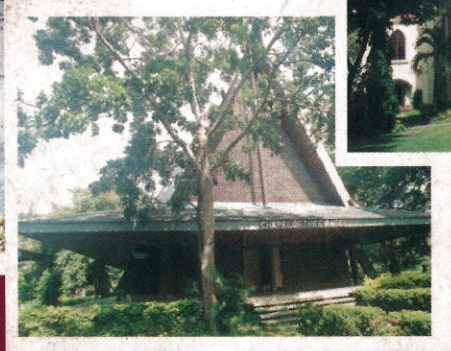
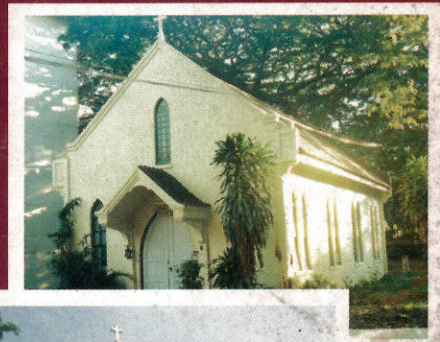


# SILLIMAN JOURNAL



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## NOTICE TO AUTHORS

The SILLIMAN JOURNAL welcomes contributions in all fields from both Philippine and foreign scholars, but papers should preferably have some relevance to the Philippines, Asia, or the Pacific. All submissions are refereed.

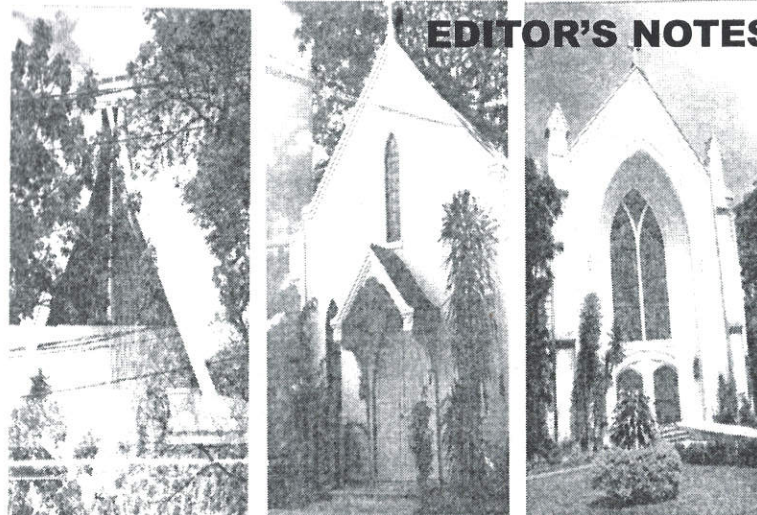
Articles should be products of research, taken in its broadest sense; a scientific paper should make an original contribution to its field. Authors are advised to keep in mind that SILLIMAN JOURNAL has a general and international readership, and to structure their papers accordingly.

SILLIMAN JOURNAL also welcomes the submission of "Notes," which generally are briefer and more tentative than full-length articles. Reports on work in progress, queries, updates, reports of impressions rather than research, responses to the works of others, even reminiscences are appropriate here. Book reviews and review articles will also be considered for publication.

Manuscripts should conform to the conventions of format and style exemplified in this issue. Whenever possible, citations should appear in the body of the paper, holding footnotes to a minimum. Documentation of sources should be discipline-based. Pictures or illustrations will be accepted only when absolutely necessary. All articles must be accompanied by an abstract and must use gender fair language. All authors must submit their manuscripts in duplicate, word-processed double-space on good quality paper. A diskette copy of the paper, formatted in MSWord 6.0 should accompany the submitted hard copy.

The Editorial Board will endeavor to acknowledge all submissions, consider them promptly, and notify authors of its decision as soon as possible. Each author of a full-length article is entitled to 25 off-print copies of his/her submitted paper. Additional copies are available by arrangement with the Editor or Circulation Manager before the issue goes to press.

## EDITOR'S NOTES



*As the center of the Church's intellectual activity, animated by the Church's motivation, and directed by its purpose, the theological school is charged with a double function. On the one hand, it is that place or occasion where the Church exercises its intellectual love of God and neighbor; on the other hand, it is the community that serves the Church's other activities by bringing reflection and criticism to bear on worship, preaching, teaching, and the care of souls.*

*H. Richard Niebuhr*

**IN THIS ISSUE:** Writing, a theological college run by in 1961 to mark the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of what was then known as the College of Theology, about the direction the college was to take in the next coming years, Dr. Paul T. Lauby, then College Dean, envisioned, among other things, "competent faculty with an international character," a progressive curriculum that will train outstanding Filipino scholars in pastoral ministry, and a research program that will foster research and writing among its faculty. Forty years



to date since that writing, as the articles in this issue affirm, Dr. Lauby's wishes have not only come true, but continue to thrive faithful to the vision that gave what is now the Divinity School its reason for being and its source of direction.

Silliman Journal welcomes to this issue a product of research and writing by outstanding Biblical scholars of the Divinity School. Coming from different areas of specialization, such as Church History, Christian Ethics, Old Testament, and New Testament, these contemporary scholars exemplify the realization of that earlier dream that inspired the founding of the Silliman Bible School in 1921. As most of them are products of this vision, they represent the link in the continuing tradition of excellence in theological education that is the school's hallmark.

Gathered in this special issue are six of the of articles originally given as part of the theological lecture series program at Silliman University Divinity School organized by

the United Church of Christ in the Philippines to commemorate the centenary of Protestantism in the Philippines in 1998, which was also the centennial year of Philippine independence. To date this special collection stands midway between two centenary anniversaries, bridging the centennial celebration of Protestantism in the Philippines and the forthcoming centennial of Silliman University in whose history the Divinity School occupies a pivotal position.

Given this special context, the articles revisit the history of Protestantism in this country and assess its impact on a predominantly Catholic society. In his foreword to this issue, Dr. Everett Mendoza remarks on the special character of Protestant theological thinking in the Philippines. According to him, it "is characterized by a boldness to engage the secular environment to which the church is called to witness." Nowhere is this claim more evident than in the articles in this issue. For these articles, the underlying premise is that re-

ligion is a defining institution in any society. History yields abundant evidence to demonstrate how, in the words of psychologist Gordon Allport, "it [religion] has provoked wars and impelled peace, inspired great works of art and literature and presided over their destruction, united individual aspirations toward common goals and divided families against each other." Because of its intensely personal significance in people's lives, religion occupies a predominant place in the public domain becoming part of our national dialogue and current debate on such issues as democracy, elections, poverty, pornography, contraceptives, or people power revolutions. It is precisely this engagement with the social context which is the focus of these articles.

Noriel C. Capulong's "Nationalism and Prophetic Critique" exemplifies most closely the claim that Protestant theological practice in the Philippines is socially engaged. This perceptive discussion opens with Capulong's astute

observation of the painful irony underlying the simultaneous centennial celebrations commemorating on the one hand, Philippine Independence from Spain, and on the other, the coming of Protestantism into the country. In his own words, Capulong laments that "no sooner had the Philippines claimed its independence as a nation from Spain in 1898 that it also had to relinquish it to the Americans who proceeded to colonize the whole country with unprecedented brutality against those who tried to resist." Similarly, he finds it equally ironic that "the centennial anniversary of Protestantism in the country is inseparably identified with the people who simply trampled upon our newly won freedom." In this paper, Capulong looks to Jeremiah's teachings in order to come to terms with these ironies, as well as to find the basis for a theological paradigm that will be used in probing whether nationalism could provide a viable ideological base for a people's struggle for na-



tional liberation.

Very much socially engaged, Everett L. Mendoza's "The Social Environment and the Creation of a New Humanity" begins by posing a question, "What kind of political environment would be appropriate to the moral regeneration of people in accordance with Christian standards?" Using the original Reformation teachings on the divinely ordained roles of the Church and the State as analytical framework, Mendoza proceeds to discuss the current Philippine situation affirming, in the process, the continuing relevance of the Reformists' views. Mendoza concludes by suggesting that the church, guided by the Reformation teachings, should "call on the Philippine Government to use all its constitutionally mandated authority and powers to secure the life and livelihood of the people, protect the national patrimony, and preserve the nation's sovereignty in the face of globalization."

In much the same vein, the next article by Victor

R. Aguilan also essays on the views of the Reformed tradition to clarify the nature and function of the State and the duty of the believers to the State. Of special interest to Aguilan's discussion is the Christian doctrine of the two-kingdoms that holds the view that the Church and the State are two distinct but inseparable realms. In discussing this, Aguilan examines the nature of the State or political authority from the Christian perspective.

Adding her voice to the many currently engaged in the controversial issue questioning the representation of women in Luke's Gospel, Virginia Omoso-Guazon, in "Luke for Women Then and Now," attempts a feminist reading of Luke's Gospel and examines its implications for Filipino women. The controversy under her scrutiny centers on the question whether Luke's Gospel seeks to enhance and edify the status of women or maintains a negative, if not oppressive, view of them. Omoso-Guazon's paper rejects these extreme positions and instead

settles for a middle ground in which she, while acknowledging the androcentric views in the Lukan texts, tries to redeem them through the lenses of hermeneutics of suspicion and hermeneutics of remembrance. Her conclusion is that as part of the "liberating word" of God, "the Gospel of Luke is affirming and liberating for women then and now."

In "Biblicists, Spiritualists, Millenarians, Rebels, and Pacifists: Reflections on the Radical Reformation," Gordon Zerbe revisits the 16<sup>th</sup> century reform movements in Europe collectively known as the "radical reformation" in order to trace the beginnings of the Anabaptist movement from which the Mennonite tradition springs. In reviewing the main features of the "Anabaptist Vision," Zerbe aims to illustrate how that vision compares with Anabaptist perceptions of theological perspectives of "mainline Protestantism" and Roman Catholicism. In this synthetic reading of the radical reformation, Zerbe rues the fact that "the animosity which

strained the relationship between the spiritual descendants of the mainline Reformation and the radical reformation in the past 500 year continues to this day to divide Christians" and has been exported all over the world. This paper ends on a hopeful note that as we "face the challenge of maintaining the zeal and passion of the reformation movement in its many forms," we might "learn from the strengths of our respective traditions, and hold, at the same time, to the vision of Christian unity."

In this final paper on "Two Theological Streams, One Canon: Into the 4th Millennium," Rowland D. Van Es meditates on the two theological streams in the Bible, namely, the Salvation-History Stream or the Prophetic world view and the Sagacic Search for Wisdom Stream or Creation Theology. In seeking to clarify the distinction as well as the complementarity between these two streams, Van Es also aims to nullify the pervasive perception that the Salvation-History



Stream is a more superior source of Biblical authority than Creation Theology. More importantly, Van Es seeks to highlight the canonical imbalance in theological studies and Biblical Modeling which, he says, tends to leave out Creation Theology altogether. Van Es ends this paper with the hope that "the third wave of Protestant Christians in the 4th Millennium of the Biblical faith will evangelize with the Whole Bible, with the holistic impact that they can make on the totality of the Filipino world toward making it a cosmos of wholeness."

Forty years ago, Dr. Lauby wrote that the faculty of the College of Theology was united in its optimism about the future of the school. "We are firmly convinced," he said, "that its greatest days are in the future. Our prayer is that we may be given the insight and courage to build a strong school of the prophets, a school that will produce an intelligent and dedicated ministers who can lead the Church into a new era of witness and service." If the articles

in this issue are any indication, that future is HERE!

#### *Acknowledgments*

Sherwood Anderson once said that "the whole glory of writing lies in the fact that it forces us out of ourselves and into the lives of others." Editing is not much different, perhaps only more challenging in that the editor occupies a mediating role between the reader and the writer, representing each to the other, and thus, has responsibility not just to the writer but to the reader as well. On the one hand, it is the editor's job to work diligently to make the writer's message as effective as possible so that the manuscript is understandable to everyone. On the other, as the surrogate reader for whom the article is intended, the editor must make sure that the article answers the reader's need for clarity, readability, and information. Thus, it is an accepted rule in the

editing profession "to preserve all the strengths of the manuscript while removing whatever impedes communication between writer and reader."

Yet, as any editor knows, this could also be the most challenging aspect of the job. For most writers who have "poured themselves into their works" and consider them successful, the prospect of one's work being edited breeds initial feelings of insecurity, even indignation. When this happens, the editor must perform a delicate balancing act and despite oneself, learn not only to be sensitive, but also to be tactful in bringing home the message that manuscripts have a potential to be better—clearer, more convincing, more enjoyable for readers.

In my few years of working with *Silliman Journal*, I have yet to encounter a situation requiring this delicate balancing act, and for this I am truly grateful for the professionalism of

our contributors to whose articles I attribute the expansion of my own intellectual horizons about things I would not have bothered to discover or learn on my own. For the intellectual energy and depth of insight that inform their writings, our thanks and appreciation to Dr. Everett L. Mendoza, Dr. Noriel C. Capulong, Prof. Victor R. Aguilan, Prof. Virginia Omoso-Guazon, Dr. Gordon Zerbe, and Dr. Rowland D. Van Es. Theirs was the work; mine, the pleasure of participation.

Our main debt is also to our reviewers for the keenness of their critical judgment and for the generosity of their time. Their cooperation has made editing an intellectually rewarding preoccupation.

For inspiring what we have to offer in this issue, for being an encouraging voice, and a serene presence whether in personal or professional encounters, I owe a great

debt to Bishop Erme R. Camba, Dean of the Divinity School.

It is always a pleasure to work with Dr. Everett Mendoza. The perspicacity of his mind and the serenity of his disposition keep every challenge under control. For taking charge of gathering the manuscripts, the preliminary screening, and the critical review, he spared us the greater part of the major problem and, best of all, helped us beat our deadline. To him, our special thanks for making this issue a piece of work of the right proportions.

Prof. Philip van Peel heralds this issue with his beautiful cover design from photographs borrowed from the Portal office. In addition to his artistic and aesthetic sensibility, Philip's purposive work habits and good-humored disposition send us to the press sooner than it used to be, which is a constant source of surprise, as well as relief.

In the past, Silliman Journal used to be hounded by the dearth of manuscripts, which resulted in many delayed issues. Now that we have some success in turning that situation around, we find ourselves confronting an even greater challenge, that of budgetary constraints as funding becomes more and more uncertain. Despite the long, long delay, President Agustin A. Pulido's Midas touch succeeded in materializing this much-needed financial support for our last issue which came out in early May. We are pleased to publicly acknowledge that help in these pages. As we are about to go to press again, it is our hope that he will continue to be the steady source of this magic.

Special thanks also go to Lorna T. Yso, Head Librarian of Silliman University Library, for heroically accommodating, despite her better judgment, Silliman Journal's publication costs into the li-

brary's own tight budget. More than she will realize it, her generous gesture saved the ~~last~~ issue the ignominious fate of being "hostaged" in press.

Burtlan Partosa of the Silliman Press is instrumental in finally bringing the camera-ready manuscripts to print on schedule. The ease in dealing with him in this aspect of publication and the assurance that we will get the finished product we had in mind makes the waiting less tormenting.

Finally, the Department of English and Literature deserves a greater share of our gratitude for continuing to provide Silliman Journal a home.

If the articles in this volume manage to stimulate the readers to think about their experiences in their communities and to come to a richer awareness of their place and significance in them, then part of this issue's goals will have been achieved.

*Ceres E. Pioquinto*





## The Protestant Centennial Lecture Series

The Year 1998 marked the Centennial of the coming of Protestant Missions to the Philippines. The churches founded by five mainline churches from the United States, namely, the Presbyterian Church (founder of Silliman University, 1901), the Congregational Church (founder of the Silliman University Divinity School, 1921), the Church of Christ-Disciples, the Methodist Church, and the United Evangelical Brethren eventually form the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) on May 25, 1948. And so the Year 1998 was also the celebration of the Golden Jubilee of the UCCP. Moreover, the Year 1998 was the Centennial of the Declaration of Philippine Independence. These three

major events, as well as the forthcoming Centennial of Silliman University, challenged the Faculty of the Divinity School to plan the series of monthly Protestant Centennial Lectures. The Faculty members were tasked to reflect on the current situation from the point of view of Protestant Reformed Tradition to which all the uniting churches belong.

The resulting articles in this issue of the *Silliman Journal* are the Divinity School's offering to God for the combined celebrations. It is doubly significant that the *Journal* is published in the Centennial Year of Silliman University and on the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Divinity School.

I would like to express my appreciation to the Editorial Board of the *Silliman Journal* for making this issue possible. Thanks be to God.

*Bishop Erme R. Camba, Dean  
Silliman University Divinity School*

Church historians consider 1898 as the year when American Protestant missionary activity in the Philippines started. Thus, Protestant churches celebrated the centenary of Protestantism in the country in the same year that the whole nation celebrated the centenary of the first Philippine republic. To mark the occasion, the United Church of Christ in the Philippines undertook various activities, among which was a series of theological lectures held at the Divinity School of Silliman University.

The first lecture was delivered in October 1997 (October is celebrated world-wide as Reformation Day) by Dr. Rowland Van Es, a long-time American mission worker of the Reformed Church of America to the UCCP, assigned at Silliman University. This was followed by two lectures, one by Prof. Victor Aguilan and the other by Dr. Everett Mendoza, which attempted to establish the

relevance of the original Reformation teachings to current issues in Philippine society. For his part, Dr. Noriel Capulong gave the voices of the Old Testament prophets a contemporary ring, while Prof. Virginia Omoso-Guazon explored the Gospel of Luke from a feminist perspective.

In writing about Anabaptism and other movements belonging to the radical wing of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation, Dr. Gordon Zerbe, a Mennonite visiting professor at the Divinity school, exposed a side of the Reformation that is often ignored in Protestant theological discussions.

Although the articles came from a wide range of backgrounds and perspectives, they reveal the vital impact of the Protestant church on a predominantly Catholic country. Protestant theological thinking in the Philippines is characterized by a boldness to engage the secular environment to which the



church is called to witness. Compared to their North American and European counterparts, Filipino theologians regard the academic community as a secondary audience as they address themselves primarily to those who are at the cutting edge of the church's mission in the world. This interest explains the various references to very specific historical facts, for example, Martial Law during Marcos' time or Ramos' program of government. Even attempts to update some specific historical references when the lectures were revised for publication purposes have also been overtaken by recent political events, for example, the ouster of former

President Estrada last January. But even though the facts cited appear anachronistic, they point to some very enduring social and political issues that continue to prevail up to this moment.

In the final analysis, theology does not begin as an academic matter but a wrestling of the mind with faith. Theology may find itself on the pages of a university journal but only in fossilized form, worthy of scholarly scrutiny. But its spirit remains free and moves with vitality in the consciousness of those who, like the Prophet Jeremiah, take their faith like fire shut up in their bones.

*Rev. Everett L. Mendoza, D. Theol.  
Silliman University Divinity School*



## NATIONALISM AND THE PROPHETIC CRITIQUE

Noriel C. Capulong

### ABSTRACT

*The 1998 celebration of the centennial year of Philippine independence provides the backdrop for the reexamination of our identity as a nation and as a church denomination. One of the most pressing questions engendered by that celebration concerns the assertion of our nationalist goals and aspirations in an age of rising globalization. In this paper the teachings of the prophet Jeremiah provide the philosophical underpinnings for the theological paradigm that will be used in probing whether nationalism could provide a viable ideological base for a people's struggle for national liberation. Central in Jeremiah's teachings is the concept of "transformation" which involves, among others, a new liberating, covenant-based, and pro-people consciousness. Jeremiah's concern for the integrity and freedom of one's nation and his conviction that the cry for freedom by the elite leaders of a nation cannot be set apart from the cry of the poor and the marginalized for redemption from their plight find echoes in the contemporary cry in our country for an independent foreign policy in which the superpowers of this world and the powerless and voiceless enjoy equally responsible and meaningful participation in law and policy. Finally, this paper expresses the view that it would do this country good to heed Jeremiah's cry. For our nation to be truly free and respected in the community of nations, it must contribute to the upliftment of its own people as well as others, instead of simply dreaming of becoming like the other more advanced nations and forgetting all about becoming a people of God.*

*Introduction: The Irony of the Centennial Year*

The past celebration of the centennial year of Phil-

ippine independence (1898 - 1998) coincided with the centennial celebration of Protestantism in the country. The twin events placed the issue of



nationalism in the center of the discussions and reflections both in the academe and church circles. For its part, the *Divinity School Silliman Ministry Magazine* devoted most of its August 1997 issue mainly to articles touching on or closely related to these twin events.<sup>1</sup> Other church publications also featured articles dealing with themes related to the centennial observance.<sup>2</sup> A common concern of these discussions centered on the recovery of the very roots of a people's identity as a nation, or as a church denomination within the framework of the coming of a new colonizer just at the time of its own founding. Even before this, however, there were already attempts to point out the fact that no sooner had the Philippines claimed its independence as a nation from Spain in 1898 that it also had to relinquish it to the Americans who proceeded to colonize the whole country with unprecedented brutality against those who tried to resist.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, it is quite ironic that those who link the centennial celebration of our

independence with the coming of the Americans ignore the fact that the Americans soon suppressed the country's hard-won independence from Spain. Equally ironic is the fact that the centennial anniversary of Protestantism in the country is inseparably identified with the people who simply trampled upon our newly won freedom.

Discussions and reflections on these twin issues which continue to this day bring out the common elements of rediscovery [emphasis provided], rediscovering the roots and foundations of the nation's identity and its continuing struggle for sovereignty and real independence, as well as unmasking [emphasis provided], that is, unmasking the myth of American altruism and benevolence in its attempt to colonize the country.<sup>4</sup> On the one hand, a more resonant and emphatic pleading to reassert [emphasis provided] the nation's legacy of freedom against all forms of foreign domination continues to be felt. On the other, the need to critically reinterpret and review [emphasis provided] our people's history

from a more nationalist perspective so as to make it reusable for the present remains urgent.<sup>5</sup>

Another historical irony that has been noted is that the resurgence of nationalist voices and people's movements engendered by the centennial year of Philippine independence had to contend with the reality of rising globalization and the actual breaking down of national, even ideological barriers through trade and commerce and electronic communication. Although the centennial year gave rise to nationalist articulations and programs for national development and renewal, it was celebrated in the context of a global socio-economic atmosphere that tends to look at nationalist economic policies as narrow minded and backward protectionism which slow down rather than hasten the economic development of trading nations.<sup>6</sup>

At a time when nationalism can easily be interpreted or misinterpreted as plain and selfish protectionism, how then did the nation make any asser-

tion of its own nationalist goals and aspirations during its centennial celebration? Is there still room for nationalism in an age of rising globalism or globalization? Is there still a space for the assertion of one's national identity, heritage, and aspirations as a people in a time of rising international relationships and dependencies? Could nationalism provide a viable ideological base for a people's struggle for national liberation at this time?<sup>7</sup>

#### *Nationalism and the Scriptures*

As one engaged more in the field of Scriptures rather than contemporary economics and politics, I will try to address these questions by drawing lessons and insights from the teachings and experiences of the prophets as they also respond to issues not totally dissimilar from ours today. This I will do through a critical examination of selected texts in the Old Testament out of which certain trajectories or patterns of development of meanings of certain texts or terms may be traced through various periods in the history



of Israel. This trajectory approach, however, will start not from the earliest texts or traditions but from what may appear to be relatively late prophetic materials such as Jeremiah, and then go backwards. The teachings of the prophet Jeremiah will then be used as the basis for synthesizing the insights taken up in the other texts and for constructing a possible theological paradigm that may be used in responding to the questions raised above. It is hoped that in reviewing the scriptural roots we will rediscover some fundamental aspects of our topic. These reflections are intended to be a modest contribution to the continuing discussions on the significance of the centennial celebration of our Protestant faith and that of our independence.

