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It will no doubt seem strange to many, if not highly questionable, for a member of the United Church to invite thanksgiving and celebration for the 450th anniversary of the publication of the *Book of Common Prayer (BCP)*. After all, our Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregationalist forebears often defined their liturgical identity in opposition to the *BCP*. Even when we have been uncertain of what we were, we have been clear about what we were not: "Ours is not a 'prayer book' tradition," we say.

Ours is a liturgical tradition defined more by John Knox's model of "common order", than Thomas Cranmer's "common prayer". Knox's *The Forme of Prayers* (1556), (later to be revised and re-titled *The Book of Common Order*) provided more than a "directory" (an outline of the structure of worship) but less than a prayer book. Similarly, United Church liturgical resources are characterized by what our own 1932 *Book of Common Order* called "ordered liberty" — a principle embodied in the provision of directories followed by orders of service containing sample prayers. Common order is the result of the liturgical dialectic (some might say compromise) of directory and prayer book.

But even if the *Book of Common Prayer* speaks of something we are not, it is still part of the equation for English speaking Christians — more so than we often realize. I remember the first time I began to think of the *BCP* as having an influence on the worship of the United Church. Several days into my settlement charge in Nova Scotia, the Clerk of Session and I made a pastoral visit to our housebound Minister Emeritus, Dr. Ewing, one of the last surviving ministers in the United Church who had been ordained a Methodist. We found him seated with a selection of books on a side table — a dog-eared leather-bound Bible among them. When it came time to leave, the Clerk asked him if he had any advice for this young newly-ordained minister. After what seemed like an interminable silence of staring at the carpet, he began to struggle to stand up.

We had to help him. Once stable, he announced: "My advice is to pray." He led us in prayer, hands held all around. I do not remember what he prayed, though I do remember that it was brief, startling in its economy of words. And I remember the feeling: the effect was eloquent yet personal, inspiring yet simple, deep calling to deep. I was dumbfounded by the experience, and days later found myself back in same living room. I just had to know, so I asked him: "How did you learn to pray like that?" "An old friend taught me," he said, selecting a small well-worn book from among those on the side table. It was the *Book of Common Prayer.* "My old friend, Thomas Cranmer," he added, gently patting it.

Perhaps Dr. Ewing was inspired by John Wesley. The founder of Methodism also loved the Prayer Book. Indeed, much of what United Church persons would consider to be "classic" United Church liturgical language is, in fact, Prayer Book in origin, though not always from the 1549 edition. For example, *BCP* sources dominate the orders for Public Worship, the "Treasury of Prayers," the collects of the "Table of Lessons", and the communion orders, in our 1932 *Book of Common Order.* Subsequent revisions in the 1969 *Service Book* and beyond continue to presuppose many Prayer Book norms. The use of Mark 10 (Jesus' blessing of the children) in baptism was a 1549 innovation to which United Church congregations continue to be attached, despite the fact that it is not a baptismal text. The much-loved structure and content of both Christian marriage and burial is also rooted in the Prayer Book tradition — from the Introduction and vows in the marriage service (i.e. "Dearly beloved, we are gathered here in the presence of God…."; and "…for better, for worse; for richer, for poorer", etc.) to the rich selection of opening scripture sentences, psalms and readings in funeral liturgies. And when United Church congregations were invited to turn to 770 in *The Hymnary* to join in a unison prayer of confession or thanksgiving, two of the three prayers found there were from the *BCP*.

It is no small irony that Prayer Book material is often considered "traditional" or "conservative" by today's standards, given that Cranmer's work was originally perceived as being so radical it caused rioting in the streets of sixteenth century England. Its

story offers many lessons in the nature of worship reform. First, liturgical change is always a political minefield. Second, what is initially reviled can become, in time, the deeply beloved. Consider, for example, our own *Hymnary*, which caused such controversy around the time of its introduction in 1930 that the editors of the *New Outlook* (the precursor to the *Observer*) finally refused to print any more letters or articles on the subject!

Worship reform is also influenced by technology. Think of the effect of the Gestetner machine on United Church worship in the 50s, or the continuing impact of computer and internet technologies today. Before the invention of the printing press at Gutenberg a century before Cranmer, his vision of *common* prayer would not have been possible. His first efforts at liturgical revision may seem somewhat modest by today's standards, aimed as they were at the translation into English of select portions of the communion, to be inserted into an otherwise unchanged Latin Mass. Nevertheless, the impact of a move to the vernacular was nothing short of revolutionary. When the full Prayer Book was first used on the Feast of Pentecost, June 9, 1549, worshippers not only heard the story of Acts 2 in their own tongue but even shared the same liturgy, language and book with their priest, the latter being freed of the burden of about a dozen different volumes previously needed for the conduct of worship. It is difficult for us to fully appreciate the paradigm shift signalled by the juxtaposition of such simple words as "Book," "Common" and "Prayer." As with reading after Gutenberg, worship after the *BCP* would never be the same. The values of "participation" and "inclusivity" which are so prized in contemporary United Church worship, did not begin with us.

To be sure, the dark side of unity can be uniformity. Every Act of Uniformity or effort at liturgical centralization can also be experienced as liturgical and cultural imperialism. Had Cranmer's principle of the vernacular been taken to its logical conclusion, the situation of the Church in, say, Northern Ireland might be very different today. In the absence of a translation into the Irish language, the Prayer Book was deeply resented in Ireland, as it was in many other regions and countries which England colonized.

Ultimately, Cranmer's genius was as much literary as theological or liturgical. In the wrong hands (or mouth), this sometimes meant that worship became an experience of disembodied words rather than embodied action, a language of the head. But at its best it was the language of the heart. Many Prayer Book collects are to the nurture of faith what Shakespearean sonnets have been to the flames of passion, or what Japanese haiku is to poetry — constructions of lasting beauty which bear the weight of return, again and again. The literary structure, liturgical focus and theological content of the collect form reaches its peak with Cranmer's pen and remains a valuable discipline worthy of study by people of faith and leaders of public prayer. Consider his well-known "Collect for Purity:"

> Almighty God,
> unto whom all hearts be open,
> all desires known,
> and from whom no secrets are hid:
> Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
> by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit,
> that we may perfectly love thee,
> and worthily magnify thy holy name;
> through Christ our Lord.
> Amen.

I recall Dr. Ewing's prayers again: eloquent yet personal, inspiring yet simple, deep calling to deep — with an economy of language which Calvin and Knox were never able to achieve, in spite of their capabilities as theologians.

Just as Northrop Frye, in the spirit of Willliam Blake, called the Bible the "Great Code" of English literature, the *Book of Common Prayer* can be thought of as the Great Code of English liturgy. Its history and content continue to instruct, influence and inspire. And as such, it is worth remembering and celebrating, praying and studying — even in the United Church of Canada.

— William S. Kervin

THE BIBLE AT THE END OF THE MILLENIUM

by Donald E. Burke

A quick look at some statistics will offer perspective on the state of the Bible at the end of the millenium. In 1998, the publication *Old Testament Abstracts*, which provides summaries of books and articles written on the Old Testament, included abstracts of more than 1800 items — both scholarly articles and books. The New Testament counterpart, *New Testament Abstracts* for 1998 lists 2150 articles and between six and seven hundred scholarly books. In addition, The Society for Old Testament Study in the United Kingdom annually prints a list of books published within the discipline of Old Testament studies and the 1998 list contains over 600 entries. Finally, the Society of Biblical Literature, the premier North American organization of biblical scholars, boasts over 6000 active members.

One might surmise, on the basis of these figures, that the Bible is doing very well indeed, and in one sense it is. Yet, Luke Johnson has observed that while on the surface the Bible may be doing brilliantly,

> [o]ther perspectives, however, suggest that all is not well. As in other boom industries, disquieting amounts of fraud and fakery appear. Overproduction itself depreciates value. More than that, however, there are growing signs that the energy and activity seem increasingly without direction. What is all this learning about, to what is it directed, for whom is it any benefit? [1]

Johnson's questions provide a starting-point for my reflections. Is it the case that in spite of the flourishing of biblical scholarship, the energy and activity are without direction? Is the study of the Bible adrift?

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[1] Luke T. Johnson, "The Crisis in Biblical Scholarship", *Commonwealth* 70:21 (Dec. 3, 1993) p.18.

Historical-Critical Study of the Bible

Since the 18th century the study of the Bible has been dominated by the historical-critical method. The rise of science, and the general acceptance of the scientific method, swept into the study of the Bible as increasing numbers of Bible students "freed" themselves from the constraints of Church doctrine. As summarized by John Collins, the four guiding principles of the historical-critical method are: (1) *the principle of criticism or methodological doubt* which maintains that since every judgment is subject to revision, historical criticism can never attain certainty, but only degrees of probability; (2) *the principle of analogy* which asserts that all events are similar in nature (it is assumed that the laws of nature are consistent through time); (3) *the principle of correlation* which contends that the phenomena of history are interrelated and interdependent, and that no event can be isolated from the sequence of historical cause and effect; and (4) *the principle of autonomy* which asserts that the scholar must be autonomous, and not subject to the prescription of conclusions from the outside.[2]

The ascendancy of the historical-critical method led scholars to focus their attention on the reconstruction of the history of Israel, and the early Church, alongside the history of the composition of the biblical text itself. When applied to the Gospels, for example, that method asks, among other things, "What can we know about the 'historical Jesus'?" Or when applied to the Hebrew Bible, it asks, for example, "What can we say about the 'historical David'? or the 'historical Jeremiah'?", often drawing a sharp distinction between the biblical portraits and the presumed "real" Jesus, David, or Jeremiah.

When the focus of the scholars is turned to the biblical text itself, attention is given to the process through which various biblical books were written. Thus, for example, early critical scholar-

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[2] John J. Collins, "Is a Critical Bible Theology Possible?", in *The Hebrew Bible and Its Interpreters*, edited by William Henry Propp, Baruch Halpern, and David Noel Freedman (Winona Lake: Eisenbraums, 1990) p. 2.

ship was devoted to questions surrounding the composition of the Pentateuch. By the late 19th century the traditional claim that these books had been written by Moses was replaced by the theory of multiple authorship. In the study of the Gospels, the question of sources used by the evangelists had been settled in favour of Marcan priority as a basis used by Matthew and Luke, and a second, hypothetical, source designated as "Q", not available to Mark, but employed by both Matthew and Luke. The tendency to search for roots, and earlier versions of the biblical writings, was carried through with a vengeance as the differentiations between sources became increasingly polished, and the hypothetical sources themselves became increasingly fragmented.

The historical-critical method continued to be developed and refined. In this century, the advent of form criticism, redaction criticism, rhetorical criticism, as well as models from sociology and anthropology, archaeological data, comparative philology, and other disciplines, have all been used to reconstruct the history of the biblical text and its world, sometimes without an obvious concern for its meaning.

The historical-critical method can provide us with a clearer picture of the process by which texts came into their present form. Used properly, theories of authorship and redaction can help us to be increasingly sensitive to the particular claims made in the biblical text. For example, in the last thirty years we have come to a greater appreciation of the individual contributions of the writers of the four Gospels, through redaction criticism, and the literary readings that followed.

The sociological readers of the biblical world have enlightened our understanding of many periods of biblical history, and thus of the texts produced in these periods. We have a better sense of the forces at work behind the scenes of the stories about Saul, David, Solomon and Jesus. We recognize more clearly the class interests that are reflected in the texts and are more aware of the way in which our readings of the texts themselves can be used to serve selfish ends.

To the extent that the historical-critical method, broadly defined, fleshes out the biblical milieu, the religious communities of the ancient world and the texts that they produced, it can be an essential partner in the interpretation of the Bible. Problems arise, however, when the practitioners of the method claim a monopoly over the interpretation of the text. Further complications arise when the biblical text is fragmented into so many sources or redactions that sight of the received text is lost.

