

Winter 2006

Reflections

Y A L E D I V I N I T Y S C H O O L

THE FUTURE OF THE PROPHETIC VOICE

William Sloane Coffin, Jr. '56 BD

(June 1, 1924–April 12, 2006)

A Tribute



Lord, keep us from being so cloistered that we become educated to close our eyes to the need about us, or come to think that the learned are excused from the human struggle.

Help us to know that human wants are not finally met only by agencies, national programs or impersonal public good will. Rather, may our knowledge in every field make us more aware of the responsibility of those with special privilege to alleviate tragedy and to express compassion whenever necessary.

Help us to be sensitive to those moments, as well, when we may herald celebration and joy. Yet too often, O God, we cast aside thy Word to meet violence with violence or cowardice.

Help us to live a way of love in this age, between war and appeasement, lest our spirits perish. May all our learning serve the holy purpose of the achievement of peace in Thee.

—Reverend Dr. Samuel Slie

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All correspondence regarding Reflections should be addressed to Jamie Manson at the School's address or at jamie.manson@yale.edu. We welcome your responses to the material contained in this magazine, particularly those written in the form of a letter to the editor.

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THE FUTURE OF THE PROPHETIC VOICE

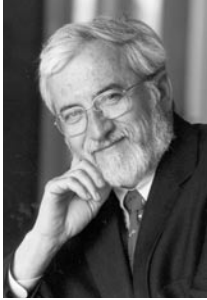
William Sloane Coffin, Jr. '56 BD

(June 1, 1924–April 12, 2006)

A Tribute



From the Dean's Desk



Harold W. Attridge

Dean of Yale University
Divinity School & Lillian
Claus Professor of New
Testament

As this issue of *Reflections* goes to press two exhibits grace the campus of YDS. On the interior walls hang pictures from Iraq, taken by “unembedded” photo-journalists showing scenes of strife and human suffering. On the Quad stand ranks of military boots and civilian shoes, part of the traveling exhibit “Eyes Open,” another graphic representation of the agony of our current involvement in the Middle East. Both exhibits remind me of the kinds of dramatic demonstrations that prophets such as Ezekiel made in order to proclaim the “Word of the Lord.” They remind us as a community of one of the roles for which our graduates prepare.

In the spring of this year we mourned the passing of an exemplary prophetic voice, well known at Yale and in the wider world. William Sloane Coffin, Jr., whose ministry at the University combined the pastoral and the prophetic in extraordinary ways, was until his death a vigorous voice calling out our best efforts to be responsive to a God of justice and mercy. At a celebration of his life and ministry here at Yale held in April 2005, he rose one last time to challenge his friends and admirers to resist violence in its most threatening forms, particularly in the form of nuclear weapons. That same event marked the endowment of a scholarship in Bill’s honor, which is awarded to incoming YDS students who demonstrate his prophetic leadership, his passion for justice, and his critical theological interpretations of the contemporary social and political scene. Our first Coffin scholar, Ms. Rahiel Tesfamariam, who spent her early childhood in war-torn Eritrea, began her

studies with us this autumn. Bill’s life and ministry, at Yale and at Riverside Church in New York City, will continue to inspire students of divinity preparing for service in the world of the twenty-first century.

How to shape and cultivate an effective and responsible prophetic voice remains a challenge. Opening our eyes to see the challenges of the contemporary world, as the exhibit on the Quad challenges us to do, is certainly a necessary condition. Being ready to speak truth to power, as Bill so often did, is an essential part of the equation, but there is certainly more. Our faculty, alumni, and friends writing in this issue of *Reflections* explore the dimensions of what constitutes prophetic ministry today, from what we say in the pulpit, to how we work in the community, from how we construe the heritage of biblical prophecy to how prophets can lead the way in reconciling the deepest divisions in our world.

It hardly needs saying that the church and the country need prophets today. We hope that this issue of *Reflections* will help us all to think about what that calling entails.



Harold W. Attridge
Dean

Contents

<i>From the Dean's Desk</i>	2
<i>Letters to the Editor</i>	4
<i>Remembering Bill Coffin</i> —Bill Moyers	6
<i>Voiced in Paradox: Prophecy and the Contemporary Church</i> —Carolyn J. Sharp 94'MDiv, '00PhD	10
<i>Everydayness</i> —Emilie Townes	14
<i>"Put Your Finger Here...": The Prophetic Nature of Reconciliation</i> —Roberto S. Goizueta '76BA	20
<i>Prophets Then, Prophets Now: An Interview with Joan Chittister and Richard Rohr</i> —Jamie L. Manson '02MDiv	26
<i>For the Love of It All</i> —Noel Paul Stookey	32
<i>In Memory of Bill Coffin</i> —Marian Wright Edelman, '63LLB	34
<i>The Prophetic Role of the African American Churches in the 21st Century</i> —James H. Evans, Jr. '75MDiv	36
<i>Speaking Truth in Love: Strategies for Prophetic Preaching</i> —Leonora Tubbs Tisdale	38
<i>Review—Brain and Culture: Neurobiology, Ideology, and Social Change</i> —Bandy Lee '94MD, '95MDiv	44
<i>An Indispensable Upstream Word: The Gift of Prophecy</i> —Walter Brueggemann	46
<i>William Sloane Coffin, Jr.</i> —James Carroll	50
<i>From the Archives: The Prophetic Ministry of Henry H. Proctor</i> —Moses N. Moore '77MDiv and Yolanda Y. Smith	52
<i>Articulating a Christian Left: A Review of Getting on Message: Challenging the Christian Right from the Heart of the Gospel</i> —Harlon Dalton '73JD	58
<i>Obedient Servant</i> —Noel Paul Stookey	60
<i>The Return of a Prophetic Voice Among American Evangelicals</i> —Harvey Cox '55BD	62
<i>Common Existence: A Review of Good Catholic Girls: How Women Are Leading the Fight to Change the Church</i> —Christiana Peppard '05M.Div.	66
<i>Visions for the New Church</i> —Edwina Gately	70
<i>From the Editor</i>	76

Dear Editor:

The current issue of *Reflections* is superb. It has been stimulating to me and has proved to be enlightening—in a dark time in a field without much light or much wisdom.

*Shalom,
Reverend William Anthony '45BD
Cambridge, MA*

Dear Editor:

I wish to thank you for forwarding the Divinity School's recent pornographic journal. My nine-year-old son, who collects the mail, was particularly keen to discuss the pictures on pages 13 and 35.

I had been wondering, but I guess the sellout is complete.

*Faithfully,
Reverend Paul Hartt '95 M.Div
Albanyville, NY*

Dear Editor:

Arguably, YDS has produced a work of soft-core pornography in its Spring 2006 edition of *Reflections*!

The artwork, from the grab-able buttocks on the front cover to the vulvaesque bouquet on the back cover, hovers between Audrey Beardsley and Georgia O'Keefe, as if Duchamp and Pearlstein had never lived; its nudes pulse with the passion of the air brush, like the old "Petty girls"—see p. 35, all pout and nipple—see p. 51.

The text reflects the images. Most of the essays try to resolve structural and procedural issues of ecclesiastical polity and order as if they were ethical issues of fair play: the reticence of the Anglican community, for example, to consecrate bishops that, to them, practice sodomy, is called an "obsession." The arrangements by which a membership organization governs itself are conflated with Constitutional limitations applicable to public bodies.

Personally, I see no reason why homosexual men and women should not be General Presbyters, presiding bishops or, for that matter, Supreme pontiffs. Sexual practices are not, for me, markers for church governance. But my views are not generalizable, and decent people feel differently. Post-structural post-modernism will, I know, subside, as biblical fundamentalism is in the process of subsiding, but for

now, it seems as slick as the artwork to say that these are "spiritual" issues, rather than governance, warm, moist feelings, not discipline.

The heart of the problem is the proposition that churches, temples, mosques, congregations and assemblies are divine projects and not simply social arrangements. The argument is made that if God made all forms of human sexuality, "His" church should encourage all sexual practices among its leadership. Alas, that is just what has been going on in the Roman Catholic Church, the hegemony of the pederast.

For many of the essayists it comes down to Jesus. Do I hear snickers about "the disciple He loved best?" But that's all nonsense: as Tillich taught, Jesus is a picture, just as Ivan Karamozov is a picture. In short, if the application of any version of the metaphysical in theology is applied to forms of social control, the result is sophistry, which is a literary version of pornography.

*Respectfully submitted,
Theodore S. Meth '47Div
Princeton, NJ*

Dear Editor:

Once again you and your contributors have hit a proverbial "ten strike" with the spring, 2006 edition of *Reflections*, "Sex and the Church." The range of topics (refreshingly not limited to gay/lesbian issues as they relate to the ordained), the diversity of the academic and pastoral perspectives from which the various writers see and enlighten their subjects, and the careful, calm reasoning applied to these usually divisive issues makes every page a truly invaluable and pragmatic fit to the Churches.

Framed by the insightful editorial comments so precisely expressed by Ms. Manson and Dean Attridge and meaningfully punctuated by the image of Tamara de Lempicka, which in my personal opinion exemplify a high benchmark of achievement in the realm of figurative art, I would hazard to say that this latest collection of superb essays from Y.D.S. faculty and alumni will have set a new standard in the current and greatly appreciated incarnation of this journal.

What strikes me most about every aspect of this edition of *Reflections* is its

amazing balance in tone and content as it bridges that usually evasive chasm which so often separates academic seriousness and popular comprehensibility. I only hope that such a precious contribution is received and digested by the various forms of Christianity that exist in this country and across the globe—finally, a fire with more light than smoke!

In the final analysis (exemplified by the astute placement of Michael Bernard Kelly's piece as the "parting impression") I came away from the experience of reading and receiving this latest gift from YDS with a much needed rebuttal to the charge that the supposedly dying mainline, "liberal" denominations (of which I am certainly a convicted member) are overly obsessed with issues of human sexuality at the expense of some sort of disembodied, not to mention absurdly pristinized, sense of mission. The simplistic and limiting category of "either/or" clearly does not apply here. Rather, in honestly and boldly facing these crucial human themes we in the Churches can actually do mission rather than avoid it. Thank God you destroyed, at least for this member of the faithful, yet another false and completely unrealistic duality that is so often presented as an oppressive and unquestioned fact.

May God bless you as you continue your marvelous work.

*Sincerely,
Reverend Michael J. Roeske '00 MDiv.
Palm Springs, CA*

Dear Editor:

Thank you for ... the Spring 2006 issue of *Reflections*. From Daniel Helminiak's opening article to Michael Kelly's appraisal of Sister Jeannine Gramick's ministry, the writing is bold, well-informed and provocative, and I am not surprised to learn that you've received many requests for additional copies. Perhaps most interesting to me was the "church-ly" nature of so much of the writing, as the authors grapple with pastoral practice and ecclesial polity alongside their explorations of identity, spirituality and power. Please convey my congratulations to Jamie Manson, along with my thanks, for her skillful assembly of this successful issue.

*Sincerely,
Michael Gilligan
Henry Luce Foundation*

Dear Editor:

I am an older, experienced Episcopal priest, serving as Vicar for a reasonably well educated small congregation in a close-in suburb of Buffalo. A number of the members here are eager to probe the sexually oriented debates and tension within our denomination, and have managed to assimilate a fairly broad reportage on the subject, and still keep their inner dialogue and shared conversation going with energy, eagerness, and hope. The material presented so beautifully in the Spring issues of *Reflections* seems to offer the opportunity to deepen, rather than broaden, their continuing search.

*Faithfully and Thankfully yours,
Reverend John A. Russell '59BD
Cheektowaga, NY*

Dear Editor:

The articles in the Spring 2006 *Reflections* just arrived, and I found the articles on the church's hang-ups with regard to sex both interesting and right on. Equally interesting, but curious: nine pictures of female frontal nudity are included, but only one modest cover picture of the backside of a nice looking male. Does the Editor have hangups that prevent her/him giving us pictures of the frontside of attractive males? Or is there some obscure YDS policy that says of female front-sides that Lo, they are good, but male front-sides are an abomination to the Lord?

*Wayne Brice '62 Div
Fort Worth, TX*

Dear Editor:

Thank you for this edition of *Reflections*. I carefully read all the articles in it and learned some things from all of them. I liked the first article best – “Sex as a Spiritual Exercise.” About five years ago I read a book entitled *Why God Won't Go Away*. It is a study of mystical experiences and two neuroscientists and they discovered that mystical experiences in all religious traditions deactivate the two areas of the brain that relate us to time and location/space. This gives the experience of being united with all things in all of time, a mystical experience. I don't think that this is mentioned in the Helminiak article, but a mystical sexuality that is mystical does this. In

fact, as noted, sex is so powerful because it dislodges us from the on-going connections of daily life – space, time, restraints, responsibilities, etc. Sex will produce mystical experiences about as readily as public worship does – not often.

Twenty some years ago I wrote a paper on sexual relations and I came to the conclusion that sex is not really an end in itself but a means to an end – relationship with another person. I follow Tillich's thought, and also that of others, that a thing, including sex, is moral if it enhances the lives involved and doesn't denigrate them or the community.

*Richard Stazesky '52BD
Hockessin, DE*

Dear Editor:

I am a 1983 graduate of Yale Divinity School/Berkeley currently serving an Episcopal Church in Fort Smith, Arkansas. The human sexuality debates within our church are, of course, a matter of deep struggle and personal concern, both within our congregation and for me as a priest and a member of the Church.

In that context, I am writing to express my complete and deep disappointment with the recent *Reflections*. It struck me as little more than a self-serving, often belligerent, assertion of “progressive” ideologies with little in the way of genuine self-examination or self-criticism. I believe it is of almost no value as a contribution to the current debate within the church. I would have expected better from Yale Divinity School.

The mainline churches have all wagered their futures in an effort to respond with dignity and humanity to those people who, in the wake of thirty years of unchecked expressive-experiential utilitarianism (Bellah), have come seeking the life and blessing of the Christian community. The churches have struggled to do that while still honoring the deep questions and concerns of those who stand within the tradition. The depth of my frustration and disappointment with your number is called forth by what that struggle has asked of me and my church, as you do it little honor.

*The Rev. Jeffrey F. Champlin '83M.Div.
Fort Smith, AR*

Dear Editor:

I have just finished the current copy of “Reflections” and it is a remarkable read. I am taking Margaret Farley's sexual ethics seminar and from the perspectives gained in that class I appreciate especially how timely, balanced, fair and informative this issue is. I hope everyone reads it cover to cover. I am proud to be a member of an institution that speaks up like that.

*Grace and peace,
Judy Holding
Darien, CT*

Dear Editor:

I received the latest issue of *Reflections* in the mail yesterday and already have had an opportunity to read a few articles. I must say that I am rapidly coming to the conclusion that this is one of the best issues of the magazine ever! Its articles are timely, informative, stimulating and thoughtful.

*Sincerely,
David Viggiani '91MAR
Canandaigua, NY*

Dear Editor:

I'd like to take this opportunity to commend and thank you for the Spring 2006 edition of *Reflections*. I received my copy in the mail yesterday, at first I skimmed it--joyously!--reading small sections from every article before I started reading from the beginning in earnest. I called to see about ordering more copies to send to friends and associates who will want to read it as well. The breadth and scope of the articles is truly impressive and I am grateful beyond words that you and the Divinity School had the courage to address this issue in all of its complexities. I sincerely believe that this journal has taken the debate on these issues to a new and higher level (long overdue), and that those who might argue that there is a lack of balance will have great difficulty demonstrating any evidence of that.

Congratulations and thank you once again.

*Sincerely,
Armand M. Belmonte
Waterbury, CT, '91MAR*

Remembering Bill Coffin

Bill Moyers

There are so many of you out there who should be up here instead of me. You rode with Bill through the Deep South chasing Jim Crow from long impregnable barriers imposed on freedom. You rose with Bill against the Vietnam War, were arrested with him, shared jail with him, and at night in your cells joined in singing the Hallelujah Chorus with him. You rallied with him against the horrors of nuclear weapons.

You sang with him, laughed with him, drank with him, prayed with him, grieved with him, worshipped and wept with him. Even at this moment when your hearts are breaking at the loss of him, you must be comforted by the balm of those memories. I envy your lifelong membership in his beloved community, and I am honored that Randy, his wife, asked me to speak today about the Bill Coffin I knew.

I saw little of him personally until late in his life. We met once in the early '60s when he was an adviser to the Peace Corps, which I had helped to organize and run. He spoke to the staff, inspired us to think of what we were doing as the moral equivalent of war, and told us the story of how as a young captain in the infantry, following military orders at the end of World War II, he had been charged with sending back to the Soviet Union thousands of Russian refugees made prisoners by the Germans. Some of them he had deceived into boarding trains that carried them home to sure death at the hands of Stalin. That burden of guilt sat heavily on Bill's heart for the rest of his life. He wrote about it in his autobiography, and raised it forty years later when we met in the waiting room of the television studio where I was about to interview him. That's the moment we bonded, two old men by now, sharing our grief that both, in different ways, had once confused duty with loyalty, and confessing to each other our gratitude that we had lived long enough to atone—somewhat. "Well," said Bill, "we needed a lot of time. We had a lot to atone for."

I had called him for the interview after learning the doctors had told him his time was now running out. When he came down from Vermont to the studio here in New York, I greeted him with the question, "How you doing?" He threw back his head, his eyes flashed, and with that slurred (from a stroke) but still vibrant voice, he answered: "Well, I am praying the prayer of St. Augustine: Give me chastity and self-restraint....but not yet."

He taught me more about being a Christian than I learned at seminary.

His witness taught me—he preached what he practiced. But his writings taught me, too: *Once to Every Man, Living the Truth in a World of Illusion, The Heart Is a Little to the Left, Credo, Letters to a Young Doubter*, and, of course, that unforgettable eulogy to his drowned son, Alex, when he called on us to "improve the quality of our suffering." During my interview with him on PBS, I asked him how he had summoned the strength for so powerful a message of suffering and love. He said, "Well, we all do what we know how to do. I went right away to the piano. And I played all the hymns. And I wept and I wept, and I read the poems, like A. E. Houseman—'To an Athlete Dying Young.' Then I realized the folks in Riverside Church had to know whether or not they still had a pastor. So I wrote the sermon. I wanted them to know."

They knew, Bill, they knew.

This will surprise some of you: Not too long ago Bill told Terry Gross that he would rather not be



known as a social activist. The happiest moments of my life, he said, were less in social activism than in the intimate settings of the pastor's calling – "the moments when you're doing marriage counseling...or baptizing a baby...or accompanying people who have suffered loss – the moments when people tend to be most human – when they are most vulnerable."

So he had the pastor's heart but he heeded the prophet's calling. There burned in his soul a sacred rage – that volatile mix of grief and anger and love that produced what his friend, the artist and writer Robert Shetterly, described as "a holy flame." During my interview with him he said, "When you see uncaring people in high places, everybody should be mad as hell." If you lessen your anger at the structures of power, he said, you lower your love for the victims of power.

I once heard Lyndon Johnson urge Martin Luther King to hold off on his marching in the South to give the President time to neutralize the old guard in Congress and create a consensus for finally ending institutionalized racism in America. Martin Luther King listened, and then he answered (I paraphrase): "Mr. President, the gods of the South will never be appeased. They will never have a change of heart. They will never repent of their sins and come to the altar seeking forgiveness. The time has passed for consensus, the time has come to break the grip of history and change the course of America." When the discussion was over, Dr. King had carried the day. The President of the United States put a long arm on his shoulder and said, "Martin, you go on out there now and make it possible for me to do the right thing." Lyndon Johnson had seen the light: For him to do the right thing someone had to subpoena the conscience of America and send it marching from the ground up against the citadels of power and privilege.

Like Martin Luther King, Bill Coffin also knew the heart of power is hard; knew it arranged the rules for its own advantage, knew that before justice could roll down like water and righteousness like a flowing river, the dam of oppression, deception, and corruption had first to be broken, cracked open by the moral power of people aroused to demand that the right thing be done. "In times of oppression," he said, "if you don't translate choices of faith into political choices, you run the danger of washing your hands, like Pilate." So he aimed his indignation at root causes. "Many of us are eager to respond to injustice," he said, "without having to confront the causes of it...and that's why so many business and

governmental leaders today are promoting charity. It is desperately needed in an economy whose prosperity is based on growing inequality. First these leaders proclaim themselves experts on matters economic, and prove it by taking the most out of the economy. Then they promote charity as if it were the work of the church, finally telling troubled clergy to shut up and bless the economy as once we blessed the battleship."

When he came down from Vermont two years ago for that final interview, we talked about how democracy had reached a fork in the road – what Tony Kushner calls one of those moments in history when the fabric of everyday life unravels and there is this unstable dynamism that allows for incredible change in a short period of time – when people and the world they are living in can be utterly transformed for good or bad.

Take one fork and the road leads to an America where military power serves empire rather than freedom; where we lose from within what we are trying to defend from without; where fundamentalism and the state scheme to write the rules and regulations; where true believers in the gods of the market turn the law of the jungle into the law of the land; where in the name of patriotism we keep our hand over our heart pledging allegiance to the flag while our leaders pick our pockets and plunder our trust; where elites insulate themselves from the consequences of their own actions; where "the strong take what they can, and the weak suffer what they must."

Take the other fork and the road leads to the America whose promise is "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" for all. Bill Coffin spent his life pointing us down that road in that direction. There is nothing utopian about it, Bill said; he was an idealist but he was not an ideologue. He said in our interview that we have to keep pressing the socialist questions because they are the questions of justice, but we must be dubious about the socialist answers because, while Amos may call for justice to roll down as waters, figuring out the irrigation system is damned hard!

He believed in democracy. There is no simpler way to put it. He believed democracy was the only way to ensure that the rewards of a free society would be shared with everyone, and not just elites at the top. That last time we talked he told me how much he had liked the story he had heard Joseph Campbell tell me in our series on "The Power of Myth" – the story of the fellow who turns the corner and sees a brawl in the middle of the block. He runs

right for it, shouting: "Is this a private fight, or can anyone get in it?"

Bill saw democracy as everyone's fight. He'd be in the middle of the fork in the road right now, his coat off, his sleeves rolled up, and his hand raised — pointing us to the action. And his message would be the same today as then: "Sign up, jump in, fight on."

Someone sidled up to me the other night at another gathering where Bill's death was discussed. This person said, "He was no saint, you know." I wanted to answer: "You're kidding?" We knew, all right. Saints flourish in a mythic world. Bill Coffin flourished here, in the cracked common clay of an earthly and earthy life. He liked it here. Even as he was trying to cooperate gracefully with the inevitability of death, he was also coaching Paul Newman to play the preacher in the film version of Marilyn Robinson's novel *Gilead*. He enjoyed nothing more than wine and song at his home with Randy and friends. And he never lost his conviction that a better world is possible if we fight hard enough. At a dinner in his honor in Washington he had reminded us that "the world is too dangerous for anything but truth and too small for anything but love." But as we left he winked at me and said, "Give 'em hell."

Faith, he once said, "is being seized by love." Seized he was, in everlasting arms. "You know," he told me in that interview, "I lost a son. And people will say, 'Well, when you die, Bill, Alex will come forth and bring you through the pearly gates.' Well, that's a nice thought, and I welcome it. But I don't need to believe that. All I need to know is, God will be there. And our lives go from God, in God, to God again. Hallelujah, you know? That should be enough."

Well, he's there now. But we are still here. I hear his voice in my heart: "Don't tarry long in mourning. Organize."

The above remarks were delivered by Bill Moyers at the funeral service for William Sloane Coffin, Jr., on Thursday, April 20, 2006, at Riverside Memorial Church in New York City.

Bill Moyers is a journalist and commentator who has spent the past forty years producing hundreds of hours of television interviews for various series broadcast primarily on PBS. Over the years Moyers earned more than thirty Emmy awards, ten Peabody awards, and nearly every other television journalism prize for his work.

On a Saturday morning last October, Rev. Tim Ahrens encountered a quote by televangelist Rod Parsley, the leader of a conservative Ohio megachurch that jolted Ahrens. The day before, Parsley had launched the Reformation Ohio movement, aiming to register 400,000 voters and bring a quarter of them to Jesus. "I'm reading the paper," Ahrens recalls, "and come across where Parsley says, 'We are locking, loading, and firing on Ohio.' I almost spat out my coffee. This was the crack in my liberty bell."

Ahrens, who describes himself as "the most excitable person in Columbus," went into high gear, e-mailing his friends, sharing his outrage. He called a meeting in the parish hall of his Columbus church, the First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, and gathered 50 like-minded pastors. "It is amazing how coming together like this has people finding their voice," says Ahrens, 48. "It's not my voice. These are the voices of scripture."

Those voices are now one loosely organized organization called We Believe Ohio that spans the state and includes over 400 pastors, rabbis, imams, and other religious leaders. Ahrens credits the group with energizing and emboldening pastors statewide to object to the use of scripture to promote a conservative political agenda, an agenda that in the near term was aimed at electing Ohio Republican Ken Blackwell as governor (Blackwell was unsuccessful in his bid).

Taking a stand isn't easy for some pastors who, as a result, have lost members and, in the case of one junior clergyman, have been banned in their own churches from preaching on certain subjects. Still, says Ahrens, "They all feel like they did the right thing." And, six months into its formal start, the group is gaining traction, not only garnering much local and some national press, but also unnerving those in Parsley's movement. "We start appearing with [people from Reformation Ohio] on stage and they don't know what to do with us," says Ahrens. "They'd written off mainline churches as so secular as to not matter anymore, as dead. What really unsettles them is that we preach the gospel."

Despite—or because of—the success of We Believe Ohio, Ahrens is deeply wary that the group will be too closely identified with individual clergy or a political agenda, or find itself co-opted by politicians. He is keenly aware of the temptations of being seduced by power, of slavishly serving media needs for shrill voices. "You talk about Falwell becoming a caricature of himself," says Ahrens. "I think Jesse [Jackson] has become that, too." That's why Ahrens has removed himself from a formal leadership position in We Believe Ohio and relentlessly sounds the message that the movement is about serving the poor, not taking power. "If a movement is to succeed, it has to continue to return to the poor," says Ahrens. "The Old Testament prophets stopped being prophets when they got too close to the king."

This wisdom of the wizened activist comes from over twenty years of experience, beginning in the mid-1980s while a student at Yale Divinity School and traveling to Groton, Connecticut, to protest the launch of a new submarine, the *Corpus Christi*. It also comes from sporadic but intense contact with William Sloane Coffin, Jr., who Ahrens first met while at Yale. "My roommate used to babysit the Coffin kids. I came into our apartment one day on Mansfield Street and there was Bill Coffin. Whoa!" Ahrens recalls that Coffin's periodic guidance was key to honing his sense of purpose. "If there is a theme in my life, it is that God calls us to justice. In God's reign, justice is the order of things set right. God's Justice is the light for my path and guides my walk with Christ."

