

PROPHETIC MINISTRY RECONSIDERED

George Telford

General Assembly Mission Board, Atlanta, Georgia

I. Introduction: A New Starting Point

In an extremely important book, World Faiths and the New World Order, Robert Bellah advances a provocative thesis. The "real" crises of the late twentieth century seem so overwhelming when we enumerate them, he says, that the only response possible seems to be some sort of urgent action. There is the food crisis brought on in part by rapid expansion of the world's population but primarily because the great majority of the people of the earth are poor and powerless to effect needed change. There is the energy crisis brought on by the growing recognition of the finite supply of fossil fuels and by the grossly unbalanced consumption of energy by some in the world at the expense of others. There are the explosive consequences of the widening gap between rich and poor all over the world. There are the political and ultimately military crises that can be seen looming not far off when the tensions created by food and energy shortages, high prices and high inflation, and the consequent unbearable poverty in large parts of the world result in desperate acts of nations and groups within nations.

It is natural, says Bellah, in the face of such terrifying realities, and even more terrifying possibilities, for some to say that we cannot afford to spend our time on theology and reflection. What we need is action, and our common concern ought to be how we can galvanize our faith communities into appropriate action as quickly and as effectively as possible. Yet, Bellah says he has serious doubts as to whether religious communities can be mobilized to act now. The religious communities everywhere in the world are divided and not very well organized and are in many cases still reeling from the intellectual and ethical critique and seduction of modern ideology. But more importantly,

Overwhelmed by the reality of the crises of food, energy and poverty we may be tempted to forget that the late twentieth century is also a time of crisis in the minds and souls of men and women. Even when the problems are clear, it is not the case that we know what to do to solve them.(1)

Bellah argues that we are finally witnessing a crisis of the modern ideological paradigm itself, which has dominated us beyond our imagining—a "faith" which is a form of "self-salvation" and which has believed that "science," "technology," or "economic development" will save us. It may be, he argues, that a pause for reflection, for assessing the insights the great theological traditions of the world might have for us would be far more "realistic" than any precipitate action we could presently imagine. Bellah admits the traditional religions have often been terribly narrow and oppressive, but he argues that they remain the guardians of the deepest truths men and women have discovered, especially in their sensitivity to the sources of human egoism, to the flawed nature of all human institutions and enterprises, and to a "structure of grace in history" without which our intelligence and will cannot be adequate.

It is, as I have said, a provocative thesis. Bellah offered it in a major

international colloquium which concluded that

The real issue is not simply one of a new international economic order . . . the real problem is a more basic one and covers a much wider area than that of mere economic crisis. The economic crisis deserves to be examined in the wider context of the overall human crisis . . . the real objective which must inspire faith communities is not a package of economic and political concessions or even some changes in the economic superstructure. . . . What is needed is a total change within people themselves as well as in their social environment. The problem is not merely structural, although structural re-arrangements must be remodelled. The starting point must be the hearts and souls of men and women, their perception of reality and of their own place of mission in life.(2)

as Richard Falk, former Professor of International Law and now Acting Director of the Center of International Studies at Princeton put it, the frustration occasioned by the current impasse over methods to reduce world poverty is likely to grow given prevailing secular structures and their supporting ideological outlooks. No amount of tinkering can fix up the present international systems. We are in a state of fundamental disequilibrium, characterized by continuing demographic pressures, increasing destructiveness and instability of the weapons environment, waste of economic resources to fuel the arms race and to sustain affluent life styles, sterility of an economic vision (capitalist or Marxist) that identifies progress with material wealth and societal fulfillment with entering the middle class, moral backwardness of a system that imposes "order" rather than satisfying basic needs, and shortsightedness of growth patterns not ecologically sustainable. We desperately need a transformative vision:

The future prospects of the human species depend upon internalizing an essentially religious perspective, sufficient to transform secular outlooks that now dominate the destiny of the planet. . . . Hope, now more than ever, that is not just an unconvincing expectation of a series of technological 'miracles,' depends on renourishing religious sensibilities. . . . Purely humanist positions cannot, in my view, engender the vision or the hope required to build toward transformation; and secularist thinking will never extend social contracts for the present to conventional arrangements for the future.(3)

II. A Radical Shift in Perspective and Direction

I recognize the danger, especially in a church which has often sought to evade responsibility for Christian social action, of arguments like these which suggest the crisis we face is deeper than our current strategies seem to suppose. Some persons, complacent or frightened, are unwilling to risk any action for justice and peace which may cause institutional or personal diminishment. They will use such arguments to turn away from what it really is possible to do, in the providence of God, to bring about genuine improvements in the social order, reduce human suffering, and enable people to have a more meaningful and just participation in our nation's and world's life.

