

the Gospel and Our Culture

a network for encouraging the encounter in north america

The Church As Parallel Culture

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We who live as the church between gospel and culture must say what we mean, what Jesus means, with the testimony of our lives. There is really no shortcut. There is no program, no meeting, no study, that can take the place of saying what we mean with our lives. Only our lives

he is the president of the Czech republic. He has written a book called *Living in Truth*, in which there is a wonderful essay called "Power in the Powerless." He analyzes how the people in his country learned to live in the dominant materialistic culture of communism before it fell.

He says that during the 70s and 80s it seemed to them, the dissidents, that the system would never change.

*The communist lie was quite simply,
"You'll be happy if you have enough things."*

give weight to our words. Still a question remains. How can we sustain a gospel sense of happiness, of meaning, and of purpose in this culture? It's not good enough just to make these assertions.

I have found the writings of Miroslav Václav Havel extremely helpful as indicating a way, not an answer, but a way for us to live in the situation we now find ourselves within in North America. Havel, as you may know, was a dissident playwright under the communist rule. Under that regime, he was jailed. Now

It seemed impermeable and immutable, an iron curtain, a system that dominated every aspect of people's lives. It wasn't just "out there," it was also "within"—within their heads, within their hearts, within their spirits. It looked like it would never change, even though it was a system based on a lie. The lie was quite simply, "You'll be happy if you have enough things."

So Havel and other dissidents began to ask, "How can we live the truth in a culture based on a fundamental lie, especially since the lie is in

*This issue begins where the newest book in the Gospel and Our Culture Series (Eerdmans) ends. Mary Jo Leddy's summarizing and visioning address at the conference that gave the book its title and substance became the Epilogue in *Confident Witness—Changing World*. Some of her concluding, poignant remarks are shared here as an invitation into the rest of the book.*

Alongside her comments, read what Gail Neal says about "Kingdom-Culture Churches" (p. 5) helping us as Leddy does to know ourselves in relation to surrounding cultural currents different from those the Spirit breeds.

To these two reflections is added a second installment of "Cultivating Ways of Christ in the Postmodern Transition" drawing from the enduring legacy of Lesslie Newbigin's thought. This one is on "Ways of Witnessing" (p. 3). A notice about the October 21-23 GOCN Consultation on "Discerning Powers" (p. 8), notes on recent books from Trinity Press (p. 4), and "Networkings" (p. 7) round out the issue.

-The Editor

our heads? How can we begin to live into the truth? We desire so much more than just things. We want something to hope in, a reason to believe.

So in his country, as in other iron-curtain countries, people began to set up what he called “parallel cultures.” They had underground study groups. They studied Plato. They had drama. They had music groups. They wrote novels and poetry, and published them underground. He called this a “parallel culture.” It was not a counter-culture because, he said, it was impossible for us to live totally outside the system. You cannot live outside a culture. But you can create within it zones and spaces, where you can become who you really are. It is in such places that one can speak the truth, where one can gather with others who share that truth.

This went on for years, not without difficulties, but for years. Over time, the truth became stronger and stronger, and at a certain point people began to walk in the streets and to say to the system, “We don’t believe you anymore.” And the system fell. It fell, not because of the power of Western nuclear equipment, but because the people said within the system, “We don’t believe you anymore.” It was a vision that had been nourished within those parallel cultures.

Of course, the story doesn’t end there, and that’s another thing to reflect on. But it does seem to me that Havel’s notion of a “parallel culture” is what Bill Burrows meant when he said the church could be the “zone” that connects us with home truth (*Confident Witness—Changing World*, p. 192). It could be what Doug Hall meant by a “diaspora existence” (pp. 67-68). I think each one of us needs to reflect on what this might mean concretely in our local situations. I can’t do that reflection for you. I simply want to point out that I find the notion of “parallel culture” helpful because it’s not the same as saying the church is a counter-culture. It is far more than saying we’re building a counter-culture to

say that we are looking for the enemy within. I think that the sense of a parallel culture, one in which we become grounded in truth, is a much more powerful notion. It is in such a culture that we can be nourished in thought, poetry, imagination, and religious practices. It is in such a culture that we can truly seek to become God’s people.