Voiced in Paradox: Prophecy and the Contemporary Church

Carolyn J. Sharp

The legacy of ancient Israelite prophecy has been robustly appropriated in traditions of Christian social justice. There may be no more iconic representation of the prophetic voice than the resonant cadences of Martin Luther King, Jr., exhorting his audience to persevere in the face of entrenched White racism until “justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream” (Amos 5:24).¹

Prophecy in this register is an act of witness: speaking truth to power, as William Sloane Coffin has said.² The prophet may offer challenges about the misuse of political influence, as did the savvy court prophet Nathan when he entrapped King David through the heartrending story of the little ewe lamb (2 Samuel 12). Or the prophet may decry economic exploitation perpetrated by the rich, as did the brilliant ironist Amos in his invective against the sense of privilege that had become narcotic for the elite of eighth-century Israel.

But prophecy in Scripture offers more than a comfortable model for the uncompromising indictment of others. The biblical prophetic books testify in complex ways to God’s truth for living communities. Further, the appropriation of biblical prophecy by Christian believers must be seasoned by the recognition that all have fallen short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23) and that we dare not judge others (Matt 7:1-5, Luke 6:41-42). Honoring our Creator’s redemptive purpose requires that we speak the truth in love (Eph 4:15). Jesus’ teaching invites us to inhabit a mature prophetic praxis that is grounded – always, seventy times seven! – in forgiveness.

We would do well to consider the nature of our contemporary cultural moment, which many have named postmodern. Technologies of globalization have created a world with porous boundaries and infinite possibilities for those with economic wealth and political capital to promote their own ideologies, for good or ill. Living communities today are geographically expansive, highly culturally

fluid, and as diverse as Internet access and transnational travel will allow. Because communities are dynamic, hybridized webs of relationships in a process of constant redefinition, no single story of origins or identity will suffice any longer, whether for a single individual or for a community. Some lament the postmodern turn. But others of us understand the fluidity of contemporary identity as liberating, a heady freedom from coercive metanarratives that never truly welcomed us to begin with.

The Church dares take little for granted these days. Many in the pews on Sunday are believers relatively new to the faith or formed in another tradition. The average age of M.Div. students is getting younger across the country; incoming students may have had little background in church work and minimal exposure to Scripture. Race, sexuality, and gender do not mean what they once seemed to mean, because old assumptions are finally being resisted at their epistemological core.³ The Church is living into an identity that is becoming increasingly globally configured, ethnically hybrid, and decentered from European and North American cultural narratives, as Christian communities in the global South gain new members at rates exponentially higher than churches in the northern hemisphere. Many competing truths illumine and complicate our common life together.⁴ Christian faith these days speaks a paradoxical Church living in the interstices among contradictory narratives, understanding its own provisionality while nevertheless proclaiming the Gospel boldly, bearing in its own embodied life

the dissonances, incoherences, and conflicting visions of a Body of Christ that is continually being transformed.

So how might we take up the prophetic voices of Scripture in this dynamic time of paradox for the Church and for the world? Two aspects of biblical prophecy can help us to envision the prophetic role today, aspects that have not traditionally been emphasized in social-justice movements. In what follows, we will consider the pathos of the prophet in community and the self-reflective writtenness of the prophetic word.

Prophetic pathos in community

I have become a laughingstock all day long;
everyone mocks me.

For whenever I speak, I must cry out,
I must shout, "Violence and destruction!"

For the word of the LORD has become
for me a reproach and a derision all day long.

If I say, "I will not mention Him,
or speak any more in His name,"
then within me there is something
like a burning fire shut up in my bones;

I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot. (Jer 20:7-9)

Jeremiah's prophetic vocation cost him dearly in the intense political opposition he faced. The suffering he had to witness was horrendous: there was no "balm in Gilead" for the anguished Jeremiah or his people (8:22). Pathos embodied in community was the very heart of Jeremiah's prophetic ministry. The Word of God burned in Jeremiah like fire. But he did not voice that Word from a place of security and privilege – he prophesied in fetters. Jeremiah shows us that a bone-deep commitment to living in community is essential to authentic witness.

Contemporary prophecy likewise must spring from rootedness within our communities, and we must be willing to suffer with others. In his recent book, *To Live in Peace: Biblical Prophecy and the Changing Inner City*, Mark Gornik reflects on intentionally relocating to Sandtown, a desperately blighted urban neighborhood in Baltimore, to devote more than ten years of prophetic advocacy among the people there. Gornik knows that a truly God-bearing church "incarnates itself within the community and becomes one with its neighbors in the struggle."⁵ This incarnational presence is radically

different from tourism or charity. Gornik says,

I am not referring to charity, relief, or compassion, but to focused activity that establishes a healthier and more just community. The emphasis is not on programs as ends in themselves or on the renewal of place apart from people, but on the development of people and the celebration of their gifts and callings in the context of their social and material world.⁶

Prophets make themselves present to real engagement in living communities – offering their "souls and bodies," in the Eucharistic formulation, for Christ's redeeming work with the suffering. Prophets must prepare spiritually for imprisonment, threats, deprivation, fear – and for the constraints that those things place on the moral imagination. Prophets must prepare to meet the despair of those who starve in the shadows of economic power, those who stumble traumatized and destitute through landscapes of tribal conflict and international war—and then they must speak a prophetic word out of that pathos, that lived commitment to staying present to brokenness.

Theological education has a crucial role to play here. The currency of "pedagogies of engagement"⁷ – teaching that prioritizes collaborative work and field-based learning across disciplines – raises important curriculum and policy questions for theological schools about how we can best prepare students for prophetic ministry. Imagine a divinity school trustee meeting devoted entirely to the issue of fostering engaged prophetic ministry!⁸ Change would come. For any theological school that funds and resources this preparation for contemporary prophecy will see the light of the Gospel transforming communities and human hearts as never before.

Writing the prophetic word

Go now; write it before them on a tablet,
and inscribe it in a book, so that it may be
for the time to come as a witness forever.
(Isa 30:8)

The Israelite prophets shouted God's Word from Temple gate and city square; they pleaded with kings and wrestled with priests. They performed the terror of God's Word using rotting figs, shattered pottery, barley cakes baked on camel dung, even marriage with (oh, the drama!) sexually autonomous women. Amos, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea offered all of themselves in their efforts to become transparent to God's purposes. They knew that trenchant tones and

vivid tableaux could fire the spiritual imagination, could draw the believer irresistibly into an encounter with the will of God. But displays of brilliant oratory and dramatic technique were only the beginning. The prophets also wrote. They wrote poetry and stories and exhortations and prayers. They risked writing in order that the power of God's Word might reach peoples near and far, contemporary and yet unborn. After King Jehoiakim destroyed Jeremiah's first scroll column by column, the scribe Baruch rewrote the entire thing in a defiant gesture of political and theological power.⁹ Isaiah implored his disciples to preserve in writing his vision of God's purposes, so that it might speak a living word of witness to those who were yet to encounter God in another time.

Prophecy in the contemporary Church, too, must witness across geographical distance and through time. Martin Luther King, Jr., could say, "I am in Birmingham because injustice is here." He was present in Birmingham, yes – but, equally important, he wrote enduring words from there.¹⁰ Civil rights activist W. E. B. Du Bois gave countless speeches and taught classes, and those unquestionably had an impact through his decades of work for racial equity. But he also wrote feverishly, virtually every day, no matter what other obligations clamored for his attention. Du Bois wrote as a man possessed – no, as a prophet obsessed with proclaiming a word of truth in any way he could, through anthropological studies, editorials in the NAACP. monthly *The Crisis*, newspaper articles, letters to scholars and politicians, autobiographical writing, essays, historical books, novels, and dramaturgy.¹¹ In the "After-Thought" to his monumental *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Du Bois offers this about the prophetic power of writing:

Hear my cry, O God the Reader; vouchsafe that this my book fall not still-born into the world-wilderness. Let there spring, Gentle One, from out its leaves vigor of thought and thoughtful deed to reap the harvest wonderful. . . . Thus in Thy good time may infinite reason turn the tangle straight, and these crooked marks on a fragile leaf be not indeed

THE END¹²

The contemporary prophetic voice must leave its own "crooked marks on a fragile leaf," must risk the accountability and visibility of the written word in order to transform lives shaped by texts, text-messaging, and slogans. In our global communities, writing has become an essential means of engage-

ment. See prophecy at work in a blog such as that of Christian Scharen at the Yale Center for Faith & Culture (<http://faithasawayoflife.typepad.com/blog/>). Listen for prophecy on a Christian political Web site such as that of Tennessee state senator Roy Herron (www.faithfuldemocrats.com), or a listserv dedicated to protecting the integrity of all God's creatures, such as the Episcopal Network for Animal Welfare (enaw@yahoo.com). In my parish, we are engaging many more people in an electronically mediated yearlong study of the book of Isaiah than we could ever have enticed to show up at weekly meetings (visitors welcome: isaiah_list@wu.wss.yale.edu). The fruits of written prophecy promise to be abundant indeed in this technological age.

Prophetic truth voiced in paradox

Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; your walls are continually before Me. (Isa 49:16)

The Isaiah tradition speaks a paradoxical word of hope into the experience of trauma and exile. With smoke still rising from the ruins of Jerusalem in the cultural background of this text, the Isaiah tradition dares to proclaim that God will not forget God's people. The nursing mother's intense care for her child is as nothing compared with God's compassion. Pathos is here: this God of love has tears streaming down Her face, because God has witnessed the devastation of Jerusalem and the anguish of a beloved people. Writing is here, too. Jeremiah and Ezekiel had eaten scrolls (Jer 15:16, Ezek 2:9-3:3), bringing honeyed divine writing into their bodies. Now God's people are inscribed on the very palms of the hands of God, indelibly etched into the being of the Holy One who creates, touches, transforms. The Creator of the Universe can do nothing – the metaphor of hands makes this clear – without remembering and caring for Her people.

So must prophets be in the contemporary Church: willing to suffer in and for our communities, willing to inscribe the prophetic truth of God's grace everywhere so that we, too, can do nothing without remembering and caring for those whom God has made. Jeremiah encourages us to stay present to our broken and divided communities, to wrestle and lament and hope alongside him. Isaiah encourages us to write – poems, stories, essays, songs, prayers – so that we may bear witness beyond ourselves.

Christians live in paradox. We have been welcomed into God's people only late, as a wild branch grafted into a vine long tended and loved (Rom 11:17-24). We seek to speak the wild truth of Christ into a world that does not understand incarnation and knows little of mercy, yet we polemicize endlessly and wound each other within a Church that seems to forget mercy almost as often as does the secular world. Naming injustice must continue to be a central part of scripturally grounded prophecy, of course. We still need the fulminations of Amos and Micah, within the Church's walls no less than outside. But we would do well to move beyond the ungenerous indictment of others that so often characterizes contemporary political and theological discourse. Prophecy is much more than that. Prophecy is courageous presence in communities that suffer. Prophecy is writing words of truth so that the poor and the powerless may be inscribed on the hands of all who take up those texts and read. The Gospel demands nothing less.

Notes

- 1 Martin Luther King, Jr., in his incomparable "I Have a Dream" speech, delivered on 28 August 1963 on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C.
- 2 William Sloane Coffin, *Credo* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 63. The full quotation is relevant: "Had I but one wish for the churches of America I think it would be that they come to see the difference between charity and justice. Charity is a matter of personal attributes; justice, a matter of public policy. Charity seeks to alleviate the effects of injustice; justice seeks to eliminate the causes of it. Charity in no way affects the status quo, while justice leads inevitably to political confrontation. Especially I would hope that Christians would see that the compassion that moved the Good Samaritan to act charitably – that same compassion prompted biblical prophets to confront injustice, to speak truth to power, as did Jesus, who, though more than a prophet, was certainly nothing less."
- 3 See in the Spring 2006 issue of *Reflections* the essay by Virginia Ramey Mollencott, "Are There Really Only Two Genders?"
- 4 For a helpful assessment of biblical interpretation in the postmodern age, see Dennis T. Olson, "Between the Tower of Unity and the Babel of Pluralism: Biblical Theology and Leo Perdue's *The Collapse of History*," pp. 350-58 in *Troubling Jeremiah*, ed. A. R. Pete Diamond, Kathleen M. O'Connor, and Louis Stulman; Sheffield (Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).
- 5 Mark R. Gornik, *To Live in Peace: Biblical Faith and the Changing Inner City* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002), 113.
- 6 Gornik, *To Live in Peace*, 129.
- 7 The phrase comes from Russ Edgerton's influential "Education White Paper," written in the fall of 1997 when he served as director of education for The Pew Charitable Trusts.
- 8 Noteworthy here is the innovative school that Mark Gornik now heads: the City Seminary of New York (<http://www.cityseminaryny.org>), which is committed to intercultural education for urban peace ministry.
- 9 Walter Brueggemann says of the "dangerous, bold process of bookmaking" in Jeremiah 36, "the conflict evoked by the scroll is between royal power and scroll power. . . . [I]n some inscrutable way, liberated prophetic imagination and experience take the form of a scroll. . . . [S]uch textured reality is a great and relentless enemy of silence. . . . This text authorizes the mute to speak and to know what to say in the face of life-canceling power." See Brueggemann, "Texts That Linger, Words That Explode," 1-19 in his *Texts That Linger, Words That Explode* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 8-9.
- 10 Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail," written on 16 April 1963 and subsequently published in his book, *Why We Can't Wait* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964).
- 11 See the magisterial two-volume biography of Du Bois by David Levering Lewis: *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919*, and *W. E. B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963*, (New York: Henry Holt, 1993 and 2000).
- 12 Reprinted in *W. E. B. Du Bois: Writings* (Library of America; New York: Viking, 1986), 547.

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Everydayness

Emilie Townes



The following text was offered during the Yale Divinity School opening convocation of 2005

... and so we begin

for some of us gathered here

this is a time that is familiar

yet even in the somewhat comfort of the known

there lurks the unknown

we can know certain things about this new academic year that is dawning

but we can never know what kind of class we will have

because new configurations of students

reading

other source materials

keep even the known in the category of

"adventure"

for some of us gathered here

 this is a time i sometimes refer to as the “oh my god what have i done” time
 we have launched ourselves into the unknown

 anticipation

 trepidation

 questioning

 or some mixture of these emotions and more

 i think, overwhelmed-but-trying-to-hang-in-there, may be a better description of
 what is going on in us

for others of us gathered here

 this is a time of affirmation

 we know this is where we should be and we are doing what we should be doing

 yes, this may even be a call

for others, this is a time of seeking and questioning

 we have a sense this may be the place—but perhaps not

 and so we are digging in and listening intently and trying to feel deeply to see what the future brings

for others, this is a time of feeling incredibly entitled or incredibly inadequate

 both are human

 both are natural

 both need to be gotten over

 quickly

for others, this is a time of resistance

 we wish we were somewhere else

 doing something else

 with someone else

 but we often don’t know what that “else” is

 so here we sit

 or when we do know what that “else” is

 time, circumstance, and letters of appointment mean

 here we sit

for others, we have the challenge of moving in and out of all these emotions and ways of being

 sometimes at the same time

 often with lightning speed

 and we are simply stunned and amazed

 and often humbled

there are other ways in which we sit here today

 and i want to suggest that given the worlds we live in these days

 however we are, as we sit here to begin this academic year

 it’s normal

the challenge, i think, for all of us is this: what will we proceed to do with the fullness and incompleteness of what we have
brought to this time and place

 as we remember that we are in a world

 that we have helped make

 that needs a new, or perhaps ancient, vision

 molded by justice and peace

 rather than winning and losing

so i want to talk with you this afternoon about a few of the things that are behind holding on to justice and peace in the midst of
myriad injustices and a world that is a spinning top of wars

 and give you some sense of why i think that what we do in this academic life has a profound
 effect on the worlds we live in

 if we choose to make our work and our studies rigorous academically and relevant experientially

it is for me to respond to the call by the black mystic and theologian Howard Thurman,

 who joined others

 in encouraging us to blend head and heart

I.

one of my sources of sustenance for this challenge is found in the speeches of the late former congresswoman from Texas, Barbara Jordan

Jordan was a woman of firsts:

1st black woman to serve as administrative assistant to the county judge of Harris County, Texas

1st black elected to the Texas state senate since 1883

1st black woman to deliver the keynote address at the democratic party convention in 1976

first black person to be buried in the State Cemetery in Austin, Texas, on January 20, 1996,

and those of us who remember or have heard the recording of the crisp bell tones of her perfect diction and impeccable cadence will never forget her testimony before the house judiciary committee during Watergate at 2am:

Earlier today, we heard the beginning of the Preamble to the Constitution of the United States, "We, the people." It is a very eloquent beginning. But when the document was completed on the seventeenth of September 1787 I was not included in that "We, the people." I felt somehow for many years that George Washington and Alexander Hamilton just left me out by mistake. But through the process of amendment, interpretation and court decision I have finally been included in "We, the people."

Today, I am an inquisitor; I believe hyperbole would not be fictional and would not overstate the solemnness that I feel right now. My faith in the Constitution is whole, it is complete, it is total. And I am not going to sit here and be an idle spectator to the diminution, the subversion, the destruction of the Constitution.

i am struck, by the profound trust she had in the notion "we the people"

Jordan was the daughter of a baptist preacher and a devout practicing baptist her whole life

one of the bedrock principles she lived her life by was that human equality under God is categorical, absolute, unconditional, and universally applicable

so when she said "we the people" she really did mean all of us

now because she was a public servant, she did not do much god-talk in her public addresses

but i think she can be a window into how we can think about how we understand one link between this divinity school on the hill and the rest of the world

and realize that what we do here is the real world

to be sure, it's only a small slice of it

but one of the temptations we must avoid

is believing that what we do here—with our well-placed and much-needed emphasis on academic and intellectual rigor means that we check our hearts at the door

for i learned well from the older black men and women who raised me in the church and outside of it

that intellect with no heart is about as useful as a heart with no intellect

and missing both sides of that equation means you probably don't have much common sense to boot

in other words, you're not very useful

so let me offer a counternarrative to the expansion of moral hubris that we are experiencing of late in many of our religious and non-religious homes

that i think springs from the kind of faith that Jordan placed in what it means to take our citizenship seriously as people of faith

these lines are from the notebook kept by Marie-Sophie Laborieux

she is the protagonist in the Martiniquan writer Patrick Chamoiseau novel Texaco

Chamoiseau's novel chronicles the path to freedom of Martinique from colonial rule

through the eyes of Marie-Sophie and her ancestors—slaves and former slaves

Marie-Sophie records the words of her father

In what I tell you, there's the almost-true, the sometimes-true, and the half-true. That's what telling a life is like, braiding—all of that like one plaits the white Indies currant to make a hut. And the true-true comes out of that braid.

Chamoiseau captures in novel form

the shorthand version of my reply to why i hold on to justice and peace as

relevant

vital

necessary
 and indispensable values
 that we can craft into faithful action in our scholarship
 in the lives of those in our religious communities
 in the worlds we live in
 that is
 lately, we have existed on the almost-true, sometimes-true, and half-true without looking for the true-true
 searching for the true-true is what i think we should be after these days
 this takes what ethicist Marcia Y. Riggs calls a mediating ethic
 this mediating ethic is not one to seek easy reconciliation

 it is an ethic, which is a “process of acknowledging seemingly diametrically opposing positions and creating a re-
 sponse that interposes and communicates between opposing sides. It is living with tension rather than aiming at an
 end result of integration, compromise, or reconciliation. These may be outcomes, but mediating as process occurs
 whether or not mediation as an end does.”
 mediating as process rather than mediation as end
 and i suggest that the only way we can faithfully look at who we are
 as a nation
 and the roles we should and must play
 as people of faith or people who hold deep values of respect for others and the rest of creation
 who must live our lives not always comforted by the holy
 but haunted by God's call to us to live a prophetic and spirit-filled life
 and not just talk about it or wish for it or think about
 means that we remain in the tension
 in the process of uncovering and working through how we can build faith-filled responses
 to meet the needs of those who may be the least of these
 or folks just like many of us—blessed with resources and abilities and a divine mandate to use them
 with a spirituality that will not let go of that relentless justice that can only come from a rock-steady God

II.

we must be about these things because
 we are living in a time in which imperialism is being dwarfed by empire
 from the beginning of this country as a republic
 the myth of universal uninhibited freedom has always had its evil twins—studied sadistic subordination and anal-
 retentive annihilation
 our history is one of that cast native americans outside of the constitution
 and included blacks in the constitution—but not as 5/5ths of being human
 this has, to my mind, always been a great problematic in our self-understanding as a nation
 we have not always been the land of unfettered liberty, equal access, and open markets for all peoples and on a truly
 equal playing field
 we have, domestically and globally, been a nation that has practiced—far too many times—imperialistic domestic
 and global outrages that carry kinder and gentler names such as
 usa patriot act
 economic growth and tax relief reconciliation act
 free trade area of the americas
 you and i are drawing breath in a country, which is for many of us, our country
 one that possesses an incredible concentration of financial, diplomatic, and military power
 and is rather disingenuous not to admit the tremendous power and influence we have on a global scale
 and also recognize the awesome responsibility that comes with this
 because we have the power to do incredible good—and have done so
 and must continue to grow this side of who we are as a nation larger and stronger
 on the global stage and here at home
 this is part of the true-true i think Chamoiseau is trying to tell us about

and the way that we respond to this is by telling the truth as we see it, know it, smell it, breathe it
this is what empire and permanent war does not count on:
people of faith telling the truth that not only does the emperor have no clothes, the emperor is, as my grandmother
used to say: naked butt
if we can hold on to digging up the truth when it gets buried in political and theological cat fights and mud-wrestling contests, i
think we will be able to bring together issues of justice making and peace

but only if we take seriously the challenges of a mediating ethic that tells us that we are caught in H. Richard
Niebuhr's web of creation
we are responsible for each other and ourselves
we may not always agree, nor should we expect to
we have to give an accounting of our actions and inactions
we may get tired and need a break, but we must always come back because we do not get out of this life
alone
and we are responsible for what goes on in our names

III.

we human folk are challenge and hope
living with ourselves is often a demanding or difficult task
many of us are called to prove or justify our very lives in a court of law that may be structured so that some of us
need not apply for justice or mercy or equality or harmony or peace
we see (when we do not sense) that there are false accusations lining the fabric of our lives
that we are involved in an ill-designed and misbegotten contest
that is deadly, oh so deadly
but we have expectations of and for others and ourselves
we have dreams that can be more powerful than the nightmares
possibilities more radical than the realities
and a hope that does more than cling to a wish
or wish on a star
or sit by the side of the road, picking and sucking its teeth
after dining on a meal of disaster and violence
for a challenge such as we face today, is also a call to respond
and this, i believe, is where our challenge meets up with hope
this is not the hope of pandora's box
for pandora, hope is an evil that comes to confuse the human spirit
it is not the hope of goethe

for goethe believed "why roam in the distance? see, the good lies so near. learn only to achieve happiness, then
happiness is always there"
it is not the hope of camus
for camus' myth of sisyphus was to teach us that we should "think clearly and [do not] hope"
no, the challenge and hope we have before us
comes from miss nora

ms. montez
mr. press
miss rosie
and mr. waddell

this hope is unequivocal and unambiguous
it does not detach the human spirit from the present through mad delusions and flights of fancy
no this hope is one that pulls the promise of the future into the present
and places the present into the dawn of a future that is on the rimbones of glory
To combine challenge with hope is powerful. For together they enable us to press onward when we feel like giving up; to draw
strength from the future to live in a discouraging present. Challenge and hope make it possible for us to see the world, not only

as it is, but also as it can be; to move us to new places and turn us into a new people.

For there is something about challenge yoked with hope, when it is grounded in living for tomorrow as we live for today, that is solid enough to sustain our lives and overcome skepticism and doubt. But it is frightening because we know that loving and caring for others and ourselves interrupts the mundane and comfortable in us, and calls to us to move beyond ourselves and accept a new agenda for living. Hope cannot simply be given a nod of recognition, for it demands not only a contract from us; but covenant and commitment. When we truly live in this deep-walking hope, then we must order and shape our lives in ways that are not always predictable, not always safe, rarely conventional, and protests with prophetic fury the sins of a world (and sometimes theological worldviews) that encourage us to separate our bodies from our spirits, our minds from our hearts, our beliefs from our action.

Yoke challenge and hope in our lives so that justice and peace mean something, and are more than rhetorical ruffles and flourishes. None of us can hide from any of the “isms,” war, the economy, confirmation processes, rising oil prices, calls by a conservative christian leader to assassinate a duly elected president of an oil-rich nation because it is cheaper than another \$200 billion dollar war, HIV/AIDS, terrorism, and a proposed freedom walk next month from the Pentagon to the National Mall inaccurately linking the Iraq war to September 11th. A walk that will end with a country music concert headlining Clint Black (whose music i generally like) singing lyrics from his song “I Raq and Roll” like “our troops take out the garbage, for the good old U.S.A.” It is wicked, ya’ll, to mix jingoism with the death of innocents in our national mourning. No, we cannot hide from responsibility or accountability. We can choose to say that someone else is more qualified and more knowledgeable about economic forecasts and political decisions. We can be content to allow experts to debate the quality of our lives. We can wring our hands, or declare we are too busy, or worse, turn our backs in indifference and callous disregard to the erosion of human rights.

But this never relieves any of us of the responsibility that we have to our generation and future generations to keep justice, peace, and hope alive and vibrant. And if all we want to be are poster children for the status quo, then we can find much less expensive places to train for this—and places better equipped to teach us this—than a divinity school.

IV.

ultimately, i believe that somewhere deep inside each of us

we know that perhaps the simplest, yet the most difficult, answer to the challenge of “what will we proceed to do with the fullness and incompleteness of what we have brought to this time and place” is: live your faith deeply
now i am not talking about perfection—i’m an american baptist
i’m talking about what we call in christian ethics, the everydayness of moral acts
it’s what we do every day that shapes us and says more about us than those grand moments of righteous indignation and action
the everydayness of listening closely when folks talk or don’t talk to hear what they are saying
the everydayness of taking some time, however short or long, to refresh ourselves through prayer or meditation
the everydayness of speaking to folks and actually meaning whatever it is that is coming out of our mouths
the everydayness of being a presence in people’s lives
the everydayness of designing a class session or lecture or reading or writing or thinking
the everydayness of sharing a meal
the everydayness of facing heartache and disappointment
the everydayness of joy and laughter
the everydayness of facing people who expect us to lead them somewhere or at least point them in the right direction and walk with them
the everydayness of blending head and heart
it’s the everydayness of getting up and trying one more time to get our living right
it is in this everydayness that “we the people” are formed
and we, the people of faith, live and must witness to a justice wrapped in a love that will not let us go
and a peace that is simply too ornery to give up on us
have a good year

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“Put Your Finger Here . . .”: The Prophetic Nature of Reconciliation

By Roberto S. Goizueta

More than forty-five years had passed since I had last peered out an airplane window at the turquoise terminal building. It was exactly as I remembered it. So were the huge white block letters on the façade: “Aeropuerto Internacional Jose Martí—Habana.” Back then, I was a six-year-old awaiting a flight to who-knows-where for who-knows-how-long.

