

# RELIGION

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## THE BIBLE AS LITERATURE

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In the well-known Supreme Court decision in the case of *Abington vs. Schempp*, the 1963 case which effectively declared prescribed prayers and Bible reading in public schools unconstitutional, the Court indicated quite clearly what the limits of the ruling were. Speaking for the eight-man majority, Mr. Justice Tom Clark wrote,

It might well be said that one's education is not complete without a study of comparative religion and its relation to the advancement of civilization. It certainly may be said that the Bible is worthy of study for its literary and historic qualities. Nothing we have said here indicates that such study of the Bible or of religion, when presented objectively as part of a secular program of education, may not be effected consistently with the First Amendment.

This comment, read almost as an addendum to the main decision of the Court, pointed to a subject area which colleges had been offering as a matter of course, and which has since received some attention on the secondary level. This comment likewise received widespread and favorable mention from those commentators who did not give a simple knee-jerk reaction to the main drift of the decision.

Nevertheless, the point that the Bible might be studied for its literary and historic qualities, underlines a present dilemma. There was a time when one would automatically assume that a knowledge of the Bible—an informed, interested lay knowledge—was a precondition to higher education. In other words, the cultural assumptions of western civilization were that one acquired a knowledge of the Bible as a simple matter of course, whether at home, in church or chapel, or in school. Nowadays however, it is received as part of "finishing" one's education, as icing on the cake as it were; and now the colleges and universities routinely offer advanced undergraduate courses, usually through their departments of English, in both the Bible as literature and its rather curious concomitant, classical mythology.

*(I have promised myself that here will be no explanatory footnotes in this piece, and consequently I will resort instead to the parenthetical aside as a means of creative digression. You can read them or not, as you see fit. Let me state at the outset that I am in full agreement with the Supreme Court decision mentioned earlier. One need only extrapolate from the instances of numerous contemporary Savonarolas of all faiths throughout the world to perceive the intolerance of a state-imposed religion, even if that turns out to be, in our case, watered-down, milk-soppy Christianity. NEVERTHELESS, I have to admit that I received my first and most lasting impressions of the Bible from the daily Bible readings in my public schools in Michigan. We got no real theology of course; most of the passages read steered clear of the law, the prophets, and the begats. But what marvelous stories of wanderings, battles, reward and punishments, all read in that splendid rolling prose! That was certainly a revelation to me. Yet, it is instructive to note that even then, in the late '30's and early '40's, the community and the state expected the school to give us this admittedly minimal instruction, rather than the home or the church.)*

### BIBLICAL ALLUSION

Whatever the reason, it is true that for some time we have not been able automatically to assume a knowledge of the Bible on the part of our students. Over the past year or so, several different editorial col-

umnists have made passing reference to a minor quiry in the economy, or in the foreign oil situation, or the like, as "a little cloud, no bigger than a man's hand." Informal inquiry among students, graduate and undergraduate, indicated that none of them, and interestingly enough, few of my own colleagues, could identify this reference to the harbinger of an end to the drought in Israel, following Elijah's contest with the priests of Baal (I Kings 18:44).

On another occasion, I assigned my students in a freshman composition class a light essay on the beneficial qualities of bicarbonate of soda, "The Burning Heart," by Robert Farrar Capon. The title itself is suggestive of the writer's identity as a clergyman, and scattered throughout were echoes of and allusions to the Bible. However, my class of much better than average freshmen could not identify even one. For the record: the author speaks of the relief of bicarb as "the satisfaction of dramatic changes joyfully proclaimed." Further, this relief "comes in force: not little by little like spies in the night, but all at once, like an army with banners and shouting." Its flavor is "a bland saltiness." It works "mightily and sweetly, like the Wisdom of God." A box of bicarb can contain the equivalent of a hundred digestion pills, "and still have talents to spare." It is praised as "Leavener, and nearly omnicompetent Lifter of the otherwise forlorn flatness of our lives" and as "Very Present Help in all our troubles." Finally, says the author in an apostrophe, "If we were half as faithful as you have been, we would be twice as good as we are. May God hasten the day." Sacreligious? I don't think so, but even if it were, one would still have to be aware of both the style and the content of the original in order to make the identification and state the case. None of my students could do it.



#### THE BIBLE IN LITERATURE

Father Capon published his little essay in 1969 as part of a collection entitled *The Supper of the Lamb*. It is clear that he felt that his readers would recognize, understand, and appreciate the Biblical allusions. As time passes, it becomes more evident that this is a faulty assumption. More and more of even the most obvious allusions are lost on more and more otherwise intelligent readers. Yet writers continue to use them in titles to establish a theme or mood. I think immediately of William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom* or of James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. The Song of Solomon, or Canticles, yields up such examples as Lillian Hellman's *The Little Foxes*, George Martin's *Our Vines Have Tender Grapes*, Peter DeVries's *Comfort Me with Apples*, and John Van Druten's *The Voice of the Turtle*. The "little cloud" mentioned earlier is the title of a short story by James Joyce.