Another person who has reflected on this very helpfully is the Appalachian poet and philosopher Wendell Berry. He is very critical of the U.S. government. But he notes that if all he did was criticize his government, he would become just like what he was fighting against. He is also critical of those who say very thoughtlessly, “I love my nation—America right or wrong.” He says that both those who critique and those who declare unblinking affirmation hold such views as abstractions. He says it is important that we become grounded in some specific place. This place for him is a piece of land in a certain county in Kentucky where he is grounded in the life of a rural community. But this plot of land could also be a set of streets, a community, a region, a stretch of beach, a river, or a town. It is whatever

becomes for us, as he says, “the beloved country.” It is when we are located in a smaller space, a beloved country, that we are able either to critique our government and not be overwhelmed by it, or are able to say, “Yes, we love this country.”

So also within the church, we cannot just criticize it or just blindly say we’re loyal to it. We must first find somewhere, some local church, that we call “a beloved community.” It needs to be somewhere, a specific place where we have come to know the gospel as good news, as the saving and redeeming grace of God. It is from such a beloved community that we can then critique both the culture and the church, and where we can also affirm both of them in a real way.

In closing, I want to say that small communities, beloved communities, and parallel cultures are not necessarily powerless. At this conference we have heard the critique of Christendom, and I think most of us share the very convincing critique of the problems it had with power and control. I believe in this critique, but I also believe that at times we deny it. Christendom was a model in which the church exercised

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Cultivating Ways of Christ in the Postmodern Transition

Resources for Pastoral Leaders

George R. Hunsberger
GOCN Coordinator

In the latter years of his life, it was Bishop Lesslie Newbigin's purpose to open Western culture to a missionary dialogue with the gospel. His cultivation of ways of believing, of witnessing, of being community and of living in hope anticipates the daily and weekly preoccupations of pastoral leaders sensitive to the demands of the present day. Here the second of these elements is addressed.

Ways of Witness

Postmodern people have a way of using qualifying phrases that show a sensitivity to the opinions of others. Affirmations are prefaced by phrases like "It seems to me," or "I believe that..." or "I have found this to be true for me." The language is generous and tolerant. But somewhere in it there lurks the potential that all notions are held as true only "for me," with little or nothing presumed to be true also for others. Newbigin helps us see that even within the generous tolerance of humility about the provisional character of all our knowing there is nonetheless the possibility—for all postmodern people on all sorts of issues—to hold some things with *universal intent*, that is, as being true for everyone, however partial may be our grasp of it.

Such is surely the sense Christian believers get about how the gospel they read about in the New Testament expects to be believed. It is announced there with the firm conviction that this good news is for and about the whole world, not just a particular few within it. Jesus' prophetic utterance, "You shall be my witnesses" both energizes them with a sense of their calling and haunts them with the dilemmas it causes in the midst of the postmodern mood. It is not hard to see how deliberate, direct Christian witness rubs against the sensibilities of a world living on the backside of several centuries of Western colonialism. What right do Christians have to pretend to be the bearers of a message everyone should believe?

It is to this matter of "the duty and authority of the church to preach the gospel" that Newbigin has constantly addressed himself in an attempt to build confidence for Christian witness. What is most distinctive about his rationale for witness in the contemporary world is that it is grounded in particularity, not undone by it. Most take the particularity of the Christian church and its historic cultural location primarily in the West to be the problem that thwarts any possibility of universal witness (whether that means

among all peoples of the world or all people in our own locale). If only some point of reference in a universally validated gospel could be found, it is supposed, then witness can rest on that ground. Some seek that under the rubric of objective truth, others in universally demonstrable religious principles. In either case, the particularity of the church is suspect and believed to interfere with a justification for witness.