Through that impenetrable airplane window, I waved anxiously at my father and grandfather, not knowing if or when I would see them again. The scene would remain forever seared in my memory.

By the grace of God, our family was eventually reunited in Miami. And now, more than four decades later, I myself was returning to be reunited with a land and a people that had given me birth. I had no idea how I, who had fled with my family and found success in the United States, would be received by the Cubans on the island. Like an orphan returning to meet his parents after forty-five years, I was deeply anxious. After all, during those four decades the people of Cuba and the Cuban exile community in the United States had seemingly become estranged. Even as many Cuban-Americans had achieved economic and political success in the United States, a large number also harbored tremendous animosity toward Cubans on the island, identifying them with the dictatorial regime under which they lived. How would the impoverished, beaten-down Cuban people who struggled to survive in such desperate circumstances receive me, who had fled with his family? Would they resent me? Would they feel that I, along with the other hundreds of thousands of Cuban exiles, had abandoned them to their plight?

It did not take long for my fears to be assuaged. Wherever I went on the island, the Cuban people's response to my visit was the same: “Thank you for not forgetting us; thank you for remembering us.” Whatever “survivor's guilt” I may have experienced in steeling myself for the trip dissipated in the face

of the stunning hospitality of the people. I, who in some very real sense had abandoned them, was now being welcomed back with open arms, no questions asked—not with a “how dare you” but with a “thank you.” Everywhere I went, the message I received was the same: “You are one of us; welcome back.”

My experience of being welcomed by those who themselves were victims was, of course, hardly unique. Only two months earlier, the *Boston Globe* published the story of young Kai Leigh Harriott, a five-year-old African American girl who had been paralyzed when a stray bullet severed her spine as she sat playing on the porch of her house in inner-city Boston. The *Globe* described the scene at the trial of Anthony Warren, the man who had shot Kai Leigh:

The little girl said the word porch and then began sobbing loudly. After her mother comforted her, 5-year-old Kai Leigh Harriott looked up from her blue wheelchair in the hushed courtroom yesterday and faced the man who fired the stray gunshot that paralyzed her nearly three years ago. “What you done to me was wrong,” the dimpled girl with purple and yellow plastic ties in her braids said softly. “But I still forgive him.” . . . Yesterday, in emotionally wrenching victim-impact statements that left many spectators in tears, Kai and four members of her family told a Suffolk Superior Court judge that the shooting had changed their lives forever, but had also shown them the value of forgiveness. “We’re not victims



here; we're victors," said Kai's mother, Tonya David, addressing the court. Moments later, Warren, 29, a convicted felon who pleaded guilty yesterday to avoid a trial, approached Kai and her family and, in barely audible tones, apologized. David recalled his words later. "I'm sorry for what I've done to you and your family," she said Warren told her. "I was known in the street for all the wrong reasons, and now I want to be known for the right reasons." David shook his handcuffed right hand and embraced him.¹

The following day's newspaper article then reported the following exchange: "Asked by a reporter why she [Kai] forgave the man who shot her, she shyly but clearly said: 'I wanted him to tell the world the truth.' Warren had for three years denied the shooting, but changed his plea Thursday."²

Among the victims of our society and world, that is, among the very persons in whom one would expect to find a profound anger and resentment, what one often discovers is an astonishing hospitality, gratitude, and forgiveness. Like all prophets, they thus confront us with a Love that challenges and frightens precisely because it refuses to be limited by our meager expectations. Ironically, it is more often the powerful who harbor anger and resentment against the powerless, rather than the reverse. It is the successful Cuban-American who resents the Cuban who "stayed behind." It is the successful suburbanite who is enraged at the "demands" of the urban poor. It is the successful third-generation immigrant who attacks the recent immigrant. It is the "upstanding citizen" who refuses to forgive the African American man who shot Kai Leigh.

The Prophetic Character of Reconciliation

As Christians, we believe, of course, that we are reconciled to God and to each other through the person of Jesus Christ, particularly through Christ's death and resurrection. In the various narratives of Christ's passion, death, and post-resurrection appearances, therefore, the Gospel itself already sets forth a paradigm for reconciliation. Of all those persons who shared responsibility for Jesus' crucifixion, surely none contributed more to Jesus' agony than the apostles themselves, those fair-weather friends who abandoned Jesus to his fate at precisely the moment when he most needed them. And surely what was most devastating about Jesus' passion and death was not only the physical agony itself but, especially, the emotional and spiritual agony

of experiencing himself abandoned by his closest friends and even by God.

Consequently, there is high drama in the risen Jesus' appearances to his old friends, the apostles. How would he confront them? Would he excoriate them? Would he demand justice? How, in turn, would they react to the utterly unexpected appearance of the man whom they had betrayed? After all, they likely remained convinced that it was he who had in fact betrayed them by asking them to trade a throne for a cross. In Luke's Gospel, the risen Jesus appears to the disciples in Jerusalem, in the room where they had gathered in fear of the Roman authorities. Here we read that:

[Jesus] stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you."

But they were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost.

Then he said to them, "Why are you troubled? And why do questions arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you can see I have." And as he said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While they were still incredulous for joy and were amazed, he asked them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of baked fish; he took it and ate it in front of them. (Lk 24:36-43)

If we read this account not simply as an appearance of Jesus to the disciples, but as an encounter *between* Jesus and the disciples, we gain some insight into the significance of Jesus' wounds in this narrative. The wounds are not merely the evidence of Jesus' bodily resurrection. That they are indeed, but the wounds are also the evidence of the apostles' betrayal and abandonment of Jesus on the way to Calvary. Confronted by the still-visible wounds on Jesus' glorified body, the apostles are forced to make the connection, not only between this risen Jesus now standing before them and the man who had been crucified, but they are also forced to draw the connection between their own behavior, their abandonment of Jesus, and Jesus' crucifixion. By fleeing, the apostles had abandoned Jesus to the Roman soldiers and to his eventual death. No wonder, then, that, when the Jesus whom they had betrayed approaches them openly displaying the wounds in his hands and side, the apostles are "terrified." Had Jesus returned to exact justice or condemn them? Jesus' response to their understandable fear is as utterly unexpected as was his resurrection: his first

words are “Peace be with you,” and then he asks, ‘Have you anything here to eat?’ They gave him a piece of baked fish; he took it and ate it in front of them.” In other words, Jesus offers them peace before they’ve even acknowledged him (much less repented), then he invites himself over for dinner. That is his revenge for their betrayal; he asks them to share a meal with him.

The Gospel of John also recounts that the risen Jesus appears to the disciples and “showed then his hands and his side” (Jn 20:20). John’s account then depicts the famous “Doubting Thomas” scene:

Thomas, called Didymus, one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples said to him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nailmarks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.” Now a week later his disciples were again inside and Thomas was with them. Jesus came, although the doors were locked, and stood in their midst and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe.” Thomas answered and said to him, “My Lord and my God!” (Jn 20:24-28)

Once again, it is helpful to read this account not only as a post-resurrection appearance but also as a post-resurrection encounter—here, between Jesus and Thomas. Again, the wounds can then be seen not only as evidence of the bodily resurrection but as the instruments of reconciliation; Jesus’ invitation to “put your finger here . . .” is what makes possible Thomas’ response, “My Lord and my God!” Indeed, there is no indication that Thomas ever did touch the wound. Jesus’ invitation itself provokes conversion. Jesus’ invitation to touch and see his wounds is put forth not as a sign of condemnation for Thomas’ betrayal and unbelief but as an overture of forgiveness and reconciliation: “Peace be with you.”

When the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ are thus interpreted not only as events in the life of the individual Jesus Christ, but as events in the life of Jesus Christ as the head of the community he founded, we see that what the resurrection embodies is not simply the victory of individual life over death but the victory of communal life over estrange-

ment, the possibility of reconciliation in the face of abandonment and betrayal. And that reconciliation is made possible by: (1) the fact that the physical wounds of betrayal remain visible on the body of the risen Christ, (2) the risen victim’s invitation to touch and see his wounds, (3) the character of that invitation as an offer of pardon and reconciliation rather than a demand for the justice due the victim, (4) the apostles’ acceptance of Jesus’ offer (“They gave him a piece of baked fish” . . . “My Lord and my God”), and finally (5) the radical transformation of the apostles from a group of cowering cowards to a courageous band of disciples willing to literally lay down their lives for their crucified and risen friend and for each other.³

We can now begin to see the intrinsic relationship between the demands of social solidarity and justice, on the one hand, and the imperative of reconciliation on the other. Indeed, Gustavo Gutiérrez argues that the two principal themes of the Scriptures are: the gratuity of God’s love, and God’s preferential love for the poor. Jesus Christ reveals the privileged position of the innocent victim as the mediator of God’s extravagant, unexpected mercy. The ability to receive that mercy is thus dependent on our solidarity with the victims. If God’s mercy is truly unanticipated it will be encountered, above all, in those places and among those persons whom our society has deemed ungodly, unlovable. In wholly unexpected ways, they become the bearers of God’s mercy; this is the radical, prophetic, indeed scandalous message at the heart of the Gospel. In the words of the Salvadoran martyr Ellacuría, these are the “crucified people” through whom we encounter the crucified and risen Christ today—not because of who they are, since they are not inherently any more saintly or any less sinners than anyone else, but because of where they are located, on the cross alongside Jesus.

Whither Justice?

Despite my argument thus far, I am well aware that justice is also at the core of the Christian call to discipleship and reflects the character of God as this is revealed in Scripture, from the Prophets to the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew’s Gospel. I am also aware that the logic of forgiveness is susceptible to all sorts of dangerous distortions which, in the past as today, have promoted passivity in the face of oppression and, indeed, undermined the process of reconciliation. One need not go very far to find examples of victims being exhorted to “forgive and forget,” whether Jews who are encouraged to “get

over” the Holocaust, African Americans urged to let the by-gones of slavery be by-gones, or victims of abuse encouraged to “get on with their lives.”

The call to reconciliation in no way obviates the struggle for social justice in defense of the intrinsic dignity of the person and the rights that would safeguard that dignity. Rather, as Gustavo Gutiérrez avers, we must “situate justice within the framework of God’s gratuitous love.”⁴ A praxis of solidarity with the poor in their struggle for justice is the means by which we receive God’s mercy and the gift of forgiveness. In their shared gratitude for the gift of reconciliation, both oppressor and victim are liberated. “The forgiveness of acceptance bestowed by Jesus in the gospel accounts,” observes Jon Sobrino, “is something not merely beneficial, but liberating.”⁵ Both are liberated from themselves, argues Sobrino. “It is the gratitude of knowing oneself to be accepted,” he suggests, “that moves a person to a de-centering from self.”⁶ (Conversely, where a person remains unmoved by the victim’s offer of mercy, neither reconciliation nor mutual liberation is possible.)

The gratuitous mercy of God is what generates repentance, conversion, and solidarity in the struggle for justice; Thomas’ “My Lord and my God” is preceded by Jesus’ “Peace be with you.” Sobrino explains that, in the person of Jesus Christ, forgiveness is always the starting point for any consideration of sin:

It is the acceptance that is forgiveness that adequately and wholly discloses the fact that I am a sinner and gives me the strength to acknowledge myself as such and change radically. The conversion demanded so radically by Jesus is preceded by the offer of God’s love. It is not conversion that requires God to accept the sinner; rather, just contrariwise, it is God’s acceptance that makes conversion possible.⁷

The apostles remained paralyzed by fear until the crucified and risen Christ confronted them with his wounds, demanding that they acknowledge the wounds, yet offering pardon and reconciliation. Only then could Thomas confess, “My Lord and my God.” The convicted criminal Anthony Warren remained paralyzed by his fear of the law until his victim, the five-year-old Kai Leigh Harriott, confronted him with her wounds: “What you done to me was wrong, but I still forgive you.” Only then could Warren admit, “I’m sorry for what I’ve done to you and your family,” and declare that “I was known in the street for all the wrong reasons, and now I want to be known

for the right reasons.” Forgiveness compels confession and repentance, and repentance implies a commitment to justice: “now I want to be known for the right reasons.” The offer and reception of God’s gratuitous mercy thus implies judgment and confession, not as extrinsic but as integral to the act of forgiveness itself.⁸

Ultimately, full reparation for past suffering is impossible; we can never undo past injustices, and those injustices will always remain part of our present and future. What we can do is to reconstitute our relationships on a completely different foundation based on mercy, confession, penance, and solidarity. This will indeed involve restitution, “giving back” or redistributing resources, but the goal of such redistribution will not be the establishment of a status quo ante—which is impossible, in any case—but the reconciliation of oppressor and oppressed, the constitution of a reconciled community; the focus is not on the “what” of restitution but on the “who.” Justice is ultimately not a question of protecting rights but of nurturing communion.⁹

The Crucified People and the Ecclesia Crucis

The preferential option for the poor is nothing other than the assertion that the crucified people of history are the privileged mediators of God’s mercy in the Church and the world.¹⁰ It is a mercy that judges and convicts even as it makes reconciliation possible. Yet, in so embodying that mercy, the crucified people embody the good news that “there is another way to live.”¹¹

As mediators of the crucified and risen Christ not only in the world, but also in the Church, the crucified people also remind us that suffering is one of the marks of the Church. Indeed, it may be time to emphasize again the biblical notion of the ecclesia crucis (so central for St. Paul and Luther):

No other single ecclesiological theme receives the attention that the suffering of the church receives in our textual sources. For centuries theology has maintained that the true marks of the church are the four that are named in the Nicene Creed: “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.”...Each of these notae ecclesiae can find some biblical basis, but none of them can claim a fraction of the attention paid to the theme of the church’s suffering in these sacred writings. . . . The earliest and most prominent manner of discerning the true church and distinguishing it from false claims to Christian identity was to observe the nature and extent of the suffering experienced by a

community of faith. Why? Because, of course, as Paul makes clear . . . if you claim to be a disciple of the crucified one you must expect to participate in his sufferings; . . . you will have to become a community of the cross.¹²

To the extent, therefore, that the crucified people reveal the Church as a crucified Church, they mediate Christ's own mercy in the world and in the Church. "Now this has consequences!" observes British Catholic theologian James Alison. "It means that holiness is our dependence on the forgiveness of the victim. That is to say, our being holy is dependent on the resurrection of the forgiving victim."¹³ The preferential option for the poor, for the victims, is thus always a preferential option for *all*, since we are all dependent on the victims' forgiveness if we are to live freely in a reconciled community where there is no need for victims; this is what Christ himself offered his disciples as he appeared to them after his resurrection. This indeed is what the risen Jesus offers his estranged apostles when he greets them: "Peace be with you." The *ecclesia crucis* precisely insofar as it is the community constituted by the forgiving victim.

Both outside and within the Church, the crucified people are the privileged locus for encountering today the extravagant, unexpected mercy of the wounded and resurrected Lord. Theirs is a prophetic voice that challenges our theological and ethical presuppositions as surely as Jesus' own theological assumptions had been challenged on Calvary: "My God, my God, why . . . ?"—and as surely as the apostles' assumptions had been challenged by the risen, wounded Jesus: "Peace be with you." In so mediating God's mercy, the victims remind us that, precisely as the wounded and resurrected Body of Christ in the world, the Church herself is called to a cruciform existence in history. This is true not because the cross is the goal of Christian discipleship but precisely because it *isn't*. Precisely because Christian discipleship is *ultimately* not about death but about life, not about justice but about mercy, not about respecting rights but about restoring communion, not about denying the reality of human suffering but about engaging it head on—precisely because all *this* is true—we also know that all resurrections are *wounded* resurrections. All resurrections participate in and are made possible by Christ's own wounded resurrection:

"For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord . . . But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God,

and not to us. We are afflicted in every way but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh" (2 Cor. 4:5-11).

The crucified people make their preemptive offer of forgiveness "so that the life of Jesus," the crucified and risen Jesus, may be manifested in our oh-so-broken world. By taking the victims down from the cross we become capable of receiving their offer of forgiveness and Christ's own offer of life.

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Notes

- 1 *Boston Globe*, April 14, 2006.
- 2 *Ibid.*, April 15, 2006.
- 3 For a more extended treatment of this analysis of the Resurrection, see my "The Crucified and Risen Christ: From Calvary to Galilee," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America*, Vol. 60, pp. 57-71, an abridged version of which was also published in the April 17, 2006, issue of *America* magazine.
- 4 Gustavo Gutiérrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1987), 87-88.
- 5 Jon Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1994), 92.
- 6 *Ibid.* 96.
- 7 *Ibid.* 89-90.
- 8 Daniel M. Bell, Jr., *Liberation Theology After the End of History: The Refusal to Cease Suffering* (London: Routledge, 2001), 174.
- 9 *Ibid.* 182-183, 188.
- 10 *Ibid.* 168.
- 11 José Ellacuría quoted in *ibid.* p 171.
- 12 Douglas John Hall, *The Cross in Our Context: Jesus and the Suffering World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 140.
- 13 James Alison, *Knowing Jesus* (Springfield, IL: Templegate, 1994), 81.

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Prophets Then, Prophets Now: An Interview with Joan Chittister and Richard Rohr

Jamie Manson

During the first week of July 2006, the Center for Action and Contemplation (CAC) hosted a three-day conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico, titled “Prophets Then, Prophets Now.” The conference was led by Franciscan priest Richard Rohr, who founded the CAC in 1987, and Benedictine sister Joan Chittister. Just before the conference began, Jamie Manson, editor of Reflections, sat with both of them for an interview about the prophetic voice.

REFLECTIONS Do you feel that a conference focusing on the history and future of the prophetic tradition is especially necessary now?

CHITTISTER It’s probably more consciously necessary now than at any other immediate past period in U.S. history, except, maybe, during the Vietnam era. At the same time, this ought to be a constant in every society because speaking truth to power is the charism of the Christian. It is also the charism of the prophet. We each have a responsibility, in other words, to search for the truth and to say it. Otherwise, never mind the church, there cannot even be a democracy.

REFLECTIONS So this conference is meant to be relevant to people not only in relationship to their faith communities but also as citizens of their respective nations.

CHITTISTER Definitely. This isn’t just a religious concept.

ROHR Because that was the aim of the biblical prophet. We’re speaking to the historical situation and not just to in-house religious issues. The prophets of the Bible made the link between the two. Their focus was on the whole of society and the whole of life. That was their brilliance—that they saw the big picture, so many of their conversations were with kings and governmental figures. They knew that both “church” and state had to reflect the divine compassion and the divine justice.

CHITTISTER That’s key to the whole question of the prophetic voice in any society. It comes out of the experience and history of the time. When you look at the situation you’re in, prophets are not people who sit around theologizing out of some kind of airy-fairy transcendent overview of somebody else’s idea of what the world is. These are people who, out of immersion in the mind of God, speak about what the society is now and what the society should be. The prophetic movement in any society looks, first of all, at what is the Word of God for humanity. And then uses that as a measure for the way humanity itself is acting at this moment.

REFLECTIONS There was a time in this country’s history, not very long ago, when the voices of prophets such as Martin Luther King, Jr., William Sloane Coffin, Jr., and Rosa Parks rose up and were heard. The inner workings of many Christian churches were also in a concurrent movement toward transformation, openness, and unprecedented dialogue. Now, both our civil society and our church seem to be in a state of complacency. Do you have any sense as to what has led us to this current state? Have we lost our communal concern and desire for solidarity and become too individualistic?

CHITTISTER Well, I think that the way to control a people is not through poverty, but through affluence. When people are concentrating on their own economic development, they can lose sight of the

people who have none at all. There is a flip side to that. There is another way to control a society and that is to see that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer at the same time. Why? Because the masses, the people out of whom the revolutionary voice of any ilk, political or theological, is usually spoken, are the people at the bottom. But if the people at the bottom are struggling for survival and can just about make it, if they have enough bread, but just enough bread, they keep working to get more. Now, what is every economist in the country telling us? The poor have gotten so poor, they know how to be poor, even if it means following the garbage cans of the world to the next meal. We're losing the middle class. And the middle class is really, interestingly enough, the voice in most societies—the intellectuals, actually. Intellectuals don't make big money, you know. They are the filter through which we see the social order. But they themselves are beginning to hang on—the professors who are living under the threat of declining populations in the colleges—they're hanging on, too. So part of this is a survival problem, part of it is an intimidation problem, part of it is the problem of affluence and greed. Why is it so different now than then? Because at this time, we are losing this central part of the population—the largest part of the population—to a new kind of survival.

ROHR I'd like to build on that and point out a parallel within the church. The more the hierarchy reasserts its centralized dominance in everything, the more I am finding that many people in the Catholic Church today are passive dependent, and very often passive aggressive. I think that could be proven statistically. Let me give you an example: While doing a hermitage this Lent, I thought I would go to the local parish Mass. We were reminded about seven times during the homily what sinners we were, how unworthy we were. All these educated people in this upper-class parish, largely professionals or retired, just sat there, numbly taking this, largely poker faced. Right at the end, he reminded them, of course, that he would be hearing confessions and take care of their sinfulness. Consciously or unconsciously he built a dependency system on himself and taught them helplessness. He did not empower us as Christians. I wanted to walk out, but I didn't. This is why it is good for priests to be out in the pews with some regularity. Now there's a certain number of Catholics, as you know, who always walk out after communion. But in that particular church, I would say almost half the church walked directly from the communion rail out the back door of the church. So you see what you have. These people are just cooperating as little as

they can, in case the whole thing is true, and then they disconnect. That's the kind of passive aggressiveness I think we're going to see more and more of in our Catholic Church if people are not respected as temples of the Holy Spirit.

CHITTISTER But, Richard, I think you have pointed to a part of the population you didn't define. There are a lot of people in our churches now who are very sacramental people. They want the sacraments. They want the tradition at the center of their lives. They are really embedded in the Jesus story and they want their children to have some idea of communal and institutional worship, and they edit every single thing it does. They sit, they stare. They're not even listening, and they didn't stay for confession. There is a dimension of people in the churches today who are also thinking Catholics as well as non-thinking Catholics. The thinking Catholics, when they hear something like that, are often inclined to walk out, certainly right after communion. Or let's put it this way: if not right after communion, definitely past the confessional box. Because they've got it. They can't articulate it but they feel it.

ROHR That's a more positive interpretation and I think it's often true. I hope it is.

CHITTISTER Well, I'll bet if we went over here and did a survey of these 1,300 people who are attending this conference, I'll bet you'll find out that two-thirds to three-fourths of them are in those very parishes, and they are sacramental people. But they are no longer easily intimidated or easily bounded. And that's where the frustration is lying—between the institution and the people in the pews. They're going to church but they, themselves, are in some sort of intellectual transition about what this church is teaching and how it affects them. It's a fascinating question because I see just as many people as Richard does who do not question at all.

ROHR I think they shut down large parts of themselves to do that. They pay a big price for it. And they're willing to do that—to shut down large parts of themselves.

CHITTISTER There is something psychological here as well as religious because we're getting exactly the same attitude where the state is concerned. It's exactly the same thing. It is, somehow or other, the kind of dependency that is looking for direction. Not leadership, but direction. "Tell me where to go because I don't know." Our constitution is being shredded a line at a time. Half of this country does not care, doesn't even notice, will go so far as to say, "We have to do this in a time of war." Now, I don't

know who you think declared this war. But I can tell you, as somebody who circles this globe regularly, there is a world out there that does not see us as its freedom fighters.

REFLECTIONS Do you think part of the reason people shut down, even in the most liberal circles, is because through whatever privileges they've received they have lost touch with the oppression and injustice that continue to victimize women, non-white people, non-heterosexual people.

CHITTISTER That's right. If the women in this country would use their privilege on behalf of the four-fifths of the women on this globe who are beaten, oppressed, invisible, destroyed, then I would be happy to hear those women say, "I'm not oppressed." But as it is, I'm not at all impressed with them. Because as long as they're all right, it doesn't make any difference who isn't. They do not use their privilege for prophetic truth. This also applies to us as citizens of this very wealthy, privileged country. We live on the largest ice cube on the globe and it's melting and we don't know it. We think this is the world. We're living in a plastic bubble and we think we're fully alive, fully human, fully adult, fully intelligent. It's shattering. I have talked to high school kids in Ireland who know more about the world situation than I can discuss with too many Americans that I've met.

ROHR Another reason that I think there's been a tightening up is the whole phenomenon of post-modernism. I have dated, based on other people's scholarship, that 1968 is an artificial date for when we moved from modernism to postmodernism. I do find that people formed after that period are looking desperately for stability, order, certitude, clarity, authority, and absolutes. I was ordained in 1970 and I had the arrogant assumption that all priests ordained after me would certainly think like I did. And now I can hardly relate to a lot of young priests. I realize that they were formed in this postmodern flux. A lot of them grew up in single-parent families and want an authoritarian daddy to tell them what to do. The whole relationship of men to their father figures, their need for father figures, is something we are studying in our men's work. If young men don't have them, they demand them. I believe this has impacted so many young priests, many who have come from unstable family lives. They even call themselves "John Paul II priests," and often Jesus is hardly mentioned. The Pope became their securing and validating daddy figure. What we have today is much more "Churchianity" than any strong concern for Gospel or Scriptural Christianity. So I

think that's one reason why we're seeing the contemporary need for these kinds of conferences. We are in a postmodern demand, a "blessed rage for order," as David Tracy rightly says. There is a demand for order, even if it's not a truthful order. And that's where it gets frightening. We would sooner have "satisfying untruth" than great truth, which is always somehow unsatisfying. That's what happens when the small ego takes over.

CHITTISTER And that demand for order is happening because there are massive social changes going on. I would argue that this is probably the greatest period of social change in the history of the globe, and certainly in the history of the Western world since the thirteenth or the sixteenth century. Why? Because every single institution is in flux: marriage, churches, economic systems, cities, the whole notion of government. Every single item in the human context is changing and, at the bottom of it all, a new science and a new globalism, and a new notion of what it is to be a human being, a nation, a body. When you have that kind of ferment and foment and simmering everywhere, whether people want to admit it or not, there are some people that simply are looking for the cave. It's too much to take psychologically. So you have what I call the retreat to commitment. So we're in a phenomenal period of stress and counter-stress, change and unchanged, commitment and new commitment. This is a stew and we're all working our way through it. The fear is that these things don't just happen unless voices call for them and make them happen. So you see now, what you're in is you're looking for the synthesis of two voices—in church and in society. The past, the present, and the future are in all those voices. The fear of losing the tradition is a genuine fear and ought to be honored. The fear of losing it by failing to develop it is a fear that must be honored. Out of that must come the synthesis. But it won't come if people abandon the questions. You've got to raise the questions.

REFLECTIONS How do we begin to empower people on a practical level? How do we let people know what the questions are?

CHITTISTER You've put your finger on what, for me, is the answer. The attempt right now is to silence the questions. "You may not discuss, you may not think, you may not do." Also, if we can suppress the questions, we'll have the time, we hope, to build up a young generation in the old answers. The way you empower is to refuse to be silent. If you're silent now, if you fail to articulate the real questions now, it will take another fifty years just to legitimate the questions again.

REFLECTIONS And by that time, it's going to be way too late for both civil society and the church.

