

CANONICAL HERMENEUTICS IN THE LIGHT OF BIBLICAL, LITERARY AND HISTORICAL CRITICISM

I am very honored and pleased to have been invited to address the Catholic Theological Society of America in its annual meeting of 1985. I am also pleased to have this opportunity to respond to Professor Pheme Perkins's trenchant and gratifying paper.

Please remember that I am but a Scripture student and am not trained as a theologian or philosopher. At the same time I am a Scripture student reaching out to theologians in response precisely to the criticisms we have heard from many among you that we Scripture people have in effect decanonized the Bible by locking its formative parts into the past. You might think of me as one of an increasing number of Scripture students who wish to meet you halfway, or even more if need be, in a genuine and sincere effort to build effective and valid bridges between the exciting historical and literary work on our side and the ever-renewing need of current believing communities to be in dialogue, through the Holy Spirit, with Scripture, the churches' book.

Being a student of Scripture in a gathering of scholars like yourselves from a quite different discipline reminds me of a remark by a Protestant evangelical who was asked to be a respondent to a paper I had presented to a conference of main-line Protestants and Catholics at Notre Dame University a couple of years ago. He was reminded on the occasion of advice his father had given him as a boy—when and if he found himself in a room full of vipers be sure not to make any quick or jerky moves!

I have developed a great deal of sympathy for non-Scripture scholars. Scripture scholars have been so keenly interested for the past two or more centuries in recovering the *ipssissima verba* of ancient biblical contributors that they sometimes forget that the Bible as canon is something more than a source for reconstructing "original" historical events and moments.

In other words, I come before you self-critically desiring as a Scripture student to reach out to you in a common task for the churches' sake. I shall continue to be responsible to my discipline as it continues to develop; it is very exciting in and of itself. But along with that responsibility I feel another that is just as commanding in my mind—that of remembering that the Bible is also the churches' book: it is our common canon. I express this latter responsibility in an effort called canonical criticism, a new subdiscipline of biblical study which attempts to move beyond the Bible's last redactors and contributors on into the early believing communities where the crucial decisions about biblical literature as canon were in reality made.

At the heart of canonical criticism is the quest for those ancient canonical hermeneutics which lie amongst the lines of Scripture, Old Testament and New. Every time a community tradition was recalled, recited and re-presented, and every time a noncommunity value, called international wisdom, was drawn upon and adapted, hermeneutics were at play. Biblical criticism has developed the tools whereby we may ferret these out. They are the unrecorded hermeneutics that lie among the lines of Scripture: they instruct us in how our ancestors in the faith, the biblical authors, speakers and various contributors preserved and re-presented the precious community traditions, or how they adapted and re-presented wisdom shared with their neighbors, others of God's children.

The quest for canonical hermeneutics is an inductive search which has been conducted in four areas, which we shall later note, and is a conscious effort to learn from our ancestors in the faith, the contributors to the Bible, how they read what was Scripture, whether in early oral form or in later written form, up to their time and generation. The thesis is that we might learn from them how we might read the Bible as canon ourselves today.

The quest for canonical hermeneutics consciously resists importing later or alien hermeneutics to the Bible until the need to do so is clear and until we first honor the hermeneutics of the biblical contributors themselves. Even so, those later or alien hermeneutics we feel we must later bring to the text should be tempered and informed and restrained by the canonical hermeneutics being recovered in and by canonical criticism. It may well be that Platonic, or Aristotelian, or existentialist, or de-constructive, or re-constructive, or consent, or suspicion, or liberation, or feminist, or whatever hermeneutics the Holy Spirit may direct responsible expositors and theologians to use, should thereupon be brought to bear in order to complete the bridge of understanding (*hermeneia*) for edification of Church and world. But canonical hermeneutics should offer the guidelines and restraints as to what further hermeneutic is appropriate to the new societal context in which Scripture is re-presented.

