; and (2) the influence of the new communication technologies upon the moral and spiritual sensibilities of the context in which the church ministers.

<sup>1</sup> This was a presentation at the Touchstone Consultation held in Nanaimo, June 2000.

### Implications for Congregational Ministry

A few weeks ago my wife and I went to visit a young couple who wanted to have their four-month-old son baptized. As per usual, our repertoire included a spiel about how baptism is a covenant service where each participant in the covenant assumes various responsibilities. In other words, they had to show up at worship before we would baptize. "No problem!" The father had been raised in the United Church and they were intending to go back to church anyway. They had even gone so far as to search the web but found only three churches in Victoria. They were glad to hear of our congregation, Pilgrim, through a family connection.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a congregation either grows or dies. Growth requires evangelism and conversion. To grow, United Church congregations need to be able to reach out and touch members of the generations born post-1948. These are the generations that pollsters, such as *Environics*, characterize through a series of growing and declining trends. On the growing trend side of the ledger are listed such things as: search for meaning; individualism; control; autonomy; fear and insecurity; social Darwinism; rejection of order and authority; personal creativity; experiential hedonism; and new mental frontiers. The opposite side includes such declining trends as: religiosity; confidence in institutions; deference to authority; legacy; search for roots and social responsibility.

The basic first step of establishing contact with these people remains increasing the congregational profile. As the speed of access to the web grows a congregation simply needs to be present in much the same way as in olden times a newspaper ad was required; except those who log on expect more than those who flip to the religion section of the newspaper. Members of the Internet society, who value individualism, control and autonomy, expect access to information whenever they choose. They expect to be able to retrieve information in a form that is "user-friendly". If action is required, it should be no more than a double-click away. Large search engines and their drones continually scour the net looking for keywords and projecting profiles of a site. The clearer the

purpose and focus of a site the cleaner the hits. The web challenges congregational ministry to declare clear purpose and focus of mission. The need for clarity extends beyond the splash page.

What is the congregation about? Are there clear connections between its spiritual commitments and its life? In an age that values the visual and that loves story, what is the story of the congregation? And, from a Christian perspective, how does the story of the congregation fit into the larger Christian story? The best Internet sites provide not only good, authoritative information in an accessible, user-friendly format with a clear path for response and engagement but they are interesting visually and intellectually. They tell a story. This does not mean a site must be filled with eye-candy or whiz-bang Java scripts, but a well-constructed site has movement, direction and visual appeal. It has character, plot and an invitation to discovery.

Though seekers who come to worship may not consciously apply the same criteria, at another level they do. The expectation is that the hour will engage, have flow, continuity and provide many points of reference and access. Newcomers to Pilgrim seldom say "good sermon" but may refer to a "good service", or a "good time". We can quibble with the language but if worship services are to have any kind of evangelistic appeal there needs to be awareness of the frame of reference. The fact remains that most church worship is unintelligible to most seekers.

The web forces clarity on another level than profile. The web specializes in information. What kind of information should go on a church site? A marketing approach suggests display of that which attracts or meets the perceived needs or desires of the guest. But, as Christians, we are not just about a "sale" at any price. We are about conversion to a Way marked by truth. How much of the truth should be displayed and in what form?

In some ways, the challenge parallels that faced by most preachers in congregations desiring growth. Sacrifice does not always attract but it remains part of the Christian gospel — yet only a fool leads with this message. As a preacher I want people to leave gripped more by God's vision of "Thou shalt" than "Thou

shalt not". I like them leaping from the pews and bounding down the front steps gripped by the joy of what they "get to do and be" rather than what "they've got to do". And yet there are boundaries — to life and to a web site. By their nature every web site and community operates within boundaries. We need to declare them clearly at some point. We need to declare who and what we stand for and what we stand against.

Church sites on the Internet serve many purposes, only one of which is the attraction of potential converts. The most popular use currently is as a service vehicle for the converted. Various types of information flows through the site to members of the congregation or denomination with the intention of nourishing disciples. What type of information becomes critical to that task? What do Christians need to know in order to be certified Christians or to grow in their discipleship?

A number of obvious possibilities surface. There should be a site that leads people through various levels of biblical knowledge. The interactive nature of the web makes it a wonderful fit for the development of skills and knowledge in Christian ethical reflection and moral decision-making. A large part of the richness of our growth as Christians depends upon conversations with those saints who have come before us. Resources of theology and history seem indispensable. The Web allows not only the provision of text but audio and visual engagement, even individualized tutoring in any of these traditional disciplines.

The resources of individual congregations and the competencies of individual clergy are now stretched beyond the comfort zone; yet, the ability to create these gifts for the good of the wider church has never been easier or more powerful. Individuals are not isolated in their desire for information. Information nurtures community.

Even before the Methodist circuit riders, clerics were information providers about the health and welfare of parish members, if not the state of the larger community. In a print world, congregational bulletins and newsletters met some of that same information-sharing need. Web pages now provide opportunity to furnish

written text and images, still and animated, that might build community. Email listserves like BC BROAD fulfil a similar function. The interesting question then becomes, To what extent does information-sharing really build community? What type of information carries nutrients? Or perhaps more accurately, What type of community forms in response to the exchange of certain types of information?

Clearly on-line "communities" which arise in response to subscription to a listserve, meeting or chatroom are a different type of community than one born of face to face encounter. The community portrayed in the TV series *Cheers* would not be duplicated online even if everyone knows your name. At the very least, the Internet provides the means to exchange information concerning issues historically identified as important to the community as well as common household matters. The gift of the Internet, however, goes beyond such basics. It presents a wonderful mechanism to generate and simmer the type of stress and conflict that promotes growth within a community. The Internet provides distance while at the same time grants access to any that desire, and can afford, it. Much clarification and information sharing can be done prior to any face to face discussion. Community can be fermented and nurtured in some ways.

Over the last few decades, various parts of the church have engaged in significant whining about the state of the church. We have acted as if we lived in a world governed by fate even while being given one of the most powerful tools ever to reach out, establish contact, and communicate with various kinds of people the world over and within our ranks. The largest single implication the new technologies present to the church is the need for leaders who are not afraid of, or seduced by, the new reality in which the church remains called to witness. "The single most critical variable to the success of a team or organization improvement effort is the behaviour of those leading it," writes Jim Clemmer, a Canadian management consultant. There are many other particular implications for congregational ministry and church work. However, the more profound challenge occurs at a much different level.



### **Impact upon Moral and Spiritual Sensibilities**

My wife, Gaye, and I have five children, the youngest of whom is 19. None of them currently live with us. The evolving family pattern involves the hosting of family dinners every couple of weeks. At a recent meal, conversation turned to the question of wills and who would get what. The topic of the disposal of my CD collection, which primarily consists of country and jazz selections, emerged. I was touched by the intensity of the discussion until I realized that the real issue was who would *have* to take these CDs! Moreover, the consensus was that possession of my CD collection should not count against the holder when it came to an equitable division of other parts of the estate!

Reception of new communication technology by various levels of the church has been notoriously varied. For many their response has been simply a matter of taste. Like country music, "It's just not us." Tempting as such a response may seem in an already rapidly changing world the challenge and promise of the Gospel demands more than a snobbish response to this new reality.

