



the Gospel and Our Culture

a network for encouraging the encounter in north america

REGIONAL MEETINGS

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In the most recent edition of this Newsletter (Vol. 8, No. 4: December 1996), Alan Roxburgh reported that two regional seminars had been held in Canada since the bi-national conference in Chicago in March 1966. "Out of a number of requests," he wrote, "and our own desire to extend [the GOCN] conversation among church leaders unable to attend bi-national meetings, we ... developed a seminar for regional gatherings.... It was clear to the two of us who led these events [the first in Vancouver, B.C. and the second in Toronto, Ontario] that ... this implementation of the GOCN conversation at the local level in regional settings was scratching where church leaders are itching." (Roxburgh invited readers who might wish to coordinate or promote the seminars where they live to contact him.)

Similar efforts have also been reported by Network members in at least two other locales, Buffalo, New York and Jackson, Mississippi.

Sid McCollum and Ben Beaird hail from Jackson. Both have been actively involved with the Gospel and Our Culture Network since soon after the network was born. Rev. McCollum is currently on staff with the Presbytery of Mississippi, and Mr. Beaird is an engineer with Bell South and a Presbyterian Elder. Both attended the GOCN March '96 Conference, "Confident Witness, Changing World," for which Ben served on the planning team that organized the Conference. Together they have offered to two different audiences presentations of insights drawn from their participation in Gospel & Culture discussions, with the express intention of stimulating similar discussion among their hearers, then action.

In the first instance, their self-assigned task was to share the substance of the March meeting with sisters and brothers in their home church who had had little or no exposure to GOC themes and analyses:

"Lots of changes are taking place in our society. None of this is new. What we want to talk about is why these things are happening, how we should view them and how we should respond. Our situation is a little bit like the bullfrog. It is said that if you drop a bullfrog in a pan of hot water, it will immediately jump out; but if you drop it into a pan of cool water and slowly heat the water, you can boil the frog — it will never jump out. We are not likely to be cooked, but our

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effectiveness and our influence as Christians is likely to be totally marginalized if we do not consider what's happening and respond to it. What is happening is that the relationship of the church to the culture is rapidly changing. What is at stake is the church's ability to be the church and to accurately represent the Gospel of Jesus Christ here."

With that introduction, McCollum and Beaird examined the marked growth of ethnic and religious pluralism in North American culture and their weakening effect on "Constantinian" Christianity as a significant social force. Next they spoke of the useful lessons that have been learned by missionaries in places where Christianity is not the dominant religion. From there they moved to "Some Missionary Dynamics," using diagrams to picture a variety of relationships — ideal to distorted to badly distorted — between the gospel, a church, and that church's host culture. And then the ball was in the audience's court: "What can and should we do about all this?" was the focus of the small group discussions that followed.

That first presentation took place in April '96 shortly after the Chicago conference. The second occasion on which Beaird and McCollum addressed these issues was almost a year later, February 1997. *Kaleidoscope*, the name of the Mississippi Presbytery's school, is the major leadership training event on the presbytery's calendar. Participants arrive in Jackson on Friday afternoon and the complete program runs through Saturday to 4:30

p.m. Sid and Ben co-offered a course titled "What's Going On Here? Our Culture, The Gospel, and The Church." Their syllabus included the basics of the GOCN project and an emphasis on Hauerwas and Willimon's *Resident Aliens* as a study text for small groups in individual churches. Following their presentation, a group of people asked McCollum and Beaird to lead them in a more detailed study of *Resident Aliens*, and that series will begin shortly. The two are also in the process of developing materials for additional such activity.

Should you like to know more of what Ben and Sid are doing and learning in these efforts, get in touch with either or both of them directly.