For utter clarity I should here note that we are not speaking of what Brevard Childs calls hermeneutic movements within some final form of the text, though that is always worth noting to see if it is congruous with canonical hermeneutics. Nor are we speaking of the hermeneutic being discerned by my revered colleague, Rolf Knierim, in what he calls the conceived reality lying back of the text, though that too is worth noting to see if it is congruous with canonical hermeneutics. We are rather speaking of those hermeneutics whereby our ancestors in the faith re-presented authoritative traditions for their communities, whether home-grown or international. What Knierim is doing, if I understand it aright as he develops it, seems to be quite congruous indeed with what we are doing; in contrast to what Childs says is his interest—namely the hermeneutic moves in the compressed, final, synchronic state of the text—Knierim and I are both interested in the hermeneutics discernible diachronically in the several layers of the text deriving from the ongoing ancient communities of faith as they made their contributions to its literary development, including and always starting with the final form.

Canonical criticism views Scripture not as a box or casket of jewels which are still valued and negotiable, but as a paradigm made up of records, in numerous

literary forms, of the struggles of our ancestors in the faith to monotheize in their various cultural contexts over against the various modes of polytheism most people, even most normal-thinking ancient Israelites and Judaites, pursued. Even those who have from time to time claimed to be monotheists in name have in actual fact thought and acted polytheistically. Fragmentation of truth is a natural human tendency; in fact, in such a group as this I assume we can call it by its "real" name: sin! This point in itself is a hermeneutic stance: rather than being a box of ancient jewels to which one might add or from which one might subtract, Scripture should be viewed as a paradigm of the struggles of our ancestors in the faith to monotheize over against the various modes of polytheism expressed in the five culture eras through which and out of which Scripture was formed.

Scripture comes to us out of 2000 years of such struggles; and those 2000 years may be seen as containing five different culture eras: the Bronze Age, the Iron Age, the Persian Period, and the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Each culture era had its own mores and idioms and these are abundantly reflected in the languages and idioms of the Bible. The struggles of our ancestors in the faith to monotheize in their times and eras is expressed in those temporal-spatial idioms. To view the Bible as a paradigm coming out of those eras means that we need not, indeed, must not absolutize any of the mores and idioms, but rather learn through these idiomatic texts the paradigms whereby we in our temporal-spatial contexts and constraints may learn to go and do likewise. We do not use their verbs and nouns in our struggles to monotheize but we can and should use the paradigms they have taught us whereby to pursue our own lives of faith and obedience in our day.

The Bible comes to us not only out of five discernible and largely describable culture eras from about 2000 BCE to about 120 CE, it also comes to us out of the liturgical and instructional programs of ancient believing communities, Jewish and Christian. Canonical criticism attempts to move the focus of biblical study beyond individuals, whether authors or redactors in antiquity, to the communities of which they were a part and which came after them for a period. It may be viewed as a gift and legacy from early believing communities to later such communities. Nothing in the Bible got there through a side door, as it were, slipped in by some ancient individual. Everything in it first passed the tests of liturgical and educational needs of ancient communities of faith, over a period of time and in a number of communities. There is a difference between inspired literature and canonical literature. Some literature that did not make it into the canon of any believing community, whether we inherit it by continuous scribal activity or have discovered it through archaeology, may well have been inspired. What is in the canon, of whichever believing community, whether Jewish, Catholic, Orthodox or Protestant, is surely inspired; but canon need not be said to have a monopoly on inspiration. The canon has another dimension: it provides the paradigms for conjugating the verbs and declining the nouns of the pursuit of the Oneness of God, even today!

Canonical criticism is not primarily interested in the question of what literature is in and what was left out; nor is it greatly interested in the theological or other criteria by which such "decisions" were made. Such "decisions" were effected out in the pertinent believing communities over a span of time; whatever early councils there were, such as the consistory of Jabneh or Jamnia, could only

ratify what had already happened or was happening to the various larger units of literature. The authority commanded by later church councils should not be read back into the early eras of "canonization." When we speak of Scripture as canon we of necessity have to relate the concept of canon to a believing community. The Jews have the shortest canon, the Protestants the next largest, you Catholics the next largest, and certain orthodox communities have even more; the Ethiopian Orthodox Church has 81 books in its canon!