The impact of the new communication technology reaches far beyond lifestyle. Though we tend to be attracted and distracted by the flash and bobbles of the new communication gizmos, the more serious hits strike at beliefs that operate at the pre-conscious level, beliefs that shape how we see the world and respond to it.

If we are serious about witness, evangelism or conversion we need to examine the impact, exposure to, and use of, the new communication technologies have upon those beliefs that shape the way we see and respond to the world. As the church seeks to share its witness, to give any meaningful account of "the living hope" that is within us, we need to recognize and engage the impact the new technology has upon both our *perspective* and our *attitudes*, a distinction used by ethicist Dr. Terry Anderson.

In particular, the new communication technology presents four major challenges to the Christian witness.

1. Is there any meaning to life and, if so, what is it? This is the question of meaning.

2. What or who should be granted authority to shape lives and relationships? This is the question of sources and authority.
3. Is there any hope for the future? What is the extent of our power to shape the future and the present? This is the question of destiny.
4. What is the nature of the Power that is beyond us? This is the question of God.

### **The Really Real — the Question of Meaning**

All of our understanding and experience of life is mediated. We see through a lens. We interpret. Many beliefs form the lens. One of those beliefs addresses the big, usually unasked question: What really is going on in life? What is real and what is illusion?

For centuries we have been able to assume some version of reality. At times, it was a large version that included a multi-dimensional, spirited world. At other times, the real world was restricted to the realm of arborite and melmac.

Part of the Christian answer usually involves some version of a doctrine of creation and/or redemption. God was and continues to be at work, bringing into being, establishing relationships. We view a world populated by beings, many of whom are identifiable through the use of our senses. These beings operate within certain constraints of time, mortality and other laws. The character of the relationships between these beings and between them and their surroundings lead quite logically to other questions such as sin, evil, redemption and the possibilities and limitations of the future.

Now things are not so clear. To use Robin Williams' phrase, "Reality! What A Concept!" 'Reality' now has a modifier. The new lexicon uses phrases like virtual reality. Well, if some reality is virtual, where is the line with the other stuff? Does the existence of a virtual reality mean there exists some reality that, though *experienced* and *felt*, is an illusion, a trick of the mind and senses? How does one know?

A few weeks ago a pastoral situation arose where a 15 year old teenage boy had been in conversation in an Internet chat room with someone whom he believed to be a teenage girl of his own

age. Conversations flourished between possible soul mates and progressed to the point where she was keen to send him a photo. He agreed but because their home computer did not have the technical capabilities to receive the photo it was sent to the home computer of a friend. When downloaded by a parent, the photo revealed an erotic image of a naked twenty-something woman. The teenage boy was delighted, but underneath the question nagged, Was this really the person whom he had come to know as friend? Where did the illusion lie? He will never know.

On a more common level, everyone *knows* that we can no longer believe what we see. Photos or videos can easily be digitally altered, if not constructed or reconstructed. Any half decent photo shop offers you the chance to remove “red-eye” from your photos. There are even some specialty services who will remove unwanted people from past photos. Perhaps you have divorced and married again and like the picture of yourself, your flower girls and ring-bearer but are, for any number of reasons, not too keen to have that other person in the picture? For a small fee the ex can be removed, just like they never existed. No new acquaintance will suspect a thing! How are we to know the “reality” captured in any image exists at all? In some ways, the challenge of defining reality matches that of obtaining accurate memories. What really did happen? What really does exist?

Popular culture recognizes the seriousness of the issue. The movie *Wag the Dog* posed the matter of reality and illusion as it may surface in the political arena. The movie *Matrix* provides serious and profound exploration raising fundamental questions of epistemology, creation and salvation. Keanu Reeves, who recently signed for \$30 million for *Matrix II and III*, plays Neo, the One Who Is to Come. The One sees life as it truly is. He unmask the illusion that most call everyday life but which, in fact, is funneled digitally into our minds so that life and energy can be drained from us. Hope lies with The One. Those who work with him are called to lives of discipline, self-sacrifice, courage and perseverance in battle with Agents of the Power of the Matrix. Sound familiar?

### **The Way — the Question of Sources and Authority**

In a world where reality might be virtual, the prime moral and spiritual questions become Who can be trusted? What can be trusted? Is every perception of reality valid, or is there a Way through the maze, the matrix, the web? (If so, bookmark it!) The ethical corollary of the question would be Why resist the illusions? Why even bother to resist the interlocking, mutually supporting, consumption-promoting, individualistic, entertainment-oriented strands that grease the waterslide to the advertised good life? Or in computer jargon, Why even log on?

The call to witness comes in this environment. To what or whom do Christians bear witness? If we have truth to proclaim about the nature of ultimate reality how can we proclaim it if all realities are seen as suspect? How do we know that to which we bear witness is true? Why should we even bother to raise a voice in the midst of the thousands of other messages that flood our senses and screen? What or who should be granted authority to shape lives and relationships? The emergence of the virtual world makes the issues of meaning, sources and authority urgent.

### **Hope**

Each of our five children has a different posture toward computer technology. The eldest is afraid of it. It was years before she even dared to turn on the computer without supervision. The second daughter views computer technology like a tool/toy. It's there and you play with it. Let's see what it can do. Another device to help me conquer the world. The third tends to view the computer much like she does the toaster. It's an appliance. Just tell me how I make it produce my research paper. The fourth recognizes the value, even the necessity of the technology in our culture, but has neither the finances nor the skills. She phones from Toronto for her mother to fax an updated resume whenever one is needed. The fifth, because of an ill-fit with the school system and an ongoing battle with drugs, has fallen into the Expendable Class of our society where he has neither skills nor access. He has difficulty obtaining or provid-

ing information in formats other than face to face communication. In many ways, our children mirror the attitudes of the culture toward the new communication technology. I lift up only two concerns.

First, underlying each position is an attitude concerning the power of the new communications technology and their ability to engage that power in a way beneficial to themselves. Fundamentally, it is the question of hope. One end of the spectrum sees the demonic; the other views the potential to encounter the holy and move toward Heaven.

Again, popular culture stands very aware of the power of the new communication technology and has posed the alternatives at each end of the spectrum with drama and power. *The Terminator* movie series, in particular *Terminator II*, provides illustration of the end of the spectrum that views technology, "the Machines", as a threat to life as we know it. The power of the technology cannot be denied but the deep-rooted conviction remains that such power will ultimately threaten humanity, and probably the planet, with annihilation, termination. The Machines will move beyond human control and certainly, like a fallen angel, move away from the originally intended purpose.

An echo of this attitude often resounds through offices. "I'm down. The computer is down", which means of course that all meaningful and productive activity has ceased. The machines have decreed that any human contributions will cease.

On the other end of the spectrum, the movie *Contact* provides a much more positive response. Some day technology, even if we do not understand it fully, may be the tool to take us to the place where we recognize the great gift that is life. Perhaps once we can be transported to a different point of view, or maybe even to Heaven, humanity may be moved to live with respect, tolerance and compassion.