Literary Readings of Biblical Texts

One response to the fragmentation of the biblical materials into hypothetical sources and redactions has been the dramatic rise in what has come to be called the *literary* readings of biblical narratives. More than thirty years ago, various attempts were made to stake out a place on the scholarly landscape for a literary reading of biblical texts that focused attention on the final form of the material.[3] Of course, from within the ranks of those who used the historical-critical method sharp questions were raised about the legitimacy of such readings. The concern for the rhetorical and literary dimensions of the Bible was often interpreted as a disregarding of the historical context and origin of the text that stood at the centre of the historical-critical method. Therefore the literary readings were, by definition, suspect. And in the secondary literature of the 1980s one finds every literary reading of biblical texts prefaced with an apology for the method. If one can measure the acceptance of a methodology by a decline in the vigour of the apologies offered in its defense, the 1990s have seen a more general acceptance of the literary reading of biblical texts.

[3] Frequently reference is made to James Muilenburg's 1968 presidential address to the Society of Biblical Literature (published subsequently as "Form Criticism and Beyond" in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 [1969] pp. 1 - 18) as a pivotal event in the development of rhetorical criticism and its concern for the final form of the text.

The trend toward literary readings has brought with it a new sensitivity to the coherence of biblical texts which at times stands in an uneasy tension with historical-critical treatments of those texts. This is not surprising, for while not entirely discounting documentary or redaction criticism, literary readings set such theories aside in order to focus on the final form of the literature.

This literary reading began with the narratives in Genesis and Samuel, but quickly spread to include other genres, like the prophetic books. In the study of the prophetic literature, it has been customary to distinguish between pronouncements thought likely to have been made by the "original" prophet, and additions to the words that can be assigned to disciples or later writers. At one time words like "spurious" and "inauthentic" were applied to the work of these later redactors. Further, in an attempt to distinguish layers of redactional activity, sometimes a great many redactors were postulated. In the study of Jeremiah, for example, matters reached a point where it was thought necessary to assert that as a book Jeremiah is incoherent. But now, the growing influence of literary readings is reaching the prophetic literature, and it is now taken for granted that the *present* form of the prophetic books is critical in understanding individual prophets.

The literary readings of biblical texts in vogue at the moment provide a counterbalance to the fragmenting tendency of the historical-critical method, and have in some measure been successful. But in the process they also have often left untreated the religious claims of the biblical text.

The Religious Dimension

Along with the rise of the concern for the historical dimension of the biblical texts there came a corresponding depreciation of their religious or theological import. The study of the Bible was "liberated" from the constraints of the teaching of the Church. Once its interpretive monopoly was broken, the Church as the context in which the texts could best be interpreted became less and less mate-

rial, since the emphasis upon the "impartial" adjudication of the evidence by the individual scholar occupied centre stage. In this way the historical and religious dimensions of the text were first distinguished and then divorced.

In the 20th century this divorce between the historical-critical investigation of the text and its theological content is exemplified by Krister Stendahl's influential essay on biblical theology.[4] In that essay Stendahl argues for a division between the "descriptive task" of scholars that seeks to describe the meaning of the text in its original context, and the "normative task" that seeks to articulate the contemporary relevance of the text. The primary task of the scholar is to search out answers to questions about "what it meant", that is, what the text meant in its historical context. In this task all scholars of good faith, who have a commitment to the historical-critical method, regardless of religious convictions or their absence, could be partners. The normative task, that seeks to articulate "what it means", is a secondary endeavour which must be informed first and foremost by the descriptive task.

Faith communities themselves understandably have long had an ambivalent attitude toward the historical-critical method. On the one hand it is evident that the results of this approach have brought with them vast advances in our understanding of the biblical text, its composition, and the context out of which it came. Without question, this enriches our understanding of the biblical world and the Bible itself. In many ways we understand the Bible better today than we ever have. But as the text became increasingly rooted in the historical reconstructions of the past, and more and more fragmented by the progressively complex theories of composition, it also became increasingly difficult to relate the Bible to the present. In an insightful article dealing with the case of George Jackson, who was professor of English Bible at Victoria College early in this century, Tom Sinclair-Faulkner argues that the tension between the historical-critical study of the Bible and

[4] Krister Stendahl, "Biblical Theology, Contemporary", in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible A - D* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962) pp. 418-432.

its use in Protestant churches was resolved inadequately by means of a separation of theory from practice.[5] Jackson, who was both a professor teaching the historical-critical method and its results, and the occupant of a prominent pulpit in Toronto, became the focus of an attempt to halt the advance of the critical study of the Bible and its perceived threat to the authority of the Bible. In the end, Jackson sought to straddle the dividing line between the two uses of the Bible. According to Sinclair-Faulkner, theory, exemplified by the use of the Higher Criticism, was confined to the classroom, and practice, as exemplified in personal piety, was kept in the pulpit. Jackson exemplified the uneasy compromise that came to characterize mainline Protestant attitudes toward biblical scholarship in Canada early in this century.[6]

Commenting on the tension between the historical-critical study of the Bible and its religious appropriation, Jon D. Levenson attributes it to the fact that historical critics have a method for taking the biblical text apart, but lack one for putting it back together again.[7] Writing specifically about the Hebrew Bible he goes

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[5] Tom Sinclair-Faulkner, "Theory Divided from Practice: The Introduction of the Higher Criticism into Canadian Protestant Seminaries", *Studies in Religion/ Sciences Religieuses* 10 (1981) pp. 321-343.

[6] A subsequent study of Jackson's troubles after his return to England fails to take Sinclair-Faulkner's essay into account, and generally does not provide a framework within which to interpret the controversies that plagued Jackson, even though the evidence presented in the study supports Sinclair-Faulkner's thesis. See D.W. Beggington, "The Persecution of George Jackson: A British Fundamentalist Controversy", in *Persecution and Tolerance: Papers Read at The Twenty-Second Summer Meeting and the Twenty-Third Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, edited by W.J. Sheils (London: Basil Blackwell, 1984) pp. 421-433. Proceedings similar to those taken against Jackson were also taken against others in Canada and elsewhere. For a study of the case of Charles Briggs in New York see Max Gray Rogers, "Charles Augustus Briggs: Heresy at Union", in *American Religious Heretics: Formal and Informal Trials*, edited by George H. Shriver (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966) pp. 89-147. For a general study of the history of biblical studies in Canada see John S. Moir, *A History of Biblical Studies in Canada: A Sense of Proportion* (Biblical Scholarship in North America, No. 7; Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1982.)

on to say: "When historical critics assert, as they are wont to do, that the Hebrew Bible must not be taken 'out of context', what they really mean is that the *only* context worthy of respect is the ancient Near Eastern world as it was at the time of composition of whatever text is under discussion."[8] This claim to a monopoly on the legitimate interpretation of the biblical materials, and its limitation to the ancient context, is troublesome to those who read the Bible for religious purposes. As Levenson goes on to observe,

> Religious traditionists, however, are committed to another set of contexts, minimally the rest of Scripture, however, delimited, and maximally the entire tradition, including their own religious experience. The goal is not to push the Book back into a vanished past, but to insure its vitality in the present and future.[9]

This fundamental tension between the focus of the historical-critical method on the past, and the concerns of faith communities with interpreting the biblical word for life in the present, remains in large part unresolved.

An important and influential effort to bridge the gap between the historical-critical study of the Bible, and the use of the Bible in the Church, has been made in the extensive writings of Brevard Childs. In 1970, shortly after Muilenburg's call to move beyond form criticism, Childs published his sharp critique of the "biblical theology" movement of the 1940s and 50s.[10] In a series of large studies that embraced both testaments, Childs has drawn attention repeatedly to the failure of the traditional scholarly methods of biblical study to take into account the role of the canon of Scripture as a context for the interpretation of

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[7] Jon D. Levenson, "The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism", in *The Future of Biblical Studies"*, edited by Richard Elliott Friedman and H.G.M. Williamson (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987) p. 20.

[8] Ibid., p. 22.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970).

texts.[11] The emphasis placed upon the origin of the biblical text and its early historical contexts has detracted from the ability of the Bible to speak in its wholeness. For Childs, while the traditional scholarly interpretation of the Bible cannot be abandoned, it is not sufficient.

Yet, while it is true that the historical-critical method has as its focus the quest for the historical past, it is also true that even the most enthusiastic historical critics frequently move from their historical agenda to a religious one, taking for granted that such a move is both possible and proper — though often it is done without acknowledgment. It is to his credit that Robert Funk, in his work with the Jesus Seminar and its attempt to reconstruct the "historical Jesus", does acknowledge that he has a religious agenda, which is to "liberate" the historical Jesus from the chains of the Gospels and subsequent Church tradition, and to present him in a way that is accessible to modern, secular North Americans. In his book *Honest to Jesus*, which bears the subtitle, *Jesus for a New Millenium*, Funk writes:

> The aim of the quest [for the historical Jesus] is to set Jesus free. Its purpose is to liberate Jesus from the scriptural and creedal and experiential prisons in which we have incarcerated him. What would happen if "the dangerous and subversive memories" of that solitary figure were really stripped of their interpretive overlay? Were that to happen, the gospel of Jesus would be liberated from the Jesus of the gospels and allowed to speak for itself. The creedal formulations of the second, third, and fourth centuries would be dedogmatized and Jesus would be permitted to emerge as a robust, real, larger-than-life figure in his own right.... The pale, anemic, iconic Jesus would suffer by compari-

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[11] For example, see *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1979); *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1984); *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1985); *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflections on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

[12] Robert W. Funk, *Honest to Jesus: Jesus For a New Millenium* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996) p. 300.

son with the stark realism of the genuine article."

However one may view Funk's work, at least he is honest about his real agenda.

In the study of ancient Israel, a religious agenda can be seen, for example, in the reconstruction of Israel's emergence in the land of Canaan undertaken by George Mendenhall, Norman Gottwald, and others. With its emphasis upon pre-monarchic Israel as a more purely Yahwistic community and the rise of the monarchy characterized as a "paganization of Israel"[13], it does not take much effort to uncover an agenda that seeks to establish the shape which a faith community, or more broadly a society, should take and to root it in a reconstructed Israelite past. Widely distributed power with little in the way of bureaucratic structure is idealized, and power concentrated in the hands of a royal administration is demonized.

Thus many practitioners of the historical-critical method (among whom I count myself) do have a religious agenda to which they resort. Frequently, however, that agenda has been confused with the historical one. It is assumed, even by evangelical and conservative Christian scholars, that a direct link between the reconstruction of the historical Jesus, or the historical Israel, has immediate relevance for the religious appropriation of the biblical texts. The findings of historical critics somehow become normative for faith.

Few have been as articulate as Luke Johnson in their criticism of this confusion of agenda. He has been an outspoken critic of the Jesus Seminar on precisely this point. In his 1996 book, *The Real Jesus*, Johnson asserts:

> The most destructive effect of the Jesus Seminar and recent Historical Jesus books has been the perpetuation of the notion that history somehow determines faith, and that for faith to be correct, the historical accounts that gave rise to it have to be verifiable.
>
> But this simply is not true. The first reason is the obvious one: historical

[13] George E. Mendenhall, "The Monarchy", *Interpretation* 29 (1975) pp. 155-170.

> reconstructions are by their very nature fragile and in constant need of revision.... The second reason is that, although the Christian creed contains a number of historical assertions about Jesus, Christian faith as a living religious response is simply not directed at those historical facts about Jesus, or at a historical reconstruction of Jesus. Christian faith is directed to a living person.... [T]he *real Jesus* for Christian faith is not simply a figure of the past but very much and above all a figure of the present, a figure, indeed, who defines believers' present by his presence.... Christians direct their faith not to the historical figure of Jesus but to a living Lord Jesus. Yes, they assert continuity between that Jesus and this. But their faith is confirmed, not by the establishment of facts about the past, but by the reality of Christ's power in the present. Christian faith is not directed to a human construction about the past; that would be a form of idolatry. Authentic Christian faith is a response to the living God, whom Christian declare is powerfully at work among them through the resurrected Jesus.[14]

The danger against which Johnson protests is precisely that which Levenson identified: the claim that the *only* context of the Bible worthy of respect is the original context. The further claim is then made that it is this ancient context alone that provides the resources for the appropriation of the Bible by religious communities.