ROHR It almost feels like the great Catholic tradition that formed us is becoming parochial, that it's not "catholic" at all. It's so tiny and defensive and afraid, and not even very tied to honest historical scholarship. This great tradition of wisdom and love, started by Jesus, is simply invalidating people who do not say it our way. And yet, ironically, Jesus consistently exemplified and taught two things: forgiveness and inclusivity. There is hardly a gospel narrative that does not teach one or the other, or both. I mean, what kind of a universe is this, if we can just silence the opposition? Even scientists do not do that, they just do more research. The irony is, as we both know, we're simply going to create more opposition, a much deeper, more angry, more alienated, and more irrational opposition. In fact, much of the irrational dismissal of the church that I find among the alienated is a dismissal and a pattern that they first learned from us! It comes back to haunt us.

REFLECTIONS Richard has written that prophets live in a "liminal space." That is, they live inside an institution, but on the very edge of it. By being in that space, the prophet doesn't critique or throw stones from the outside, but neither does he or she remain complacent or safe on the inside. I wonder if nowadays, in our therapeutic culture, that's simply too stressful? Have we become too concerned with ourselves and our own personal health and well-being to take risks for the sake of the community?

CHITTISTER It's not all the fault of the individual. Why are people as self-centered as they are about those things? It's because there are no safety nets being built into the system and the society anymore that they can count on. I mean, they're telling the older generation, "Get over it. This is the last time you'll see Social Security." They're telling young people, "You're going to have to take care of yourself." Once you take away peoples' support system, they're into that survival mode that I was talking about a few minutes ago. It doesn't look like survival because these are all good-looking people, driving big cars and living on tree-lined streets in nice houses. But they're scared, absolutely.

ROHR So you're pointing out that people are fleeing to individualism because there are not that many institutions that can be trusted.

CHITTISTER They're being forced into individualism. It's everybody on her own now because this government is not going to help. It won't help you when

your children are sick. It won't help you when you're close to death. It's not going to help you when you can't earn any more.

REFLECTIONS So in order to do the kind of prophetic work that you both are writing about, one really has to have a sense of hope.

ROHR If you don't come from a core of hope, I don't think you can be a prophet. If you're just oppositional and negative, you're no prophet. The core of hope, the absolute centrality of the inner-God experience, is crucial to true prophesy. And you can tell in a person whether her inner core is positive, hopeful, and believing, or cynical, sarcastic, and dead. Some in the hierarchy write us off. They think we're cynics. In fact, we're radical believers, deep believers. That's what gives any of us the true authority to speak.

REFLECTIONS And that is completely grounded in our biblical tradition. I hear many Christians say, "I don't read the Hebrew Bible. That God is so angry. I can't deal with that God." And I always respond, "No, that's the God who's profoundly wounded. That's not an angry God. That's a God we can relate to in ways that we cannot relate to the God of the Christian Scriptures."

CHITTISTER The God of despair, the God of frustration, the God of great vision. That God is the God that leads to Jesus. It's also the story of a people who are in exactly the same situation we're in right now, and learning new things about God and life, little by little.

REFLECTIONS So there over 1,300 people waiting to hear you speak about the prophetic voice, and they are not looking simply for a spiritual high. How can these people living in individual communities inspire prophetic ways of being in the church and in society?

ROHR What I always encourage people to do, because they don't feel they have power over the big system, is find one area where they're gifted, one concrete, particular—the "scandal of the particular," as Walter Brueggemann says, and begin there.

CHITTISTER We must train people to ask one question: About what are you most concerned? About which of these great global questions are you most concerned? And then join a group who shares your concern and move the globe with them. Is it global warming? Is it the ozone layer? Is it the women's issue? Is it war? Where does your heart bleed? Over what does your soul weep? Identify that. Find the group, because they're out there. Find the group that has committed their lives to burrowing through that issue and join them.

ROHR That's where your gift is.

CHITTISTER Find what your gift is and link it with other people, because that is the answer to the despair of individualism.

ROHR The largest percentage of the prophets served as prophets for one event or one era or one king. It wasn't like they wore the shingle "Prophet" from birth until death. They were called to operate as a truth speaker in a particular situation. Most of them were short-term prophets—for an event, for a period—which, I think, gives people a lot of hope that we can be prophets, too. As Moses says in the Book of Numbers, "Would that all the people of God were prophets!" (11:28). There is always one area where we are gifted to see and speak clearly.

REFLECTIONS Would you say that the particular situation that Jesus addressed was the frequently oppressive and corrupt nature of religious authority operating during his time?

ROHR Absolutely. That is so obviously the case. I offered a talk at a conference a few years back where I took Matthew's gospel and pointed out how, just in that one gospel, there are so many scenes of hostility between Jesus and the religious authorities. It takes up nearly the entire gospel. I wonder how we made out of these Jesus narratives a religion that is not self-critical? It's phenomenal to me.

REFLECTIONS It seems to me that Jesus was arguing with the rigidly conservative and judgmental Catholics and Protestants of the time. And yet, today, conservative believers use Jesus to defend themselves.

ROHR When we imitate Jesus that way, we're called rebellious, disloyal, disobedient, unorthodox. I think Joan and I have paid our dues to orthodoxy. I can defend the orthodox tradition because it is the only thing that gives me the courage to talk this way. I was educated in the tradition and I know the tradition. The prophets were radical traditionalists. When many people speak about tradition today, they talk about something out of the 1950s.

CHITTISTER That's maintaining the past, not the tradition. The tradition is alive and dynamic. Someone wrote once, "The only difference between an optimist and a conservative is that there are those who believe that foolishness frozen in time is better than foolishness fresh off the vine." I do think that it's probably part of the reason that people who are not asking the questions, finding their gifts, and bonding with others feel so overwhelmed that they prefer to disappear behind it. I have a friend who told me

that, among her circle of women, one of them—a very privileged and wealthy woman—said that she could not talk about the women's issue any longer because, if she did, something in her life would have to change. So the only way out of it is to close the door in your mind.

REFLECTIONS So in order to have prophetic vision, one must first go through some form of *metanoia*, a radical change of heart and vision?

CHITTISTER Absolutely. Once you see, you cannot not see.

ROHR The notion of transformation was part of the breakthrough that led me into working with men's spirituality. It is in the male psyche to be heroic, to operate on some level of what he thinks is greatness. It's usually associated with power, money, control, and dominance. And yet what you find across religious boundaries—not just Christianity alone, but explicitly in Jesus' teaching—is that in every initiation rite there is a "language of descent." The Christian phrase was "the way of the cross." Males have to be carefully taught a wisdom path, and much of that centers on their learning how to critique their own power. Males believe that they are physically more powerful than women. Yet Jesus taught us that those positioned at the top are, in fact, the most trapped. Grief work was a part of every initiation rite because by becoming capable of empathy for suffering a young boy was able to shatter his narcissism. In Kenya, a group of male African lawyers took me on a tour of what they called "The Caves of Grief." These were stalwart guys. They were dressed in their traditional robes. And they said, "Here, we had to learn to cry." There is a brilliant recognition that males are often trapped at the top. Tears do not come easily to the typical male because such a large part of him has been closed down by always "ascending" into illusion.

CHITTISTER I really take that as one of the signs of hope in our society. In my lifetime, I have watched men be able to cry. You have no idea how that touches me. That says to me that a man has two choices. He can choose to tell the truth and be a human being or he can choose to lie about his invulnerability and become an animal.

REFLECTIONS So vulnerability, that openness to be wounded, is also essential to being a prophet?

CHITTISTER You can't understand oppression until you have identified your own. How do you know what it feels like to be abandoned, to be poor and not be able to take care of your children, until you have stopped bullying your way through every in-

RICHARD LINDSAY '04M.DIV.

stitution on earth? Who stands in line if they have money and power? So many women religious give up the habit because we knew it was absolutely essential to our ability to identify with the very society we said we wanted to serve. Too much privilege came with the habit: every door opened and every restaurant had a table.

ROHR In male initiation rites the wounding of the initiate was universal. A boy was always symbolically wounded because it taught him, at least symbolically, the necessity of vulnerability, patience, and healing. The great traditions say that it is in suffering that you understand, and you don't understand any other way. In fact, the Africans told me that it was precisely during the healing of their circumcision that wisdom was taught to them. Finally, they were in a teachable space. It is the same for history and for institutions.

CHITTISTER I have the sneaking suspicion that it has something to do with the male attraction to war. In war they can be wounded and be heroic in their wounds. There, they can cry for another human being and be considered masculine. They keep the power, hide the wound, make it heroic, and, somehow or other, have the community that goes along with all that.

REFLECTIONS It's fascinating because Jesus was quite the opposite. He was the wounded one. The crucifixion, it seems to me, is the ultimate act of vulnerability. Prophets take similar risk. They speak out of a passionate love of their communities, and paradoxically is it exactly that love that puts them at risk of being hurt by their very own communities. Which is why I suppose, Jesus says, that the prophet has nowhere to lay her or his head.

ROHR The vulnerable position, identification with the crucified Christ, and crucified people will never be a popular position on either Left or Right. The Left is into its heady and rational idealism and the Right into its moral separateness and superiority. These are just different ways we create an identity for ourselves. Neither is the naked position of the Gospel, where "I live no longer with my own life" (Galatians 2:20). In that place, as Jesus warned, "the whole world will hate you" (John 15:19). One wonders why anyone would choose or want to be a prophet.

After spending thirty-one years in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the last few in anguished expectation that the mainline denomination might start permitting gay ordination, Richard Lindsay is on the verge of leaving for a church that will accept him as a minister.

As he tells it, deciding whether to leave is an agonizing process. On the one hand, after getting a master of divinity degree from Yale Divinity School in 2004, he is fed up with waiting. And, even if the waiting ends, the dominant culture in the church may still be sharply negative toward gay clergy. On the other hand, he and his family are Presbyterians to the marrow, so much so that he credits the church's emphasis on study and reflection with his parents' highly unusual decision to have Lindsay out himself to his extended family. Plus, Lindsay believes that change is most effectively wrought from within an institution. "There is certainly always room for visionaries and idealists," says Lindsay, currently a doctoral candidate in homiletics at Berkeley's Graduate Theological Union. "But the people who really affect change are working within institutions...Ultimately, human beings and societies can evolve morally in the same way that we evolve physically."

Lindsay so believes in the efficacy of reforming institutions from within that, last spring, he took part in a gutsy, cross-country campaign to enlighten and provoke the students and administrations of colleges with discriminatory policies. Modeled after the Freedom Riders of the civil rights era, Equality Ride 2006 took thirty-two activists to nineteen institutions of higher learning, most of them evangelical Christian. Lindsay was the group's media spokesperson, putting him front and center in places like Wheaton College, the United States Air Force Academy, and Jerry Falwell's Liberty University. Sometimes the Equality activists were invited to speak to students. Sometimes they were threatened with arrest if they set foot on campus. "We got very used to negotiating, to defusing a situation," says Lindsay, still marveling at the experience. "When you have people who are willing to check their stereotypes at the door and really talk to people with opposing points of view, then you're standing on holy ground."

When the Equality Ride arrived in Virginia Beach to speak with students at Regent University, founded by televangelist Pat Robertson, school administrators blocked access to the campus. "There was a small army of police waiting for us, on horseback, in riot gear," recalls Lindsay. "The students were not allowed to cross the line." So, Lindsay held up a placard with his mobile phone number on it. Students called and a later impromptu meeting at a nearby 7-Eleven convenience store ensued. "We came back the next day and some of the students knelt before us, asking for forgiveness."

Nowadays, as Lindsay settles into what is likely to be a five-year stint earning his doctorate at GTU, there is a hint of wistfulness in his voice when he speaks about the fifty-one-day Equality Ride. "I'm feeling fidgety. I feel the need to get into trouble."

For the Love of It All

In the beginning, as life became form,
The oceans heaved, the mountains were cleaved,
The firmament stormed.
At the center of being, immensely small
Was the master of now, don't ask me how
The Love of it all

And the seasons were many.
Creation was new.
And there on a tree (deceptively free)
A forbidden fruit
Upon leaving the garden, after the fall,
One thing was clear; we chose not to hear
The Love of it all

But for the Love of it all
I would go anywhere.
To the ends of the earth,
What is it worth if Love would be there?
Walking the thin line between fear and the call
One learns to bend and finally depend
On the Love of it all.

"Irresistible targets"
I heard someone say.
They were speaking of angels
Who are so courageous day after day
Gunned down on a highway (as we often recall)
I hear a scream; I have a dream
The Love of it all

Still the world is in labor,
She groans in travail.
She cries with the eagle, the dolphin,
She sighs in the song of the whale.
While the heart of her people
Prays at the wall.
A spirit inside is preparing a bride
For the Love of it all

For the Love of it all,
Like the stars and the sun,
We are hearts on the rise,
Separate eyes with the vision of one.
No valley too deep, no mountain too tall,
We can turn back the night with merely the light
From the Love of it all.

And so we are marching to 'give peace a chance'
Brother and sister as one in this mystery dance.
Long ago on a hilltop where now the curious crawl
A man on a cross paid the ultimate cost
For the Love of it all

For the Love of it all
We are gathered by grace
We have followed our hearts
To take up our parts
In this time and place.
Hands for the harvest,
Hear the centuries call:
It is still not too late to come celebrate
The Love of it all
"Eli, eli, lemana shabakthani"
The Love of it all.

Noel Paul Stookey

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In Memory of Bill Coffin

By Marian Wright Edelman

GOD GAVE EACH OF US TALENTS according to God's purposes. But when God created Bill Coffin, God "sho-nuff showed off." And Bill, showered with prodigious gifts of mind, body, and spirit, used God's blessings to bless all he touched and to help transform the nation and world he traversed for eighty-one years.

Bill was a man of boundless joy whose zest for life often made him appear bigger than life. He had a capacity to make each of us feel special, seen, heard, cherished, and embraced in his boundless fountain of friendship. Bill's spirit of hospitality was equally boundless. There was always a welcome table in the Coffin house. I'm forever grateful that he took me, a penurious law student, into his family's bosom with Amy and Alex and David and Eva for a year's respite from Yale's then segregated graduate and professional women's dorm – Helen Hadley Hall. And he didn't get mad when I seriously bent the fender of the almost new Coffin station wagon backing out of the garage.

I loved Bill's gift of strategic mischief. He cagily used me to integrate the all-White-male usher board at Yale's Battell Chapel, calculating that some Yalies would be afraid to protest such a revolutionary change for fear of being perceived as anti-Black. It worked.

Bill's fluency in languages (he spoke four), in the prophets and gospels, in the tenets of all great faiths, and in a range of literary muses and philosophers fed a wellspring of eloquence in conveying God's overarching messages of justice, faith, peace, and respect for the earth and others. Like the prophet Habakkuk who railed to God about the violence and evil all around him, Bill followed God's response to the prophet to write the vision and make it plain so that even a runner might see it. Bill raised an unwavering prophetic voice against the growing gap between the haves and the have-nots in a world in which 691 billionaires' net worth exceeds that of over 3 billion human beings living in the 99 poorest nations. He challenged leaders who are still turning a deaf ear to the cries of babies starving for bread, and mothers dying in childbirth every minute in a world that squanders trillions of dollars on bombs and missiles as we teeter on the razor's edge of nuclear destruction.

Bill's extraordinary musical versatility – voice, piano, guitar, classical, Russian folksongs, sacred music, and hearty hymn sings – inspired and revived us during good and bad times. James Carroll recounts how Bill's strong voice soared across the District of Columbia jail they shared after an anti-Vietnam War demonstration, carrying all their voices because he knew the words and the music of Handel's *Messiah* and could express, like few others could, our deepest longings in protest and sermon and song and civil disobedience.

Bill's courage was legendary. A child of the establishment, he challenged it. A white man of privilege and power, he joined his dear friend John Maguire and others on a Freedom Ride in Alabama to end racial apartheid in America side by side with Dr. King. Shocking many Yale alums, and giving Kingman Brewster the first of many severe political heartburns, Bill led protests against the Vietnam War and stood with the young who resisted the draft.

Let me close with Bill's words and gifts to us from his book *Credo*, which he sent inscribed "with love abounding and lots of hope," and instructions to see page 19, which says:

"It's hope that helps us keep the faith, despite the evidence, knowing that only in so doing has the evidence any chance of changing."

"Hope has nothing to do with optimism. Its opposite is not pessimism but despair. And if Jesus never allowed His soul to be cornered into despair, clearly we Christians shouldn't either."

"Hope criticizes what is, hopelessness rationalizes it. Hope resists, hopelessness adapts."

Bill never adapted to injustice perpetrated by anybody, anywhere or to war or environmental degradation or nuclear proliferation, and we won't either.

Bill's final words to us in *Credo* were about his gratitude for "family and friends and nature's beauty." Although still outraged by callous behavior, particularly in high places, "I feel more often serene, grateful for God's gift of life. For the compassions that fail not, I find myself saying daily to my loving maker, 'I can no other answer make than thanks, and thanks, and ever thanks.'"

And so we join Bill today in celebration, thanking our faithful and loving God for Bill Coffin's great life with thanks, and thanks, and ever thanks!!! Amen.

Marian Wright Edelman is a lifelong advocate for disadvantaged Americans and is the Founder and President of the Children's Defense Fund (CDF). Under her leadership, CDF has become the nation's strongest voice for children and families.

The Prophetic Role of the African American Churches in the 21st Century

James H. Evans, Jr.

A Soul/Voice

The situation of the African American church at the beginning of the twenty-first century is strikingly similar to its position at the beginning of the twentieth century. The African American church stands at a pivotal, historical point looking back on a century that included degradation, humiliation, victories, and exaltation. It was exactly one hundred years ago that W. E. B. Du Bois gave voice to the pain and promise felt by African Americans in the nineteenth century in his classic work *Souls of Black Folk*. The tensions within the African American church at this time were related to the allure of Booker T. Washington's "gospel of wealth," and the echoes of the prophetic voice of Bishop Henry M. Turner; between the focus on the inner life of the black church, as suggested by the formation of the major Baptist conventions, and the push of Black Social Gospelers like Bishop Reverdy C. Ransom; between the politics of passivity and the politics of progressivism.

Today the African American church is confronted with historical tensions that are structurally similar to that of the past century. The gospel of wealth has been repackaged as the "prosperity gospel" even as the gospel of cultural pride is submerged in and co-opted by a materialistic culture. The focus on the inner life of the church now reappears as a near exclusive emphasis on "praise and worship," even as the whispers of the social gospel refuse to be silenced. Some high-profile ministers push political passivity while many of the lesser known continue to cry out and work for justice.

Du Bois declared that the great problem of the twentieth century would be the color line. If one were to ask today what the great problem of the twenty-first century is, there would be a number of potential answers. The emergence of technology as a key variable in the quality of life, and the inequalities that attend to its availability, have created a technological divide in our society. The economic divide, exacerbated by policies that depress wages and increase costs for those who can least afford it, has

only grown wider. In a nation in which the wealthy are becoming wealthier, larger and larger numbers of our brothers and sisters live below the poverty line. What may appear to be an economic gap to the rest of America is most often an unbridgeable chasm for the African American underclass. What may appear to be a temporary economic setback for the rest of America quickly becomes a permanent condition for African Americans. The peculiar and disproportionate nature of this suffering may be a source for the emergence of the prophetic voice in our times. Certainly, economic inequality affects the lives of those who live below the "poverty line," yet there are groups who, in spite of economic success, continue to experience a kind of powerlessness. These are persons who are middle income but not middle class. I would like to suggest that the great problem of the twenty-first century concerns the *power line*.

Freedom and Power

How can the African American church recover and reclaim its prophetic mandate, mission, and message in the post-civil rights era? How can the African American church contribute to the realization of the kind of transformation and reconciliation that is called for? What should be its prophetic voice? Do African American churches face the critical task of speaking to the powerful on behalf of the powerless?¹

Fifty years after the appearance of Du Bois's narrative, the civil rights movement emerged on the American scene. This great social and spiritual awakening of the progressive dimension of the African American was broad, though not universal, in its appeal. Two deep human needs were addressed by this movement: the need for freedom and the need for power. These needs are still present in the African American community and beyond. And these needs, I believe, should provide the context for prophetic speech and witness today.

There are two major emphases that should

guide the prophetic witness of the African American church (and, I would add, all Christian communities in the United States) in the twenty-first century. The first is a “consistent theology of liberation” and the second is a “consistent ethic of empowerment.” The African American church must recognize and defend its historic claim that no form of oppression is consistent with God’s will, or cease to use liberation as its fundamental theological touchstone. As is well known, the African American church at its best has been a beacon of liberation in America. From the resistance movement during slavery to the civil rights movement, liberation has been its hallmark. Currently, the African American church, in too many instances, proclaims a “limited liberation.” This is a liberation that includes race but excludes gender. It is a liberation that includes race and gender, but excludes class. It is a liberation that includes race and gender, but excludes sexual orientation.

The key here is that groups may come to share a commitment to liberation for themselves and for others whether or not they experience oppression in the same way. A consistent theology of liberation would not be bound by the narrow and occasional moralities of a privileged and powerful minority but would call us beyond our own social locations, personal preferences, and group allegiances to recognize that if oppression exists anywhere, it exists everywhere. A consistent theology of liberation would keep the church at the forefront of the battle against sin (alienation) and its historical manifestations (oppression).

The African American church must practice an *ethic of empowerment*. The church must recognize and defend its historic claim that faith is essentially empowerment, and that any ministry or sociopolitical or economic structure that fosters dependence, degradation, or despair is not the product of true faith. Currently, the church, in too many instances mimicking society as a whole, appears to be a cult of dependence. This cult of dependence is characterized by a leadership that is served rather than serves. This is especially evident in some contemporary settings where the pastor rather than Christ is the object of veneration, and where worship serves more as entertainment than edification. The church must be more than the occasion for empty ritual “having the form of religion, but no power.” A consistent ethic of empowerment would keep the church at the forefront of the battle for the salvation (reconciliation) of all people, and its historical manifestation (the kingdom of God).

Prophesy to Your Own House

It is important to note that the prophetic voice is more than an objective critique of the Other. The dangers of self-righteousness and hypocrisy are ever present. While these twin dangers threaten every Christian community’s prophetic effort, the African American church, in its best moments, has been able to avoid their deleterious effects. One becomes aware of the dangers of self-righteousness when one’s own righteousness is continually disputed. One becomes aware of the dangers of hypocrisy when the truth is the key to life itself. Historically, the African American church has stood for righteousness of freedom in the midst of the unrighteousness of slavery. It has stood for the truth of human dignity in the midst of the lies of black inferiority.

This history does not absolve the African American church from its own critique. On the contrary, the African American church must first preach liberation to itself. It must practice empowerment in its own life. And when it attends to this task, it will position itself to give voice to more relevant leadership paradigms for the church. It will give voice to more relevant organizational structures for the church. It will give voice to more effective methods for the ministries of the church. It will be able to speak truth to power. From this powerful base, it will be able to, once again, “Shout the Victory!”

Notes

- 1 In this regard, see Anthony B. Pinn, *The Black Church in the Post–Civil Rights Era* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2002); and Dwight N. Hopkins, ed., *Black Faith and Public Talk*. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999).

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Speaking Truth in Love: Strategies for Prophetic Preaching

By Leonora Tubbs Tisdale

For many preachers—including myself—prophetic preaching is the most difficult kind of preaching we do. I know that when I first graduated from seminary twenty-seven years ago and went out to serve as co-pastor, with my husband, for four small churches in rural Virginia, I equated prophetic preaching with head-on, confrontational preaching. I thought that unless I was making people angry through an occasional prophetic sermon, I probably wasn't doing my job well.

My role models for preaching then were the minor prophets, people like Amos and Micah and Hosea, who called the people of Israel to accountability before God in no uncertain terms, and who sometimes even referred to their hearers by such uncomplimentary terms as “you cows of Bashan” (Amos 4:1).

It wasn't until I had been in ministry for awhile that I realized that the minor prophets might not always be the best models for parish ministry, since ordinarily they were not also serving as pastors or priests for their people at the same time. It is not easy to be prophet and priest, a gadfly and a comforter. We are dealing with a complex calling here, and one in which the local pastor frequently feels torn between what seem like conflicting roles in ministry.

Yet the more I read the sermons of contemporary prophets, such as Barbara Lundblad, James Forbes, and William Sloane Coffin, Jr., the more I also realize how desperately we need more preachers like them. The church today seems to have developed a severe case of *prophetic laryngitis*¹ in the public arena, and our witness is suffering because of it. Furthermore, theologically we need the prophets because ultimately their message brings hope—hope of a new day to come when justice will roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

My own preferred working definition of prophetic preaching comes from Walter Brueggemann's now classic book, *The Prophetic Imagination*. Bruegge-

mann writes, “The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us.”² For Brueggemann such countercultural witness will necessarily involve criticizing the old order, and sometimes even pronouncing a death sentence upon it—which is why prophetic witness can be so difficult. But Brueggemann also reminds us that while the first task of the Biblical prophets was to *criticize* the old order, their second task was to *energize* their hearers with a hope-filled vision of the new reign of God that was to come. “The riddle and insight of biblical faith,” he writes, “is the awareness that only anguish leads to life, only grieving leads to joy, and only embraced endings permit new beginnings.”³

In this article I will identify seven strategies for approaching the task of prophetic preaching with wisdom, pastoral sensitivity, and love. Yet when talking about strategies, it is also important to remember that our goal is not to make the Gospel more palatable. It is to make it more hearable. And that is a very different thing. The distinction Paul Tillich makes between “genuine” and “wrong” stumbling blocks in his book *Theology of Culture* is helpful in this regard.⁴

Genuine stumbling blocks, says Tillich, are those theological affirmations that are at the heart of the Gospel itself—those offenses that we dare not remove or else we have robbed preaching of its very heart and soul. Offenses like a crucified messiah, a

gospel that will “lift up the poor and send the rich empty away,” or the radical call of Jesus to love and forgive our enemies. Helping people get beyond genuine stumbling blocks is not our work, says Tilly. It is God’s work.

“Wrong” stumbling blocks, on the other hand, are those things we preachers may do—either intentionally or unintentionally in our communication of Gospel—that keep our congregations from giving the Gospel we preach a fair hearing. Things like our arrogance or aloofness in the pulpit, the use of illustrations that belittle or put someone down, or our failure to use inclusive language. Wrong stumbling blocks are something we can and should do something about.

To that end, I would like to suggest seven strategies that we preachers might employ to occasion a genuine hearing of God’s prophetic Gospel, so that people can decide for it or against it.

The importance of trust and speaking prophetic truth in love

In his book *Speaking Truth in Love*, Philip Wogaman tells about Ernest Freemont Tittle, one of the great prophetic preachers of the mid-twentieth century, who held a number of fairly radical views that were not broadly shared by his congregation at First Methodist Church in Evanston, Illinois. At one juncture in Tittle’s ministry a serious move was mounted by some members of the congregation to have him removed from the pulpit. But the tide, Wogaman says, was stemmed when a leading layman in the congregation—widely known for his conservatism—put a stop to the idea with a moving speech about how Dr. Tittle had stayed up all night with the layman’s dying wife.⁵

Wogaman continues: “If the whole point of the prophetic word is God’s love, how on earth can that message be heard if it is not expressed in a context of love? . . . We cannot preach about love unlovingly; it is a self-contradiction.”⁶

If prophetic preaching is born out of thinly disguised anger at a congregation, out of frustration with a congregation, or out of a desire to appear loving so that the message will be heard and accepted, people will know it. We can’t fake love in the pulpit.