Depending upon the day and the stability of our software most of us oscillate between the convictions that the new technology provides a blessing and a pathway to something greater and the

thought that it fundamentally can only be a tool of the demonic. The question of hope thus emerges as a key theological and spiritual issue. In terms of the larger culture, the question of the source and reliability of hope remains an open and a vital question. For the church simply to say, "Jesus Christ, the Hope of the World" has less content to most than "Mr. Clean, the hope of kitchen cleaning."

Like those of the time of the writing of 1 Peter, the call is to proclaim "new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3). The evangelical opportunity exists to witness to the power of the One who can set free. The challenge becomes the discovery of forms of witness that connect. Part of the call to connection relates to the second concern I shall lift up. Those who are excluded from the new form of power sound a particular call to the church.

In his essay "The New Technological Imperative in Africa: Class Struggles on the Edge of Third-Wave Revolution", A. Aklalimat begins with this.

(the) twentieth century is ending as a global drama full of conflict and change, with humanity torn between hope and despair. For a few the new century offers the wonders of a high-tech future, with wealth amid the birth of a new civilization; but for the majority there is fear of war, starvation, homelessness, poverty and plagues."

The church has been long familiar with the ethical dilemmas surrounding the fair and equitable distribution of resources for health care, education, training and economic development. Into this mix must now be added the fact that information itself has become the major commodity of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and many view information, dissemination, and commodization as fueling international domination, inequality, and the suppression of cultural uniqueness and traditional values.

The entire continent of Africa ... contains fewer telephone lines that does Manhattan. African customers who sign up for service today are put on a waiting list 3.6 million people deep; in sub-Saharan regions, the wait is currently about nine years.

South Africa has 9.5 main telephone lines per hundred people, giving a teledensity twenty times higher than the rest of sub-saharan Africa. But only 11.6% of Africans have telephones in their homes, compared with 87.4% of whites, and 47.6% of Africans have no access to any phone, compared to only 6.6% of whites.

The African example provides one clear illustration of the matter of access. There are parallels on the global stage. Developed countries hold 90% of the world's bandwidth and thus for all practical purposes control what may be viewed or accessed by any peoples within a country. Equally as serious though is the implications of what happens to the cultural and social fabric when access is gained. It no longer proves that difficult to provide huge amounts of data to a population. What remains more difficult are matters of attitudes and values and the question of what should be changed so that data can flow?

The fundamental engineering design of the Internet is interdependence and yet the economic force seems to be to the privatization and commoditization of information. D. Brin asks the logical question. "What will be the consequences when, as some predict, the personal computer is so cheap that the average citizen of the Third World has greater access to data than clean water?" Cell phones, yes; water, no. The concern has a domestic edge as well. What kind of a country provides Internet access but allows one in five children to live in poverty? Does the Christian church have nothing more than a shrug to offer on this situation?

### **Power Up Power Down**

The question of hope has obvious moral implications for hope fuels action. Hopelessness drains the power to act. And when hope becomes tied to access to or ability to use the new communication technology beneficially then the plug drops out of the can of hope because Who can keep up?

When I thought about making this presentation I entertained the possibility of bringing out, in a show and tell fashion, two tool kits - the one that I use and one similar to the one my father used.

The more I thought about it I became aware of a growing sense of embarrassment about the technological tools that I use.

The topic is supposed to be concerned with *new* technology but the CPU in my home computer is only a Pentium II not even a III; my laptop is staggeringly heavy at well over 5 pounds and crawls at a tortoise pace of 100 mhz, my Palm Pilot is only a IIIx with not even a colour display and my cell phone, while at least digital, is certainly heavy and does not even approach the Qualcomm that combines both the phone and the PalmPilot functions. And my digital camera only has a 1.4 million pixel resolution. Who am I to talk of the new technology when I am easily two or three years out of date?

Change has left me choking dust and there seems to be little I can do about it. Similar progress in automobile technology to that in information technology would have produced a Lexus for about \$2.00 that could travel at the speed of sound and go 600 miles on a thimble of gas.

People look at you as if you are a member of the flat earth society if you do not know that change, meaning big change, is happening everywhere, all the time. Whether or not that is actually true feels irrelevant because the point is 'We're out of date!' or could well be the next quarter. Only the church seems to believe itself insulated from the possibility it may receive a pink slip or be judged antiquated. The positive spin would be to say that in the midst of rapid and profound change we should be able to live with profound humility and openness to innovation. The business community shows particular sensitivity to the need for ongoing innovation. A friend, who is 35 years old and manages a database development company, operates with a planning frame of 3 months. The mantra for cutting edge companies seems to be "Whatever you think you know, forget it! Think again."

Most often though, life lived sensing the rumble of oncoming tsunami-like change carries a subsonic spiritual dimension of despair and powerlessness. Change *bears down* upon us.

Jesus faced his own temptations in the wilderness. In the swirling sands of our time, frantiness, distraction and paralysis tempt



us. These, of course, have profound implications for congregational ministry and the societal ministry of the church. To be fair, some have a more positive expectation. Maybe things will change for the better some day. Video screens will soon be worn much closer to the eye, probably mounted on a headset. Casio now markets a wrist watch that contains a digital camera whose images are downloaded using infra-red technology. Maybe something dramatic will happen and pull us out of this global-warming, increasing child poverty and AIDS-dying spiral?

The point is that an apocalyptic expectation underlies our interaction with much of the new technology whether we wait for Armageddon or the Rapture. Either view tends to see change as fate which most are powerless to affect. At best one can learn to surf the wave, at worst we drown. Such a view stands in stark contrast to the God Christians knew through the resurrection and Pentecost. Is there any hope for the future? What is the extent of our power to shape the future and the present? This is the question of destiny.

### **A Networking God**

Now, even though this is not a football game or an American election campaign I did want to mention something about God, and the opening the new communication technology provided for talking of God in an evangelical, witnessing, apologetic way. For the question of God may be the most central of our time. What is the nature of the Power that is beyond us?

In that great popular theological work, *Star Wars*, George Lucas provided a powerful image of the Force. This image dramatically altered the possibilities for renewed discussion in the popular sphere of the nature of God. The Internet provides similar opportunity and by so doing allows initial conversation on the issues mentioned above — meaning, authority, hope and destiny. As one looks around, certain similarities emerge between our time and that of the Apostle Paul cruising through Athens. A paraphrase might run like this.

Surfers of the Web, I see how extremely aware you are of links and relationships. For as I surfed the Web and carefully looked at your sites, I found among them many sites that consisted of links to other sites.

To those dependent upon and fascinated by links I have Good news.

Even before the first site was mapped there was a great Weaver of Links who not only gave birth to the Web and everything in it but to all that came before. The Great Weaver is not restricted to any server or subject to any sysop. The Great Weaver needs no portal or line but connects directly and cannot be denied access by any encryption or firewall.

For the Great Weaver made all to have their site, and allotted to each their time online, their password and their protocol, so that at those times we have cause to search we might find, though indeed the Great Weaver is not far from any of us. Indeed, it is in the Web of the Weaver that we "live and move and have our being." (Acts 17:22ff).

