

Current Trends In Theology: Bold Realism Or Visionary Hope In The 80's?

“Without a Vision, the people perish”
— *Ancient Proverb*

In this paper I wish to focus attention on the following three interrelated issues: (1) the question of current trends in theological education relative to the tasks of ministry in the world, (2) a brief look at two models or scenarios of the Church and the theological problems they raise as Christians struggle with what it means to be *faithful* in our time, and (3) the crucial relevance of some type of “normative road-map” for the survival and transformation of the Church as it engages future society.

The task of understanding the complexity of theological education in the final quarter of the 20th century is typified by bold realism and visionary hope. It is typified by diversity and uniformity, by institutional revision and the search for viable traditional roots as diehard administrators, faculties, and boards of control attempt to map out strategies for survival of the churches that seek to be true to the gospel.¹ From a socio-historical perspective, the growth and decline pattern of mainstream churches over the last decade seems to signify both “good news” and “bad news.” In the former sense, social practitioners and researchers observed that conservative protestant churches, in varying

¹Frederick Herzog, “Theological Education and Liberation Theology,” in *Theological Education* (Autumn, 1979) pp. 7-11. Herzog believes that the primary concern of theological education should be with the matter of “responsible vocation within the Christian Community” as we try to understand and respond to the claim of the gospel as a call to *liberation*. He raises the critical question: “What does the gospel of liberation mean for church people, laity, ministers, seminarians, denominational leaders, and particularly those committed to the task of theological education?” Further, he suggests some initial steps by which people can reflect and affirm that liberation is the central focus of the gospel and biblical faith. These include the following affirmations: “(1) we believe that God calls the whole people of God to do justice; (2) we believe that in the cries of the world’s suffering we hear God’s call to justice; (3) we believe that doing theology today means joining action and reflection in the light of responsible social analysis; (4) we believe that to respond to human suffering means addressing the personal, economic and political contexts of that suffering; (5) we believe that to do justice means affirming that salvation and release from oppression are bound together; (6) we believe that the biblical witness links theological and ethical dimensions so closely that they can never be separated,” (see — Holy Scriptures, cf., Jer. 22:13-16, Lk. 4:16-30; Mt. 25:31-46; Rom. 12:1-2).

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degrees, have grown in membership, loyalty, and participation in church-related programs. The latter factor is also compelling: the experience of a significant decrease in membership and participation, loyalty and devotion, on the part of liberal protestant churches in American society. With any enterprise, there is also the problem of secularity and competition as theological schools observe certain trends or variables in the wider society namely: patterns of reduced birthrates, diminished enrollments, rising educational costs, ideological polarization among ethnic minorities, and the lack of clear institutional management programs as we face the future.²

Perhaps the underlining assumption I wish to articulate can be put rather simply: the amazing array of theological trends that can be cited on the contemporary American scene cannot be an adequate substitute for a real living faith in Jesus Christ; nor can it be a vehicle which ignores the importance of the critical-historical method as Christians attempt to appropriate the meaning of biblical faith in our time. As we face the future, we are called by the Crucified and Risen Lord not to be *fearful* but *faithful*. I think this is the essence of "visionary hope" as revealed by the God of promise. It is a revolutionary vision of the future that is grounded in radical loyalty to the present age as God's age.

In a rather limited schematic way, there are several scenarios or theological trends of things to come. As practitioners we live by images. The images that become normative in our lives depend in part on what we stand and on our capacity to be historically located. Thus the image of trends in contemporary theological studies that are presented here are suggestive rather than exhaustive.

I.