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For several years I served as a Board member of the Council of Churches of Buffalo and Erie County (New York). A colleague there who retired from the Executor Directorship of the Council but is still very active in both ecumenical and denominational projects, called to say he had heard about the "Confident Witness, Changing World" Conference. A group of his friends, chiefly clergy but including a few laypersons as well, wished to explore gospel and culture themes. Some of them were already familiar with material that Jean Stromberg had provided regarding the WCC project. At that moment, issues implicated by "gospel and culture" were front and center in the thinking of several in the group because they were soon to be in

The Gospel and Our Culture Newsletter

a quarterly publication
designed to encourage
the encounter of the gospel
with North American culture

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Europe visiting churches with whom they've had annual such conversations for a number of years.

On a Tuesday in late September, twenty-five of us gathered at the invitation of the Joint Partners Committee of the Western [New York] Area United Church of Christ - Disciples of Christ. We were all provided both a booklet titled "First, We Must Listen" and the packet of materials from the WCC U.S. Office detailing the study project on Gospel and Culture in the United States.

Inasmuch as not everyone in attendance expected to participate in the coming engagement with churches overseas, the group elected to set aside global considerations and focus on the local. Taking principles from two presentations which I was invited to offer (one in the morning and the second following lunch), we sought to apply GOC insights to our immediate circumstances as active members of local congregations. To initiate discussion, we asked ourselves:

What does culture do *to* us? What does it do *for* us?

How has and does culture shape our perspectives? Does our religious practice disclose any evidence of syncretism?

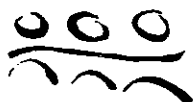
What is authentic gospel? What is authentic church?

What will come of the session, if anything, is yet to be seen. For additional information, you are welcome to contact me.

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It's to be hoped that similar activities are cropping up in a variety of places throughout North America. Should you be aware of any, it would be very helpful were you to pass the word to George Hunsberger and/or to Judy Bos at the GOCN office. ■



The Dialogical Imperative

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In North America we are on the brink of interfaith living. This fact we cannot deny or avoid. The only uncertainty lies in whether it will be helpful or hurtful. Only those living in a Christian ghetto will be able to retreat from this issue—but the retreat is only temporary. Even small town, rural America is being challenged by religious pluralism. On a recent trip through rural Texas I drove through a town of 1500 and noticed that next to Christ's Haven for Children, there looms in the distance a distinctly different structure, a Buddhist Temple. That this is occurring near "the Buckle of the Bible Belt" demonstrates the pervasiveness of this new religious reality.

Global living has elevated dialogue as the means by which we engage other cultures and religions. I celebrate the increase in exchange and learning, but there is a fundamental supposition that causes me concern. Dialogue is viewed as an open invitation to engage the other, the different. But is dialogue optional? I believe that a biblical theology of dialogue would have to answer resolutely, "No!" We, the Christian community, carry with us a dialogical imperative.

David Tracy has concluded that "Dialogue among the religions is no longer a luxury but a theological necessity (95). Though his final conclusion is valid, the assumption that dialogue was ever a luxury is deficient. Dialogue has never been an optional activity for theology. At the center of all proper theological thinking and *praxis* is dialogue; or one could say, there is no theology or missiology without dialogue. The basis for this flows from an incarnational theology reminding us that "The knowledge of Christ never comes to us apart from culture, or devoid of any cultural baggage. Christ comes to us in the garb of Christianity; and Christianity, in all its various forms, already involves an inculturation of the faith.... A Christ without culture is a docetic, non-incarnate Christ" (Gonzalez, 30).

The richness of this supposition is that the very thing that separates and often divides us, namely culture (and religion), becomes the basis from which the gospel is unfolded to us. This should lead us to seek out, dialogue with, and learn from other cultures because it gives us continuing opportunity to discover the fullness of the gospel. The potential distortion of the gospel always looms close if cultural and religious monologue prevail. Therefore we must ever hold as primary the unfolding of the gospel as dialogue between cultures, including their religious dimension. Just as "the Word became flesh," so too the gospel is "in the flesh" we call the Gospels. Therefore, minimally, dialogue represents the engagement between the culture in which the story of Christ is found and the culture from within which we seek to receive it.