The rise of the Internet and the World Wide Web provides a profound metaphor to begin to talk of how we experience and understand God. In particular, the possibility exists to talk to people about God using the language of God as Spirit. Though we may not often pause to reflect upon it we accept that all around us digital information is moving and flying at astonishing speeds. Even on the personal level life has become constant movement between a series of sites, some more or less permanent. The energy — to use a New Age seasoned term — lies in the movement, the connectivity. The life and wonder of the Internet is not so much found in any particular site but in the ability to move between sites in some ways similar to the movement of the Spirit that exists and moves in and between all that is.

The moral language that goes with this theological emphasis concerns responsibility for relationships. One takes responsibility for the site one puts up or the listserv one moderates. One takes responsibility for the links from one's site. There are boundaries, obligations and responsibilities but also the power to fulfil those responsibilities within boundaries. If one is to experience the Internet fully one is required to be faithful to the protocol of the system. If you are not faithful you will be shut down in a manner similar to the understanding of judgment expressed in the Wisdom tradition. Access denied. Connection terminated.

Such theological beliefs as righteousness, responsibility and judgment that may have been elbowed to the sideline in times past make eminent sense in the world of the Internet. We do not have to appeal to or wait for a prophetic tradition but simply note the intrinsic logic of the system and enlarge the frame. From a preaching standpoint, the basic feeling of many in our culture about their lives parallels the response of many to their new computer or software: "It's not working. What's the matter, it's not working." From the viewpoint of the Wisdom tradition, response to the software and to the way many live their lives becomes the same. "It's not working because that's the not the way it's designed to work." Or, in more appealing language, this path does not lead to the joy of abundant life. Many other theological and spiritual points of connection to the daily life of an Internet user emerge.

Responsibility for our links and the experience of an external power being able to shut us down are as well-known as the crashes engendered by bugs in the operating system. Even a veteran code warrior knows there are moments of decision where confession must be made and repentance undertaken. That is not only true of the beta version of any software but through the iterations of versions. The discipline of sanctification must be part of the journey of any new effort.

Opportunities abound for apologetics and evangelism. The conceptual frameworks are easily mined, linked to in order to enable proclamation. What an opportunity the new communications technology presents the church! What a responsibility to witness!

## Sermon

### LIVING LIKE WEASELS

by Ross Smillie<sup>1</sup>

Text: Luke 6:20-31

A pilot comes on the intercom of a jet aircraft: “Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain speaking. I have some good news and some bad news. The bad news is that we have been hit by lightning; all our navigational instruments and communication systems are down, and we are lost. We have no idea where we are or where we are going. The good new, however, is that we know our air speed, and we are making very good time.” I first read that story in a book on medical ethics. The author was pointing out that with all the powers of modern medicine and technology, and the exponentially increasing speed at which things are changing, we are going somewhere very fast, but in a society in which there is no commonly accepted vision of the good, of where we should go, we may be going very fast in the wrong direction.

Science and technology give us the power to accomplish all kinds of good, but what is the good? More choices are available to people today than to any other people who have ever lived. But what are we to choose? What is really worthy of devoting ourselves to? That is the critical question of life, and it is the question that the church is uniquely equipped to put to a culture that seems to have forgotten it. It isn't enough, I want to suggest this morning, to be good at something. You can be good at something without being a good person, and a saint is a person for whom that latter quest, the quest to be a good person, is the real goal in life.

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<sup>1</sup> This sermon was preached on All Saints Sunday, 1998, in Knox-Metropolitan Church, Edmonton.

In an airplane, of course, you have a pilot, who makes the decisions. But increasingly in our society, there is no pilot. Important social decisions are made by an unpredictable and erratic process in which a bewildering array of social forces and interest groups vie for public attention and popular support, each hoping to convince the rest of us that their interest is best for us all. The optimistic among us rely on that corruption of Adam Smith's famous statement that if everyone acts in their own interest society will be guided by an "invisible hand". I am not such an optimist. I do not believe that it's enough to consider what's in my best interest, or your best interest.

Some of you know that one of my concerns relates to ecological questions. I spent some time recently studying the management of common property resources — like air, water, fish, forests, pastures — resources which cannot be easily privately owned. It seems to be fairly clear that if everyone uses those resources to pursue their own individual interest, the air and water will be polluted, the fish stocks will be destroyed, the forests and pastures will be over-used. Without organizations that monitor and control the use of the ecosystem, the pursuit of individual behaviour leads to ecological tragedy.

In an important article called "The Tragedy of the Commons" Garrett Hardin pictured a pasture which was used by a number of ranchers. It is in the individual interest of each herd keeper, he argued, to keep as many cattle as possible, even when the pasture starts to be overgrazed, since each rancher will realize the full benefit of each additional animal, but the cost of the overgrazing will be shared among all who use the pasture. Each individual, thinking primarily of their own self-interest, will conclude that the desirable course is to keep increasing their herd. This creates the tragedy, for the result of overgrazing results in the collapse of the whole community. "Each man", says Hardin, "is locked into a system that compels him to increase his herd without limit — in a world that is limited. Ruin is the destination toward which all men rush, each pursuing his own best interest in a society that believes

in the freedom of the commons. Freedom in a commons brings ruin to all.”

This article is a classic parable of environmental resources. Societies in which individuals are given the maximum freedom to pursue their own private good will, as a matter of course, be ecologically destructive. Only a community which is able to deliberate together about a common good and reach common conclusions, can sustain itself ecologically.

Our society is finding it hard to talk together about the common good. And that is why the question that the church keeps asking, the moral question, the question of what is good rather than what is possible, what is worthy rather than what is expedient, what is holy rather than what is popular, is a question which our society desperately needs. It is an incredibly difficult question, and it is one that is increasingly becoming unfashionable, but it is one that still vitally needs to be asked.

One of the great gifts that our religious tradition has given to the world is the belief in one God, who is both the Alpha and the Omega, both the beginning and the end of all things, the One in whom all things hold together and find their purpose. I believe that that faith is still good news for our world, because it is the conviction that behind all the struggles and tensions of our world, behind all the diversity which pulls us in such different directions, there is a fundamental and profound unity. This is a question for faith rather than sight, because the unity is often not obvious, nor easily grasped, but the faith that it is there keeps us asking the question, “what is that unity? What is that one fundamental good which lies behind all the competing interests of our world?” Faith means to hang on to the question, not necessarily to have the answers.

This faith in one God is being challenged by a new and vigorous brand of polytheism, not the old polytheism which sees a separate god over every nation and in each aspect of human existence, but a kind of polytheism which says there is no fundamental unity, no common good, only the competition of interests and the proliferation of specialties. We practice polytheism when we devote

ourselves to a narrow good as if it were a god. We make that good into a god, and if we are tolerant we are prepared to let other people devote themselves to their own interests, as long as they don't interfere with us.

For example, in our economic life, this new polytheism is the faith of those who want an unbridled capitalism: "Don't trouble us about the common good", says this brand of polytheism. "Don't trouble us with questions about corporate responsibility, about ecological health, about social health. Get out of the way so that we can compete."