Current Trends

In the first place, there is the issue of church growth and its relation to the theory of *socio-cultural homogeneity*. The homogeneous-unit principle places emphasis upon "consciousness of kind" as a sociological requisite for understanding the dynamics pluralism in American society. The increasingly wide acceptance of such a principle of church growth raises serious demands for theological-ethical reflection. As suggested by Donald McGavran, the classic statement of the principle is: "(People) *like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic or class barriers* (*Occasional Bulletin*, January 1978, p. 12). Put another way, the principle itself is reflected in the following observation made by a D.Min. student concerning the real center of gravity of his local congregation, when he remarked: "*what really holds our Church together is not so much loyalty to Jesus Christ, but the social fact that we all are yankees!*" C. Peter

²David A. Hubbard, "The ATS in the 80's: Visionary Realism," in *Theological Education* (Autumn 1978, p. 9). While the author is deeply concerned about the present state of theological education, he goes on to stress the themes of *stewardship, corporateness, and servanthood* as important for church renewal and societal reconstruction.

Current Trends In Theology

Wagner, professor of Church Growth at Fuller Theological Seminary, suggests that something on the magnitude of 95 to 98 per cent of the congregations in Christendom are made up basically of one kind of people, and there is little evidence that this trend is reversing.³

For the practitioner, three critical questions must be squarely faced: "Is homogeneity good precisely at a time in western society when modern systems of communication can bring remote parts of the human family — given the pain and anguish of poverty and social neglect in Third World countries — into our living room as we drink coffee and sip tea? Is it true that the more mixed the congregation is, especially in class and color, the greater its opportunity to witness to the power of Christ? Is the homogeneous-unit principle another clever disguise or "cover-up" in the face of deeper societal problems: racism, sexism, social injustice, capitalistic greed, cultural banality, and demonic materialism which undermines the spiritual character of human life? Can Christians achieve the "measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" in a community where we all think alike, look alike, and act alike?

A second trend in theological education is the attention being given to the importance of *hermeneutics* in Church and society.⁴ Indeed, one of the strongest movements of the 70's, especially among biblical scholars and theologians, was the fresh bout many of us had with hermeneutical issues. For these scholars the main focus has centered around the meaning of "story," "narrative," and "parable" as tools for unpacking the sticky problems of faith and life. Here it seems to me that the task of the pastor-theologian as well as the lay person is to engage the congregation in *hermeneutical* reflection in regard to scripture and tradition as they bear upon the social situation. Hermeneutics (coming from a Greek verb meaning "to make clear") simply means the science of interpreting texts (see Brown's *Theology in a New Key*, p. 80). For example, what hermeneutical principle(s) should Christians use as authoritative for creative and responsible living?

Third, there appears to be a new vitality among ethically sensitive scholars as well as practitioners of *biblical* thought, particularly to the *doctrine of God and creation*. At the methodological level, there is much debate on how we ought to talk about God in an age of secularity and dominative technology. Recently, Martin E. Marty reported that Christians in America are returning to the Bible for answers to basic problems and the

³See — C. Peter Wagner, "How Ethical Is The Homogeneous Unit Principle," in *Occasional Bulletin*, p. 12. Wagner seeks to make a case for the principle of "homogeneity" as a functional concept for church growth and social harmony. It is doubtful as to whether this concept expresses the true blessings of God's Kingdom of love and justice. It may be just the latest cover-up for institutionalized racism in the 80's — a more vicious form of "cultural elitism" under the disguise of the "new pluralism" in America.

⁴Martin E. Marty, "How My Mind Has Changed: Previewing The Series For This Decade," in *The Christian Century* (Dec. 26, 1979, p. 1288). Concerning the current interest among biblical scholars as well as lay persons in the discipline of hermeneutics Marty asserts: "The professionals regard this development with utter seriousness. They talk about narrative, story, parable and other forms of language that, they say, concern us direly (cf.)."

tensions of life. At the University of Chicago, there is increased interest in the Bible and advanced studies in Religion, according to some observers. Why this development at a time when the world faces so much economic uncertainty and anxiety?

Fourth, there is the current trend in theological education toward a sort of "reformation spirituality," which places stress on the spiritual nature of the gospel. This particular outlook tends to view the totality of Christian faith as reducible to *a priori* spiritual consciousness (which often ignores the corporate expression of the "good news" of the Kingdom).⁵ Although spiritual nurture is, undoubtedly, an important ingredient for our modern churches, the character of the moral life is seriously impaired when it is reduced only to *preaching, piety* and *prayer*. The whole gospel involves action-faithfulness as it calls us to corporate responsibility in the world. I suspect that the current trend toward "spirituality" is part of a wider cultural phenomenon symbolized in the "back to basics" movement in secular education; in addition, the so called "Jesus movement" typifies the same sort of phenomenon among some pentecostals and charismatics in America.