*Initial Definition as Applied in Jeremiah*

Nationalism is understood essentially as that spirit of loyalty and devotion to the interests of one's nation as a whole.<sup>8</sup> Usually, it is related to the people's demand and strug-

gle for sovereignty and freedom from all forms of domination by any other nation, people, or group. Such popular understanding of nationalism is also imbedded in some of the prophetic testimonies. In the days of Jeremiah, for instance, there were times when the issue of nationalism was inextricably identified with the issue of independence. This understanding, however, has been challenged by those advocating what may easily appear as submission or collaboration with foreign invaders.

During the time of Jeremiah, Judah was already a vassal state of the superpower Babylonia. At this time, the ruling elite of the nation had already been expelled to Babylon in the first exile of 597 BCE. Some popular nationalist prophets, however, were stirring up and reviving the hopes and faith of the people by proclaiming the end of the exile of their leaders, the defeat of Babylon, and the return of the exiles to Judah, including their king Jehoiachin. One such nationalist prophet was Hananiah (Jer. 28). Right there

in the vicinity of the temple in Jerusalem, in the presence of the priests and of all the people, Hananiah proclaimed with much confidence: "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: 'I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon. Within two years, I will restore to this place all the vessels of the temple of the Lord which Nebuchadrezzar, king of Babylon, took away from this place to Babylon. And I will bring back to this place Jeconiah (Jehoiachin), son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, and all the exiles of Judah who went to Babylon,' says the Lord, 'for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon'" (Jer. 28:2-4).

Hananiah imbued his prophetic pronouncement with the power of the imagination which envisions a future for the nation free from foreign domination. In doing so, he revived the fading hopes of the people and inspired them to nurture plans of joining any movement that will hasten the day of the downfall of the hated Babylonian empire.

Being a Jerusalem-based prophet and probably

also a priest, and most likely the father of a certain Zedekiah, an official or cabinet member in the court of King Jehoiakim (cf. Jer. 36:12), Hananiah must have been among the beneficiaries of the earlier reformation movement launched by king Josiah in 621 BCE. This movement mandated the centralization of all worship in the city of Jerusalem to protect it from any foreign, non-Yahwistic religious contamination, and the removal and destruction of all other sanctuaries in the provinces (2 Kings 23). With King Josiah himself rallying the people towards a more independent political and religious posture vis-a-vis the then superpower Assyria, the reformation movement he led fostered very strong nationalist sentiment.

Thus, Hananiah was just speaking and acting as a product and beneficiary of a very popular movement started by no less than one of their most popular and beloved kings. This movement aimed to cleanse the nation of all forms of foreign influence in both religion and politics. One cannot



be more nationalistic than that. It stressed that the religion of Israel, the worship of Yahweh, is itself the identifying mark of the nation. The rejection of all other foreign influence and domination therefore implies the affirmation of the sole lordship of Yahweh over his people, Israel. Thus, the words of Hananiah come as words that affirm the uniqueness of the nation as the people of Yahweh, a God who will allow no other rival for the people's allegiance. The call to reject Babylonian domination and declare the forthcoming freedom of the exiles becomes a high point in the heightening of Israelite nationalism at this time.

But Jeremiah happens to see things differently. He called on the people not to believe, not to listen to the words of prophets like Hananiah, for, as he says, they are just plain lies. And to Hananiah himself, Jeremiah declared, "The Lord has not sent you, and you have raised false confidence in the people. For this, says the Lord, I will remove you from the face of the earth; this very year you shall die, because you have

preached rebellion (*sara*) against the Lord" (Jer. 28:15-16).

It is not surprising that after this pronouncement Jeremiah was booed and jeered by the listening crowd. His unpopularity must have reached unprecedented levels at this point and must have been a factor in the various attempts to incarcerate and even kill him. One arresting group was even led by a grandchild of Hananiah (Jer. 37:13). To the crowd in his time, Jeremiah appeared as the false prophet while the likes of Hananiah were being glorified as the true prophets for articulating the essential hopes and aspirations of the people. Hananiah called for a national revival and renewal along with independence in the tradition of Josiah's reformation movement. Jeremiah called for submission and collaboration with the invaders along with working for, praying for, and seeking the welfare of their captors as he states in his letter to the exiles, an approach which must have been unprecedented (Jer. 29:7). But Jeremiah's accusa-

tion against Hananiah is no less serious. The Hebrew word *sara*, translated as "rebellion" by most versions actually implies an act of turning aside or simply, in a more military sense, "defecting to the other side."<sup>9</sup>

Why would the articulation of nationalist hopes and aspirations be labeled as an act of rebellion against Yahweh? Why would the attempt to galvanize the spirit of a people into one body united in its opposition to foreign domination be labeled as defection to the other side? No wonder this part of the Scripture often poses a challenge to contemporary interpreters pushing for a more nationalist perspective in looking at the present realities.

*A Continuing Tension: To be God's People or to Become like the other Nations?*

Underlying Hananiah's prophesy was his call for the restoration of the nation-state of Judah governed by a Davidic king and dominated by the few who were actually exiled and whose return and restoration to their old power

and privilege Hananiah was anticipating. In effect, Hananiah was calling for the revival of the Davidic monarchy to rule and dominate the nation-state of Judah. In contrast, Jeremiah was calling for an indefinite period of submission to the power of Babylon as the only way to survive. He was not looking forward at all to the restoration of the Davidic monarchy, not even to the restoration of Judah as a nation-state (*goy*). Instead, he was waiting for the restoration of Israel as a people, specifically, as a people of God, when God would once again re-claim Israel as a covenant partner, and when God would once again declare to her: "I will be their God, they shall be my people" (*'am elohim*, Jer. 31:33).

Jeremiah's conviction had deep roots in the pre-monarchic days of Israel. The earlier stages in the history of Israel may be seen as reflective of the continuing desire of God to make Israel an *'am elohim* even in the midst of the ongoing efforts of the Israelites to become a nation-state (*goy*). Thus it was a history high-



lighted in most parts by this tension between the covenant intention to form Israel into an 'am elohim and that of the aspiration of the people to become like the other nations (*goyim*).

Hebrew thought and language make clear distinction between the concepts, 'am and *goy*. Although the term *goy* may also designate a people, the word is used more appropriately to refer to the political as well as territorial affiliations and identities of the people concerned. Given this implication, *goy* approximates our modern idea of a nation with a centralized tax-extracting, bureaucratic, military-imposing government system.<sup>10</sup> It is interesting to note that the term *goyim* evolved in meaning which up to the present would mean "non-Israelites", or non Jews. They are the strangers, those that are different from Israel.

On the other hand, the term 'am, although closely related to *goy*, refers chiefly to a social and cultural grouping identified by linguistic or ethnic identities existing in tribal or even smaller communities without the presence of any

centralized political authority.<sup>11</sup> Predominantly, however, 'am is used to express two basic characteristics of people considered as a grouping: (1) the relationships sustained within or to the group, and (2) the unity of the group. Relationships could range from those within the family or clan, such as maternal, or ancestral, filial, children, wives, to those outside including slaves and servants. In other cases, they can be established or cut off on the basis of religious affiliations, such as distinguishing between the circumcised and the uncircumcised. Such relationships are established and even strengthened and evolve into a clan or tribal unity on the basis of common traditions, beliefs, customs, practices, and the need to protect each other and defend each other from outside threats and invaders. Unity, on the other hand, can also be achieved on the basis of family and clan ties, as well as religious identities.<sup>12</sup>

*"People" vs "Nation" in the Early Monarchy*

By the time of the early monarchy, specifically during the days of David and Solomon, Israel had acquired

the characteristics of a *goy* which began to overshadow those of an 'am. Israel indeed became like the other nations. Yet, at the height of its economic prosperity and political stability during which imperialist expansionism launched by David flourished, there emerged prophetic voices who were responsible for the creation of the literary tradition in the Pentateuch known as the Jahwist or simply "J" (ca. 950 BCE).

One of the foundational materials found in "J" is the story of the call of Abraham in Gen. 12:1-3. There, in the setting of Abraham being given a covenantal promise of God for him to become a recipient of God's gift of land, to become the father of a great nation (*goy gadhol*), and to become a blessing to all other "families of the earth" (*mishpakbath haadamah*), Israel is mentioned by "J". Specifically, the text spoke of nationhood as Israel's destiny and future (underscoring added). However, this is a future being envisioned not only in terms of Israel's greatness as a *goy*, but

also in terms of being a blessing to all other peoples of the earth: "In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." Here, it appears that the well-being of Israel carries in itself some potential for the well-being of other peoples and nations as well. As Israel is to be blessed by God, she is not allowed to live in a vacuum. Israel must always live with, for, and among the others.<sup>13</sup> That is, as a particular witness to and bearer of Yahweh's presence and lordship in all other communities and nations of the earth.

Thus, there is a very strong missionary intent in the call of Abraham. His call is not just for the creation, self-propagation, strengthening, and expansion of a nation-state even at the expense of conquering other peoples, tendencies which became very evident in the time of David and preserved by Solomon. The call rather is for the creation of a community whose existence will serve as a sign of God's activity and from whose witness will arise a means through which other peoples will find a



blessing. In short, as far as "J" is concerned, the emergence of a *goy*, the nation-state, can be justified only in the context of a collective missionary purpose and consciousness.

However, this thought is given a new twist in the tradition in Exodus which is identified with the strand of "E" or Elohist as illustrated in Exodus 19:5-6. There, Israel's being a *goy* is given a very particular qualification.

According to this strand, if Israel is to become a nation, (*goy*) it is only as a "holy nation" (*goy qadshob*). If Israel is to become a kingdom, it is only as a "kingdom of priests" (*mamlekbeth kohanim*), that is, within the context of the covenant offered by God to the people at Sinai: "If you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine. You shall be to me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation" (Exodus 19:5-6). That is, Israel is called to live in a relationship which will reflect her uniqueness as a people set apart for the purpose of providing a distinctive wit-

ness to an alternative mode of existence God is offering to his people which will then serve as a model to other nations.

This alternative mode of existence is rooted in the people's concrete experience of liberation from the house of bondage to be led by God to a land that is His own gift to them. This alternative mode of existence is to be lived in a place where people are able to celebrate freedom in a radical, revolutionary, and egalitarian mode of managing the earth. There they are to live as a community of families brought together by a common experience of redemption and bound to a covenant relationship with their redeemer who, through the Law (Torah), is demanding a life of trust and obedience with compassion and respect for each other. This is also a way of living wherein all forms of power that will oppress and enslave are rejected.<sup>14</sup>

This is the kind of nation that will be known as God's people, "*am elohim*," a nation whose way of life is fueled by a powerful memory of a decisive saving event and

whose faith-response will be commensurate with the holiness of their covenant God. This is a people who will be known for their service among the nations the way priests are known to function in a society. It is a nation whose covenant responsibility encompasses her whole life, defining her relation to God and to her neighbors. The quality of her existence reflects clearly the kind of God she worships and serves even in the sight of other peoples. Although set apart, this nation will be called to minister even to other peoples.<sup>15</sup>

This assertion comes from the tradition of the Exodus but owing to its possible Elohist source, may be dated to about 850 BCE in the Northern Kingdom. Such assertion may have served as a prophetic reaction to the kind of development which took place about 150 years earlier at the moment of transition of Israel from the pre-monarchic, tribal stage to the monarchy itself. It could even be considered as a corrective to the strongly monarchic tendencies of the "J" tradition.<sup>16</sup>

### *Decisive Transition in the Days of Samuel*

The evolution of Israel from a pre-monarchic society generally identified as an *'am* to a monarchic state known as *goy* did not come about without any tension. Tradition attributes the transition to that momentous event in the days of Samuel when the people of Israel, led by their elders, in a riotous assembly demanded and petitioned the aging judge-prophet at that time to appoint for them a king "who will govern them and lead them in their battles against their enemies, so that we may also be 'like the other nations'" (*kikbol bagoyim*, 1 Samuel 8:19-21). This took place despite Samuel's warnings that the king and the monarchy itself, once they are established, will only take away the people's basic freedom as well as their livelihood. They will be enslaved and their properties subject to taxation and confiscation, their sons subject to conscription, their daughters subject to forced labor (1 Sam 8:10-17). And in that day, says Samuel, "You will cry out be-



cause of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the Lord will not answer you on that day."

In his speech, Samuel portrayed the monarchy as one that will always take whatever can be taken from the people. To him, the monarchy was a parasite sucking away every thing of value that can be taken from the people, a virtual "taker", a taker of people's freedom, livelihood, and dignity.<sup>17</sup> The king will take "*your daughters, ...the best of your fields and vineyards and give it to his officers and servants. He will take the tenth of your grain...He will take your men servants and maidservants, and the best of your cattle and your asses. He will take the tenth of your flock and you shall be his slaves.*"

This graphic description portrays the very nature of a monarchy as one existing by means of confiscation and concentration of wealth and land even as it also "lives for the sake of such a concentration".<sup>18</sup> Its logical consequence is also clearly invoked by Samuel: slavery [underscoring added]. When Israel decided to

have a king, she also consigned herself to the destiny of becoming slaves anew, just like what they were in Egypt. In his condemnation of the monarchy, Samuel was unrelenting. Yet, as the story shows, the people insisted on their demand to have a king in order for them to be like the other *goyim*. Samuel could do nothing but to give in to the popular demand.

But Samuel was also articulating the sentiments of those who had always regarded the monarchy with much suspicion and even fear. These were people who had always felt the security and protection provided by the old pre-monarchic tribal arrangements, especially in the area of land distribution and management on a periodic basis. Samuel voiced the anxieties of those who had become much more rooted and attached to the old economic relationships provided for in the tribal days, who feared they were bound to lose the land assigned to them and the benefits derived from it. In short, that assembly which led to the transition of

Israel from a tribal confederacy to a monarchy must have been a very divisive one. There were those who continued to lobby for the institutionalization of the kingship and its bureaucratic governmental and military systems. Among the most avid supporters of this new system were the Jerusalem priesthood as well as the emerging nobility of the land. Nevertheless, there were those who continued to be wary and even critical of the institution of the monarchy itself. Among such group were the prophets.

The passage in I Sam 8, especially, verses 6-7, which says, "But the thing (the people's demand for a king) displeased Samuel... and Samuel prayed to the Lord. And the Lord said to Samuel: 'Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them.'" In the writer's view, this event marked the day when the people rejected Yahweh as the king over them and instead pinned their hope and security on a person and on a new system rather than

trust in the power and reliability of their covenant God. From this perspective, the monarchy appears as the historical expression of the people's rebellion or turning away from their God. It is to be seen as a drifting away from the essential calling of Israel as a partner of God in an eternal covenant relationship.

The "J" tradition in Gen. 12 tried to recover for the people and especially for the king the memory of the original calling of Israel even as it provided some justification for the establishment of a nation-state in the form of a monarchy. The "E" tradition in Exodus with its root in the covenant laws tried to endow a legal and ethical expression on such calling. In the view of the Elohist, which serves as a corrective to "J", the covenant community of Israel, with its religious and ethical laws, was actually older and more fundamental than the political dynasty of David in Jerusalem or the more recently established northern kingdom.<sup>19</sup>

Viewed from this perspective, the history of the



monarchy may be seen as a history of the continuous turning about of Israel, her turning away from her calling to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, and to be a blessing to other nations. Instead, Israel, with her kings, began to believe that her future and security lay in becoming like the other nations in terms of relying either on her armaments or on foreign powers to protect her and insure her survival.

#### *Jeremiah Revisited*

When Jeremiah called on the exiles in Babylon to build houses there—not temporary dwellings—and live there in anticipation of a prolonged sojourn, to plant gardens, raise families, pray for and seek the welfare of the city where God had sent them in exile, he was actually referring back to the old calling of Israel, and seeing in it a golden opportunity for the people to become a real blessing in the midst of other peoples (Jer. 29:5-7). He was envisioning Israel—even though humbled in the situation of exile—to become a sign that their God

Yahweh is present even in a foreign land. He was envisioning that Israel's eventual restoration would come about as a result of her own humble and penitent transformation, that her being humbled would become one basic ingredient for her being restored into a new covenant relationship. For even in the land of their exile, according to the prophet, they can become God's people again even if they may have lost their nationhood (underscoring added). They can be restored to a new and eternal covenant relationship with God even if their own political institution (Davidic monarchy) has been shattered for good. They can still become one family bonded together by a common memory and common religious and social obligations even if they may have lost their own home territory.

#### *Conclusion: The Prophetic Alternative*

Transforming now the prophetic critique into a prophetic paradigm for an alternative consciousness, we go back to the prophet Jeremiah.

Here we find in Jeremiah the parameters and features of a possible paradigm. The key word, however, is "transformation" which involves the basic experiences of repentance, the acknowledgment of a totally new social reality to which we are being summoned, the emergence of a new liberating, covenant-based and pro-people consciousness, a recommitment to such new consciousness, and a trusting mode of life characterized by faithful obedience and witness.

For Jeremiah, the issue that Israel had to confront was not the end of the exile, but the people's rebellion against their God. It was not about the restoration of the Davidic monarchy and the return of the old ruling elite. It was about the restoration of their commitment to a relationship with God and each other which called for a truly alternative way of living. It was about being just to one another. It was about protecting the weak and the marginalized such as the orphans, the widows, the poor, and the aliens from oppression. It was putting social substance

to the cultic and ritual rejection of idolatry as Jeremiah himself declares it so powerfully: "For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly execute justice one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever" (Jer. 7:5-7). Such were the things that bound a people together into one "holy nation."

These are the things that remain essential in living as a covenant partner of God. As Jeremiah reminded his people: "Thus says the Lord: Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, nor the strong man glory in his strength, nor the rich man glory in his riches; but rather, let him who glories, glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord; I act with steadfast love (*chesedh*), justice (*mishpat*), and righteousness (*zedakah*) in the earth, for in these things I delight" (9:23-



24). For people to claim to have a special relationship with God, they must first establish a social arrangement in which the will of God for justice, steadfast love, and righteousness becomes a living reality itself. These are realities which form the foundations of being a people of God.

For prophets like Jeremiah, the concern for the integrity and freedom of one's nation can only be but part of the greater issue of the integrity and wholeness of the life of the people who are called to live as a family, as a community in covenant with their creator and redeemer God. The cry for freedom by the elite leaders of a nation cannot be set apart from the cry of the poor and the marginalized for redemption from their plight. God's will and desire for justice, steadfast love and righteousness cannot demand less. Otherwise, it will only be the freedom of the elite and for the elite and the likes of Hananiah that we shall be envisioning and even struggling for. The cry for freedom from foreign intervention cannot be set

apart from the cry of the peasants to be freed from the bondage of feudal exploitation and to be able to live as a community in a truly alternative, self-reliant mode of economy in our lands and farms.

In the more contemporary sense, the cry for an independent foreign policy vis-a-vis the superpowers of this world cannot be set apart from the cry of the powerless and voiceless sectors of our society for a responsible and meaningful participation in law and policy making which will insure that such process will not be a monopoly of a privileged few for their own vested interests. The cry for a cultural revival inspired by the centennial year cannot be set apart from the need for a comprehensive religious and social renewal among the people. This will involve a new experience of and a new perspective about God and God's demands on us. This will also involve the emergence of an alternative, community-oriented consciousness among us and the rejection of the idols of colonial mentality, uncritical reliance on foreign powers,

unmitigated and cutthroat competition, corruption, and greed.

The cry for our nation to be truly free and respected in the community of nations will only become meaningful if, instead of just dreaming of becoming like the other more advanced nations, we are able to strive for what can be the unique contribution of our people in the upliftment of other peoples. The campaign for nationalism in the centennial year will only become relevant if we ourselves are able to be part of a larger internationalism of all

other oppressed peoples and nations struggling for genuine liberation. Perhaps this solidarity can somehow enable us, in spite of our unworthiness, to become a sign of God's redeeming presence in those places, an instrument of God's grace, and a channel of God's blessings. Otherwise, amidst the din of nationalist rhetoric in this age of internationalization and globalization, we will be consigned to the fate of Israel, struggling always to be "like the other nations" while forgetting all about becoming a people of God.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The issue includes major articles such as, Letizia Constantino, "The Katipunan's Legacy: A Vision of Social Spirituality or, 'Bonifacio, the Inconvenient Hero,'" pp. 16, 21-30; Victor Aguilan. "The Other Side of Our Heritage: Protestant Mission and American Imperialism," pp. 10-12.
- <sup>2</sup> The July-Aug., 1997 issue of *NCCP Newsmagazine* also featured a number of articles on the theme of the centennial with essays by Louie Baclagon and Nidia A. Liu, "The Iglesia Filipina Independiente: How Revolution founded a New Faith", pp. 23-25; Ellery P. Ortiz, "American Methodism and the Filipino-American War", pp. 26-30, and a reprint of Aguilan's SMM article
- <sup>3</sup> Renato Constantino, *The Past Revisited* (R. Constantino: Manila, 1975), pp. 246-251, also, L. Constantino, "Recalling the Philippine-American War,"

- Education Forum* (TAP, vol. VIII SM 150, Jan 1989).
- <sup>4</sup> Renato Constantino, *ibid.*, pp. 3-11.
- <sup>5</sup> Renato Constantino, *ibid.*, pp. 242-243.
- <sup>6</sup> e.g., the response of Senator Ernesto Herrera to then anti-Bases advocate Senator Wigberto Tanada in the heated debates preceding the senate rejection of the US Bases in 1991: *You want to bar foreign investment; we want to welcome them. You think ill of exports; we believe they are critical to our industrialization. You believe in overprotecting our industries...we believe in a fair amount of protection, not in a policy of perpetually betraying the interests of the consumers... You believe in withdrawing from a global economic order dominated by the Americans and the West. We believe in becoming an important player in that arena... You believe in non-alignment even when this has lost all meaning because of the end of the Cold War. We believe in close partnership with the democratic nations which now include the USSR...*, Jovito R. Salonga, *The Senate that Said NO*, (University of the Philippines Press, 1995), pp. 245-246.
- <sup>7</sup> Cf., Renato Constantino and Letizia Constantino, *The Continuing Past* (Foundation for Nationalist Studies: Quezon City, 1978), p. 344.
- <sup>8</sup> cf. *New Illustrated Webster's Dictionary*, (PMC Publishing Co.: New York, 1992).
- <sup>9</sup> Francis Brown, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon*, (APA, Inc., 1978), R. Laird Harris, et al., eds. *Theological Wordbook of the OT*. vol. 2 (Moody Press, 1980).
- <sup>10</sup> G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. vol. II, (W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Michigan, 1975), pp. 426-428
- <sup>11</sup> cf. Norman Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh*, (Orbis Books, New York, 1979), pp. 241-242.
- <sup>12</sup> R. Laird Harris, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, (TDOT) vol. 2 (Moody Press: Chicago, 1980), p. 676.
- <sup>13</sup> Cf. Walter Brueggemann, *Interpretation: Genesis* (John Knox Press: Atlanta:1982), p.119.
- <sup>14</sup> Norman Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction*, (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1985), p. 350; see also his major work, *The Tribes of Yahweh*, (Orbis Books: New York: 1979), pp. 584-587.
- <sup>15</sup> Brevard Childs, *The Book of Exodus: The Old Testament Library* (The Westminster Press: Philadelphia, 1974), p. 367.
- <sup>16</sup> Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible*, p. 138.
- <sup>17</sup> cf. Walter Brueggemann, "I and II Samuel", *Interpretation*, (John Knox Press: Louisville, 1990), pp. 63-64.
- <sup>18</sup> Brueggemann, *ibid.*
- <sup>19</sup> Gottwald, HB, 138.



## THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT AND THE CREATION OF A NEW HUMANITY

Everett Mendoza

### ABSTRACT

*At the heart of the Christian notion of salvation is human transformation which falls under the rubric of the doctrine of sanctification. Although sanctification basically refers to the inner change of individual persons, it requires the presence of external and social conditions for it to actually take place. According to the Reformers, the Church and the State represent God's right and left hands for realizing His designs for the world. The State's chief concern is to provide the external environment for the gospel to work out its power to transform the inner person. On the other hand, the Church is duty bound to help the State to realize the role that God has appointed it. The State's specific role on earth is to execute justice which, in the biblical sense, means the protection of the poor and vulnerable members of society. Such role requires the suppression of the wicked and binding their evil tendencies by force and terror, if necessary. For Luther, the State's negative function is its sole reason for being, while for Calvin the State is part of God's created order. The role of the State in the teachings of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformers may be a source of guidance for the church in the Philippines today in the pursuit of its mission in the era of globalization. Invoking this Reformation teaching, the church should call on the Philippine Government to use all its constitutionally mandated authority and powers to secure the life and livelihood of the people, protect the national patrimony, and preserve the nation's sovereignty in the face of globalization.*

#### Introduction

On September 22, 1972, residents of Silliman

campus woke up to learn that the nation was put under martial law. Many of them had had

an inkling of it since the writ of habeas corpus had been suspended a year earlier. But nothing prepared them for a militarized regime that put the life and death of citizens in the hands of local military functionaries. For campus residents who had been used to a tranquil and placid Dumaguete, the first few weeks of martial rule realized their worst fears of a military dictatorship.

Through *Presidential Proclamation 1081*, the dictator justified his action as having been forced by necessity: to save the nation from chaos and disorder brought upon it by the enemies of the Republic, namely, the foreign-inspired communists, the criminals, as well as oligarchs, and economic saboteurs. Marcos claimed that a strong government was needed to stop rising criminality, unbridled profiteering by unscrupulous merchants, rampant corruption in government, and communist insurgency. In the ensuing weeks, however, Marcos made into public policy a moral agenda, which he viewed as a thorough moral reformation of

the Filipino people under the auspices of a nationalistic authoritarian rule. This moral campaign was expressed in the slogan, "Para sa ikauunlad ng bayan, disiplina ang kailangan." The new dispensation claimed that no less than an authoritarian political system was needed to reverse centuries of colonial inertia.

From today's perspective, the moral agenda was, of course, nothing more than a justification for a power grab. But it brought into focus an issue that concerns the church and all those who seek a moral renewal of people and society: the place and function of the social environment in reforming social behavior. How important is the establishment of social structures for the moral regeneration of people? Traditional evangelicalism tends to maintain that since only the gospel can change the human heart, persons can be reformed through personal evangelism regardless of the kind of social environment. On account of this belief, evangelicals seem indifferent, if



not antipathetic, to reform-oriented church programs.

Under the administration of President Estrada, who was an ardent Marcos supporter during the martial law years, the nation found itself at a crossroad. Since the political arrangement he had succeeded proved to be incapable of solving the nation's worsening crisis, Estrada sought for additional powers to push the same economic agenda, namely, economic development fueled and directed by foreign capital, that he has inherited from his predecessors. On the other hand, a new revitalized Left offered a new paradigm of development that necessitated fundamental changes in traditional and existing patterns of economic relations. In each case, a different political system is required to accomplish its social goals. Of special concern to the church is what kind of political environment would be appropriate to the moral regeneration of people in accordance with Christian standards?

### The Political Environment and the Moral Transformation of Persons

#### *The Lutheran Reformation*

Luther's and Calvin's understanding of the distinction and relation of law and gospel provides us with a theological framework for addressing contemporary issues, particularly the role and importance of political environment in the moral transformation of persons. At the outset, it should be stated that faithfulness to the Protestant tradition does not mean a mechanical application of the Reformers' social teachings. Protestant theologians like Paul Tillich, for example, consider the so-called "Protestant principle" as an instrument of criticism that spares no human work including that of the Reformers themselves.<sup>1</sup> Yet, for Protestants, the Reformers' fundamental insights should be able to furnish them with a particular perspective, a method, or an approach to ethical problems. Thus, for instance, Luther's theological views on which he based his exhortation to the

German princes supporting the violent suppression of the Peasant Uprising may even be a source of instruction for Christian participation in social change today.

According to the Reformers, the law refers to the eternal will of God by which God rules the world. This law is originally engraved in the human heart as an "inner witness and monitor"<sup>2</sup> but that "evil desire and love has darkened this light and blinded a man so that he does not look at such a book in his heart"; hence, in order for God to accomplish his purposes "external commands, book, with the sword, and by force have been promulgated on earth".<sup>3</sup> In other words, due to human depravity the eternal law of God has assumed historical forms by which the divine will is made manifest in human society. What was originally intended as an inner moral guide had become, because of sin, a coercive external power.

The law, according to Luther, has two basic functions. The first, which is the proper concern of this paper, is the

civil or political function that God intends for the preservation of social peace and civic order in the civil community. God has divinely ordained governments, parents, teachers, as well as laws and other ordinances for the purpose of restraining and regulating those human impulses that tend to disrupt social interaction.<sup>4</sup> The law is God's hand to bind the propensity of wicked people to commit evil. It is the formal or external form of God's word that relies on coercion in order to compel external compliance.<sup>5</sup> *In this paper, the law in its political function is understood to mean the setting up of a socio-political order for the regulation of human affairs* [emphasis added].

In his time, Luther saw the greed and cruelty that victimized the poor and the weak but he continued to believe that only God's law in the form of political structures and exercised by political authorities could prevent the weak from getting totally devoured by the greed of the powerful. Knowing intimately the extent of sinfulness in human society,



Luther supported righteous princes who were strong enough to check the excesses of their own kind, and also to protect the population from lawless elements. For him, the gospel that teaches love and mercy cannot be the basis of political rule in society because those who are in power have no real regard for the gospel. It is by the law and the sword in the hands of the authorities that God comes to protect the poor and the weak among the people. In Luther's view, therefore, the coercive and violent function of the law is legitimate provided that it is exercised for its intended purpose: the suppression of the wicked and the protection of the weak and the innocent.

The Reformers understood political structures and institutions to be instruments of God's justice for the protection and vindication of the innocent. This conviction is based on what Paul had said in *Romans* chapter 13. For that reason, Luther insisted that Christians ought to obey the authorities whether or not they are just. He taught that Chris-

tians should rather suffer the violence inflicted on their bodies by wicked rulers than lose their soul and suffer in hell for subverting the social order instituted by God. It did not matter to Luther that the rulers in fact failed to live up to this divinely ordained role, for he believed that human disobedience does not nullify God's law. Even though he despaired over the behavior of Protestant princes, still he held on to the conviction that secular authorities are God's agents of divine justice on earth. Hence, based on this belief, Luther admonished the subjects to submit themselves to the authority even of unjust rulers.<sup>6</sup>

When the principle is applied to unjust authority, its social and ethical consequences can only be disastrous. Luther's position in the Peasants' War continues to hound Protestants to this day. But the principle remains valid in regard to one specific aspect: the role that civil authorities play in society. Governments are indispensable for the preservation of justice and social peace. The pres-

ence of unjust or unfit rulers is not remedied by doing away with governments but by installing the right kind of government. Interpreted this way, Luther's understanding of the political function of the law may translate into a people's historical task to install a political system in which a government is truly and actually empowered to "defend the cause of the poor, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor" (Psalm 72:4).

Today, Luther's teachings about the political function of the law in society gain relevance in view of the thrust of the leading capitalist countries to completely liberalize national economies in the name of globalization.<sup>7</sup> Under the auspices of world and regional bodies, like the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), resource-rich but very poor nations are being enticed and coerced into eliminating all forms of trade and financial controls. They are made to believe that globalization is the only way by which they can share in the global

prosperity that comes with free trade. In the Philippines, laws that regulate commerce and investments have been relaxed, if not repealed, in order to make the economy completely porous to foreign capital even though this runs counter to the Constitution. In actual reality, however, globalization has meant the pillage of critical national resources by foreign companies, the uncontrolled upswing of prices of oil products, the bankruptcy of small local enterprises, the collapse of traditional agriculture<sup>8</sup> and the susceptibility of the Philippine currency to financial speculation. If Luther thought that he had fathomed the depth of human greed and cruelty in the vices of royal families, he should have seen how transnational corporations today to ravage the world for private profit.

To the well meaning among its proponents (if there are any left!), economic liberalization is premised on a naïve and optimistic belief in natural human goodness. They have no idea of the bottomless depth of human greed and pride, of



sin. For this mistaken belief, they consent to leaving the marginalized nations and sectors in society without any kind of protection against economic predators that transnational corporations really are. They are no less guilty than the cold-blooded owners and managers of global capital for whom the degradation of billions of human beings and the despoilation of the environment are but the inevitable costs of progress.

Adam Smith was wrong when he said that the unrestricted exercise of individual freedom to make profit would eventually redound to the well being of everyone in the whole society. In the United States, the outstanding example of capitalist economy, a high increase in corporate profitability does not necessarily lead to a corresponding increase in wages. In Britain, the privatization of public transport has only led to its deterioration and an unprecedented inefficiency of its services.<sup>9</sup> The theory of comparative advantage that underlies economic globalization is said to make local

products competitive in the world market. In truth and in fact it has only driven Third World countries like the Philippines down the drain.

In light of the Reformers' understanding of the political function of the law, globalization is but a design of the rich to abolish the law—political and economic structures that regulate social relations for the protection and well being of the whole society—in order to allow them to rob the poor with as little restraint as possible. It seeks to do away with governments and its institutions that guarantees the survival of the vulnerable sectors through various subsidies and socialized basic social services and a modicum of social justice through state regulation of the economy. It awards and sings praises to national leaders in the likes of Roberto de Ocampo who got international recognition as the world's best finance minister for having made the Philippines WTO-compliant ahead of schedule.

In that respect, imperialist globalization is a form of rebellion against God. Feeding

on human greed, it seeks to abolish God's rule of law in order to establish its own reign of greed. It is a basic biblical teaching that God's law has been given primarily for the protection of the weak and vulnerable in society. Luther, the champion of grace, insisted that the law in the form of political and economic structures is God's instrument to restrain unbridled greed and lust for power so that the little ones may have a chance to live.

But the Reformers did not actually invent this idea. They learned it from the Scriptures. The Books of the Prophets are replete with passages about the social function of the law. Even the Book of Psalms, which is regarded as a book of songs and praises to God, does not fail to mention this conviction.<sup>10</sup> That is also what the Apostle Paul meant in his Letter to the *Romans*, Chapter 13 where he said, "Rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad ... for [they] are servants of God to execute his wrath on the wrongdoer." The law of God has been given to the world in the form of gov-

ernment institutions precisely to protect the weak from all wrongdoers. In that sense, government institutions are God's *vicars* in the world, in the words of Calvin. A national leadership that fails to protect the poor but in fact uses its awesome power to break their defenses is pictured by the Prophets as shepherds who feed on their own flock.

In the Bible, social justice has a very specific content: the protection of widows, orphans, the poor, and the aliens who have no rights. Because they have no one to turn to in life, God has appointed the kings to give them justice. In the words of the Psalmist, the good king "will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help. He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death. He will rescue them from oppression and violence... he will be like rain falling on a mown field, like show-ers watering the earth" (Ps. 72:6-7, 12-14).

In light of that biblical teaching, former President Estrada's main slogan, "Erap



Para sa Mahirap” gets exposed as a mockery of justice. Its consummate implementation of the WTO-mandated policies had the effect of making the disadvantaged sectors – the peasants and small farmers, workers, and indigenous communities – even more vulnerable. It is common knowledge that during his presidency, Estrada, for example, gave the three giant and monopolistic oil companies full liberty and justification to make profit from an already emaciated consuming public in the name of the unholy trinity of liberalization, deregulation, and privatization. His administration could not say that it was for the poor and yet leave their fate completely in the hands of foreign investors.

#### *The Calvinist Reformation*

What has been discussed so far is the negative or binding function of the law. There is also a positive side to it, which is emphasized by the Reformer in Geneva, John Calvin, from whose branch of Protestantism the UCCP descended. For him, civil govern-

ments are a part of God’s original intent for creation for the realization of the divine plan of salvation. In his time, Calvin insisted that it was the duty of civil magistrates to provide the social conditions for the advancement of the work of the gospel.<sup>11</sup>

Calvin believed that secular authority has a two-fold task, namely, that of providing a “public manifestation of religion among Christians” and “that humanity be maintained among them”. But because secular authority is necessary for the maintenance of the people’s basic human quality, he considers the vocation of civil authorities to be the “most sacred and by far the most honorable of all callings in the whole of moral men.”<sup>12</sup> He went on to call them, “vicars of God.”<sup>13</sup>

In Geneva, Calvin collaborated with the civil authorities to create a society where the gospel could be preached unhindered and the citizens would learn to live according to the tenets of the gospel. The church in Geneva was governed by the Consistory composed of the

ministers and the elders who were appointed by the city council, a compromise Calvin had to make with the city government in exchange for their cooperation.<sup>14</sup> For Calvin, the idea of separation of church and state meant respect for each other’s calling and dignity rather than indifference to what the other was doing. Each must help the other realize its distinct role in the world in accordance with God’s design for the whole humanity. The state’s calling is that of establishing justice in society – in the biblical sense of protecting the vulnerable members – and providing the social space needed by the church to carry out its evangelistic and pastoral tasks. On the other hand, the church has been called to care for the citizens’ spiritual welfare and also to support the state in the execution of justice.

In other words, the church’s freedom in carrying out the work of the gospel ought to be supported by the state, while the state expects support from the church in its work for justice. This means that the two kinds of justice –

the justice of the gospel and the justice of the law – are both God’s work with equal importance and dignity and, therefore, complementary. Consequently, the gospel is able to work out its benefits most effectively in a social environment ruled by justice. An unjust social order is necessarily hostile to the gospel; hence, the truthful preaching of the gospel will inevitably invite persecution from an unjust state.

Calvin, however, was basically a preacher of the gospel, not a social visionary. His interest in political matters was limited by his concern for the propagation of the gospel. Although he showed a personal preference for the aristocracy over the monarchy, he failed to recognize the inner contradictions between the work of the gospel and an unjust social environment. He sought collaboration with the state not because he wanted the church to have a share in political governance but to secure state support for the evangelization of the citizens. But in the matter of conceiving a society where



justice is best served, Calvin remained indifferent since, for him, that matter is the proper concern of the state.

Thus, for many Protestants, Calvin's actual social views mark the limits of the church's involvement in society. In line with that thinking, Protestant churches like the UCCP are not supposed to actively engage in movements for social reforms, provided the state puts no impediments to the preaching of the gospel. This understanding may be consistent with Calvin's views, but it fails to appreciate the deeper implications of Calvin's understanding of the political function of the law and its relation to the gospel. In fact, it tends to regard Calvin's legacy as a historical dead weight that prevents the church from moving on to new paths of obedience to the call of the Lord.

What is Calvin's positive view of the law? For him, the state is an ordinance instituted by God for the realization of creation's goal, none other than its sanctification. The law plays a supportive role in the work of the gospel for the creation

of a new humanity. It is clear that the gospel needs a social environment that complements the church's work of nurturing the new person in Christ. Such an environment works like the mother's womb that allows the new life to unfold not only in the community of believers but also in the larger world. Concretely, the justice of the law must rule in society in order for the righteousness of the gospel to take root in the human heart and bear fruit.

But where injustice abounds, anger and resentment, fear and contempt will likely reign in the human heart. Patriots and nationalists are resentful people because they see foreigners ravish to no end their children's patrimony. The poor are envious of the rich because the latter's life style has led them into thinking that only those with heaps of money can be happy. In time, these bottled up dark feelings may erupt into a massive explosion of rage that can engulf the whole society to the ruination of all protagonists. When justice fails, the tumults of vio-

lence and conflict can easily drown the still small voice of the gospel.

While it is true that the Reformers did not spell out the kind of society that can best serve the cause of the gospel, their understanding of the intimate relatedness of law and gospel has clear implications and significance for the task of social envisioning and reconstruction. For reasons already cited earlier, it is imperative for the church at any given point in history to join with the people in envisioning and working out a social order that is compatible with the gospel's spiritual goals. The church fails to obey God fully when its preoccupation with the proclamation of the gospel causes it to neglect the demands of the law for, as Luther said, "Law and Gospel cross path continually."<sup>15</sup>

What makes a gospel-friendly social environment? Essentially, it is one in which the law of justice prevails; a society of persons where the vulnerable among the people receive ample care and protection from exploitative and op-

pressive elements; where power is not monopolized by a few but is truly exercised by and for the whole society; where every member has unconditional access to the material conditions of life; and where employment is a right to be enjoyed by all who are able. Justice is a non-negotiable condition for working out the material development of society, and when prosperity yields its fruit in abundance, then the objective material conditions are set for the spontaneous, not guilt-driven, and genuine, not self-serving, practice of Christian virtues. In the words of Augustine, "If there is nothing we can do, goodwill alone is enough for the lover. We should have the truest love for a happy man, on whom you have nothing to bestow, such love will have a greater sincerity and a far more unspoilt purity."<sup>16</sup> Scarcity of values, material or social, is the mother of greed and envy. Overcoming it is a necessary condition to building human relationships based on spontaneous affections.



At the practical level, however, the church must reckon with various competing social visions. For example in Germany, the Roman Catholic Church and the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) issued a joint statement on the economic and social conditions of Germany. Having learned from the collapse of the centrally-planned economies of Eastern Europe, as well as the failure of the most successful capitalist economies to eradicate poverty at home, the two churches proposed a "social market economy" that requires private capital to demonstrate responsibility for the disadvantaged sectors of the economy.<sup>17</sup> In the Philippines, however, different options are available to the church considering the country's actual economic backwardness (semi-feudal) and its status as a continuing object of imperialist domination and exploitation (semi-colonial). In order to be socially informed, the church should engage in constant dialogue and cooperation with progressive movements that share its own vision of a society where God's law of justice is observed.

The historical experience and culture of the Filipino people should provide the materials for the construction of a society that corresponds to the Christian image of humanity reconciled to God and with one another. For example, in order to heal centuries of animosity between people of peasant and landlord backgrounds, it is necessary to first abolish their unequal relations by enforcing, among other programs, genuine land reform [underscoring added]. Also, the socialized [underscoring added] appropriation of the products of labor will eventually erase the inherent antagonism between property owning and the property-less classes of society. And at the international level, genuine goodwill towards other nations may begin to grow when the right of every nation to genuine self-determination [underscoring added] is restored and respected. For Filipinos, justice is not an abstract term for it means land, jobs, and national sovereignty. These new social conditions, however, do not just sprout spontaneously. They are preceded by a new form or type of governance, one that fits the bib-

lical image of a righteous king.

From the Protestant point of view, these are the external conditions needed by the gospel to accomplish its spiritual task of overcoming hatred, resentment, mistrust, hopelessness, fear, timidity, greed, pride, and other destructive inner forces that under-

mine human relationships. In their place, people will eventually learn "to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with their God" (Micah 6:8). The new humanity is the fruit of the gospel, but its seeds have been planted and nurtured in the soil of a just social order.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era* (Chicago: 1948; London, 1951), p. 163.

<sup>2</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol. I (Philadelphia: the Westminster Press, 1960), p. 367.

<sup>3</sup> Cited by Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 252.

<sup>4</sup> Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, p. 145-46.c

<sup>5</sup> Luther, *Selected Writings* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), p. 215.

<sup>6</sup> J.M. Porter, *Luther: Selected Political Writings* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), pp. 85-86.

<sup>7</sup> As described by Letizia R. Constantino, "globalization is fundamentally about power. It shifts power from governments to the corporate sector. It entrenches that power beyond the reach of future governments. And it limits governmental capacity to define and pursue national development goals." *Kilosbayan*, Vol. IV, No. 1 (August 1997), p. 19.

<sup>8</sup> See IBON's special release on Globalization.

<sup>9</sup> William Pfaff, "The Mistakes of Market Ideology are Increasingly Apparent," *International Herald Tribune*, June 10-11, 2000. Cited in Satur Ocampo, "The G-7 Summit, Globalization and Debt," a paper read at the Ecumenical Jubilee 2000 Conference, Miriam College, Quezon City, July 5, 2000.

<sup>10</sup> "Give the king thy justice, O God, and thy righteousness to the royal son! May he judge thy people with righteousness and thy poor with justice! Let the mountains bear prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness! May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor!" (Psalm 72:1-4).

<sup>11</sup> "And thus all have confessed that no government can be happily established



unless piety is the first concern; and that those laws are preposterous which neglect God's right and provide only for men" (*Institutes*, pp. 1495 ff.).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1490.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 1491.

<sup>14</sup> I. John Hesselink, *On Being Reformed* (New York, New Jersey: The Reformed Press, 1988), p. 16.

<sup>15</sup> Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, p. 162.

<sup>16</sup> *Living Theological Heritage of the United Church of Christ*, edited by Reinhard Ulrich (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1995), p. 203.

<sup>17</sup> It is an economic system "which is based on the principle of private ownership committed to the well-being of all, a functional competitive system and the safeguarding by the welfare state of the income of those not in work" (*EKD Bulletin*, June, 1997).

## POLITICAL AUTHORITY AND THE CHURCH: THE CHALLENGE OF THE REFORMED POLITICAL TRADITION

Victor R. Aguilan

### ABSTRACT

*This paper examines the views of the Reformed tradition in relation to the nature and function of the State and the duty of the believers to the State. It argues that the Reformed tradition has reiterated the Christian doctrine of the two-kingdoms that holds the view that the Church and the State are two distinct but inseparable realms. However, the Reformed perspective has a more positive view of the function of the State. Hence, according to this view, believers must render obedience to government authorities as long as they fulfill God's mandate to do justice.*

### Introduction

The State is seen as a conscious, rational entity with organizational capabilities and instruments at its disposal that can shape human destiny. It makes and implements laws. It enjoys police and military power. Control of the State means control of society and its wealth. Thus, the State is a very powerful instrument in society. To fully comprehend this immense power calls for a theological understanding of the nature and task of the State. Hence, this paper will

examine the nature of the State or political authority from the Christian perspective using a theological framework rooted in the Reformed Tradition. In addition to the ideas of the Reformed Tradition, the viewpoints of Theology of Struggle, Theology of Liberation, and Christian Realism also inform this paper. The purpose of this paper is to offer Christian churches, specifically Protestant Churches, a guide in their efforts to assess the present political situation and to pro-



vide a possible direction to the continuing search for a better political order.