What has been lost in the process is the recognition that the Bible, to the extent that it witnesses to the divine-human encounter, transcends the historical and literary treatments of it. Until this religious dimension of the text as witness to a living tradition of the human encounter with God is recovered as a legitimate component of the study of the Bible, Johnson's earlier assertion that the study of the Bible is adrift will be correct.

Conclusion

It is important to acknowledge once more the gains provided by the historical-critical method. It provides many ways in which the past of the Bible can be uncovered even if we are removed

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[14] Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996) pp. 141-143.

from its world by over two millennia. At the same time, literary readings of the Bible help us to overcome the fragmentation of the biblical text that is an almost irresistible tendency of the historical-critical method.

What is needed now is an effort to uncover that most central of experiences reflected in the Bible — the experience of the *mysterium tremendum*, the experience of the divine human encounter. As students of the Bible, we must begin to attend to the religious depth of the Bible, to its ability to engage the most fundamental issues of human existence. This can't be done by biblical scholars in isolation from others, as we have tended to do in the past. Neither the historical-critical method, nor the literary readings of the Bible, on their own are capable of reaching to these depths. Biblical scholarship at the beginning of the new millenium can no longer be a self-sufficient discipline. Narrow specialization may continue to be a fact of life in scholarship; but there is need for a recovery of the breadth of reading, knowledge, and experience — as well as a breadth of dialogue — that will allow us to explore these deeper issues of human existence. It is in this way that the historical, literary and religious dimensions of the Bible can best be investigated. This, I am convinced, would go a long way toward meeting the legitimate concern about the lack of direction in biblical scholarship.

WE CAME AROUND THAT CORNER A CENTURY AGO

by Mac Watts

As we move into a new century, and even a new millennium, it is instructive to cast our minds back exactly one hundred years. In 1900 a book was published in Germany — and immediately translated into English and other languages — that was a sensation throughout the Christian world. It was entitled *What Is Christianity?*, written in a very accessible style by a scholar who had a higher international profile than any other Christian writer of the time, Adolph von Harnack. It is said that demand for the book was so great, the railway yards in Dresden were clogged with freight trains carrying copies of the book out to the world.[1] What Harnack had to say was not new by any means, but the clarity of his presentation, the credentials he bore as a scholar, and the receptivity of the times, came together to create a mighty impact.

Harnack affirmed that Jesus' central message was not about Himself but about God. The apostles got the emphasis decidedly wrong; they witnessed to Christ the Son when Jesus would have wanted them to point single-mindedly toward God the Father. If we distil Jesus' actual message, Harnack said, we come up with three themes: (1) the Kingdom of God and its coming; (2) God the Father and the infinite value of the human soul; (3) the higher righteousness (i.e. higher than the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees) and the commandment of love. Harnack saw that higher righteousness to be very much a social thing, so it's not surprising that people summed up Harnack's book by saying that for him Christi-

[1] James Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought* (New York: Macmillan, 1971) p. 262.

anity was about the "fatherhood of God[2] and the brotherhood of Man".

Here, then, we have set out with convincing clarity the position that there is a disparity between what the New Testament (NT) says and what Jesus was actually about. In order to get at the real Jesus and His true message you must get behind the surface of the Gospels, especially the synoptics. What we find in Harnack, and indeed in modernist[3] Protestant scholarship throughout the whole century that came before him, was a demand to read the Gospels differently than had been done throughout most of the history of Christendom. Traditionally it was assumed that the Gospels were part of a larger whole in the NT, and that they should be seen in the light of the epistles, in the same way that the epistles should be seen in the light of the Gospels. What 19th century modernism did — and Harnack shared the modernist outlook — was to drive a wedge between the synoptic Gospels and the Fourth Gospel, and between the synoptics and the epistles. No longer, they implied,

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[2] If we want to know why the immediate generations before us had such a focus on the fatherhood of God we can find an important impetus for it in writings like Harnack's. When I was young the prayers I heard offered in Church — I'm talking about extemporaneous prayers, which most prayers were in the 30s and 40s — almost always began, "Our heavenly Father...." It wasn't written down anywhere that that's the way they should begin. Indeed if ministers had looked up some of the historic prayers of the Church they would have found that they almost never started in that fashion. But the influence of Harnack, and others who followed him, made the heavenly Father the object of virtually all prayers. The feminist reaction against the preoccupation with God's fatherhood often includes the assumption that this is what conservative patriarchal Christians had always done. But it's not true. The focus on the intimate Father in heaven, which turned up in so many 20th century prayers and hymns, was actually part of the modernist alternative to classical Christianity put forward by people like Harnack.

[3] Labels are always to some degree misleading. I considered using the term "liberal" instead of "modernist", but in the end opted for the latter as the better one in the circumstance. A label of some kind is needed, but I'm aware that I am applying it to people who didn't always give it to themselves, perhaps instead referring to themselves as liberals. Moreover, there were many who in one way or another identified themselves as "moderns" whose theology doesn't entirely fit my inevitably reductionist descriptions in this article.

should the synoptics be read in the light of the epistles, but the epistles must be read in the light of the synoptics. Indeed, they went further: instead of the stories of His death and resurrection being seen as the interpretative foci of the Gospels, Jesus' life and teachings were now looked upon as the really important parts, and Paul's letters were faulted for not giving attention to the life and teachings. The inordinate length given to the passion portion of the narratives in all four Gospels was considered to be a sign of a failure on the part of Jesus' followers to recognize what was truly significant. Moreover, a skeptical searchlight was beamed especially upon the very beginning and the very end of the narratives, so that the accounts of Jesus' birth and of His resurrection were both placed in a special category, called myth. One of the characteristics of the modernist position was in the critical distinction made between the portions of the Gospels that were to be labelled history, and the parts that must be understood as myth or legend.

Jesus as a Seer

In this interpretation it was said that Jesus should be looked upon not so much as a Saviour and a Redeemer, but as a moral and religious *teacher* of unique depth and penetration, and as one who in his own person was a model of spiritual breadth and moral integrity. And this is what humanity needs, they said. The whole notion of original sin was a mistake. Human beings are not fatally flawed. They display flaws, true enough, but what people need is help to overcome their problems. They need inspiration. They need moral leadership. And Jesus, they said, provided that in abundance, which can be seen especially in the synoptic Gospels — or perhaps what can be seen through and behind the synoptics, where the true historical Jesus is to be found. In the perspective of 19th and early 20th century modernist theology the historical Jesus, therefore, was more a compassionate Seer than anything else, a Seer out of whom shot parable after parable to illumine His wonderful insights. If modernist theology also saw Jesus as a Revealer, it was

in the sense that he had a unique perception into the heart of God which He passed on to people through His life and teaching.

It's not as though the cross had no place in this theology. But instead of being seen as a saving deed it was looked upon as an inspirational martyrdom. That is, what we have in the death of Jesus is something entirely consistent with a distinctive life, one of outstanding moral serenity in the face of the hostility of religious and political leaders, who perceived in His teaching and example a threat to the status quo. Thus in this theology the cross was preached as something that revealed details about the human condition, and that offered an instance of a person of unique moral integrity ready to give his life for what was right. Therefore the cross was portrayed as an inspirational deed that could captivate peoples' minds and hearts. But it was not seen as something with cosmic dimensions — that is, it was not looked upon as an atoning event.

At the same time in 19th and early 20th century modernist theology the resurrection was spiritualised. Following the general principle that all the references to miracles should be suspect, the story of the greatest of the miracles, the resurrection, was interpreted in such a way that it was brought into line with the conventional perception that the "spirit" of individuals continues on after their deaths; the greater the impact the person made in this life the more powerfully their "spirit" can impinge upon people following their demise. The Gospel accounts may have spoken about an immediate bodily presence of the resurrected Jesus with the disciples, but according to modernist theology what was really happening was the growth of a myth inspired by the powerful feeling the disciples had that Jesus was still with them "spiritually".

All of this was expressed most convincingly in NT studies. Through the use of the historical-critical method the NT was taken apart, and the analysis of its contents was put forward as though it was based on principles of interpretation that were virtually above question. We were given to understand that, unlike the old scholarship which was driven by dogma, historical-critical scholarship

was free from presuppositions and simply followed the evidence.

In any case, the modernist theology of the 19th and early 20th centuries often found itself in an uneasy relationship with the Fourth Gospel, in an uneasy relationship with Paul, and indeed with much of the rest of the NT. And this was perhaps even more true of its relation to the developments in the early centuries of the Church; modernist theology found the christological debates, and the development of trinitarian theology, to be signs that the Church had become captive to Greek-style philosophizing: abstract speculations had triumphed over the simplicity of Jesus' teachings. They thus found nothing in the Nicene Creed or in the Chalcedonian affirmations that they considered to have authority for contemporary Christians. On the contrary!

The 19th Century Come Back

It is instructive, then, to move forward in our century to the early 60s, with the publication of John Robinson's *Honest to God*. Much of what happened in the turbulent debates which followed that book was really a continuation, even though often in different language, of what had already been discussed in the 19th and early 20th centuries. As Karl Barth said about it, it was the 19th century come back.[4] And, if we carry on to the 80s, and even 90s, the same thing can be said of aspects of feminist theology. Great gains have been brought to the Church through feminist theology, but whereas the prevailing image of it is that it breaks new ground, important strands of it are a continuation of the agenda of the old modernism: the emphasis upon the humanity of Jesus as over against His deity;[5] the tendency to see incarnation as a principle rather than as a

[4] Karl Barth, *Letters, 1961-1968* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981) p. 102.

[5] Not all feminists react against affirmations about the deity of Jesus. Roberta Bondi reports on a graduate seminar she led on the early Church's view of Christ, a class made up entirely of women. She assumed that they would be drawn to the theology of Antioch with its emphasis upon the humanity of Jesus, rather than that of Alexandria, where the deity of Jesus was held up. She was wrong. It was

unique event in Christ; the reaction against the traditional teaching about sin; the hostility toward the doctrine of the atonement; the suspicion toward Paul; the adversarial relationship with the patterns of life and thought throughout much of the history of the Church. All of these are echoes of what can be found in the modernist theology that goes back at least as far as the 18th century.

And then there is the Jesus Seminar. Several years ago the Seminar put out a book entitled *The Five Gospels,* which was a colour-coded edition of the four canonical Gospels, plus the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas. The members of the Seminar had cast their votes on the reliability of the words in the Gospels attributed to Jesus, and the results of their voting were indicated in the book by ink colour:

> The words printed in red: That's Jesus
> The words printed in pink: Sure sounds like Jesus.
> The words printed in gray: Well, maybe.
> The words printed in black: There's been some mistake.

The procedure placed the burden of proof, not upon those who challenge, but upon those who trust the authenticity of the material in the canonical Gospels. If such "proof" was not forthcoming the words were judged to be counterfeit. Perhaps a fifth of the words attributed to Jesus in the Gospels were deemed to have a reliably authentic ring to them; the accounts of the birth and resurrection were considered to be bogus, etc. A disciple of the Jesus Seminar, in another publication, expressed the outlook of the Seminar succinctly:

Alexandria that they turned to. They explained: "Look at what it means to women and men, too, if Jesus is not just some innocent human victim God has set up to die, but rather is God's own self, the powerful God who created us and gives shape to our universe and loves us intimately — who for our sake chooses to be emptied of the divine power and shares in real human suffering and dies for the sake of the resurrection. Don't you see? What we have right here in the tradition are some real resources for a strong feminist Christology." (Roberta Bondi, "A Matter of Christology", *Christian Century*, March 17, 1999, p.316.)