The classic example of the use of the Bible in literature is Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. Melville was not religious in the pietistic sense of "constant churchgoer;" his background was Dutch Reformed, but he was not active in his membership. On the other hand, he accepted the Bible as a part of his culture and assumed that his readers would recognize Bible allusions almost as automatically as breathing. The book goes into great detail about every aspect of whales and whaling; common enough as the industry had been in the mid-nineteenth century, Melville could not assume that his readers knew anything at all about it. But the Bible was a given. And it is omnipresent in direct and indirect allusion from the first sentence in the novel, "Call me Ishmael," to the last, "It was the devious-cruising Rachel, that in her retracing search after her missing children, only found another orphan."

A quick overview of just the high spots gives some indication of the ubiquity of the Bible in the novel. The narrator, who seems to have no background, no roots, and no future, calls himself Ishmael. At the seamen's chapel in New Bedford, Father Mapple preaches on Jonah. The close, somewhat devious Quaker owners of the whaler *Pequod* are Captains Peleg and Bildad. The skipper, of course, is Captain Ahab. The crazy sailor who stands on the wharf in Nantucket and prophesies doom for the ship and her captain is named Elijah. One of the whalers encountered on the voyage, a plague ship with a religious fanatic aboard named Gabriel, is called the *Jeroboam*; another, the one searching for a missing boat, is the *Rachel*. This overview of names does not, however, begin to mention any of the indirect allusions that cover each page

and permeate the language and style of the author. Similar allusions cover the pages of writers as various as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Anthony Trollope, and Samuel Butler. A modern writer who would consciously do what these writers did unconsciously would indeed be writing for a very special audience. Consequently, academic courses have been devised to help a potential readership acquire this special knowledge. Ironically, the tendency is now for modern readers of these classics to make too much, critically, of the use of the Bible in literature once it is pointed out to them.

#### THE BIBLE AS LITERATURE

But the Bible in literature, interesting as it is as an indication of the social and cultural norms of a given period, is ultimately less interesting than the Bible itself as a literary document. Naturally, this kind of study might in itself disturb some people who might feel that a literary survey of scripture would tend to detract from its primary function. But whenever a story to tell or a concept to convey passes through a human agency, it will become, not a direct recital of all the facts, but the facts selected, altered, reorganized—in short, literature.

Note what happens in our own lives. When we recount anecdotally something that has happened to us, we do not put in every single irrelevant detail that was coincident with the event. However incoherent the days of our lives probably are, we recount the event by putting it into a frame, by giving it a beginning and end, an appropriate setting. If we are really skillful, we will move the account along with a minimum of irrelevant details, pointing always to the climax to the punch line. Those who are particularly skillful at this, who can manipulate the details of a story without appearing to do so, become our story-tellers.

The Bible, then, is no different from any other collection of miscellaneous pieces, except that it was assembled to be, as G. Ernest Wright and Reginald H. Fuller put it, "The Book of the Acts of God." Further, it went through the hands of particularly skillful, devout people. Occasionally, as with the "begats," or with the recital of the laws in the *Torah*, there is virtually no way to render the subject with much literary acumen. Occasionally, too, as in the Chronicles, the writer, or chronicler, was not terribly skillful; and sometimes, as with Ezekiel or Revelation, the writer seems unnecessarily obscure. But much of the Bible displays a particular skill in a variety of literary effects. The writer of the Gospel of Mark, who is not writing biography or history, but a special genre called "gospel," the good news, is able to frame each of the teachings of Jesus within that brief book by having Jesus move about the country or sail about the Sea of Galilee between each lesson thus underlining the didactic integrity of each unit.

*(Second digression: I am frequently asked about the versions of the Bible used for the teaching of the Bible as literature, and this seems about as good a place as any to discuss this subject. Naturally, we are talking here about the Bible in English translation, and when one speaks of the English Bible, the natural tendency is to think of the Authorized, or King James Version of 1611. The concomitant Protestant tendency is to think of this as a particularly splendid example of the English language in its golden period, what John Livingston Lowes called "The Noblest Monument of English Prose," a perception that can be carried to the extreme of bibliolatry. Actually, the King James Bible is stylistically based on the work of Tyndale and Coverdale a hundred years before. After its appearance, it was nearly fifty years before it was accepted fully, most Englishmen preferring the more accessible Geneva Bible of the English Calvinists. I sometimes get the impression that the esteem in which it is held is more indicative of simple familiarity than of any critical perception or textual scholarship.*

*Nevertheless, this is the version that has had such a tremendous effect on our cultural and stylistic consciousness for the past four hundred years, and it is therefore the principal text used in teaching the Bible as literature. However, students should also have near at hand a good contemporary translation like the Revised Standard Version, the New English Bible, the Jerusalem Bible, or the Good News Bible. My personal favorite among these is the Jerusalem Bible. In spite of its unpromising origin as the putative English translation of a French translation, it is particularly effective in rendering each book as a stylistically distinct entity. Previous translations have tended to make each book virtually undistinguishable from the other in style and diction.)*

#### THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Before we look at some particularly "literary" passages of the Bible, it would be well to turn for a moment to a portion of scripture that is not usually thought of as literature. I speak here of the so-called Sermon on the Mount. Despite, or more likely because of its didactic nature, chapters 5 through 7 of the Gospel of Matthew is a tightly organized rhetorical exercise, indicative of the polishing that comes from repeatedly preaching the same material, and thus consciously working it over, plus the probability of extensive oral transmission before it was written down as we have it. We have become entirely print-oriented today, and we look upon literacy as so necessary that we are inclined to distrust memory and to allow our memorizing faculties to atrophy. But in the pre-literate culture of first-century Palestine, there were plenty of mnemonic devices which enabled people to transmit virtually intact a story, or a sermon, without any reference to writing at all, provided that it was initially reasonably well organized.

The frame of this passage is the escape of Jesus from the importuning multitude to a relatively secluded spot on a mountain (unnamed), where he teaches his disciples. At the conclusion of this extended passage, these same hearers express surprise at the authority of his words. The important thing to notice is that this is really an instruction period: he is seated as he begins his discourse, the traditional teaching position in ancient Hebrew society (see Luke 4:20 for a similar action which a modern reader might misinterpret). In

short, what follows is not a "sermon," as we ordinarily understand the term. And Cecil B. DeMille or Monty Python to the contrary, it was heard only by his serious followers, his disciples, not by a heterogeneous mixture of the interested and the curious.

The Sermon begins with a sequence of aphorisms commonly called the "Beatitudes." Each aphorism has a parallel construction, beginning "Blessed (or 'happy,' or 'fortunate,' there is no precise English equivalent) are . . .," identifying a segment of society singularly unhappy or unfortunate, as the world perceives happiness and good fortune. In each aphorism, the unfortunates are presented with an explanation of their future happiness: "Blessed are . . ., for . . ." The string of aphorisms ends with one directed to the hearers, "Blessed are ye, . . ." who are, perhaps for the first time in their careers, shown that they, too, might be considered unfortunate.

After focusing on the disciples, Jesus proceeds to characterize them. In two parallel passages beginning "Ye are . . .," they are metaphorically identified with salt and light, two common everyday necessities meant to be used, not hoarded or hidden. But these allusions are extended in two familiar expressions, "the salt of the earth," and "the light of the world." As such are the disciples themselves to be used. Hoarded salt deteriorates and is good only for laying the dust on the road. And a lamp isn't lit just to be covered up. (That "bushel" of the King James Version, by the way, is a metal measuring tub, not the highly combustible bushel basket).

Having indicated that his followers will inevitably be highly visible, Jesus then proceeds to stipulate that the traditional Jewish law must be followed not just to the letter, but with righteousness exceeding that of people looked to as models. A sequence of passages beginning "Ye have heard that it was said . . ." deals with the laws regarding wrath, adultery, divorce, testimony under oath, exaction of the law, enemies, and almsgiving. These are each balanced with the dictum ". . . but I say unto you . . .," in which the ordinary interpretation of these laws is shown to be inadequate. This is the section of the Sermon that has given "an eye for an eye," then and now a pretty humane concept of justice, an undeserved negative reputation. But in instructing his followers in a new application of the law, Jesus gives some splendidly ringing exhortations: "turn the other cheek," "go the second mile," "love thine enemy."

This contrast of traditional law and the new law is concluded parallel to the stipulations on almsgiving, contrasting public hypocrisy and private sincerity, with a similar stipulation on prayer. Here are contrasted the hypocrite who prays in public with the sincere disciple who prays in private. This stipulation is fleshed out with a sample sequence of petitions that may appropriately and properly be addressed of God, a sample which is in itself so successful that we have made of it a complete prayer, the "Lord's Prayer." This body of petitions ends with a request for forgiveness and an admission of weakness and dependency (the final section beginning "For thine is the Kingdom . . ." would appear to be a later addition), leading to some further comments on the whole subject of forgiveness. Then, parallel to the stipulation on almsgiving and prayer, this section of the Sermon is concluded with comments on fasting, again contrasting public ostentation with private sincerity.

The next section of the Sermon is an apparent sequence of miscellaneous comments, but they are held together by the device of making them all imperatives, addressed to the hearers. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth . . ." "Take no thought of your life . . ." "Take therefore no thought for the morrow . . ." "Judge not . . ." "Ask and it shall be given you . . ." "Enter ye in at the strait gate . . ." "Beware of false prophets . . ." The sequence likewise has an identifiable order, beginning with commands to put aside worldliness, continuing with some promise of future reward, and ending with indications of who will obtain the Kingdom. This section contains some of the most memorable, yet the simplest and commonest details: the lilies of the field, the mote and the beam, wolves in sheep's clothing, figs from thistles. It also contains comments with an absolutely chilling finality: "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof;" and "By their fruits ye shall know them."