### The Political Authority from the Reformed Perspective

The Reformed tradition is primarily derived from the work of John Calvin.<sup>1</sup> It affirms the distinction between the "spiritual kingdom" and the "earthly kingdom," between the "church" and the "state." Calvin gives a more precise interpretation of this principle when he says that:

*...there is one kind of understanding of earthly things; another of heavenly. I call "earthly things" those which do not pertain to God or his Kingdom, to true justice, or to the blessedness of the future life; but which have their significance and relationship with regards to the present life and are, in a sense, confined within its bounds. I call "heavenly things" the pure knowledge of God, the nature of his righteousness, and the mysteries of the Heavenly Kingdom. The first class includes government, household management, all mechanical skills, the liberal arts.*

*In the second are the knowledge of God and of his will, and the rule by which we conform our lives to it.<sup>2</sup>*

The notion that Christians live in the realm or sphere of two distinct but inseparably related governments is derived from Luther's doctrine of two kingdoms.<sup>3</sup> Calvin, like Luther, emphasized the distinction between the two realms, but unlike Luther, he believed that although the two realms are distinct they could neither be separated, nor could they exist independently of the other.<sup>4</sup> In the last chapter of Book IV of the *Institutes* Calvin gives more emphasis on the correlation than on the distinction between the two realms.<sup>5</sup> He begins with an assertion that there is a need to make a clear distinction between the two realms and then argues for their inseparable relatedness. Thus, in Calvin's theology, Church and State are two distinct but equally direct expressions of divine providence. Predictably, this view has led Calvin to assume a more

positive stance toward the civil government. His basic attitude towards civil government is summed up in the following lines:

*Yet civil government has as its appointed end, so long as we live among men (sic), to cherish and protect the outward worship of God, to defend sound doctrine of piety and the position of the church, to adjust our life to the society of men (sic), to form our social behavior to civil righteousness, to reconcile us with one another, and to promote general peace and tranquility. All of this I admit to be superfluous if God's Kingdom, such as it is now among us, wipes out the present life. But if it is God's will that we go as pilgrims upon the earth while we aspire to the true fatherland, and if the pilgrimage requires such help, those who take them from man (sic) deprive him of his very humanity.<sup>6</sup>*

Calvin rejects the idea that politics is a polluted thing and believes that civil government has a positive function for religion and for society.<sup>7</sup> Because the proclamation of the gospel requires a favorable so-

cial arrangement, it is the duty of civil magistrates to provide the favorable political conditions.<sup>8</sup> For this reason, he considers the vocation of civil authorities to be a "most sacred and by far the most honorable of all callings in the whole of mortal men [sic]"<sup>9</sup> and the civil authorities themselves as "foster fathers of the church"<sup>10</sup> and "vicars of God."<sup>11</sup> Yet, he does not support the notion that civil authorities should assume the task of proclaiming the Word. That is the business of the Church. Christ commissions the Church to preach the Gospel "in season and out of season" (2 Timothy 4:2). For Calvin, the task of civil authorities is to help the church by preserving order and justice and deterring evils and lawlessness, so that the Church can continue with its work.

Karl Barth, another Reformed Tradition theologian, followed Calvin's position toward the State. In his essay entitled *The Christian Community and the Civil Community*, Barth takes an equally positive attitude toward the civil community.<sup>12</sup> Following the argu-



ment of Calvin, he asserts the need for the civil community, or "kings", declaring that,

*...the Christian community is particularly conscious of the need for the existence of the civil community. For it knows that all men (sic) (non-Christians as well as Christians) need to have "kings", that is, need to be subject to an external, relative, provisional order of law, defended by superior authority and force. It knows that the original and final pattern of this order is the eternal Kingdom of God and eternal righteousness of His grace. It preaches the Kingdom of God in this eternal form. But it also thanks God that His Kingdom has an external, relative and provisional embodiment 'in the world that is not yet redeemed', in which it is valid and effective even when the temporal order is based on the most imperfect and clouded knowledge of Jesus Christ or no such knowledge at all.*<sup>13</sup>

Barth recognizes the fundamental function of the state in "safeguarding both the external, relative, and provisional freedom of the individuals and the external and rela-

tive peace of their community."<sup>14</sup> He also asserts that the church benefits from this protecting function of the State. According to him, "without this political order there would be no Christian order."<sup>15</sup>

This positive function of the state is derived from the widespread belief in the providential origin of civil community. According to this view, the State, in spite of its imperfection in history, is not a product of sin, but an ordinance of God against sin. For Barth, "the civil community shares both a common origin and a common center with the Christian community."<sup>16</sup> And this common center is the kingdom of God. Hence, the State like the Church is under the dominion of the Kingdom of God. Though the Church and the State are distinct, they are both "instrument[s] of divine grace."<sup>17</sup>

Insisting that the Christian community is distinct from the civil community, Barth, like Calvin, also rejects the idea that the

state can take over the tasks of the church:

*Christians are no longer gathered together as such but are associated with non-Christians (or doubtful Christians). The Civil community embraces everyone living within its area. Its members share no common awareness of their relationship to God, and such an awareness cannot be an element in the legal system established by the civil community. No appeal can be made to the Word or Spirit of God in the running of its affairs. The civil community as such is spiritually blind and ignorant. It has neither faith nor love nor hope. It has no creed and no gospel... For this reason the civil community can only have external, relative, and provisional tasks and aims.*<sup>18</sup>

Following the tradition begun by Calvin, Karl Barth holds the view that the Church must "proclaim the rule of Jesus Christ and the hope of the Kingdom of God."<sup>19</sup> Proclamation of the Word is a task entrusted solely to the Church and not to any other institutions for the divine purpose is not to make the Church into a

State or the State into a Church.<sup>20</sup> Echoing his predecessor, Barth argues that the distinction between the State and the Church must be maintained.

In the matter of political authority, the Reformed perspective espoused by Calvin and Barth views political rulers as God's appointed instrument to execute justice in society. In other words, the legitimacy of the civil government and civil authorities lies fundamentally in their fidelity to execute and obey the moral law of God which is to do justice. Calvin maintains that kings are instruments of God's justice for civil society who are entrusted with the power to be used against those who would oppose the rule of justice.<sup>21</sup> This view of justice becomes the norm or standard of all legal and political laws of civil government. Civil and political laws are to conform to justice.<sup>22</sup> The centrality of the concept of justice in the Reformed political tradition is revealed in this speech by Abraham Kuyper to the Chris-



tian Social Congress in 1891:

*When rich and poor stand opposed to each other, [Jesus] never takes his place with the wealthier, but always stands with the poorer. He is born in a stable; while foxes and birds have nests, the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head... Both the Christ, and also just as much His disciples after Him as the prophets before Him, invariably took side against those who were powerful and living in luxury, and for the suffering and oppressed.*<sup>23</sup>

The power of the civil government to govern therefore carries with it the responsibility to "represent in themselves to men [sic] some image of divine providence, protection, goodness, benevolence, and justice."<sup>24</sup>

Taking up the same theme long before it was adopted as the central theme of "liberation" theology, Karl Barth wrote:

*The human righteousness required by God...has necessarily the character of a vindication of right in favour of the threatened innocent, the oppressed poor, widows, orphans*

*and aliens...God always takes his stand unconditionally and passionately on this side and on this side alone...against those who already enjoy right and privilege and on behalf of those who are denied and deprived of it.*<sup>25</sup>

In other words, the state ought to pursue justice in this world for God has established rulers on earth in order to promote justice, protect the innocent and the defenseless, and deter oppression, evil, and injustice. In appropriating this theme, Reformed Political theology is faithful to the testimony of the Scripture as it is written:<sup>26</sup>

*You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality; and you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of the righteous. Justice, and only justice, you shall follow, that you may live and inherit the land which the LORD your God gives you. (Deuteronomy 19-20.)*

The conclusion is clear. The state is distinct from the church. This has been the position of Martin Luther and to

a certain extent adapted by Calvin and later by Barth although both of them maintained a more positive stance towards the state. Hence, Reformed Christians need to be constantly reminded that the distinction between the Church and the State does not mean that politics and God's Law are not related. On the contrary, the Church and the State are both subject to God's providence just as the Gospel and Law both come from God's Word. This understanding of civil government is a distinctive mark of the Reformed tradition. Reformed theological ethics tries to coordinate the functions of the civil society relative to the mission of the Church in this not-yet-redeemed world. Accordingly, the State, from the Reformed perspective, did not arise because of sin. Rather it is God's gift. Reformed tradition insists that the State has been brought about by a gracious God to give time for the proclamation of the Word without belittling its function of deterring lawlessness and man's wrongdoing. God has established the

State as his means to work in society for justice and righteousness and against injustice and evil. The State is given the power and the authority to pursue its appointed task in a sinful world so that the Church can continue with its proclamation of the Word. Christians therefore must submit to the power of the state. The Church must never usurp this form of power. God has entrusted this power to the State alone. To the Church, God has entrusted the task of *proclaiming the Word* to remind the State of its legitimate function.

### Political Duty of the Churches

The Reformed tradition holds that a government should be obeyed because it has the authority instituted by God. The Church must pray for the political authorities. In one of this commentaries Calvin wrote:

*Since God appointed magistrates and princes for the preservation of mankind [sic], however must they fall short of the divine appointment, yet we must not on account cease to love what belongs to God, and to desire their preservation.*



*That is why believers, in whatever country they live, must not only obey the laws and the government of magistrates, but likewise in their prayer supplicate God for their salvation.*<sup>27</sup>

Hence, believers ought to show their obedience to civil government and political authorities.<sup>28</sup> Since he believes that even wicked kings are put in power by God and so deserve public obedience,<sup>29</sup> subjects have no right to go against bad rulers. Instead, he recommends patience, prayer, and the readiness to suffer martyrdom if necessary.<sup>30</sup>

For his part, Barth asserts that Christians must subordinate themselves to the State. He defines "subordination" as

*...the carrying out of this joint responsibility in which Christians apply themselves to the same task with non-Christians and submit themselves to the same rule. The subordination accrues to the good of the civil community however well or however badly that community is defended, because the civil cause (and not merely the Christians*

*cause) is also the cause of the one God.*<sup>31</sup>

But there is always one very important proviso: we obey government insofar as its laws and instructions are not in conflict with the Word of God. When the State becomes demonic and unjust the Church is free not to render obedience to such demonic and unjust order. Barth suggests that the Church could help the State by being *the* [emphasis added] real Church. For the real Church "must be the model and prototype of the real State. The Church must set an example so that by its very existence it may be a source of renewal for the State and the power by which the State is preserved."<sup>32</sup>

However, it is a misreading of the Reformed perspective to focus only on the tradition that believers are to obey political rulers. In Calvin's commentary on Romans 13:1, he points out that St. Paul speaks of the "higher," and not the "highest" power which implies that the power of civil ruler is not absolute.<sup>33</sup> Since

the power of the State is derived ultimately from God, the exercise of State power is subordinated to God's power and the ruler has no authority apart from God's ordinance. In this context, a Christian's obedience to political ruler is never absolute. Our obedience to political authority is subject to God's command. Thus when rulers violate God's command, Calvin calls our attention to the very words of St. Peter, "We ought to obey God rather than men."<sup>34</sup> Calvin provided a way of resisting the tyranny of wicked and unjust kings through the intervention of the "constitutional magistrates."<sup>35</sup> He was convinced that it is the duty of the magistrates, acting in an official capacity, to resist the tyrannical actions of wicked kings.

### Conclusion

As this paper has earlier shown, Reformed political tradition is influenced by the doctrine of the two kingdoms which focuses on the distinction and coordination between the State and the Church. Reformed theology asserts that

the State, even though it is distinct from the Church, is under God's divine Grace. According to the Reformed view, the State is the instrument ordained by God to pursue justice in this sinful world. Hence, the State should be the defender of the poor and the marginalized. This means that the State has the duty to promote the interest and well-being of the marginalized sectors of society and safeguard the civil and political rights of the citizens.

From the Reformed political tradition, today's believers have a twofold duty. First, believers have the duty to obey the government especially in the promotion of social justice. Since the State is established to pursue justice as mandated by God's Law, it must cooperate and work as partners of the Church in this pursuit. Churches therefore must support programs of government that promote the interests of marginalized groups.

Another equally important duty of Christians is to be



vigilant. In addition to the task of pursuing social justice for all, Christians are expected to exercise critical judgment of government programs and policies. Churches have the mandate to question the State when it violates the principle of justice. It is evident that our society is indeed sinful: greed, disorder, corruption, oppression, and exploitation are all too rampant. For this reason, God has mandated the State to work for a more just social order even in the midst of sinfulness. Yet, it is common knowledge that the State can be turned from its divine mandate of justice into an instrument of oppression and death. Consequently, while the Church has the duty to work with the State for a just society, it has also the responsibility to guard against the transformation of the State into an instrument of death and oppression.

Given this awesome responsibility, the Church today cannot afford to be indifferent to the manner in which the State and the "authorities" govern. Constant work and coop-

eration to improve society are possible and necessary so that the laws of the State become "more in conformity" with the will of God. God has established the State as his means to work in society for justice and against injustice. The State is given the power and the authority to pursue its appointed task so that the Church can continue with its proclamation of the Word.

In proclaiming the Word of God, the Church must remain vigilant against the excesses of the authorities. It is the duty of the Church to preach sharply and strongly against all injustices, all ungodliness, and neglect of duty in high places. In describing this particular role of the Church, Calvin used the expression from Ezekiel, that they "are placed in the Church as watchmen."<sup>36</sup> The duty of the watchmen in Reformed theology is to speak the truth according to God's Word, straightforwardly and plainly, and

thus, also to call injustice by name without fear. It must remain clear that when the Church speaks to the State, it does not cease to be the Church; neither

does it put itself in the place of the State. Rather the Church is performing its primary duty of challenging the State to be a true State.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Calvin, John. *Institutes of Christian Religion*. 2 Vols. Edited by John T. McNeill. The Library of Christian Classics, vol XX. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960.)

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Institutes*, II, 2, 13. p. 272. He further elaborates this doctrine in this passage from his *Institutes*: "...that there is a twofold government in man {sic}: one aspect is spiritual, whereby the conscience is instructed in piety and reverencing God; the second is political, whereby man {sic} is educated for the duties of humanity and citizenship that must be maintained among men {sic}. These are usually called the "spiritual" and the "temporal" jurisdiction (not improper terms) by which is meant that the former sort of government pertains to the life of the soul, while the latter has to do with the concerns of the present life - not only with food and clothing but with laying down laws whereby a man {sic} may live his life among other men {sic} holily, honorably, and temperately. For the former resides in the inner mind, while the latter regulates only outward behavior. The one we may call the spiritual kingdom, the other, the political kingdom. Now these two, as we have divided them, must always be examined separately; and while one is being considered, we call away and turn aside the mind from thinking about the other. There are in man {sic}, so to speak, two worlds, over which different kings and different laws have authority. III, 19. 15. p.847

<sup>3</sup> Luther, *Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed* (1523), in Luther's Works, vol. 35, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), pp. 81-129.

<sup>4</sup> see Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, trans. Harold Knight Baker (Book House: Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1956) pp. 229ff. see also Helmut Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, Vol. II, ed. by William H. Lazareth (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), pp. 565-614.

<sup>5</sup> *Institutes*, IV, 20. cf.

<sup>6</sup> *Institutes*, IV, 20. 2. p. 1487.

<sup>7</sup> *Institutes*, IV, 20. 3. p. 1488. Calvin's position on the role of governments is briefly summarized in this brief passage from his *Institutes*: "Its function among



men {sic} is no less than that of bread, water, sun and air; indeed, its place of honor is far more excellent. For it does not merely see it, as all these serve to do, that men {sic} breathe, eat, drink, and are kept warm, even though it surely embraces all these activities when it provides for their living together. It does not, I repeat, look to this only, but also prevents idolatry, sacrilege against God's name, blasphemies against his truth, and other public offenses against religion from arising and spreading among the people; it prevents the public peace from being disturbed; it provides that each man {sic} may keep his property safe and sound; that men {sic} may carry on blameless intercourse among themselves; that honesty and modesty may be preserved among men {sic}. In short, it provides that a public manifestation of religion exist among Christians, and that humanity be maintained among men{sic}."

<sup>8</sup> "And thus all have confessed that no government can be happily established unless piety is the first concern: and that those laws are preposterous which neglect God's right and provide only for men {sic}." *Institutes*, IV, 20. 9.

<sup>9</sup> *Institutes*, IV, 20. 4.

<sup>10</sup> *Institutes*, IV, 20. 5.

<sup>11</sup> *Institutes*, IV, 20. 6.

<sup>12</sup> Karl Barth, *Against the Stream. Shorter Post-War Writings (1946-52)*, (1954 Philosophical Library Inc. New York.) pp. 15-50.

<sup>13</sup> Barth, *Christian Community and the Civil Community*, pp. 19-20

<sup>14</sup> Barth, *Christian Community and Civil Community*, p. 16.

<sup>15</sup> Barth, *Christian Community...* p. 20. The following statement reveals Calvin's influence on Barth's political attitude. "It (the state) serves to protect man {sic} from the invasion of chaos and therefore to give him time: time for the preaching of the gospel; time for repentance; time for faith. Since 'according to the measure of human insight and human capacity' and 'under the threat and exercise of force' (Barmen Thesis No.5) provision is made in the state for the establishment of human law and (in the inevitably external, relative and provisional sense) for freedom, peace and humanity, it renders a definite service to divine Providence and plan of salvation, quite apart from the judgment and desires of its members. Its existence is not separate from the Kingdom of Jesus Christ; its foundations and its influence are not autonomous, it is outside the Church but not outside the range of Christ's dominion - it is an exponent of His Kingdom" p. 21.

<sup>16</sup> Barth, *Christian Community and Civil Community*, p. 21.

<sup>17</sup> Barth, *Christian Community and Civil Community*, p. 21.

<sup>18</sup> Barth, *Christian Community and the Civil Community*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>19</sup> Barth, *Christian Community and the Civil Community*, p. 22.

<sup>20</sup> "The divine purpose is therefore not at all that the State should gradually develop more or less into a Church. And the Church's political aim cannot be to turn the State into a Church, that is, make it as far as possible subservient to

the tasks of the Church." Barth, *The Christian Community and the Civil Community*, p. 30.

<sup>21</sup> "But since they cannot perform this unless they defend good men {sic} from the wrongs of the wicked, and give aid and protection to the oppressed, they have also been armed with power with which severely to coerce the open mal-factors and criminals by whose wickedness the public peace is troubled or disturbed." *Institutes*, IV, 20. 9. p. 1496.

<sup>22</sup> *Institutes*, IV, 20. 2.

<sup>23</sup> Kuyper, *Christianity and Class Struggle*, trans. Dirj Jellema (Grand Rapids: Piet Heim, 1950) pp. 27-28, 50)

<sup>24</sup> *Institutes*, IV, 20. 6. 1491.

<sup>25</sup> Karl Barth, CD Vol 2/1 p. 386. cf *Christian Community and Civil Community*, "The Church is witness of the fact that the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. And this implies that - casting all false impartiality aside - the Church must concentrate first on the lower and lowest levels of human society. The poor, the socially and economically weak and threatened, will always be the object of its primary and particular concern, and it will always insist on the State's special responsibility for these weaker members of society." p. 36

<sup>26</sup> see Herman Hendrickx, *Social Justice in the Bible*, (Quezon City: Claretian Publication, 1985)

<sup>27</sup> *Opera*, 52, 267. *Commentarius in Epistolem ad Timotheum I*, I Tim 2:2

<sup>28</sup> *Institutes*, IV, 20. 23-29.

<sup>29</sup> "In a very wicked man {sic} utterly unworthy of all honor, provided he has the public power in his hands, that noble and divine power resides which the Lord has by his Word given to the ministers of his justice and judgment. Accordingly, he should be held in the same reverence and esteem by his subjects, in so far as public obedience is concerned, in which they would hold the best of kings if he were given to them." *Institutes* IV,20. 25

<sup>30</sup> *Institutes*, IV, 20. 30. p. 1517

<sup>31</sup> Barth, *Christian Community and Civil Community*, pp. 24-25. cf CD II/2 pp. 721 ff. "Everyone - every member of the Church, 'because of the mercy of God,' must submit himself {sic}, not blindly and uncritically .... but with true self-adaptation to this political authority. The power of the state as such is of God (13.1), and whenever this power is found (not in so far as it may be partially anarchy or tyranny, but in so far as it is legitimate authority) it is ordained of God, so that those who try to evade it or oppose it resist the ordinance of God and the kingly rule of His Son." p. 721

<sup>32</sup> Barth, *The Christian Community and the Civil Community*, p. 48.

<sup>33</sup> Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle to the Romans Chap 13*. p.83-87. in John T. McNeill, *Calvin: On God and Political Duty*, (New York: Library of Liberal Arts, 1956).



<sup>34</sup> *Institutes*, IV, 20. 32.

<sup>35</sup> *Institutes*, IV, 20. 30-32. A summary of Calvin's argument goes like this: "For sometimes he {sic} raises up open avengers from among his {sic} servants, and arms them with his {sic} command to punish the wicked government and deliver his {sic} people, oppressed in unjust ways, from miserable calamity." *Institutes*, IV, 20. 30.

<sup>36</sup> *Institutes*, 4.3.6

## LUKE FOR WOMEN THEN AND NOW: FRIEND OR FOE?

Virginia Omoso-Guazon

### ABSTRACT

One of the highly contested issues that continue to polarize biblical scholars is the representation of women in Luke's Gospel. In particular, the controversy centers on the question whether Luke's Gospel seeks to enhance and edify the status of women or to maintain a negative, if not oppressive, view of them. Those who support the first view argue that the texts on women in the Book of Acts are empowering and liberating for women today. Recent biblical scholars, notably the feminists among them, however, argue that Luke is an extremely dangerous text for its denigrating treatment of women. Combining a historical-literary investigation of the Gospel of Luke with the hermeneutics of feminism, this paper examines this controversy in light of its implications to the life of Filipino women. In engaging the Gospel of Luke for women in the Filipino context, this paper rejects the two extreme positions as dangerous and problematic. Instead, it takes a middle ground which, while acknowledging the texts' androcentric views, seeks to redeem them by reading them through the lenses of hermeneutics of suspicion and hermeneutics of remembrance. The paper concludes that as part of the "liberating word" of God, the Gospel of Luke is affirming and liberating for women then and now.

**Introduction: Current Debate on Women in the Gospel of Luke**

Even a casual reading of Luke reveals that women figure prominently in this book

than in any of the other New Testament books. Highlighted in Luke's Gospel from the very start until the end, women are more frequently mentioned and are given far more signifi-



cant roles in Luke than in the other Gospels.<sup>1</sup> For these reasons and more, Luke has been traditionally and widely considered as displaying a positive view of women. Those who uphold this viewpoint maintain that the author of Luke seeks to enhance and edify the status of women through the Gospel, and that the whole Gospel brings benefits for women. In short, according to this view, Luke is women-friendly.<sup>2</sup>

Recent biblical scholars, however, have strongly criticized the position that Luke has a positive view of women. These scholars find Luke not as a friend, but as an enemy of women, in a friend's robe. They argue that Luke presents a negative view of women, especially in their role as early church leaders. For them, Luke's Gospel is oppressive, and more detrimental than beneficial to women. The view that Luke takes a "negative" stance toward women, which began even before Mary Rose D'Angelo's landmark work in 1990,<sup>3</sup> is becoming increasingly popular today.<sup>4</sup>

Jane Schaberg begins her recent commentary on

Luke, in *The Women's Bible Commentary* with the thesis that "the Gospel of Luke is an extremely dangerous text, perhaps the most dangerous in the Bible."<sup>5</sup> Schaberg's work is representative of feminist<sup>6</sup> studies which find in Luke's Gospel a denigrating treatment of women. It presents, with highly provocative arguments, the claim that the author of Luke's Gospel had a deliberately negative agenda in relation to women, and for this reason the Gospel is extremely dangerous to modern readers.<sup>7</sup>

Since North American and European biblical scholarship has enormously shaped, and in many ways still continues to shape and influence the culture and lives of Filipinos, including the lives of women, the ongoing debate over whether or not Luke has a positive view of women has led to a dilemma about how to approach the Lukan text. Should and can the Gospel of Luke be seen as affirming and supporting the worth and dignity of women? Or should it be considered as completely bankrupt as a liberating text for women,

and therefore be completely rejected? Does Luke, in fact, display a negative agenda in regard to women? How authoritative is Luke in the lives of women today?

The Lukan material becomes problematic both from its historical and literary-feminist perspectives. From the literary-historical perspective, the issue concerns (1) the nature of the author's intention pertaining to women and how this situation shaped the selection and editing of the materials, and (2) whether the text records accurately the actual roles of women in the time of Jesus and the early church. From a contemporary feminist perspective, an additional problem is to consider how the Lukan material as a piece of sacred literature is being appropriated for women in the Philippine context.

### Purpose and Framework of the Study

In light of the debate on women and Luke, this paper looks closely into the problematic aspects of the Lukan

material both from the historical and literary-feminist perspectives. At the same time, it seeks to discern whether the Lukan material is liberating for women today, especially in the Filipino context. It endeavors to investigate whether the claims for or against the text of Luke as liberating for women are in fact valid in a historical and literary sense. It also attempts to respond to the question of how this material is being appropriated in the Filipino context in light of ongoing debates surrounding the usefulness of the material for the empowerment and emancipation of women today.