> "The Gospels do not reveal Jesus. They reveal what various first-century communities wanted themselves and others to believe about Jesus.... [And those who preach in the 21st century will need to learn] what a forthright fiction the Acts of the Apostles is.[6]

More recently the Jesus Seminar has put out a new book, *The Acts of Jesus*. The publishers made use of the following blurb to advertise the new volume (a blurb that may have come from the Seminar itself):

> Challenging the virgin birth and the bodily resurrection, the [Jesus] Seminar rolls away every stone in their attempt to raise the real Jesus from the tombs of gospel fiction!!

It seems that there are still a lot of folk around who look upon this as a new, fresh approach to the Bible, but as we have seen it is yet another expression of what has been said by many writers over the past two hundred and fifty years.[7]

The driving spirit behind the Jesus Seminar has been Robert Funk, who has recently published a book of his own with the title *Honest to Jesus* — an obvious claim of kinship with John Robinson's publication of almost 40 years ago, *Honest to God*. In

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[6] Letter to the editor of *The Christian Century* by Harry T. Cook, April 23 - 30, 1997, p. 426.

[7] I am not surprised when lay people hold up the Jesus Seminar, or Bishop Spong's well-worn clichés, as though they were saying something novel, but it does disturb me when I see clergy doing that, for they should know better. Yet, there may even be some *Touchstone* readers who wonder if I am overstating it when I claim that all these so-called fresh insights have been around a very long while. Those who do wonder can make a raid on their closest theological library, and take out Albert Schweitzer's *The Quest For the Historical Jesus*, which first appeared in 1906. There is no need to read the whole book, which is quite lengthy. Just look at the early part where Schweitzer provides a summary of New Testament scholarship of the previous hundred and fifty years. All readers should find Schweitzer's summary illuminating, but I think it is a particularly useful piece for those who feel the Gospel story, with its supernatural elements, is hard to swallow. Schweitzer outlines the various "rational, non-supernatural"explanations of Jesus' life put forward by students of the Gospels in the 18th and 19th centuries; they reach levels of irrationality that are breathtaking.

his book Funk states that "Jesus is not the proper object of faith",[8] and that we must "give Jesus a demotion....A demoted Jesus then becomes available as the real founder of the Christian movement... With [the human only] Jesus as the actual leader, this movement will be subject to continuing reformations born of repeated quests for the historical Jesus."[9]

I think we can be grateful to Funk that he has put the issue before us so forthrightly, in saying that Jesus is not to be an object of faith. What Funk is getting at, of course, is that God alone should be the object of faith. Since for Funk Jesus is *only* a human being, we should not be worshipping Him. This is precisely what the clearer minded of all those in the modernist tradition had been saying. It is certainly what Harnack was getting at when he said that Jesus' teaching was not about Himself but about God the Father, and it is Jesus' authentic teaching, and not the later voices of the apostles, that should be taken seriously. As I said earlier, the modernist position presupposes that the apostles were mistaken in their overall appraisal of what Jesus was about.

In the course of this brief discussion I have been holding up what I consider to be the negative side of the contribution of 19th and 20th century modernist theology — and the negative side of historical-critical NT scholarship — because they pulled us away from a "hermeneutic of trust" toward the NT documents, and drew us into a "hermeneutic of suspicion". Before I move on I need to make clear that we owe an enormous debt to modernist theology, and to historical-critical investigation of the NT. Many things could be cited, but at least this much must be said: it has left us with the inescapable recognition that the NT writings are not timeless entities that somehow fell from heaven, but are all human constructs which arose out of a specific time and place, so that each one needs to be understood in its particularity, and in its historical context. In addition modernist theology left us with a more authentic feel for

[8] Robert Funk, *Honest to Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper/Collins, 1996) p. 304.
[9] Ibid., p. 306.

the humanity of Jesus, which is not to be compromised by whatever other things must be asserted about Him. And this theology bestowed on us a more attentive ear to the truths to be found in other religions. As has been said of the great liberal evangelical, Nathan Söderblom, "the uniqueness of the revelation in the incarnation of Christ enabled [him] to listen sympathetically to every disclosure of the word and will of God anywhere."[10]

Alternative Voices

It needs to be noted that alternative voices were lifted up throughout the period from at least the mid-19th century onwards, the voices of people who, unlike the modernists, did not jettison the classical Church tradition, but went deeper into it, and thus were doing what all the great figures in the history of the Church had done, reinterpreting it in their own time. In Denmark there was Søren Kierkegaard, in Scotland there was James Denney, and in England P.T. Forsyth. In Sweden there was Gustav Aulén. In Germany there was Dietrich Bonhöffer, and in Switzerland there were Emil Brunner and Karl Barth. In the United States there were the Niebuhr brothers, Reinhold and Richard. And of course there were many, many others, including in recent times people like Hans Frei, Jürgen Moltmann, Robert Jenson, William Placher, and N.T. Wright.

Over the past thirty years a solid body of biblical scholars has given a fresh recognition to the NT as a corpus of writings that needs to be considered together. The historical-critical method pulled things apart, not only within NT books, but also between them. It was the *variety* within the NT that was acknowledged, not anything that might be called its unity. The Jesus Seminar represents that position carried to extreme. But now, with what is designated as literary criticism, the NT canon as a whole is looked at, in recognition of the fact that the Church passed on to us a small

[10] Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Melody of Theology* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1988) p. 240.

library of works which both in their diversity and in their togetherness represent the richness of the apostolic witness. It assumed that we needed all of them, and must give heed to all of them. For example, there was not just one account of Jesus' life that was authoritative, but four. Thus the Church required all four Gospels to have a full, rounded portrayal of Jesus' life, teachings, death and resurrection. And when the Church was reading Jesus' words in Matthew about the disciples being the light of the world, it would be remembering His claim in John that He is the Light of the World, as He is also the Bread of Life and the Good Shepherd. When the Church was reading in the parable in Matthew about all the labourers in the vineyard being paid the same amount, no matter how long they worked, it would be remembering the parable in Luke where the wastrel son was without condition given an honoured place back in the household. When the Church was reading in John's Gospel about Jesus being the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world it would be remembering the words in Revelation about the slaughtered lamb sharing the throne of God. When the Church was reading in Romans and Galatians about our being justified by faith it would be remembering the letter of James, which asserted that we are justified by our works.

In any case, the overall result is a moving back into the NT narrative as it is, or more exactly, moving back into the biblical narrative as a whole. Instead of trying to reconstruct it into a different story, or at least a sharply modified story, there is a greater acceptance of the narrative as it has been preserved for us, and without the effort to make sharp distinctions between what is truly historical and what is not. Indeed, we find emerging a recognition of story, of narrative, as the essential character of the biblical message. Not that everything in the Bible is narrative; in the OT there are prophets, psalms, and proverbs as well as story. And in the NT there are epistles as well as story. But the story has always been looked upon as being primary. That's why, if you go to synagogue on Friday night, you find the service is built around readings from the Pentateuch. The psalms provide the body of the liturgy but the

heart of the service is in the salvation account contained in the Pentateuch. And that's why historically, in Christian services, special observances have highlighted the readings from the Gospels. The story is primary. The Gospel is first of all narrative. Thus the Christian Year is built around the main moments in the Christian story, beginning with Christmas and ending with Pentecost. The seasons of Advent and Lent are not independent things, but find their character and significance in connection with the narrative festivals. Our Christian Year would be much the poorer if we didn't have Advent or Lent, but we could get along without them. We couldn't, however, get along without Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. And the additional festivals like Trinity Sunday, All Saints, and Christ the King are derivative times that spell out the implications of the basic story.

And when the Gospel is seen as being first of all a salvation *story*, it is then recognized as a dynamic reality which has a living and breathing central character, with an array of those who play supporting roles. In the OT the chief character is God; in the NT it is Jesus Christ. Does that mean God has been sidelined? No indeed; the central figure of the NT is still God, but it is God present in a human being. But wasn't God present in Moses, and in David, and in Jeremiah? Yes of course, in the sense that they were God's emissaries. But in Jesus, God was not making use of an emissary. In Jesus Godself was uniquely present. That's why it was not the apostles who got it wrong, but Harnack and the others were the ones who got it wrong. In bearing witness to Jesus as the Son of God the apostles were not pulling our attention away from God, but pointing in a fresh way to God as the One who runs after prodigal children, and goes to the cross on their behalf. Remember the way it is put in Philippians: that the one who was equal with God did not hold on to his honour but emptied himself, becoming a servant, even going to the cross. And therefore God has highly exalted him and given him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. But, is that really the way that sen-

tence ends? No, it concludes "and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father". Yes, to the glory of God the Father! The honour given to the once lowly Jesus does not diminish the honour given to the most high God, but allows for its true flowering. In spite of what Robert Funk says, Jesus *is* the proper object of faith, because in worshipping Him were are in fact worshipping God — as is made so clear on every page of the fourth Gospel, and in the Book of Revelation where the lamb shares the very throne of God.

Present Trends

So what are the present trends in theological discourse? There are still two main streams to be identified. One flows in the tradition of people like Harnack, the Jesus Seminar, and those who espouse what is sometimes called "radical" theology — which may be radical enough to catch up with the 18th century. The Jesus found in this tradition fits in easily with the current principles of pluralism and inclusivity, and with those who are into things like spirituality, because there are so few restraints coming from the New Testament, and virtually none from the historic theological statements. There is almost complete freedom in this tradition to adapt Jesus to a desirable contemporary mold, since the assumption is that the real Jesus is not to be found in the NT but beyond it. So if there is something in the NT that seems to get in the way of our interpretation, we are at liberty to dismiss it as not representing the true historical Jesus.

The other main stream in contemporary trends is the one which finds Jesus *in* the richness and variety of the NT story. It is not always a comfortable, secure place to be. As William Placher says,

> Christians learn about a vulnerable God through complex and ambiguous narratives in which no one story overpowers all the others. Partially repressed voices make themselves heard, and honest readers have to struggle

> with diversity and ambiguity as they think about how these texts make sense and relate to their own worlds.[11]

But in those texts is to be found the Fount of Blessing, because the central figure in them is not dead, and is thus not solely a wonderful memory. He is alive, and through the Gospel we are brought into His presence again, drawn afresh into His life.

And now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Eph. 3:20,21)

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[11] William C. Placher, *Narratives of a Vulnerable God* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994) p.89.

CELEBRATION OF MINISTRY SERMON

FINDING THE CHURCH[1]

by Foster Freed

Isaiah 45: 9-12
Psalm 84: 1-6, 10
Ephesians 4: 7-13
John 21: 15-17

Judith, Bill, Wally, Catherine, Katherine, Reg, Gail, Michelle, Rob, and anyone else who cares to eavesdrop: permit me to begin by trotting out four of the premises — four of the working assumptions — I bring to this occasion.

Premise One: the God who shapes us in creation, is the same God who has called us into the Church, the God who shapes us in and through the Church. That's premise one.

Premise Two: we are here, this morning, to celebrate the varied ministries — the incredibly rich assortment of ministries — that God has established within the Church, that the Church might play its appointed role within creation. That's premise two.

Premise Three: this celebration is unapologetically focussed on the Church's "ordered" ministry, not because ordered ministry is better or more challenging than other ministry, but because ordered ministry has pivotal responsibility for guiding and nurturing — for feeding, for equipping — the Church's other ministries. That's premise three.

Premise Four: the Church's ordered ministry, by and large, is an in-house ministry: ministry that attends to the Church in what Terry Anderson would call its gathered mode. And while there are certainly exceptions to that broad generalization — ordered ministers who serve primarily out in the world, and laity who serve

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[1] This sermon was preached at the Celebration of Ministry Service, B.C. Conference, held at Castlegar in May of 1999.

primarily within the four walls of a church building — functionally speaking, that distinction by and large holds. In other words, ordered ministry has special responsibility for the life and health of the Church. That's premise four.

And it's that last premise, especially, that leads directly to my theme, namely: that those who are called to such ministries, those who would presumably rather be doorkeepers in God's house than live in luxury any place else, need to be able to locate the house, need to be able to find the Church.