The reality is that creative possibilities for contributing to God's purposes for a more just social order are open in history and in every community, and we are presently called to more active commitment in political life. As the Melbourne Conference on World Mission and Evangelism (May 12-25, 1980) put it:

In a world of large-scale robbery and genocide, Christian evangelism can be honest and authentic only if it stands clearly against those injustices which are diametrically opposed to the kingdom of God and looks for response in an act of faith which issues in commitment. Christian life cannot be generated, or communicated, by a compromising silence and inaction concerning the exploitation of the majority of the human race by the privileged few. . . . In our witness to the kingdom of God in words and deeds, the churches must dare to be at the bleeding points of humanity.(4)

Thus, I yearn for the faith community to venture forth upon a "politics of transformation" and be a more effective bearer in word and deed of the divine participation in the human story. I yearn for the Church, and my own church in particular, to be a witness to the fact that the time is finally here for a radical shift in perspective and direction. I yearn for the involvement of men and women of faith, with heart and mind and soul and strength in an unyielding pressure on an established order, already under judgment for its default. And thus I yearn for the time when the church will finally abandon its time-honored addiction and allegiance to principalities and powers in order to identify with the suppliants of history: the weak, who in spite of their weakness, are actually the strong; the poor, who in spite of their poverty, are actually the rich; the oppressed, who because of their oppression, appeal to a sovereign ideal of justice and humanity, to the judgment and grace of God.(5)

Yet, I am this advent Season, more than ever before, aware of the terrible tension between my yearning and reality. In his great Gifford Lectures which coincided with the outbreak of World War II, Reinhold Niebuhr reflected in a footnote on the pertinence of Christian faith for comprehending the events that were then occurring. The Christian, he insisted, is not permitted to regard the tribulations of a civilization with detachment. Nor is one obligated to identify the meaning of life with the preservation of one's own culture. The responsibility of Christians, he said, is clear: they must strive to fashion the common life to conform more closely to the kingdom of God. "But," he wrote, "if we should fail, we can at least understand the failure from the perspective of Christian faith." Now, more than thirty years later, it has become increasingly evident that the failure he anticipated as a real possibility for our situation has come among us. The pathos of our condition is not so much that we have failed; it is that we cannot bring ourselves as a people to contemplate our failure. And that, by Niebuhr's account, would have to imply a failure of Christianity itself, as we have known it. For he regarded faith to be, in its essence, the courage to reflect on the tragic dimensions of existence without being "tempted to regard it as meaningless." Perhaps our very failure to be the transfigured people of God could be the beginning of something more akin to faith in biblical terms. Perhaps real faith and courage, like real wisdom, can only occur at eventide--that is, in those times of darkness where human beings have come to the end of their know-how. Advent is really about that, is it not?(6) It is a time for remembering the pathos and the hope of a "people who walked in darkness . . . dwellers in a land as dark as death" (Isaiah 9:2). Perhaps we shall not make it through as a society, nor the church find its way to authentic ministry again, except by embracing our inscrutable darkness, and then affirming that something is "on the move" in the darkness that even the lord of darkness does not discern.

Perhaps we are close now to reaffirming once again, with more than words, that politics is means and not Messiah. That fashion premature celebration of

messianic activity is vulnerable to distortion, that one of the great temptations of religious people is the confusion of God's initiative with the human, the outrunning of God's patience with human eagerness, the substitution for God's time of our own timetable. Perhaps we are close to being able and willing to admit that politics, as we have known it, has run headlong into the situation where what is needed is something less than a totally different foundation and style.