This paper combines the historical-literary investigation of the Gospel of Luke with the hermeneutics of feminism. As an example of a feminist biblical scholarship, it ties together the historical-literary approach and a feminist theological-practical framework in exploring the significance of Luke's Gospel for women in the Filipino context. In general, this work is a response to the feminist challenge of the



times to develop new ways of studying and interpreting the ancient Gospels so that the liberating word of God can still be heard and proclaimed even by Filipino women whose suffering and victimization may have been, in one way or another, perpetuated and legitimized through such allegedly oppressive texts as the Lukan material.

As mentioned at the outset, two extreme views dominate the current biblical discussions of the Lukan text. One extreme considers the entire text as simply and in all respects affirming for women. The other extreme rejects the Lukan text as a completely misogynist text,<sup>8</sup> and, therefore, a hopelessly irredeemable piece of literature. This paper argues that approaching the Gospel of Luke from one of two extremes is dangerous and problematic.

#### Viewing Women in Luke through Acts

Luke-Acts is a single work in two volumes. The Gospel of Luke, the first volume, tells the

story of Jesus Christ. Acts, the second volume, tells the story of the early church. The story of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke is an anticipation of the story of the church in Acts.<sup>9</sup> As two mutually dependent parts of a unified work, Luke-Acts must be read and understood as a whole. One's understanding of Luke is incomplete without understanding Acts. Likewise, Acts cannot be fully understood apart from Luke. To understand how women are treated in Luke, therefore, one must understand how women are treated in the Book of Acts. This is particularly so since Acts provides images of how, in my view, the story of Jesus was being fulfilled in the early church.

This section will examine the representation of women in the Book of Acts and assess the ways in which the texts can be empowering and liberating for women today. Following this line of argument, it will appear that, from a historical and literary perspective, the case for an anti-women agenda is not as strong as suggested by some feminist interpreters. Yet, this

view also acknowledges that these texts, like other texts in the Bible, are indeed androcentric. To redeem these androcentric texts, it is necessary to read and interpret them not only with suspicion but also with remembrance. The hermeneutics of suspicion<sup>10</sup> enables us to see the androcentric texts about women in Acts generally as stories of terror about women whose contributions as leaders and as active participants in the life of the early church are not given much importance and significance by presumably male writers like Luke. As stories of terror, they also reflect stories about the struggle of women trying to survive in a patriarchal world.<sup>11</sup> The hermeneutics of remembrance,<sup>12</sup> on the other hand, should enable readers to uncover the values that are embedded in the texts, along with their patriarchal or liberating qualities relating to their historical context.<sup>13</sup> Seen from these two perspectives, the androcentric texts of terror and struggle can also be empowering and emancipating for

women. When interpreted with suspicion and remembrance, the texts of terror and struggle of women in Acts can be seen as reflective of stories of hope and promise for the liberation of women. These texts in Acts can also help readers understand that the texts about women in Luke are not only texts of terror and struggle, but are also texts of promise and hope for the emancipation of women, then and now.

#### *The Kerygma of Luke-Acts*

Embedded in Luke-Acts is the proclamation that nothing in the history of the church has happened by chance. Everything is part of God's faithfulness to the promises made to Israel, which unexpectedly for the Jews, include outcasts, such as the Gentiles, the women, the poor, the Samaritans, the unclean, the tax collectors.<sup>14</sup> God's plan for a universal salvation in and through Jesus Christ includes all those considered outsiders to Jewish religion and society.



*The Book of Acts: The Story of the "Time of the Church"*

It is the Book of Acts that tells the story of the "time of the church" that awaits Jesus' coming again or the parousia. The book narrates how the gospel, under the guidance of God, through the Holy Spirit, is brought from Jerusalem to the greater world through the early Christian mission. It emphasizes how the church grew and triumphed over opposition in her mission of bringing the gospel to the Gentiles. The main characters in the story of Acts are Peter and Paul (especially Paul), as they are the missionaries responsible for spreading the gospel to the outside world.<sup>15</sup>

The story of the Pentecost in Acts 2 is a key programmatic text introducing major themes that will be unfolded in the Book of Acts. As we shall see later, the Holy Spirit comes and works through the church for the proclamation of the reign of God. At Pentecost, in fulfillment of Joel's prophecy, the Spirit empowers the church for witness and service, that

"...your sons and your daughters shall prophesy...then everyone who calls on the Lord shall be saved from Jerusalem to Rome and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 2:17, 21).

*Texts on Various Roles Women Play in Acts*

Women in the Book of Acts are portrayed in various ways, ranging from wealthy women patrons to poor widows and slaves; from women believers of the Christian faith, to women prophets, ministers, and teachers. This range indicates the author's theological perspective that God's concern is inclusive for rich and poor, powerful and weak, and leaders and followers alike. The texts below illustrate the varying roles women play in Acts.

1. Women as Believers

The attention given in Acts to women as believers, or as converts is significant. In Acts 1:13-14, the author portrays the women, including Mary, the mother of Jesus, as women believers who were constantly devoting themselves to prayer. In Acts 2:1-4, the

story of the Pentecost shows that women were part of those who gathered and experienced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This suggests that women took part in the early stages of the church mission,<sup>16</sup> and were active participants in the life and work of the early church.

The stories about women in Acts tell us that they were not just passive bystanders watching the growth and development of the early church. In Acts 12:12-17, a woman named Mary, the mother of John Mark, offered her home for the early Christian missionaries to gather and pray together. Acts 21:5-6 tells the story of the women of Tyre, who, together with men and children, escorted Paul and company outside the city. They prayed with Paul and bade him goodbye before Paul started his journey to Jerusalem. Again, Acts provides its readers with a picture of the inclusive nature of the early Christian communities.

As active believers of the Christian faith, women were among those who suffered

together with men when Saul persecuted the early Christians (8:3 and 9:2). Paul's testimony in Acts 22:4 attests to the persecution of women together with men, either through death or imprisonment.

Women converts are also mentioned. In 5:14, women are cited as among those who were converted to Christianity in Jerusalem. Women also believed and were baptized in Samaria (8:12). A woman named Damaris is numbered as among Paul's converts in Athens (17:34).

Women converts include even devout Greek "leading women" and women of "high standing." Acts 17:4 says: "Some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women". Acts 17:12 also shows that the believers included "not a few Greek women and even men of high standing." This reflects that Christian converts include women of high socio-economic status who probably have helped much in supporting the early Christian missionary



work, therefore playing a significant role in the growth and development of specific local churches.<sup>17</sup>

## 2. Women as Patrons

More significant attention is given to women in Acts 16 to 18. As I have mentioned earlier, the Acts presents women believers in the early church as including wealthy women, who were expected to function as patrons. Not only did they participate actively in church life and work, they also served in other ways, such as providing financial support necessary to the expansion and development of the early Christian church.

One of these women patrons is Lydia (Acts 16:13-15), the dealer of purple cloth who is the patron of the church in Philippi. She is apparently a prominent woman, as she is capable of offering her home as the meeting place for the church.

Mary, the mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12-17) is also named in Acts as a woman Christian believer who offers her home to be a center of

church activities. Like Lydia, she is probably a patron of the early Christian church.

For Luke, to be a patron entails leadership roles. Being head of her household who offers her home as a missionary center, and a benefactor of the developing Christian community suggest a woman's leadership role in church. As Wayne Meeks points out, the type of leaders in the early church includes those who "were financial benefactors of the congregations," as well as those who "were supported by the congregations from a very early time."<sup>18</sup>

## 3. Women as Prophets, Disciple or Teacher

Women prophets are also referred to in Acts 21:9. Mentioned here are the daughters of Philip the evangelist, who had the gifts of prophecy. In a later section, these women prophets will be discussed at greater length.

Luke-Acts boldly speaks not only of women prophets but also of a woman disciple. Acts 9:36 tells the story of Tabitha (whose Greek name is Dorcas) of Jaff, the woman who is explicitly called a disciple. Mathetria, the femi-

nine form of the word "disciple," and which literally means woman follower,<sup>19</sup> is found only here in the entire New Testament.<sup>20</sup> Tabitha is known for her "good works" and "acts of charity," indicating that Tabitha is considered by the author as a true disciple. For in Luke-Acts, doing "good works" and "acts of charity" are marks of discipleship.<sup>21</sup>

Another woman disciple who evangelized in Corinth was Priscilla (18:2ff.). She is named in Acts 18:26 as a teacher of Apollos, Paul's fellow-missionary. For Luke, she is a representative of women leaders in her time who acted independently, made a name for themselves and had significant roles and social status of their own, apart from their husbands.

## 4. Women as Beneficiaries of the Ministry: Poor Widows and a Slave

The author of the book of Acts refers not only to the prominent, powerful and wealthy women. Acts also tells about the weak and the powerless: the poor women such as

the widows and the slave girl. The story found in 6: 1-6 tells about widows in the early church, in particular, the poor widows who need to be ministered to.

The slave girl in 16:16-17 is also a recipient of the church ministry. She is mentioned by the author as a representative of the many women in his time who were oppressed and exploited in a male-dominated society. She needs to be liberated not only from the possession by demon spirits that made her utter mantric proclamations, but also from the grips of her dominating and exploitative male master. Women like her need liberation.

### *The Women Prophets (Acts 21:9): Story in Focus*

Acts 21:9 tells of certain women prophets, identified as the daughters of Philip, one of the seven chosen evangelists. The story of the women prophets, like other stories outside those of Paul and Peter in the Book of Acts, is very brief. Once the women are mentioned in the writer's introduction of the prophet Agabus in



tradition as told in Mark (14:3), of the prophetic character of a woman who anoints Jesus' head, in the same manner as the Old Testament prophets anointed the heads of Kings. They further claim that Luke used his ingenious writing skills to erase the prophetic character of the woman and pushed her into a more passive, docile, and dehumanized role.<sup>24</sup>

At the literal level of the narrative, the story of the woman who anoints Jesus' feet is a story of terror that reflects the sad plight of women in a patriarchal world. The narrative is wrapped in patriarchal and androcentric language, and can be degrading to women. This text can easily be used to support the stereotype of women as "sinners" or as "prostitutes". But as a story of terror, the story is also a story of struggle. Shown is the tip of a social iceberg, of women struggling to survive and reclaim their humanity in a patriarchal world that dehumanizes them.

Through a combined application of Fiorenza's

hermeneutics of suspicion,<sup>25</sup> the hermeneutics of remembrance,<sup>26</sup> and the hermeneutics of liberative vision and imagination,<sup>27</sup> the story can be seen not only as a story of terror that tells about women struggle in a patriarchal world, but also as a story of promise and hope.

A number of significant issues surround this story foremost of which is that the woman's sins have been traditionally interpreted as sexually related. Many consider her as a prostitute. But was the woman really a prostitute? The text does not openly say so.<sup>28</sup> Thus, the interpretation that the woman is a prostitute is not necessarily true, for while Luke describes the woman as "a sinner" in the city, an analytical study of the word "sinner" will not easily yield an explicit answer that the woman was a prostitute.

The Lukan formulation: "woman in the city who was a sinner" makes more sense when the city, *polis*, is considered not so much as a characterization of a "geographical" place but of "the social envi-

ronment in which the woman is defined as a sinner."<sup>29</sup> In this sense, "the city" is a socio-religious category that implies a place of questionable character (as it still does today).

Luke's reference to "sinner", *hamartolos*, indicates general sin, and not anything in particular, such as prostitution.<sup>30</sup> The term "sinner" appears 16 times in Luke, and focuses as much on socio-religious stereotyping, stigmatizing, and exclusivism, as it does on "objective" or "factual" sinning.<sup>31</sup> Jesus' response to the actions of the woman also overlooks the preoccupation with "specific" sins.

As Fiorenza puts it, the woman "could have possibly been a criminal, a ritually unclean, or morally bad person, a prostitute, or simply the wife of a notorious sinner."<sup>32</sup>

As a "type" of story exemplifying the reversal and table-fellowship themes, this story fits into the overall structure of Lukan stories revealing Luke's concern for the marginal and the outcasts: the sinful woman—the intruder, the uninvited guest, the stranger—

becomes the host. The "outsider" becomes an "insider." The "last" becomes the "first."

In its entirety we can see in the story the contrast between the "respectable" men, represented by Simon the Pharisee, and the socially despised and outcast woman who anoints Jesus' feet. Jesus allows a sinful woman, to touch, kiss, and anoint him, and compares her behavior favorably with that of his host, Simon, the righteous Pharisee.<sup>33</sup> What was unacceptable in the eyes of righteous men became acceptable in the eyes of Jesus. And the righteous man was criticized for not doing his job.

Here is a real story of reversal, as Jesus turns social values upside down. The outsider becomes the insider; the stranger becomes the host; the "last" one becomes the "first." Luke unmasks the essential cruelty of men and society and exposes their pretensions to righteousness. As Walter Wink aptly puts it, "Jesus reverses the cultural values and identifies with her against the representatives of a patriarchal system that requires the presence



of prostitutes and yet refuses to acknowledge their humanity."<sup>34</sup>

Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38-42)

The Martha<sup>35</sup> and Mary<sup>36</sup> pericope in Luke 10:38-42 is a story about a remarkable pair of women disciples of Jesus in the early church who both shared and struggled to learn the word of God<sup>37</sup> as they perform their ministry of service and proclamation. It is an episode that tells of the struggles of two women missionary leaders against a patriarchal system/culture that restricts their leadership and ministerial roles and functions, as Jesus' disciples.

Yet, this interpretation is not readily seen and understood from the face of the text itself. Not only is the text wrapped in androcentric and patriarchal language, it also uses words with both literal and symbolic meanings, which makes it doubly difficult to interpret.

For the Martha and Mary story to be truly liberating to women, it needs to be liberated from patriarchal and

androcentric biases and interpreted with its double meanings, well in mind. When the narrative is approached and interpreted only at face value, it can be a story of terror that downplays the leadership role of women. But even in a text of terror that reflects the struggle of women for survival in a man's world, the hermeneutics of remembrance<sup>38</sup> will enable us to see that the reality reflected in the story can also be a source of hope and liberation for women. It becomes a story of promise and hope for the liberation of women from the bondage of a patriarchal culture that restricts their roles and functions, and holds women captive to passive and subordinate roles.

Today, many conflicting issues continue to revolve around the Martha and Mary pericope. On the one hand are the many scholars who consider the Martha and Mary story as a source of hope for the upliftment of women. On the other hand are those who interpret it as an affirmation of submissiveness—a narrative that restricts women to domes-

tic and passive roles.

From a negative perspective, a traditional interpretation of the story suggests that Martha and Mary represent the ministry of service (*diakonia*) and the ministry of the proclamation of the word, respectively. This interpretation implies that ministry has a dual and split functions. On the one hand is service (*diakonia*). On the other hand is proclamation of the word. Corollary to this is the judgment of many that the proclamation of the word represented by Mary is superior to the *diakonia*, represented by Martha which is limited to the service of waiting on tables. In this respect, Fiorenza then argues that Luke has a clear intention not only to distinguish between *diakonia* and listening to the word as two distinct roles, but also to subordinate the ministry of the table to the ministry of the word.<sup>39</sup>

Earlier than Fiorenza, Elizabeth Tetlow also claimed that the Martha and Mary story is a Lukan attempt to limit the role of women to domesticated and passive roles of

discipleship such as serving and listening/learning.<sup>40</sup> Jane Schaberg echoes the above arguments of Tetlow and Fiorenza.<sup>41</sup>

It is generally assumed that Martha's "serving" (*diakonia*) means providing food and drink to Jesus, a male itinerant missionary. While this is possible, an analytical study of the word *diakonia* will show that the *diakonia* or the service of women in the early Christian church was *not* [emphasis added] only limited to the domestic chores for communal fellowships and gatherings or to providing hospitality to itinerant male missionaries.<sup>42</sup> In New Testament times, particularly during the time of Luke, the Greek words *diakonia* and *diakonein* were technical words referring to the early Christian ministry. And this one ministry is the *diakonia* of both serving at tables and proclaiming the word, performed not only by men, but also by women (cf. Rom. 16:1).<sup>43</sup>

On the positive side, biblical scholars who consider the Martha and Mary story as having positive implications for



women, disagree with Fiorenza's interpretation by arguing that Luke is showing how Jesus challenges the traditional view that a woman's role must be restricted to such domestic duties as doing household chores and rendering hospitality services. According to this view, Jesus' defense of Mary, for instance (vs. 41-42), does not mean that he commends submissiveness. Rather, "it affirms the right of women to learn the word the same as men."<sup>44</sup> The characterization of Mary is considered as an affirmation of the right of women to learn the word of God on an equal level with men, and Mary's role as a representation of Luke's model disciple who performs the "hearing and doing" of the word.<sup>45</sup> Luke intends the name "Mary" to evoke up the idea of the "model disciple."<sup>46</sup>

In the story, Mary is described as sitting "at the Lord's feet" (v. 39 RSV). A more accurate description of Mary's position should be that Mary was "sitting down beside the Lord's feet," or "sitting down near the Lord's feet," (v.

39), a description which suggests an equal position. Mary was sitting beside Jesus as an equal, a friend, a learner, and a woman disciple. Here, Jesus is encouraging a woman, whom society has restricted to domestic roles, to learn from him like any other male disciple.

While considering the issues raised by Tetlow, Fiorenza, Schaberg, and others, as legitimate, I join those who consider the thrust of the Mary and Martha story as positive for women.

On the literal level, the story of Martha and Mary can be another Lukan narrative that presents women disciples of Jesus being led beyond the traditional prescribed roles which restricted and confined them to the tasks of serving in the home. On the symbolic level, it tells us of the interrelatedness of service and proclamation of the word in the ministry of the church. In both its literal and symbolic senses, the story is affirmative for women today, as it questions those traditional views that confine women to the home

and household tasks, and to the ministry of service in the church. The story commends those who take bold steps to go beyond traditional roles and functions in the home and in the church. At the same time, it challenges those who stick to the traditional views that limit the roles of women and relegate them to passive and subordinate functions.

The story also poses a challenge to the erroneous concept of the church that splits the ministry of service and proclamation into two separate functions. Moreover, it challenges the wrong notion that the ministry of service is inferior to the ministry of the word. As Luke sees it, service and proclamation of the word are interrelated and inseparable ministerial functions of the church, and women are variously engaged in both functions as they actively participate in the life and ministry of the church. In the words of Letty Russell, "both discipleship and service are essential, and both take place in women's lives as they join with others in communities of solidar-

ity with those who yearn for liberation and wholeness in their lives."<sup>47</sup>

### The Other Women in Luke

Section 2 of this paper investigated the various ways that women are portrayed in the Book of Acts. Having studied two critical stories about women in the Gospel of Luke (Sections 3 and 4), this section will now look at how the remaining women are represented in the Gospel of Luke.

#### A. Mary as the Image of *Anawim* Par Excellence

The Hebrew term *anawim* denotes all those unfortunates in Israel, including the lowly, the sick, and the downtrodden.<sup>48</sup> In general, *anawim* in the NT signifies the humble/d poor whom God chooses as special clients to liberate.

The Magnificat of Mary (1:39-56) is a hymn that expresses Mary's identification with all the *anawim*.<sup>49</sup> As Mary's humble situation gains the favor and blessing of the Great, Mighty, Holy, and Merciful God (vs. 48-50), she iden-



tifies herself with the others who are poor and humbled like her. For Luke, Mary presents the image of the *anawim* par excellence.

### B. Other Stories of Women *Anawim* Paired with Men's Stories

Many of Luke's stories about women occur in the framework of paired episodes. Luke deliberately multiplies women stories, which serve as pairs to stories about men, whenever there is a parable example, a healing, an action, or an expression of faith. In Luke's peculiar way of pairing, a full measure of equality which was not expected in Jesus' time is implied.<sup>50</sup> In pairing, Luke suggests that both women and men stand together as equals before God. Below are some of the stories of women *anawim* paired with stories about men:

1. the references to Ana and Simeon as prophets (2:36-38, 2:25-35)
2. the story of the mother-in-law of Simon paired with the story of the healing of a man who was possessed by a demon (Luke 4:33-39)

3. the story of the widow of Nain paired with the story about the healing of a centurion's servant (Luke 7: 1-17)

4. the story of the healing of two women suffering from physical illnesses paired with the healing story of the Gerasene demoniac named Legion (Luke 8:26-56)

5. the healing during Sabbath of a crippled woman (13:10-17) and a man (14:1-6)

6. the references to the release of the bent-over woman during Sabbath in 13:10-17 (its pair story of the dropsical man in 14:1-6 can also be found in Mark 3:1-5)

### C. Women: Faithful Followers and Witnesses of Jesus' Life and Death

In Luke 8:1-3, the evangelist enumerates names of women followers of Jesus, as Mary of Magdala, Joanna, Chuza, and Susana, among the "many others" (vs. 2-3). These affluent women finance their missionary journey with Jesus,

using their own money. They also proclaim the word while following Jesus.

It takes a little imagination to see women in Luke, and in the whole New Testament, for that matter, as proclaimers of the word of God. But when feminist interpreters use imagination to fill in the gaps in the stories told about women, their interpretations are not usually considered as biblically based. As Letty Russell puts it, "among those who consider historical critical scholarship as the norm for what is to be accepted in biblical interpretation, feminist interpretations are considered biased and unfounded and dismissed with little self-examination of white male academic bias."<sup>51</sup>

Luke persistently presents women and men as standing side by side as equals before God in the remaining episodes of the Gospel, even as he portrays how women remain courageous and faithful disciples of Jesus until the very end.

Three brief narratives about women are presented by

Luke as the evangelist tells of the last crucial moments in the ministry of Jesus. These brief narratives provide the readers with deeper insights into the courage and truthfulness in the expression of spirituality and discipleship, even in the face of threats and perils. Luke 22:55-58 narrates the encounter of Peter with the servant girl who truthfully identified him as one of Jesus' disciples, while Peter denied the recognition given by the woman. The mourning women in Luke 23:26-31 responded positively to the call for discipleship in truth and in courage, in spite of possible threats. And Luke 23: 49, 55-24:12 tells us of the women disciples who faithfully followed Jesus from Galilee to the empty tomb. These women disciples later became the understanding recipients of the good news of Jesus' resurrection.

As pointed out by Duling and Perrin, "Jesus' first public words refer to widows (4:25); his last public words are addressed to the women of Jerusalem."<sup>52</sup> As the Gospel begins with the story of women



through Elizabeth and Mary, it ends with the story of women at Jesus' empty tomb.

### Conclusion

To conclude, let me highlight the following points:

First, contrary to the arguments articulated by Schaberg and others, Luke had no deliberate, conscious negative agenda regarding the subservient role of women. As we have seen in the Book of Acts (e.g. Lydia, Priscilla, etc.) and in the Gospel of Luke (e.g. Martha and Mary, and more), women also occupy leadership and other prominent roles.

Second, there is still the reality to be faced that the text of Luke is an androcentric and patriarchal fraction of an androcentric and patriarchal Bible. It is still male-oriented and contains stories of terror, insofar as the text is a product of a patriarchal and androcentric context. Thus, it contains narratives with expressions and portrayal of

situations that can be used to suppress and oppress women. When read with suspicion, remembrance, and liberative vision and imagination, however, these stories of terror can also become liberating stories of struggle.

Third, notwithstanding current scholarly debates about whether or not the Gospel of Luke is women-friendly, as part of the "liberating word" of God, the Gospel of Luke is affirming and liberating for women then and now.

I finally conclude, therefore, that readers need to be more consciously aware of the possibility of Luke's terrors, even in engaging with texts that are commonly accepted as women-friendly. Likewise, readers must also heighten their consciousness to see and hear God's liberating word even in those narratives which are reckoned as texts of terror for women.