There is, I confess, a sense in which I mean that in a quite literal way. When I sat here — actually three or four hundred kilometres North-west of here — as an ordinand a mere nine years ago, the prospect of locating the Church seemed quite daunting. Those of you who this year find yourselves having been settled in places as unfamiliar to you, as Hornepayne, Ontario was to me in May 1990 (I recall with embarrassment that I once or twice referred to it, until I got the name straight, as Horsepayne instead of Hornepayne!): for those of you heading to places like Hornepayne, simply finding your Church may prove a challenge.

But no. When I speak of "finding the Church", I am pointing to a deeper issue: not so much finding a particular church, but finding *the* Church, the Church we have been asked to serve as people in ordered ministry. Strange to say, of all the questions I have found myself asking over the years, that question — a question I never expected to ask — has come to loom as the largest question of all. How to locate the Church. How to find the Church. And I ask your indulgence, as I share with you three of the answers I have stumbled upon during nine years in ministry.

In the first place, I have discovered that the Church is much nearer, much closer at hand, than I could ever have anticipated when I left seminary in the spring of 1990. The Church, as I have come to discover, is as close at hand as the two congregations to which I have been called, as near at hand as the two communities of faith in whose midst I have been placed.

And that is, of course, something of a truism. We have all been taught, and we all like to pay lip-service to our conviction, that the Church is *wherever* God's people are praising. That was something my professors pounded into my head day-in and day-out. Nevertheless, very few of us are ready for the traumatic moment that so often arrives at some point during the first six months in a new parish, when we discover that *our* language of faith (as the one who has been called) bears nary a trace of resemblance to the language of faith of the ones who did the calling.

And I doubt it matters whether the language to which you grew accustomed during the seminary years was that of neo-orthodoxy, or liberation theology, or Church growth evangelicalism. At some point in the first six months, as one begins to discover the dense maze of local customs and strange fetishes that comprise the life of a typical congregation, it becomes hard to resist the thought that the Church is surely to be found any place but here, and preferably in places (depending on one's theological orientation) with names like Basel, New York, San Francisco, Sao Paulo, Geneva, Toronto, or God help us, even 4383 Rumble Street. Which becomes dangerous as soon as we succumb to the temptation of investing time and energy dreaming about the day when we will at last arrive in one of those places.

And there are, of course, any number of practical reasons why most of us need to resist that temptation most of the time: starting with the simple fact that neither the vibrant life of the seminary, nor the vibrant life of the denomination, (nor, alas, the vibrant life of the Conference) are conceivable without the vibrant life of countless local communities of faith. And yet the larger consideration is theological, since the problem for most of us is not that the God we worship is too small, but that the God we worship is too big: too big, too distant and too impersonal to really care about the life of "Little Lost Church in the Woods", and the seemingly endless trivia that comprise the life of such places.

And yet God is in the details: including the details that we continually stumble over within the very congregations to which

we have been called. As Jeremy Sheehy, Principal of St. Stephen's House in Oxford reminds us: "A valuing of locality is a gift that the church needs in our rootless age. It can be very easy to believe in the transfiguration of all things by God's grace, but very hard to believe in the transfiguration of your particular corner of all things." Which is why the real privilege of congregational ministry is the opportunity it affords us to take part in God's on-going work of local transfiguration: with its never-ending frustrations, but with its endless assortment of unexpected opportunities to witness and to bear witness to God's grace. Which is why I hope you will discover, as I have discovered (often to my chagrin) that the Church is much nearer, much closer to hand, than I might ever have imagined. As near and as close at hand as the congregations to which we have been called. That's one discovery I have made over these past nine years.

A second discovery, one that will sound completely contradictory (which would hardly surprise the folks who are used to hearing me preach back in Parksville), a second discovery I have made, one that I hope you will make as well, is that the Church is also further away than I had originally conceived it to be. Further away both in time and space than I had once imagined.

Here I need to speak of the acquaintance I have made of unexpected brothers and sisters: folks I never thought to meet over the course of my time in ordered ministry. Specifically, those Christians who come in a bewildering and at times disconcerting variety of shapes, sizes, and flavours. Christians from whom I have learned a great deal; Christians who have taught me how terribly artificial, and how terribly destructive our labels can be, and how readily labels such as liberal or conservative, feminist or orthodox, fundamentalist or charismatic, can distort the reality to which they point: how easily they can destroy our ability to learn from those to whom such labels have been affixed.

Dialogue, as David Lochhead reminds us, "is an attempt to see the world through the eyes of the other." Whatever else ordered ministry has taught me, it has taught me (as I hope it will

teach you) how important it is to struggle to maintain the kind of openness that permits us to see the world through the eyes of the other. The eyes of the other, including those countless Christian eyes from whom we no longer expect to have very much to learn. Whether it has been the pastor of the unhinged independent charismatic church down the street or the writings of that rag-tag assortment of desert Christians from the fourth and fifth centuries, I continually find myself coming to the painful realisation that my view of the faith is too parochial, and that I have much to gain and very little to lose when I listen to my sisters and brothers, especially those whose experience I am most ready to ignore.

And just as Richard Hays is correct when he insists that a hermeneutic of trust must take priority over a hermeneutic of suspicion in our appropriation of scripture, I am convinced that a hermeneutic of trust must take priority over a hermeneutic of suspicion in our appropriation of the great Christian tradition. Not because the tradition is flawless; coming from a Jewish background I know its flaws only too well. And not because there is no need to approach the tradition critically. But no amount of criticism, and no amount of suspicion, can ever obscure the fact that we have much to learn from those who walked this walk before us: the Augustines, the Wesleys, the Bonhoeffers — and yes the Clarke McDonalds; the Hildegaards, the ten Booms, the Thereses — and yes the Jesse Olivers. They are our elders, and they have so much to teach us, if we are willing to listen to them where and when we find them, as we seek to find the Church, the Church that is further afield both in time and space, than we sometimes imagine.

I suppose that leaves but one further dimension, one further angle of vision in regards to this business of finding the Church. It's the dimension that probably looms larger than any other on an occasion like this, but one that I have so far passed over in silence. Because the Church — which *is* both closer than we often assume and further afield than we sometimes imagine — *is* most certainly located precisely where so many of us hope to find it: especially at this time of year when we solemnly gather in hockey arenas and

curling rinks from one end of this nation to the other. Yes, the Church is also to be found in its numerous denominational formations, including this denominational formation.

And I need to stress that my celebration of the local congregation on the one hand, and the Church catholic on the other hand, should not be construed as an attempt to do an end-run around the Church denominational. Indeed, as someone who would be hard-pressed to disown the label of post-denominational Christian, I nevertheless remain profoundly grateful and stubbornly hopeful for this denomination we call the United Church of Canada.

John Webster Grant, in his masterful essay in the *Voices and Visions* collection that was published on the occasion of the United Church's 65th anniversary, speaks of "the widespread impression that the United Church comes in two editions, a hardcover official one, expressing decided opinions on a great variety of subjects and a loose-leaf one with which almost anyone can be comfortable." My own impression is that the United Church cannot afford to settle comfortably into either of those identities. Neither the rigidity of the "hardcover" version, nor the wishy-washiness of the "loose-leaf" version will serve us well in the end.

On the contrary, as Gabriel Fackre tried to remind us when he was in British Columbia at the Vancouver School of Theology to deliver the Peter Kaye Lectures in 1995, the greatest gift the mainline Protestant churches — including the United Church of Canada — can presently offer to the world-wide Christian movement, may well lie in our ability to maintain a thriving centre. Such an option will differ dramatically from the strident sectarianisms of the left and the right, but will also resist the middle-of-the road wishy-washiness that John Webster Grant rightly cautions us against. More to the point, a desire to find the vibrant centre will leave us well poised to embrace our rich congregational diversity without feeling threatened by that diversity, as well as the multi-hued heritage that is available to us from the wider Church, if we have the discipline to acquaint ourselves with it. I am certain that it was the availability of that vital, vibrant centre within the United

Church, that made it possible for this lost and lonely former semi hippie wayfarer to hear and to embrace the Gospel of Jesus Christ some 20 years ago. And I am equally certain that a denomination that is willing to reclaim that vital centre will be well poised to welcome many other wayfarers, ex-hippie or otherwise!

Many such wayfarers. In places such as this one (this lovely city of Castlegar, nestled in the midst of mountains and valleys), and in countless other places. Places bearing strange and exotic names, such as Bella Bella and the Elk Valley, Chemainus, Crofton and Quesnel, Quebec's Eastern Townships, Saskatchewan's Northern Lakes and Quill Plains, even Prince Rupert, ….downtown Victoria and yes even downtown Parksville.

Which, of course, is my parting wish for you, Judith, Bill, Wally, Catherine, Katherine, Reg, Jay, Gail, Michelle, Rob, and anyone else who may have been eavesdropping this past 20 minutes. That's my wish, better still my hope, better still my prayer for each of you. That you *will* find the Church. Not just a church but *the* Church. And having found it, that you will be enabled, in the midst of diverse communities of faith, to *be* the Church. To be the Church with such clarity of purpose, creativity of conviction, breadth of compassion and depth of humility (perhaps especially the humility), that others — when they come knocking at your door — will quickly come to realise that they in their turn, have found the Church. Amen.

ORDINANDS' PRESENTATIONS[1]

GROWTH PROMOTERS

by Heather Lea

I still have a poinsettia I received for Christmas five and a half years ago. It was one of several bought to decorate a December wedding, then given to a groomsman who neglected them badly. He eventually called his friends and said, "If you want one, take it". Our son, Michael, looked at the droopy plants, took one, and drenched it with water. A skeptical onlooker commented, "Water won't make any difference to a dead plant, you know." But the pouring of water can make a difference, to people as well as to seemingly dead plants. When I consider my growing into relationship with God through Jesus Christ, I recognize the importance of the water which marked me as Christ's own — three little dabs, I expect, rather than a thorough drenching, but it was enough!

As I began preparing these remarks the poinsettia sat in one corner of our living room, resplendent with large green leaves and plentiful scarlet ones. It was beautiful, and I was reminded of the times when I have experienced God's gracious and abundant blessing. I also recalled with thanksgiving and wonder those times when I have known myself to be God's blessing to others. Earlier this week, as I completed the text for this brief talk, the poinsettia was outdoors in the garden, its largest leaves withered and desiccated by 36 hours of a strong, drying wind. Its once scarlet leaves were faded and marred with blemishes. That, too, has been part of my experience in ministry and in my relationship with God. I am reminded that the most important thing is neither the resplendent,

[1] Heather Lea was being presented for ordination to the Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario, and Gail Miller to the Conference of British Columbia. These are the remarks they made at the time.

nor the withered, plant; the important thing is the continuing new growth, and new growth for both poinsettia and me sometimes seems greatest after withering!

Four things have been used to promote growth and colour on the poinsettia: water, fertilizer, light, and dark. When I was confirmed I promised to use growth promoters too, four things that would nourish faith and deepen my relationship with God. They were called means of grace: regular public worship, participation in the Lord's Supper, reading Scripture, and prayer. Those means of grace, even when used imperfectly or in small quantity, lead me to deepening relationship with God and increasing awareness of Christ's Spirit within and around me.

The fourth verse of "O Little Town" is a prayer for Christ's presence:

O holy child of Bethlehem,
Descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin, and enter in;
Be born in us today.

Be born in us today. The God I know is a God of incarnation, coming once and uniquely in the child of Bethlehem, but coming again and again to live and work in me and others by the Holy Spirit. To know moments of God's Spirit embodied in me is to know great awe and humility, to stand with fear on holy ground.

In this moment I look ahead with anticipation, wonder, and hope, trusting that God will continue to work within me. I come trusting the words in Romans that God works for good in all things, even those things, or maybe especially those things, that look withered and dried up. As I seek ordination I reaffirm the promise to make use of the growth promoters — the means of grace — confident in the sufficiency of God's steadfast love, goodness, and mercy.

GOD WILL ALWAYS BRING LIFE FROM DEATH

by Gail Miller

When I was first told that I would be addressing Conference, I wondered what I would say. I hoped I would be able to make a profound statement, or at least have some pearls of wisdom to impart. But I decided that I would simply tell you what is in my heart.