Fifth, the life of the seminary and the practice of the Church must be brought into closer dialogue and creative encounter as both seek to identify the real purpose of ministry in today's world. The sharp distinction often drawn between students and faculties, scholars and practitioners, professionally-trained pastors and lay leaders will probably become less significant in the future development of theological education. More emphasis will, undoubtedly, be placed on *decentralization* (i.e. seminary campus or urban-based) and the creation of experimental-experiential learning centers in rural areas or local congregational settings.⁶ Thus, there is the struggle for radical "repositioning" of theological education.

Sixth, there is the issue of "*faith-in-God*" and how it can be expressed in a culture largely dominated by science and technology. The churches cannot afford to ignore what's going on in the technological world because the issue of authority is sharply brought into focus. Such important questions as these must be posed: who is in control of our society? what are the real benefits as well as current dangers of modern technology? are we controlling technology or does it control us? what issues of loyalty does it pose

⁵John A. Cartwright, "A Symposium Of Response," in *Theological Education* (Autumn '79, pp. 21-24). Cartwright sets forth the thesis that the current emphasis among mainline "liberal" theological schools to interpret the gospel essentially as a socio-political force for liberation has become an end in itself, thereby making the *speech* of liberation more important than the *deed* of liberation in the social and economic context of modern history. The result of such a theological trend is the danger of sensationalism in light of the demands of secular humanism.

⁶Harvey Cox, *Ibid.*, pp. 25-29. The idea of "radical-repositioning" of theological education is a plausible concept for the Christian Community. It is grounded in the belief that God comes to people where they are, to bring new life and hope to their social situation. For Cox, the emerging perspective on liberation includes at least three biblical postulates about God's relationship to history: (1) "that God speaks through the world's suffering; (2) that salvation and liberation go together and (3) that knowing and serving the God of justice requires a corporate response."

for Christians who see Jesus Christ as the ultimate source of authority for life and action? For example, the return of Skylab, the summer of '79 demonstrated the potential horrors of a "run-away-technology."

Seventh, the current issue of "scarcity" poses some acute ethico-theological problems for the churches and seminaries in modern industrial society. The task of learning to live within "limits" is an ethical issue that bears upon our current lifestyle in America. There is an increasing awareness among Christians and secular persons of the need to develop both an "ethics of limits" and a theology of scarcity in the light of our diminishing natural resources. For example, how are we to define moral responsibility and faithfulness to *Yehweh* in the face of over-production, and excessive materialism among affluent nations?

Eighth, the trend toward Christian vocation as *Praxis*, reflects a pattern of "bold realism" in contemporary theological education. Here the emphasis seems to be on an approach to the issues of faith and life that's *action-reflection* oriented rather than abstract thinking and scholasticism. This approach or orientation holds promise for the churches of North America and third countries where economic oppression is real because it tends to view God as one who sides with the poor and outcast. I think that this makes all of our statements about God and the gospel of Jesus Christ radically *political* and *eschatological*. The gospel is political in the sense that the aim is to change, objectively, inhuman conditions of oppression and economic exploitation; it is eschatological in that the hope of the Kingdom cannot be fully realized unless all the oppressed are free. This means that God's suffering in solidarity with the oppressed is a starting point to positive action and engagement in the service of freedom. "The bias is clear beyond any doubt. God sides with the oppressed," says Robert McAfee Brown, "the oppressors are on the wrong side. It is as clear as that. And as disturbing as that."⁸ In his book, *God of the Oppressed*, James Cone also appears to take seriously a methodological framework of action-reflection, horned out of the social situation of injustice and white racism.⁹ So then, the God of biblical faith is historical and concrete. *Yahweh* speaks the word of liberation to us; he requires of us obedience. Action-engagement, therefore, is the proper response to his liberating power in Jesus Christ.