That really is the burden of this essay. I do not believe we are going to undergo the transformation we need by the strategies and politics we have. Not by education," not by a more substantive analysis of political and economic realities, not by a critique of the palliative effects of present social and economic policy, and not by a "creative incrementalism," which has no sufficient power. The situation we now face is not as amenable to mere logic, discursive discourse, exhortation, organizing and incremental gains as liberal hope would have it. Our problem is, as E. Schumacher so persuasively argues, that "this peoples heart is waxed gross; they do not see, they do not understand with their heart."⁽⁷⁾ As Schumacher puts it, anyone wedded to the scientific materialism and intense rationalism of the modern world is going to have a hard time understanding what this means. Granted, faith is in conflict with reason, and I have faith so as to be able to understand. But since we have been inclined to believe that the important knowledge is public knowledge, available to anyone, precise, indubitable, easy to check, easy to communicate, and above all virtually untainted by any subjectivity on the part of the server. Western civilization, consequently, has become incapable of dealing with the real problems of life which are refractory to ordinary rational solutions but require a wisdom that transcends them. We have taken great pride in voluntarily limiting our efforts to "the art of the soluble." But all the serious problems of our world are suspended, as it were, between the poles of freedom and order, between justice and mercy, stability and change, planning and laissez faire. In the life of societies there is the need for both. Everywhere society's health depends on the simultaneous pursuit of mutually opposed activities or aims. The adoption of a wholly rational solution is not possible, and the effort to do so often means a kind of faith sentence for our humanity. The real problems of life are these divergent problems, and the answers to them come not primarily from logic but from an interior journey. Thus, as Schumacher points out, finally now,

Some people are no longer angry when told that restoration must come from within; the belief that everything is 'politics' and that radical rearrangements of 'the system' will suffice to save civilization is no longer held with the same fanaticism as it was held twenty-five years ago. Everywhere in the modern world there are experiments in new lifestyles and Voluntary Simplicity; the arrogance of materialistic Scientism is in decline, and it is sometimes tolerated even in polite society to mention God. Admittedly, some of this change of mind stems initially not from spiritual insight but from the materialist fear aroused by the environmental crisis, the threat of a food crisis, and the indications of a coming health crisis. In the face of these--and many other threats--most people still try to believe in the 'technological fix.' If we could develop fusion energy, they say, our fuel problems would be solved; if we would perfect the process of turning oil into edible proteins, the world's food problems would be solved . . . and so on.

All the same, faith in modern man's omnipotence is wearing thin. . . . The modern experiment to live without religion has failed, and once we have

understood this, we know what our 'post-modern' tasks really are.

Only if we know, says Schumacher, the risk of our life can we summon the courage and imagination needed for a turning around, a metanoia. Only then can we recognize that the generosity of the earth allows us to feed all humankind, that we know enough to keep the earth a healthy place, and that we are quite competent enough to produce sufficient supplies of necessities so that no one need live in misery. "Above all, we shall then see that . . . there is no economic problem, and in a sense, there never has been. But there is a moral problem . . . which has to be understood and transcended."(8)

III. More than Incremental Gains

The reality is that if Christian faith is to be a resource, and if Christians are to be a witness, in the situation in which we now find ourselves, it will not be ultimately by seeking and contributing to more incremental political and economic solutions to our problems, as desperate as is our need for creative and substantive political and social witness by individual Christians and the corporate Christian community. That is not, I suppose, the expected word from a director of a denomination's ecumenical and social mission arm, who is utterly committed to the church's witness to peace and justice and human compassion. So be it. What we must recognize and witness to anew is that however important and foundational is the reality of our human freedom and power given to us by the providence of God, however urgently and insistently we are called to contribute in our time to the genuine improvements needed in our world's life--to the reduction of human suffering, to an improvement in the modes of distribution of goods and power in our communities, nation and world, to the enablement of people to self-determination and meaningful participation in a qualitatively better human life--it is nevertheless true that our freedom corrupts all those possibilities and efforts. History continually recedes from the ideal to which it is continually and progressively lured. Sin and fate as well as creativity haunt our history. And thus for possibilities to be really possible in history we must learn ever anew how to discern, rely upon and speak of not only the providence of God, the work of common grace, and the present activity of the Spirit acting in our history, but also of a transcendent and transforming grace that comes to a sinful world and sinful history despite our sin, and so makes possible against all expectations, new possibilities for our common existence that our sin has denied.