If the message we bring is genuinely born out of love—a love regularly practiced for even for the most recalcitrant of sinners—hearts may well be opened to the prophetic message of the Gospel in ways we cannot even begin to imagine or anticipate. And, as Wogaman rightly notes, this is at heart not a

practical matter, but a theological one, issuing from the way in which God deals with us.

Starting with the Familiar and the Comfortable, and Moving Toward the Unfamiliar and Stretching

James Forbes, the current pastor of the Riverside Church in New York City, makes an interesting progression as he moves from the more familiar to the less familiar with his own congregation in the following sermon:

Years ago, when I was still living in North Carolina, someone said to me, ‘Brother Forbes, do you think the gospel can be preached by someone who is not Pentecostal?’ Well, I wasn’t sure, for it was the only preaching I had known, but I imagined that it could happen even if I hadn’t seen or heard it. Indeed, I found out some time later that it was so.

After I had moved away from my hometown, someone said to me, ‘Rev. Forbes, have you ever heard the true gospel from a white preacher?’ Well, in theory I knew it had to be true for God doesn’t withhold the Spirit from anyone. Though I had my doubts that a white preacher could speak with power, I came to a point in my life where I had to say, ‘Yes, I’ve heard it!’

Some time went by, and people began to press upon me the question of the ordination of women. ‘Could the gospel be preached by a woman even though the holy scriptures led a woman to keep silence in the church?’

I had to ponder this, for it went against what I had known in my own church and there was much resistance from my brother clergy. But I listened to my sisters and before too long I knew the Spirit of God was calling them to preach. Who was I to get in God’s way?

Now I thought I had been asked the last question about who might be called to bring me the word of the Lord. But I found out I was wrong. A new question has been posed to me, and many of you know what it is. ‘Can gay men and lesbian women be called to preach the word of God?’ Oh, I know what the Bible says and I know what my own uneasiness says and I can see that same uneasiness in some of our faces. But I’ve been wrong before, and the Spirit has been nudging me to get over my uneasiness. Sometimes we forget Jesus’ promise—that the Spirit will lead us into all truth. Well, that

must have meant the disciples didn't know it all then, and maybe we don't know it all now.⁷

By starting with the familiar and comfortable, and then pressing toward the unfamiliar and the uncomfortable, we can allow people the time and the space to have their horizons stretched from the inside out. And in the process, we can also establish points of identification with them that strengthen the bonds between pastor and people—even while prophetic words are being spoken.

Using a Congregation's Own History as a Bridge for Forging the Way Toward a New Future Prophetic Vision for Its Future

One of the stories I tell in my book *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art* is about Tom Hay, a seminary classmate of mine who was at one time the pastor of a small church in a very conservative community in eastern North Carolina that was seriously divided by race. One week—during which the Gospel lectionary text was focused on the story of the Syrophoenician woman and how (as some commentators suggest) she pressed Jesus to expand the community of his ministry to include even her, a Gentile—Tom decided to use his sermon to address the issue of race.

He began by recounting the story of “Stone Soup”—a story in which, during a time of famine after war, the members of a community gradually come together and, by contributing the vegetables that each had stashed away to a large community pot that had water in it and a magic stone, ultimately made enough soup to feed not only themselves, but also the strangers who passed through their town. He went on in his sermon to affirm the congregation for their own past history as stone soup makers, as he told the story of how one snowy January theirs was the only church in the community that stayed open for worship and how, as they went out to the highways and byways to bring people to church in their pick-up trucks, they ended up having such a large congregation that they had to break more bread and pour more wine for their communion time.

And then he went on to tell them—in both an encouraging and a challenging way—that while they had become very proficient in making stone soup, enough to feed many people, they still had some growing to do in the area of sharing their soup with strangers. And that a part of God's vision for their future was that they would become more open to

those in their own community who, due to the divides of race, had become virtual strangers to them. He challenged them to do their part in breaking down the dividing walls of hostility so that all could sit together and eat together at the same table.

That sermon caught fire in that congregation—so much fire that they later named their homecoming and outreach Sunday “Stone Soup Sunday” and had mugs made with that slogan on them.

Standing With the Congregation Under the Word of God, Rather than Opposite the Congregation Armed With the Word of God

Walter Brueggemann draws what has proved for me a very helpful and insightful analogy between preaching and family systems theory. He says that in most church situations of biblical interpretation three voices are operative: that of the biblical text, of the pastor, and of the congregation. Yet all too often pastors team up with texts to “triangle” against their congregations in preaching, leaving the congregation “a hostile, resistant outsider.” How much better, contends Brueggemann, if the pastor stand with the congregation against the text, letting the radical Word of God offend both!⁸

One of my first years on the faculty of Princeton Seminary I heard Brian Blount—my dear friend and NT colleague, who is also a very fine prophetic preacher—preach a sermon entitled “Stay Close” to graduating seniors. The sermon—based on the story in Mark 9 (14-29) where Jesus heals a demon-possessed boy and then challenges the disciples to pray harder so that they, too, can cast out such demons—is a strong challenge to seminarians to stay close to God through prayer so that they, too, can be empowered by God to cast out the many demons of injustice they will face in their ministries.

By the sermon's end, we find these very honest and self-revealing words, spoken by the preacher. Listen to how Blount, by his own honest identification with the fears of these budding pastors, also enhances the power and authenticity of his proclamation.

But before I close I must come clean myself. You know, when I first heard about this invitation, my first inclination was to turn it down. Not because I'm not honored that you would ask me to preach at such an important occasion (which I am), but because I was a little afraid. Not of preaching, but of preaching in this academic context. I never preached in this chapel while I was a student, and when I returned, I honestly intended not

to preach here as a professor. When I was a student it was because it always felt more like an academic exercise than a spiritual one because I felt, even then, that I was being graded. Now it's because I remember how my sermons in my community in Virginia sometimes got me into trouble, and junior professors already have all the trouble they can handle just by being junior professors. I worry about that kind of stuff all the time, it seems now. About how people perceive me. About whether I'm doing too much. Saying too much. About how far I have the resources to push myself beyond the confines of this sheltered seminary existence to work where I ought to be working in the world around it. . . .

Believe me, there will come a time when you start to worry in the same way. Worry about offending parishioners, threatening the budget, offending powerful people on the session, in the presbytery, on the deacon's board, in the bishop's office, in the mayor's office, on the school board, on the chamber of commerce, in the Princeton Theological Seminary community, and you start to think, you know, "I've got a family. I want to have friends. I want people to like me. I want to keep my job or secure it for a long time." So you start to think, "Maybe I ought to do Christianity, do faith the way Brian Blount plays basketball, without risk, without doing anything that might push me to the point of no return." I'm here tonight, though, because I want to tell you, and remind myself, if that's what you've graduated to do, then maybe your presbytery can use you, maybe your bishop can use you, maybe your church can use you.

But I'm not so sure God can use you.

Appears to me, by then you're pretty much all used up. God needs soldiers, not used-up followers. God needs players who can give God twenty points every night. That's what finally came to me as I meditated on the decision to worship with you this evening. I thought about my father struggling and believing, I thought about those slaves singing and believing. In cotton fields, in cornfields, in tobacco fields, in fields of misery and hopelessness, and yet they sang the Lord's song in a foreign land. They stayed close to God, and that gave them faith and the faith gave them power.⁹

By taking his stand *with* the congregation under the Word of God, and by openly acknowledging the ways in which that Word also convicts him, Blount is able to speak some challenging words in a hearable way.

Articulating the Opposing View Point in a Sermon in a Manner that Is Fair and Accurate and Believable

If we are going to tackle the position of someone who disagrees with us in a sermon, it is often very important that we state their position as fairly and as accurately as we can. Otherwise, we can easily raise the ire and the defenses of people who feel that we've diminished or misrepresented their points of view in our preaching.

In his book *Preaching Christian Doctrine*, William J. Carl shares these insights about how William Sloane Coffin, Jr., prepared for preaching. He writes:

Coffin does not avoid the "emotionally explosive"; he ignites it.

But he never does so foolishly or dogmatically. The reason is that he knows what he is talking about. Not everyone will agree with Coffin's conclusions on issues, but no one questions his knowledge of the problem.

Coffin always does his homework. He sets aside time and reads articles and books—whatever he can get his hands on. He reads both sides of an issue. When he emerges from his study, he knows the history of the problem, the political and social dimensions the various arguments and questions for the modern Christian to ponder.

He does not attempt a major moral problem every week. In fact, his practice has been to immerse himself in one major problem for a period of time. In the early sixties it was civil rights. In the late sixties to early seventies it was Vietnam. In the late seventies it was hunger and American intervention in places like El Salvador. In the eighties it has been the arms race....At Yale and at Riverside his practice has been to do his homework and make his statement clearly and early to the congregation only once, and not badger them with it week after week. Most of the time he preaches the lectionary and deals with pastoral issues.¹⁰

My own study of Coffin's sermons reinforces the truth of Carl's statements. Though some of Coffin's critics at Riverside Church accused him of preaching on only one theme during the 1980s and early '90s—namely, nuclear disarmament—his sermons do not

bear that out. They are varied and often highly pastoral and, as Carl notes, ordinarily lectionary based. I also find it interesting that Coffin's most famous sermon, "Alex's Death," preached only two weeks after his own twenty-four-year-old son was tragically killed in an automobile accident, deals with that most personally existential of all issues: death.

But when Coffin does preach on a social issue, it is clear that he has done his homework, and done it well. And that if you are going to argue with him, you had better do your homework equally well before attempting it!

Helping People Stand in Another Person's Shoes and See the World from a Different Perspective

Barbara Lundblad, Professor of Preaching at Union Seminary in NYC, begins one of her sermons—based on the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke's Gospel, and preached to an ecumenical group of pastors—by telling about a pastor friend of hers who, while ministering to a very poor community in Detroit, asked a group of mothers one day what they would do if they won the lottery.

"What would I do if I won the lottery?" one woman said. "I'd buy easy chairs for the Laundromat—enough chairs so everybody could sit down and take a load off. All they've got is three old chairs, and two have broken seats—and the one that's not broken is so hard you'd rather sit on a dryer and burn your—you know what I mean, Pastor."¹¹

The pastor went on to press the point, asking the woman if there weren't anything else she'd want to do with the money, she held firm. No, she said. Just chairs for the Laundromat.

Lundblad uses this story to open up—in a very personal way—the reality of the gap between the rich and the poor in this land, and the fact that while some in our country are purchasing expensive watches at Cartier, many of the poor in our land really desire only to have basic needs met, and those often on behalf of someone else. She ultimately uses her sermon to encourage preachers to challenge the language often heard in the public arena, which portrays the poor as lazy, lacking in motivation, having too many illegitimate children and cheating the government, and that urges the adoption of policies that will only further widen the chasm.

"Those of us who claim to speak in Christ's name," she concludes, "are called to share his vision....If we speak in the name of Jesus we must see Lazarus and

love him, love him back to life again. We hardly know where to begin to close the chasm between the rich and the poor on this side of heaven. We could begin by talking to the women in the Laundromat, and by listening—really listening—to the One who has risen from the dead."¹²

Taking the Long View

Finally, I want to talk about taking the wisdom of taking the long view in prophetic preaching.

In my early years of ministry I tended to think that change in people's lives and in the life of a congregation happened either immediately or not at all. And so, if I preached a few prophetic sermons and nothing much happened, I considered my people to be recalcitrant and myself to be a faithful, if ineffective, change agent.

Over time, though, I have come to realize that for most of us change happens slowly, imperceptibly, and over the space of years. And that genuine transformation in preaching often follows a similar trajectory.

I once heard someone say of the pastor of his congregation that one of the things he most admired about him was his patience with his flock, and the way in which his overall preaching reflected a long-term strategy for transformation, rather than an episodic or immediate one.

"Here's the pattern I've observed," he said. "For three weeks out of the month, my pastor will preach sermons the congregation has pretty much come to expect from him. Sermons that are full of grace and love and encouragement and pastoral care. But about every fourth week, there will be this sermon with a zinger in the middle of it that really stretches our edges and challenges us in some area. And because they come as a part of the whole package, our people are usually very open to hearing them.

"I've seen this happen so many times over the years," he continued, "that I have to believe this strategy is very intentional on our pastor's part. He knows we need to hear those stretching sermons that challenge us to take the next step in our journey of faith. But he also knows we'll hear them better if they are enshrouded in the midst of sermons that offer us lots of love and grace."

One of the phenomena I have observed through the years is that for whatever reason, people tend to hear prophetic sermons louder than others. You can preach ten pastoral sermons and one prophetic sermon, and the sermon that will be heard the loudest is the prophetic one.

THE REVEREND BLISS WILLIAMS BROWNE

Frankly, I think we need to acknowledge this reality and plan our preaching accordingly. The balance of our preaching is not measured in terms of how many sermons we may have preached on this or that issue. The balance is often measured by how people hear us. And in prophetic ministry, as well as in all forms of ministry, there is good biblical and theological rationale for erring on the side of grace. After all, that is what God in Christ has consistently done with us.

Notes

- 1 Some years ago I heard Thomas G. Long say at an evangelism conference that he thought the church of that day had developed *kerygmatic* laryngitis. It is his term I am playing off of here, when I speak of *prophetic* laryngitis.
- 2 Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2001), 13.
- 3 Ibid., 60.
- 4 Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), ed. Robert C. Kimball, 213.
- 5 Philip Wogaman, *Speaking Truth in Love: Prophetic Preaching to a Broken World* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 19.
- 6 Ibid., 21.
- 7 James A. Forbes, Jr., Sermon preached on videotape. As quoted in Barbara K. Lundblad, *Transforming the Stone* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 53-54.
- 8 Walter Brueggemann, "The Preacher, The Text and the People," *Theology Today* 47 (October 1990): 237-47.
- 9 Brian K. Blount, "Stay Close," a sermon in *Preaching Mark in Two Voices*, Brian K. Blount and Gary W. Charles (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 179-80.
- 10 William J. Carl III, *Preaching Christian Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 122.
- 11 Barbara K. Lundblad, "An Easy Chair at the Laundromat," in *Transforming the Stone*, 113-19.
- 12 Ibid., 118.

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The Reverend Bliss Williams Browne is a woman of firsts. Back in 1969, she was among the first women to enroll at Yale. In 1979, two years after a pioneering ordination into the Episcopal Church as a woman, a banking job took her to London and she became the first female priest to preach in that city's hallowed Westminster Abbey. Nowadays, the 56-year-old mother of three spends ten months of each year overseas, being the first to introduce her novel concept of "Imagine" to dozens of countries.

"I love going into pioneering situations and making them work. I'm so attracted to the edge, in between the future and the present," says Browne, going on to explain how she discerns the "edge." "I think you listen and watch. One of my favorite words is *prolepsis* – something that is happening in the present but belongs to the future."

Browne's ability to find the edge and, more significantly, to encourage others to do the same, has defined her life since 1992. That's when she founded Imagine Chicago, an organization that started by bringing young adults and local community builders together to talk and launch projects. Browne's model is now in place in cities across the world. She spends most of her time traveling abroad, planting Imagine initiatives. In Chicago, past programs included a training initiative to help local leaders develop community projects, an endeavor aimed at giving the city's public school teachers a sense of renewal and a literacy project for parents.

In many ways, Browne's journey began at Yale, specifically with an encounter with William Sloane Coffin, who encouraged her to become a minister – at a time when the Episcopal Church didn't ordain women. It's something she talked about at a May 2006 memorial service for Coffin, when she recalled hearing him speak the previous year.

"I was very moved by what he said, and by realizing how very much his words and witness had shaped my own life and work in ways I had not realized. My life had been lived, personally and professionally ever since I left Yale, at the intersection of faith, imagination, and public life, but for some reason I had forgotten how much his legacy and witness had imprinted and given courage to my own. After I heard Bill speak last year, I went and stood outside, on the very spot where he had stopped me that day my senior year and pointed me toward God's future as the one demanding my attention. I took stock of the ways my life had been marked by his witness and presence."

It wasn't easy moving in the direction of God's future, as Browne recounts with a degree of relish. Upon moving to London and taking up her post there at the First National Bank of Chicago, she was greeted with letters from three top Anglican clerics, who had somehow gotten word of the female priest's arrival. Each letter, according to Browne, delivered the same general message: "We know you're here. Behave yourself." She did, more or less, and returned to Chicago to continue banking and begin serving in first a local parish and later the cathedral. Browne worked under supportive senior clergy but, in some cases, the laity was much less so. "There was discrimination," she recalls, "having someone come up to you at coffee hour and say, 'Why do you want to ruin our church? What are you trying to prove?'"

As she grows older, Browne talks of how a "conversation with God" that she's kept up since she was a child is moving beyond being an "inside conversation that made me bigger than who I am." Now, she increasingly centers on the external, "on the still point of the turning world, where the dance is."

Review—*Brain and Culture: Neurobiology, Ideology, and Social Change*.

by Bruce E. Wexler (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006)

Reviewed by: Bandy Lee '94 MD, '95 MDiv

For practioners concerned with ministry and social change, *Brain and Culture*, is a groundbreaking book providing new insights into how individuals and societies encounter change and the implications for ideologies and social change. Though not directly addressed in the book, it is only a small leap to discern implications for religious practice and ministry.

The work appears at an exciting time, when divergent areas of inquiry, after centuries of fragmentation and specialization, are coming together. Concepts of body and soul, determinism and free will, and the viewpoints of science and religion are converging, not through negotiation or compromise, but through developments within the disciplines themselves. In recent decades, religion has undergone a momentous evolution, transcending fixed notions and rules to approach an essence that underlies different languages and practices. A similar phenomenon is occurring in the sciences, in that the assumed hard-wiring of the brain, the fixed course of gene expression, and even the durable quality of physical matter are turning out to reflect methodology more than inherent qualities of nature. We are finally nearing the possibility of integration since the replacement of *universal faith*, expressed in Augustine's "Credo ut intellegam," with its opposite, *universal doubt*, articulated in Descartes' "De omnibus dubitandum est," rendered a science that is "lame" and a religion that is "blind," to borrow Einstein's words. That a solution would arise in the most delicate interface of neuroscience might be unsurprising, but scientists grappled with the emerging data for decades before arriving at an adequate language to communicate them.

With scholarly rigor and highly original thinking, Professor Wexler draws connections between brain characteristics and socio-cultural dynamics over a solid foundation as few others could. His presentation is both meticulous and far-reaching, while the language he uses makes the exciting developments of neuroscience accessible to students of all fields. In 298 succinct pages, he guides the non-technical reader through an overview of the human brain; how environmental stimulation physically shapes it well into early adulthood; how these structures in turn influence an individual's experience of the environment; and the personal, social, and global consequences of the reduction of neuroplasticity upon reaching adulthood. He creates a continuum between existing paradigms and offers a revolutionary interpretation that makes these scientific findings

highly relevant in our understanding of both personal experience and the perils of our time.

Dr. Wexler warns in the introduction that the volume is full of "details," but it is in these details that the reader will find support for each stage of his argument and his distinction from authors who might make unsupported leaps in logic.. Drawing from a wealth of historical, philosophical, anthropological, political, and literary sources, the examples he gives animate as well as demonstrate in form the content of his synthesizing argument. Through persuasion, we return to the ancient tenet that reality is a process, including our own understanding, and we accept this with firm footing. Humanity is not chained by its biology, and it is also not cut adrift in random and capricious motives but arises as a distinct identity that is summative of environment-specific experiences. The book gives empiric confirmation to anthropologist Clifford Geertz's observation that, when it comes to human beings, "culture, rather than being added on ... to a finished ... animal, was ingredient, and centrally ingredient, in the production of that animal itself." Since culture is increasingly of human design, human beings come to fashion not only their environment but their very nature. Hence, it is part of our biology that we are all connected and responsible for one another.

With this malleability also come variation and a wide variety of internal structures. Amid rapid changes in the environment with each succeeding generation and accelerated migrations, the solidification of an internal compass that should have had a biological advantage becomes an impediment in the meeting of very different worldviews, and increasingly, a cause of violent conflict. Dr. Wexler illustrates this in the various efforts adults make to match the external world with existing internal structures. He considers bereavement and immigration where the arduous task of restructuring an adult brain becomes necessary, and segues to consideration of the meeting of cultures and belief systems. He gives neurological credence to our observations in the modern era, in which changes, even when positive, are met with resistance and radical attempts at reversion to some familiar past: religious fundamentalism in our society attempts to replace with literal belief what Jean-Paul Sartre called "the God-shaped hole," where God had always been; Islamic extremism decries the West as "the camp of unbelief" and vows to destroy the doubters, as if that could destroy the doubt; racism and genocide spread throughout many regions,

so that the West described in Sven Lindquist's book by a line from Joseph Conrad, *Exterminate All the Brutes!* seems only the harbinger of a worldwide trend. With the insights gained from *Brain and Culture*, one comes to see these events under new light and with a deeper understanding.

My one criticism is that Dr. Wexler could have illuminated more of the *psychological* to complement the *biological* (neuroscientific) and *social* (sociological, cultural, and political). Granted, psychological dynamics are complex and may warrant a whole other book, but they may also have a crucial role in neurocognitive structures and their articulation in human affairs: for instance, while neural structures solidify at a consistent age range, we see younger children experience change as trauma when nurturance is inadequate and older adults who have great tolerance for dissonance and uncertainty, sometimes even a welcoming acceptance of diversity and change. There seem to be factors that make individuals capable of *surmounting* the challenges that external circumstances and neurological requirements pose, not to mention *preventing* the largely human-induced destabilization from happening in the first place. Although how exactly policies might be an instrument to enhance a population's collective emotional health has yet to be explored, adequate distribution of education, healthcare, wealth, and security may be a start (this has been done in Western Europe after World War II). Perhaps religion could also help inform, for religious experience (as

distinguished from religious ideology) represents a highest state of emotional health—or, religious role models exemplify what one is capable of doing (e.g., treating others, even enemies, with genuine and abundant love, compassion, and respect). Religion and science together show that the individual has agency, greater co-creative powers than initially apparent, and perhaps a larger part in the mechanism by which “*Verbum caro factum est.*”

In Classical times and in Ancient China, scholars engineered and determined the course of society, and until recently in the developing world, teachers, university professors, and physicians inspired the public with their moral authority far more than could force or propaganda. In our troubled times, when politicians are too entrenched in special interests to be able to provide alternative visions, perhaps it is again time for scholars and religious leaders to become a prophetic voice. Dr. Wexler' does so in his unassuming way, implementing the concern and compassion that come through in his book through actions such as his founding of *A Different Future*. By educating the public across cultures to see each other as human, and that we all desire peace, he himself embodies an example that shows how we can use our newfound knowledge and power to shape our future.

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An Indispensable Upstream Word: The Gift of Prophecy

By Walter Brueggemann

How strange that in our sophisticated, technologically advanced world of knowledge, power, and control we pause to consider, yet again, the strange, primitive voice of the prophetic. It is a voice that does not fit, and yet which turns out, repeatedly in times in crisis, to be an urgent voice.

At the outset, ancient Israel was constituted according to a peculiar polity. That polity provided, in a normal fashion, for judges (Deut 16:16-18), a supreme court (Deut 17:8-13), a king (Deut 17:14-20), and priests (Deut 18:1-8). Most remarkably, alongside these predictable offices, provision is also made that a prophet will be a constitutive indispensable role in society, a voice that, like that of Moses, will *critique* idolatrous self-aggrandizing power and *imagine* alternative modes of covenantal, neighborly power.

The prophetic belongs to the essentials of such a society because the inscrutable holiness of God always subverts and destabilizes our best settlements, our most certain certitudes, and our preferred power arrangements. Every successful society, like that of ancient Israel, seeks and sometimes manages to eliminate the reality of the Holy God and so to construct a narrative account of reality without reference to such elusive ultimacy. In ancient Israel, that dominant account of reality featured the unconditional claims of monarchy, the assumed divine presence in the temple, and the guaranteed security of the city of Jerusalem. All such unconditionality, assumed presence, and guaranteed security among the powerful regularly dispenses with the holiness of God; at the same time such assumptions nullify the legitimacy of the weak, the poor, and the vulnerable. In ancient Israel, amid such dispensing and nullifying, there were regularly evoked uncredentialed prophetic voices that, in surprisingly authoritative ways, re-described the world with reference to the holiness of God and the reality of the neighbor.

Settled society, with its several entitlements and guarantees, always seeks to establish a durable equilibrium. It regularly does so through the practice of *denial* that covers over the facts on the ground for the sake of an illusion that is marked by self-deception and self-indulgence, a fantasy world that conceals and disregards social facts that are contrary to imagined equilibrium. In the midst of such denial that is accomplished by euphemism, propaganda, and ideology, prophetic voices resist such denial by resolute *truth-telling* that calls social facts by their right name. The purpose of truth-telling is in order that members of the community can see their life as it really is.

In that ancient world, Amos is among the most prominent of truth-tellers. He describes a world of lavish self-indulgence in a poem that could pertain to any unbridled consumerism:

Alas for those who lie on beds of ivory,
and lounge on their couches,
and eat lambs from the flock,
and calves from the stall;
who sing idle songs to the sound of
the harp,
and like David improvise on
instruments of music;
who drink wine from bowls,
and anoint themselves with the
finest oils. (Amos 6:4-6a)

The truth that follows this characterization is that his companions have not noticed that behind the facade of prosperity there is "ruin," the failure of the social infrastructure. And they, numbed in self-indulgence, pay no heed:



But are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph! (Amos 6:6b)

And then follows a characteristic prophetic “therefore”; consequences inescapably follow from such numbness:

Therefore they shall now be the first to
go into exile,
and the revelry of the loungers shall
pass away. (Amos 6:7)

Without being a “predictor,” the prophet can anticipate the drastic outcome of such narcotized society...loss, dismay, and displacement. Most remarkably, YHWH is nowhere mentioned in the poem of Amos. But truth is told; things are called by their right names with the added gain of anticipated trouble to come. It remained only for the truth of the poem to be accepted as a wake-up call.

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Displaced society, when under assault and threat with security jeopardized and old certitudes in a state of failure, plunges into *despair*. Such a society, when accustomed to self-sufficiency, now notices that it has no tools or resources for self-sustenance; such a society can see no curb to the malaise. It regresses into nostalgia for a past that never existed, or into a privatism that abandons the common good, or into ominous brutality of neighbor against neighbor.

In the midst of such *despair* that features a deep and limitless futility, prophetic voices challenge such despair by buoyant *hope-telling* that asserts new social possibilities that are grounded in the fidelity of God. The purpose of such truth-telling is in order that life can be reimaged and redescribed wherein the powerful promises of God are in effect and have not been voided by the failure of the old order.