This has special import for those who view dialogue of the interfaith variety as a betrayal of christological orthodoxy. Dialogue emanating from an incarnational theology upholds the Chalcedonian formula of Jesus Christ being "very God and very man." Unfortunately, many have sensed a forced choice between interfaith dialogue and faithfulness to Christ. Taking incarnational theology seriously compels us to engage in dialogue knowing that by doing so we are not abandoning our orthodoxy, rather we are living it out.

Having said this, I know that many will still feel reticent to embrace dialogue, especially if labeled "interfaith." Dialogue in a postmodern world implies that one must accept other faiths uncritically. It seems to carry an implicit mandate to

embrace whatever one encounters. Because of this, people become uneasy with interfaith dialogue—and they should if this presupposition is true! However in searching Scripture to exemplify the dialogical imperative at work, we discover a prototype of interfaith dialogue that demonstrates how the Israelites engaged people of other living faiths.

In Hebrew Scripture we find an existing interreligious penetration that is often overlooked or under-applied. It is easily missed by those who rely on a synchronical approach to interpretation because only texts condemning the idolatry of foreign gods are found. David Lochhead says:

The very logic of Hebrew faith, as we know it through the Hebrew scriptures, relied on a sharp distinction between the God of the Patriarchs and the Exodus on the one hand, and on the other, the 'other gods' which were worshipped by the 'nations' in general and the Canaanites in particular. Faithfulness, in the apostolic writings as well as in the Hebrew scriptures, involved faithfulness to the God who is known through the Prophets and Gospels as opposed to the many gods and lords of surrounding communities. Openness to other traditions, in this light, would seem to be openness to idolatry (40-41).

Even though Lochhead advocates the dialogical imperative, without using a diachronical interpretative approach he overlooks the riches of the interreligious dimension of Scripture. As we shall see, Israel's contact with surrounding religions was not wholesale rejection but one of assimilation. All too often even those who do uncover the similarities between Israel's faith and religion miss the significance. The parallels are too casually attributed to the cultural or literary influences

in which the Israelite's faith originated, but it is more than this. It is a religious influence. We discover that interfaith dialogue is not a recent phenomenon in the history of our faith, for it stands at the heart of Israel's unfolding of the message of Yahweh in Canaan. There is an intentionality in their encounter with other faiths whose fruits we see in our Scripture.

Dialogue implies encounter, openness, and learning, which leads to assimilation. It is not incorporation *carte blanche*, but a process of discernment leading to acceptance and/or rejection. In the Hebrew nomads' encounter with Canaanite religion we see this process, demonstrating that it is more than literary dependence: the content of the Canaanite faith is also being adapted and adopted.

Let us briefly consider how El, the kind and compassionate high god of the Canaanite pantheon, and Baal, the god of fertility and vegetation, were encountered and assimilated into Israel's understanding of Yahweh.

It is interesting to discover that nowhere in Hebrew Scripture do we find antagonism between El and Yahweh. In El the Hebrews were able to assimilate and articulate a broader understanding of Yahweh. Mention of "the stars of El" (Isaiah 14:13) and "the assembly of El" (Psalm 82:1) are overt references to Canaanite mythology. We also find the combination with El to form proper names arising from the patriarchal worship of God, e.g., Gen. 14:22 (*El Elyon*), 16:13 (*El Roi*), 17:1 (*El Shaddai*), 21:33 (*El Olam*), and 31:13 (*El Bethel*). It is in Genesis 33:20 that we find the clearest example of their conscious identification of El with Yahweh: "There he erected an altar and called it 'El is the God of Israel'" (*El Elohe Israel*). "One could say that El has been fused with Yahweh in one way or another" (Wessels, 56). It may be an overstatement to say that they equated El with Yahweh, but the absorption of El into their understanding of Yahweh is clearly evident.

The encounter with Baal was quite different. Here Israel had to say "No" to assimilation. Though they used some of Baal's characteristics to express their

understanding of Yahweh, the Israelites came to see the fertility cult of Canaan as evil and adulterous to Yahweh. The climax is the contest on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18), which is the familiar story of Elijah defeating the prophets of Baal.