Daniel Bell, the great Harvard social historian whose sensitive study of the crisis of modern capitalism and of the general economic and social crisis of our society is one of the most perceptive anywhere, makes the same point. He writes:

We stand, I believe, with a clearing ahead of us . . . a long era is coming to a close. The impulse of modernism was to leap beyond: beyond nature, beyond culture, beyond tragedy--to explore the apeiron, the boundless, driven by the self-infinetizing spirit of the radical self. . . . Now the wheel of questions brings us back to existential predicaments, the awareness in men of their finiteness and the inexorable limits to their power (the transgression of which is hamartia), and the consequent effort to find a coherent answer to reconcile them to the human condition. Since that awareness touches the deepest springs of consciousness, I believe that a culture which has become aware of the limits of exploring the mundane will turn, at some point to the effort to

recover the sacred.(9)

Bell writes, he says, not of the events of the decade but of the deeper crisis which unsettles modern society, morally and intellectually unprepared for calamity, yet certain to face it. Our resources are very thin. On the one hand, there is the liberal empiricist, which redefines all the existential questions into "problems" and looks for "solutions" to problems. On the other hand, there is the utopian assumption of limitless ends achievable through the marvelous engine of economic, if not technological, efficiency. In the past, societies prepared for the calamity by anchorages rooted in experience that yet provided some transtemporal conception of reality. Modern societies have substituted utopia for religion--utopia not as a transcendent ideal, but one to be realized through history (progress, rationality, science) with the nutrients of technology and the midwifery of revolution. But these anchorages have proven an illusion. We are now faced on the one hand with a hedonistic culture, a consumption ethic, a radical individualism, and a loss of that sense of solidarity which makes men and women feel as brothers and sisters to one another. We have lost the moral purpose, the telos which provides moral justifications for the society.

Thus the changes we must have, argues Bell, are not amenable to "social engineering" or political control. They derive from the value and moral traditions of the society, and these cannot be "designed" by precept. "To use an unfashionable term," he says, "it is a spiritual crisis." Our restoration cannot be manufactured, nor the revolution we need engineered. It can only come regrasping those experiences which give one a tragic sense of life, a life lived on the knife-edge of finitude and freedom. At a crucial juncture of history like our own, he argues, religion becomes the most revolutionary of all forces. In such circumstances we look, most of all, for prophets.(10)

IV. The Need for Prophecy

It is not surprising then that one of the ablest Old Testament scholars of our time, Walter Brueggeman, Dean of Eden Theological Seminary, urges the same perspective in one of his latest books.(11) The time may be finally ripe in the church, he argues, for a serious consideration again of prophecy as the most crucial element of our ministry. For we shall not find, he believes, the energy we need by hiding or denying the nature of our crisis, but only by acknowledging it, and embracing the pathos of it. The first task of the church now is to help cut through the self-deception and despair of our time, to bring to public awareness the fear and error denied so long, to face the reality of the collapse of our self-madness, the utility of the barriers and the pecking orders we are using to secure ourselves at others expense, and the fearful, fearful practice of eating off the table of our hungry brothers and sisters. The task of ministry today, says this theologian, is to speak both metaphorically and concretely about the decay at the heart of our affluent and self-deceiving culture, and to do so not in rage, nor in cheap grace, but with a candor born of anguish and of passion. Says Brueggeman:

The contemporary American church is so largely enculturated to the American ethos that it has little power to believe or to act. This enculturation is in some way true across the spectrum of church life, both liberal and conservative. . . . The church will not have power to act or believe until it recovers its tradition of faith and permits that tradition to be the primal way out of enculturation. This is not a cry for

traditionalism but rather the judgment that the church has no business more pressing than the reappropriation of its memory in its full power and authenticity.(12)

The need says Brueggeman is not for local pastors to spout assaults on the corporate state, nor even to address specific public crises, important as the latter may be on occasion, but to

Address in season and out of season, the dominant crisis that is enduring and resilient, of having our alternate vocation co-opted and domesticated.(13)

Brueggeman offers, as one of the clearest biblical models for our ministry Jeremiah, who grieves the grief of Judah because he knows how compromised Israel is from the fidelity and radicality of its early life, who knows that an end must surely come, because the freedom of God has been so grossly violated that a certain death is at the door and will not pass over. Jeremiah neither scolded nor reprimanded. He wept. He wept in the name of the God of passion and pathos, not out of self-pity, but in an attempt to break open in the name of God, the numbness of history. For Jeremiah knew that criticism of God on an insensitive, numb society had to be faced and embraced, for only then could come liberation from incurable disease, from broken covenant, and from failed energy. Brueggeman says:

Prophetic ministry does not consist of spectacular acts of social crusading or of abrasive measures of indignation. Rather (it) consists of offering an alternate perception of reality, and in letting people see their own history in light of God's freedom and justice. . . . (it) seeks to penetrate the numbness to face the body of death in which we are caught. Clearly the numbness sometimes evokes from us rage and anger, but (it) is more likely to be penetrated by grief and lament. . . . Prophetic ministry seeks to penetrate despair so that new futures can be believed in and embraced by us. . . . In a society that knows about initiative and self-actualization and countless other things, the capacity to lament the death of the old world is nearly lost. . . (as is) the capacity to receive in doxology the new world being given. . . . We are at the edge of knowing this in our personal lives, for we understand a bit the process of grieving. But we have yet to learn and apply it to the reality of society. And finally, we have yet to learn it about God, who grieves in ways hidden from us and who waits to rejoice until his promises are fully kept.(14)

V. The Task of Ministry

The fundamental theme of this essay has been to propose, with the support of a number of sensitive observers, that we may now have reached the point again where our most urgent political task is a theological one. Such an argument is in no way meant to undercut or minimize the importance of direct political action for social justice or the imperatives for ministries of compassion. Even if we recognize that humans will still be sinful in a more just social order, it is still the case that:

If we stand historically amidst radical injustice, in a society ruled and oppressed by an outside power, as in much of Eastern Europe and South America; or if we stand in a racist society legally, economically and politically; or in an economically unjust society with maldistribution of

goods, of social power and of social participation; or in a politically tyrannical society where none but the powerful have legal rights or political voice--if we stand historically in such a situation, calling for radical change, our deepest historical intuition, the "knowledge" that lies back of all political praxis, tells us that a new political, economic, social or legal possibility will make a real difference to life. Sin may continue and the promised land is not yet; but life can be more humane than it was though it remains in part and in fact inhuman. The new is possible, and it can be a new with more justice and more fulfillment in it.(15)

Both our experience and the witness of faith assure us that even in the most tragic situation of captivity a new covenant in history is promised; in our darkest hour, new birth and new life in human affairs arise. Advent is about that.

Nevertheless, there come times when we apprehend the fallen character of human history in unique ways, when we are especially sensitive to the deep corruption of the destiny and freedom God's providence has set before us, and we are more acutely aware that the reform of objective institutions, or the alteration of current patterns of economic and social behavior, even the achievement of "liberation" from real and concrete political or psychological oppression, while necessary, is not sufficient for our situation. Then hope rests, more explicitly and urgently on redemptive and creative forces to bring about a new and deeper relation of human life to the divine ultimacy in which human life is grounded and sustained and by which it is redeemed. Then hope rests very much on a renewed apprehension of our radical need for transforming grace, infinitely more than on our intelligence, our will, or on incremental political gains.(16)

At such a time a prophetic ministry is critical, a ministry which will evoke the tragic ambiguity, self-contradiction and pathos of our situation as well as the possibilities of unexpected healing. Only such a ministry, witnessing faithfully to the divine judgment and the call to more faithful possibilities than the ones pragmatic politics can envisage, can address the deepest sources of disintegration in modern society and contribute to the courage, humility, and confidence we now so desperately need.

Such a ministry will not be easy, in significant part because we are ourselves so deeply compromised. As Walter Brueggeman puts it, "As I reflect on my ministry, I know in the hidden places that the real restraints are not in my understanding or in the receptivity of other people. . . . I discover that I am as bourgeois and obdurate as any to whom I minister. . . . We are indeed 'like people, like priest' (Hosea 4:9). That very likely is the situation among many of us in ministry and there is no unanguished way out of it. It does make clear to us that our ministry will always be practiced through our own conflicted selves. No prophet has ever borne an unconflicted message, even until Jesus (cf. Mark 14:36)." We are not more skilled in grieving the death of our own lives and permitting a new future to emerge than all the other children of the faith community. Thus we must engage in the same painful practices as they of becoming who we are called to be. That is a precondition to faithful ministry and to joy.(17)

(1) World Faiths and the New World Order: A Muslim-Jewish-Christian Search Begins, edited by Joseph Gremillion and William Ryan. Interreligious Peace Colloquium, 3700 13th Street, N.E., Washington, D.C., 1978, p. 150.

(2) Ibid., p. 182.

(3) *Ibid.*, p. 137.

(4) Conference Report, World Council of Churches Conference on World Mission and Evangelism, Melbourne, Australia, May 12-24, 1980. WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, Case Postale No. 66, route de Ferney, CH-1211 Geneve 20, Switzerland.