Our history is filled with moments of incredible faith, and moments of deep despair. But what I have come to believe.... what I have experienced is that even in times of chaos and doubt, God is actively creating something new, and working to transform our hearts and our structures into instruments of grace and shalom.

In my own journey I have struggled with who we are as a Church. I have questioned the worth of our institution, and have seriously wondered if we still have a place and purpose in our world.

Despite my doubts, despite times of complete frustration and disillusionment, I have for the most part stood in awe of God's love for us. I have stood in awe of God's faith in us, by continuing to be present as the Spirit moving through our communities calling us to new ways of living our faith and proclaiming the radical good news of the Gospel.

We face in our Church today many challenges, as we see our structures change, as we feel the pressure of economics, as we face the increasing despair and hopelessness of the world. My hope is that we will refrain from acting out of fear and doubt, that we will live as a people who really believe the promise of resurrection, that God will always bring life from death. I hope that we will have the courage to let go of our idols, to trust God with our very lives, to risk everything we have to become spiritually fertile ground in which can plant the seeds of a new Church.

I don't know what our future holds, and I don't have any profound statements to make about how we are going to get there. But I know the world is aching for a word of hope, aching to know the love of God. We are people who have looked into the face of the Crucified One. We are people who have danced outside the tomb of the Risen One. As that people, we have known God's love. And I know for my own life, once touched by that love, one will do anything to share that experience with others.

MY SORROWS LED ME HOME

by Laura Mckenzie

Nicodemus stole out in darkness to hear Jesus' words, ashamed and afraid to humble himself publicly before the fearful Love. I, too, waited until the sun had set to seek out the Christ, and likewise it was in the midst of my night that Jesus came for me. Shackled by a mind too rational to name its secret hungers, I was empty, with only ideas telling me I was full. Here the story's metre wanes, for the motions of grace are inexpressible. If you know the sudden flurry of birds startled into the sky, you know more of rebirth than my words can say. My sorrows led me home, and yet I went by no path known by map.

To know God intimately, to be reborn, is to abandon oneself, to let go of our old ideas of who we are and what we are to do, to die. Indeed, even our ideas of what a holy life should look like, or the nature of God itself, must pass away. In the words of Clifford L. Stanley, "any god who can be killed, ought to be killed", for our true God is glorious beyond earthly conception. To see with the eye of the Spirit is to open ourselves up to the sweet and terrifying madness of the Divine. Alone and quiet, we must prepare for the way of the Word, and yet know it cannot be wrought by human effort alone. Courage arises when we have faith that though the flood will destroy our earthly selves, it will end the exile of form. The mercy of Christ is that He rushes into our arms, even as we stumble towards Him.

Old with pain, I paced endlessly the same wastelands and Christ grieved as He watched. My blind constriction made Him "sad with the sadness of the wingèd who will not soar above his comrade" (Kahil Gibran). One night, the suffering grew so large that it burst the walls I had erected and called "Myself". Blessed dissolution, the waters rushed at me and carried me high and I knew what it was to be precious. Now, I borrow the words of the Sufi poet Rumi, to say, "My soul at dawn is like darkened water

that slowly begins to say 'Thankyou'Thankyou."

But my stone-heavy words clarify nothing. I have built a frame but there is no picture for it to house. May you all know the elusive mystery of rebirth in your hearts.

Sweet Lord, lead me ever into your arms.
Let my eyes see only your shining.
Grant me the courage to die and to die and to die,
that your arms might bear me up.
My Jesus, my love. Holy, mad one.
Your madness is the sanity this world lacks,
Fill us of you, Empty of us.
Guide us by fire, by Water, leave none of us intact.
When we fear, let us know your way is gentle,
When we rage, let us know your way is just,
Bring us to our knees.
Love us to remembrance,
Dance us to madness,
Hold us evermore. Amen.

Profile

MARTHA J. CARTMELL: MISSIONARY TO JAPAN

by Marilyn Färdig Whiteley

Miss Cartmell (courtesy Archives of The United Church of Canada, Acc. No. 76.001 P/928N).

On Friday, November 3, 1882, the parlours of Centenary Methodist Church in Hamilton rang with the hymn "All Hail, The Power of Jesus' Name," as Methodists gathered to say farewell to Martha J. Cartmell. The occasion was both festive and solemn. In a few days, Cartmell would set forth across the continent to sail for Japan, the first missionary sent by the Woman's Missionary Society of the Methodist Church of Canada. The young society looked forward eagerly to working through its chosen representative to bring Christianity to the women of Japan, yet they were aware of the enormity of the undertaking.

This darker hue permeated the remarks of some who spoke from that platform that evening. One minister attempted to encourage the group by saying, "Sad thoughts might come to some, but in reality this was no time for sadness. Looked at from the right standpoint all was brightness." A few minutes later, another, "with contagious enthusiasm, dwelt upon the brighter aspects of the occasion. It was a time not for gloom but for gladness, and the devoted sister who was going forth was to be congratulated and not commiserated."

The devoted sister, Martha Cartmell, must have felt a strange mix of anticipation and anxiety that November evening, but little could she have known how her pioneering departure would both elevate her to the status of hero, and test her to her limits.

Background of a Missionary

Another of the speakers in the Centenary church parlour "rejoiced in the family character of the gathering." Cartmell's uncle, Dr. John Williams, also addressed the group, and two of her cousins received mention in the newspaper report. Rev. Donald Sutherland replied on Cartmell's behalf when "a well-filled purse" was presented to her, and Elizabeth Sutherland Strachan, Secretary of the Woman's Missionary Society, was also in attendance. All these were connected by birth or marriage to the family of William and Elizabeth Robinson.

The Robinsons were Wesleyan Methodists who lived in Linconshire. In 1832, William and Elizabeth and their seven children sailed for North America. Only a few days out, William died at sea, a victim of cholera. His wife and children landed at Québec, but soon moved to Prescott, in Upper Canada. During the following years, some resettled in New York State, others in different parts of Upper Canada.

The third child, Sarah Robinson, married James Cartmell. Sarah and James had seven children; Martha, the fifth, was born on December 14, 1845. James owned a stone quarry situated on the Niagara Escarpment near Thorold. Its stone was used in construction of the Welland Canal, and for the stone abutments of a suspension bridge over the Niagara River, completed in 1854. At an earlier stage of construction there was only a foot bridge, three feet wide, and in later years Martha remembered that her father proudly took some of his family onto it. Young Martha, however, became so frightened by its swaying that her father was forced to carry his crying daughter back to land.

In January 1850, less than a month after Martha's fourth birthday, her mother died. Martha and her next-older sister, Mary, were taken into the home of Sarah's sister Margaret, who had married Great Lakes shipping captain James Sutherland the year after her arrival in Canada. In the early 1840s the family had moved to Hamilton. Their daughter Elizabeth was four years older than

Martha, and the protective concern of the eight-year-old for her four-year-old cousin showed up decades later in letters from "Lizzie" to "Mattie," for the lives of the two remained closely linked right through to Elizabeth's death at the age of ninety.

James Sutherland died in 1857, a victim of the Desjardins Canal disaster which occurred near Hamilton, when a train plunged into the canal while crossing a swing bridge. Little more is known of the family except that its members were active in McNab Street Methodist Church and then in Centenary Church. Elizabeth Sutherland married a Dr. Strachan of New York in 1867.

In 1861 the Wesleyan Female College opened in Hamilton, and Martha Cartmell was among its early students. She then studied at the Toronto Normal School — established in 1852 by Methodist minister Egerton Ryerson, who had become superintendent of education for Canada West. The Normal School trained women and men to teach, and Cartmell received her teaching certification and returned to Hamilton. There she joined the staff of the Central School.

The Missionary Dream

Although she was a successful teacher, Cartmell held a secret dream. Early in the 1870s some Canadian Methodists began to consider inaugurating missionary work overseas, and in 1873 Dr. Davidson Macdonald and the Rev. George Cochran were sent to Japan by the Methodist Church of Canada. This was an era of growing enthusiasm for foreign missions, and the year that changing policy in Japan made that country receptive to Western ideas and institutions.

According to family tradition, the year before the mission was opened Cartmell heard a powerful address urging Methodists to take on foreign work. When the speaker mentioned a need for women missionaries, Cartmell felt called by God. But the General Board of Missions would be sending no single female workers, and she said nothing about her dream.

During the next years, Macdonald and Cochran sent back reports that were read avidly by Canadian Methodists. They commented on a way in which their work was limited because they were men: by social custom they were denied access to Japanese homes. Only women missionaries could reach the women of the nation.

Methodist Episcopal women in the United States, and both Baptist and Presbyterian women in Canada organized societies and began sending out missionaries. The Woman's Missionary Society of the smaller Methodist Episcopal Church in Canada was formed in 1876, and although it did not sponsor missionaries of its own, it demonstrated the ability of other Canadian Methodist women to organize for missions.

Dr. Alexander Sutherland, influential Missionary Secretary of the Methodist Church of Canada, favoured the formation of an auxiliary Ladies' Missionary Society, hoping that the support of women would ease the financial burden of the General Board of Missions. In June 1880, at a meeting in Centenary Church, Hamilton, he urged the women to organize. Later that month, the women formed a Branch Missionary Society, and began to meet regularly. Elizabeth Sutherland Strachan, now a widow, missed the first gatherings because she was travelling in Palestine, but in October she became part of the group.

Not all the women were content with the way that the society initially "place[d] itself under the direction of the General Missionary Society." At a meeting the following February, they openly questioned this decision. The minutes report their deliberations in ringing rhetoric:

> Are we quite sure we are willing to hand over the funds of the Society to the General Committee and have them transact all our financial business, reserving to ourselves the right, simply to collect the money and determine what shall be done with it, as they will be very glad to have us do? ... Or shall we strike out on an entirely new line? Assume all the responsibilities ourselves, and take the burden upon our own hearts and heads, which will force us to our knees to seek the wisdom from above which is profitable to direct, and the zeal which will surely accompany knowledge and love?

The writer of these minutes was the recording secretary, Martha Cartmell!

It soon became clear that if significant work was to be accomplished, Methodist women needed to organize on a broader basis. And so at a meeting in Hamilton on April 29th, 1881, Cartmell moved that a denomination-wide Woman's Missionary Society be formed . When the new organization was formally constituted on November 8 of that year, the women also resolved "to support a lady missionary in Japan." But who would undertake this pioneering mission?

A letter from Elizabeth Sutherland Strachan to her brother Donald on December 9, 1881, indicates that the decision did not take long: "Mattie was selected." Cartmell told the women who informed her of this decision "that for nearly two years, Japan had been on her mind although she would not move a finger to go as she knew that if God had called her to this work, He would open the way, and make it all plain." Although Strachan acknowledged that her cousin was "freer than many to go", she admitted to feeling "considerably disturbed over this matter" but trusted that "we shall be Divinely directed".

Strachan hoped that another missionary could be sent with Cartmell, but that was not possible. Instead, it was arranged for Cartmell to travel with missionaries from the United States who were also heading for Asia. First she had to assemble her missionary outfit. She gathered a wide variety of books, including Herodotus and Homer, Dawson's *Origin of the World* and the ten-volume *Chambers's Encyclopedia*, the poems of Frances Ridley Havergal and the sacred songs of Moody and Sankey. Like others, she also attempted to take all the personal and household goods they would need on the mission field. Meticulously Cartmell listed what she packed and where she packed it, showing, for instance, that a packing case held, among other items a coal-oil stove with five night dresses and several sheets in the oven.

Leaving on November 23, 1882, Cartmell travelled across the

continent by train, travelling by necessity through the United States. Her accounting of expenses was as precise as her baggage list: "eggs boiled hard .12," and "ice cream .25," a rare luxury. Once the party arrived in San Francisco, she paid $150 for her steamer ticket to Tokyo and another $43.19 for extra baggage.