The Sermon is concluded by a device commonly used elsewhere in the Gospels, but not before now in this passage. This is the illustration, or parable, of the house built on a rock, contrasted with the house built on sand. I will have more to say about the parable as a literary form; the point here is that directing the illustration to his hearers, specifying those who *do* as contrasted with those who only hear, is an effective way of rounding out the didactic nature of the discourse and underscoring its essential importance. The whole section is then rounded off by the end frame mentioned earlier, followed by the picture of Jesus coming down from the mountain and continuing his healing ministry.

This is probably the longest extended passage in the entire Gospels except for the description of Jesus's passion, death, and resurrection. The primary purpose of the Sermon on the Mount is to instruct, but it is not marked by the tedium one might expect from such passages. On the contrary, it is strikingly memorable. One is in fact struck by the fact that almost the whole of it sticks easily in the mind and can be effortlessly recalled. The reason for this is very simple. The Sermon itself is a masterpiece of expression and organization with parallel structures and homely details that take it out of the realm of lecture and make it literature.

#### THE CREATION

For something more traditionally literary, but with similar kinds of balance and organization, the first Creation story, Genesis 1-2:3, offers good material for analysis. (*Another digression: Those who view scrip-*

tivities, whether they were ritualistic or communal. Salvation might be personal but it demanded practical and present activities.

The view of Jesus found in this passage neutralizes messianism in a way different from that of Pharisaic Judaism. For Jesus history is irrelevant to religious salvation. Only a spiritual life, opposed here to life of the flesh, can qualify one for personal salvation. Whereas both Pharisaic Judaism and Jesus agree on the second point, that is, that salvation is not nationalistic or political, they disagree about the need for spiritual rebirth. For Jesus only a purifying of the self from the gross material aspects of the flesh can be the way to win salvation. The Pharisees made civil religiousness possible by sanctifying the civil realm while insuring against political nationalism. In this passage Jesus draws a separation between the civil and the spiritual realms. Only by dying to the one and being reborn in the other can salvation be achieved.

An emphasis upon spiritual rebirth is common to both the Pharisaic and New Testament traditions. In their effort to reconcile Jewish exclusivism with the demands made by the environment, the Pharisees insisted on the priority of spiritual aims over traditional practices. Jewish law for the Pharisees was a means by which historical context was elevated to spiritual levels. If the spiritual level conflicts with the letter of the law, then the law is sacrificed. The statement "man was not made for the Sabbath but the Sabbath for man," is a Pharisaic tradition attested to in ancient texts.

The Christian parallel to that saying is significantly revised. In it we hear not about "man" but about "the Son of Man," which by the final editing of the Gospels clearly refers to the person of Jesus. The Christian, like the Pharisee, emphasizes a spiritual rather than a political or even cultural identity. Yet the Pharisee says that that identity comes from a certain activity, spiritualizing the mundane world, while the Christian finds belief in Jesus as the key to spiritual life. Both the Pharisee and the Christian agree that the various rituals and observances which often place obstacles between Jew and non-Jew can be set aside. The Pharisees suggest that only in the ultimate messianic fulfillment will all the laws be fulfilled and therefore flexibility is permissible in this historical context. The Christian claims that because all laws have already been fulfilled through Jesus, no other means of personal salvation is needed.

Martin Buber has rightly pointed to this difference as the crucial one between Judaism and Christianity: "... revealed means for the Pharisees," he notes, "through the historical revelation in the Word brought into the tradition of Israel and manifest in it; for Jesus however the tradition of Israel has not adequately preserved the historical revelation in the Word, but now it is adequately disclosed in its meaning and purpose." The significance of this difference is that the Pharisees do not distinguish between the law which spiritualizes concrete reality and a second realm which is "pure spirit." Jesus overcomes the difference between the exclusiveness of Judaism and its universal message by creating a new universal fellowship. Through belief in Jesus, a new brotherhood is created. By being reborn of the spirit, the Christian enters a world citizenship which expands the boundaries of his universe.