Whatever is found wanting in the portrayal of women as leaders in the

Gospel of Luke, let it be a continuing challenge for us, interpreters of today, to strive to seek new and more liberating ways to interpret Luke's texts on women which are wrapped up in male-centered and androcentric language. It is in the acceptance of this challenge that we see the multi-faceted nature of the Lukan texts on women: as texts of terror, as texts of struggle, and as texts of hope and promise for the emancipation of women today.

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Mark Allan Powell, *What Are They Saying About Luke?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 92-93.

<sup>2</sup> The perspective that Luke reflects a positive view of women can be represented by Eugene H. Maly who says: "It would seem that, while Jesus and the early Church clearly did not ignore completely the contemporary social structures [about women], they did go beyond those structures at times by reason of the Kingdom vision they enjoyed....Similarly, while we find in Luke no outright condemnation of the current social and religious strictures on women, those strictures are often wholly laid aside by Jesus in his ministry." Eugene H. Maly, "Women and the Gospel of Luke," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 10 (1980): 104. Also see, e.g., Jane Kopas, "Jesus and Women: Luke's Gospel," *Theology Today* 43 (1986): 192-202; Mark Allan Powell, *What Are They Saying About Luke?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 93-97; Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation 1: The Gospel According to Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 132-39; idem, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation 2: The Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 208-9, 280-81.

<sup>3</sup> The view that Luke has a negative perspective of women can be represented by Mary Rose D'Angelo who emphasizes that, "If one concurs with Parvey that the Gospel intends the education of women, its apologetic is also addressed to women who practice and aspire to practice that prophetic ministry, and its intent is to change that practice, to restrict the participation of women to the bounds of discreet behavior." D'Angelo also stresses that "the women in the Gospel are at once a means of edification and of control." See Mary Rose D'Angelo, "Women in Luke-Acts: A Redactional



View," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109 (1990): 441-61.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Elizabeth Tetlow, *Women and Ministry* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 101-9; Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *The Women Around Jesus* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 140-44; Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 118-59; Jacob Jervell, "The Daughters of Abraham: Women in Acts," in *The Unknown Paul: Essays on Luke-Acts and Early Christian History* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 146-57, 186-90; Jane Schaberg, "Luke," in *The Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (London: SPCK; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 275-92; Gail R. O'Day, "Acts," in *The Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (London: SPCK; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 305-12.

<sup>5</sup> Schaberg, 275.

<sup>6</sup> The term "feminist" refers to anyone who advocates any change that will establish equality of the sexes in political, social, economic, and ecclesiastical levels. "Feminist" must be distinguished from the biological terms, "female," and "feminine," which refer to the set of roles and personal characteristics that are culturally defined. See Letty M. Russell, *Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective—A Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974), 145.

<sup>7</sup> See Schaberg, 275. Schaberg claims that in the Gospel of Luke is the "subtle artistic power of the story to seduce the reader into acceptance of it as simple history and into acceptance of the depicted gender roles as divinely ordained." For her, the danger in Luke lies in the fact that modern readers tend to treat Luke as a piece of literature that is liberating to women when in fact it is oppressive.

<sup>8</sup> "Misogyny" is defined as "hatred of women". It is coined from the Greek words, *miso*, meaning, "hatred of", and *gyne*, which means, "woman". See Edwin B. Williams, gen. ed. *The Scribner-Bantam English Dictionary* (New York: Bantam Books, 1979), 577.

<sup>9</sup> David L. Barr, "The Story of Luke-Acts," in *New Testament Story* (California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1987), 208.

<sup>10</sup> According to Fiorenza, "a *hermeneutics of suspicion* seeks to explore the liberating or oppressive values and visions inscribed in the text by identifying the androcentric-patriarchal character and dynamics of the text and its interpretations." Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 57.

<sup>11</sup> See footnote #17, Chapter I.

<sup>12</sup> A "*hermeneutics of remembrance*...cannot take grammatically masculine, allegedly generic language and texts 'about women' at face value...it seeks to

recover all possible remnants of textual and material information in order to rearrange them in a different and more plausible historical picture..." Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 53-54.

<sup>13</sup> Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 62.

<sup>14</sup> Karris, *The New Jerome Bible Commentary*, 676.

<sup>15</sup> Acts 1:8 provides us with the key to understanding the whole structure and movement, as well as the main theological idea of the second volume of the book: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witness in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

<sup>16</sup> See Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation 2: The Acts of the Apostles*, 208.

<sup>17</sup> Tannehill, 208.

<sup>18</sup> See Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*, (New Haven: Yale University, 1983) 135.

<sup>19</sup> See Louw-Nida Lexicon.

<sup>20</sup> See O'Day, 309.

<sup>21</sup> See cf. Luke 1:53; 16:25 and Lk. 12:33. See also Luke's exhortations to give and do "acts of mercy" in Lk. 3:11-14; 11:41; 12:33; 19:1-10.

<sup>22</sup> See Tetlow, 108.

<sup>23</sup> See Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation 1: The Gospel According to Luke*, 134.

<sup>24</sup> See especially Schaberg, 285-286.

<sup>25</sup> "A *hermeneutics of suspicion* rests on the insight that all biblical texts are articulated in grammatically masculine language—a language which is embedded in a patriarchal culture, religion, and society, and which is canonized, interpreted, and proclaimed by a long line of men. Without doubt the Bible is a *male-centered* book!" Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 53.

<sup>26</sup> "A *hermeneutics of remembrance*...cannot take grammatically masculine, allegedly generic language and texts 'about women' at face value...it seeks to recover all possible remnants of textual and material information in order to rearrange them in a different and more plausible historical picture..." Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 53-54.

<sup>27</sup> A "*hermeneutics of liberative vision and imagination* seeks to actualize and dramatize biblical texts differently...Creative re-imagination employs all our creative powers to celebrate and make present the suffering, struggles, and victories of our biblical foresters and foremothers." Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 54-55.

<sup>28</sup> Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke, XXXIV, I-IX*, 689.

<sup>29</sup> Mark Allan Powell, *What Are They Saying About Luke?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 92-93.



<sup>30</sup> See Louw-Nida Lexicon.

<sup>31</sup> For instance, in 7:39, it is the righteous Pharisee who holds up the category in his mind as the chief characteristic of the woman: a "sinner" (cf. Lk. 5:30, 32; 6:32, 33, 34; 7:34; 13:2; 15:1, 2, 7, 10; 18:13; 19:17).

<sup>32</sup> Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 129.

<sup>33</sup> See Dewey, "Images of Women," *The Liberating Word: A Guide to Nonsexist Interpretation of the Bible*, 73.

<sup>34</sup> See Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992) 361.

<sup>35</sup> The name Martha signifies woman leadership. "Mar" comes from the Aramaic noun, *mare*, which means lord or master; and "tha" is its feminine ending. [See Francis Brown, S.R.Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon: With An Appendix Containing The Biblical Aramaic*, (Indiana: Associated Publishers and Authors, Inc., 1979), 597. Also see Jurgette Honculada, "Mary and Martha," *Women of Courage: Asian Women Reading the Bible*, (Seoul: Asian women's Resource Center for Culture and Theology, 1992), 218. For further reference on the meaning of the name Martha, see Joseph Fitzmyer, "The Gospel According to Luke," *AB*, 893.]

<sup>36</sup> The Greek name Maria comes from the Aramaic and Hebrew name Miriam, which means, "rebel." (See Brown, 597, and Honculada, 218.)

<sup>37</sup> See Letty M. Russell, "Kitchen Table Solidarity," *Church In The Round*, (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1993), 75-75. Russell quotes Mary Rose D'Angelo in her article, "Women Partners in the New Testament," [*Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 6:1(Spring 1990), pp. 78-79.] saying that "there is an ancient and widespread reading of 10:39 that says Martha had a sister named Mary who also sat at the feet of Jesus" as the rabbi's disciple.

<sup>38</sup> See Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 68.

<sup>39</sup> Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 65.

<sup>40</sup> See Tetlow, 104.

<sup>41</sup> Schaberg, "Luke," *WBC*, 288-289.

<sup>42</sup> Wayne Meeks points out that "When *diakonos* appears in association inscriptions, it seems always to refer to persons whose function more or less directly involved waiting on tables; the Christian technical usage is quite different." Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 79-80.

<sup>43</sup> See Fiorenza, *But She Said*, 64-65.

<sup>44</sup> Powell, *What Are They Saying About Luke?*, 96.

<sup>45</sup> See Karris, "Luke," *NIBC*, 698; Fitzmyer, "The Gospel According to Luke," *AB*, 892-893; and Mark Allan Powell, *What Are They Saying About Luke?*, 96.

<sup>46</sup> See Karris, "Luke," *NIBC*, 698.

<sup>47</sup> Russell, "Kitchen Table Solidarity," *Church In The Round*, 76.

<sup>48</sup> See Fitzmyer, "The Gospel According to Luke," *AB*, 361.

<sup>49</sup> For Jane Kopas, "Mary's song celebrates the solidarity of all who seek justice, especially women who share her hope." Kopas, "Jesus and Women: Luke's Gospel," *Today*, 194.

<sup>50</sup> Kopas, "Jesus and Women: Luke's Gospel," *Today* 43 (1986), 192.

<sup>51</sup> Letty M. Russell, "Authority and Challenge of Feminist Interpretation", *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, Letty Russell, ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985) 137.

<sup>52</sup> Dennis C. Duling and Norman Perrin, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace, 1994) 171.



BIBLICISTS, SPIRITUALISTS, MILLENARIANS,  
REBELS, AND PACIFISTS:  
REFLECTIONS ON THE RADICAL REFORMATION<sup>1</sup>

Gordon Zerbe

ABSTRACT

*This paper revisits the 16<sup>th</sup> century reform movements in Europe collectively known as the "radical reformation". In particular, this paper traces the beginnings of the Anabaptist movement from which the Mennonite tradition springs and reviews the main features of the "Anabaptist Vision" in order to illustrate how that vision compares with Anabaptist perceptions of theological perspectives of "mainline Protestantism" and Roman Catholicism. In undertaking this historical review, the analysis takes account of (1) the character and diversity of late medieval Roman Catholicism; (2) the numerous church reform and intellectual currents leading up to the 16th century; (3) the economic realities (notably the rise of the merchant class and the plight of the peasant class); and, (4) the political dynamics (namely, the rise of nationalist interests seeking to shake off Roman or Spanish dominance). This synthetic reading of the radical reformation shows that the animosity which strained the relationship between the spiritual descendants of the mainline Reformation and the radical reformation in the past 500 year continues to this day to divide Christians and has been exported to the rest of the world. Nevertheless, as theologies and churches indigenize across the world, they also bring with them new opportunities. As contemporary Christians, we face the challenge of maintaining the zeal and passion of the reformation movement in its many forms, of learning from the strengths of our respective traditions, while holding, at the same time, to the vision of Christian unity.*

Introduction

This paper aims to provide a schematic review of the varied movements lumped

together as the "radical reformation." The radical reformation is one of the terms by which historians refer to an ar-

ray of 16th-century Christian reform movements in Europe, most notably the Anabaptist movement, from which the Mennonite tradition springs. This confessional tradition does not play any direct role in the "many springs" which gave birth to the "single stream" of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP). This essay therefore must be regarded as an example of the UCCP's continuing interest in ecumenical dialogue and partnership, in accord with its character as a united and uniting church. At the same time, this paper will review the main features of what Mennonites today have come to call the "Anabaptist Vision." As such, it is a kind of synthetic and "canonical" reading of the rather varied 16th-century manifestations in order to illustrate how that vision compares with Anabaptist perceptions of theological perspectives of "mainline Protestantism" and Roman Catholicism.

During the 16th century and the few centuries which followed, a sharp divide separated Anabaptist-Mennonites on the one hand,

and the "mainstream Protestants" (Reformed, Lutheran), on the other. But by today, these traditions have all evolved to some extent and have come to close degrees of rapprochement, as the contexts from which they were birthed have changed. This is despite ongoing confessional differences and mutual caricaturing. Indeed, in 1970, Walter Klaassen, a leading Mennonite historian, titled a book *Anabaptism: Neither Protestant Nor Catholic*, but has recently gone on record saying that he wished he had titled the book *Anabaptism: Both Protestant and Catholic*.

A brief description of the characteristics of the Anabaptist-Mennonite movement might be useful at the start. The Mennonite Church is a Christian denomination which, while adhering to the central doctrines of Christianity, has traditionally been marked by strong biblicism, insistence on adult baptism, a separated pure church based on voluntary membership (free of civil government or state control and ties), strict church dis-



cipline with emphasis on separation from the world, exercise of the ban (excommunication) as a last resort of church discipline, promotion of acts of social welfare, refusal to swear an oath, refusal to bear arms (and do military service), and refusal to hold government office. It has traditionally considered itself "restitutionist"—that is, seeking to restore the original character of the New Testament church.

In contrast to the "radical reformation," historians sometimes refer to the "mainline" Protestant Reformation in Europe (Reformed, Lutheran) as the "magisterial," or "state-church" reformation. "Magisterial" is used to indicate that the course of this reformation proceeded under the supervision, guidance, and permission of the authority of the civic governments (city councils, princes). For Anabaptists and Mennonites, this constituted a half-reformation which never really forsook the "Constantinian synthesis" of church and empire (state) and the Augustinian idea that the true church was somehow invisible.

## Historical Review

### Main Groups within the Radical Reformation

An adequate account of the various strands of the Reformation in Europe must take into account (1) the character and diversity of late medieval Roman Catholicism; (2) the numerous church reform and intellectual currents leading up to the 16th century (e.g. Beguines, Waldensians, Wycliff, Hussites, mystics, Christian humanists like Erasmus); (3) economic realities (notably the rise of the merchant class and the plight of the peasant class); and (4) political dynamics (namely, the rise of nationalist interests seeking to shake off Roman or Spanish dominance). As indicated earlier, the word "radical reformation" and the slightly narrower term "Anabaptism" refer to a variety of groups in Dutch- and German-speaking areas of Europe who sought various changes in church doctrine and practice for which they were fiercely persecuted by both Roman Catholics and

Protestants (Reformed, Lutheran). What follows is a brief review of the main groups.

### *Within the Lutheran orbit, north-west Germany*

In the early 1520s of the Lutheran reformation, a number of associates of Luther became disenchanted with the direction and the pace of the reforms he instituted under the protection and supervision of the powerful German princes. Two notables among these were Andreas Carlstadt and Thomas Müntzer. Criticizing Luther on many points and calling him a compromiser, Carlstadt, also a theology professor in Wittenberg, began to propound many doctrines later shared by the "Anabaptists."<sup>2</sup> As a result of this, Carlstadt was forced to give up his professorship and to flee the area in 1524.

Much more radical was Thomas Müntzer, who became a Lutheran pastor at Luther's prodding, and who, in addition to some other new teachings, began to preach against infant baptism while favoring comprehensive social reforms and relief from the domination by the princes, a stand which

brought him into sharp conflict with Luther and the princes. Under the influence of the "Zwickau prophets," Müntzer developed a strong millenarian zeal, based on a vision of the imminent arrival of the kingdom of God.

In vain, the Zwickau prophets even went to Wittenberg in 1521 hoping to convince Luther to rely more on the Holy Spirit. Müntzer, learning of the incident, said he would not trust Luther even if he had swallowed a dozen Bibles, to which Luther retorted that he would not trust Müntzer even if he had swallowed the Holy Spirit, feathers and all.<sup>3</sup> Müntzer's message eventually drew a large following among the peasants who, in their economic distress, demanded the abolition of debilitating taxes and the structure of serfdom, the right to elect their own pastors, and the granting of land rights amid growing alienation of common, peasant lands through a new system of titling. Müntzer was soon preaching the necessity of taking up arms to fight against injustice and to usher in the



Kingdom of God. In response to armed uprisings against monasteries and castles, the well-armed German princes united, and with the encouragement of Luther, crushed the rebellion in a military showdown on May 15, 1525. Luther wryly remarked: "Thus, anyone who is killed on the side of the rulers may be a true martyr in the eyes of God... On the other hand, anyone who perishes on the peasant's side is an eternal firebrand of hell... These are strange times, when a prince can win heaven with bloodshed better than other men with prayer." As a result of this episode, known as the Peasants' Revolt of 1524-26, many common people lost respect for Luther. Later Luther was to lump all radical reformers in the same category of Müntzer as *Schwärmer*, meaning, "enthusiasts, extremists" driven by passion and without realism, a term that is still used negatively today by many Lutherans to describe the Anabaptists and their descendants. Mainstream Anabaptists, as we shall see, however, also disowned Müntzer and his movement.

### *The Swiss Brethren*

The "Swiss Brethren" refers to the movement spawned by the radical disciples of the Swiss reformer Zwingli, preacher in the main church of Zürich from 1519 to his death in 1531.<sup>4</sup> Zwingli was well aware of Luther and his reforms, but claimed that his reforming ideas were arrived at independently of Luther's. Coming to Zürich, he shocked the congregation by preaching from the Greek NT, working consecutively through the Gospels.

Resigning as a Roman Catholic priest in 1522, he was soon reinstated by the city council to his position as preacher, a momentous event signaling the beginning of the Swiss reformation and state church. Not only did this move signal a separation from Roman control, it also put into the hands of the civic authorities the right to name ministers. Zwingli's Bible studies led him to a more radical view of the Lord's Supper as a symbolic memorial than that of Luther. But in addition, he began to propound the idea of a pure

church of committed, disciplined believers, questioned various aspects of the Catholic practice of infant baptism, concluded that charging interest and requiring certain tithes (taxes) was unbiblical, among other things.

His teaching drew together a group of followers from the ranks of priests of surrounding villages and of others. These, in turn, began to preach in the surrounding countryside, and the ideas Zwingli inspired were met with considerable acceptance. However, when Zwingli halted the pace of church reforms to accommodate the civic magistrates, the young radicals broke away from him, thinking that the reform of the church could never wait for or depend on the views or actions of the civic magistrates. They proceeded to write letters to each of the main north German reformers—Luther, Carlstadt, and Müntzer—seeking clarification or support for their views, and to find allies in church reform. In the letter to Müntzer, they highlighted the necessity of placing oneself under the full

authority of the Scripture, in contrast either to excessive caution and forbearance Zwingli promoted or to the excessive spiritualism of Müntzer. And while they shared many of Müntzer proposals for social reform, they further cautioned him about resorting to physical violence to further the cause of justice or church reformation. At the same time, they clarified their position that baptism reflects the conscious commitment of the believer and is the sign of entrance of the believer into membership of the Christian congregation.

The break with Zwingli was sealed on January 21, 1525 at a prayer meeting to plot their strategy in response to the city council's demand that they discontinue their preaching under a threat of banishment. During this prayer meeting, one leader asked to be rebaptized by another, and in turn, all those present were rebaptized. Anabaptist-Mennonites consider this event to be the formal beginning of Anabaptism as a visible believers' church with emphases distinct from



both Roman Catholicism and emerging Protestantism. Soon these reformers became nicknamed as *Täufer* (baptizers) or *Wiedertäufer* (re-baptizers, thus "Anabaptists"), and imprisonment, fines, and torture immediately followed. The first death penalties were inflicted by governments of R/C cantons who executed them simply as Protestants, while the first death penalty at the hands of a Protestant was in Zürich in early 1527, on the civic charge of sedition for refusing to obey the government injunction not to [re-]baptize, by means of drowning.

While the Zürich radicals quickly found a large gathering of followers in the surrounding areas, they were sharply pressured by organized *Täuferjäger* or "baptizer hunters" and were constantly on the run. At a week-long secret meeting in the small village of Schleithem in 1527, they hammered out various points of consensus. The articles of the resulting *Schleitheim Confession* contrasted their position both from the "spiritual liberty" of fanaticism and from the con-

formists who remained in the state churches; clarified the meaning of church membership defined by baptism, the ban (discipline), and the Lord's Supper; highlighted separation from the world of darkness (immorality) and unbelief; provided for local church leadership; and clarified the relationship of the Christian to the state, rejecting the swearing of oaths and the bearing of arms. (It should be noted, however, that at least one of the leaders of this branch of Anabaptism, B. Hubmaier, differed from the *Schleitheim* consensus on the matters of bearing arms and of Christian involvement in civic government, while otherwise committed to the rest of the points. Hubmaier's pamphlet on the biblical basis of believers' baptism, published in 1525, became a classic and was the one to which the other reformers, including Calvin, Zwingli, and Luther, felt compelled to respond. He, too, was arrested and executed in 1528. After his death, the *Schwertler* [sword-bearing] faction of Anabaptism in that area faded away, in favor of the *Stäbler* ["staff-bearers"].

In general, the Swiss Brethren represented a sober biblicist, albeit quite radical, reformation or restitutionism, quite distinct from the spiritualist, the revolutionary millenarianism of the movement around Müntzer.

#### *Anabaptists in central and south Germany*

It is much harder, however, to characterize the Anabaptist movement in central and south Germany. They were quite varied, and Anabaptists in that area during the 1520's can be characterized as mystics, spiritualists, millenarians, and even communitarians. What they all experienced in common was pressure from both Catholic and Protestant authorities; many leaders were constantly on the run, and many Anabaptists became refugees to lands where there was some degree of tolerance, especially Moravia. Some groups were influenced by the Swiss Brethren, others by the millenarian Melchiorites; others more so by the Müntzer perspective.

Some of the leaders in this area, in fact, had been with Müntzer at the crushing defeat of the peasants in May 1525, but were among those who escaped. While many came to reject Müntzer's call to armed insurrection, following the massacre of thousands of peasants, his millenarian fervor which looked forward to the imminent establishment of the Kingdom by God's dramatic action and social radicalism were continued. Some leaders vigorously refused not only military service, but also the payment of war taxes.<sup>5</sup>

One Anabaptist group began to practice full community of goods, and they still survive to this day as the Hutterites, followers of Jacob Hutter, or Hutterian Mennonites, the longest lasting communitarian movement in Western society. A more moderate form of Anabaptism (non-communitarian, non-millenarian), however, emerged in Strassburg, a sort of safe haven for Anabaptists for a few decades, and developed close links with the Swiss Brethren. While tolerated and



protected by the main preacher of Strassburg, their views (especially those advanced by P. Marpeck, placed them into fierce conflict with M. Bucer, the main spokesman for the mainline reformation there.

*Netherlands and northwest Germany*

Contacts and travel along the Rhine River eventually caused the spread of Anabaptist ideas into the Netherlands and northwestern Germany. The form of Anabaptism that first emerged in these areas, however, was strongly millenarian. One of the leaders in this area, Melchior Hoffmann (thus his followers, called Melchiorites), an able evangelist who sent out many "apostles," was convinced that Strassburg was to be the New Jerusalem, and he was Elijah.

Although certain that his imprisonment in Strassburg in 1533 would help usher in the kingdom, he died in prison 10 years later. Unlike Müntzer, however, his millenarianism was pacifist—he saw no reason to take up arms with God. Some of his disciples, however,

upon his imprisonment, took up the cause with greater passion. The northwest German city of Münster was chosen as the place for the New Jerusalem in 1534 when many sympathetic followers whose hopes were aroused emerged there. The leaders began to institute community of goods and to preach the necessity of taking up arms against the wicked (the religious authorities and the rich); soon attacks against monasteries and properties of the wealthy resulted. All residents of the city were enjoined either to take up baptism and join the new movement or leave the city. The bishop of Münster, living outside the city, soon organized an army led by a union of German princes who then besieged the city. After the first leader, Jan Mattheijs, was killed, an even more radical one, Jan of Leiden, claiming to be the new King David emerged and ruled with an iron hand. Eventually the city fell in June 1535 and the rebel visionaries were massacred.

