

A TIME FOR SPIRITUAL REFORMATION

One of the most dangerous pitfalls for readers of the Bible and for those wishing to live Christian lives, is to believe that there can be only one interpretation to each verse or passage of Scripture. This assumption is not only erroneous, but it is also one of the basic causes for the lack of unity that has plagued the church through the centuries, and is the direct source for so much denominational fragmentation today.

Recognition of scholarship and the fact of different levels or types of interpretation allows us to see broader horizons and more profound truths in the Bible, and keeps us from placing our minds in a hermeneutical strait jacket.

The presupposition that Bible passages can have more than one valid interpretation is useful in appreciating the Bible and in applying many of its truths to our own lives.

Let's look at the first two verses in the Bible. In Genesis we read: "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters."

Join me in my progressive discoveries about these words.

First of all, I imagined myself as existing at that time, in fact, before the beginning of time. There was no history of humankind from which to learn. There was no tradition. It was impossible to say: "It has always been done that way." Everything was new. I must confess this to be an entertaining fantasy.

My second ideation was that we can't go back in time to what has happened. However, history is what the dead say to the living. If we can't go back to Genesis, maybe we can bring Genesis forward to 1996. We can imagine what might happen.

A word that comes to my mind now is rebirth. The days in which we live are in convulsion. A new kind of world is struggling to be born. Familiar patterns of living are breaking up. New patterns aren't clear. There is a lot of fear and despair around. But, to some the times are exciting as we think of the possibilities for the future. We are "in the midst of unfolding", as the poet exclaimed.

Rebirth, in this case, has nothing to do with optimism; it has to do with hope - a profoundly religious hope. There are dimensions of the world that cannot be measured by statistics. The creative wind that swept over the waters of Genesis may be symbolized in our time in a period

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of resurrection. The human psyche for resurrection is great: for aliveness, wakefulness, awareness, and rebirth.

Are not Christians in a period of resurrection? The church as we have known it is dead. The divine reality of creation is moving not only upon the face of the waters, but in the hearts of humankind. There are those who are discovering the new creation, who are more experimental about life, and less rigid, less political, less partisan, less afraid.

The new beginning has to be apolitical, more mature and creative. We are learning that moralism kills the church. It quenches the spirit. This a time for "doing" the truth. Our actions must conform to our Christian standards. Christian life is a matter of character, but of character moved by concern. Christians, "doing the truth", is conduct motivated by compassion. The church, if it is to be resurrected, cannot be reborn without experiencing concern for the world. Christians are called to be socially responsible.

Such responsibility for the world in all its social, economic, and political problems belongs to the very heartbeat of the Christian gospel. Today the church that has nothing to offer civilizations in peril of death has no gospel. The church that does not care about God's creatures and creation is not Christian. The church without a gospel for society is simply sham.

The test of our Christian religion is not whether it is credible, but liveable; not do people believe in it, but do they live it? Christianity is a way of life.

Our difficulty is not so much a lack of knowledge of what is right and wrong to do and to be, but lack of courage to live what we know to be right and best. We are afraid to live love.

When I was a boy, during the summer holidays, some of us would pedal our bicycles over to the swimming hole in the Thames River at the 16th Line. Someone had tied a length of hay fork rope to a high limb of a large tree that hung out over the water. The bravest of us would swing out on this rope over the water, let go, and drop into the swimming hole. We'd come out cool, refreshed, exhilarated, and eager to repeat the adventure.

Not everyone is willing to be daring and take the adventurous swing out over the water hole. They prefer to wade around in the mud of the shallows.

Today we are being challenged to live experimentally, to catch the spirit of discovery and exploration and rebirth. It is a time to test the meaning of the words of T.S. Eliot in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock: "And, indeed, there will be time/ To wonder, 'Do I dare?' and 'Do I dare?'.../ Do I dare/ Disturb the universe?"

There is a great discovery awaiting those who choose to live and enact their moral values in the day-by-day life of the community and world. They will not be in opposition to the rest, only conscious of what is right and needed. Nobody wants children going hungry, people living in poverty, inadequate housing and medical care. Nobody wants violence. So why not explore the immense possibilities in living love, sharing

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generously with one another in our needs, exercise our values without selfishness, affirm life, and spread hope for the new world.