In the passage from Luke, Jesus is addressing this same polytheism. He is addressing a society deeply divided between rich and poor, but he refuses to allow those divisions to be seen as permanent. You may be poor, hungry, and unhappy now, he says, but it won't last. Blessings will come to you. You may be well off and comfortable and happy now, but it can't last. Woes will come to you. A society in which the rich and the well-fed and the happy enjoy themselves with no thought for the poor, the hungry, and the grieving, will not survive long. When people pursue their own interest with no concern for the good of others, when we see our good as independent of the good of others, we are flying in the face of the very nature of reality itself, a God who is not many, but one, and whose creation will also be one. The one God, in whom all things hold together, will ultimately overcome these divisions, making us one. That will mean that the rich will weep, because what they have unfairly accumulated will be taken from them and distributed to the poor. That is why the poor will laugh and the rich will weep.

This passage refuses to allow the vision of a world divided into interest groups to be perceived as the ultimate reality. If there is one God, in whom all things hold together, then even when our interests collide and compete, that God binds us together. So "love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. Do to others as you would have them do to you." Do not allow the tensions of life to tempt

you into pursuing your own narrow interests, which creates enemies out of those who pursue their different interests, for that is an economic version of polytheism.

And there is a kind of polytheism in our intellectual and educational organizations as well, wherever the quest for knowledge takes the finest minds into increasingly varied and detailed specialties, without raising fundamental questions of ethics and the common good. The devotion of a fine mind to a narrow pursuit is a modern form of the old polytheism. A hundred years ago, in many universities, every student, in whatever field, had to take a final year course that focused on questions of ethics, philosophy and theology. The course helped students to integrate their specialized studies into a broader vision of the good. By requiring such a course, the university was in effect saying, "It is not good enough to be an expert. It is not enough to be a specialist. The worthwhile goal in life is to turn our expertise to a great good. It is not enough to be able to fly very fast. We must know which direction in which to fly." One of the great tragedies of our age is that we have so many experts, and so few saints; so many people who devote their lives to great knowledge, and so few who devote their knowledge to a great vision.

My ethics teacher, Terry Anderson, was fond of telling a story about the Papago Indians, who live in the deserts of the southwestern United States. The Papago were approached by a group of politicians, scientists, and engineers, who wanted to build a cyclotron on Papago land. It was a huge project, worth hundreds of millions of dollars, and a large expanse of what the builders thought of as empty land was required for it. The proposers had prepared carefully for their consultation, marshalling all the arguments they could think of: the scientific benefits, the economic benefits, including how the Papago would benefit. The elders listened politely to all the presentations, read all the documents, carefully considered all the arguments that were being made. In the end they had one comment: "We know what you want to do with the land, but what does God want us to do with the land?" For the Papago, what to do with



the land is not an economic or technical question, but a spiritual one which cannot be addressed apart from a broader vision of the good. It was the question which could not be addressed technically, the one question which required the experts to be more than experts, to be saints. The politicians, scientists, and engineers were flabbergasted and flustered. Because they did know how to address that question the whole process broke down, and the Papago did not allow the cyclotron to be built in their land.

This All Saints Sunday presents us with the question of who we celebrate as saints, and what it means to be a saint. To modern ears, the word saint sound quaint, archaic, old fashioned. The modern world venerates experts rather than saints. This is another form of the new polytheism, the modern faith in which there is no common vision of the good, in which even to ask the question is to risk being branded as a fanatic. But a fanatic is a person who is excessively devoted to a narrow good, while a saint is a person who is appropriately devoted to the fullness of good, who is devoted to the One who created all things and holds all things together, and Who will finally redeem all things. Saints are those who will not let go of this question about what it means to be good, about a good vision to which we should devote our lives and our society. To be a saint in our time is to refuse to allow our diverse interests and our fragmented disciplines to go their separate ways. To be a saint in our time is to hold tight to that unfashionable faith that there is one God, a fundamental unity in the universe, in which all things hold together.

I borrowed my title for this sermon from an essay by Annie Dillard, who writes as beautifully and profoundly about the human condition as anyone I have ever read. In "Living Like Weasels" she contemplates a tiny predator about ten inches long, "thin as a curve", and utterly tenacious. Dillard describes how when a weasel once bites into something, it hangs on and won't let go. A naturalist was bitten by a weasel and simply could not get it off. He didn't want to kill the animal, so he "had to walk half a mile to water, the weasel dangling from his hand, and soak him off like a

stubborn label." Once an eagle that had been shot was found to have the dry skull of a weasel attached to its throat. It is assumed that the eagle had pounced on the weasel, and in the life and death struggle that ensued the weasel had swivelled and bit at the eagle's neck, and then died while remaining fastened to the eagle's throat. Dillard says, "I would like to have seen that eagle from the air a few weeks or months before he was shot; was the whole weasel still attached to his feathered throat, a fur pendant? Or did the eagle eat what he could reach, butting the living weasel with his talons before his breast, bending his beak, cleaning the beautiful airborne bones?"

Dillard says that she would like to learn something about living from the weasel.

I think it would be well, and proper, and obedient, and pure, to grasp your one necessity and not let it go, to dangle from it limp wherever it takes you. Then even death, where you're going no matter how you live, cannot you part. Seize it and let it seize you up aloft even, till your eyes burn out and drop; let your musky flesh fall off in shreds, and let your very bones unhinge and scatter, loosened over fields, over fields and woods, lightly, thoughtless, from any height at all, from as high as eagles. (*Teaching a Stone to Talk*, 1982, pp. 29-34.)

When we devote ourselves to the One Good, to the God in whom all things hold together, then we will have learned to live like weasels and to lives like saints, we will have found the direction to which to steer this lost jet of life, we will have found what it means to be truly blessed.

**Let us pray:**

Gracious God, be thou our vision, enlighten the eyes of our hearts, that we may learn to love you with all our heart and all our soul and all our mind, and all our strength, and in loving you, love all that you love. Amen.

## Profile

### PROPHET OF RECONCILIATION: RICHARD ROBERTS (1874–1945)

by Michael Bourgeois



Preacher, theologian, and sixth moderator of The United Church of Canada (1934–36), Richard Roberts was born in 1874 in Blaenau Ffestiniog in northern Wales.<sup>1</sup> His mother was the daughter of a shipping clerk and his father a slate quarry worker who became a respected minister in the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Church. Although Richard Roberts had a solid bond with his father, his early relationship with Christianity was not close. His

conversion process took place over several months in 1892 during his studies at University College of Wales, Aberystwyth. He began to consider whether he should become a preacher, became a candidate for ministry, and planned to study theology after completing a degree in science. Because his poor eyesight hindered his ability

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<sup>1</sup> For more detailed treatments of the life and work of Richard Roberts, see Gwen R. P. Norman, *Grace Unfailing: The Radical Mind and the Beloved Community of Richard Roberts* (Etobicoke, ON: The United Church Publishing House, 1998); Catherine Gidney, "Richard Roberts: A Case Study in Liberal Protestantism in Canada During the Interwar Years," 81–100 in Bruce L. Guenther, ed., *Historical Papers 1995: Canadian Society of Church History, Annual Conference, Université du Québec à Montréal, 9–10 June 1995*; and Gidney, "Contextualizing Richard Roberts' Thought: Liberal Protestantism and the Dilemmas of the Modern Age," in Norman, pp. 263–86.