The Pharisees, as Nicodemus represents, do not comprehend such a new brotherhood. Spirit is accessible only through interaction with the concrete world, only by making the profane holy. But how is the distinction between Jew and non-Jew to be overcome? The Pharisees portray God as saying to mankind:

"There are so many things in the world that are bitter but man can make them sweet. The lupine is bitter, but if you boil it in water seven times it will become pleasant; so it is with mustard, capers, and many other things. If then you sweeten for your use the bitter things I have created, how much more so can you sweeten your own evil inclinations." (*Tanhuma Genesis*)

The Pharisees see all mankind as involved in a single project, that of sweetening the world. Law is a means by which not merely the Jew but all human beings improve the world. Nicodemus might reply to Jesus that he does not need to be reborn; he needs only to improve that with which he was born. As for so-called "exclusiveness," the Pharisees point out that not only Jews sweeten mustard, but all human beings. The test of man's achievement is whether he has inherited the "holy spirit." The Pharisees see this gift as accessible to all people:

I call upon heaven and earth as witnesses. Whether it be one of another faith or a Jew, whether it be a man or a woman, whether it be a male slave or a female slave, according to the deed that each performs does the holy spirit rest upon him. (*Seder Eliyahu Rabba, IX*)

The type of leadership which this view envisions is very different from the type which Jesus offers to Nicodemus in John 3. Both Pharisaic leadership and that offered by Jesus is extended beyond the Jewish community and to the entire human family. Jesus, however, is an agent of salvation because of *what he is*. His very nature transforms those who believe in him and enables them to enter the Kingdom of God.

The Pharisees are leaders who act to help individuals individualize *themselves*. For the Pharisees each individual has a special part to play in God's world and the role of the religious leader is to actualize the potential of each individual. By enabling even the non-Jew to see his place in God's scheme, the Pharisee leads him to "the holy spirit." "The holy spirit" rests on the individual, not by virtue of his teacher or by

what his teacher might be, but by *virtue of his own actions*. The true leader, they would insist, is one who is an agent of salvation because he enables the individual to become that *which he was meant to become*. In effect each person is the means to his own salvation.

In order to reconcile the depressed social and political condition of the Jew with his universalistic and messianic aspirations, both Jesus and the Pharisees suggest the neutralization of messianism, the importance of spiritual rather than purely historical goals, and the common condition of mankind. Jesus' view finds full expression in his response to Nicodemus. The Pharisaic view, on the other hand, is often misunderstood, or at least neglected. As this essay suggests, that view should be given serious consideration and understood as a valid religious response to the needs of the times.

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### NCRPE Moves To Smith Hall

The National Council on Religion and Public Education moved its office to Lawrence, January 1. Previously at Muncie, Indiana with its former Executive Director, Daryl Adrian, the address is now changed to:

NCRPE  
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# TRAVERSE LOG

Let's put it in the past tense; the progressive present tense sings us sleepy: we've used up our fuel resources. As historians remind us, we now live in the Age of Limits.

The ante room to the Age of Limits has been the Age of Rising Expectations—expansion, more and more things, especially from the wonderful good ol' government. The reason we know there are no men on Mars is that they have not been to Washington to ask for money. Over the last quarter century the rising expectations have become rising entitlements (Daniel Bell). The expectations have turned into rights.

The subject of limits is a furious bandersnatch. Anybody who continues to talk about such an unpopular idea can be the lead ten pin at the neighborhood bowling party. Obviously the rising expectations are the rhythmic accompaniment to the lullaby which whispers that maybe the limits are yet ahead. Perhaps, we hope, there's some extenuating arrangement, some chance in the cosmic crapshoot, that it ain't necessarily so. But it's real, all right. Lily Tomlin is correct, "We are all in this alone."

I will fire and fall back with this observation: The Age of Limits puts limits on our desires and greeds. Mobility is reduced, our turf is smaller, but life still can be grand!

Mobility has come up wondrous well since the time when the President of the United States rode seven days on a horse to get to his inauguration. But this day when someone chafes at having to wait at a red light or swears for missing a turn in a revolving door—this day does not necessarily better the quality of living.

The point of this and the thrust of religion is that freedom need not be affected at all by the Age of Limits. The good life does not depend upon a full tank of gas. We can live here. Of course there will be some changes. For example, some of us who conduct national business by traveling somewhere and looking at each other may turn to the conference telephone. We can adjust the air conditioner. We can drive cars less. There are whole communities—happy ones—where people don't travel 100 miles away in a year. Buoyancy is what's in the mind; it is the *quality* of a person, the fine grained, sensitive, in-tune-with-it quality.

One of my favorite stay-at-homes is E. B. White who moved to a farm in Maine years ago, about the time I sallied out to set the world on fire. White stayed there not just enjoying the animals and the clean air, but enjoying what was in his head. Others might have lived there and found it dull. The good life will be more free, if less mobile, according to how we look at it from within.

If we tune out the lullaby of rising expectations and clear our emphases, we might still overhear the cavalier, Richard Lovelace, singing from old Gatehouse prison.

If I have freedom in my love  
And in my soul am free,  
Angels alone, that sore above,  
Enjoy such liberty.

—LFT

# TRAVELER Log

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ture as a seamless whole, or monolith, might be disturbed by my characterizing this as the first Creation story. But careful reading makes this conclusion inescapable. Genesis 1-2: is a totally different account from Genesis 2:4ff. To view them as a single account would give the reader too many duplications to have to explain away. In addition, the tone of the two accounts is very different. The first tends to move along with a very impersonal kind of creation with a very distant God existing beyond the cosmos, while the second, the Adam and Eve story, contains an anthropomorphic God who is very much a part of the events of the story. Yet each story has its own special purpose, and thus both are included in the final "edition."