The purview of this piece does not allow us to expand on the process of assimilation, but it is sufficient to show that Israel said both "Yes" and "No" to Canaanite religion, which implies an intentionality to the encounter. We catch a glimpse of how the dialogical process works at unfolding the message of God, for Israel did not adopt a position of total rejection (*monologue*) or total acceptance (*situationalism*). It was only through dialogue that true *contextualization* and communication of their faith was possible. From this we learn that though an openness to discover and learn is critical in dialogue, so too is it for the community to use its faith as a foundation from which to discern whether incorporation or adaptation of another's ideologies and practices are possible. A proper theology of dialogue casts fear of dialogue aside because we realize that we do not set our faith aside when engaging others.

As we stand on the brink of interfaith living, our scriptural and theological roots remind us not to evade that which is culturally or religiously different. Instead our faith calls us to seek out the opportunity to have the gospel unfolded through dialogue. Though the dialogical process has not always been named or officially recognized, it is clear that it stands as an imperative in fulfilling the calling of the Church.

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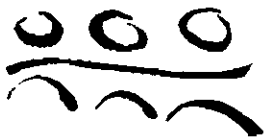
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LISTSERV

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By reason of the missiological interests that draw GOC Network members together, we comprise a uniquely distinctive slice of North American society. Nonetheless, in certain respects we probably look a whole lot like everyone else in our culture. Particularly, some among us are computer devotees and others are complete computer illiterates. But whether you're an aficionado of the Information Superhighway or a person who can't work up any interest in cyberstuff, still it's worthwhile keeping yourself informed about GOCN's "listserv." A great deal of day-to-day interactions among members of the Network is taking place there.

Some vocabulary for the uninitiated: a "listserv" (often called simply a list) is a quasi-public forum in which people can "talk" to one another and engage in discussion of whatever ideas happen to strike their fancy at the time. Actually the talk is all in writing;

there's not a word of oral speech, ever. And the forum is solely electronic; there is no physical place where participants gather to meet face to face. (To the contrary, most people participate in solitude as they interact with that inanimate thing on their desk called a PC, or personal computer — which bugs a lot of critics of the computer craze, but that's another story for another time.)

The listserv is *quasi*-public because various conditions surround the determination of who participates and how. Many lists, including GOCN's, are moderated: before a message goes out in a broadside to every reader ("subscriber"), it is reviewed by the "owner" of the list for relevance and appropriateness. Once a message is distributed, however, it is decidedly public: every subscriber reading

"'Kingdom building' smacks to me of our taking God's gifts and re-packing, re-shuffling, re-tooling them to be even more useful in our day."

the list will see it, and any subscriber who wishes to respond is welcome to do so.

GOCN's listserv was established in '94 as an unmoderated list. Discussion ebbed and flowed, and then for a time there was a fair amount of traffic that was not quite on point of gospel and culture concerns. So the list is now "moderated." When the changeover to a moderated list was announced, the purpose underlying the listserv was also reiterated:

"The Gospel and Our Culture Network joins together people who are seeking to renew the missional character of the churches of North America. By 'missional character' we mean two things: How we hear the gospel of Jesus Christ speak to us in light of the culture of which we're a part; and how we embody that gospel and give witness to it as a Christian community.

"[You are encouraged] to submit thoughtful reflections or questions, or to pose pressing issues regarding these matters to help us develop a conversation that will help all of us to engage the encounter of the gospel with our North American culture. And send replies and responses to the items others submit...."

Following is a set of excerpts — a very tiny slice — taken from a series of recent exchanges. If it's your view that people are "wasting their time" with all this, try to recall those particularly notable experiences in your life when you found it invaluable to talk things through with others in order to clarify for yourself where you stood on a significant issue. And if you decide you want to join these colloquies or even just to "listen" in, you'll find subscription instructions below.