to do dissection and other lab work, however, he twice failed his exams. Although discouraged, he nevertheless began theological studies at Bala in the autumn of 1894.<sup>2</sup>

Upon completing his theological studies in 1896, Roberts joined the Calvinist Methodist Church's Forward Movement, working in the coal fields and seaports in southern Wales where he quickly related the gospel of Jesus Christ to the realities of economic injustice. Roberts had also been converted to socialism at college but, in his words, "got into the thick of the fight" after a theological course. At Newport, his second Forward Movement posting, the local Independent Labour Party secretary was his friend and attended his services, but Roberts "suspected that there was a certain anti-religious animus at the back of his mind." One Sunday evening he surprised Roberts by remaining for the "after-meeting, to which were invited those who desired to begin a new life", but did not speak when Roberts issued the "usual call to any who were moved to begin a new life and desired our prayers, to declare themselves." Nevertheless, at the end of the meeting his friend remained after everyone else had departed, and when Roberts approached and spoke to him:

He burst into tears, and I could get nothing out of him. So I suggested that we should pray together. We knelt, side by side, and I prayed simply to God that we might both dedicate ourselves to His service. We remained there kneeling a while longer, and then rose. We looked each other in the face—and then, suddenly, he almost shouted at me, "I AM GOING TO BE A BETTER SOCIALIST THAN EVER!" Which was as it should be.<sup>3</sup>

Roberts was ordained in September 1897 and shortly thereafter recalled to Bala to assist the school's principal. He accepted a call to the Willesden Green Welsh Church in London in 1900. The following year he married Anne Catherine Thomas, a native of Wales whom he had met in London, and with whom he would raise three daughters, Dorothy, Margaret, and Gwen. In 1903 he

<sup>2</sup> Norman, pp. 3-28.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Roberts, "'Radical Religion' Forty Years Ago," *Christianity and Society* 5 (Fall 1940): pp. 32-34; and Norman, pp. 38-39.

transferred to the Presbyterian Church of England and became minister at St. Paul's Church, Westbourne Grove, London, where he made the acquaintance of Roman Catholic philosopher of religion Baron Friedrich von Hügel. In 1910 Roberts was called to Crouch Hill Presbyterian Church, where one of the members of the congregation was the young John Macmurray, with whom Roberts was to become closely acquainted and whose later religious and philosophical writing would influence Roberts's own theology.

When the "Great War" erupted in August 1914, Roberts was attending a conference of the Presbyterian Fellowship and he returned to London in order to preach at Crouch Hill the following Sunday. He had prepared a sermon, "a potpourri of my own conflicting emotions", but did not deliver it for he realized during the service that the young German men who had been attending Crouch Hill were not present. "I had a shattering intuition that perhaps my boys, the British and the German, might meet on some battlefield in Europe, where it would be their business to kill one another!" Instead of preaching, Roberts reported this intuition and asked those present

to consider as Christians the appalling circumstance that lads of that congregation, who had worshipped God together in that church, might, under the orders of their superiors, be called to murder each other. . . . I knew when I left the church that morning that as a minister of Christ I could take no part in a war.<sup>4</sup>

While he was not alone in this conviction, Roberts certainly was in a minority. With a fervour that approached the feverish, support for the war quickly enveloped England and threatened also to overtake the churches. One contemporary described English Christianity's uncritical support for the war as "this Gadarene-swine race of the churches down a steep place into the sea".<sup>5</sup> Nev-

<sup>4</sup> Roberts, "How the Fellowship Began," Fellowship 9 (January 1943) p. 3, also found in Box 4, File 98, Richard Roberts Papers, United Church/Victoria University Archives; and Norman, p. 83.

<sup>5</sup> Norman, p. 87.

ertheless, some in the churches sought alternative responses. Roberts convened a meeting at his home of “younger ministers and laymen of the Anglican and Free Churches” who had become acquainted through the Student Christian Movement. Resolving “to do something to safeguard the Christian faith and testimony from being swamped by what [at that time] seemed likely to be the greatest war in history,” they began to publish a series of *Papers for Wartime*. Roberts wrote the second paper, entitled “Are We Worth Fighting For?” When later papers in the series demonstrated “a strong drift” to supporting the war, Roberts and Henry Hodgkin, the group’s lone Quaker, took steps to “create another body that would be more forthright in maintaining the Christian front during the war”.<sup>6</sup>

By the end of December 1914, with the help of Quaker Lucy Gardner and others, they had established the Fellowship of Reconciliation. Roberts himself seems to have suggested the word “reconciliation”, not only for the new fellowship’s name but also as the task to which they understood themselves committed. According to Roberts, as they had tried “to work out a Christian pacifist philosophy that could be accepted by the group” they had recognized that:

For us peace was something to be waged, as war was waged. Peace is not a passivity, a state or rest, a lull between wars. It must be conceived as an activity; and the name of that activity is *Reconciliation*, which is the finest of all arts, the art and practice of turning enemies into friends. It is the essential core of Christian divinity and of Christian ethics. Its chief exemplar is God — and its classical statement is to be found in St. Paul’s Second Epistle to the Corinthian Church. . . . It is the fundamental principle by which we should regulate our public relations, our politics, whether domestic or international, and our commercial and professional concerns. . . . *That* is the will of God, that men should be reconciled to Him and to one another.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Roberts, “How the Fellowship Began,” pp. 3–4; Norman, pp. 85–87; Thomas P. Socknat, *Witness Against War: Pacifism in Canada 1900–1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), p. 100; and Richard Allen, *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada 1914–1928* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), p. 320.

<sup>7</sup> Roberts, “How the Fellowship Began,” p. 5.

Roberts's pacifism and other congregational tensions led to his resignation from Crouch Hill in July 1915, whereupon he became Secretary of the FOR and the first editor of its monthly journal, *The Venturer*. This work led him in 1917 to ministry at the Church of the Pilgrims in Brooklyn, New York, where he was to work part time while also advancing the work of the FOR in the United States. After a trial period on contract there in 1916, he began a longer term appointment in January 1917, three months before the United States entered the war.<sup>8</sup>

After the war's end in 1918 Roberts considered employment options in both England and North America, but nothing definite emerged until he was called to the American Presbyterian Church in Montreal in late 1921. With it he was received into The United Church of Canada in June 1925, in the first action of the first General Council following the signing of the new church's Basis of Union.<sup>9</sup> His ecumenism had been reflected earlier not only in his friendship and work with Catholics, Anglicans, and Quakers, but also in his involvement with organizations such as the Free Church Federation, of which he was president in 1912, and the Free Church Fellowship, the members of which "gave themselves up to the dream of a United Free Church of England and, beyond that, One Universal Church".<sup>10</sup> After 1925, Roberts devoted this enthusiasm for the church's unity and mission in the world to The United Church of Canada.

Roberts was called to Sherbourne United Church in Toronto in 1927 and remained there until 1938. His work during this time was marked by attention to evangelism, social service, and economic justice. At the General Council of 1932, during the Great Depression, Roberts called for the establishment of a Commission on Christianizing the Social Order and during the subsequent two years helped the Commission's chair, Sir Robert Falconer, draft

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.; Norman, pp. 97–106; and Socknat, p. 100.