Based on all these observations, and others limited space does not permit me to list, canonical criticism urges a quite different view of the inspiration of Scripture from the common and traditional. The model nearly all positions have followed is that of God or the Holy Spirit inspiring an individual in antiquity whose words were then more or less accurately passed on by hearers, followers, schools and scribes. The model canonical criticism sees as more nearly corresponding to reality is rather that of the Holy Spirit working all along the history and process of formation of Scripture, and indeed thereafter in the believing communities. The only real difference between liberals and conservatives using the older model is quantitative: for the conservative all or nearly all of the text of a particular provenance was spoken or written by some such ancient inspired individual; for the liberal, contextual scholar, some of the text is viewed as secondary or spurious. But for both, only that which actually comes from some original moment or person in antiquity is called genuine or primary. Rarely has the liberal scholar made clear the distinction between genuine text for reconstructing original historical moments and genuine text for guidance of believing communities in their lives of faith and obedience. Canonical criticism accepts the responsible results of biblical criticism generally: the formation of a biblical text is often a many-layered thing. But it sees a concomitant necessity in altering the model for understanding inspiration from focus on individuals to focus on all the process and history of formation of the texts. That same Holy Spirit continues to work with these texts in all their forms and versions to effect the guidance the believing communities need in their pilgrimage as called people of God.

A very useful tool we have developed in canonical criticism is that of the triangle. Explanation of it as a tool may answer a number of questions theologians might have about how canonical criticism works.¹

The bottom right angle of the triangle would represent the societal setting, in all its political, economic and other contours, in which an authoritative tradition was being re-presented. Much is being done in biblical studies to enhance the information available about biblical societal settings: one thinks of the work being done at Yale by Wayne Meeks, Abraham Malherbe, Robert Wilson and others; or of the work of Helmut Koester, Joseph Tyson and Norman Gottwald.

The bottom left angle of the triangle would represent the ancient authoritative tradition, whether oral or written, which was being re-cited and re-presented in the new societal context. It is very important to note here that in the Iron Age lit-

¹See James A. Sanders, "Hermeneutics in True and False Prophecy," *Canon and Authority*, ed. G. Coats and B. Long (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), pp. 21-24, especially pp. 21-22; and Sanders, *Canon and Community* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), pp. 77-78.

erature of the Old Testament, as in the case of the Jesus traditions in the New, the authoritative tradition brought forward, while viewed by the community of hearers or receivers as quite authoritative indeed, was more often than not in an oral form. In fact, it is quite clear that such authoritative traditions were poured into different "forms" as the occasion indicated; the same tradition, such as the Exodus, was adapted to numerous literary forms, as need arose or societal setting indicated. Current discussions in New Testament scholarship about the formation of considerable portions of the gospels in oral forms being determinative for their current written forms is very interesting.²

The bottom left angle also serves to represent authoritative extra-community traditions such as international wisdom being adapted and presented for a given setting. Wisdom crossed national borders and was often found in the same forms in numerous societies. Canonical criticism is interested not so much in the question of who borrowed from whom but the hermeneutics by which such international wisdom was adapted for the indicated setting.

The top angle of the triangle represents the hermeneutics by which the tradition or "wisdom" was caused to function in the setting indicated.

By canonical hermeneutics is meant the unrecorded hermeneutics that lie among all the lines of Scripture. Often an expression of the hermeneutics is indeed made explicit in the text or close by to the text being studied. But even where they are not, they are nonetheless discernible by use of the valid tools of biblical literary and historical criticism. By canonical hermeneutics is meant not the hermeneutic rules and techniques by which a tradition or "wisdom" is caused to function, but the hermeneutic axiom, or view of God, explicit or implicit to the argument advanced. A text can be made to say quite different things depending on whether one has in mind God as universal Creator of all peoples or if one has in mind God as Redeemer in Israel and in Christ. This is the case whether it be the ancient contributor to the Bible or the later interpreter down to our day. The same Word of God which comforts the afflicted may also afflict the comfortable: an old and true saying.

The two basic hermeneutic axioms are prophetic critique or constitutive-supportive mode. The one is based on having in mind God's being universal Creator of all peoples and hence free to judge and redeem whomever God wills; the other is based on having in mind God's being Redeemer in Israel or in Christ and hence faithful to God's promises. It must be understood in canonical terms that these are not mutually exclusive even though they may seem to be contradictory as first one then the other was applied to whatever tradition was being re-presented. The prophet Amos was able to re-present the Torah traditions of Exodus from Egypt and Entrance into Canaan in his sermon in the royal sanctuary in Bethel in ca. 750 BCE (Amos 2:9-12), agreeing that Israel was the only family of all the earth of which God had a special knowledge (3:1-2), but present it as authority for declaiming judgment and punishment of Israel itself! The force of his re-presenting the Exodus tradition was to contrast what God had done for Israel when their heads