Ninth, the concern for human rights as expressed in the women's movement and the struggle for equality among the sexes is a trend that merits

⁷See — Coner Story, "Skylab's Fiery Fall," (*Time Magazine*, July 16, 1979, pp. 20-26ff).

⁸Cited in A. A. Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1977), p. 9. See also — Alistair Kee, ed. *A Reader in Political Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974). Kee observes that Christian theology is political theology which calls for prophetic justice on the part of the poor; the ministry of Jesus is seen as favorable toward the poor and "have-nots." The writer asserts that Jesus "associated with the poor and despised rather than with the rich and influential. When challenged about this he justified himself in parables. He takes sides apparently because God has taken sides. . . . God is biased in favor of the poor and meek: the rich and the powerful. . . . have no part in God's Kingdom. Political theology is biased because Jesus was biased." (p. xi.)

⁹See James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975, pp. 16-38ff.).

serious theological attention.¹⁰ The role of women in church and society and the emergence of "gray-power" (ageism) will be of crucial importance in regard to the future shape of theological education as the churches face the challenge of the year 2000.

Perhaps a brief word about the current status of "liberation theologies," in the theological enterprise would be appropriate.¹¹ In responding to liberation themes, Professor R. M. Brown describes the Church as being in need of what he called "a hermeneutic of hope and engagement" relative to the social reality of corporate power and privilege in modern capitalist societies. In the attempt to unravel such an hermeneutic, he suggests five biblical motifs or ways to begin critical reflection.¹² These include:

1. *The God Who Takes Sides* (Exd. 1:8-14; 2:23-25; 3:7)
2. "To Know God Is To Do Justice" (Jer. 22:13-16)
3. *The True Worship* (Isa. 58:6-7)
4. *Liberty To The Oppressed* (Lk. 4:16-30)
5. *The Judgment Of The Nations* (Matt. 25:31-46).

This trend toward liberation as a new style of ministry, as a new approach to scripture and tradition deserves the "green flag" as well as the "yellow flag." For instance, whenever theologizing about the gospel of liberation becomes an *end in itself*, serious ethical questions ought to be raised. We must remember that while the gospel calls us to "solidarity with the poor and the oppressed" of the land, the poor and the disinherited are not immunized from the impulse toward self-righteousness and idolatry. The rich and the poor both stand under the force of God's judgment ("bold realism") as well as the promise of His liberating grace revealed in Jesus Christ (visionary hopes).

"Without 'Songs' to God, without celebration of his liberating love there is no Christian life."

— G. Gutierrez, in Gutierrez and Shaull,
Liberation and Change, p. 94

II.

Two Scenarios Of The Future Church

Worldwide sociological changes, the result of industrialization, urbanization, modernization in society have produced a crisis in our perspective

¹⁰Cf. Allen O. Miller, ed., *Christian Declaration on Human Rights*, (Grand Rapids, Mi.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977). This volume makes an important contribution toward understanding the theological source of human rights and equality in regard to the inclusive character of the human family on planet earth. Sexism and racism are anti-theological to God's purposive order and His right to claim us as His own. ". . . the basis of fundamental human rights is God's rights to — that is, claim on — the human being . . . the right to be a person is anchored in God's love to us as human beings . . ." (p. 21).

¹¹Cf. Gayraud S. Wilmore and James H. Cone, ed., *Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966-1979* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1979, pp. 363-445). See also: Letty M. Russell, *Human Liberation In A Feminist Perspective — A Theology*. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974, pp. 172-185.)

¹²Robert McAfee Brown, *Theology In A New Key* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1978, p. 88)

on the Church.¹³ Social critics and theologians observe that even the moral fabric of the entire social system, which has been in the past largely influenced by Judeo-Christian values, is breaking down. People today seem to feel, increasingly, a sense of personal rootlessness and social *anomie*.¹⁴ Perhaps nowhere is this feeling more pervasive than the loss of authority in Church and society. Descriptively speaking, both social institutions seem to be experiencing discontinuity of purpose and vision.