Writer "A": "Kingdom building" smacks to me of our taking God's gifts and re-packing, re-shuffling, re-tooling them to be even more useful in our day. The trouble with the resulting kingdoms seems to be that they consistently look/sound/feel more like us, and far less like the Giver. The gift quality disappears, and our institutional, bureaucratic, niche-serving, credential-bearing qualifications appear instead....

Writer "B": Yet, if God is the architect, and we are simply the laborers at work with the tools we are given — by this I mean that we do not attempt to "improve the design" — then I believe we have hope to "build the kingdom."

Writer "C": I'm fairly new to discussion groups, so please understand if this is sent or worded inappropriately.... Isn't this tension of gospel and culture an issue that's been hanging on since the Enlightenment? Why are we still at it?

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MARTIN & CLAPP

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A few of us went out one evening to unwind after two full days of discussing the implications of postmodernism for the missional church. Forty or so colleagues in the Network had gathered in late October '96 in Techny, Illinois and, as always, the time together had been "stimulating," to say the least. An evening out, however, typically becomes a busman's holiday. Our conversation moved from small talk to "unusual" ideas to fascinating observations and information shared around our table in the local pub.

As we argued over an off-the-wall thesis raised by one of the group (the particulars need not detain us here), another individual mentioned Dale B. Martin's *The Corinthian Body* [Yale University Press, 1995, 352 pgs., cloth, \$35]. He had not had time yet to read Martin's work thoroughly but he was very much impressed by the little he had seen.

It is a good book. Moreover, I found it especially instructive because I just happened to read it in tandem with Rodney Clapp's *A Peculiar People: The Church as Culture in a Post-Christian Society* [InterVarsity Press, 1996, 251 pgs., paper, \$14.99]. Time and again I come across material about the ancient past together with counterpart analyses of our contemporary condition, and the experience is (almost) always a delight. This was no exception. Martin's exploration and explanation of the prevailing ideologies that marked both Christians and nonChristians alike in Corinth, is a stunning partner to Clapp's piece-by-piece scrutiny of the prevailing ideologies which shape western, especially North American, Christian-

ity today. There are substantial differences *and* similarities in those respective ideologies, but their consequences for the people of God are unarguably significant.

Both authors are scholarly — in the finest sense of that term — in their handling of their topics. Every source of even the most subtle suggestion found in others' published works and incorporated in either of these two books is plainly identified for the most compulsive or skeptical reader to pursue. Martin's analysis is written chiefly to and for other scholars. His intended readers are not solely colleagues in his own discipline to be sure, yet the people he appears to be addressing are presumably quite at home with the languages and literature of the classics. Clapp, by contrast, seems to have had in mind a widely varied "lay" readership, people who might enjoy expertise in a particular field or two or three, but who are completely untutored in other areas. Both authors, however, are eminently readable writers, skilled wordsmiths whose elegant phrases carry meaning and make sense.

The essence of Martin's thesis is that social class ideology decisively framed the Corinthian Christians' understanding of how life as the church is to be lived. In this analysis, "social class" includes but is by no means limited to economic indicators, especially personal wealth. "Class is not a matter of rich or poor or something in between.... Rather it should be seen as relational, as concerned with relationships between *groups* of people in society" [italics added]. The relationship that matters most, the one that goes to the heart of class distinctions, is the power of one *group* to live off the surplus labor value of others.

As Martin walks the reader through Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth he painstakingly shows how each problem that Paul addresses is plausibly to be understood as an artifact of social class ideology: the divisions among parties in the church; the slogans that emphasized radical freedom and superior knowledge; resort to civil courts for dispute

settlement; behavior in the observance of the Lord's Supper, etc. Previous interpretations of each passage are reviewed, then very detailed evidence is presented from recent research to argue instead that social class distinctions permeated the perspectives and conduct of the Corinthian Christians in that day.