But not so for Newbigin. The rationale for witness, for the mission of the church and thus its very existence, does not lie in some universal principle distilled out from the particularity of Christian communities, but is rooted precisely in their particularity! He finds it an unworkable myth that we could only witness forthrightly if we somehow could rise above and beyond particularized belief to some universal knowledge. That is impossible, at any rate. But what is more important still, for Newbigin, is that he finds in the biblical rationale for witness the notion that a true particular faith is exactly where the universal scope of witness finds its grounding.

He shows this in what he calls the "logic of election." In his understanding of the "missionary significance of the biblical doctrine of election" we find a thread that runs through his major work on mission theology, *The Open Secret*, and in fact throughout the range of his writings. By the term *election* Newbigin refers to God's choice of Israel to be God's particular people, to be blessed by God and to be a blessing to the nations, and God's choice of the incipient church, the earliest circle of disciples, to be witnesses to the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus. In both cases, the choice of the nation and the church is the choice of a particular community to be the means by which people of other particularities will hear and see the witness. In the very act of witness from one particularity to another, and in the birthing of faith in persons and communities to whom the witness is born, the healing reconciliation about which the gospel speaks is coming about. In the end, so declares Paul in Romans 9-11, both the Jew and the Greek are dependent on the witness of the "other" from whom the gospel is received. God's method of choosing particular witnesses is congruent with the social nature of the gospel which envisions the healing of the nations.

The consequence of such a rationale as this for the church's mission of witness is an attitude of humility. Any missionary who recognizes this as the source of authority for commending the gospel with *universal intent* will commend it knowing that the particularity of the missionary church's faith must be worn with confidence but not assumed to be absolute or final. The conviction with which the gospel is told leads to a humble form of missionary dialogue with the ways that a new person or community or culture grasps and exhibits the gospel in response to the Spirit. The calling of the church is to give the gospel away and expect wonderful new flowerings of its expression in the recipients of the message. ■

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The Church as Parallel Culture
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power in a worldly way, where power was manifested as both domination and control. We do well to reject this model of power. But many of us have often taken on the Enlightenment model of power as our alternative, where power is knowledge and to know is to control. We need experts, we need people who can tell us how to do things, how to work things out. We will also do well to reject this worldly form of power. But are these the only models of power?

We need to redefine power, not to become powerless, but to think about what power really means. I don't think that the only power is a power of domination, nor is it a power of predictability and control. As Christians, we know a different power, the power of the Spirit. Here, I think, we should carefully consider that the Spirit's power is not a thing that some people have a lot of, and others have a little of. It's not a quantity in that sense. It is not a piece of pie that is divisible, and therefore there always have to be power conflicts. We might do well to think of spiritual power as an energy. Spiritual power is the energy that happens when

people are in-relation to one another. It is what happens in-between people. This is a power that happens when people gather in Jesus' name. When they interact, there is energy, there is power. This is why significant change has often happened when small groups come together.

This is what happens when Christians function as a parallel culture. Power has nothing to do with numbers, it has to do with the quality of relationships, what happens in-between. It is important for us to remember that the power of God arises when we are in-relation to God. This is how power was experienced in the upper room. People gathered, they talked, and they prayed. They were there in a sustained interaction. And then there was power between them. It was not a power that any one person possessed. They were possessed by the power of God, because they were in-relation to God as a community. And then they went forth with great power as missionaries. Today, just as 2,000 years ago, may we too come together in-relation and experience power, the power of the Spirit of God. ■

[Excerpted from *Confident Witness—Changing World* with permission from the publisher, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.]

Christian Mission and Modern Culture (CMMC) Series

Trinity Press International, a division of the Morehouse Group, has announced these new volumes in their series.

Canon and Mission, by H. D. Beeby. An assertion that the biblical canon is at its heart a “handbook of mission” and a proposal that the Exodus theme be seen as a way of understanding both the canonical unity of the Bible and Christianity's mission in today's world, a mission that must include interfaith dialogue.