In that ancient world, Isaiah in the exile is a most prominent hope-teller. He listens acutely to the sad lament and weeping resignation of his displaced community, a lament and resignation that are perhaps expressed in liturgy:

But Zion said, “The Lord has forsaken me,
my Lord has forgotten me.” (Isa 49:14)

The statement of despair that is quoted by the prophet is likely from a communal lament, likely from Lamentations 5:20. In its despair, Israel imagines that it is God-forsaken. But the poem of Isaiah counters the lament with a rhetorical question:

Can a woman forget her nursing child,
or show no compassion for the
child of her womb?

Even these may forget,
yet I will not forget you. (Isa 49:15)

We might expect a negative answer to the question asked by the prophet. But the poet allows, in an extreme case, a positive answer: “Yes, it is possible that a nursing mother will forget.” The poetic assertion continues with an adversative “yet”:

Yet I will not forget you.
See, I have inscribed you on the palms
of my hands;
your walls are continually before me.
(Isa 49:15d-16)

Others may forget. YHWH as nursing mother will not forget because this nursing mother, with full breasts, will remember the seemingly forgotten people of Israel. And out of that divine remembering will come new beginnings of a public, visible restoration that culminates in a new beauty:

Your builders outdo your destroyers,
and those who laid you waste go
away from you.
Lift up your eyes all around and see;
they all gather, they come to you.
As I live, says the Lord,
you shall put all of them on like an
ornament,
and like a bride you shall bind them on.
(Isa 49:17-18)

It is not proposed that God will rebuild what was lost in Jerusalem. Rather, when Israel hears that it is remembered and valued by YHWH with mothering compassion, the pall of despair will lift and there will be energy and will for newness!

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Prophetic faith and prophetic imagination are always upstream and counterintuitive. In a context of *social denial*, one does not expect or welcome *truth-telling* that calls things by their right name. In a context of *despair and resignation*, one does not expect or easily receive *hope-telling* that summons out of a stupor of hopelessness into bold and constructive activity. Because truth is unwelcome and because hope is not easily received, prophets are not easy companions. Society characteristically seeks to silence, censor, or eliminate such voices that testify to the ordinary power and reality of God who finally is not mocked by either self-indulgence or by resignation:

Yet the Lord warned Israel and Judah
by every prophet and every seer, saying,
“Turn from your evil ways and keep my
commandments and my statutes, in
accordance with all the law that I com-
manded your ancestors and that I sent

to you by my servants the prophets.”
They would not listen but were stubborn, as their ancestors had been, who did not believe in the Lord their God.
(2 Kgs 17:13-14)

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! (Luke 13:34)

The wonder of biblical faith and perhaps the great mystery of human history is that such voices of truth and hope can be temporarily silenced, momentarily censored, and provisionally eliminated. But not finally! Finally such voices will sound. They will sound in the most totalitarian contexts that try to contain and control all voices. They will sound in the most narcotized society that is schooled in not listening. They will sound, because the irrepressible reality of the Holy God will not go away. Or alternatively, they will sound because the wretchedness of human pain and the buoyancy of human possibility belong to the human spirit and will not yield. It is no wonder that ancient Israel regarded the prophetic as constitutive, even if in practice it could scarcely bear such voices. For that same reason, in the contemporary as in the ancient world, we have witnessed poets and artists and makers of images and practitioners of holy imagination speak effectively after all the more final voices of legitimacy have been either exposed as false or accommodated in silence.

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The transposition of the notion of the prophetic, from ancient Israel with its theocratic assumptions to contemporary society in its mode of democratic capital secularism, is not obvious. Except that the elemental human realities have not changed. Contemporary societies, including our own, can manage with a mix of *self-deceiving denial* and *abdication despair* that together generate *violence*. But the voices of alternative sound all the way from nameless common poets in peasant communities to the imprisoned poetry of Daniel Berrigan to the ringing cadences of Martin Luther King to the compassion of Desmond Tutu to the critical Jewishness of Michael Lerner to the refusal to be “left” or “right” by Jim Wallace to the plain speaking of Joan Chittister. These voices, surely gifts from God, penetrate the silence of limitless consumerism and the self-indulgence of the national security state.

This voice that sounds in rich cadences
is *a voice of truth*:
Is it nothing to you, all you who
pass by?
This voice that sounds in rich cadences
is *a voice of hope*:
I have a dream.

In such cadence, listeners, ancient and contemporary, hear the sounds of the God who will not be mocked or disregarded. Beyond our little systems and our broken resignation, it is this one to whom belongs the kingdom, the power, and the glory! This one will, soon or late, be uttered!

Notes

1. See S. Dean McBride, Jr., “Polity of the Covenant People: The Book of Deuteronomy,” *Interpretation* 41 (1987), 229-44.

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William Sloane Coffin, Jr.

By James Carroll

“WILLIAM SLOANE COFFIN DIES AT 81,” the *New York Times* headline read. A subhead defined him as “A preacher on behalf of the poor to the most prominent.” The *Boston Globe* headline read, “CIA agent became beacon of antiwar movement.”

Even these quick references caught the genius of the man, and, as I collected my thoughts in preparing to speak at a memorial service, I saw what had made him great. There was tension in the headlines – poor versus prominent, CIA versus antiwar – and such tension gave structure to his life. A first white man to stand with blacks in the civil rights movement. A patrician who was tribune of the nobodies. A patriot who had served his country nobly, but was suddenly in disobedient dissent. A critical thinker with a simple faith. Bill embodied in his very biography the possibility that the divisions of life can be brought into resolution.

What made Bill Coffin famous was his rhetorical flair. His genius for the energetic soundbite was the solution to every reporter’s deadline problem.

“It’s not enough to pray for peace. Work for justice!”

“War is a coward’s escape from the problems of peace.”

“We must be governed by the force of law, not by the law of force.”

Such language was a reflection of the choices that defined him – the dynamic of “versus” again. This is the rhetoric of irony, a bringing together of polarities to see how the tensions of life and the various levels of meaning can be brought to resolution. Irony of this sort is the essence of humor, which is why those who knew Bill Coffin, or ever heard him speak, remember, above all, his great rolling laughter.

Irony depends on an exquisite balance of language and ideas both, opposites held in tension with each other not to split them apart, but to propose a new kind of unity. In the choices

he made, and in the language he used, Bill Coffin held up the possibility of hope. He proclaimed by his preaching and his living that the human heart is not doomed to break, however cracked it is by war, by injustice, or even by the sorrows, say, of a child who dies too young.

By his preaching and living, Bill Coffin told us that the divisions of the human heart can be brought into unexpected harmony. This, of course, always assumes that “the heart is a little to the left.” That book title of his, derived from Brazilian Archbishop Helder Camarra, is the perfect example of the free and freeing mind of Bill Coffin, a sly but gentle jibe at right-wingers, reminding them that the human body itself suggests we are all meant to be liberals.

A man of paradox and hope. For all of the political power that accrued to Bill, through his civil rights and antiwar celebrity, it was his religious conviction that most defined him. Peace and Justice were his absolute values. But, by his own account, he had those values not from his privileged background, nor from his beloved America, nor from Yale. To the mystification and even consternation of many, Bill Coffin defined himself by Jesus. And what did Bill love about Jesus if not the paradox? The contradictions that added up to hope. Jesus, the peasant nobody who is Lord of the universe. Jesus, the victim who is victorious. Jesus who can say “My God, my God, why have You abandoned me?” while also saying, “Into Your hands.” With that habitual rhetorical flair of his, Bill said “I don’t know *what* is waiting for me after death, but I do know *Who*.”

I first met Bill Coffin forty years ago, when I was a seminarian. He gave me a new idea of what the ministry could be. In large part because of him, I became a college chaplain – and then, however timidly, a war resister. Once, I found myself in a jail cell next to his after a demonstration. Through a long and – to me – terrible night, Bill led the cellblock in choruses from Handel’s *Messiah*. Even now, when I hear its sweetest refrain – “Comfort ye!” – I hear his resonant voice. I am consoled and emboldened both.

Through the decades, Bill faithfully maintained his commitments. He was a firm critic of the unnecessary war in Iraq, and he never stopped decrying America’s unbroken bondage to nuclear weapons. But with his unfailing generosity of spirit, he never stopped embodying the hope that oppositions, even of the kind that still divide his beloved America, can be overcome.

James Carroll is best known for his work, An American Requiem: God, My Father, and the War That Came Between Us (1996). He resides in Boston, MA, where he writes a weekly column for The Boston Globe.

From the Archives:

The Prophetic Ministry of Henry H. Proctor¹

Moses N. Moore, Jr., and Yolanda Y. Smith

Describing the changed conditions facing the American Christian community during the opening decades of the twentieth century, the Reverend Henry H. Proctor, an 1894 graduate of Yale Divinity School, wrote: “Evidently, we are on the borderland of a new world, not only in the application of modern science to the progress of mankind from a physical viewpoint, but also in the application of the things of the spirit to the social relationships of man. Old things are passing away; all things are being made new.”²

Especially concerned about the impact that this scientific, social, and spiritual revolution was having upon the black community, Proctor issued a prophetic call for the establishment of “a new type” of black church and ministry. Envisioned was a church and ministry prepared to meet not only the myriad challenges associated with the era’s new scientific, intellectual, and academic currents, but also the more immediate problems posed by increased migration, urbanization, industrialization, and resurgent racism.

Proctor’s progressive ministry placed him in the vanguard of one of this era’s most innovative religious-based social reform efforts—the social gospel movement.³ It also made him a herald and forerunner of the modern civil rights movement.

Born to former slaves near Fayetteville, Tennessee, in 1868, Proctor’s religious and theological lineage included the rural southern Methodist piety of his parental home and youth; a reform-oriented evangelicalism imbibed during seven years of study at Fisk University; and the emergent socially engaged theology of Protestant liberalism that he embraced as a student at Yale Divinity School. This diverse theological lineage would subsequently be refined during the course of his almost forty-year ministry in the Congregational Church.⁴

As a student at YDS from 1891 to 1894, Proctor studied under scholars who strove to clarify the

issues and challenges presented to their faith and respective disciplines by the new scientific and intellectual currents of the era. The theological transformation taking place at the Divinity School was accompanied by courses that exposed Proctor and his classmates to the methodologies and insights of emergent disciplines such as comparative religion, biblical criticism, philosophy of religion, and sociology. During Proctor’s first year of studies, a course on Social Ethics was also added to the curriculum.⁵

Upon graduation from Yale Divinity School in 1894, Proctor responded to “the lure of the New South” and accepted the call to Atlanta’s First Congregational Church. Amid the urban, industrial, and racial sprawl of bustling Atlanta, he and his new bride, Adeline L. Davis, began to forge a ministry that would be both spiritually and socially relevant.⁶ A gifted preacher and organizer, Proctor quickly doubled First Congregational’s membership and extended its ministry to include a Christian Endeavor Society, a Working Men’s Club, a Women’s Aid Society, a Young Men’s League, and a prison ministry.⁷ Arguing that the church as a whole must be “an institution for social betterment,” he also challenged other ministers to make social salvation as much a part of their agenda as soul salvation.⁸

Within a decade of accepting his call to First Congregational Church, Proctor had succeeded



in forging an impressive model of socially applied Christianity.⁹ However, his ministerial efforts were not limited to Atlanta or the geographical boundaries of the United States. Committed to extending the “Kingdom of God” both at home and abroad, he made southwest Africa a special focus of his expansive ministry and succeeded in encouraging the establishment of the Galangue mission in Angola.¹⁰ Of key importance nationally was his role in the establishment in 1903 of the National Convention of Congregational Workers among Colored People and his unanimous election in 1904 as assistant moderator of the National Council of Congregational Churches.¹¹

Despite Proctor’s accomplishments, the Atlanta Riot of 1906, a convulsion of racial violence that shocked both Atlanta and the nation, served to painfully illuminate both the limitations of his evolving ministry and the magnitude of the problems with which he and other progressive clergy were confronted. Yet, even as Atlanta’s embers cooled, Proctor took the lead in establishing an interracial coalition of prominent black and white clergy, educators, and civic leaders concerned with easing racial tensions and addressing the causes of the riot. His efforts contributed to the founding of Atlanta’s famed Interracial Commission, often heralded as a harbinger of the modern civil rights movement. His labors also inspired a literary tribute that proclaimed First Congregational “The Church That Saved a City.”¹²

Amidst the ruins of the riot, Proctor was convinced that a more expansive application of Christianity emanating from First Congregational could provide an antidote to the volatile social and racial conditions that continued to plague Atlanta. Thus, he endeavored to build a new church—an institutional church that would provide social, welfare, and cultural programs, as well as a ministry of racial reconciliation to the wider community. In early December of 1908 the new “institutional church” at the corner of Houston and Courtland streets was dedicated in an elaborate service.¹³ The new edifice and its expansive ministry was hailed by Proctor as the model of a “New Type of Church,” fully attuned to the modern needs of the race:

In the heart of Atlanta stands a new type of Negro church. The typical Negro church has more heat than light. It is closed in the week and open on Sunday. It has a fine tower and a poor basement. It appeals to the soul and neglects the body and the mind. But here is a church in the midst of the skyscrapers and in the

center of the colleges, a church that is open Monday as well as Sunday [that] appeals to the body and the mind, as well as the soul. . . . In this industrial temple we dedicated the pulpit and the parlor, the auditorium and the organ, the dumb-bell and the needle, the skillet and the tub, to the glory of God and the redemption of a race.¹⁴

Among the distinguished visitors hosted by Proctor at his new “Industrial Temple” were presidents William Howard Taft and Theodore Roosevelt. His innovative ministry also attracted some of the era’s most prominent pulpit princes, including T. De Witt Talmage, Samuel Parkhurst, and Russell Conwell, all of whom concurred that First Congregational was “the most progressive church . . . in the south.”¹⁵

Proctor emphasized racial cooperation as an important and integral part of his social gospel ministry. During the waning months of World War I, this emphasis attracted the attention of the United States military, which was confronted with increasing unrest among black soldiers.¹⁶ An invitation from the War Department and General John H. Pershing resulted in Proctor sailing for Europe in early 1919. However, he would do more than placate and offer racial bromides to the more than one hundred thousand black soldiers to whom he preached his message of applied Christianity. Proctor protested the racism and abuse endured by the black soldiers and described them as “brave but dejected men” who “had come overseas to fight for [a] democracy for others” that they did not enjoy at home.¹⁷ Acutely sensitive to the wider impulse and currents of the era, Proctor perceived that the events leading up to war, the war itself, and its aftermath would have profound consequences not only for the returning black soldiers, but also for their communities and churches.¹⁸

As the twentieth century approached the troubled close of its second decade, Proctor would reflect proudly on his twenty-five-year ministry at First Congregational Church. The congregation had grown “from 100 to more than 1,000,” and, by most accounts, his efforts to foster a social gospel ministry and institutional church in the heart of the urban south had been eminently successful.¹⁹ Nevertheless, he remained acutely aware of the limitations of his success in Atlanta, most notably that the South’s “peculiar problem” had not yielded in any appreciable extent to his ministry of social activism and racial cooperation.²⁰ Moreover, he was increasingly concerned with the steady stream of black migrants from the South into the urban and

industrial centers of the North and Midwest and the myriad challenges that this massive population shift, which he described as “the national redistribution of the American Negro,” was presenting to the black church and ministry.²¹

A call to Brooklyn's Nazarene Congregational Church in late 1919 to replace the elderly Albert P. Miller (YDS 1885) provided Proctor with an opportunity to join the migratory movement of the race and apply his version of the social gospel amid the complexities and challenges of northern urban life.²² A year into his new pastorate, Proctor elaborated on his reasons for relocating to New York and shared his vision of a more expansive ministry:

New York City is the center of the life of the American people. As goes New York so goes the nation politically, commercially, socially and religiously. This is, therefore, the place to build the first unit of a chain of churches across the continent that will function in the entire life of the Negro people. . . . What the First Church of Atlanta meant to the people of the Gate City and the South we would make the Nazarene Church Community Center mean to the metropolis and the nation.²³

Interracial cooperation, a key component of Proctor's ministry in Atlanta, also became the centerpiece of his Brooklyn-based ministry. He would be joined in numerous interracial efforts by Dr. Samuel Parkes Cadman, prominent pastor of Central Congregational Church and president of the Federal Council of Churches from 1924 to 1928.²⁴ His optimistic message of racial cooperation and reconciliation also found favor with other progressive white clergy who hailed him as the “Henry Ward Beecher of the Colored Race” and “the best informed man of his race on inter-racial relations.”²⁵

In 1926, Proctor became the first black moderator of the New York City Congregational Church Association, and Nazarene was proclaimed the “largest Negro Congregational Church in the United States.” Consequently, with the purchase of a larger structure, Proctor appeared to be on the verge of realizing his dream of making Nazarene the prototype of a nationwide string of black institutional churches.²⁶

However, on the threshold of the Depression acquiring funds necessary to meet the demands of an expanded institutional ministry soon proved debilitating. By the end of the decade, Nazarene's increasingly precarious financial situation provided the context for an explosive controversy that illu-

minated liabilities inherent to Proctor's ministerial style and the application of his version of the social gospel.²⁷

In the aftermath of controversy and amid the onslaught of the Depression, Proctor found himself pastoring a shrinking congregation and attempting to maintain an attenuated social gospel ministry with severely reduced resources. Nevertheless, evidence of Proctor's continued commitment to a prophetic vision of the black ministry was provided by his active participation in a pioneering seminar on the black church held in the spring of 1931. Returning to New Haven, he joined prominent black leaders and clergy including Dr. George Edmond Haynes, A. Philip Randolph, and Benjamin E. Mays in the three-day conference held at Yale Divinity School. Notably, Yale black students “preparing for religious work” joined with YDS professor and social activist Dr. Jerome Davis to organize the conference.²⁸ Titled “The Yale Seminar on the Negro Church,” it focused on topics of critical concern to Proctor and other proponents of a black prophetic ministry. Major topics included “The Negro Church in a Changing Social Order”; “The Negro Church and Economic Relations,” “The Negro Church and Education,” “The Negro Church and Race,” and “Future Leadership of the Negro Church.” While acknowledging the historic contributions of the black church, seminar participants also noted the inadequacy of its response to current challenges facing the black community. Thus, in answer to the pressing question “Whither the Negro Church?” concluding resolutions adopted by seminar participants were farsighted in their call for the black church to “set itself to the task of developing a more prophetic and fearless technique in making applicable the implications of the religion of Jesus in relation to the social order,” and to “discover and develop a type of leadership that would do for America and the Negro race what Gandhi has done for India and what Jesus has done for the world.”²⁹

Plans to hold subsequent conferences at the Divinity School apparently failed to come to fruition. Nevertheless, this pioneering and historic seminar anticipated and encouraged revival of the prophetic black religious tradition—a tradition that would subsequently provide critical leadership, inspiration, and resources for the emergent civil rights movement. Significantly, a number of seminar participants, most notably A. Phillip Randolph and Benjamin E. Mays, would play prominent roles within its ranks.³⁰

Proctor, however, would die unexpectedly on May 11, 1933. His supporters and critics turned out en

masse for his funeral, overflowing Nazarene Church and the surrounding neighborhood to offer a final tribute.³¹ Fittingly, Proctor's body was returned to Atlanta for a memorial service at First Congregational Church.³² Among the many posthumous tributes in honor of Proctor was a resolution passed by the national boards of the Congregational and Christian Church that acknowledged him as "a pioneer in the modern movements of inter-racial good will, a loyal Congregationalist and a gentleman of rare dignity and poise."³³ An insightful memorial was also penned by his former classmate, W. E. B. Du Bois who noted:

One of the first men I met, when I came to Fisk in 1887 was Henry Hugh Proctor, a long lanky youth.... He grew into a strong and forceful man and dying before his day, left a mark on the world. He was an evangelical Christian so honestly orthodox that any question of fundamental truth never entered his mind. So sure to him was its foundation that he could play with it, compromise for it, adapt it to circumstances, perfectly and eternally certain of ultimate rights. To the skeptic, therefore, the natural questioner and heretic, Proctor was anathema. But to the doer of the Word he was a strong Tower. He spared neither his strength nor money in his life work and was supremely indifferent to mere matters of income and expense. . . . His great work was the community church in Atlanta, perhaps the first and certainly one of the most successful in Colored America. He put in a life work there and then essayed a larger field in Brooklyn. But neither the time of his coming nor the character of this community was suited to his plans. Old Brooklyn is ever cold to the stranger and suspicious. Yet he was ever at the edge of a new triumph . . . but he fell victim of the Depression before his new effort was thoroughly established.³⁴

Recent commemorations and studies marking the centennial of the Atlanta Riot and its aftermath have illuminated Proctor's pioneering contributions to the emergent civil rights movement.³⁵ The legacy of his prophetic ministry is also affirmed at Atlanta's First Congregational Church, where a commemorative plaque and an annual "Proctor Memorial Sunday" was dedicated "to his memory and the ideals that he sought to perpetuate."³⁶ Under the current leadership of Dr. Dwight Andrews YDS 1977, First Congregational Church continues Proctor's prophetic vision and expansive ministry into the twenty-first century.

Notes

- 1 This article was researched and written as part of a study titled "'Been in the Storm So Long': Yale Divinity School and the Black Ministry—One Hundred and Fifty Years of Black Theological Education." Principal investigators are Dr. Moses N. Moore, Jr. (YDS 1977), Arizona State University, and Dr. Yolanda Y. Smith, Yale Divinity School. For more information on this project see www.yale.edu/divinity/storm.
- 2 Henry Hugh Proctor, *Between Black and White: Autobiographical Sketches* (originally published 1925, reprint, Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 182.
- 3 Robert T. Handy, ed., *The Social Gospel in America: 1870–1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966) and Charles Howard Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism, 1865–1915* (London: Oxford University Press, 1940).
- 4 Henry H. Proctor, "From Cabin to Pulpit—Life Sketch," *American Missionary* 56 (June 1902): 291–95.
- 5 Roland H. Bainton, *Yale and the Ministry: A History of Education for the Christian Ministry at Yale from the Founding in 1701* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), 191.
- 6 Proctor, *Between*, 91–92. Adeline L. Davis was born in Nashville in 1870 and died in 1945. See also David A. Russell, Jr., "The Institutional Church in Transition: A Study of the First Congregational Church of Atlanta," M.A. thesis, Atlanta University, 1971, 39; and Proctor, "From Cabin to Pulpit," 293.
- 7 Proctor, *Between*, 94. See also Proctor, "From Cabin to Pulpit," 293–94.
- 8 Henry H. Proctor, "The Church as an Institution for Social Betterment, Abstract of the Paper Read by the Rev. Henry Hugh Proctor, B.D." "Proceedings of the Third Atlanta Conference" and "Resolutions Adopted by the Conference" in William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, ed., *Some Efforts of American Negroes for their Own Social Betterment. Report of an Investigation under the Direction of Atlanta University; Together with the Proceedings of the Third Conference for the Study of the Negro Problems, Held at Atlanta University, May 25–26, 1898* (Atlanta: Atlanta University Press, 1898), 45–51.
- 9 Proctor's pioneering efforts to forge a socially and racially attuned ministry also extended to the increasingly volatile and dangerous arena of Georgia politics. Milton C. Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land: African American Religion and the Great Migration* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1997), 29; and John Dittmer, *Black Georgia in the Progressive Era, 1900–1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 60–62, 96.
- 10 Kathleen Redding Adams, "The Involvement of 1st Congregational Church, Atlanta in Angola—The Atlanta Interracial Commission—Carrie Steele

- Orphanage—Carrie Steele-Pitts Home as of 1938,” October 1975, unpublished manuscript, Proctor Papers. See also Henry H. Proctor, “Our Apostle to the Galangue,” n.d. Proctor Papers.
- 11 Clifton Johnson, “Henry H. Proctor,” *Dictionary of American Negro Biography*, ed. Rayford W. Logan and Michael R. Winston (New York: London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1982), 505-06; and Proctor, *Between*, 95, 112-13.
 - 12 Proctor, *Between*, 109. See also Homer C. McEwen, “First Congregational Church,” *Atlanta Historical Bulletin* vol 21 (spring 1977); 137; Johnson, “Proctor,” 506; and Bruce Barton, *The Church That Saved a City* (Boston, 1914).
 - 13 Proctor, *Between*, 99, 106-07 and *The Atlanta Constitution*, 13 December 1908, 4.
 - 14 Proctor, *Between*, 107.
 - 15 Proctor, *Between*, 108-11 and William M. Welty, “Black Shepherds: A Study of the Leading Negro Clergymen in New York City, 1900-1940,” Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1969, 183-84.
 - 16 Proctor, *Between*, 157.
 - 17 Proctor, *Between*, 160-62.
 - 18 Henry H. Proctor, “On the Trail of the Colored Doughboy,” Proctor Papers; and Proctor, *Between*, 157-64.
 - 19 Henry H. Proctor, “The Place of Religion in Community Betterment” and “Social Uplift in the Church,” delivered at Howard University, 13 November 1919. Proctor Papers.
 - 20 Dittmer, *Black Georgia*, 12-13, 21-22.
 - 21 Proctor, *Between*, 167-174; and Proctor, “The National Redistribution of the Negro American.” See also Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land*, 54, 71-73, 75.
 - 22 Clarence Taylor, *The Black Churches of Brooklyn* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 11-14.
 - 23 Henry H. Proctor, “A Vision and A Task,” *The American Missionary Magazine*, 1921, Proctor Papers.
 - 24 On Cadman, see Henry Smith Leiper and Edward Daniel Staples, *Dr. S. Parkes Cadman: Preacher, Pastor, and Ecumenical Prophet* (Boston: Congregational Christian Historical Society, 1967).
 - 25 “A Negro in Beecher’s Pulpit,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, 21 February 1927; *New York Herald-Tribune*, 14 February 1927. Ironically, Proctor’s skill and success at forging cooperative and supportive alliances with whites made him vulnerable to charges by black critics that he accommodated racial paternalism. Proctor vigorously denied these charges, noting that he was a “race man” and that his ministry of racial cooperation emphasized racial pride and active protest against racism. See Henry H. Proctor, “Why I Am Glad I Am Colored,” *The Southern News*, July-August 1928, vols. 6-7; Dittmer, *Black Georgia*, 167; and Proctor, *Between*, 100-102.
 - 26 Johnson, “Proctor,” 506.
 - 27 Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land*, 122-53.
 - 28 The genesis of the seminar appears to have been the founding in 1930 of a “Negro society called Upsilon Theta Chi whose motto was ‘Service and Sacrifice for Christ.’” Its aim was to “produce a new type of leadership” which would “give itself unstintedly to the uplift of the Negro race and other oppressed peoples, and to the creation of a new social order based upon the principles of Jesus.” Dr. Jerome Davis, “Foreword” to *Whither the Negro Church? Seminar Held at Yale Divinity School, New Haven, Conn.* April 13-15, 1931.
 - 29 *Whither the Negro Church?* 45, 47.
 - 30 See Dennis C. Dickerson, “African American Religious Intellectuals and the Theological Foundations of the Civil Rights Movement, 1930-55,” *Church History*, 74 (June 2005): 217-35.
 - 31 Among clergy officiating was his close friend, fellow social gospel activist, and confidant, Samuel Parkes Cadman. See *Afro-American*, 20 March 1933; *Brooklyn Eagle*, 16 March 1933; and *New York Herald-Tribune*, 16 March 1933.
 - 32 *Atlanta Constitution*, 16 May 1933; *Atlanta Constitution*, 17 May 1933.
 - 33 *Brooklyn Eagle*, 13 May 1933.
 - 34 “Postscript,” *Crisis* 40 (September 1933): 212.
 - 35 For recent studies, see David F. Godshalk, *Veiled Visions: The 1906 Atlanta Race Riot and the Reshaping of American Race Relations* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); and Gregory Mixon, *The Atlanta Riot: Race, Class, and Violence in a New South City* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005).
 - 36 Russell, “The Institutional Church in Transition,” 2-3, 40, 44. More than half a century after Proctor’s departure for Brooklyn, Homer C. McEwen, minister of First Congregational from 1947 to 1979, observed that the church continued “to pioneer in the areas of social usefulness which marked it in the days of Henry Hugh Proctor. Indeed this is part of the rich heritage which his generation bequeathed to the church.” McEwen, “First Congregational Church,” 138-41. See also L. E. Torrence, “Social Activities of the Negro Church in Atlanta, Georgia,” master’s thesis, School of Arts and Sciences, Atlanta University, 1934).