<sup>9</sup> The United Church of Canada, Record of Proceedings of the First General Council, Meeting in Toronto, Ontario, June 10th–18th, 1925 (Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 1925), p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> Norman, p. 78.

the report. He was elected the United Church's sixth moderator at the 1934 General Council, and during the next two years travelled extensively on evangelistic missions across Canada. Although not a member of the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order he was sympathetic to its work and wrote the short foreword to its 1936 book, *Towards the Christian Revolution*, which he described as "a very important contribution to the current discussion of the ends and values of a Christian society, and the ways and means of achieving it".<sup>11</sup>

While Roberts had been writing books and pamphlets on a variety of topics for many years, in the late 1920s he began to articulate his wider theological perspective. In part because of his abiding interest in science and the natural world, in essays and lectures during this time he reflected on the inadequacy of both fundamentalist and liberal evangelical theologies in coming to terms with evolution. According to Roberts, while fundamentalist evangelicals failed to address the proper implications of evolution for divine immanence, liberal evangelicals neglected due consideration of divine transcendence. Roberts therefore attempted to clarify the issues at stake in a way that, while not offering a final synthesis, might at least on the basis of a "provisional dualism" point the way toward a more adequate understanding of divine immanence and transcendence and their relation to evolution. Such a theology, Roberts hoped, would better enable Protestant Christianity to articulate the meaning of its affirmation of God as creator and sustainer of the universe in terms persuasive in the twentieth century, and thus enable it to continue to evangelize men and women, to evoke in them a "holy discontent" for the creation of the "Beloved Community". In these writings Roberts also demonstrated that his commitment to reconciliation was much broader than its specific use in the context of pacifism and non-violence.

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<sup>11</sup>Gidney, "Contextualizing Richard Roberts' Thought," in Norman, p. 273; R. B. Y. Scott and Gregory Vlastos, eds., *Towards the Christian Revolution* (Chicago: Willet Clark & Co., 1936; reprint ed., Kingston, ON: Ronald P. Frye & Co., 1989). Unfortunately, the foreword was not included in the reprint edition.



A prominent theme in his theology is the need to reconcile or at least hold in tension various ideas — the personal and the social, divine immanence and transcendence, evolution and creation, evangelism and social service, Karl Barth's emphasis on revelation and John Macmurray's emphasis on community. Roberts sought a theology that held together the authentic points of the various dualities that he observed persisting throughout Christian history.<sup>12</sup>

As war approached again in 1939, Roberts was in Halifax lecturing at Pine Hill Divinity School. He had agreed to add his name to a public declaration against war but had counselled against issuing one because statements by the United Church in 1938 were, to his mind, "so great an advance on any comparable document in 1914". By 1939, however, the church's attitude began to shift towards supporting the war and when the "Witness Against War" appeared it included his name among its seventy-five signatures. In the ensuing controversy, the attorney general of Ontario threatened prosecution but ultimately only condemned the "Witness" at a press conference and entrusted the United Church with an appropriate disciplinary response. The statement from the General Council sub-executive, issued on the same day, attempted to strike a balance but succeeded in pleasing few.<sup>13</sup> Roberts felt that the controversy had justified his counsel against making a public statement at that time, but also that the action of the United Church's

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<sup>12</sup> "The Theological Dilemma in America," *The Hibbert Journal* 25 (October 1926–July 1927) pp. 140–141; *The New Man and the Divine Society* (New York: Macmillan, 1926); *The Christian God* (New York: Macmillan, 1929); "The Scope of Theology," unpublished lectures, 1927 (Box 4, File 112, Richard Roberts Papers, United Church of Canada/Victoria University Archives); and "Wheels and Systems: A Plea for Another Theology," unpublished manuscript (Box 3, File 17, Richard Roberts Papers, United Church of Canada/Victoria University Archives). For a complete list of his work, see "A Bibliography of the Writings of Richard Roberts" in Norman, pp. 287–94.

<sup>13</sup> "'Witness Against War' Papers," (Box 3, File 64, Richard Roberts Papers, United Church/Victoria University Archives); "'Witness Against War' Correspondence," (Box 2, File 50, Richard Roberts Papers, United Church/Victoria University Archives); *United Church Observer*, 15 October 1939, p. 21; Norman, 241–45; and Socknat, pp. 200–11.

sub-executive was “feeble and cowardly”, particularly because it had failed to affirm the right of “ministers to hold and express dissenting convictions”. As a result, he was “rather grateful in some ways that my name is on the list”. This gratitude was nevertheless tempered by repentance. As he wrote in the spring of 1940 to one of his daughters, the outbreak of war demonstrated “the actual and tragic failure of pacifism” and suggested that “the proper wear of pacifists at this time is sackcloth and ashes. Personally, I feel under conviction in the matter very keenly.”<sup>14</sup>

Roberts’s sense of the tragic failure of pacifism, however, did not prevent him from criticizing Reinhold Niebuhr for his attack on pacifists in his 1940 essay “Christian Moralism in America”. Both because of what he said and because it was the formerly pacifist Niebuhr who had said it, Roberts wrote: “It hurts me, though, to see your flag at half-mast, when I remember how bravely it once bore ‘the battle and the breeze’.” He argued with Niebuhr on several points, including the relation of history to the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ and the process of redemption of which it is a part. The incarnation of God in Jesus Christ was also for Roberts central to understanding history and what might be possible within it. While Niebuhr argued that “the human situation remains the same in peace and in war, though it may be more clearly seen in war than in peace,” Roberts maintained on the contrary:

War is an incident in the course of a world which God sent His Son to redeem. And why should any incident in history be allowed to impose a moratorium on the business of human redemption? Am I to soft-pedal the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ at every international crisis? The episode that we call the Incarnation should have a certain absolute significance for Christian believers — it is the only passage of history that has that character: and it is our one hope over against our desperate plight in this world.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> “‘Witness Against War’ Papers” (Box 3, File 64, Richard Roberts Papers, United Church/Victoria University Archives); and Norman, p. 245.

<sup>15</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, “Christian Moralism in America,” *Radical Religion* 5 (Winter 1940) pp. 16–20; Roberts, “Open Letter from Dr. Richard Roberts,” *Christianity and Society* 5 (Spring 1940) pp. 41–43; and Reinhold Niebuhr, “An Open Letter to Richard Roberts,” *Christianity and Society* 5 (Summer 1940): 30–33; Socknat, pp. 222–23; and Norman, p. 248.

Roberts's understanding of the relation of history and the incarnation was based on his conviction that the power of the spirit of God in Jesus Christ can and does operate to regenerate persons. By repentance, conversion, and transformation humans are recreated and sanctified for the redemption of all things that, by both the world striving for God and God reaching toward the world, comes with the establishment of God's righteousness.

From the summer of 1940 Richard Roberts lived in the United States, preaching, leading retreats, and addressing student conferences there and in Canada. In the fall of 1944 his health began to deteriorate due to arteriosclerosis and resulting strokes. He died in a nursing home in Brooklyn on April 10, 1945, less than a month before the end of the war in Europe. Of his last hours, his daughter Margaret reported: "All during the last night before he went into coma, he was moving his arms around in his old pulpit gestures and murmuring . . . 'I want to preach—I want to preach Jesus Christ'."<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Norman, pp. 251–58.

