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Letters to the Editor

May 1, 1984

Dear Editors,

Browsing through my copy of the most recent *TSF Bulletin* (7/5, May/June, 1984), I was startled to discover your editorial modification of my review of Alan Culpepper's *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*. Whereas I had written, "One might hope that Culpepper's future work would explore further the challenge that reading of John poses to historical-critical orthodoxy," the printed review reads as follows: "One might hope that Culpepper's future work would not explore further the challenge that his reading of John poses to historical-critical orthodoxy." Indeed, I suppose that someone might well cherish the latter hope, but I certainly would not. Nor would I have thought that the editors of *TSF Bulletin* would harbor closet concern for the defense of "historical-critical orthodoxy"; consequently, I assume that some unclean spirit of criticism has tampered with your word processor. I hope that you will apprise your readers of this mischance.

Note also that the quotation from Culpepper in the final paragraph of the review should read, "the gospels, in which Jesus is a literary character . . ."

Grace and peace,
Richard B. Hays

March, 1984

Dear Editor,

The report in the March-April *TSF Bulletin* on the "Evangelical Study Group" at the AAR offered an interpretation of that meeting that surprised and disappointed me. I want to offer a differing assessment in two areas. First, the one line about a "hearty exchange among the panelists and a few from the 70 or so in attendance" failed to suggest why it was so "hearty." A major debate ensued over the recent forced resignation of New Testament scholar, Ramsey Michaels, at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and similar actions against Robert Gundry by the Evangelical Theological Society. Panelist Royce Gruenler, a professor at Gordon-Conwell, justified the dismissal on grounds that Michaels had failed to circulate his ideas adequately before publishing them. Within the "evangelical" seminary family, Gruenler explained, they could not tolerate "surprises." David Scholer, the academic dean at Northern Baptist

Theological Seminary and a former colleague of Michaels, countered that Michaels' position maintained an orthodox christology and that his views had been, in fact, widely known throughout the twenty-five years Michaels taught at Gordon. Though the board of Trustees and the Faculty Senate recognized publicly that Michaels had affirmed biblical "inerrancy" in good faith, their failure to spell out beforehand precisely what hermeneutical approaches and historical results are precluded by it was and continues to be a serious ethical flaw to many AAR participants. I reasserted (cf. *USQR* 3/23 (1977) 81-94) my charge which I deny. At least Michaels had a trial!

Moreover, the reporter portrays my "homelessness" as the product of unresolved, perhaps directionless, tension in my being "in some ways Pentecostal, in some Evangelical, in some liberal." However, Dayton and I both claimed that precisely such a ghettoizing use of "labels" is completely misleading from a historical and theological perspective. In my view, I could be neither a "fundamentalist" nor a "liberal" because I am not a "modernist." I also tried to describe myself in more positive terms as one seeking to be "ecumenical" in a divided church. At the same time, I must admit that "this world is not my home, I'm just a passin' through." Being "homeless" means that I am simply not comfortable living in a ghetto, even a white, affluent evangelical one during the "Year of the (Christian?) Bible." Instead, I hope in God's grace to act in conformity with a liberating Gospel and seek to articulate a post-modern, non-racist Christian confession that can never claim to do more in words alone than erect "a fence around a mystery" (Augustine's description of church creeds). In sum, I am "homeless" not in my Christian faith, only in my affiliation with diverse institutions, which at its best, and to the degree God has given me wisdom, testifies to my vision of God's working at the same time in groups that have often sought through prejudice to ignore, condemn, and belittle each other. I do not want to support this prejudice, for I believe the mystery of the Kingdom is that it sprouts in places where we refused to sow and where through a poverty of imagination we either least expected it or hoped that it could not grow.

Gerald T. Sheppard
Assoc. Professor of Old Testament
Union Seminary, NY

May 4, 1984

Dear Editor,

In the May-June 1984 issue of the *TSF Bulletin*, in a sympathetic treatment of my book *The Ecumenical Moment*, your reviewer, no doubt under pressure of space, makes a statement which in its brevity could be misleading. He writes: "[Wainwright], with Wesley, openly welcomes non-Christians to share in eucharistic fellowship."

Wesley's remarks, in the sermon on *The Meaning of Grace*, about the Lord's Supper as a "converting ordinance" occur as part of his opposition to the quietistic teaching of the Moravians that those seeking full assurance of faith should abstain from prayer, Bible reading, and the Lord's Supper. In 18th-century England, Wesley could count on such persons as already having been baptized, and, unlike the Moravians, he allowed for "degrees of faith." It was, therefore, far from a case of admitting unbaptized unbelievers to the holy communion. Early Methodism was in fact quite strict in its discipline of admission to the Lord's table.