²See Werner Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul, and Q* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

were in the dust of the earth of Egypt with what Israel was doing to the poor among its own people in Amos' day (2:6-7). Recent work on the hermeneutics in the issues of true and false prophecy in the OT prophetic corpus is very helpful in this regard.³ Emphasis on God as Creator of all peoples indicated God's freedom to judge God's own people. The so-called First Isaiah was able in this manner to bring even the Davidic traditions to bear as authority for declaiming God's judgments of his own people. The difference was not in the theological tradition brought to bear, or recited, but in the hermeneutics by which it was brought to bear. Earlier work on true and false prophecy had left the impression that the major difference lay between the Mosaic and Davidic understandings of covenant and election; now it is clearly seen that the difference was, on the contrary, in the hermeneutics by which the re-presentation was made. The method has been applied to all the recognizable disputation passages in the prophetic corpus.

But the method, using the tool of the triangle, has also brought to light the importance of historical-societal context for understanding the canonical appropriateness of re-presentation and application of authoritative tradition. The prophet Ezekiel in 586 BCE rejected out of hand an argument from tradition which the Second Isaiah advanced as gospel truth only some forty years later (Ezek. 33:24ff.; Isa. 51:1-3)! Both arguments referred to the tradition of Abraham and Sarah's being given the promise of the land and both used the constitutive hermeneutic of reliance on God's redemptive promise; the difference between them was historical context and all that that meant.

There have been four major areas of biblical study in which the method has been tested: 1) that of true and false prophecy; 2) that of the covenant lawsuit tradition; 3) that of the function of Scripture (OT) in the New Testament; 4) and that of the modes evident in the Bible, OT and NT, of adaptation of international wisdom (myths, legends, proverbs, laws, etc.) into numerous types and genres of biblical literature.⁴ An area in which work has only recently begun is that of applying what we have learned about hermeneutics in true and false prophecy to the disputation passages in the NT between Our Lord and the Pharisees, and others. If, for instance, one were to read the lament or woe statements in Matthew 23 against the scribes and pharisees in the light of the lament or woe passages in the prophets, for example, Isaiah 5 and 10, one would read them as prophetic critique by a Jew (Jesus) against fellow Jews, precisely as was the case with the prophets, rather than, as we usually read the chapter, as anti-Jewish or even anti-Semitic invective. The gospel narrative presents such woes precisely in that way; then dynamic analogy would indicate that it is we who should hear the challenges of Our Lord's prophetic critiques in this regard. Work in this area is progressing apace.

Work on the pervasive biblical adaptation, at all stages and levels of the formation of biblical literature, OT and NT, of international wisdom indicates four

³See above note 1.

⁴See James A. Sanders, "Adaptable for Life: The Nature and Function of Canon," *Magnalia Dei: The Mighty Acts of God. Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Memory of G. Ernest Wright* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1976), pp. 531-60; and Sanders, *Canon and Community*, above note 1.

hermeneutic steps by which such adaptation was made: 1) depolytheizing; 2) monotheizing; 3) Yahwizing; and 4) Israelitizing—or Christianizing or christologizing in the NT and early church. Israel and the early church often and betimes learned from others of God's children, freely and openly. In Ancient Near Eastern studies we learn almost daily about the "common theology of the ANE." Sometimes there was conscious borrowing; sometimes the traditions were simply so common that the interest is purely in the hermeneutic mode whereby Israel or the Church claimed such common wisdom, and expressed it. In biblical studies discovery that Israel learned from or shared something with the Canaanites is so common that nowadays, in contrast to the days of the pan-Babylonian school, we no longer feel we have to give up something, but rather offer up thanks for the Canaanites, or Babylonians, or whomever!

Thus does the Bible give warrant to and restraints for what we have all along done ourselves—if it is viewed as paradigm and not as a closed container of ancient wisdom. Jewish and Christian theologians have always learned from non-Jews and non-Christians; even sermons are full of nonbiblical references and always have been! What we learn from studying the Bible as paradigm for how to monotheize, or how to pursue the Integrity of Reality, is how our ancestors in the faith, the contributors to the Bible, learned from others and adapted that wisdom into expressions of the faith. We must find our own valid and responsible ways of depolytheizing, monotheizing and bringing such wisdom home to Jewish and Christian celebration of God's work—and discernment of how our work may be shaped, formed and informed thereby.