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Articulating a Christian Left: A Review of *Getting on Message: Challenging the Christian Right from the Heart of the Gospel*

by Peter Laarman, Editor (Beacon Press, 2006) reviewed by Harlon Dalton '73 J.D.

This collection of essays, edited by Peter Laarman, brings together writers, scholars, pastors, and activists who share a belief that “enlightened public policy ... hinge[s] on getting one’s theology right” (p. ix). The message they seek to convey is, as James M. Lawson, Jr. puts it, that although we “are quite willing to proclaim Jesus as Lord and Savior,” we often fail to “claim the spirit, the mind, the heart and the soul of Jesus as the content of how [we] are to live.” (pp. 31).

Given the times, the so-called War on Terror and the war in Iraq hover overhead. In “Easter Faith and Empire,” Ched Myers laments: “I write on the second anniversary of the declared ‘end’ to the latest Iraq war” (p. 52). “We are ... well down the road of imperial unilateralism, and are seeing clearly that this means a world held hostage to wars and rumors of war” (p. 51). In “Higher Ground,” Lawson concludes: “[W]e who are followers of Jesus must love the enemy, for that enemy is the recipient of God’s grace — of God’s rain — just as we are.”

Several themes reverberate throughout the book, themes of fear, hope, estrangement hospitality, separation, connection, borders, home place. Even in essays that address domestic matters — capital punishment, mass incarceration, entrenched poverty, economic maldistribution — these themes recur. One of my favorite essays is Heidi Neumark’s “Strangers No More.” In it she skillfully interweaves biblical stories (Moses and the Israelites; the Road to Emmaus; and Peter’s call to minister to the Gentiles) with the stories of two parishioners. Javier is an undocumented Mexican man who, following his brother’s untimely death, felt duty bound to take the body back to Mexico for burial despite risking detention, deportation, or worse. Brian is a pale blond relatively affluent gay man who has decided to fly home to Iowa to come out as a gay man to his religiously conservative parents. Neumark draws lessons aplenty, not least that two such seemingly disparate people can find common ground and discover that they fundamentally belong to one another in a church that is truly committed to radical hospitality.

Despite the provocative subtitle, very few of the essays in *Getting On Message* take dead aim at conservative Christianity. In the main, this collection is less about “challenging the Christian Right” than it is about articulating a Christian Left. But even this characterization is misleading. The labels “progressive” and “conservative,” “left” and “right” are

misplaced when we turn to God talk. They impress secular categories onto religious life, and invite us to view theology through the lens of everyday politics. If I had my druthers (and were unimpeded by marketing concerns) I would change the subtitle to “Reclaiming Prophetic Christianity from the Heart of the Gospel.”

At every turn, this volume presents a vision of Christ as prophet. Ched Myers is but one of several writers who take us for a slow stroll along the road to Emmaus. There, Jesus lends a pastoral ear as Cleopas and the other disciple anxiously describe “the things that have taken place” in Jerusalem. “Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, [Jesus] interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures” (Lk 24:18, 27). Myers reminds us that “these prophets are the ones who throughout ... history engaged the way things were with the vision of what *could* and *should* be. They question authority, make trouble, refuse to settle, interrupt business as usual, speak truth to power, give voice to the voiceless.”

Several essays invite us to carry on Christ’s prophetic work in today’s world. They inspire us by lifting up women and men whose faith leads them to live visionary Gospel lives. A particularly fine example is Rick Ufford-Chase’s “Who Is My Neighbor?” At one level it is a finely-grained description of the effects of globalization on Agua Prieta, a Mexican town just south of the U.S. border. But it is also an account of the prophetic witness of the women of Sagrada Familia Parish, who respond to an influx of Central American refugees by providing food and shelter, caring for the sick, visiting the imprisoned, educating workers about their rights, and engaging in direct action against scurrilous textile factories. “At Sagrada Familia ... the women of the *comunidades* discussed the arrival of the refugees in light of stories like the Good Samaritan ... [and] the Judgment of the Nations in Matthew 25 in which Jesus makes it clear that caring for the poorest of the poor is the same as caring for Christ himself.”

To its credit, *Getting On Message* gets off message on occasion. Two of the most thoughtful essays in the collection caution against pursuing a progressive vision uncritically. In “Woman, Childbearing and Justice,” Chloe Breyer seeks “to establish beyond any doubt a woman’s capacity for moral discernment.” To that end, she develops a set of moral criteria that women should consider when contemplating an abortion. “I wish to present a constructive alterna-

tive way for religious leaders to engage women who are confronting the question of what to do in the face of an unwanted pregnancy," she says, while at the same time challenging "some 'pro-choice' supporters who have, unwittingly or not, allowed the language of choice to be too closely associated with ... mere personal preference and ... a materialistic and self-serving popular culture."

The other somewhat contrarian essay is entitled "The iPod, the Cell Phone, and the Church." In it, Vincent Miller traces the impact of the iPod on consumer culture, noting that it "enables the disembedding of songs from their contexts," and "has also fed the decline of shared listening. Whatever one thinks about the banality of Top 40 music, it provided shared cultural touch points, a communally remembered soundtrack of memory" (p. 176). Similarly, an inclination to "sample" from a variety of religious traditions and to develop the equivalent of individualized "playlists" has resulted in the exaltation of

do-it-yourself "spirituality" over culturally-embedded religious practices. "Consumer culture trains us to engage elements of religious traditions as disconnected fragments," Miller says, "shorn of the interconnections with other symbols and doctrines that together weave a worldview. Commodified pieces of religious traditions are less likely to be complex, to make demands upon us that challenge us to live differently" (p. 178). All of this leads him to challenge progressives to "reevaluate their suspicions of institutions and frustrations with the shortcomings of tradition." After all, "in an ever-changing, fluid, globalizing world, [religious institutions and traditions] provide essential places to stand and from which to act" (pp. 188-189).

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Obedient Servant

And to the heart of every man,
Every woman, every child in every land
There comes a time to relinquish selfish plans
And sacrifice our pride
Reveal the fear inside
And listen to the whisper of a voice that's been denied

And when we come into this perfect place
Where perfect truth abides in perfect grace
Though once in darkness we come face to face
And understand the Word
Spoken often; finally heard
And accept the gift that we've been given
So that we may give in turn

Obedient servant
What you have done today
I will remember though time itself has passed away
Has passed away

And in the twinkling of an eye
We live our lives and then we die
And only Love will ever show us why
And justify the loss
death's apparent cost
By filling us with the Spirit of
A life beyond the cross

Obedient servant
What you have done today
I will remember though time itself has passed away
Has passed away

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The Return of a Prophetic Voice Among American Evangelicals

By Harvey Cox

The voice of prophecy often springs forth from unexpected places. Those who articulate it often, like Amos, the tender of sycamore trees, do not claim to be prophets. Thus when an ad appeared in American newspapers in early June of 2006 condemning torture as “morally intolerable” and a violation of the human dignity that all religions hold dear, the list of signers surprised many readers.

It included not only the names one might expect, like the General Secretary of the National Council of Churches; it also bore the signatures of several well-known evangelical leaders, including Rev. Ted Haggard, former president of the National Association of Evangelicals, Rick Warren, pastor of the famous Saddleback mega-church in California, and Dr. Roberta Hestenes, minister-at-large of World Vision, an evangelical development organization. Further, this ad appeared on the heels of the formation of an evangelical alliance to fight global warming and growing evangelical opposition to the Iraq war. Was something new afoot, or does this mark the return of a prophetic voice that was once vibrant but has seemed almost completely lost in the vast American evangelical community?

It was not really something all that new. Religiously conservative American Protestants have not always embraced the right-wing political agenda many do today. A hundred years ago when a series of pamphlets called “The Fundamentals” appeared, those who supported them (and who therefore called themselves “Fundamentalists”) were often populists and progressives in the political arena. After all, their nineteenth century forebears had fought for abolition and women’s rights. The “Fundamentals” were all about religious orthodoxy. They spelled out what their writers believed were the rock-bottom beliefs threatened by liberal trends in theology. They insisted that such doctrines as the Virgin Birth, the verbal inerrancy of the Bible, the physical Resur-

rection of Christ, and his imminent return must be staunchly defended if historical Christianity was not to be erased by what they called “modernism.”

Still, the earlier impulse for societal reform did not die out completely. The best-known self-styled “fundamentalist” of the early twentieth century was the three-time Democratic candidate for president William Jennings Bryan. But Bryan’s positions on public policy issues were similar in many ways to those of Bill Coffin a half century later. And they were the complete opposite of those that Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, and the current “religious right” contend for today. Bryan brought crowds to their feet with his stinging attacks on Wall Street and rich bankers, and he was so suspicious of militarism that he resigned from Woodrow Wilson’s cabinet before World War I to protest what he saw as that president’s belligerency toward Germany. Unfortunately, Bryan is remembered today mainly for his role in the Scopes “Monkey Trial” in 1925, the last year of his life. But even then, Bryan remained a progressive fundamentalist. The life and teaching of Jesus inspired his political career. He allowed that the seven days of Creation mentioned in Genesis might refer to very long eons. He slyly ribbed the biblical literalists by remarking that, “The Bible is about the rock of ages, not the age of rocks.” His argument against the theory of evolution was not based on a literal reading of Genesis. It was a moral one. He argued that the idea of “survival of the fittest” was a flat contradiction of the central core of

Christian ethics, and that it might lead to the belief that some races were more evolved than others. In this view he showed remarkable prescience. The Nazis loved evolutionary theory, which they twisted to undergird their ideology of the master race.

Some historians believe that after the ridicule poured on them during the Scopes trial American fundamentalists retreated in humiliation and almost disappeared. This, however, is a mistaken picture and makes it hard to explain their powerful rebirth after World War II. Where had they been?

During the 1930s and 1940s American fundamentalists did not disappear. They simply regrouped. They crafted a nationwide religious counterculture made up of thousands of independent churches, Bible institutes, summer camps, conference centers, radio ministries, and revival services. They founded their own colleges, such as Wheaton in Illinois and Westmont in California. They advised their people to “come out and be separate.” Since society at large was so obviously plunging toward judgment and destruction, they usually eschewed political involvement. Why patch up a ship that was doomed to sink anyway? The kind of prophetic reforms Bryan once advocated now seemed pointless to them. The best one could do was to snatch a few coals from the fire and save as many individual souls as possible.

The year 1940 marked a major change in the American religious landscape. An influential group of Protestant religious conservatives, under the leadership of Reverend Harold Ockenga of Boston’s Park Street Church, formed the National Association of Evangelicals. Its purpose was to draw a sharp line not just against “modernists,” but also against fundamentalists. These evangelicals held some of the same beliefs as fundamentalists, but there were important differences. Evangelicals firmly believed in the religious and moral authority of the Bible, but did not consider it a dependable source for geology or history. But the main point of contention was that evangelicals did not want to abandon the larger society; they wanted to engage it. They longed for a rebirth of Protestant Christian influence in America, especially in what we now call “values.” They went public.

If Bryan had been the most visible American purveyor of born-again Christianity in the 1920s, the role was taken over in the 1950s, and held for many decades to follow, by Reverend Billy Graham. Starting as a raw-boned ultra-conservative, Graham matured and broadened and soon became much more than the icon of evangelicals. Polls showed him to be the most respected religious leader in the country. Graham always claimed that he was “a



New Testament evangelist, not an Old Testament prophet.” Nonetheless, as he shook off his early shell, his actions took a prophetic turn. He reaped scorn and abuse from his associates on the religious right by cooperating with “liberal” denominations in his many crusades, by insisting that his audiences (even in the South) should not be segregated, and, later, by calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons. Graham became the “pastor of America.” It seemed entirely fitting that at the memorial service held at the National Cathedral after 9/11 in which a Roman Catholic cardinal, a Jewish rabbi, and a Muslim imam participated, it was Billy Graham – now an old man – who was assisted to the pulpit and preached the sermon.

But besides Billy Graham’s generous ecumenical outlook, a very different and contentious kind of evangelicalism had emerged in America. These evangelicals moved out of the religious ghetto and boldly addressed the wider public. They began to voice what might be called “right-wing prophecy,” but the values and worldview that informed their preaching were not, despite their protestations, “biblical.” When a little-known Baptist preacher and self-styled fundamentalist named Jerry Falwell, with the help of conservative Republican campaign specialists, organized what he called “The Moral Majority” in the late 1970s, the core religious principles of a Bryant were nowhere in sight. The movement was based on what they called “traditional American values.” Anything but an advocate of “come out and be separate,” Falwell welcomed into the fold Catholics, Jews, and even Mormons who shared his political and moral convictions. One heard little about the Virgin Birth or even the inerrancy of scripture, and nothing at all about Jesus and his prophetic Hebrew predecessors. Falwell’s agenda was evoked by what he and his followers saw as a frontal assault on the core traditional values of American society. Some of the voices in this new and politically charged “moral fundamentalism” took the battle to the streets and, like Randall Terry, founder of Operation Rescue, were arrested blocking abortion clinics. Now the enemy was no longer theological modernism, but a series of court decisions that took prayer and Bible reading out of the schools, legalized abortion, and reached a malicious climax by approving of gay marriage. Indeed, one preacher called the fight over same-sex marriage not just another skirmish, but the “battle of Gettysburg. If we lose this one,” he said, “we lose the culture war.”

By the 1990s Falwell’s Moral Majority had faded, but it was succeeded by Pat Robertson’s Christian Coalition and James Dobson’s Focus on the Family. Both have explicitly political agendas. But one peculiar type of “prophecy” did continue. It was the idea of the imminent Second Coming of Christ, fictionalized for popular consumption by the *Left Behind* series of novels, which focuses on the cataclysmic disaster they say we are heading for in the Middle East, a blood-soaked catastrophe that will usher in the Last Judgment. The immense popularity of these novels (they have sold some sixty million copies) stems both from a residual apocalyptic sentiment that still lingers in the American religious psyche, and from the foreboding quality of the present bewildering age.

Meanwhile, the alliance Falwell forged with the most conservative wing of the Republican Party had paid off, at least temporarily, for both partners. The religious right mobilized perhaps millions of voters for Republican candidates. In turn, Republican office holders rewarded them access to the highest level of the administration, including the Oval Office.

But the alliance is now fraying. Republicans in office have just not achieved the results the religious right expected. *Roe vs. Wade* still stands. There is little chance that mandatory prayers and Bible reading will return to public schools. There is not yet, and probably will not be, a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage. Consequently, it begins to look as though leaders on the religious right will not devote much energy to getting out the vote this fall, or maybe even in 2008. Meanwhile, intemperate statements by Falwell (who attributed 9/11 to God’s judgment on America for its gays and feminists), and Pat Robertson (who publicly called for the assassination of the president of Venezuela) and the criminal investigations of Ralph Reed, the former director of the Christian Coalition, have driven more moderate evangelicals away from the religious right.

There is another change that might have even longer lasting significance. It is the emergence of the mega-churches. These congregations of fifteen to twenty thousand are sprouting up all over the country, and are often evangelical in style but not in substance. Their preachers generally avoid both controversial doctrinal questions and divisive political issues, but nonetheless a genuinely biblical prophetic voice seems to be emerging. The same Rick Warren of the mammoth Saddleback church who

BONITA GRUBBS '84 M.DIV.

signed the statement against torture also organized a coalition of evangelicals to join the fight to save the environment. They call it "caring for Creation" and have urged their members to be faithful stewards of the world God has commanded us to nurture. They have been denounced and criticized by Falwell and Robertson, but they have attracted the appreciation of many evangelical young people. They signal the rise of a new generation of evangelical leadership, and the future seems to be on their side. The old guard that once claimed to speak for American evangelicalism can no longer do so with any confidence that it will be heard.

So, once again the voice of prophecy has begun to sound forth from an unexpected quarter. Who knows? Maybe the wheel is turning. Maybe the progressive impulse of early twentieth century evangelicalism is making a comeback to an America sadly in need of a vision that is both spiritually vital and politically forward-looking. Maybe we live not in the Last Days or the "end time," but at the beginning of something new and promising.

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Reverend Bonita Grubbs works in two realities. The first consists of some of New Haven's poorest neighborhoods, a place where gunshots ring out nightly and the number of murders in 2006 is poised to top twenty. The second is a state that ranks as the nation's richest, and where Grubbs's clients are often treated as disposable. As the head of Christian Community Action for eighteen years, Grubbs negotiates both worlds with a deceptive ease, channeling the moral authority accrued from her work among the poor to poke and prod those in power as the city's leading figure on poverty issues.

As the head of an organization that simultaneously depends on government and businesses for funding and aggressively lobbies them for social change, Grubbs is keenly aware of the line between aggressive engagement and alienation. "The notion of survival is important. When one looks at survival, one looks at whether or not to speak. There is funding to think about," says the American Baptist clergywoman, adding, "There is the collection plate to think about."

Perched on a rolling office chair in her tiny, windowless, impossibly cluttered New Haven office, Grubbs seemed to savor a recent invitation to pause and look beyond running an impressive set of CCA programs ranging from transitional housing to health care reform advocacy to job training to Thanksgiving food baskets.

"This is not just a job, this is God's calling upon my life. There's a certain amount of confidence that comes when you know that you're in the place that God wants you to be," says Grubbs, whose girlish face and flyaway hair belie her 51 years. "The prophetic part of what I do is really trying to grab hold of this vision of what community ought to be, what society ought to be, trying to help us grasp the prophetic in a way that it becomes real, it becomes tangible, visible before our eyes. It moves us from the reality of the human condition to the vision that we have for society that people so desperately need to hear in these times."

In New Haven and in the capitol in Hartford, Grubbs's voice is clear and loud — but rarely shrill — on issues affecting the homeless, jobless and working poor. In the early 1990s, Grubbs helped make the unpopular case for a state income tax that would bring stability and consistent funding for state programs. A decade later, she fought and lost a battle to halt the construction of a new high school in New Haven that displaced poor residents. Nowadays, she is focusing on health care reform, all the while managing a constellation of CCA programs and initiatives.

Through it all, she says, faith is essential to maintaining context, staying in touch with her base and obtaining God's guidance on when to speak out and on which issues. This, Grubbs says, is key to being heard, to maintaining a discourse with those in power and not slipping into the margin. As she hones her skill of listening to the divine, church becomes less important.

"My faith has matured to the point where I spend much less time in the local church. Folk in the church take way too long to get involved in the activity of improving the human condition," says Grubbs with characteristic directness. "The calling is not to have a fish fry."

Common Existence: A Review of *Good Catholic Girls: How Women Are Leading the Fight to Change the Church*

by Angela Bonavoglia (ReganBooks, 2005) reviewed by Christiana Peppard '05 MAR

Describing oneself as a “Catholic woman” can be a dicey undertaking. There are approximately half a billion people worldwide who fit this description, which suggests that what it means to be simultaneously woman and Catholic is not a one-size-fits-all phenomenon. Plurality is no simple matter in this global church. Indeed, the term “Catholic woman” is often a site of contention – even such that, when describing myself thus, I sometimes hold my breath.

Catalyzed by Andrea Bonavoglia’s *Good Catholic Girls*, this review charts several complexities and tensions in being both Catholic and woman in the current American moment.

I. Identities in Tension

Bonavoglia writes passionately about women (and, to a lesser degree, men) who strive to make aspects of the Catholic Church more just. Consistently throughout the book she bristles at structural iniquities of the Catholic hierarchy and offers a litany of practical and historical indignities experienced by the laity at the hands of an all-male celibate priesthood with exclusive sacerdotal power. In this way *Good Catholic Girls* is an exposé of particular corruptions and an impassioned biography of several among the Church’s committed activists. It often reads as a frustrated, indignant, and querulous attempt to bring to light the many layers of what it means to be a Catholic whose lived experience contradicts Church teachings and practices that have become especially prominent since Vatican II.

The realities that most concern Bonavoglia have to do with sexuality, sexism, and the power of the hierarchy over the laity. By topic, her chapters include debates over women’s ordination; the sex abuse scandals; the many faces of Catholic sexuality in relation to the requirement of celibate all-male priesthood; issues of sexual ethics beyond the priesthood, such as birth control, abortion, homosexuality, and divorce; and the significance of feminist theology and critiques of religion in the latter half of the twentieth century. Giving flesh to these topics are personalities, whom Bonavoglia characterizes with great enthusiasm. One of the significant strengths of the book lies in the care and dedication with which Bonavoglia profiles these people – primarily women – who in many different ways embrace tensive identities as reform-oriented Catholics. These personalities range from renowned Sister Joan Chittister, to Sister Jeannine Gramick, to the less well known founders of Call To Action and Voice of the Faithful, to Mary Ra-

merman – a lay Catholic minister who was ordained by an Old Catholic bishop in 2001, in response to the call of her parish in Rochester. Also included are many feminist scholars who have questioned the terms of traditional theological debates, shifted toward new methodologies, and focused on retrieval and reconstruction within the tradition. Readers of *Reflections* will recognize Bonavoglia’s invocations of Catholic womanist and feminist scholars – including Lisa Sowle Cahill, M. Shawn Copeland, Mary Daly, Margaret Farley, Ivone Gebara, Christine Gudorf, Diana Hayes, Elizabeth Johnson, Catherine Mowry LaCugna, Rosemary Radford Reuther, Susan A. Ross, Sandra M. Schneiders, Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, Cristina Traina, and Janet Walton.

The product of years of research, in-depth interviews, and attendance at multiple conferences, *Good Catholic Girls* does a remarkable job of depicting the multiplicity of concerns and opinions of committed Catholics who dissent from official Church teachings on these contentious issues. For the reader who wants to explore some on-the-ground contours of Catholic unrest within the ranks, or for the reader who has never before considered the significance of the laity’s experience in the formulation of theology and ethics, Bonavoglia’s book offers a corrective. However, the book also has weaknesses. Her analyses are more circumstantial than systematic,¹ and Bonavoglia unabashedly focuses on the personalities that she finds most appealing—i.e., those who rail against the hierarchy and the Church’s stance on women. Finally, the book is quite American-centric, such that at times the reader forgets that the Catholic Church is a global church, facing challenges beyond the borders of the United States; and that the afflictions shaping women’s lives worldwide do not all boil down to these issues.

Taking Bonavoglia’s book as a catalyst, I would like to contextualize some of the debates about what it means to be Catholic and to be woman at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

II. Change and Authority

The Catholic Church interprets its tradition as enduring through time, tracing ultimately back to the life and teachings of Jesus. This raises questions about the character of that endurance: Can Church tradition and moral teaching change?² If so, on whose authority? Such inquiries are particularly pressing for women in the Church who bristle at contemporary moral teachings.

These questions came to the foreground in the latter half of the twentieth century, prompted in part by liturgical and theological revisions following Vatican II; by an increasing involvement of lay people – especially women – in theological education; and by the tenor of the Church's engagement with a pluralistic world. As these factors converged, American Catholics in the pews and in professorships began to question the methods, assumptions, and authority of several pontifical decrees. In particular, the teachings of two encyclicals became sites of contention: *Humanae Vitae* (1968, forbidding birth control) and *Inter Insigniores* (1976, rendering official an exclusively all-male priesthood because women lack a “natural resemblance” to Jesus). In response to theologians' qualms, the Vatican has reiterated the authority of these teachings. Most notably, in 1995 the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (Cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI), upped the ante by defending the teachings of *Inter Insigniores* as “infallible.”³ This has not solved the issue of authority once and for all, but it has certainly reflected the Vatican's sense of urgency on the issue. It has also prompted reflection about the role of conscience in moral discernment and the significance of dissent. Practically speaking, theologians today are not entirely certain when their theological opinions will be deemed problematic or with what consequences. In recent decades several prominent theologians and activists have found themselves censured, silenced, or excommunicated. The issue is still live and skittish.

III. Gendered Theology

*Lord, I am not worthy to receive you; but only say the word and I shall be healed.*⁴

As noted above, some of the most contentious points of disagreement among laity, theologians, and the Vatican have to do with matters of sexual identity, practice, and morality. With regard to women, the Catholic Church is the largest among Christian communities that do not recognize women as ordained church leaders. But the issue is not just about ordination. As the late Catherine LaCugna pointed out in a 1992 article in *America*, a more fundamental issue persists: “The basic theological issue is anthropological,” insofar as “God is imaged and conceptualized as a male, and ... woman is seen as complementary and subordinate to man.”

Phrased differently, the issue is one of authority *and* anthropology. Who defines what it means to be human, to be woman, to be man? LaCugna insists that several additional questions cannot be avoided:

Are women persons in the same way that men are persons? ... Do the obvious biological differences between men and women amount to a qualitative difference in personhood? Is woman's personhood derived from man's personhood? Has God eternally decreed that in the orders of creation and redemption woman be subordinate to man? If so, then who is God?⁵

Anthropological concepts have significant ethical fallout: They shape the lives of individual women and men, and they affect the sacramental life of the Church.