In my own case, the implicitly offending sentence seems to have been: "No one should be refused communion who has been moved by the celebration [of the Lord's Supper] then in progress to seek saving fellowship with the Lord through eating the sacramental bread and drinking the sacramental wine. Then such a person should be brought to the sealing commitment of baptism as expeditiously as possible" (9p.141). A footnote refers to the place in my *Eucharist and Eschatology*, pp.128-135, where I gave the grounds for this view and expressed it in a more nuanced way. In conversation, this view has been shared by several individual Eastern Orthodox theologians, who appreciate that it may call for a charismatic act of discernment on the part of the pastor. This support is the more interesting when one considers that the Orthodox Churches practice a very strict discipline of communion.

Yours,
Geoffrey Wainwright

Ed. Note: The specific mention of Wesley in the review in question is the responsibility of the editors.

MISSION

Linking The Gospel and the Human Predicament: An Interview with Emilio Castro

Emilio Castro, an Uruguayan Methodist pastor, recently completed eleven years with the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches. As Director of CWME he organized the Melbourne meeting (1980) which produced the much acclaimed statement, "Mission and Evangelism—An Ecumenical Affirmation," (see "An Evangelical Observes a WCC Assembly" by Clark Pinnock, *TSF Bulletin*, October, 1980; and an edited text of the Melbourne statement in the Sept./Oct., 1983 issue). Since leaving his position with CWME, Castro has been completing graduate studies in Europe, and working on plans to return to South America. In January, 1984, he was among the lecturers at the seminars sponsored by the Overseas Ministries Study Center (co-sponsored by *TSF*). Mark Lau Branson interviewed him at that time. In July, the WCC announced that Castro had been elected General Secretary, succeeding Phillip Potter. Castro will begin his new

position in the summer of 1985.

Castro's old friend and mentor José Miguez-Bonino, a former World Council president, remembers greeting a queue of worshipers after the Easter service at Central Methodist Church in Montevideo, Castro's former parish. "An old woman approached me somewhat mysteriously: 'You meet Emilio Castro sometimes?' 'Yes, of course,' I replied, 'I'll be seeing him in a few weeks.' 'Please greet him for me. You know, he was my pastor. He introduced me to Jesus.'" (Reprinted from *The Christian Century*, Aug. 29-Sept. 5, 1984.)

TSF: Prior to working for the CWME, you were an active churchman in South America. Could you describe some of your activities?

Castro: I was General Secretary of UNELAM, Commission for Evangelical Unity in Latin America. This was an attempt to bring

churches together through a process of reflection and communication. This movement later on emerged as CLADE, the Conference of the Latin American Evangelical Churches. During this time I spent every moment on Uruguayan soil and was involved with my church. I was president of the church and very much engaged in evangelistic proclamation, especially through the mass media. Those were years of tension and passion in Uruguay; political life was in great in turmoil. Yet it was possible to preach on television. That gave me a chance to put fundamental questions before the country.

A military coup took place in 1973, six months after I left the country. Since then, Uruguay has known almost no freedom. More recently, however, signs indicate that people are striving to get a democratic opening, and I hope the churches will play a role in that process.

TSF: During your years with CWME, what encouraged you the most about the Church?

Castro: I have been encouraged by the willingness of most of the churches to face their respective situations with an evangelistic question in mind. Churches in the Soviet Union and in Western Europe are in entirely different situations. But both are facing the same question—how to convey the gospel in a society submitting to secularizing influences. Such pressure may come through a political party or, in the West, through the whole ideology of the consumer society.

For example, the Russian churches cannot see themselves simply as guardians of the past. They must face the question of how that past can be turned into an instrument for inviting the young people to share the future in terms of Christian beliefs, values and activities. Their recent talks about the evangelistic dimension of the liturgy were very hopeful.

In the Western world the situation is very different. The church has been reduced, radically speaking, to core groups, a remnant. This remnant is confronted with the tremendous masses of people who consider themselves Christians but in their lifestyles do not pay attention to gospel values or practice. Now, some churches have the mistaken idea they are the church of the majority. However, others have discovered their actual minority status and once again are facing the evangelistic question.

For example, there is the Kirchentag in Germany. Once every two years, more than 100,000 young people gather to deal with the gospel and society. They develop all kinds of associations. They have what they called a "market of opportunity." Every group will offer their gift, through theater, music, dancing—all kinds of evangelistic manifestations. Then they have a Bible study in groups of 7000 or 8000. They conclude with the Holy Communion Service. The service last year drew 150,000 people. The impact is not just for those who participate; it affects the whole community. In the last two locations, the question of peace was faced in a way that obliged all political parties to pay attention. It's another way of responding to the anonymity of modern society.