## Review

### **A PASSION FOR GOD'S REIGN: THEOLOGY, CHRISTIAN LEARNING, AND THE CHRISTIAN SELF**

**Edited by Miroslav Volf  
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998,  
112pp. \$18.99**

As the proceedings of the Payton Lectures on "Christianity and Western Values" given at Fuller Seminary in 1996 by Jürgen Moltmann, Nicholas Wolterstorff and Ellen Charry, the essays collected in this volume surpass the quality usually expected from conference papers. The first of Moltmann's three essays offers a brief recap of the Enlightenment with its faith in human reason and scientific mastery. The modern transformation of those values, Moltmann argues, has begun to turn against the well-being of the planet, particularly in the two-thirds world. The economic expansionism typical of modernity is directly linked to our current spiritual poverty. The second essay tackles modernity's relationship with Christianity. The partnership of modernity and Christianity in the last 500 years has resulted in vast fragmentation, as individuals are increasingly atomised

within thinly-connected societies. Moltmann elevates communitarian and covenantal living as antidotes. In essay three he considers the changing public role of theology in the context of multireligious societies, where faith has become a commodity. He advocates a transformation of interfaith dialogue from polite exchange to dynamic action for the sake of life and its flourishing.

In response to these essays, Wolterstorff affirms with Moltmann that the primary content of theology is the Kingdom of God. Unlike Moltmann, he is not persuaded that Enlightenment virtues will continue to allow a preferential place to Christian theology within the secular academy. Thus he advocates that every Christian teacher seek to bring the Kingdom to bear upon all that is thought and taught. And so, in response to global economic crisis, for instance, "(w)hat is needed is not a theology of economics but theologically faithful economics". In spite of the gradual encroachment of secularism upon confessional Christian theology, Wolterstorff suggests that in a truly pluralistic academy, theology may well continue to have a rightful place.

Charry's response essay addresses Moltmann's assessment of the modern self. Rather than embracing "the modern identity one constructs for oneself", she calls

Christians back to the theological foundation that selfhood needs to be grounded in God, rather than the ultimately empty attempt to ground the self in itself. A return to Christian devotional practice and communal formation will help to fill the sense of emptiness that modernity has provoked.

These five essays offer a great deal. There is an overall straightforwardness to the language and arguments, as Moltmann lays out themes familiar to his readers, especially liberation for the poor and for the planet. The economic assessments, though unsophisticated, are significant in the connection made to the spiritual drought of our times. There are places where I have reservations: at one point Moltmann offers ideas about "a Hindu, Buddhist, and Confucian Christianity". The notion is not precisely syncretistic, but seems oddly colonialistic, as if other traditions were available piecemeal for Christians to assimilate. Still, he deserves credit for exploring new models for interfaith cooperation.

In all, this book offers a lively engagement with modernity and the roles of public theology within it. In the post-Constantinian era, there is scant room for complacent and isolationist theology. However, Wolterstorff's caveat bears citing: "It is far more important... that Christian learning be practised

*somewhere* than that it be practised in the public university." Endless accommodation to the secular university's demands for neutrality will render theology an ineffective shell. The distinctive gift Christian theology brings is the proclamation of the Kingdom; the desire of God for peace and justice, for bread and reconciliation. It is to this proclamation that we continue to be called, both within the academy and beyond it.

— Rob Fennell

### **CADENCES OF HOME: PREACHING AMONG EXILES**

by **Walter Brueggemann**  
Louisville: Westminster/John  
Knox 1997, 169 pp. \$28.00.

The prolific Walter Brueggemann is now into his fourth decade of writing provocative, preacher-friendly books, commentaries and essays. Before running off for his latest offering, however, readers should first digest one overlooked these past few years.

Published in 1997, *Cadences of Home* offers eight essays, five previously published between 1989 and 1995. Brueggemann's major contention is that the central metaphor for understanding Christian existence in North America today is exile. "Exiles experienced a loss

of the structured, reliable world which gave them meaning and coherence, and they found themselves in a context where their most treasured and trusted symbols of faith were mocked, trivialized or dismissed. Exile is not primarily geographical, but it is social, moral, and cultural."

The departure point for Brueggemann is George Lindbeck's call for an intratextual theology and Alyster McIntyre's contention that knowledge of any kind is founded upon narrative. Even knowledge which appears objective and "common sense" is based upon the story that a particular community tells about itself. Brueggemann identifies the dominant ideological story of North America as liberalism, and calls its more negative manifestations "the empire". Christians are called upon to proclaim their own story, an imaginative alternative to the hegemonic story of the empire.

The image of exile and the centrality of narrative shape these essays. As exiles, Christians can only tell their story as "testimony", a story which compels only through the persuasiveness of its telling and not through any external authority. It is a story to be told with imagination and playfulness, courage and joy. The goal is not to create a new, public consensus but to support and nurture the identity of an alternate community of faith, one that can

stand up against the power of the empire. The Christian story is a drama into which people are drawn, not a metaphysic to be evaluated and judged.

Brueggemann is clear that the Christian story is the biblical one. It is through an intensive engagement with scripture that Christian exiles begin to hear a "dense" story which differs from the "thin" narrative of the empire. This "dense" story is filled with various witnesses, speaking with different voices and in a multitude of ways, all "deeply saturated with Yahweh". "Yahweh is not some supernatural oddity that needs explanation, but an accepted, assumed, embraced Character who belongs invariably and without question in the middle of the narrative."

Throughout the essays Brueggemann continues to do what he does best. He carefully and imaginatively exegetes biblical passages, not resting solely on a few isolated verses. While academic, his exegesis helps open up the scripture to preaching and theology, revealing in contrast how much contemporary exegesis is mired in academic trivia. His writing is clear and passionate. And, as a bonus, almost every page is a treasure mine for preachers.

Two areas deserved fuller treatment: first, the question of truth. Brueggemann's contention that the

present times call for an alternate story is convincing. He is also clear that it is the Christian story which deserves to be heard. But it is not clear why. Throughout these essays the reader gets the uncomfortable feeling that perhaps any alternate vision would do. If Christians are passionate about the truthfulness of their story only because it is "ours", then to proclaim it publicly would simply be a new imperialism — albeit one without much teeth. Brueggemann needs to be forthright about speaking of the "truth" of the gospel as it faces other truths.

Second, Brueggemann needs to expand his ecclesiology. Although the church plays a central role for him, the shape of this church is not clear. What would a community look like which hears, proclaims and lives this alternate vision? How would it relate to the surrounding

society? Brueggemann repeats several times that this church will not be a sect but, if not, how will it survive in a hostile environment? He suggests that the exilic church needs to be a "textual community" with an intense concentration upon "the cultural-linguistic infrastructure of the community", but how is this possible in a culture where television and pop culture are ubiquitous? If Christians are to be exiles for some time to come, a clearer vision of what the exilic church looks like must follow.

Both of these complaints are possible only because the rest of Brueggemann's position is so convincing. Reading *Cadences Of Home*, you can hardly help but want more, as much and as soon as possible. Write on, Brueggemann!

— Douglas Goodwin