(5) For a powerful and passionate theological study of the biblical and human meaning of politics in a revolutionary world, to which the above "yearnings" are indebted, see Paul Lehmann's The Transfiguration of Politics. Harper and Row, New York: 1975. Lehmann's care for the community of faith, his belief in its regenerative vocation, his firm conviction that "to read and understand the Bible politically and to understand and practice politics biblically is to discern in, with and under the concrete course of human events the presence and power of God at work, giving human shape to human life" (p. 234, et al) has sustained my own faith in ways too extensive to even begin to credit.

(6) The Niebuhr quotation is from Douglass John Hall's, Lighten Our Darkness (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976) as are the other suggestions in this paragraph.

(7) A Guide to the Perplexed, by E. F. Schumacher. Perennial Library, Harper and Row, New York: 1977. p. 44. See also for further exploration, Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered, by E. F. Schumacher, Harper and Row, 1973.

(8) *Ibid.*, pp. 139, 140.

(9) The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism, by Daniel Bell. Basic Books, New York: 1978, p. xxix. Bell notes that this is the theme of his Hobhouse Lecture, given at the London School of Economics, May 19, 1977, as "The Return of the Sacred: The Argument on the Future of Religion," and printed in the *British Journal of Sociology*, December, 1977. Bell's exploration of what has happened to American culture as a result of the transformation of the foundational asceticism of Puritanism that enabled capital formation, to the hedonism based on "self-fulfillment" and supported by installment buying and debt as a way of life in a high consumption society is very important for understanding our present tragedy. This analysis is only surpassed by his wrestling in the same context with first causes and final things and his insistence on the religious commitment needed to challenge the modern liberal temper, toward "the mutual redemption of fathers and sons."

(10) *Ibid.*, pp. 83, 28, 30, 169.

(11) The Prophetic Imagination, by Walter Brueggeman. Fortress Press, Philadelphia: 1978. Brueggeman's witness is, I believe very important for persons like the readers of this journal. He argues that the practice of prophetic ministry is done most essentially by those who stand in conventional places of parish life and other forms of ministry derived from that model. He clings to the conviction that prophetic ministry can and must be practiced there, although many things militate against it: the fact of the daily round of busyness that may be reduced but cannot be ignored, the fact that ministry often exists in congregations in which there is no special openness to or support of prophetic ministry. But he affirms that it is not some special thing done two days a week, but is done in, with, and under all acts of ministry--as much in counseling as in preaching, as much in liturgy as in education.

(12) *Ibid.*, p. 11.

(13) *Ibid.*, p. 13.

(14) *Ibid.*, pp. 111-113.

(15) See Reaping the Whirlwind: A Christian Interpretation of History, by Langdon Gilkey. Seabury Press, New York: 1976, p. 287. Langdon Gilkey's study of

providence and eschatology could be an extremely important resource for persons wishing to pursue further themes of this essay. Gilkey argues that the symbols of creation and providence are central to the Christian community's ability to affirm and value the contingent beings that we are, and the relative but creative possibilities of life despite our contingency. He affirms the way God's providence provides for the freedom of humankind in history which is polar to destiny (the given necessities of our situation). He argues for the importance of politics, in the providence of God to keep destiny from becoming fate, oppressive and destructive of our powers and so our freedom. But he also argues that politics and economics are not all there are in the life of human communities. The structure of history has a dimension of ultimacy and sacrality to it and is not nearly as secular as our age supposed. "Political experience is thus unavoidably religious and therefore theological . . . but religion is infinitely risky. It injects the demonic as well as transformative grace into history. For the call to authentic action in each of us is only partial, and we corrupt it as we seek to embody it. . . . Thus the real ground of our hope must . . . be the divine action that transcends our powers and autonomy as well as completes them" (p. 68). So "for possibilities to really be possible in history, more than creation and providence are necessary--whether we speak of our personal lives or the social world in which we are selves. This 'more' . . . is the substance of the gospel; God is redeemer as well as creator and preserver and inspirer" (p. 316). [For a helpful analysis of Gilkey's study of providence, see McCoy Franklin, "The Cross as Gospel: Speaking of Providence in a Time of Pessimism," Journal for Preachers, Lent, 1980, pp. 4-11.]

(16) Says Gilkey: "Without this dimension all else is an optimism that abstracts from the warped concreteness of existence, or a pessimism that in the end enervates historical vitality" (p. 129).

(17) Brueggeman, The Prophetic Imagination, p. 112, 113.