For many Mennonites, the Münster Rebellion, as historians call it, was one of the

darkest hours of Anabaptism. Eventually, the disorganized and disoriented remnants of more peaceful and non-millenarian Anabaptism were shepherded by the leadership of Menno Simons, a former Catholic priest in a small Dutch village, ordained by the bishop of Utrecht, who joined the movement in 1536. Forging strong links with the Swiss Brethren and the Anabaptists along the Rhine (e.g. Strassburg), the churches pastored by Menno Simons in the Netherlands and north Germany soon became known as the Mennists, or Mennonists, and eventually Mennonites. Here too, the Anabaptists were persecuted, resulting in migrations of Dutch Mennonites eastward into north Germany and eventually to the Vistula delta in Prussia around Danzig (modern Gdansk, Poland).

**Results**

By the late 1530's, Anabaptist streams willing to use armed insurrection disappeared—either wiped out or disillusioned—although vari-

ous degrees of millenarianism continued among some groups. Pacifist Mennonites, however, were also diminished in numbers, due to persecution. At least 10,000 were executed in the first 100 years or so, and many recanted under pressure. Popular modes of execution were burning at the stake, drowning (thought of as appropriate for "re-baptizers"), or beheading (the merciful method). Anabaptists were vigorously opposed by Luther, Calvin, and the Catholics. Why? The movement was seen as destabilizing for the social order, in which religion and civic identity/loyalty were assumed to be identical. Re-baptism and the refusal to baptize infants were thought to imply the refusal to be citizens under the authority of any state. Refusal to perform military service confirmed for the authorities the subversive character of the movement. The movement thus survived mostly in rural areas. A highlight was the publication of *Martyrs Mirror* in 1660, the Mennonite story of persecution by Protestants and Catholics. At the same time,



the movement experienced fragmentation due to both internal factors and external pressures.

Two main branches emerged. The first, the Dutch, north German, and Prussian groups, were driven eventually to Russia (Ukraine), and most of these then emigrated to North America from the 1860s to WWII. The second, the Swiss south German branches, also sought a place of greater freedom of religious expression, and began to emigrate as early as the late 1600's to North America, especially Pennsylvania, and founded in 1682 on Quaker principles of religious tolerance. By today, over one million people identify themselves as Mennonite. As a result of emigration and mission work, Mennonite churches can be found in sixty-one countries on six continents; now Asian, African, and Latin American Mennonites comprise the majority of Mennonites, becoming more numerous than the former European and North American majority.

### Distinctive Features and Themes of the "Anabaptist Vision"

The Anabaptist movement was by no means homogeneous. Nevertheless, there are common themes across a broad spectrum now "claimed" by Mennonite descendants of the movement. The Anabaptists also did not leave a towering academic systematic theologian, in the order of Calvin and Melancton, to give comprehensive theological specificity to the movement. Not only was there little opportunity for comfortable academic theology; it was also not their preferred method. Nevertheless, the writings that have survived display coherence on many themes, exhibiting marked differences both to Roman Catholicism and emerging mainline Protestantism. The following summary presents core features of Anabaptism highlighted by many contemporary Mennonites; it does not necessarily describe the actual beliefs of the average individual member.

### 1. Authority - *sola scriptura*

#### A. Roman Catholic

The Catholics had long rested on the twin authorities of Scripture and tradition, and saw them as mutually compatible. Indeed, they could claim unbroken historical continuity with the disciples and to have collected, preserved, and canonized the Scriptures. They saw tradition as the accumulated wisdom of the church's interpretation of Scripture through the ages. Nevertheless, it was easy by the time of the Reformation to make the charge that tradition, maintained by the councils and the pope, had in fact become the final authority, and was an implacable guide for the interpretation and application of the Bible. True interpretation was to be left to those with proper credentials, and so it was kept from the hands of the common people.

#### B. The Reformers

Luther's own experience with the Scripture and his debates with Catholic officials led finally to his rejection of the

authority of the pope and council and their "official interpretation" and replacing it with the sole authority of Scripture. Luther's claim of *sola scriptura* thundered across Europe. But practical questions soon arose about the meaning of Scripture as the sole authority:

First, is each text, each verse authoritative? By itself? Or is each book authoritative? Or the general trend of Scripture? Or the sum total of Scripture? And what about the Old Testament, the "pre-Christian" writings taken over as a body by the Church from Judaism? Was it equal in authority with the specifically Christian New Testament? Second, how much tradition should be discarded? Should Christians start "from scratch?" And who is the proper, competent interpreter? The "doctors of theology" at the universities (like Luther)? The Protestant ministers replacing the bishops and priests of the previous hierarchy? Each individual Christian? Third, in what realm is the Scripture authoritative? In and for the Church? What is its role in "Christian" society in general



and the "Christian" state in particular?<sup>6</sup>

C. Anabaptists

Anabaptists wholeheartedly endorsed the Scripture alone principle. Further distinctive features might also be noted:

First, letter and Spirit. Anabaptists claimed by later Mennonites affirmed the primacy of the written word over visionary, spiritual interpretation (e.g. Müntzer). At the same time, they highlighted the literal application of Scripture against attempts to soften the plain, hard meaning of the text (e.g. Sermon on the Mount). They thus rejected Luther's interpretation that you could love your enemy "in your heart" while continuing to oppose him violently.

Second, understanding, faith, and obedience. Anabaptists highlighted the issue of obedience to Scripture's demands: obey what you clearly understand and in obedience, more clarity will come.

Third, the interpreter: hermeneutics of community; hermeneutics of obedience. In

one sense, the Anabaptists sided with the Catholics in their recognition that the "Church" is the rightful interpreter of Scripture, as opposed to the individual (appealing to 1 Cor 14:26-33; 1 John 4:1; Mt 23:6-12). In contrast, the Protestant reformers often gave the final word to academically trained individuals. For Anabaptists, the gathered, discerning community seeking to obey Scripture was the place of proper interpretation (even as they promoted the study of original languages and scholarly findings).

Fourth, the canon. For Anabaptists, the "canon within the canon" was the life and teachings of Jesus (e.g. Sermon on the Mount), in contrast to Luther's understanding that the "gospel" of Scripture is to be identified as God's grace which justifies sinners by their faith. They felt no need to reduce the practical status of specific New Testament writings, as some reformers did with James and Revelation.

Fifth, Old Testament and New Testament. Anabaptists did, however, diminish the au-

thoritative value of the Old Testament, in contrast to the "flat" view of Scripture mostly held by the reformers, that is, that all Scripture is equally inspired and authoritative. The Anabaptists affirmed the primacy of the New Testament over the Old Testament. Later revelation supplements, corrects, and sometimes supersedes the former. All Scripture should be approached through Christ as norm of interpretation. Whatever in the Old Testament is in agreement with the New Testament is accepted; where there is conflict between the two, the New Testament takes priority.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Anabaptists refused to promote Law and Gospel as twin, complementary principles in Scripture. For them, there was but the one Gospel, which was both gracious and demanding.

2. The Church

Questions about the nature and meaning of the "true" church preoccupied Catholics and Protestants alike.

A. Roman Catholic

As the "one, holy, apostolic, catholic" church (the creeds), the Roman Catholic church saw itself as the representative on earth of Jesus Christ. Since salvation was in Christ alone, there was no salvation outside the church. Within the church, there was both salvation and assurance of this salvation, namely, via the sacraments as visible means of God's grace for all human needs. They were "really" God's grace; their effectiveness did not depend on the character or integrity of the minister (priest), or, for the most part, on the moral uprightness of the recipient. The "true church" then, was the same as the visible, experienced church that met regularly in each parish and received the sacraments.

B. Luther

Dissatisfied experientially with that framework, Luther discovered through Bible study that salvation comes by faith. For Luther saving faith comes through study—and thus the preaching—of the Word. But this justifying faith



was internal, and so, invisible. It is completely separate from anything that might look like "works of righteousness." The true church was therefore also invisible; the actual church which one met regularly in the gathered parish might be a mixture, among whom only God could recognize the true children. Nevertheless, when the Word was preached and the sacraments rightly administered in this gathered community, then the true church was present.

#### C. Calvin

For Calvin, in continuity with his emphasis on the absolute sovereignty of God, the true church consisted of all those whom God had elected (chosen) to be saved. Ultimately then, only God knows who these elect are and what are the boundaries of the true church. For Calvin, the true church is also invisible. Nevertheless, since humans do not know who is really part of the elect, we should treat all in society as if they were. Even the lives of those not of the elect should be "Christian" and thus

regulated by God's will, as they owe obedience to the sovereign God in any case. Because of this belief, a Christian state could tolerate no "heretics" such as the Anabaptists. Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and Calvinists alike, then, retained infant baptism, though for somewhat different reasons, as the mark of the Christian society, and maintained a similar functional view of the church. To reform the church meant to reform the whole society. And given the close church-state ties of that time, any substantial reform of the society had to have the cooperation of the state.

#### D. Anabaptists

Faced with opposition to reform and the expression of their beliefs from both the institutional church and the closely related state, Anabaptists came to the insight that the church consists of those who repent and commit themselves voluntarily and publicly to Christ and his church. That is, the true church, consisting of believers, is visible because its members

have made a public commitment, which includes openness to communal admonition and discipline. Further results of this position can be identified.

First, the believers' baptism. If baptism is the formal entry into the church, it should follow personal repentance and confession of faith and commitment to live a Christian life. It should thus not be coerced (by the state or any other body) nor performed on infants for whom personal profession is impossible.

Second, ethical standards. Since all members have made adult commitments to a reformed/reforming church, ethical standards can be expected of all of them.

Third, mutual admonition modeled on the "rule of Christ," the Anabaptist term for Mt 18:16-18, was therefore to be practiced, the ultimate sanction being expulsion, never death or punishment.

Fourth, since not all in society were committed to the church, mission to the "world" (one might say, newly discovered within European "Christian" society) was necessary,

consisting of a call to repentance and offer of forgiveness through faith, toward an act of (re-)baptism.

Fifth, community. Anabaptists thus also saw the church as a "distinct" community, which regulated its own life, with mutual responsibility in all areas, including the economic realm, and one which sought non-hierarchical and non-centrist polity.

### 3. Christian Ethics

Anabaptists rejected, on the one hand, the double standard perpetuated in the Roman Catholic church by priests and those in religious orders observing the "counsels of perfection." Ordinary Christians needing only to live by lower "precepts of Christ." On the other hand, they decried what they considered to be the moral laxity of mainstream reformers. It might be recalled that in the case of Luther, this was achieved also by a dualist ethic—one for a Christian as a private individual; another for the Christian's role in government or other social structures.



Anabaptists also decried the appeal to "natural law" and other principles to minimize the demands of discipleship. For Anabaptists, the essence of Christianity was defined as "following" or "imitating Jesus." One Anabaptist leader remarked that it was Zwingli who had taught him that "to be a Christian is not to talk about Christ, but to walk as he walked." Another popular Anabaptist dictum was that "no one can truly understand Christ without following after him in life."

Mennonite pacifism has been based both on its literal reading of Jesus' teachings as indicating the primary form of discipleship, and on its view of the church, whose "being" "signs" a new way of new relationships to the world, and which alone—in contrast to any "state" or political movement—can claim ultimate allegiance for any Christian. In recent years, Mennonite pacifism has both evolved or been discarded by some. Among those who are seeking greater relevance in society at large (including myself), the move has

been from the traditional Mennonite stance of "non-resistance" [which implies passivity and non-involvement] toward "peace and justice activism."

#### 4. Church and State; Church and Society

##### *Separation of church and state*

Separation from the state became impossible to avoid in practice, since the act of believers' baptism was considered seditious. But even in places where the state temporarily tolerated the Anabaptist church, the separation had to take place in principle. Anabaptists recognized the state as ordained of God to maintain order in the fallen world, but that since that involved the use of coercion and violence, the methods of the state were "outside the perfection of Christ" (Schleitheim).

Anabaptists have historically been more willing to name the demonic in the state/temporal realm than have the mainline reformers. For them, the un-Christian means of the

state were neither acceptable in the spiritual government of the church, nor for Christians occupying positions of "worldly" authority as magistrates; moreover the commitment of members to Christ took priority over the loyalty which the state demanded. Consequently, Acts 5:29 became a favorite text. Anabaptists dismissed the idea that an orderly state organized according to "Christian" law was a prerequisite for the church to do its work adequately. This has left a legacy of non-conformity and civil disobedience, including challenges against "nationalism" in the European and North American contexts.

Luther had recognized in principle that the state had no authority in the church; but in accordance with his "two-kingdom" doctrine, a Christian was responsible in both the realm of the church and in the realm of the state. Thus only in one's personal, private Christian life did one guide one's life by Jesus' ethical teachings (e.g. Sermon on the Mount); but in the spheres of government, business, or family, a different

set of norms might apply, based on scriptural or natural law.

It might be noted, parenthetically, that the modern notion of the "separation of church and state" emerged first from the tradition of non-conformist/free churches versus state churches, favoring a church based on voluntary adult membership and free of state control/ties (e.g. Baptists, Quakers, Mennonites, Congregationalists, etc.), and second, from the philosophy of "natural religion" or Deism, undergirding the French Revolution and the "founding fathers" of the United States, and which relegated religion to the private sphere, whereas the public sphere was to be guided by reason and natural law. The first perspective never seeks to bar the church from affecting the state or society; and invites the state simply to tolerate different faith positions. By contrast, the second perspective, in the name of "separation of church and state," decries the involvement of the church in "politics."



*Church and society*

Anabaptist Mennonites have often been pressed with the charge of irresponsibility or irrelevance, when it comes to relating to the rest of society and to constructing a social ethic. Indeed, their major fault is that, at various periods of history, they have been withdrawn and isolated from the rest of society, partly due to flight from extreme persecution, but then content to work out their own internal purity. Mennonites have often answered that when confronted with the alternative between being "effective" or "faithful," they would choose the latter.

Perhaps the question of the church's social responsibility can be framed in the following way. It is both (1) what the church "signs" to the rest of society through its "being" as a distinct, alternative community, and (2) what the church "does," either (a) being in solidarity with the needy (within and outside the church), or (b) helping to transform society or the state toward a more "Chris-

tian" reality more directly. Generally speaking, Mennonites have historically majored on items (1) and (2a), maintaining the notion that the church is the place where or the means through which God is especially at work. Emphasis on item (2b) is the special contribution of the Reformed tradition. In my opinion, today's situation around the world calls Anabaptist Mennonites and mainline Protestants to further dialogue on this matter, drawing on the best of our traditions.

A church that is really no different (in its structures and relationships) from the rest of society does not really have anything to offer it and is hardly in a position to truly transform it (thus the necessity of #1). On the other hand, a church that withdraws unto itself or that cannot see the horizon of God's work outside its walls, or that limits its Gospel work to the individual, private, and spiritual spheres, will have no relevant mission and reason for being (thus the necessity of #2b).

**Conclusion**

Relationships between the spiritual descendants of the mainline Reformation and the radical reformation in the past 500 years have not always been cordial, and have, in fact, often been strained. Positions in which believers entrenched themselves 500 years ago in Europe have continued to divide Christians, and have been exported to the rest of the world. As theologies and churches indigenize across the world, however, new opportu-

nities are before us. The challenge is to maintain both the zeal and passion of the reformation movement in its many forms, to learn from the strengths of our respective traditions, and to hold, at the same time, to the vision of Christian unity. It is the hope of this paper that we continually seek, in our many contexts, to realize the meaning of biblical Christianity in today's world, as we also gain strength to resist the powerful and insidious gods of consumerist culture.

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**ENDNOTES**

<sup>1</sup> This article on the "Radical Reformation" was part of the Divinity School lecture series commemorating 50 years of the UCCP and 100 years of Protestantism in the Philippines.

<sup>2</sup> The term "Anabaptists" was the nickname others used to describe movements within the "radical reformation." Historically, the label Mennonites became the accepted designation for one wing of the Anabaptist movement, and later used to designate most of the surviving groups.



<sup>3</sup> Examples of the doctrines Carlstadt propounded which were later shared by Anabaptists were emphasis on following Jesus in life, rejection of oaths, rejection of Luther's sacramental interpretation of the Lord's Supper, and removal of hierarchical distinctions in the church including that of the use of the title "doctor" for theology professors. Nevertheless, Carlstad himself cannot be considered an Anabaptist.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. For the importance of the "divine voice"/spirit inspiration in most millenarian/nativistic movements, including those of the Philippines; see R. Iletto, *Pasyon and Revolution*. Luther's and Zwingli's negative views on the book of Revelation are largely related to the kinds of movements they thought that it inspired.

<sup>5</sup> Following Zwingli, the main leader of the Swiss reformation was John Calvin in Geneva, beginning in 1536.

<sup>6</sup> Among other reasons, to raise money to fight the [Muslim] Turks; one Anabaptist indeed considered the Turks as God's instrument to destroy the wicked ruling powers in Europe!

<sup>7</sup> For instance, on the issue of making changes in actual practice in the Church, such as the mass, Zwingli, when pressed, replied that actual reform would be decided by the city council since that was an "external" matter; the Church, on the basis of Scripture alone, decided on the "internal" [theological] meaning of the mass. Anabaptists supposed that in general the mainline Reformers hedged the authority of Scripture by limiting its role to doctrine, its interpretation to competent bodies or persons, and its practical implementation to the magistrates.

<sup>8</sup> Anabaptists therefore took issue, for instance, with Müntzer's [and the Münsterites'] appeal to the Old Testament to justify revolutionary violence, with Zwingli's appeal to the Old Testament to defend infant baptism by reference to the covenant of circumcision, and with Luther's many appeals to the Old Testament, including his encouragement that Henry VIII of England resort to polygamy to solve his marital and political succession problems.

## TWO THEOLOGICAL STREAMS, ONE CANON: INTO THE 4<sup>TH</sup> MILLENNIUM<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper is a contrastive meditation on the two theological streams in the Bible, namely, the Salvation-History Stream or the Prophetic world view and the Sagacic Search for Wisdom Stream or Creation Theology. In seeking to clarify the distinction as well as the complementarity between these two streams, this paper also aims to nullify the pervasive perception that the Salvation-History Stream is a more superior source of Biblical authority than Creation Theology. More importantly, this paper seeks to highlight the canonical imbalance in theological studies and Biblical Modeling which tends to leave out Creation Theology altogether. To correct this imbalance, this paper suggests giving the two streams equal attention for together they give us the foundation for our faith and its practice. The bones of Salvation-History take on the flesh of Creation-Theology. This meditation ends with the hope that the third wave of Protestant Christians in the 4th Millennium of the Biblical faith will evangelize with the Whole Bible (complete canon), with the holistic impact that they can make on the totality of the Filipino world toward making it a cosmos of wholeness.*

In the familiar words of Isaiah of Babylon we hear an invitation to a wonderful banquet.

*Isaiah 55:1 Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without*

*price. 2 Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. 3 Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. 4 See, I made him a wit-*



ness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. 5 See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

### *The Salvation-History Stream*

These words come from what might be called the majority view in the Biblical canon. Most of our Scripture is written from the Prophetic world view and its way of describing the relationships of God and world and humankind. The majority of Christian theologizing and preaching comes from this theological stream of the Bible. It works with a schema that emphasizes the juxtaposition of Sin and Salvation. The prophets described the relation of God and God's people as that comparable to a well-known covenant style of relating known as Suzerainty Covenant. This is the way they pictured God at work in the world. In this analogy, God called (chose) a people from slavery (Israel) or from otherness (Abraham), and God made a covenant with them (labeling them My People) to do God's will and accom-

plish God's purpose in the world.

Familiar relational events take place within this covenant bond, such as Forgiveness and Reconciliation as experienced in faith upon confession of guilt when the covenant is broken. One familiar application of this approach is in the Deuteronomic Preaching and the history of Israel associated with that (DtcH), which is an application of the Yahwist's-Elohist's covenant account. This theological stream is sometimes referred to as the Salvation-History approach (others use terms such as trajectory or even world-view instead of approach). It is one major trajectory of the Scriptures. It has dominated the interpretation of scripture since the Reformation, when the theme sola scriptura was emphasized, and it has shaped much of our understanding of what the "Bible says." In a very real sense, this Salvation-History material has been for many Christians their real canon within the broader canon of the Scriptures. For them, real Biblical authority

rests with this theological interpretation of the Bible.

### *The Sagacic Search for Wisdom (Life) Stream*

A second, but not so well recognized, schema is also found in Scripture. It can be called Creation Theology. It is often presented in terms of a search for wisdom. The ordering of the universe (out of Chaos, according to Genesis 1) can be searched out so that it divulges the things we need to know in order to fit our lives into it harmoniously. It develops the revelation that humankind is created in the image (form?) of God and that humankind is entrusted by God with responsibility to maintain and discipline the "world" as God's representative.<sup>1</sup> Here is a contrast to the Prophetic stream. Here is complementary material that can also be very helpful in presenting our faith-understanding. It is a formulation of our Christian world-view that must not be overlooked.

This theological stream also depicts an invitation to a wonderful banquet.

*Proverbs 9: 1 Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn her seven pillars. 2 She has slaughtered her animals, she has mixed her wine, she has also set her table. 3 She has sent out her servant-girls, she calls from the highest places in the town, 4 "You that are simple, turn in here!" To those without sense she says, 5 "Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. 6 Lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight."<sup>2</sup>*

Here is the invitation to banqueting in its original form. Wisdom invites us to her well laid feast. God intends that we live according to Wisdom. We are invited to this way, which is the way to Shalom, Wholeness, and Life, or as she says here, the way to sense, maturity, and insight. The feast invitation is, as it always is with God, an imperative. The tone of Creation Theology is that of invitation. Wisdom says, "Try me out. Choose the way of Wisdom." Of course if one chooses not to follow wisdom, if one rejects the feast, then that means one chooses the way of death. There are only two ways.



One is challenged by the sages to learn to live. Your learning is aided by training your powers of observation so that you can see what God has implanted in the ordering of the world for you to learn and know. You can receive instruction in the way of wisdom. You can shape yourself into the kind of personhood that does things right, that is successful. It is a matter of right choices.

Life is like a series of one discovery after another leading you on to a successful completion. Your attitude of receptivity to learning and openness to instruction, called humility, is all-important in this quest. But God has made this ordering good and well disposed toward such efforts. In fact, as one really gets into the way of wisdom one will discover that Wisdom is really searching us out and calling to us to give encouragements and directions all along the way.

Since the prophetic approach seems so much more authoritative and definitive, can it be that the way of Wisdom is equal to it in authority? Is Creation Theology as

clearly God ordained as is Salvation-History Theology? There is the answer that "it is in the Bible," therefore it is authoritative, just as the Salvation History Theology is authoritative. Somehow, in our situation, that answer does not seem to have much strength. Yet, that is what I will claim. We believe the Bible is the Word of God in truth, and that in some mysterious way it is a unity greater than the sum of its parts.

The Sages claim authority equal to that of either prophet or priest. The Wise Person claims that when s/he speaks forth "Try my way," it is as authoritative as when the Priest quotes the Law or as when the Prophet cries out "Thus says the LORD!" The sage only says, "Try my advice" and "Just see if it doesn't work." A later sage says, "He who has ears to hear, let them hear!" (Matt. 11:15, 13:9, 43) This is the imperative of invitation. My claim is that the Biblical Sage learns to assert equal authority alongside that of the prophet and priest.

I have already mentioned the Banquet and the imperative of invitation. Add to this the opening words of many pieces of advice, "My child, ..." In a culture that venerates parents and elders, this is a weighty opening. But most weighty in this argument is the fact that the invitation to the banquet is an invitation to LIFE. The sages understand themselves as dealing with matters of life and death importance. Says Lady Wisdom in Proverbs "For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the LORD; but those who miss me injure themselves; all who hate me love death."<sup>3</sup>

It can also be claimed that Sages understand themselves as brokers of revelation (as revelation is understood in the prophetic trajectory) to the fabric of society. The sages speak to humankind as humankind, not to any special people. Yet, would you challenge the authority of the sage when the sage claims the following?