Those who subscribe to the Graf-Willhausen theory of the multiple authorship of the Pentateuch usually assign this passage to the "Priestly writer," a somewhat later writer than the "Jahwist" and the "Elohists," but probably earlier than the "Deuteronomist." If this is indeed the Priestly writer at work, he has pretty clearly outdone himself, because his hand is most clearly evident in the extensive genealogical insertions commonly called the "begats." This is also a good place to mention the fact that the traditional verse and chapter divisions are entirely arbitrary in nature. They were relatively late in developing, and were added for the quite obvious purpose of helping one to locate passages, and thus are not to be considered sacrosanct. Since this particular account overlaps the first three verses of "chapter 2," they may be seen here as an impediment to understanding.) This Creation story begins with a vision of chaos, pictured here as water whipped up by a constant wind. There follows a succession of six creation days, marked by three structural and stylistic parallels. First, God voices His creative desire—"Let there be . . ."—and that is all He needs to do: ". . . and it was so." Second, "And God saw that it was good." Finally, "And the evening and the morning . . .," the traditional Jewish day, from sunset to sunset, make another day.

The six days of creation are organized into two parallel groups of three each. First, God divides the light from the darkness, creating day and night. Second, He divides the firmament, or heavens, or sky, from the waters below, creating the heavens and earth pictured as a bowl inverted over a flat plate of water, the bowl keeping out the heavenly rainwater. And third, He divides the land from the sea, creating the geographical configuration of the earth, and endowing the land with grasses, plants with seeds, and trees with fruit. At this point God has quite literally brought order out of chaos. His plan is halfway to completion, and the reader is filled with a sense of expectation.

The second three days very carefully complement the first three. Each day involves the populating of the previously ordained areas of Creation. On the fourth day, God establishes a greater and a lesser light to dominate their own time periods and to determine the seasons, days and years. The lights are not named, purposely to undercut the practice of sun and moon worship and to underscore the implicit message that God is in charge. On the fifth day, God creates fish for the sea and fowls for the air. These are blessed and are charged to be fruitful and multiply. And on the sixth day, He creates the living creatures for the earth, culminating in man. This last is created in His likeness, and created male and female, and given dominion over the rest of creation. This culminating creation is blessed and given a very special charge, "Be fruitful and multiply, replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion . . ." Creation is now complete. On the seventh day, the Sabbath, God rests, and the seventh day becomes blessed and sanctified.

This Creation story is integral and complete within itself. Its primary purpose is to establish God's overlordship of all creation, a message that is in no wise disturbed by its own internal contradictions, (lights so necessary for both day and night and for the concept of day itself are not created until the fourth "day"), or by contrary geological or scientific evidence. The picture is essentially cosmic, not scientific. It is very different from the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The latter tries to explain how, in effect, mankind has arrived at its present unfortunate position, and thus has a different mythic perspective—in the larger sense of the word "myth"—than the former story.



## THE PARABLE

Thus far, in the interests of literary analysis, we have explicated the stylistic and organizational structure of two quite different kinds of passages. Except in the sense that the Creation story is indeed a kind of "story," a narrative account of something supposed to have happened, neither of these passages are ordinarily thought of as being "literature." Elsewhere in scripture, however, there is God's plenty of literature. We could look for it in the Hebrew poetry of the Psalms, in the wisdom literature of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, in the historical narratives, in the prophetic visions, in the epic expanses of Job, even in the letters of Paul. But in the interests of space, I have chosen to look more closely at just one example of conscious literary effort, the illustrated point, or Parable.

Parables are not illustrative stories worked out to pep up a sermon, but are instead intended to make concrete what would otherwise be an abstract and very abstruse theological point. Unfortunately, they tend to get removed from this context and turned into stories on their own account. Such a potentially misdirected parable is found in Luke 10:25-37, the so-called "Good Samaritan" parable. This title has become a kind of cliché which erodes the effectiveness of the piece because it is far from being a kind of fable that teaches us to be nice to those in need, a circumstance which certainly should require no prompting from Jesus or anyone else.

The parable of the Good Samaritan is intended to answer the question, "Who is my neighbor?" The larger frame of the parable is a situation in which a listener learned in the Torah tries to put Jesus through a test to determine his orthodoxy. The background of the parable itself is quickly established. A man is robbed, beaten, and left for dead. There then develops a rather common circumstance in oral literature, a series of three characters is introduced, the last of which proves to be the most effective, although not at first the most promising. This is something which we encounter in such various places as the Cinderella story (the two cruel step-sisters and the youngest girl) and the Three Billy Goats Gruff. It also occurs in the parables of Jesus. It would seem that groups of three, for tests or ordeals, are universal in the art of storytelling.