From Complicity to Encounter: The Church and the Culture of Economism, by Jane Collier and Raphael Esteban. The authors believe that mission within and to the “culture of economism” needs to be a mission of encounter in which each challenges the other to conversion, advocating that such conversion implies the abandonment of the misuses of power and the commitment to the pursuit of the good.

Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts, by Paul G. Hiebert. An exploration of the issue of epistemology—or theory of knowledge—and its impact upon how we view and do missions in today's world, examining especially three theories of knowledge: positivism, instrumentalism/idealism, and critical realism, siding with the latter as a way to avoid arrogance and colonialism on the one hand and relativism on the other.

Beyond Sectarianism: Re-Imagining Church and World, by Philip Kenneson. The book suggests that the church's role in contemporary society is to serve as a “contrast-society,” a model that holds missional promise in that the church's embodied life in the world is its witness to the world. Over against critics of such a view of the church, the author shows the church-as-contrast-society model as the one that moves “beyond sectarianism.”

Another City: An Ecclesiological Primer for a Post-Christian World, by Barry A. Harvey. What is the church, and what is essential to it particularly in a post-Christian age? The author calls upon the church to remember that it is “Another City” that does not compromise itself by giving allegiance to any political entity that belongs to this world. Here is a call for the church to have the courage to live, like Israel of old, in the diaspora as a distinct minority.

Liberating Evangelism: Gospel Theology and the Dynamics of Communication, by Stephen K. Pickard. A portrait of the church as called to be a community of the evangel and thus a community that seeks to embody the glad tidings of God in all of its life. The author calls for a recovery of the complementary nature of theology and evangelism (the theory and practice of the gospel), a theme he develops in terms of the dynamics of communication. ■

Kingdom-Culture Churches

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Down-sizing was forced upon the church by the economic realities of declining membership and decreasing funds. Many predicted this would be the harbinger of the death of the church. What we forget is that “all things work together for good for those who love God” (Romans 8:28). And God is certainly bringing good out of that which we, with our limited vision and pessimistic imaginations, could only conceive of as bad.

The good news is that we have been forced to stop presuming that we know what God wants the church to be. It has been too long since we have examined the assumption that the church is a place where we *do for*. This *do for* model seems to be based on the idea that every organization, including the church, exists for the purpose of answering the

high on a consumer-culture’s list of values. But it is high on God’s agenda for the world. It is, in fact, an integral part of what it means to be citizens of the Kingdom of God. The bad news of downsizing becomes good news when we begin to understand that the church is called to be something other than a *do for* agency. That the church should not operate just like every other business in America is a radical departure from what many perceive to be sound church administration policy and practice.

Each year, frequently in the fall, we Christians hear about raising funds to meet the operating budget and balance the books. Some may use words which sound more ‘churchy’, words like stewardship, mission, charity, faith budget, etc. But, the bottom line in most congregations is the bottom

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question, “What can you do for me?” As members of a consumer-oriented culture, we have accepted without question the proposition that the church should operate as a free market enterprise which exists to *do for* its members and the world. Many today conceptualize the church as being in the business of marketing a product, producing a program, and/or providing a service. It doesn’t take an extensive survey of the current literature to realize that the language of capitalism is being used by many church folks these days.

The problem this cultural mind set creates for the church is two-fold. First, the Biblical concept of discipleship has more to do with obedience than with acquisitiveness. While a market economy is motivated by profit, discipleship is found only by giving ourselves away. This ‘take up your cross and follow me’ message of the gospel doesn’t correspond very well to the notion of building bigger and better ‘mousetraps’ in order to achieve success.