Were that the end of the story, one might politely applaud Martin's efforts to clean up the record of why the Corinthian church was so unseemly in its treatment of one another, and go on to other interests. Martin's tale does not, however, end here. Indeed this is not even its starting point. His core objectives are to show [1] how the widely accepted notion of hierarchy among parts of the human body was exploited by the upper social classes to justify maintenance of the hierarchical *status quo* in the body politic, and [2] how Paul — an adept rhetorician — persistently and adroitly turned that argument inside out and upside down to establish an antipodal set of values and organizing principles among people who are members of the body of *Christ*. The story is compelling, well told, and fascinating to read.

But once again, were that the end of *my* story, the reader might well say, "I'm happy for this guy; he enjoyed Martin's book. So what's for lunch?" There's still more, however: Clapp's work.

What Martin does so well with social class ideology and its associated norms in the church at Corinth, Clapp likewise accomplishes with Constantinian and Enlightenment ideologies in the churches of North America. The players live millennia apart, and their world-views are more dissimilar than similar. Of greater significance perhaps, today's churches are watching their privileged status in the social order slip slowly away, in contrast to the Corinthian church which, as a new kid on the block, had to carve out a place for itself in a social milieu that could turn real ugly if irritated.

Despite these central differences, however, the analysis that Clapp brings to the contemporary church is markedly — *markedly* — parallel to Martin's survey of the early Christians at

Corinth. The difficulties that both sets of disciples face are directly attributable to the sway that prevailing ideologies exercise over their perspectives and attitudes and conduct. North American Christians must face up to the fact that their Master has no interest in being President or Prime Minister of a churchly nation-state. His agenda places far more importance on his "Body" — 20th Century Christians: re-read Paul — than on personal spiritual growth. The pluralism that's behind the culture wars is a God-given opportunity for churches to return to "an existence that can become distinctively, exhilaratingly Christian," a "peculiar" culture that is glaringly obvious to all on-lookers as an alternative way of life. In collective worship, Christians will teach and encourage and practice the fine art of seeing things as God, not the present rulers of the world, sees things. Liturgy will be transformed from mere ritual into a parade, into a joyful celebration of victory over the (real) Enemy. Churches will be communities where people listen to one another, where they are friends to one another. To bring the two analyses full circle, churches will constitute an identifiable culture, living out the proclamation that God is in this world palpably present in the Body of Christ. To phrase the matter in one of the many terms currently popular among us in the GOC Network, the church will be the hermeneutic of the gospel.

It is well known that old habits die hard. Deeply rooted presumptions about what the world is like and about how things ought to be, often have far greater staying power and authority, it appears, than that of the naive Emperor who publicly pranced about in no pants. For an author merely to show that the perceptions and social arrangements and symbols and values that characterize life in North America or in Corinth do not flow from Sinai is not enough to persuade some people to forsake them.

On the other hand, the church at Corinth did respond affirmatively, at least in measure, to the apostle's instructions. And across North America today, as we watch the Constantinian epoch draw to its close, there are stirrings of dissatisfaction with what churches have become, and bright anticipation of what God might still be willing to do not only to us, but through us and for us as well. Martin recounts an historical instance; Clapp offers us a vision of the immediate future worth contemplating, indeed worth longing and working to know. ■

LISTSERV continued from page 5.

Hasn't the ongoing presence of the issue demonstrated that there is indeed something that is not dead, or that won't go away? ... I find more and more people, as often as not outside the church, very ready for serious spiritual growth. Then why are we looking for a place for the church? These people *are* the church.

Writer "D": "C's" comments raise the right issues, but I take a different direction. I find no biblical way to promote or be satisfied with "spiritual growth" as an agenda to

replace the formation of an alternative community. It appears to be another individualistic cover. The harder work is in social-formation (love)....

Writer "C": Indeed, "spiritual growth" can be a cover for individualism. But what I need to hear is a North American story of a genuine transition to spiritual, inclusive community. Where are our (ongoing) equivalents of the base communities? The closest I've found in my neck of the woods are the recovery and twelve-step groups. All I'm after is to raise this question: By trying to look at how to adapt theology and practice to current social reality, are we not attributing far too much power to "social reality" or culture?