IV. Waiting

And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, the women went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, “Who will roll the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” (Mark 16: 2-3)

Bonavoglia's book is a testimony to the fact that the relationship between women's lives and the life of the Church – especially its rituals of faith and its halls of power – can be fragmentary and difficult. But the issue is not localized to Catholicism: Pandemics rarely respect ecclesial boundaries. Within many Christian denominations in the United States (and other religious traditions, too) women's roles can be contentious, and their opportunities for leadership can be limited. The “stained-glass ceiling”⁶ persists for many women ministers. Even those who have painted their way into ordained church leadership face difficulties. In a conspicuous example, the first woman presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church U.S.A., Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori, has remarked that “there is anxiety about a woman in the boys club.” Although the U.S. Episcopal Church has been ordaining women since 1974, in a recent article the *New York Times* commented that Schori's performance in a leadership position “may be made more difficult by her sex.”⁷

What, then, does it mean to be a woman who stays, who continues to live amidst tensions of tradi-

Common Existence: A Review of *Good Catholic Girls: How Women are Leading the Fight to Change the Church*

continued from previous page

tion, gender, and power? Often it means embracing *embeddedness* in one's ecclesial community, living with *liminality* in that same community, and persisting because of *deep faith*. Embeddedness, liminality, and deep faith are also characteristics of prophets. The "pathos of prophecy in community" is an intimate phenomenon. Many women know it well.⁸

Embeddedness, in the words of Carolyn Sharp, means that "a bone-deep commitment to living in community is essential to authentic witness."⁹ Liminality results from the fact that those who speak intimate truths are not mainstream; they are incisive, but not popular. They press our convictions, reveal our biases, and speak difficult words. As Juan Arzube notes, "[A] characteristic of a prophet is to point out something beforehand, that is, before everyone else already accepts it or believes it, because we are convinced, as a result of prayerful meditation, of its validity and truth."¹⁰ This means also that prophets are not merely critics: Deep faith is required. Indeed, deep faith is the only thing that can sustain the enterprise of living prophetically. In Joan Chittister's words:

the core of hope, the absolute centrality of the inner-God Experience is crucial to true prophecy ... we're radical believers, deep believers. That's what gives any of us the true authority to speak. ... The God of despair, the God of frustration, the God of great vision. That God is the God that leads to Jesus.¹¹

Explaining *how* women stay in the church, or *what it means* that they stay, does not tell us exactly *why* they stay. This last question haunts Bonavoglia with regard to Catholicism. Certainly it is true that, in the words of Bonavoglia's aunt, "Plenty of Catholic women like things the way they are." Yet Bonavoglia is less interested in women who like things the way they are than in those who don't. For this latter group there are no easy answers. In the epilogue some of these women speak for themselves. Some stay because they view change as that which happens from within, not (in the words of one chaplain) from "quitting my job and becoming Mary Daly." Some realize that eventually they might part ways with the Church, but not yet. Others stay out of stubbornness coupled with a powerful love for community, the meaningfulness of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, or the resonance of tradition. Still others bifurcate their hopes for the Church from their personal spiritual lives. One ninety-year-old

suggests that being a woman in the Church means being someone who is "successfully maladjusted, who [won't] settle for the status quo, who [is] determined to make changes, but without bitterness." Others interpret "staying" as following a call, even if it means official excommunication, as is the case for Mary Ramerman. And Bonavoglia offers her own ambivalent answer: "I am Catholic still, I see. With all my hurt and all my anger, I am Catholic still. Because of the love. Because of the hope. Because of the community. And, oh. Because of the beauty."

Of course, faith is not about simplistic solutions. It is about complex questions. It is about the Gospel witness, the cloud of witnesses, and the convoluted pursuit of discipleship.

And very early in the morning, when the sun had risen, the women went to the tomb.

Notes

- 1 By this I do not mean to suggest that circumstantial evidence is ancillary to theology and ethics. On the contrary, the experiences that constitute this "circumstantial evidence" matter a great deal, and it is in the lifting up of some lived realities that Bonavoglia's book makes its biggest impact. For a helpful essay on the role of experience in moral and theological discernment, see Margaret A. Farley, "The Role of Experience in Moral Discernment," in Lisa Sowle Cahill and James F. Childress (eds.), *Christian Ethics: Problems and Prospects* (Pilgrim, 1996), 134-51.
- 2 There is a large literature on whether, and in what way, continuity of tradition entails change. For some key points in this debate, see John W. O'Malley, S.J., "Vatican II: Did Anything Happen?" *Theological Studies* 65 (2006): 3-33. See also: Steven Schloesser, S.J., "Against Forgetting: Memory, History, and Vatican II," *Theological Studies* 67 (2006): 275-319; John T. Noonan, Jr., *A Church That Can and Cannot Change* (Notre Dame, 2005); and Charles Curran (ed.), *Readings in Moral Theology, No. 13: Change in Official Catholic Teaching* (Paulist, 2003).
- 3 The Catholic doctrine of infallibility, besides being a point of contention as described above, is also often misunderstood. The doctrine itself was established in 1870 and holds that certain papal decrees made *ex Cathedra* are infallible. Thus far only two decrees have been made in this way: the notion of

infallibility itself and the doctrine of the Assumption of Mary into heaven. Given this situation, whether or not Ratzinger's 1995 pronouncement confers the "infallibility" that he asserts is an open question. The assertion of the infallibility of *Inter Insigniores* is found in "Responsum ad Dubium: Concerning the Teaching Contained in *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*," October 28, 1995. It follows up an apostolic letter from John Paul II of May 22, 1994, "*Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*: On Reserving Priestly Ordination to Men Alone."

- 4 This line is spoken in Catholic mass during the preparation of Communion in the Eucharistic rite.
- 5 Catherine Mowry LaCugna, "Catholic Women as Ministers and Theologians," *America* 167(10), October 10, 1992.
- 6 See the excellent article on struggles of Protestant ordained women described in Neela Banerjee "Clergywomen Find Hard Path to Bigger Pulpit: Rising Slowly, They Hit Stained-Glass Ceiling," *New York Times* (August 26, 2006), page A1.

- 7 Both quotations are cited in the article Neela Banerjee "For an Episcopal Pioneer, the Challenge is to Unite," *New York Times* (June 21, 2006), page A10.
- 8 This is Carolyn Sharp's phrase from "Voiced in Paradox: Prophecy in the Contemporary Church," in this issue of *Reflections*.
- 9 Carolyn Sharp, "Voiced in Paradox."
- 10 Juan Arzube, "Criteria for Dissent in the Church," in *Readings in Moral Theology, No. 3: The Magisterium and Morality*, Charles Curran and Richard McCormick(eds.) (Paulist, 1982), 202.
- 11 Joan Chittister, in "Prophets Then, Prophets Now: An Interview with Joan Chittister and Richard Rohr," in this issue of *Reflections*.

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Visions for the New Church

By Edwina Gateley

Visions for the new church. Well, I had a few of those and I tried sharing them. I have been in trouble ever since. Clearly the visions we are all talking about are ones that also include over half the human race. That is, women. Women called to be prophets, preachers, priests, confessors, birthers of new life.

But, of course, none of us started out with a vision of church as inclusive and holistic and just. We started out with the church that was passed on to us as children. A safe, comforting, inspiring children's church with hymns and stories and images of heaven and holy people. A church to which I was utterly devoted as a child and as a young woman. A church that gave me a sense of security and belonging—and, along with that, a God who was Father and Judge and Lord, and who demanded obedience and loyalty. No problem for a young teen in the 1960s!!!

I was safe with my God, secure with my church—and and fiercely devoted to both. Until, of course, I went to Africa, and took my God with me. My God who was white, male, Catholic...British. As we mature, and as we grow in experience of life, continuing the journey in faithfulness, God grows with us. God gets bigger. God no longer fits into the church of the Fathers built on the notion of the classic hero's journey, characterized by strength, power, control, hierarchy, rules, pomp, and triumph.

As we plunge into the complexities of life's journey, the clear and strict boundaries that we learned in our youth no longer fit our experience. Those boundaries are too small! There are far more questions than answers. What once appeared black and white becomes grey and blurred. God, and the church (like the world), becomes complex and unfinished. And, as we begin to experience injustice, suffering, pain, exclusion, and a host of other bewildering realities, there arises within us a rage and a passion impelling us to become involved in birthing a new vision of church. A church that is different, more balanced, more authentic, inclusive, and adult.

A church that reflects who we are becoming and who we are called to become. A church that we can claim as our own, as our family. A church where adult, intelligent, and caring Christians will not only feel at home, but where they can become catalysts for new life and hope in our nation and our world.

We all sense this. But what to do?

What to do with a longing for healing and wholeness in an environment of hostility and oppression?

Some folks just keep quiet and hunker down and sit in the back row lamenting, hoping things will change in the next several decades or so (although recent British research concluded that true equality for women will take another two hundred years!!!). It is perhaps no wonder that many of our brothers and sisters retreat. Passively waiting is a real option for many.

I am reminded of the poem "We Should Talk About This Problem," by the great Sufi mystic Hafiz:

There is a Beautiful Creature
Living in a hole you have dug.

So at night
I set fruit and grains

And little pots of wine and milk
Beside your soft earthen mounds,

And I often sing.

But still, my dear,
You do not come out.

I have fallen in love with Someone

Who hides inside you.

We should talk about this problem

Otherwise,

I will never leave you alone.

Some of have been seduced out of the hole already. We have climbed out, though not without trauma. We have been so hungry, so thirsty for new life that we have dared to take a risky journey in that quest for newness.

We are not alone on this journey of longing. We are a community of believers driven by the Spirit of a passionate God. We are women and men gifted and empowered to be healers and birthers and bringers of new life.

And aren't we desperate for that in a world where:

- Six thousand children die every day because of poor sanitation. This is an issue for a new vision of the church.
- Half of all the creatures with whom we share the planet are facing extinction. This is an issue for a new vision of the church.
- Globally over one million children are trafficked for sex. This is an issue for a new vision of the church.
- Global trafficking is now the third largest illegal industry and fastest growing industry in the world, generating \$18 billion in profits. This is an issue for a new vision of the church.

Aren't we desperate for a new vision of church in a country where:

- Our total defense spending is well over \$500 billion this year, while \$16 billion has been cut from Medicaid and another \$14 billion will be cut from Medicaid next year. This is an issue for a new vision of the church that has a biblical mandate to take care of the widow and the orphan.
- Funding for our food banks is 40% less than it was ten years ago, even though there are 10 million more people applying for food assistance. This is an issue for a new vision of the church that has a biblical mandate to feed the hungry.
- We have spent more than \$7 trillion on nuclear weapons. This is an issue for a new vision of the church with a biblical mandate to turn the other cheek.
- We have over 3 million homeless. This is an issue for a new vision of the church with a biblical mandate to give shelter to those without homes.

In the face of all of this reality, it is not surprising that we can so often feel overwhelmed and hopeless. But despair comes when we are out of touch with our divinity, our called to wholeness.

There is available to all of us a divine energy, an internal power for transformation that was promised by Jesus. Such a spiritual energy cannot be harnessed by the faint-hearted because, by its very nature, it drives us from our comfort zone into the "disturbing" company of the disempowered, the marginalized, and the excluded.

But it is here that we will form community. We can be sure that it is the very ones who have been excluded that will become the source of conversion and vision for our church. Why? Because it is only those who are most broken who understand what the breaking of the bread truly means. Their pain and passion will revive us. This is where Jesus stood, and, so, it is where the new church must stand.

From such a stance with the marginalized will arise, involuntarily, visions for this new church of ours. As we align ourselves with the poor and ignored of our church and our world we will come to know what a new church looks like. It will be black and white and brown; it will be female and male; it will be gay and straight; it will be married and celibate. And its mandate will always be commitment to the poor and a self-searching zeal for justice.

This vision will come about as we deepen ourselves into the presence of God.

Our task as people of God is to lead each other into a consciousness of our own spiritual power. It is the only way whereby we will have the resources and the courage to birth visions for our new church and our world. This consciousness of our possibilities will lead us to believe in doing things we once only dreamed of and prayed about: feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, welcoming the stranger in our midst, visiting the prisoners.

This is a community-centered agenda. But we are living in times of crisis, when personal survival often seems the most reasonable—and only—option for many people.

We, the whole church, must serve the whole community. Victor Frankl has said that in times of crisis, people do one of three things: they deny, they despair, or they ask critical questions. Far from being preoccupied with personal survival, we, the new community called church, must ask the critical questions that will lead us to action in our church, our country, and our world.

Coming from churches that ask no questions, we the new church must ask the critical questions that challenge our pursuit of violence and power,

the erosion of human rights, the destruction of our environment, the assault on human life and dignity, and the exclusion of the different. Only a questioning community can begin to bring solutions to the surface.

And we must redefine our notion of sin, not as primarily concerned with sex, gender, and women's bodies, but as that which destroys or diminishes human dignity, tramples on the poor, and harms our planet. We must, for example, declare from our pulpits that this administration's cutting of over 150 programs affecting health, education, and social services for the poor in order to pay for war is a sin! This is an issue for a new vision of the church. We must declare from our pulpits that all war and forms of violence are conditions of sin.

We, with a new vision of church as a community of justice and love, must confront these shadows in our world and bring to bear alternative solutions. Birthing a new creation, a vision for the new church is messy—it stretches and it hurts! But we must think with our hearts and speak from our deep sense of truth.

Right in the middle of all the violence, all the chaos, and all the fear, our voices must rise with hope and a vision based on the words of Jesus: "I have come that you may have life, and have it to the fullest." It is interesting that in response to Jesus' words, some people claimed: "He is out of his mind!" Indeed! New possibilities, new visions, new ways will always elicit fear and rejection in the minds of those whose wealth and identity are dependent on maintaining the system that supports their power—the status quo.

Changing such a system in the name of the little ones is never a popular stance with those in authority. In 1917, during the struggle of voting rights for women, the government tried to get a suffragette, Alice Paul, certified insane and institutionalized. The doctor hired to evaluate her refused to cooperate, declaring: "Courage in women is often mistaken for insanity."

We, the women and men of a new church and a new vision are not insane. We are not out of our minds, but deep in our hearts. We must find our voices in a world and a church desperate to hear the authentic word of God. We must speak aloud words of life, not words of war and death, words of love and comfort, not anger and terror, words of justice and kindness, not hatred and retaliation.

St. Catherine of Sienna once said, "Silence is violence. It is silence that kills the world. Speak as if you had a million voices." The new church may be small, but its voice must sound as a million voices.

The new church must have a mighty voice. Our vision for the new church is one where women will preach and prophesy and preside, and where men will not be afraid to weep aloud and listen deeply to the whisper of God within them.

This new church of ours will not spend millions of dollars and years of research trying to dig up details on the lives of ecclesiastical fossils who died hundreds of years ago in an effort to prove them saints. We will raise up our modern saints and martyrs who dare risk their lives for love. Martyrs and saints like Marla, who was killed by a suicide bomber after spending over three years documenting civilian casualties in Afghanistan; or Rachel, who was run over by an Israeli bulldozer as she stood in front of Palestinian homes that were being destroyed; or Sr. Dorothy, who was shot to death after decades of championing the rights of peasant farmers in Brazil; or Tookie Williams, the executed gang leader, killer, and addict who publicly repented of his crimes and turned his life over to God and the healing of young people on the streets.

It is these people, the heartbroken, who are most open to God's working through them. There is a saying that it is the crack in our heart that lets the mystery in. Indeed! We have all have a crack in our hearts that leaves us vulnerable, but it should also make us receptive and open to new ways of seeing God's working in the world.

It is these people, who have anguished so deeply, who truly understand the resurrection. We will all anguish in the new birthing. But the feminine spirit of God—so long and inaccurately declared masculine by the dying church of the Fathers—will be with us on this journey of birthing a new vision. She is the One who makes her home in those who seek her. She is the one who cries aloud in the marketplace. She is the one who seeks out the vulnerable whose very brokenness can be a source of new life. She is the one who leads us to a vision for our new church. And because of her, we are all expectant.

We, women and men with a new vision for the church, must stand before the altar of our Mother-Father God and declare: Here we are, broken and believing, dreaming and visioning. We are the healers, the believers, the birthers, and we have a dream and a vision for our children and our church.

Edwina Gately offers talks and retreats internationally on her faith journey and her struggles to be faithful to her call to urban ministry and mission. A prolific writer, she devotes much of her time to working with abused and marginalized women, and serves as a "Mother Spirit" for Exodus, a program in Chicago for women in the second phase of recovery from prostitution.

JESSICA WILBANKS

Nuclear weapons aren't at the forefront of consciousness for many these days. After all, the Cold War is over, and though headlines about North Korea and Iran paint a panicked picture, the collective fear of nuclear annihilation has taken a back seat to other concerns. For Jessica Wilbanks, that's a problem. "It's not on people's radar screens," says Wilbanks, co-coordinator of Faithful Security, an action-oriented and faith-based organization working to reduce the global threat of nuclear weapons. "The issue is almost too immense for people to determine that it affects them directly, and in the moment." Her goal, then, is to translate these issues and priorities so that people see the possibility of engaging.

Faithful Security has its seeds in the lifelong passion of Rev. William Sloane Coffin, who understood the threat of nuclear weapons as transcending political and national arenas into a realm of danger to all of creation. Through faith-based language that recognized all life on Earth as sacred, Coffin appealed to worldwide religious communities to work in the name of peace. In early 2006, shortly before Coffin died, Faithful Security was formally created to serve as a resource for leaders working within their communities against nuclear proliferation. "The first time I met Bill," Wilbanks remembers, "I was a little intimidated. Here were all these religious leaders...and then me. But he was immediately embracing and warm toward me, and always made me feel—as he did everyone—like I was the only person in the world to him right then."

Based in Goshen, Indiana, Faithful Security is the public face of the National Religious Partnership on the Nuclear Weapons Danger, a collaboration of denominations and official religious groups. While Wilbanks is technically the organization's only fulltime staff member, both Fourth Freedom Forum and the Churches' Center for Theology and Public Policy help co-staff Faithful Security and provide some funding to supplement its grants and fundraising.

Wilbanks is responsible for helping to coordinate a growing core of useful and timely information about nuclear issues, from contacts for potential speakers to PDF "toolkits" for spiritual leaders to download and share with their faith communities. "It takes time for us to develop the language and materials that

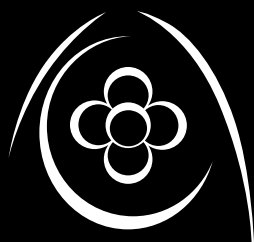
will reach people," she says, "but we're getting there." Time has taken on new meaning for Wilbanks, who at 26, recalls her most recent method for personal success in school and life: "I was used to just putting my nose to the grindstone and getting things done," she says. "Now, the grindstone is still there, but it's a vastly different time scale of success."

Wilbanks grew up in southern Maryland in a conservative Christian evangelical family. "Religion was a huge part of my life," she says, "I remember being very interested in religious questions from a really early age, and asking my dad questions about the Bible stories I didn't understand." A voracious reader of everything from sermons to poetry, as Wilbanks grew older, she began to find discrepancies between some things the church was teaching and what she felt in her heart. "I was raised to believe the most important thing about Christianity is love," she says, "and I saw my church sometimes forgetting about these laws of compassion." This was a moment of awakening for Wilbanks, who says, "I started looking at issues on a more global scale, and I became so hungry for different ways to work with faith."

At Faithful Security, Wilbanks seems to have found just that, as she is now helping form a steady and persistent call for faith-based action. "In a way, it's a very different thing than I was expecting," she says. "Of course it's a matter of working long hours and getting key individuals to sign on to a statement, but it's not a quick campaign that will produce results and be over. It's about relationship building within each community, and going slowly to respect and support what leaders can do in the moment." For Wilbanks, the local, grassroots level of community activism is paramount, but her job has been to balance this with the training of leaders who can most effectively spread this message within their own constituency.

Wilbanks is working on the premise of faith as a connecting force, across lines of nations, politics, denominations, and cultures. For the staff of Faithful Security, faith becomes the way to divorce the issue of nuclear needs from a rhetoric-bound political agenda. "Faith can sometimes be a dividing line," she says, "but for us it's a connector. It brings this issue to the level of importance for all of humanity."





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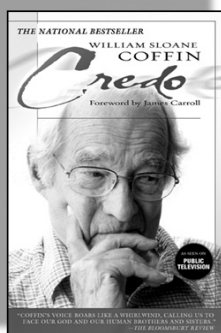
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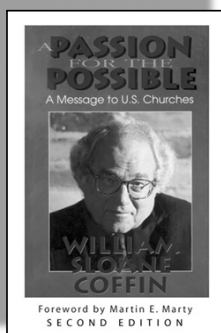
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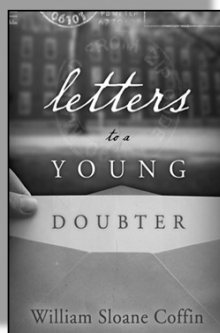
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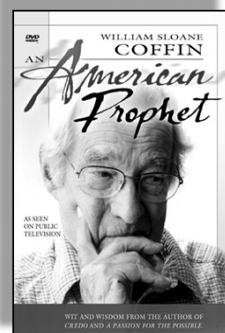
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From the Editor



It is with both joy and sorrow that I complete this most current issue of *Reflections*. It is a joy to present a topic urgently needed and long ignored or overlooked by progressive Christian communities. The sorrow comes in its dedica-

tion to the memory of Bill Coffin's 56BD, whose passing leaves a dark space in a world more than ever in need of illumination.

Since we at Yale Divinity School hosted a major event in honor of Bill in April of 2005, it was our intention to publish an issue of *Reflections* on the future of the prophetic voice and dedicate it to him. The creation of this issue began months before Bill's passing during Holy Week in 2006. In the wake of his death, the urgency of the topic only mounted as war and violence continued to intensify throughout our world, estrangement and isolation grew between nations and individuals, and voices of religious extremists continued to drown out voices of compassion, dialogue, and peace.

To be true to Bill's spirit, we believed it was important not to produce a collection of tributes to him, but to create a magazine that deals with the critical issues surrounding the biblical legacy, recent history, and current imperative of a prophet's speaking truth to power. Interwoven throughout this issue are eulogies that were offered about Bill at his memorial service at Riverside Church in New York City where he served as pastor from 1977-1987 after seventeen years as chaplain of Yale University.

I am grateful to Bill Moyers, Marian Wright Edelman, and James Carroll, each one a prophetic voice in his or her own right, for their immediate willingness to contribute their own memorials to this issue. I am also thankful to the Reverend Samuel Slie, Bill's long time friend and colleague, for contributing several of his legendary prayers offered at Battell Chapel during Bill's tenure. Though these words were prayed nearly four decades ago, they remain hauntingly relevant to our current situation. Noel Paul Stookey,

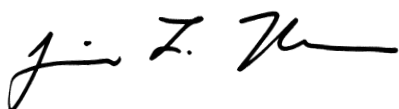
of the renowned folk group Peter, Paul, and Mary, graciously offered his poetic lyrics to enrich this issue.

I am indebted also to Bill's widow, Randy Coffin, as well as David Coffin and Eva Rubinstein for their generosity of spirit, time, and support in guiding me through the selection of artwork. For some viewing this edition of *Reflections*, the artwork may seem contrary to Bill's noted jovial and good-humored disposition. The photography illustrating this issue is the work of Ms. Rubinstein, a prominent artist and Bill's first wife. When I first viewed her photography, I was struck by the ways in which the moods and tones of the photos resonate symbolically with the theme of prophecy. As many of the articles contained in this magazine attest, a prophet's life is often spent on the edge of a community, and therefore is often deeply challenging, lonely, and isolated. In these melancholic spaces, the prophet continually attunes her or his vision to witness more deeply the living presence of God in all who cry out for love and justice. Prophets find the courage to enter into the most fractured and marginalized places in reality, and thereby become the hopeful beams of light that break into dark, empty spaces. No wonder Christians throughout history have avoided or abandoned their biblical mandate to be prophets in their religious and civil circles!

There is only one photo featured in this issue that was not taken by Ms. Rubinstein, the image of Bill of the back cover of the issue taken in July 2004 by Gabe Cooney. I was with Gabe on the trip to Bill's home in Strafford, Vermont, for the photo shoot. Bill allowed only nine frames to be taken of him, and insisted on spending the rest of our visit in the kitchen for lemonade and bantering. Those hours I spent with him seemed somehow out of space and time—an experience that undoubtedly has been shared by many who have been graced with such an opportunity. Though we spent little time talking about me, Bill's spirit was such I came away from our meeting with greater insight into myself and my own vocation, and more painfully and profoundly aware of the call of my own prophetic spirit. Some of our readers are aware that last year, I left my full time post as director of pub-

lications at YDS to pursue pastoral work in a Catholic parish in New York City noted for its ministry to GLBT, poor, homeless, and mentally and physically disabled communities. My desire to transform my vocation was put into motion during this visit in the summer of 2004 and was confirmed during our celebration of Bill in April of 2005. I am grateful to Bill for inspiring me to take on this new challenge and to the team at YDS for allowing me to continue my editorship of *Reflections*. I hope that my work “in the trenches” of ministry enhances the depth and sensitivity with which I engage each new issue.

I have little doubt that my story pales in comparison with the powerful, intimate stories that so many of our readers have about Bill. Whether you knew Bill personally, was inspired by him from afar, or are just encountering him for the first time, it is my prayer that this issue of *Reflections* will stir the prophetic voice in you and fill you with—as Bill was famous for saying—“lots of hope!”



Jamie L. Manson
Editor

O God, who hast manifested thyself in lives of men and women who have honestly lived and died, give us today some deep measure of insight and of understanding. As we participate in the perspectives of this hour of worship, help us to gain a new vision of the hurrying events of our crowded days. Free us from pettiness and foolishness, give us the wisdom to discern the deeper issues of our time, and give us the power to meet the obligations they place upon us.

We are grateful, O God, for home, family and friends, for our studies and work, for the green world, blue skies and pure air thou hast given us despite our poor stewardship of these gifts. We thank thee for all the beauty that we may see and feel and touch and know; and the skill and the science to put it all to meaningful use. We thank thee for high thoughts, happy days, after feeling and hope of peace, and a faith that looks through gloomy days toward a larger life.

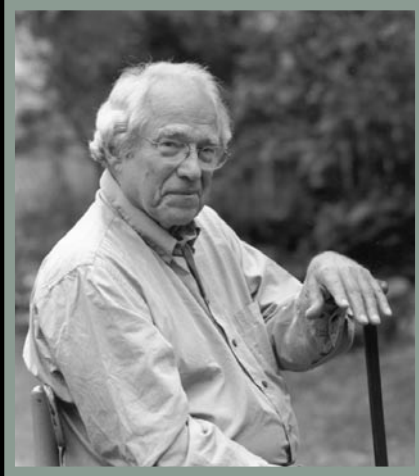
Help us, O God, to use our education and our faith to achieve a commitment about life, upon which we may act; bring us out from behind our words to responsible action, bring us out from behind our rhetoric to truth.

Help us to express our prayers in action o God. Make our humble-honest-real actions be a form of prayer in the midst of our increasingly polarized community, Help us to reach the hearts of persons for whom justice is a club and those for whom it is a ploy and a scapegoat. Help us to reach the hearts of those who have never learned to love, and those who have stopped loving,

Lord God Almighty, purge our land, we beseech thee, from the secret power and the open shame of great national sins. From dishonesty and corruption, from cruelty and violence, from vainglory and Towers of Babel, from covetousness and impurity, from stupidity, intolerance and intemperance which give birth to many crimes and sorrows -- purge us and deliver us, our children, and our children's children into a land and a time blessed with the truth of thy love - through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Reverend Samuel Slie

Battell Chapel



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