St. John in his Book of Revelation, chapter 21, states: "See! The home of God is with men, and he will live among them. They shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death shall be no more, and never again shall there be sorrow or crying or pain. For all these things are past and gone. . . . See, I am making all things new!"

Let the wind from God sweep over the face of the waters.

Any "Deserving" Poor?

In the second chapter of St. Luke's Gospel, we read of the presentation of Jesus in the Temple. His parents made the "poor man's offering" of two turtle doves, which was allowed, according to Leviticus 12, when the family could not afford to offer a lamb. Jesus was born into a poor family.

Today, in our society there is a strong prevailing resentment towards helping our poor and unfortunate neighbours with welfare assistance. I hear people complaining that these people are getting something for nothing - at their expense. Many seem to feel the poor and unemployed are getting what they deserve.

Does anyone really get what they deserve? I have the misfortune of having a white skin which burns easily in the sun. However, it is advantageous for acceptance in the white, conservative society in which I live.

I did not deserve my education. People before me sacrificed and paid for schools and educational programmes to be available for me when I came along. Now I can keep the system up for those who follow me.

I don't deserve to travel as easily as I do, but those before me saved and worked to build our system of roads. It has made life so much more enjoyable and profitable for me. Now I must contribute for the ones to follow me.

As a probation and parole officer I came to know a lot of young people and adults who didn't deserve the upbringing they received, the lack of social skills and moral values, the ordeal of being an outcast at school and society, unwelcome in the church.

The many workers who have contributed their best working years faithfully to their workplace do not deserve being let go, dismissed like criminals, and ignored by their government and society.

All of us are recipients of the largess of the past. Much of what we possess was given us by our forefathers, the founders of churches, schools, freedom and democracy. Their self-sacrifice gave us our opportunities. Our overpowering emotion should be gratitude rather than selfishness.

The Two Brothers

Once upon a time there was a man who had two sons. When the first son was born, the parents gave him love and care, but was not able to dress him in fine clothes or to send him to school. When the boy was old enough

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both father and son went out into the fields and worked from dawn to dusk.

A second son was born to the family. The harvests of those years were plentiful and, because the father and the older son continued to labour, when it came time there was enough money to send the younger son to school. So, the second son went to school, studied with all his might, and became wise in the ways of the world. Upon graduation he embarked on a career and, being honest and educated, he acquired riches.

The parents were pleased with both sons - the one who toiled in the fields and the other who laboured in business. When the father grew old he called them and their families to his house and their mother prepared a meal for them. The father said: "My sons, I have nothing to leave you in this world save the knowledge that I have loved you both with all my heart. Keep that memory within you and love one another as brothers with the same love that I have loved you." And the man died.

The fortunes of the brother who worked in the fields fell on bad times. The land no longer produced food, and he became poor.

He sent his children to the house of his rich brother to ask for food, for they were hungry. But the rich brother was busy and he did not hear their cries.

Then the wife of the poor brother came to the house, and she said: "My body is sick; my house is cold; my children are hungry; help me." But the rich brother told his servant to close the door.

Finally the poor brother came himself to the house, and said: "My brother, remember the love we learned from our parents, and remember that it was my labours that enabled you to study and prosper. Now I am poor. My wife is sick; our house is cold; the children are hungry; and I need work. Help us.

The poor brother left the house, and that night, as he lay on his bed, he dreamed of swords and fire.

Now, what do you think? Which of these two brothers did the will of their father: the rich one or the poor one? Who was deserving, and who acted scandalously? Who is on trial in our society today?

What Is the Meaning of Life?

1. One can run away from life, or at least one can try to. Read the Book of Jonah. Let's not run away from life.
2. One can run along with life. To take it as it is - no questions, no thoughts, no dreams.
3. One can try to run life - both your own and the lives of others. Myself and what is mine is what matters.
4. One can acknowledge a power higher and greater than their own, and in love and commitment choose to follow the leading of that power.

A child reading Bible stories commented to her mother that God must have been more exciting in those days.

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