The Missionary Reality

Early in December Cartmell sailed. She paid fifty cents for a "Steamer reclining chair," but it is not known how much she was able to enjoy it. She was assigned to the top one of three small bunk beds, and was seasick during most of the crossing. Upon landing, she was met by the three Canadian Methodist missionaries then in Japan. For three months she stayed in the Tokyo home of Dr. Davidson Macdonald while a small house behind it was being prepared for her. Then she moved to the new second storey of the building; on the lower floor of which she was able to receive visitors.

Her first activity was the vital and challenging task of studying the Japanese language, but soon she reported that she was "embracing every opportunity of sowing the seed through an interpreter". Before long she began teaching English to a group of young men one evening a week on the condition that they would also attend her Bible-study class.

Yet Cartmell had not crossed the Pacific to do what could be done by male missionaries. "Woman's work for woman" was the motto of women's missionary societies. They recognized that in many cultures only women had access to native females, and they held late-Victorian assumptions regarding home and family, and a conviction that a nation's women shaped its future generations.

The dream of Cartmell and of those who sent her was to open a school for Japanese girls. Initially they planned to open a day school, a less costly undertaking, but Cartmell came to believe that a boarding school was preferable. She petitioned the Japanese government for permission to open a school, and her petition was

granted. Missionaries of the General Board offered her a site adjacent to the boys' school property—for $1000. Cartmell bravely accepted the offer, then wrote to her Board of Managers. At the same time, the president of the Woman's Missionary Society wrote to Cartmell to go ahead and begin a boarding school at once. The two letters crossed in mid-ocean, and Cartmell's bold act appeared providential.

With the help of Dr. Davidson Macdonald, Cartmell oversaw the construction of the building. In October 1884, the Toyo Eiwa Jo Gakko (Oriental-English Japanese Girls' School) opened with only two pupils. Before long, however, its popularity required the construction of a second building. In February 1885, Eliza Spencer was welcomed as the second Woman's Missionary Society worker in Japan.

Despite the success of her school, Cartmell longed to see more directly evangelistic work among the women of Tokyo. Soon after her arrival, she had begun a Bible class for women. Language was a formidable barrier, and it also proved difficult to gain invitations to Japanese homes. Native workers, Bible women, were needed for the work of evangelization. Cartmell hired first one, then others, and drafted a course of study for their training. Although Cartmell herself could carry out only a limited amount of evangelistic work, her initiative made evangelism among women an important part of the Methodist women's mission.

Cartmell's high level of activity was motivated by a feeling she shared with other missionaries in Japan that this was a moment of unprecedented opportunity. In July 1885, she wrote of what another missionary called "high tide," and went on to say "I am satisfied we have now an opportunity to speed on the work, which will not return to us if allowed to pass unimproved." Missionaries had been welcomed to the country because of Japan's modernization policy, and had established schools. Yet the nation was developing its own system of public schools. Cartmell felt that she needed to take advantage of the present opportunity, and she used all her energies to this end.

To missionaries, and especially to missionary women, the cost

was high. Suddenly transplanted to a culture very different from their own, missionaries were faced with the huge barriers of an unfamiliar culture and a difficult language. For missionary women there was an additional challenge. The independence and initiative required of them in Japan was not only contrary to the role of women in Japanese society, but to women's customary activity in Canadian society as well.

Missionaries far from home were nourished by correspondence. For Cartmell, news from the society's Board of Managers combined with news of family and friends as she received letters from her cousin Elizabeth Strachan, who was also Corresponding Secretary of the group. Despite her busy schedule Cartmell also wrote, for this was one of the expected tasks of a missionary. At first, Strachan copied Cartmell's letters and sent them to the auxiliaries. The society published others in the denominational periodicals, and soon began to print its own monthly collection of letters. This shared information made Martha Cartmell a hero in the eyes of Methodist women at home, and helped gain her the support needed to build and expand the school, and to pay the salaries of Bible women.

Letters to family and close friends were sometimes difficult. In September 1895, Cartmell wrote, "If I could have withheld from you the news of my illness I would have done so. But I feared it would not be right." Very reluctantly she had been forced by increasing ill health to withdraw from the work, and rest. Her letter included a heartfelt plea that those in Canada would not say to her "You have worked too hard", for she believed that she had been careful, and could not bear the guilt of thinking she had brought this on herself. Nor did she wish to be told how much she had accomplished: "Some have tried to comfort me in that way. Their words are like daggers to my heart."

In additions she made before sending her letter, Cartmell reported that she was improving, and she dreamed of resuming her work. No surviving letters indicate the precise nature of her medical condition, but she did not regain sufficient health to return to

her demanding responsibilities. Early in 1887 she submitted her resignation, and that spring she sailed for Canada, to her own sorrow and to the deep regret of those who felt affection for their first foreign missionary.

Interruption and Return

Canada's transcontinental railway had begun carrying passengers about a year before Cartmell's return, so no longer was it necessary for Canadian missionaries to travel across the United States. Cartmell returned by way of British Columbia. In Victoria she learned that the Woman's Missionary Society was considering instituting a rescue home for Chinese prostitutes and "slave-girls" who appeared destined for prostitution, but opinion was far from unanimous. She wrote a strong but delicately phrased appeal which was published in the denominational paper. Cartmell explained, "My heart turns sick at the thought of such plain statements appearing in print from my pen. But what avails modesty that only shudders and weeps." Apparently the women understood her discreet entreaty, and agreed with her sentiments, for at its annual meeting in the fall of 1887 the society decided to open the Chinese Rescue Home.

At home in Hamilton, Cartmell rested, but as soon as her health improved sufficiently, she accepted invitations to speak at meetings of Missionary Society Auxiliaries and the Bands of children and the Circles of girls that the women organized. She was, after all, their hero, their first foreign missionary, laid low by the rigours of the work.

In 1890, Cartmell seemed well enough to return to missionary service in a less difficult setting than Japan. She was sent to Victoria to take up residence in the rescue home that had been founded in part because of her urging. Since her arrival at the end of 1887, Annie Leake, the matron, had been alone there, unable to go out on the simplest errand unless she arranged for someone to

come in. Now Cartmell could sometimes relieve Leake, and could work among the women of Chinatown. Leake wanted a second missionary who knew or could readily learn the Chinese language, but the officers of the Woman's Missionary Society assumed that Cartmell's experience in one Asian culture would stand her in good stead in another, and Leake conceded that Cartmell could "hold the fort" until the ideal worker was found.

In addition to visiting and teaching in Victoria, Cartmell served as a regional agent for the Woman's Missionary Society. From afar the officers had to make important decisions, and they welcomed Cartmell's observations and advice regarding such issues as whether to build a new girls' school at Port Simpson.

Cartmell's heart remained in Japan, and by the summer of 1892 she seemed well enough to return to that country. With her travelled two young Chinese women who had sought the aid of the rescue home; they were now on the first leg of their journey to return to China.

Cartmell did not resume administrative duties at the school she had founded, but worked as an evangelist in Tokyo and Kofu. This lacked the spectacular character of her early endeavours, and trouble was brewing between other Missionary Society women and the men of the General Board, so reports from this period of Cartmell's labour are scanty. In 1896 she returned to Canada once again for health reasons. After two more years' service in Victoria, in 1898 Cartmell resigned with regret from work with the Woman's Missionary Society.

Missionary at Home

Back in Hamilton, Cartmell returned to the home of her cousin Elizabeth Sutherland Strachan. The household was joined by another woman as dedicated to missions as Cartmell and Strachan. This was cousin Elizabeth Williams Ross, now a widow. While living in Montreal, she had become president of the Montreal Branch of the Woman's Missionary Society, and in 1897 she was

elected president of the national society. The house which the cousins shared became a centre of missionary society activity, and a haven for missionaries on furlough. Cartmell travelled, speaking to gain support for the Woman's Missionary Society and to attract talented young women into its service. For a time she also edited the society's column in the denominational paper, the *Christian Guardian.*

She also developed a new, though related, interest. In 1894, the Methodist Church instituted a deaconess order, and women attending the Methodist Training School in Toronto prepared for work as urban missionaries. The subject of supporting a deaconess was brought before the Centenary Ladies' Aid in 1899, and from the start, Cartmell was a strong supporter of the idea. In 1901 she canvassed friends, and reported at a meeting in April that she had already received promises for nearly two hundred of the three hundred dollars required. A deaconess was hired. As more deaconesses came to the city, women of various churches formed a Deaconess Aid Society. Cartmell became its president, resigning in 1905 "on account of failing health". Yet in that society and within her home congregation, she remained active in her support of deaconess work. Her experience with the Woman's Missionary Society had taught her the value of women's work in the community, and of women's power as they banded together to maintain such work.

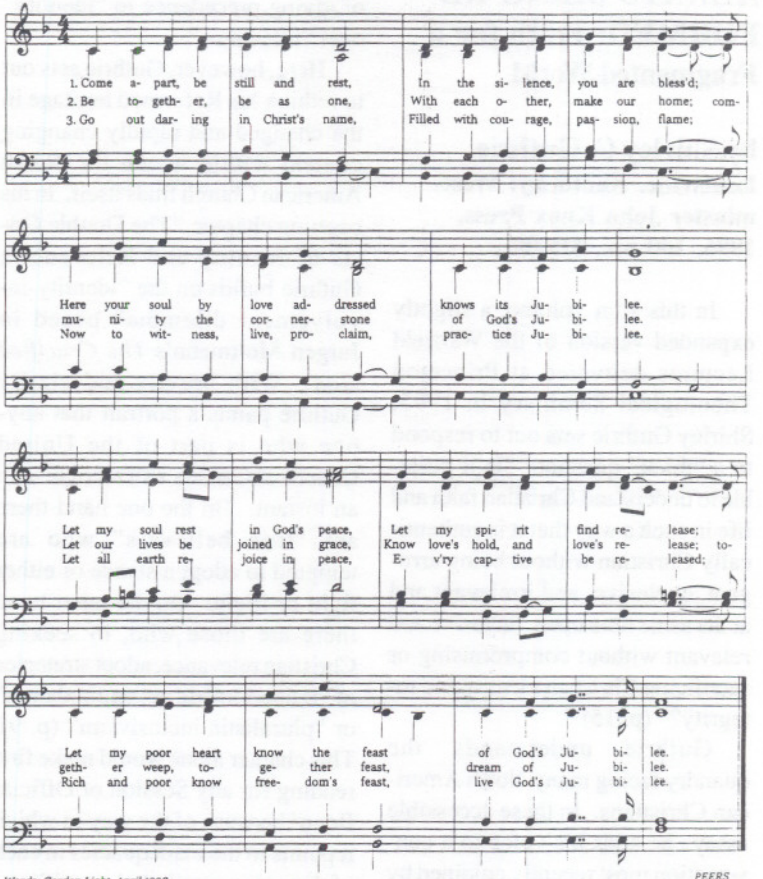
In about 1923, Cartmell wrote, "Old age is a state of mind, more than a bodily condition", but over the next ten years, her body's abilities suffered increasing limitations. In 1933, one of the Japanese Christians with whom she had worked wrote to her, "You say you are nearly blind and deaf, but you are quite well mentally and spiritually. I congratulate you." Like Cartmell, he placed highest value on her mind and spirit.

In 1932, Cartmell attended a meeting in Hamilton to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Woman's Missionary Society. The slender woman "with fluffy white hair moulding a face with a smile that is still volatile" was called upon to speak. She did so "with a clearly thought out message, easily heard to the back of the room."

Neither Ross nor Strachan lived to mark that anniversary. The former died in 1929, the latter in 1931. Cartmell went to live in the home of her niece, Mabel Hardy Pescott and her husband, the Rev. Walter Pescott. Twice Martha Cartmell had been forced to return from her beloved mission field because of frail health, yet she lived to the age of ninety-nine! She died on March 20, 1945. The fearful child on the swaying bridge had followed her call to the other side of the world. Her time there was brief, but she left her mark both through her pioneering work in Japan, and through the inspiration that Methodist women in Canada received from their beloved first missionary, Martha Cartmell.