We have developed a mnemonic device in canonical criticism for expression and application of canonical hermeneutics. It is called the Three Hs: honesty, humility and humor.

By honesty is meant the basic hermeneutic for reading all the Bible, even its so-called wisdom literature: that of theologizing while reading a passage instead of moralizing. That means asking what the passage indicates God was doing with the likes of us mirrored in the text. The focus and emphasis is on how God signified situations humans got into rather than on the idioms and mores of the culture era from which the story derived. If we ask first what a biblical text says we should do, we tend to focus on the Bronze or Iron Age mores, or worse perhaps, the hellenistic mores of the NT period. We then tend to absolutize them. Or, unable to approve of those mores we prefer not to read certain passages and thus find ourselves again selecting, by our moral standards, a canon within the canon. If we could learn to celebrate what the texts say God was able to do in and through such ancient idioms and mores, even when the ancient text reflects tribal views of God, we might get the message that God can also work in and through our modern idioms and mores even when we denominationalize or tribalize God. *Errone hominum providentia divina* is a common biblical theme: we can celebrate the theme if we learn always to theologize first upon reading a biblical passage and then moralize thereafter. We are going to moralize; we have to go on and put one foot in front of the other (*halachah*). But we could hold off, in reading the Bible, until we have celebrated the gospel, God's Spell, God's story of how God has been able to work through all sorts of squalor in an earlier day, then we would learn to celebrate the hope that God continues to work with us human beings on this pitifully

shrinking planet and order our days and our lives in the light thereof.

The second H is humility or dynamic analogy. This means raising our consciousness about whom we identify with in reading a biblical text and making the effort to identify with those who heard the Bible's prophetic challenges and thus receive the blessing of them. This means being willing to identify with other than Joseph, Jeremiah and Jesus but with those around them. It means consciously identifying in the texts with those most dynamically analogous to ourselves, our group or our people. In the Exodus story it might be with Raamses II and the good, generous Egyptians, surely not, in our case, with the slaves, though modern powerless groups might do so. In the NT we might identify with the good Presbyterians, I mean, Pharisees. What hubris we have in so identifying with Our Lord in the gospels that we become anti-Jewish or anti-Semitic in doing so; or at best, we feel sad about them and fail to see our human foibles in them. A good definition of bias or prejudice is being down on what we're not up on. Jews feel called into God's service, and Judaism for them is the expression of that service. The canonical authority for the churches' reading the biblical texts by dynamic analogy is that of the called people of God being understood primarily as a Pilgrim Folk, needing to hear Our Lord's challenges to take another step on the pilgrimage.

The third H is humor. And that means taking God a little more seriously and ourselves a little less seriously than we usually do! It means more than theologizing; it means putting God at the center in a thoroughly theocentric hermeneutic. It means monotheizing. The Bible is not so much a monotheistic literature as a monotheizing literature. All of it monotheizes more or less well—depending on the mores and idiomatic givens of the culture era from which the passage principally derives. In the early period it meant denying polytheistic panthea by affirming a heavenly council in which there is only the one, true God who has power, with all the members (analogous to the gods of a polytheistic pantheon) being but God's servants doing nought but God's will. In the Persian period it meant denying polytheism by affirming that a most prominent member of the heavenly council was the Satan who tested people's piety to see if it was self-serving or God-centered, to see if one could be seduced by whatever power one might have into forgetting the Giver of that power. To polytheize is to grant the Satan or the Diabolos power of his own. In the hellenistic period it meant denying the polytheism of the principalities and powers and affirming in numerous ways that God could marshal even demons into service, God having the power, their having none whatever except that which the doubt of the believer gave them. To fear God is to be absolutely relieved of fearing anything else; the heavenly, earthly and chthonian deities which polytheists worship are really naught but birds, beasts and fish (Gen. 1:28).⁵

To monotheize is to pursue the Integrity of Reality, the oneness of God. That Integrity is both ontological and ethical. To monotheize is to surrender being judge of what is ultimately good and righteous, but leaving such judging to God. To monotheize is to admit our humility and human limitations. We are like the three

⁵See James A. Sanders, "Mysterium Salutis" (= "God is God"), *Year-Book 1972-73, Ecumenical Institute* (Jerusalem, 1974), pp. 103-27.

blind persons around the elephant; we cannot measure reality or truly fathom it. By faith we say that Reality has Integrity.

