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COMMEMORATIVE ISSUE: A TRIBUTE TO KARL BARTH

sive both to the complexity of Scripture and to the complexity of human life. In addition, given feminist theology's concern for inclusiveness at every point in theological reflection, it became imperative that this method be accessible to anyone desiring to live out of the encounter between Scripture and life. As I worked at following Barth's Christologically-based reflection, I could see that he was engaged in a form of narrative theology. That is, Barth always described and defined his concepts and ideas by maintaining their connection with the biblical narratives in which they appeared or from which they had been taken. The meanings of the concepts were unintelligible apart from their story contexts. For example, Barth explicitly refused to speak of man or woman in abstraction from biblical narratives which seemed to tell their respective and related stories.

The possibility of a feminist narrative theology meant more than a method I could name as my own. Above all, it was a way to dialogue with Barth on his own terms, a way to take him seriously while still challenging him at a foundational level. I found my need for Barth giving way at this point to his need for me. He needed me, not to rescue him from unwarranted accusations of being closed to dialogue, but to take him seriously as both of us struggled to bring all the complexity of our lives into dynamic encounter with all the complexity of Scripture. Here I found Barth deficient in a foundational sense; he had not taken seriously—in spite of his intentions to the contrary—that part of human life to which he, as a white male, was an outsider. This failure to listen to all of life was echoed in his failure to take seriously those parts of Scripture which seemed to him *not* to address male and female. Barth's constricted outlook on life was matched by a constricted appeal to Scripture. In each case, Barth saw only that with which he was already familiar. The rest remained invisible and thus insignificant to him—as did the woman in his theology of male and female. It is ironic that in spite of his imaginative powers, displayed in their fullness on every page of the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth failed to see the full complexity of human life as it is embodied in human relationships and presupposed in the pages of Scripture. By taking Scripture as the history of the compassionate neighbor, instead of the history of a covenant between unequal partners, every human relationship with God and with others suddenly became a significant part of the whole. The hope for full humanity was not reserved for those within a marriage between unequal partners, but was offered as the task and possibility for *all* God's creatures in *all* their relationships. The priority of God as the only source of divine grace was maintained, as was the priority of the other as the equally necessary source of human solidarity.

My encounter with Karl Barth continues. It has lost none of its unpredictability, none of its freshness, none of its struggle. But Karl Barth is visible to me in ways I never anticipated, and my world is not quite as isolated from his world as it was six years ago. We have come a long way together, and I am eager to get on with the next hundred years.

Happy birthday, Karl.

"Re-Visioning America": Religion's Role in American Life

by Joel Carpenter

Over the past two years, the Center for American Studies of Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis has brought together scholars from a variety of academic disciplines and from institutions from across the nation to discuss religion's many roles in the American experience.

This series, titled "Re-Visioning America: Religion and the Life of the Nation," was the brainchild of Rowland Sherrill, Professor of Religious Studies at IUPUI; and Jan Shipps, a historian who directs IUPUI's Center for American Studies. Grants from the Lilly Endowment and the Indiana Committee for the Humanities made possible the four symposia and one major conference.

Scholars and clergy at these meetings considered how the United States' collective national identity and public discussion of national purpose and mission have been baptized with religious meaning. Several themes surfaced: 1) the ways in which a variety of people and movements have tried to fabricate, mend, or reweave a religious vision of America; 2) the clash of competing sets of ideals for national life; 3) the variety of angles of perspective and interpretive layers from which visioning or re-visioning can take place.

The first of the invitational symposia took place on March 1-3, 1984, and featured papers on "Crisis in the American Republic," by Douglas Sturm of Bucknell University; "Christian Primitivism and the Life of the Nation," by Richard T. Hughes of Abilene Christian University; and "Psychic Child, Real Child: Reflections on the Critical Spirituality of Robert Coles," by Bruce A. Ronda of Skidmore College.

Meeting again on June 14-16, 1984, the core group of 30 scholars considered essays on "Religion and the Renewal of American Culture," by John F. Wilson of Princeton Unviersity; "The View from the Outside," by J. Gordon Melton of the Institute for the Study of American Religion; and "Religion in the Life of Eleanor Roosevelt," by Amanda Porterfield of Syracuse University.

A third session convened on September 27-29 to discuss the issues prompted by papers presented by Richard L. Bushman of the University of Delaware on "Religion and the Self: Christianity and Gentility in Nineteenth-Century America"; Albert Raboteau of Princeton University on "Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Tradition of Black Religious Protest"; and

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Jon Butler of the University of Illinois at Chicago on "The Sacralization of the American Landscape: Church-building, Bell-ringing, and Ritualization, 1680-1760."

The culminating event of the "Re-visioning" project, however, was the public conference held on March 28-30, 1985, which displayed the work of over two dozen scholars and showcased three plenary addresses: "We the People: Black Religion and the Re-Creation of America," by Vincent Harding of the Iliff School of Theology; "Revisionary, Revisionist, or Revisory; or, How Do You Revision an America?" by Giles B. Gunn of the University of Florida; and "Missions and Millenialism: American Christianity's World Vision," by Timothy L. Smith of the Johns Hopkins University.