The crisis of perspective, relative to dominant developments within theological education today, is evident in two approaches to the Church. The first approach is that of the Church as a *bureaucratic-voluntary association*. This model of the Church tends to see everything as a matter of voluntary choice and free will.¹⁵ There is a story about a successful businessman who made a practice of joining the most prestigious church in town upon job relocation. While attending an orientation class for new membership, the teacher asked: "why do you want to be part of our church?" The newcomer retorted, "Besides being a nice thing to do, it's good for business." (i.e. the enhancement of his own business image!) This scenario depicts the Church merely as a place one goes with no real obligation to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The key words in this model are *voluntarism* and *social positioning*. Everything becomes a matter of "getting ahead" and moving up the corporate ladder of success in the wider society.

The voluntary model of the Church provides its members with a comfortable pew without the biblical understanding of prophetic purpose. It tends to encourage lay people in their contentment rather than call for genuine commitment to the theology of the cross. It inspires faith *about* Jesus Christ a moral teacher without faith in Him as the Crucified and Risen Lord of our lives. As with the story of the successful business man, there is the acquiring of social status by virtue of new membership without the glorious scandal of the Despised One who saves by His Grace. The theological problematic of the voluntary model of the Church is simply this: *it encourages a style of Christian Life that seeks acceptance and recognition without genuine moral obligation to the gospel and regeneration of the world. The bureaucratic-voluntary Church becomes a "tail-light" rather than the "head-light" of society. In the scenario suggested by Martin Luther King, the Church has become a "thermometer rather than a thermostat, recording the climate around it rather than changing it."*

The second model, which may provide us with useful clues into the future, is that of the Church as a *covenant* community of faith. The covenant model of the Church is characterized by a move from secondary

¹³Egbert de Vries, ed. *Man In Community*. (New York: Association Press, 1966, p. 124ff.)

¹⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 125-138ff.

¹⁵Cf. George H. Crowell, *Society Against Itself* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1968, pp. 63-81ff). Crowell argues the thesis that the question of social justice for the poor and disadvantaged in America is ethically problematic because of the principle of voluntarism. "Social Action," he declares, "is merely voluntary . . . conversely, those activities which are obligatory in American culture, especially the requirements to perform faithfully at the job and in the family, lend powerful support to the existing order." (pp. 30-31).

relations (*Gesellschaft*) to primary relationships (*Gemeinschaft*). It signifies a move on the part of the Christian from social formality to religious formation, from convention to conviction. It means moving from cultural stiffness to ethical spontaneity and freedom — from logging around in the world to a fundamental sense of loyalty. For the ethically sensitive person, the notion of covenant symbolizes a move from the vertical society of striving and competition to the horizontal community of sharing and love.

Scripture teaches us that the Church of the Living God, the *ekklesia*, is a Covenant Community of faith, where each is called to be oneself under the Lordship of Christ.¹⁶

The Church is not first an institution, a building, a social club, or a humanitarian society where good individuals happen to gather; but the Church is the people of God who are under divine mandate to work for justice and to increase love in the world.¹⁷ From an ethico-theological perspective, the *ekklesia* is not first a voluntary association but a community of moral decision-making. The five main functions of the Church, in regard to its historical formation, include: (1) *Kerygma* (the proclamation of the Word, the preaching of the gospel which frees men and women from pride and sinful presumption), (2) *didache* (the office of teaching, and reflection upon agape love within the household of faith as well as in the public life), (3) *diakonia* (the enabling task of ministry in the service of the Kingdom of God in the world — especially the practice of justice), (4) *Koinonia* (the radical formation of the new community in Jesus Christ, grounded in God's righteousness and mercy), and (5) *cultural metamorphosis* (the formation of "new values" which brings about socio-cultural change in the light of God's transformation of the world). Now the relation between these functions is not static but dynamic. Each exists in relationship to the others. The pattern is one of interdependence in regard to the Church's mission in the last quarter of the 20th century.