Another response is that of the community of Taizé in France. It is the center of Protestant monastic life. Thousands and thousands of young people go there every weekend for meditation and Bible reading. It is a style of pilgrimage based on the traditions of the middle age, though the message being communicated is much more up-to-date. Taizé provide a way to respond to spiritual needs while the local churches are often not able to offer that outlet.

What we have learned from the churches in China is unbelievable! They have gone through this tremendous and terrible Cultural

Revolution and have survived and thrived with an evangelistic spirit. We published a small book called *The Household of God in China*, a beautiful story about the church—no success story, no romantic story, but down-to-earth. There is the fear and trembling of their coming together in the morning to celebrate in worship and Bible study. One is suddenly awakened to the reality: here is the Church, it is alive!

People in the middle of a struggle for life discover that in the Gospel are the sources of endurance and resistance. They cannot do that through their own secular ideologies; they need each other and need to find their roots in the Gospel. In that sense, evangelism is essential for churches everywhere.

TSF: What is the definition of evangelism you're working with?

Castro: I consider evangelism to be the linkage, the bringing together of the story of Jesus Christ with the story of a particular person or a particular people. There is no evangelism without recognition of the facts of the Gospel. We talk about the Good News, something that happened in Jesus Christ, we do not talk about a package deal that is declared loudly, but remains irrelevant for today. We talk about Jesus Christ alive today, the Risen Lord. We are retelling the story with the hope and the prayer, that the Gospel story will become alive in the encounter with the story of the peoples who are hearing. Only Christians who are immersed in an incarnational model of community life and are living side by side with the people are able to attempt this linkage.

But the linkage can also come from another direction. Perhaps there are some people immersed in deep human problems who are searching for some sense of direction. Christians could then say, "Listen, this unknown god you are looking for, we know—This is the One who has made himself known in Jesus Christ."

There must always be two dimensions to evangelism—a clear reference to the Gospel story and a clear recognition of the seriousness and reality of the human predicament. The encounter of those two realities should be the moment when the Holy Spirit has a chance to make evangelism work.

TSF: What were the biggest discouragements for you during your time with CWME?

Castro: I would not say that I had any discouragements. I will say that the amount of time we Christians lose in fighting each other is distressing. We provide a good excuse to the nonbelieving world for their nonbelief, because they see us excommunicating each other. I think that once we recognize the joys of life in Christ and see the reality of a world in such desperate need, we can use the nuances and different manifestations of our Christian belief, to help people see their reality in light of the story of Jesus Christ.

Of course the theological task is necessary, of course the ecumenical work has something to do with reciprocal corrections. But, if I must choose between the task of proclamation to the world outside the Church and the task of correcting my Christian brothers and sisters, I know very clearly where my priorities are.

How do we challenge each other to say a clear word to the outer world, to the masses of secularized Christians, or false Christians or to people with other religious persuasions? If our focus is on the missionary task, the correctives that we need will come in the dynamic of ministry.

TSF: What have been some things you've learned that have changed your thinking during the last few years?

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Castro: The basic change concerns the discovery of the Orthodox Church. That is very thrilling. I come from a Methodist evangelical tradition, so I have learned about the depth of evangelical faith and the depth of Christian obedience in the context of difficult struggles. However, now I am faced with this encounter with Orthodox believers. Prior to now, I had only had an intellectual description of them, or caricatures of old people who were very static and very quiet; we all remember the story of what took place during the Russian Revolution. The Orthodox bishops were meeting in Leningrad discussing the color of their hats as the revolt began; now, for me, all those caricatures are being shed.

First, I was taken by the honesty, the candor and the faith of the Orthodox believers. Second, I became aware of the beauty of the liturgy. If I am supposed to love God with all my being, can that also include the beauty in the harmony of colors, or appropriation of the other senses, that draw me to the mystery of God? My Latin American Protestant tradition will reject the Catholic Church and with that will reject what we call "externals of religion." But the externals can become very, very internal when they are made into fine symbols, almost becoming a sacramental anticipation of God's presence. They have been able to dramatize the mysteries of the Gospel and, through these means, to pack all Gospel message into a form that can exist in this situation where the availability of Bibles is not as we would like it to be.

Third, I am impressed by the way in which Orthodox believers have been able to commit generation after generation to the faith of the Church. They have been working for twelve or thirteen centuries in Muslim countries with the prohibition against doing any evangelistic work. An attempt to convince somebody could mean death. What a sense of mission! A sense of presence, evidence, endurance, patience—a waiting for the chance to come. You begin to realize that in such a dramatic situation just the preserving of the faith is a tremendous missionary act. Of course, the Orthodox believers have something to learn from the Western World, from the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches. But, they know that the Church has a priestly responsibility, a responsibility to be representative of the whole. Biblically speaking, the Church is more than the adding of individuals. It's the reality of the Body of Christ that takes presence around the Eucharist. And, as we have learned from the Orthodox believers, the Eucharist is a missionary event.