Writer "E": I am new to this discussion, so bear with me. We are created human, born into a real cultural setting, language, filter set. These may well be manifestations of The Fall, but it is certainly what we have to work with. My map, for example, is English, materialistic, Armenian, etc. My faith and action *will* be defined and circumscribed by these givens....

Writer "C": Indeed! The language and mediations of the gospel have to change, but the gospel does not....

Writer "F": What "C" says is what many of us have come to recognize as the necessary way to travel, knowing that "the language and mediations of the gospel have to change, but the gospel does not." Some of us go farther and say not that the language and mediation "have to" change, but that they "inevitably" do, as the culture expressing it changes, or as it is communicated across lines of cultural difference into the forms of another culture.

But this is not an easy situation, especially on the second part ("the gospel does not change"). The difficulty is that there is no "gospel" that we can ever know or talk about that is not, by that knowing and talking, being formed by the culture that is ours. So, what really do we mean when we say that "the gospel does not" change? This is an easy and in many circles proper thing to claim. But what does it mean? Exactly what is it that "doesn't change"?

The gospel I [often] hear ... as the unchanging one has all the marks and emphases and nuances (personal salvation, etc.) of the modern American versions of the gospel that are very distinctively shaped by our American ethos. Do we claim as unchanging the particular cultural tradition of gospel we have inherited? How do we know if we are doing that? And where do we go from there? ... ■

Do you have a topic you'd like to hear discussed? Or would you like to "listen" in as others pursue various issues? If so, send an e-mail message to <majordomo@calvin.edu> and in the body of the message place only the phrase "subscribe gocn" [without the quotation marks].

NETWORKINGS...

Three upcoming events deal with themes central to the GOCN agenda. The fact that they are in three very different ecclesial orbits signals the range of places where these issues are being taken up.

Trust and Suspicion? Hermeneutics in a Broken World is a conference for scholars, teachers, pastors and others concerned about the interpretation of Scripture in our contemporary philosophical climate. Sponsored by the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto, it will be held on May 21-23, 1997. Featured keynote speakers include James Olthuis, Walter Brueggemann, Phyllis Trible and Sylvia Keesmaat. For further information, contact the ICS at 229 College Street, Toronto, Ontario M5T 1R4, Canada, 416-979-2331.

Linking Gospel and Culture is the theme for this year's Summer at Maryknoll program running from July 14 through 31, 1997. Featured international theologians include Michael Amaladoss, SJ, Megan McKenna, Pablo Richard and John Walsh, MM. The three weeks of the event are self-contained, but interrelated, units and they cover in succession the themes of Scriptural Foundations, Understanding Contexts, and Pastoral Applications. The event is sponsored by The Center for Mission Research and Study at Maryknoll in cooperation with The School of Religion and Religious

Education of Fordham University. Men and women of all faith traditions may apply. For information, contact Dr. Anne Reissner, Maryknoll Summer Program, P.O. Box 305, Maryknoll, NY 10545, e-mail <mklcmrs@igc.apc.org>.

Shaping Missionary Congregations is the title for a series of seminars to be held by the Center for Parish Development during the summer of 1997. The staff at the Center, Paul Dietterich, Inagrace Deitterich, Dale Ziemer, and Ray Schulte, will lead eight seminars for pastors and church leaders and four for consultants in church systems. The seminars are designed "for those who are responding to God's call in a new era" and run at various times from the end of June through the middle of August. Topics include: Reading the Signs of the Times, Becoming a Learning Community, Cultivating a Stewarding Community, Transformational Leadership for the Missional Church, The Purpose-Driven Missional Church, The Church of the Future? Designing Missional Structures, and The Church Transformation Consulting Process in Action. For more information, contact the CPD at 5407 S. University Avenue, Chicago, IL 60615, 773-752-1596.

Wally Hobbs, guest editor and writer of this issue, retired from the faculty of the State University of New York at Buffalo in 1993. The following year he began his active involvement in the GOCN.



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