In the covenant model, there is the recognition that to be faithful means the capacity to respond to human need, in the light of what the gospel demands as we live, move, and interact one with another in the social situation. Biblically, covenant has to do with *promise* and *fulfillment*, between God and his people. In a sense, it is a "promissory oath"; it is a relationship that comes about through some interaction between two or more parties implying commitment, such that parties come to belong each to the other, and to have enduring common claims. So then, the *covenant* model means that the people of God are accountable both to the Divine law as well as to the human law of community. A sense of mission and a sense of

¹⁶Cf. Walter Brueggemann, *The Bible Makes Sense* (Winona, Minnesota: St. Mary's College Press, 1978, pp. 16-23ff.). The author proposes a *Covenantal-historical* model for understanding the church's mission in the world. It is covenant that defines our fundamental character as a Christian Community and our relation to God. Thus "the main theme of the Bible is covenantal history," p. 29.

¹⁷Cf. William A. Jones, tr., *God In The Ghetto*. (Elgin, Il.: Progressive Baptist Publishing House, 1979, pp. 55-60). See also, M. Douglass Meeks, "Toward a Critical Theology of Church-State Relationships" contracted by *Office for Church and Society*, U.C.C. (Sept. 28, 1979, pp. 24-25).

belonging are important centers of gravity for the *ekklesia* as a community of faith.

Under the covenant model, the goal of the Church is liberation of the disinherited. This is a pre-condition for a fuller sharing in God's Kingdom. At the practical level of consciousness and church life, this scenario envisions a future which is brought about by the liberating activity of God.

Furthermore, I think that the crucial question here is not merely the issue of viability of competing models of the Church, but points more importantly to the task of the pastor or lay person as theologian. What is the role of the pastor or lay person as theologian? Perhaps to raise the question means to answer the question. I believe that the task of the pastor as theologian is twofold: (1) *moral discernment*, and (2) *ethical imagination*. The discerning person is one who perceives reality; and makes out as with the eye, or by the mind, about what's going on in the world. As theologians of the Church, the task of discernment in the moral life is to make connections between image and story, myth and symbol, creed and deed, as they play upon the critical issues that confront us in the '80's.

The second task that we must be about is a recovery of a sense of ethical imagination. The genius of imagination is the capacity on the part of the human spirit to move beyond "what is" and catch a glimpse of "what ought to be." The ancient proverb, "without a vision, the people perish," is descriptive of the times in which we live and points to the need for ethical imagination. The call for imagination means getting in tune with the creative possibilities inside of us. That people with imaginative dreams can make a difference in the world — especially in light of the realities of sin, greed, and oppression as well as sexism, racism, and social injustice in our midst. Imagination is the vehicle of spiritual consciousness that can carry us in the future because of who we are, as a Christian Community, and what we do in the present. In short, the idea of ethical imagination — which is a requisite for understanding the theological task of ministry — includes two key aspects. *First*, the character of ethical imagination means an openness and sensitivity to what God is doing in the world in behalf of the poor and dispossessed. *Secondly*, I think that ethical imagination engenders within us "the gift of vitality which enables the believing community to discern possibility and promise, to receive newness and healing where others only measure and count and analyze."¹⁸ We shall now turn our attention to the question, "what is the Church called to be and do?" in the light of a normative strategy or roadmap to meet the demands of the '80's.

III.

A Road-Map For Survival And Transformation

Thus far we have examined a number of current trends in theological education in terms of their relevance for the Church in the '80's as well as the ensuing 21st century society. While no comprehensive and satisfactory

¹⁸Cf. Walter Brueggemann, *The Bible Makes Sense*, p. 32ff.

“Master Plan” has been designed to give to Christians a viable perspective on the future, I do think that there are some clues which might be promising in regard to a road-map for survival and transformation.