TSF: Since Melbourne and the publication of "Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation," it appears that bridges have developed between Western-based evangelicals and the ecumenical movement. There seems to be more opportunity for dialogue. How do you evaluate that bridge-building at this point?

Castro: I do not want to use the word "bridge." Rather, I think a document tries to be sensitive to what Christians are saying about the evangelistic missionary responsibility. It seeks to be sensitive to people and aware of the viewpoints that entered into the shaping of the document—Catholic, Orthodox, Evangelical, and Liberal. The document doesn't pretend to be a potpourri; it is an affirmation of all those groups.

If the member churches of the World Council say, "Well, now we are at peace with evangelicals," and then go about business as usual because they believe, somewhat accurately, that we are not so far one from the other, that would be total failure. The important thing is what we are able to provide an instrument to challenge, to inspire, to give guidance to our evangelistic practice. The task of the document is not the facilitation of conversation, it is the call to

obedience of every group that reads this document, independent of their presuppositions. If this document gives happiness to evangelicals, but does not challenge, then the document is not good. If this document says, "Okay, we have provided our shibboleth to the evangelicals, now we can go on with business as usual according to the ecumenically-minded churches and people," then it is a total failure. This document should be an opportunity for us to take stock of our main convictions. However, concerning the bridging function, it is incidental, a by-product for which I am very thankful. It should not be considered equal with that fundamental role, with that central role of promoting evangelism.

TSF: What can seminaries do to help promote mission and evangelism?

Castro: Two things: First, we must challenge the traditional theological disciplines to see themselves in the light of the mission of the Church. The progress of history should be analyzed: When did churches grow? When did they fail to grow? How did they relate to their countries and cultures? What was the Holy Spirit saying? These questions will spur the imagination of students and provide a sense of expectancy. Also, students will discover the freedom of the Kingdom in history. So, the professor of dogmatics could not simply teach about the Creation and the Fall, etc., etc.—just so the student will pass an examination—but the professor will help the students understand how dogma relates to the people with whom they will be working.

Second, I think seminaries should give more importance to linking of the theological discussion to the actual world of the parish. Students will often begin their pastoral careers in a small churches, perhaps in rural settings. The congregations will consist of perhaps thirty or forty older people. We have given them, in the three or four years of training, all kind of rhetoric, "World-wide evangelization!" or "Liberation!" or "Revolution!" Then, in their new churches they have the shock of their lives. They can't touch their new reality. Normally, the new pastor tries to survive one or two years in anticipation of moving to something better. A Baptist lady in Montevideo said to me, "I do not know what is wrong with the Holy Spirit! Whenever we have a promising young pastor in our small parish, the Holy Spirit calls him to a better and higher-paid parish. But the Holy Spirit never does it the other way around!" This young pastor has the hope that one day he/she will have a platform for big ideas, but all the time this pastor is losing his or her soul. How do we relate the big dream, the big love, and the big international discussion to the reality of the thirty older people? I am convinced that the local congregation that is able to see themselves in terms of the kingdom dynamic will be transformed! Let's be realistic—older people have much more freedom to commit themselves than do young people or middle-aged people. Young pastors should be helped to discover those potentialities and to create the models for commitment and transformation. We must bring the global affirmations into close relationship with a local context. The young pastor cannot simply imitate the old pastor. It would be very creative and exciting if there were an attempt to bring the dynamics of the kingdom down-to-earth in the local situation.

Evangelism in the seminaries has become a second-class discipline. Perhaps if it were to be more forceful, more provocative, more specific in terms of meeting the needs in the world, it could become recognized on its own terms, be valued as it should and have an impact on the church and the world.

"SPIRITUALITY—FOUNDATION OF FAITH AND MINISTRY"

This 1984 Oak Brook Conference on Ministry will focus on spiritual disciplines and is designed for church professionals and committed laypeople. It will be held October 16 and 17 at Christ Church of Oak Brook, Illinois. Speakers include Donald Bloesch, Fr. Mark Gibbard, Robert Meyer and Arthur DeKruyter of Christ Church. For more information, contact Donna Fleck, Christ Church of Oak Brook, Thirty-first and York Rd., Oak Brook, IL 60521.

CONFERENCE ON JONATHAN EDWARDS

"Jonathan Edwards and The American Experience," a conference sponsored by the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals, will occur October 24-26, at the Billy Graham Center in Wheaton, Illinois. Topics include "The Spirit and the Word: Edwards and Scriptural Exegesis," "History, Redemption and the Millennium," and "Rationalist Foundations of Jonathan Edwards's Metaphysics." Speakers include Nathan Hatch, George Marsden and Mark Noll. For further information contact Joel Carpenter, ISAE, Billy Graham Center, Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL 60187.