Second, Christians are neither producers nor consumers. Christians are folks who experience divine mercy through *not* receiving the wages our sins have earned us. Instead, we receive by divine grace what we could never, ever, afford to buy or acquire for ourselves. Not receiving what we have earned and receiving that which we could never earn isn’t

line. The real concerns are: What is our overhead? What are the operating costs? Where can we cut the budget to make ends meet? Inevitably someone will say, “The church has to balance its budget just like any other business.” And yet another will say, “We need more members so that we can meet the budget.” In effect, regardless of the words used, the real concern becomes how the church can, as cheaply as possible, merchandise its product in order to acquire a larger share of the market and increase its ‘profit margin’ which is usually defined in terms of ‘mission’ projects and activities.

This is not to say that financial realities aren’t of concern. Obviously, they are. The issue is, should the church be market-driven, consumer-oriented, and business-minded? Or, should the church be Kingdom-driven, mission-oriented, and Christ-minded? Granted, these two ‘realities’ are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, we must pause before too quickly leaping to the conclusion that sound judgment and practical wisdom indicate the necessity to focus on a worldly agenda. Remember, “God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength” (1 Cor. 1:25). The church needs to realize that economic concerns are of paramount importance only when production and consumption are

among its highest priorities.

Some churches are experimenting with alternative models of how we can be a church which is identified more closely with the Kingdom of God than with the marketplace. Some are even claiming that, if Christianity is not called by God to be a market-driven, consumer-oriented, business-minded *do for* organization, it is called by God to be a Kingdom-driven, mission oriented, Christ-minded cross-cultural existence.

Culture is a word used to describe the ways in which people are formed and molded by the social, religious, political and physical environment which surrounds them. It describes 'the way things are done around here.' As the world has grown smaller, we've found that nations are patch works of many cultures. Thus each of us actually lives in multiple cultural contexts. Take America for example. While we speak of the 'American way of life,' there are actually many ways of life within our nation. The culture of inner city ghettos is very different from the cultures of suburbia or small-town rural America. Racial/ethnic differences increases cultural diversity. The culture of Hispanic migrant workers in the onion fields of southern Colorado is as different from the culture of Hispanics in the New York barrio as it is from the cultural experiences of African-Americans in Harlem or Anglo-Americans in Hollywood or Scandinavian Americans in Minnesota. Each of these is a unique cultural variant within the overall context of our American way of life.

When members of one culture live within the confines of another culture, they experience a cross-cultural existence. The television situation comedies *Green Acres* and *The Beverly Hillbillies* are humorous examples of the difficulties faced when one culture confronts another. In *Green Acres* an Anglo-American couple from upper-class New York City move to small-town rural America. He plows fields in a three-piece business suit while she tries to cope without a maid. In *The Beverly Hillbillies* an Anglo-American family from an isolated community in West Virginia move to Beverly Hills where they keep livestock in their mansion. These are obviously cultural caricatures. But they do portray the multi-cultural nature of America and suggest some of the problems which occur when one culture interacts with another.

By virtue of baptism, Christians are born into a culture the Bible refers to as the Kingdom of God. And the culture of the Kingdom of God is very different from any other culture in America — or around the world, for that matter. Like members of any culture, citizens of God's Kingdom, are expected to look at the world in particular ways, behave in a prescribed manner, think and act and value certain things, hold particular beliefs, give primary allegiance to aspects of that culture, etc.

The Bible tells us that the Kingdom of God is not of this world, i.e., it is non-geographic. Christians are members of a culture which is not identified with any place. Rather, it is identified with the norms of people who live according to its particular cultural standards.

The Bible tells us that the Kingdom of God is ruled, not

by any person or people, but by God. The Kingdom-culture expects Christians to give allegiance first, last and always to God, worshiping and praising, obeying and serving nothing and no one else. Christians are also encouraged to develop a personal one-on-one relationship with their Ruler-God through prayer, worship, service, Bible reading, and the regular exercise of other Christian disciplines.