If we as ethically sensitive persons take seriously the conviction that the Church in the '80's has a mission and purpose in the world, then a theological “road-map” for survival may include — to furnish a thread-bare outline — the following elements:

(1) *A Sense of Community.*

In the first place, it seems to me that the prime category and organizing principle of biblical faith is the recognition that the Church is *covenantal* community of faith. The bibleo-centric affirmation is historically clear: we are a people *under* covenant where promises are given and received, where obligations and duties are affirmed, where commitments and moral laws are established by *Yehweh*, the God of history and hope who comes in power to determine the decisions that disclose the destinies of humankind. I suspect that a sense of community is a valuable motif in regard to a road-map for survival in the decades ahead.¹⁹ Because it reminds us that we are not only a *historical* people with a tradition and memory, but we are called to be an *eschatological* people with a vision and hope. Without a sense of community the Church becomes ungrounded, having neither purpose nor vision.

In contemporary society it is important for us to see that to be in community is to be *sustained* by the Divine Initiator of Covenantal-community. *Yehweh* is the Covenant-Maker, the Promiser who upholds the faithful in their struggle — not to conform to the norms of secularism and materialistic idolatry of the world — but to transform the world; because we have been *transformed* by the power of the Crucified and Risen Lord!

(2) *A Sense of God-Consciousness.*

In the second place, there is an expressed need, in these times in which we live, for a deeper sense of God-Consciousness. It seems to me that two interrelated sets of questions come to mind in light of a viable road-map for the future. I think that we are compelled to grapple not only with the *prima facie* question, “who are we?” but the fundamental prior question is: “whose are we?” Biblical faith teaches that we *belong to God*. That we are sons and daughters of God. That our true moral identity is rooted in God as disclosed in Jesus Christ, the Liberator and Reconciler. Perhaps a deepening sense of spirituality and God-consciousness become indispensable normative elements in our road-map for the future. Of course, this perspective on the future of the Church, in terms of God-consciousness, brings us logically to the question of *cui bono* (i.e. for whose good or on what behalf does the *God-conscious*

¹⁹Cf. Kenneth L. Smith and Iha G. Zepp, Jr., *Search For The Beloved Community* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1974, pp. 128-140).

person speak and act?). "Will the Church of the future serve itself, primarily, or the good of the neighbor, the community or the world? Can the Church of the future survive in isolation from its true identity and *Sustaining Source*?" To be sure, the prophet Isaiah, in the final analysis, makes clear the fact that the community of faith cannot sustain itself in history apart from the everlasting power of God. The prophet speaks: Do you not know, have you not heard? The Lord, the everlasting God, creator of the wide world, grows neither weary nor faint; no man can fathom his understanding. He gives vigor to the weary, new strength to the exhausted. Young men may grow weary and faint, even in their prime they may stumble and fall; but those who look to the Lord will win their new strength, they will grow wings like eagles, they will run and not be weary, they will march on and never grow faint. (Isa. 40:28-31)

(3) *A Sense of Solidarity with the Poor.*

In the third place, the morally sensitive Christian must recognize that the gospel of Jesus Christ not only affirms, but favors the humanity and dignity of the poor and outcast. In the book, *Theology in a New Key*, Robert McAfee Brown suggests to us the fact that the biblical vision of the Kingdom stresses the exaltation of the poor and weak, the least and last in human community.²⁰ The annunciation of the gospel is replete with references to the poor and the importance of morally responsible acts of solidarity with the oppressed, inside as well as outside of the Church, in their struggle for full humanization and liberation. To know God as revealed in Jesus Christ is to identify, in heart and mind, with the dispossessed.²¹ Luke, the evangelist, puts the matter in proper theological perspective for the contemporary church in society. "[God] has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away."

(Lk. 1:51-53)

(4) *A Sense of Commitment and Corporate Responsibility.*

In the fourth place, there is the increasing recognition that the Church cannot do effective ministry or be perceptive to the new voices of the '80's apart from a deep sense of commitment to Jesus Christ as well as corporate responsibility for the gospel in the world.

The values that shape the moral life of the Church in the 21st century will be critically related to the ethics of commitment and corporate responsibility for the good of God's Kingdom in the world. On the one hand, this means that the Church of the future

²⁰Robert McAfee Brown, *Theology In A New Key*, pp. 164-165.