Here the three are passersby who can render assistance. The first is a priest, the second, a Levite, both members of the Jewish religious establishment who should both be expected at least to render first aid. But they both pass by after quickly assessing the situation. They apparently don't want to get involved. But the third in the series is a Samaritan, a man despised by orthodox Jews because he and his kind represent an instance of racial impurity, the intermixing centuries before of Jews with their Assyrian conquerors. A Samaritan would therefore have every right to follow the lead of the others and pass this man by but instead he renders first aid, takes the man to a place of help, cares for him, and pays his bill. The original question can thus have only one answer, although Jesus's tester answers it obliquely—being unable to pronounce the word "Samaritan" in a favorable context—and one response: "Go, and do thou likewise."

The question and its answer are often lost in a consideration of the detail of the parable. Further, the significance of the Samaritan is lost today, for the expression "Good Samaritan" has become a kind of weak universal for "helping hand." When this expression is right up there with "St. Luke's" as a name for hospitals, it no longer carries an overwhelmingly negative connotation.

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The Second Annual  
KANSAS RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP  
CONFERENCE

July 21-24, 1980

Lawrence

Leaders from the religious communions in the area, clergy, para-professionals and laity, will share in the conference beginning July 21. National and regional leaders will present four sections of studies under the theme "What God Is Saying in the Eighties." The sections include:

- The Bible Alive, Relevant Approaches to Use of the Bible—Richard Jeske
- Perspectives in Inclusive Worship, with Jewish, Roman Catholic, and Protestant Resources—Susan Elkins, Sr. Rose Tomlin, Margie Bertsch
- Religion in Life, Simulation Laboratory in Operative Religion—Richard Tombaugh
- Group Building, a Practicum in the Fellowship of the Group—Richard Orr

Participants in this intensive, four day conference will be housed together. Chairman of the conference committee is Stephen Fletcher, Minister, First Baptist Church, Lawrence.

Another famous parable susceptible to misunderstanding is found at Luke 15:11-32. This is the so-called story of the Prodigal Son. This label which is found nowhere in the parable itself, (it was originally a head-note at the top of the page in an early edition of the King James Version), is totally misleading. The real focus should be on the forgiving father. The frame of this parable is implied; it occurs after the parables of the lost sheep and of the lost coin, and is thus emblematic of the fact that God doesn't give up on any of us.

The situation is that of a father with two sons, each with certain weaknesses. The younger son is the wastrel who wastes his inheritance on what is suggestively called "riotous living." Determined finally to return to his father, he even has a contrite speech all prepared, but he only gets to use a part of it before his father effectively silences him with a tremendous show of compassion and great happiness. And thus a celebration is quickly organized to mark the lost son's return.

The older son, though much less blameworthy, has his own problem. He is, to put it bluntly, something of a prig. He has stayed at home, done what was expected of him, and worked hard for his father, not for himself except in the expectation of a reward some day. Naturally, he is upset when he learns of the celebration. He refuses to join in, nursing instead a peevish feeling that all his efforts have gone unappreciated. It is up to the father, then, to resolve the situation by showing his joy in both: in the younger for returning, and in the older for his faithfulness. The listener (or reader) falls into the category of one son or the other, but not in the father's category. Final forgiveness, with all it entails, is not for us.

The parable, then, serves its purpose of exemplifying that which would otherwise be beyond the grasp of the average listener. The most abstruse theological concept is thus rendered intelligible, and the details of the parable become commonplaces expressed in ordinary terms. These involve not only the danger of the road and the less than perfect behavior of one's children, but also such things as coins, debts, the planting of seeds, the gap between the have-nots, and bringing in the harvest. Some of these, nearly 2,000 years later, may now require some explanation. But for the most part they will serve the intention for which they were made.

The Bible is a document suitable for literary analysis. In the best of all possible cultures, it should not be necessary to have to "teach" literature. With maturity, one ought to develop a sensitivity to the totality of the best literature in one's native language, to its style, organization, rhythms, and details. But this doesn't happen. Instead, such sensitivity is at best nudged, but most often has to be inculcated. By the same token, the literary basis of scripture is also necessarily the subject of detailed instruction. The background of the Bible is perhaps a given, but the book itself originated in a culture different from what is encompassed in western civilization. It requires literary explication as an important step toward its appreciation on whatever basis one pleases. As such, it is a suitable subject for instruction in the public schools and colleges. But this is as far as we should take it in our public institutions. Its creedal, confessional, and theological explication should be kept in those places most suitable for it; the home and the church.

## RECENT ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES AND THE BIBLE

Conference April 20-21

Woodruff Auditorium, Kansas Union

### Presentations by visitors:

#### "Discoveries at Ebla and Their Significance"

David Noel Freedman, University of Michigan. General Editor of the Anchor Bible, Vice President, American School of Oriental Research.