The Bible tells us that the Kingdom of God culture has certain characteristics. These characteristics were evident in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ who taught citizens what it means to be members of the reign of God. The meek will always come out on top, the hungry go to the front of the food line; the powerful wash the feet of the homeless, the resources of the earth are conserved and all its creatures are preserved, children are protected and life is cherished. It is inhabited by citizens who work for justice, seek shalom, give themselves away in service to others, love their enemies, give more to the thief than the thief would have stolen, show respect to the elderly, honor one another, work for the good of others rather than self.

The Bible tells us that the Kingdom of God has no military to protect it, no international alliance to promote it, no commander-in-chief to lead it. Rather, members of this culture have faith that, regardless of external obstacles, communal persecution, personal hardship, political legislation, the Kingdom of God will thrive only and always by the power of God through the Holy Spirit. Because it believes in the resurrection of the body to eternal life through Jesus Christ, this culture embodies absolute trust in spite of evidence to the contrary.

Learning to live according to the unique cultural expectations of the Kingdom of God does not come naturally. It is learned behavior that is integrated into each citizen through the power of the Holy Spirit. This learning occurs within the community which the Kingdom-culture calls the church. Thus the first role of the church is enculturation, passing the Kingdom-culture from one generation of citizens of the Kingdom of God to another. A second role of the church is to equip its citizens to live as strangers in a foreign land (Hebrews II: 13 -16), witnessing to the world that 'this is what it means to be citizens of God's Kingdom.'

This model of the church as Kingdom-culture community, is in marked contrast to that of the church as a *do for* organization or agency. Instead of producing a product for members and/or non-members to consume or providing a service for them to utilize, the church becomes a community which lives and witnesses to the Christian culture within a foreign land. "This is what it means to sing the Lord's song in a foreign land" (Psalm 137:4), each congregation declares.

In international diplomacy, it is the work of ambassadors and their representatives to witness to foreigners what it means to be American in Somalia or Japanese in Tibet or Kenyan in Saudi Arabia. According to Scripture, every Christian becomes an ambassador (πρεσβεύω, be a representative) upon baptism. Each congregation becomes a Kingdom-cultural community within a foreign land where

cross-cultural existence is a way of life and each member is an ambassador for Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:20).

But, like any cultural enclave, the church cannot stand alone against the dominate culture which would dilute, absorb and destroy it. Just as Little Italy and Chinatown need relationships with the 'homeland' to maintain their unique cultural identities, so, too, does the Kingdom-culture-church require the support of other Kingdom-culture churches to remain faithful and obedient citizens of the Kingdom of God.

These connections are provided by ecclesiastical embassies variously called presbyteries, conferences, synods, districts, conventions, associations, classes, dioceses, councils. Kingdom-culture communities rely upon these ecclesiastical embassies to provide them with the nurture, support and resources they need. These ecclesias-

tical embassies don't *do* anything *for* their ambassadors; they are, however, the connecting tissue which binds them together for the common good. They link all Kingdom-culture churches with one another, helping them build relationships, provide mutual support, develop resources and gather together to address common concerns. They facilitate corporate critical thinking which guides and supports the body as it seeks to determine how to live and witness as Christians in a foreign land. They provide encouragement and strength which enables Kingdom-culture churches and their ambassadors to present an accurate witness to other cultures which surround them. They supply the corporate power to influence and impact the dominate culture so that it is persuaded to adopt policies and procedures which are more just and closer to the biblical ideal of shalom. ■

NETWORKINGS

The Damaris Project

Lilian Calles Barger, founder and president of *The Damaris Project: A Women's Culture Initiative*, has announced a National Consultation to be held on November 5-7, 1999, at the Doubletree Hotel, Lincoln Centre, in Dallas, Texas. Its theme will be "Women's Culture and the Gospel: Entering the 21st Century" and it will seek to establish "a vision for reaching trendsetters in women's culture." The consultation is designed to be a two-way dialogue to identify the current cultural barriers to reaching women with the gospel in North America. It will look at philosophical, theological and social issues that must be addressed in order to reach this mission field effectively. Academics, students, church and evangelism leaders, creative thinkers, and strategists, women and men are being selected and invited to attend. Among the speakers already confirmed are: Frederica Mathewes-Green, Donna Hailson, Sarah Sumner, Vicki Schaefer, Amy Tracy, Zondra Lindlblade, and Lilian Calles Barger.