The United Church of Canada/Victoria University archives contain various records documenting the life of Martha Cartmell, including the Strachan-Cartmell papers. Her missionary reports were published in the CHRISTIAN GUARDIAN, the MISSIONARY OUTLOOK, the MISSIONARY LEAFLET which became the MONTHLY LETTER, and the annual reports of the Woman's Missionary Society.

Jubilee



Words: Gordon Light, April 1998
Music: Gordon Light, April 1998; arr. David Ferguson, June 1998

PEERS
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(1 July 1998)

Reviews

ALWAYS BEING REFORMED: Faith for a Fragmented World

by Shirley C. Guthrie
Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996, 100 pp., $19.00

In this slim volume, a slightly expanded version of the Warfield Lectures delivered at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1995, Shirley Guthrie sets out to respond to a "thick" question: "Is it possible to understand Christian faith and life in such a way that it is authentically Christian without being arrogant, exclusive, and irrelevant and at the same time open, inclusive and relevant without compromising or sacrificing Christian identity and integrity?" (p. 15)

Guthrie understands the quandry facing many North American Christians. In these accessible essays he adds his voice to a conversation most recently enjoined by George Lindbeck and the "Yale School", on the one hand, and David Tracy and the "Chicago School" on the other. The author of the widely used adult study book, *Christian Doctrine*, Guthrie approaches the contemporary debate from strong Reformed roots. He clearly feels at home with that confessional tradition and its heritage of giving precedence to "identity" over "relevance".

Here, however, Guthrie sets out to rethink his Reformed heritage in the changed and rapidly changing context within which the North American Church finds itself. In his opening chapter, "The Double Crisis of Identity and Relevance", Guthrie builds on the "identity-involvement dilemma" posed in Jurgen Moltmann's *The Crucified God*. With brevity and clarity Guthrie paints a portrait that anyone who is part of the United Church of Canada will recognize in an instant. On the one hand there are "true believers" who are tempted to adopt a stance of either fight or flight. On the other hand there are those who, in seeking Christian relevance, adopt strategies of "reductionistic accommodation" or "pluralistic inclusivism" (p. 9). This chapter alone would make fine reading for any Session or Official Board because of the way in which it points to the inadequacies in each of these commonly held positions.

A student of Karl Barth, Guthrie agrees with his famous teacher's statement that: "Dogmatics is the science in which the church, in accordance with the state of its knowledge at different times, takes account of the content of its procla-

mation critically, that is, by the standard of holy scripture and under the guidance of its confessions" (p. 16). With Benjamin Reist, however, Guthrie argues that Barth paid too much heed to the priority of scripture and confession and placed too little emphasis on "the state of the church's knowledge at different times" (the historical-social context). While Barth's fear of preoccupation with context is understable, argues Guthrie, the Reformed tradition's most important contribution to theology is a dogmatics in which scripture, confession and context are all engaged in a balanced conversation.

Guthrie is particularly helpful in his articulation of the Reformed tradition's insistence on crafting new confessions in new times. This "religious relativism of the Reformed tradition" (p. 16) grows, he argues, from asking "in every new time and place what the living God we come to know in scripture is saying and doing *here* and *now*, and what we have to say and do if we are to be faithful and obedient Christians in *our* particular time and place ..." (p. 30). In a chapter entitled "Suffering, Liberation, and the Sovereignty of God" Guthrie calls "the discovery of the suffering love of the suffering triune God... one of the most important discoveries of Trinitarian theology in our time" (p. 58). Then in chapters on "Jesus Christ and the Religions of the World" and "Worldly Spirituality" he outlines a position which seeks to be "(1) authentically and unreservedly Christian and *just for that reason* open to pluralistic conversation and community; and (2) truly relevant *just because* it openly and unapologetically seeks to make a distinctively biblical-Christian contribution to the quest for unity in diversity in our pluralistic church and society." (p. 15).

The strengths of Guthrie's book lie in his ability to speak with such clarity and brevity. Alas, it is the brevity which is also the book's weakness. The reader is left eager for more, full of questions, curious about just where this position will lead the Church that Guthrie is so obviously committed to. Nonetheless, his lifetime of teaching is here brought to bear on the central theological question facing mainline Protestantism in North America. The result is a slim volume with thick content, and the promise of lively and balanced theological conversation for any community which opens its covers.

— Edwin Searcy

REMEMBERED VOICES: RECLAIMING THE LEGACY OF "NEO-ORTHODOXY"

By Douglas John Hall
Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1998 x+166 pp.
$27.95

In this attractive and accessibly written book, Douglas Hall surveys the thought of seven neo-orthodox theologians: Barth, Tillich, the Niebuhr brothers, Bonhöffer, Brunner, and Suzanne de Dietrich. Hall argues that their thought remains highly relevant, and too often is known only in slogans or caricatures. Each chapter examines one of the above, and traces a theme relevant for the Church today.

In Barth, Hall finds an acceptance of the end of Christendom; the Church must now think and live out of its own tradition, without the recognition it once received as an accepted part of society, and without the captivity this entailed as well. In Tillich, he sees a quest to understand reality as a whole, a quest that is necessary for responsible discipleship, and that theologians may be tempted for forgo if they become academic specialists. In Reinhold Niebuhr, he finds a repudiation of North American optimism and faith in progress; in Bonhöffer, a new sense of faith as commitment to social responsibility. In Brunner, he finds an understanding of truth as encounter; in Richard Niebuhr a christology that transcends the shortcomings of liberalism and rigid orthodoxy; in Suzanne de Dietrich a sense of the need for all members of the Church to be biblically literate.

Hall argues that each thinker was forced to retrieve and reconstruct classical doctrines of sin and grace as the basis for a radical and prophetic critique of Church and society in their day. Each was in dialogue with experience in the present, but drew deeply and creatively upon the theological heritage of the past. In this they present a model of how to do theology for the Church today. Hall also makes the point that for all their differences, all stood in the tradition of the *theologia crucis*, and criticized liberal and orthodox versions of the theology of glory. This is a significant insight. It raises interesting questions regarding theological developments that have occurred since then. For instance, David Tracy presented his attempt to move beyond Tillich's method of correlation as a legitimate demand for a more thorough-going rationality in theology. But might it in some ways represent a relapse into a sophisticated theology of glory?

This thought-provoking book

stands on its own. It could also function as an introduction to these thinkers from the Church's recent past for those who as yet have only heard of them. No one will agree with all of Hall analyses of these people, or his estimate of their relevance for the present. But anyone turning to this book is likely to find Hall's interest in them stimulating, informative and infectious.

— Don Schweitzer

TENDING THE HEART OF VIRTUE: How Classic Stories Waken a Child's Moral Imagination

by Vigen Guroian New York: Oxford University Press, 1998, 198 pp.

When I became a grandmother, one of the activities I looked forward to was reading stories to my grandchildren. I decided early on that I would look for and buy Bible story books. After all, if one is going to read something to children, it may as well be worthwhile, and I have been pleased with the selection of books that re-tell Bible stories in a simple, attractive way. While browsing in bookstores, both secular and religious, however, I have also found a whole other genre of children's literature that I scarcely knew existed. I don't know the term used in the world of booksellers, but I think of these books as "Pop-Psych for Kids". I'm sure you have seen them; "My Baby Sister Died"; "Why Mommy and Daddy Don't Live Together Any More"; "Granny's Gone to a Nursing Home". They certainly reflect the issues which children are facing these days, and some are written with both sensitivity and skill, but all in all I find them terribly earnest and not very entertaining. And I wonder if children feel the same way. I was therefore very interested to be given a copy to review of the book by Vigen Guroian.

Like the children's self-help books, I found this one also to be terribly earnest, and not very entertainng. The author makes his case thoroughly, but without much passion. Nevertheless, what he has to say is worth our consideration. As the title indicates, Guroian believes that many of the classic stories that have been read to children, whether written to educate or to entertain, have the effect of awakening the more imagination. He writes:

> Fairy tales and fantasy stories transport the reader into *other worlds*, to navigate his (sic) way through them, and to imagine himself in the place of the heroes and heroine who populate these worlds. (p.26)

Hie claims that through readings or hearing the classic stories that children will begin to learn to distinguish between good and evil, to learn to love, and to develop virtues that no amount of memorized rules and regulations could accomplish.

Guroian warns, however, that it is only authentic classic tales that can accomplish this end, and not the sanitized version offered up by the Disney studios. As an example, he devotes a chapter to comparing the original Pinocchio story to the animated movie version. Where Disney portrays Pinocchio's becoming a real boy as a kind of magic, Carlo Collodi's original take makes it clear that forgiveness is the transforming gift. The blue-haired fairy, in the original, is more angel than will o' the wisp. Over and over Collodi's Pinocchio learns moral lessons, and it is this learning that leads to repentance and makes him a real boy. There is not much grace in this interpretation; forgiveness is earned by trying hard; nevertheless I think Guroian makes his case that the classic stories have more to offer than what is most commonly given to our children.

In comparing the original of *The Little Mermaid* to the Disney version, Guroian again demonstrates that Anderson's use of allegory to teach about love and immortality is reduced to a cute summer romance. Having never been a Disney fan, I enjoyed the way the author articulates in such detail why the stories and movies, which are supposedly good and wholesome for children, are so cloying, with about as much substance as cotton candy.

The book continues with fine examples of the stories that illustrate such themes as friendship, evil and redemption, faith and courage. The instances given in the body of the work, as well as the bibliographic essay at the conclusion, provide us with a solid reading list for children's literature. Many of the classic tales were remembered favourites from my childhood, read to me by my mother, without comment or analysis. For us adults now, the analysis can help to assess books and movies for children, and help us to pick our way through the vast array of what is available.

Although fairly brief, Guroian's pedantic writing style makes this book slow to read. Nevertheless, he makes a useful contribution to the field of children's education and nurture.

— Rose Ferries

STORIES IN MY NEIGHBOUR'S FAITH: Narratives from World Religions in Canada

Edited by Susan L Scott. Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 1999, 184pp. $18.95.

In his current bestseller *Becoming Human*, Jean Vanier suggests that stories have a strange power of attraction. When we tell stories we touch hearts. When we speak about ideas the mind may assimilate but the heart remains untouched. Stories link the mind and heart in ways that penetrate barriers, opening windows to new awareness. It is risky to tell stories because this forces self-disclosure and often results in personal change. Stories help people locate what is meaningful in their own and in other's spiritual traditions.

Susan L. Scott participated in a United Church "neighbour's faith" project, and this book is the result. She allows us to meet faithful people representing twenty different religious traditions. From experience Scott has learned that the sharing of narratives between persons holding varied belief systems can become the first step to interfaith dialogue. Those committed to the sharing of the Good News, but who have reservations about proselytising in a doctrinaire fashion, will find this book a creative model and helpful resource.

The narrators in this collection represent American and African indigenous religions: Jew, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Taoists, Sikhs, Parsis, Baha'i, Earth-based Naturalists, Universalist/Unitarian, Evangelical Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox Christians. All stories are told from a modern Canadian perspective. They range in scope from a recovery of First Nation legends to a translation of powerful mythology originating elsewhere but contextualized in a new host community.

As might be expected, there is an unevenness between the narratives. Some authors are more adept at storytelling than others. Rather than homogenizing them, Scott highlights each contributor's strengths and the special gifts offered — be they oral, scholarly, or poetic. Some of the traditions represented are ancient while some are of more recent vintage. The reader is left to select what is most subjectively appealing. I was attracted to

"The Gift: Growing Up Mennonite" (Penner), "The Snake and the Stone" (Oji-Cree, Morrison), "Every Person Has a Story" (Jewish, Rappaport), and "Shannon's Song" (Muslim, Hassain), but there are lessons to be gained from each selection.

"Stories invited us beyond dialogue to relationship", says Scott. Exchanging stories of personal meaning with others, across cultures and spiritualities, helps us get to the heart of where we live our faith and grow in the knowledge of the truth.

— Wayne A Holst