Quite literally as an afterthought, the conveners held a fifth and final symposium on January 30-February 1, 1986, to consider essays by Martin E. Marty of the University of Chicago on "20/20 Revisioning: An Acute Eye on American Religion"; and Henry W. Bowden of Rutgers University, "Six Authors in Search of a Character: Religious History and Revised Meanings in America."

One measure of the success of these meetings is, of course, the quality of written work which they inspired. Fortunately, those who did not attend will be able to judge for themselves within a year's time, for the enterprising conveners have edited two volumes of essays, and their colleague, Anne Fraker, has compiled a participant-contributed companion bibliography on American religion. These books will be published by the University of Illinois Press.

Another important measure is the quality of discussion. This was a fundamental concern of the planners, and they worked hard to create a climate that encouraged the free exchange of ideas. In my estimation, they succeeded admirably. Their large public meeting in particular was designed to draw in and encourage the participation of "laity" (actually religious professionals, by and large) who sported no scholarly expertise, but were vitally interested in the subject.

Such participation, at least in the sessions I attended, was animated, intelligent, and refreshing. Only a few of the academicians in this motley collection of literary critics, religionists, ethicists, American studies scholars, political scientists, psychologists, and historians failed to communicate effectively to each other across disciplines, and to the large public audiences. The relative success of these meetings speaks well for the development of a genuinely interdisciplinary study of American religion.

Readers of *TSF Bulletin* will no doubt wonder whether the purpose of "Re-Visioning America" was more analytic or prescriptive. Did these folk have visions to pursue, or were they content to assess the American dreams of past and present and to discuss new angles of vision from which to evaluate them? I am not sure whether the participants agreed. Two of the papers at the first meeting, by Sturm and Ronda, openly prescribed alternative visions of the common good. Many of the others saw their task as bringing new clarity to our understanding of American life, past and present, and thus providing some insight on how to work with present reality. And still others were content to learn more about the various perspectival "lenses" and levels of "signification" with which one discovers and makes "visionings."

Participants seemed to agree, however, that if the United States is not quite in a state of crisis concerning its purpose and mission, that it is exhibiting some pronounced symptoms of malaise. Yet scholarly reticence about offering concrete suggestions, and strong doubts as to what sort of explicitly religious visioning today's norms of public civility might allow, inhibited what might have been a fruitful discussion of such ideas.

As one of the relatively few evangelicals involved in these sessions, I was taken aback by the intensity of the disgust and anxiety that my colleagues felt about the new religious political right. It seemed clear to them that politicized fundamentalism is a major threat to democratic institutions and process, and that in league with the bellicose Reagan administration, these Moral Majority types are endangering humanity's very existence. Copnsequently, some of the "scholarly interest" I heard expressed about fundamentalism in particular seemed to be predisposed to show how "pathological" this movement truly is. It seemed well-nigh impossible that many of my fellow scholars could develop a humane empathy for fundamentalists as subjects of research. For the sake of fairness and honesty in our work, we all should heed Leo Ribuffo's cautionary tale of liberal scholars' ritual slaying of the "Old Christian Right" a generation ago.

This fear and loathing of fundamentalism underscored to me what was the burden of Martin Marty's address: that assessments of American religion are neither fully objective nor completely subjective, but perspectival. For religious scholarship to help those who wish to live responsibly in America today, it needs to be the product of a pluralistic community of contributors, whose varying angles of vision will add perspective to the commonly agreed-upon landmarks. "Re-Visioning America's" conveners seem committed to Marty's inclusive, collegial approach. Evangelicals, no less than other religious, ethnic and gender groupings in American life, should accept such invitations to contribute to the re-making of American religious studies. They cannot afford to have scholarly analysis "done" to them without adding some perspectives of their own.

Antiphonal Readings For Summer

by Steven F. Trotter

Summer is upon us at last. Are you looking forward to a long break and some good reading? Steve Trotter of Christ Our King Presbyterian Church in Bel Air, Maryland, provides us with a very helpful list of books drawn from the classics of pastoral care and spiritual guidance.—Ed.

In the fall of 1983 I wrote Eugene Peterson asking if I could spend a study year with him. I wanted to study with a pastor rather than an administrator, and I also wanted to study with someone called to a smaller congregation. Pastor Peterson was known to me through his books and articles (e.g., *Long Obedience in the Same Direction* (IVP); *Earth and Altar* (IVP); "Annie Dillard: Praying With Her Eyes Open," *TSF Bulletin*, Jan/Feb 1985).

To my surprise, he and the church said yes to my request. So my wife and I moved to Bel Air, Maryland, in the fall of 1984. For that year, I was not on staff at the church, nor did I serve as a paid intern.