The consultation is part of the larger mission of *The Damaris Project* to "present, defend and spread the gospel of Jesus Christ to women on the leading edges of our culture." The goal is that the gospel be "presented to women's culture through the voice of women using a multi-disciplinary approach. Our aim is for this women's voice to be a powerful tool in fulfilling the command that we be a 'light for the gentiles' that we may 'bring salvation to the ends of the earth.' In this case, the ends of the earth are the

leading edges of women's culture."

The project envisions three types of activities towards that end. Those involved in the project "will *first* define where the leading edge of women's culture is through ongoing research. *Second*, we will coordinate the work of women apologists, theologians, creative thinkers and social activists to produce material that responds to the culture with the gospel in creative ways. We will provide leadership in identifying and challenging assumptions made by women. *Third*, we will seek venues within which to engage in intelligent dialogue with women."

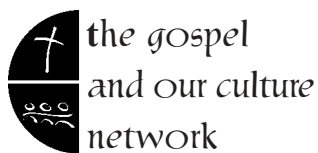
Those seeking further information regarding the project or the Dallas consultation may contact Lilian Calles Barger, President, 5910 North Central Expressway, Suite 1710, Dallas, TX 75206, 972-390-0532, damarisproject@mindspring.com.

Imagining Tomorrow III

The British and Foreign Bible Society has announced its third Imagining Tomorrow consultation in its ongoing program called *Open Book*, a joint venture with the Churches Today in England program. It will be held on September 13-15 at Queen's College, Cambridge (UK) on the theme "Reclaiming the Story." The consultation continues a series of reflections whose aim it is to shape an appropriate public theology. The focus at this time will be on politics and the media and will feature speakers such as Walter Brueggemann, Duncan Forrester, Lord Puttnam, Susan Howatch and Elaine Storkey. Further information may be requested from the British and Foreign Bible Society, Stonehill Green, Westlea, Swindon SN5 7DG, UK, e-mail openbook@bfbs.org.uk.

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“Discerning Powers”

The 1999 GOCN Consultation, October 21-23 Techny Towers Conference Center, Techny, Illinois

The church is called in its daily practice to live in a way that is discerning of the “principalities and powers” of its time and place. This it does in loyalty to Christ and in recognition of his authority over all powers. This discerning is always tricky for the church because the very powers imbedded in the culture form the way the church thinks and speaks and discerns.

This year’s GOCN Consultation will give attention to these issues by analyzing powers in some of their concrete forms. In light of those, these questions will be probed: What is the relation between responsible living in the context of the powers and our witness to the judging and saving power of God in Jesus Christ? What are the powers at work in our society today, and how are they to be faced and called to account, in word and action? What does all this mean for the responsible life and witness of the local Christian community?

The Design Team for the consultation consists of these people:

Bill Wylie Kellermann. In numerous articles in *Sojourners* and elsewhere, a kind of journalist of particular powers and Christ’s interaction with them. He is on the staff of the Seminary Consortium for Urban Pastoral Education (Chicago) and a resident of Detroit.

Liala Beukema. A pastor of a congregation that lives in the heart of Chicago, the Church of the Good News. She is a frequent mentor to ministry interns in urban ministry.

Tom McAlpine. An observer of various Christian “takes” on the issue of the powers and of the global contexts in which they manifest themselves. He works for MARC, a division of World Vision International.

Charles West. A social ethicist gripped by Bonhoeffer’s persistent challenge: never try to understand the world without Christ, or Christ without the world. He is professor emeritus at Princeton Theological Seminary.

Lois Barrett. A denominational leader nurturing churches recovering their missional identity. She co-authored the book *Missional Church* and works for the General Conference Mennonite Church.

[Subscribers will receive registration materials in August.]