#### "Evidence from Recent Greco-Roman Excavations"

A. Thomas Kraabel, University of Minnesota. Associate Director of the expedition to Khirbet Shema, 1969-73.

#### "Secret Vision of God: Documents of Nag Hammadi Egypt"

James Brashler, Claremont Graduate School. Cooperated with James M. Robinson in the publication of the Nag Hammadi Codices.

### Presentations by KU leaders:

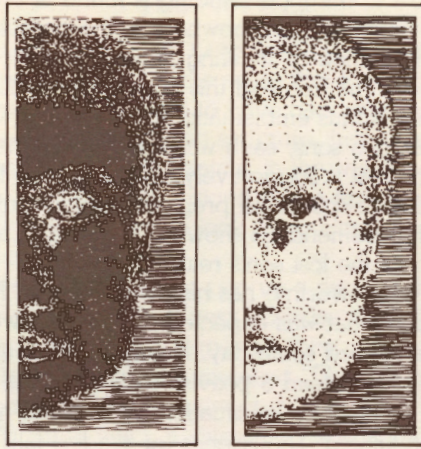
#### "Methods in Archeology"

Elizabeth Banks, Department of Classics

#### "Recent Discoveries in the Holy Land"

James E. Seaver, Department of History

Francis Fallon, Department of Religious Studies, has details.



## JESUS AND THE PHARISEES: ASPECTS OF THEIR CONFLICT

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Assistant Professor of Religious Studies

A Jew reflecting on the relationship between Judaism and Christianity cannot help but confront the New Testament with a sense of misgiving. The representatives of Pharisaic Judaism—that Judaism which has continued as the mainstream of Jewish religious life to this day—appear as the central opponents of Jesus. Were the debate between Jesus and the Pharisees presented in its entirety, the Jew might feel more comfortable with it. Such is not the case. The New Testament, speaking as it does primarily to Christians, presents only one side of the argument. While both early Christianity and Pharisaic Judaism were pluralistic religious traditions, and while no one statement of the issues between them will be exhaustive, a Jewish approach to one particular concern might be useful in reestablishing a balance.

This essay will focus on one seminal confrontation recorded in the New Testament between Jesus and Nicodemus found in John 3:1-18. We need not assume that such an encounter actually took place for the text to be a crucial one. Nicodemus represents the leading Jewish party and its interests and concerns. Jesus proposes his response to those interests and concerns. In the text itself, however, Nicodemus is hardly given a chance to say a word. Still we can deduce his concerns from Jesus' answer: he desires to know how to win the Kingdom of God, he seeks justification before God, and he is seeking a leader who can help him resolve these issues.

Nicodemus raises these issues because of the peculiar social situation in which the Jew found himself at this time. The Jew as a member of a politically defeated nation, was surrounded by an environment hostile to his religious tradition. His questions can be understood with reference to this situation. How can a Jew be loyal both to the Roman rulership and to divine command; that is, how can he win the Kingdom of God without renouncing and rebelling against the kingdom of men? Second, how can the Jew maintain his sense of spiritual identity at the same time that he is being pushed into an alien environment? Can a Jew justify his necessarily secular lifestyle before a God who demands that the Jew be "holy as I am holy?" Finally the Jew is searching for a new type of leader, a leader who will not represent parochial Jewish nationalism but the interests of all mankind; who will lead humanity not just the Jewish nation.

Jesus in his response to Nicodemus makes five points: 1) Salvation—winning the kingdom of God—depends upon spiritual rebirth. 2) Spiritual rebirth depends upon personal attitude rather than political activity. 3) Only a leader who has descended from above can make possible an ascent for the human soul. 4) Jesus has been sent by God into the world as an act of love by which men are enabled to ascend on high and gain salvation. 5) Faith in Jesus rather than concrete physical acts constitutes the means by which the individual gains deliverance.

Jesus in this response is neutralizing both Jewish nationalism and militant messianism. The response common to both Jesus and the Pharisees to the new situation of being a defeated nation was one of political acquiescence. The Pharisees, no less than Jesus, recognized the danger of messianism. The reconciliation of obedience to Rome and obedience to God was one of their objectives as well. The Pharisees recognize that messianism was often a flagrant challenge to Roman political domination and was used to incite rebellion. Pharisaic Judaism sought to neutralize the potential power of messianism by projecting it into the far future. The Pharisees saw messianic salvation to be the end point of history. While its political and social aspects were not discarded, they were neutralized by being made of little practical significance. God would bring the Messiah in His own time. The task of the Jew was to live in history, to study holy scriptures, and to serve God by participating in a number of ritual procedures and worship assemblies. The pharisaic Jew emphasized the "Olam haBa," the world to come rather than "Yemot Hamashiah," the days of the Messiah. Personal salvation was a definite concern of theirs and one can well imagine that Nicodemus had asked, "How can I see the Kingdom of God?" At the same time the Pharisees insisted that the historical realm was *religiously relevant*. The individual won his way into the world to come through concrete present-time ac-