If one attempts to describe or draw up a biography of Yahweh by the results of literary and historical criticism of the Bible one learns that the monotheizing process is affirmed by the literature that ended up in the canon, whether all ancient Israel believed it or not. As Israel migrated and made her pilgrimage Yahweh took on the attributes and job descriptions of numerous deities that ancient Israel came in contact with, both the male deities and the female deities, the heavenly and the earthly deities. God is as much feminine as masculine despite our limited human language and idiom by which we name God. And we should be able to identify with both women and men in the Bible, in their humanity, as creatures of God. God, from the human point of view, took on some of the attributes and job descriptions even of the chthonian deities. This is the classically expressed "dark side" of Yahweh, of God, who is beyond our judgments. God is not only mother and father deity, God is also the God of death as well as of life, of darkness as well as of light. There is no where or when that God is not God. There is no evil that God cannot redeem. This is a matter of faith. The story of the resurrection of Our Lord, God's new creation, is the absolutely essential inclusio of the story of the creation in the first place (I Corinthians 15:12-28).⁶ And the gospel story as a whole, beginning with Genesis, is the paradigm whereby we may pursue the Integrity of Reality in our day.

What about moralizing? What about the absolute necessity of making decisions, of walking (*halachah*) on this pilgrimage we have been called to make as eyewitnesses and servants of God's Word. Judaism faced that question in the hellenistic crisis of the pre-Christian era when it found that in that quite different cultural situation the old Bronze and Iron Age laws frozen in a stabilized, written Torah, were insufficient. They had new problems for which they had no laws and they had a bunch of old laws for which they no longer had problems. Judaism met it in two ways: by the introduction of the concept of *Torah shebē'al peh*, Oral Law, whereby they understood that God had given Moses on Sinai many more laws than he could write down but which he did memorize and which he passed on through the prophets and sages; and by the shift in ontology of canon from sacred story to sacred text so that the Bible could be read by the introduction of new hermeneutics in ways other than the peshat or plain meaning of the text.⁷ Paul faced the same problem in an even more intense way because of the conversion of non-Jews with their hellenistic mentalities and mores. His solution was to say that Torah as stipulation was abrogated while Torah as gospel was holy, eternal and good.⁸ He ad-

⁶It is clear that Paul had Ps. 8 before him (in memory or manuscript) which liturgically accompanied the reading of Genesis 1 in Early Judaism, while composing his treatise on resurrection for the church at Corinth. Ps. 8:2, 6 are easily resignified by the Holy War metaphor which Paul uses to explain the work of God in the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection generally; see I Cor. 15:26-28 and 51-57.

⁷James A. Sanders, "Text and Canon: Concepts and Method," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 98 (1979), 5-29.

⁸James A. Sanders, "Torah and Christ," *Interpretation* 29 (1975), 372-90; and Sanders, "Torah and Paul," *God's Christ and His People, Festschrift for Nils Dahl*, ed. Wayne Meeks (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1977), pp. 132-40.

vised his church at Philippi to energize God's gift of *soteria* with fear and trembling; they were to work out their obedience not by consulting a law book but by re-reading the full Torah-Christ story focusing on the point that God was at work among them both to will and to work God's *eudokia* (Phil. 2:12-13).

How then should we go about our decision making? I am convinced that Paul was not pitting faith against works in Romans or elsewhere, but rather was asking the question, "In whose works do we have faith? God's or ours?" If our faith is in God's works, from creation through to re-creation, and we celebrate God's story as the most important service we render (*liturgeia*), and we make all our decisions, small and great, in the light of that celebration and of that story, then we will find that God's Torah-Christ story has become our story, our paradigm whereby we shape our lives. The link then between story and stipulation, between faith and obedience, between theologizing and moralizing, is in the classical expressions, *imitatio dei* and *imitatio christi*. We cannot create worlds nor can we condescend in such love and grace as God did in God's first pastoral call on our parents in Eden's bower, or as God did when God crouched into Bethlehem's cradle chased by Herod's sword. No, for it is always God who first comes to us 'ere we come to God. But if we order our days and our lives through the faith perspective of God's Torah-Christ story, then it becomes our story too.

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