*My child, if you accept my words and treasure up my commandments within you,*

*then you will... find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding;... preserving the way of his faithful ones. It will save you from the way of evil, from those who speak perversely, You will be saved... For the upright will abide in the land, and the innocent will remain in it; but the wicked will be cut off from the land, and the treacherous will be rooted out of it.<sup>4</sup>*

Could you lightly put aside one who makes the following claim?

*Does not wisdom call, and does not understanding raise her voice? On the heights, beside the way, at the crossroads she takes her stand; beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portals she cries out... for my mouth will utter truth;... All the words of my mouth are righteous; ...The LORD {acquired} me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. ...And now, my children, listen to me:... For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the LORD; but those who miss me injure themselves; all who hate me love death.<sup>5</sup>*

Now we can see that in Isaiah 55 we are hearing a prophet in Sage's clothing. This gentle invitation, which seems so placid on the prophet's tongue has much more impact when



we realize that Isaiah is using a wisdom approach as a reinforcing call to take his message seriously. Heeding this call will give you the right result. The result will issue in keeping justice and righteousness unto salvation, as it is described in Isaiah 56, which is a fitting view of LIFE as the wise person would describe it. Unfortunately this powerful figure of speech is not recognized if we fail to understand the part that the Sage plays in Israel's presentation of God's word.

The sages deal in what seem to be mundane matters, but as they so carefully point out, these actually are matters of life and death. They either enhance life or detract from it. And the Lord has ordered life for good. The Biblical stream that emphasizes the history of salvation has seen God at work in deliverance, in salvation. The wisdom stream that sees God's creative work understands it as a continuing process and emphasizes that fitting one's life into God's ordering is the way to life. Fitting one's self and one's actions into the ordering is part of mankind's

role in co-creatorship. The story-of-salvation stream proclaims that "God will bring it to pass," while the God-in-ordering stream says "take my course and it will work out fittingly for life."

One more time we must take note of the fact that Hebrew thought does not make a big distinction between secular and sacred, profane and holy, in the way that the modern, scientific mind tends to do. It is interesting to watch the development of Biblical faith and religion, as well as we can determine it, from this vantage point. Apparently the sages took an increasingly active role in the theological/religious leadership when we compare the earliest times to the latest, that is, the most recent, times. As the prophetic fire appears to wane, the sages come more and more to the forefront. The sages are given credit for the final shaping of the Old Testament as we have it today. I make this note in response to the many people and commentators that find it important to say that Wisdom just deals with "practical, or prudential,

matters" with an eye to "success" in life. The Hebrew sage would be totally incredulous to hear that these descriptions make of wisdom something inferior to something that is "more religious" or "more a matter of faith." If God is creator and our instruction is divine, how can there be distinction of worldly and spiritual, sacred and profane this way? One is reminded of Jeremiah's shot at King Jehoiakim — "Did not your father eat and drink? He did what was right and just...Because he dispensed justice to the weak and the poor, it went well with him. Is this not true knowledge of me? says the LORD."<sup>6</sup>

*The Scriptures: Canon, Authority, God's Word*

These two theological paradigms are used in Scripture to describe our world and our relation to it. Together these depict who we are, where we are, and how we are in relation to God and God's intent. For three millennia they have served and inspired humankind in this capacity for those

who receive them as such in faith. My suggestion in this paper is that they will reach likewise into the 4th Millennium.

But for Scripture to be rightly effective in the fourth millennium of its existence, it is incumbent upon the church to reach a better balance in presenting and theologizing on the basis of these two helpful models. The Salvation-History cannot be the solo voice without its complementary counterpart in Creation Theology.

Since this paper is dealing with Protestant witness, it might be appropriate to note that the extent of the canon was an issue in the heat of the reformation battle. The reformers sought a buffer against abuses that had grown up in the church and had become acceptable in its tradition. The Scripture, they said, is the ultimate source of Truth. Through Scripture we receive the revelation of the will of God, which is known through understanding the world and the word. The scientific revolution and the Enlightenment, so called, played their part in



creating the atmosphere of that context. The later Scholastics would take up a theme that they called "Natural Theology" which they found insufficient for salvation. That is not what we are referring to as Creation Theology, and I hope we do not confuse these two.

For the reformers, the cry *Sola Scriptura* had to do with the Bible's place in the Theologizing-Faithing enterprise as over against tradition of the institutionalized church and any other revelation appealed to in what would become known as Natural Theology. If there were no Bible, there could and would have been no adequate protest. And, of course, there would be no going into the fourth millennium. But the very important consideration we have before us now, despite the fact that we have no unanimity on how to describe its authority and regardless of how that matter is settled, we must have the Bible with its entire witness available and in proper perspective. We must rightly interpret the word of truth.<sup>7</sup>

But presently we have a canonical imbalance in theological studies and Biblical Modeling. Biblical theologians admit this, either directly or indirectly, on numerous occasions. Wisdom theology, the source of creation theology, is openly left out of consideration even by some of the best scholars. To this day, no current effort at Biblical Theology or New Testament Theology or Old Testament Theology has adequately dealt with the study. In most cases, they have not raised the subject. In many, they simply express their embarrassment, if they do mention the Wisdom Literature.<sup>8</sup> George Wright simply says in his "Biblical Theology" that "in any outline of Biblical Theology, the proper place to treat the wisdom literature is something of a problem."<sup>9</sup> Wright ignores the problem he raises, and so, unfortunately, does most of the church.

Correcting the imbalance could have salutary affect on the impact the church has on society, and it would significantly alter seminary training for pastors. The Philippine

scene has suffered along with the rest of the world in this respect. Filipino theologians can be independent in their choices and emphases - indeed, they are called to be so by the contextualizing principles we teach and practice, but where is our initiative? We allow ourselves to suffer an inadequate Biblical Theology to work within our theologizing and faithing enterprise. What would happen if we corrected our emphases along lines I have so far suggested?

There are some aspects of Wisdom teaching that can immediately be put forward to illustrate the impoverishment that Biblical Theology and therefore Church Theology experiences presently, the first of which is its universality in outlook. The prophets specialized in bringing out the uniqueness of Israel's faith. The wise persons specialize in using thought forms and terminology and linguistic expression that were accessible and understandable to all people. They address themselves to humankind. They could even openly accept truths stated "outside of Israel"

and fit them into their world picture. These people interpret their faith-understanding in such a way that wise people of other faith outlooks could understand them. With truth as the standard, these Hebrew Wise persons could take from other faiths and cultures, "baptize that expression" and then make it uniquely their own.<sup>10</sup> They used a common stock of ideas and concerns to their advantage. They could speak with peoples outside their own culture readily. They were missionaries in practice.

Notice the comparison for the Patron of Wisdom, Solomon: "all the people of the East, and all the wisdom of Egypt" (1 Kings 4:29-34). In this passage the individuals named, Ethan, Heman, Calcol, and Darda are to be identified as Canaanite names of wise poets or singers.<sup>11</sup> There are collections of proverbs from outside Israel in the book of Proverbs, including those of "Agur the son of Jakeh of Massa" and "Lemuel the king of Massa" (proverbs 30 and 31). And then there is the celebrated case of quoting, with



significant variations, from the Egyptian literature called Amen-Em-Opet in Proverbs 22 and 23. Here the *New American Bible* translation boldly translates the text of 22:19 "That your trust may be in the LORD, I make known to you the words of Amen-em-ope." In this section the writer of Proverbs uses the "Thirty Houses" of Amen-em-ope to construct his own collection of Thirty. These are just samples of Hebrew Wisdom's proximity to other people's Wisdom.

In the common Wisdom enterprise there was a search for the World Ordering. The Wise Person's quest was for self-understanding. This understanding is in terms of the relationships of the wise with things, persons, and deity.<sup>12</sup> The relationships with persons include relationships with the institutions, both societal and religious, surrounding the person. According to Padua, "such a quest was founded upon the belief of the wise person that there existed an all embracing 'order' to the compartments of reality, whether he called this *Ma'at*,

*Tsedaqah*, or the system of *mes*, an order often bearing the connotations of truth, orderliness, and even justice."<sup>13</sup>

Egyptian wisdom literature deals mainly with the concept of *ma'at*, which is the divinely established order. Humankind is expected to integrate themselves into this order in every feasible situation if they desire to succeed in life. Those who have had some experience and have been careful to observe the processes to which they have been exposed in the world have been able by such observation to establish certain "rules" which they have handed on to those following them in this world. Without such help, the world is marked by confusion and by options of indeterminable outcome. With these rules for steering, their lives can be guided into productive and happy paths of meaningful, life-producing endeavors.

Like *ma'at*, the "Ordering of Righteousness" of the Israelite sage lent itself to a reduction into rules of life. It is important not to lock this ordering into the framework of a

modern philosophical system as if the Hebrew sages operated like Greek philosophers. They certainly did not. But it is true that the Hebrew sage assumed that a stable ordering was initiated by the creator in a way similar to that of the Egyptian sage. The rules based on such ordering were outlined and assumed in the maxims they developed. The fool was not one that lacked intelligence or intellectual ability, but rather one who acted contrary to righteousness, as righteousness can be described and understood, as well as judged on the basis of the sages' rules of ordering. The wise person was righteous, that is, s/he conformed to the righteous ordering by fitting her/his actions and attitudes according to the rules which they knew.

A primary attitude necessary was that of humility. One had to be humble to receive instruction in the rules from those who were in a position to give such information, that is, the sage: Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall (16:18). Only in this spirit

could one benefit from correction and become wise: A rebuke goes deeper into a man of understanding than a hundred blows into a fool (17:10).

The wise person in Israel believed that there was a beneficent quality to the spheres of order. As the wise person both creates order and brings her/his life into harmony with the established order, s/he is confident that the ordering is good. S/He believes that there is a design or purpose which orders reality in such a way as to reward virtue and to punish vice. This is why s/he constantly pushed past the ritual act, when s/he spoke about practicing the cultus, and sought out the inner motivation for doing it.<sup>14</sup> (cf. Prov. 3:9-10). The character of the practitioner was stressed (15:8). It is this good order which one must fit in with.

Within the system of righteousness there was the central law around which the other rules clustered, the law of retribution, as it has been called. Priest and prophet also accepted this concept and often remarked about it, but



sages made it their supreme point of reference. Even when serious challenges were asserted against the mechanistic form of this theory, as they were in Job and Ecclesiastes in particular, these challenges were projected on the same premises as those utilized by theologians writing from within the more conventional sphere, that is, those who accepted retribution absolutely.

Retribution is often misunderstood as a separate action of God in response to an action on the part of humankind. But, as part of the scheme of righteousness, it is more like the last ripple in the outermost ring that comes from dropping a stone into a pool of water.<sup>15</sup> In other words, retribution is part and parcel of the original action and its effects. It is a part of the ordering. An action can be called a destiny-producing deed. Retribution is a great instructor, for it is important for the sage to note the result that is inexorably brought by particular actions or attitudes.

Each component of life is well ordered, and these components are together ordered

into a grand whole that makes sense and that makes meaningful life possible. It is true that the wise can make analogies and comparisons between elements of the various components in seeking to define the ordering of life. It was not by accident that the basic form of the literature created by this stream of theologians is the bilinear *mashal*. The root of this Hebrew word is best taken as "comparison" or "likeness."<sup>16</sup> Comparisons could be made in their simplest and most direct manner in this form. These were the result of long and concentrated working over of ideas based on observations. These facts were trustworthy bases on which to steer one's life.<sup>17</sup> The Hebrew title of the book of Proverbs is "Solomon's *Mashals*."

Sayings that were developed by comparing various situations could be applied later to yet other situations that appeared to be similar (1 Sam. 10:12). These sayings might represent a conclusion that was drawn from observing many comparable situations (1 Sam. 24:13, Ezek. 16:44). Always,

these comparisons were to be taken with great seriousness as valuable aids in deriving meaning for life. By observing life's ordering through comparisons from within and among the different compartments of ordering, and assuming that creation was "permeated by an all-embracing cosmic order, *tsedaqah*, which served as the cohesive force holding together the various components of created order in a well integrated, harmonious whole," the wise person sought to perceive their interrelated unity to "deduce from them the divine norms which governed their harmonious functioning within the order of the cosmos."<sup>18</sup> Since this order was not cold and amoral, it could also be perceived in terms of "justice."<sup>19</sup> It was God who had created it so, and therefore retribution showed the ordering as tilted positively toward beneficence. The Hebrew sage believed that Yahweh made all this true and consistently observable.

Working with these assumptions and with this methodology, the wise persons of Israel reflected on society

and the norms for its institutions. But searching out ordering could be done only on the basis of the accumulation of a vast amount of factual observations. Evidence could be ambivalent and open to widely differing interpretation. The task could be overwhelming. One simply need reflect on the twentieth century knowledge explosion and the growing dependence on computers for storing information in the hopes that some meaningful patterns will evidence themselves to wise people of modern science. It is no wonder then the biblical sage emphasized the accumulation of age and experience and exposure through travel so that one might gain wisdom and understanding.

Another typical emphasis of Wisdom is on the power of the word. (Cf. Genesis 1 and Isaiah 55.) The Yahwist Sage must take seriously the art of powerfully encapsulating truth. Speech and its rightful practice is often the subject of maxims about having a ready and timely word (the tongue can literally hurt



or heal). Thus, his observations must be well-phrased, and what are otherwise thought of as literary embellishments or ornamentation are not merely that but they are enforcements of truth so that the instruction contained might make its proper intellectual and psychological (spiritual) impact. Thus we find wise people piling up similar sayings and listings.

Not only does the wisdom approach break us out of the limitations of particularistic misunderstandings – such as those stemming from ethnicism, or exclusivist nationalism, or fanatic (sometimes referred to as fundamentalist) religionism – it also provides an assertively positive outlook on the world and culture and life itself. After all, wisdom assumes that the ordering is oriented in a beneficent manner to humankind so that it can be referred to as just, righteous.

The results of this outlook are palpable in Hebrew wisdom thinking. The sage seeks a shalom that is available, attainable, here and now. So

wise people gear toward long life, full life, with friendship and the respect of others. They anticipate life within a righteousness marked by health, honor, enough wealth for comfort and to avoid lack, and posterity to carry on their name. One simply needs to make the community work as it is designed. Within this community of humankind the truth/faith can take on its proper meaning and come to its proper expression.

Therefore, the sages looked upon culture with a positive attitude. Culture and cultus are mutually formative. What is shaped but hidden in one is brought out and expressed in the other. The community was designed to bring the cultus into proper expression in its ordering through its corporate life and in the lives of its individuals. That forms the purpose of wisdom's instructions. The sages spoke to "those gray areas in life," where the law is not explicit and where the prophets had not pronounced oracles.<sup>20</sup>

The Hebrew concept of the corporate personality

ensures that the sage instructed an individual who would not have thought of her/himself as able to enjoy shalom in a vacuum. The sage, therefore, encourages action and a lifestyle that induce "justice for all." Anything that is unjust is subhuman, bestial. Life is lived in community. Full life is the goal of the search for wisdom.<sup>21</sup> That which is wise is that which is life-producing and life-enhancing. That which is life-producing is right, wise. That which is death producing is wrong, foolish. The opposite of life, death, is thought of as anything that is lacking full life. The bonds of death are concretely pictured as reaching up from the grave and pulling one down into the grave. Any tugging down of death is therefore already a participation, to that degree, in death. That which is death-producing to another is murder-involving. To be involved with something life-inhibiting to another is to be involved with murder.

Canonical Proverbs contributes to Wisdom's Model for theological leadership in the most basic way. Its

Hebrew title indicates its stance: "The Comparisons of Solomon." Life is a series of choices. One is responsible to make the right choices with the help of the steering of the wisdom in Proverbs.

As purporting to give steering for life, Proverbs teaches that acquiring wisdom is a process, one that requires focus, industriousness, discipline, and perseverance. Persons are held responsible for shaping themselves into the proper "Form"<sup>22</sup> as they take responsibility for co-creatorship with God. Much space is given to describing this "image" in both negative and positive comparisons. Various motivations are provided for thus responsibly shaping oneself into the proper human form while insisting that the person realize that this is a life-long process and that the person does have creaturely limitations. This human imaging is done within the community of humankind and always has that community as a point of reference. Primary to acquisition of wisdom is possessing the proper humility. Within



these parameters, it is correct to say that the focus of Wisdom is the individual. S/he is to shape her/his humanity in order to fit in correctly with the ordering and to manage her/his sphere harmoniously.

The shape of the human form can be described by piling up the desirable characteristics promoted in Proverbs. These would include: integrity, justice, kindness, self-discipline, constancy, thoughtfulness, sensitivity, diligence, morality, correctability, honesty, correct speech, humility, generosity, love, character (uprightness), good company, virtue, decorum, high motivation, direction, alertness, and all good things.<sup>23</sup>

Since the individual is seen as a being within community, much is implied in Proverbs about the primacy of human relationships. Life in its fullness can be described as healthy community life.<sup>24</sup> In the ordering of creation the primary value is placed on the ordering of human relationships into a harmonious unity of community. This harmonious ordering gives the content

to shalom: "to be free, happy, responsible, in communication, at ease, having all needs met so that existence becomes celebration."<sup>25</sup>

Qoheleth, by which I mean both the book of Ecclesiastes and the writer's stance, makes significant contributions to our search for wisdom. Qoheleth, by its very nature, forces the seeker to be humble. Human limitations are emphasized almost to the point of cynicism. But if a person properly recognizes her/his limitations, then accepting one's "portion" from the ordering and finding joy in it (and this could well be much joy) is the secret to the quest. The reason for the perceived "pessimism" of Qoheleth is that s/he is giving counsel to young people considering joining the incipient Maccabean revolution, and those young people want assured results from formal wisdom before they make their decision. Qoheleth reluctantly and guardedly does advise them by laying out their options along with the possible — not assured — results, constantly reminding them to find the joy in their "portion."

As such, Qoheleth attacks those who seek to master life rather than to live with its mystery. S/he rebels against a reading of the Comparisons (Proverbs) which would give one absolutely "assured results" or the "key to life." Life remains a quest.

In much the same way, Job (The Book and the author), quarrels with the blasé optimism of the Comparisons. The friends of Job represent a dead orthodoxy that has turned religious faith into a formula for success and, by the same token, a tool for judgment, and they have done so in a very religious manner. But Job teaches that the righteous ordering principle cannot be utilized in such a way as to condemn sufferers for having lived unrighteously (unwisely or out of harmony with the ordering). Job personally is an example of one who suffers "unjustly."

Because of his integrity, Job suffers successfully (meaningfully), and God ultimately exonerates him. Job's suffering, though "unjust," does lead him to a deeper experience of God than he had

ever had before. The wise sufferer knows how to suffer constructively even if it is tragically. The suffering wise people become wiser and are confirmed in their integrity. Every experience is after all a learning experience.

Job's defense of his integrity (righteousness) is based on his treatment of other people with justice (chapters 29-31 especially). The description of this proper treatment of others, particularly the vulnerable ones in society, is a further lesson in the ideal shape (form) of human personality. As in Matthew 25, one is judged on the basis of how he has treated his fellow human beings, particularly those who are weak.

For those who constantly feel the drive to do something about the present oppressive situation, there is a description of humanity and how to be human that invites one to fulfill all of its invitational obligations. What is the way of Wisdom? It is the way to true humanity. It is the way to life. It is the way to the proper self-formation. It is the way of properly maintaining



the created ordering. Here is a Biblically approved way of taking action. It is a mystery to me why this mother lode for activist theology goes unmined.

As Protestant Christians moving into the third millennium in the Philippines—and into the second century as Protestants, and into the second half century of witness in the Philippines as the UCCP—we are invited to two banquets that have a wonderful unity. We have in the Scripture the Banquet of the Prophets and the Banquet of the Sages. Much of the food is shared by both banquets, but they are not mere duplicates of each other. In fact, neither is complete without the other. The spices as well as some of the basic dishes are unique to each. We need to thoroughly enjoy each and both.

Many specific teachings from Creation Theology are not taught elsewhere in Scripture, these teachings are assumed as already understood and acted on. Many of the teachings brought by the Creation Theology stream, though

also taught within the Salvation-History Theology stream, are taught in Creation Theology with unique force and nuancing. The whole of Scripture is greater than the sum of its parts. Together the two streams give us the foundation for our faith and its practice. The bones of Salvation-History Theology take on the flesh of Creation-Theology.

I have heard that the first Protestant missionaries came with their Bibles, but the later Protestant missionaries came with their cameras. If the first wave of Protestant Christian missionaries came to the Philippines with their Bibles (their Salvation History Canon Bibles), and the second wave came with their cameras (for anthropological studies and with their evangelical objectivity/openness), then let us hope that the third wave of Protestant Christians in the 4th Millennium of the Biblical faith will evangelize with the Whole Bible (complete canon), with the holistic impact that they can make on the totality of the Filipino world toward making it a cosmos of wholeness.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>A form of this lecture has also appeared in *Theology and Church* (Vol. 25, No. 1), December, 1999. Tainan, Taiwan: Tainan Theological Seminary Press. Permission granted by the author.

<sup>2</sup>This idea is most clearly described in the two creation accounts of Genesis chapters one and two.

<sup>3</sup>Proverbs 9:1-8.

<sup>4</sup>Proverbs 8:35-38. Does it change the impact if we understand Jesus as speaking like a sage in telling his parable of the Great Banquet?

<sup>5</sup>Proverbs 2:1-22

<sup>6</sup>Proverbs 8:1-9:11

<sup>7</sup>Jeremiah 22:13-16 (NAB).

<sup>8</sup>2 Timothy 2:15.

<sup>9</sup>George E. Wright, *God Who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital* (London: SCM Press, 1952). Ronald E. Clements, "The Problem of Old Testament Theology," *London quarterly and Holborn Review*, n.n. (January, 1965), p. 11.

<sup>10</sup>Wright, p. 115; cf. Also pp. 103-104.

<sup>11</sup>J. Coart Rylaarsdam, *Revelation in Jewish Wisdom Literature* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1946), pp. 18f.

<sup>12</sup>W.F. Albright, "Archeology and the Religion of Israel," *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, eds. M. Noth and D.W. Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 1955), p. 13, n.2.

<sup>13</sup>J.L. Crenshaw, "Method in Determining Wisdom Influence on 'Historical' Literature," *Journal of biblical Literature*, 88 (1969), pp. 130-132.

<sup>14</sup>Leo G. Padua, *Wisdom and Cult*, SBLDS 30 (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1977), p. 11.

<sup>15</sup>Crenshaw, "Prolegomenon," *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom*, pp. 23ff.

<sup>16</sup>This analogy is taken from G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, I, p. 385.

<sup>17</sup>A.R. Johnson, "Mashal," *Vetus Testamentum Supplementum III*, pp. 162ff.

<sup>18</sup>Proverbs 1:3 "That one may receive steering in wise conduct ..." is a good translation. Cf. R. Coughenour, *A Thread of Wisdom*, unpublished manuscript, p. 59.

<sup>19</sup>Perdue, p. 135.

<sup>20</sup>It is in this light that we must understand the magnificent description of Jesus in Colossians 1:17.

<sup>21</sup>R.E. Murphy, *Introduction to the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical press, 1965), p. 38.

<sup>22</sup>Proverbs 8:35, cf. 3:18,22.

<sup>23</sup>I use the word in the sense that the divinity School has (even is) a Forma-



tion Program.

<sup>24</sup> Paul sums up this idea by pointing to Jesus as the Wisdom of God in 1 Corinthians 1:24.

<sup>25</sup> Walter Brueggemann, "Scripture and an Ecumenical Life-Style," *Interpretation* XXIV/1 (January, 1970), p. 9.

<sup>26</sup> Brueggemann, p. 12.

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