²¹*Ibid.*, pp. 166-172.

must recognize that an "individualistic Christianity" is not only alien to the corpus of biblical faith but denied the moral preconditions of covenant. A sense of commitment and responsibility are built into the Constitution of what it means to be Christian. On the other hand, the ethics of *commitment* and corporate responsibility involves risk. The insistent call for radical change *inside* and *outside* the Church on the part of the poor and oppressed will, undoubtedly, continue to test our faithfulness to the gospel in the new situations of future society.²² So then, the risk of *having to change* our lifestyle economically, socially, and culturally, is one of the biggest ethical issues of contemporary society. To be sure, any sketching of a road-map for survival in the future must be inclusive of these ethical concerns relative to a sense of commitment by Christians to the gospel.

(5) *A Sense of Justice and Love.*

In the fifth place, the primary categories of justice and love are foundational in the construction of a normative road-map for survival and transformation if the Church is to have a voice in the future of society. The biblical sense of justice is the righteousness of God. From the perspective of the prophetic tradition, it is the righteousness of God which empowers the Church to confront evil, sin, death in the world in light of the radical freedom and love that the gospel brings.

Perhaps the most seriously neglected issues of the '80's revolve around the question of economic justice as a key to understanding the church's mission.²³ What is the purpose of the Church in an age of scarcity, economic insecurity, and joblessness for the urban poor? What patterns of authority in our society determine who will eat and who will go hungry? How can the local church, a larger parish, or a council of churches alter its program plans, readjust its priorities, and change its budget allocations to reflect to commitment to justice and love? What definition of mission can best embody faithfulness to the gospel in this season of change and expectation? These are some of the key questions that Christians the world over must confront head on, if we are to have a human

²²Cf. James H. Cone, *God Of The Oppressed*, pp. 138-152. The author declares that the God of biblical faith is the God of the oppressed in history. In the context of white America, the scandal of biblical faith is God's partiality — that is, God's identification with the poor and oppressed, the weak, the sinner, the dying. See — Cone's *The Spirituals and the Blues*. (New York: The Seabury Press, 1972, Chaps. 2-4).

Cf. Herbert O. Edward, "Black Theology and Liberation Theology," in G. S. Wilmore and J. H. Cone, eds., *Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966-79* (pp. 527-528).

²³Cf. John C. Bennett, *The Radical Imperative* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975, pp. 74-75ff.). The call for economic justice in the global community deeply involves the churches and those who seek to be faithful to the gospel. The World Council Assembly, in 1968, at Uppsala made the following decision: "There can be no justice in our world without a transfer of economic resources to undergird the redistribution of political power and to make cultural self-determination meaningful. In this transfer of resources a corporate act of the ecumenical fellowship of churches can provide a significant moral lead" (p. 75).

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future. Thus a viable road-map for survival and transformation in contemporary society must include a sense of justice and love on the part of Christians. Justice and love, according to the biblical story, belong together. There can be no sustaining human relationships between man and woman, family and community, nation and world without the presence of justice; on the contrary, there can be no redemptive vision of what the church is called to be and do without the presence of love.

Finally, we must recognize that love is in service of justice as a rationale, as the *conditio sine qua non* for the redemptive mission of the Church; and justice is the instrumentality of love to meet human needs and to create a more human future under God. Hence the Christian imperative of the future is deeply rooted in biblical faith of the past, namely — to know God is to seek justice and love for all humanity — the poor, the rich, the wretched of the earth, the exploited victims in our midst, the least and last in the land. The prophet Micah seems to echo the spirit of a viable road-map for survival and transformation as we face the future: "He hath shewed thee, o man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God."

(Micah 6:8)

Current Trends in Language

The first part of the book is devoted to a discussion of the current trends in language. The author discusses the role of language in society and the impact of technology on language use. He also discusses the role of language in education and the importance of language learning in a globalized world. The author argues that language is not just a means of communication, but a reflection of our culture and values. He also discusses the role of language in the workplace and the importance of language skills in a competitive job market. The author concludes that language is a powerful tool that can be used to shape our world and our future.

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