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The Particularity of the Gospel: Good News for Changing Times

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Change and decay in all around I see;
O Thou, who changest not, abide with me." In this transitional period of modern history when change and change by revolution are the order of the day, the plaintive plea of the popular hymn seems to assume an ever more urgent note. But the question is this: How effectively, if at all, can the notion of the unchangeableness of God expressed in this hymn aid an atomic age society in coping with population explosions, sexual, racial, and campus revolutions, and the threat of worldwide nuclear annihilation? Can men of our time indeed experience good news through declarations of God's immutability? Can we thereby find the security we seek as the intellectual assumptions and societal structures, on which our security heretofore rested, change and decay about us? The fact that we continue to sing and speak such thoughts suggests we can. The fact that we find ourselves helpless and threatened by the prospect of change suggests we cannot.

To many people, including Christians, the latter speaks more truth than the former. Perhaps this is the case because these same people innately sense that good news, the gospel, is something that involves not God and His attributes alone but also man and his human predicament. This intuition, I would propose, is a correct one. For

the gospel, as we have come to learn and experience it through the Scriptures and the history of the Christian community, has always been news that is particularly good in relation to a particular historical and human situation.

An appreciation and affirmation of the particularity of the gospel, I would suggest, is a most important aid in coming to grips with the fact of change, be it a world in revolution, a church in transition, or a theology in flux.

"To live is to change; to be perfect is to have changed often." This marvelous insight of the great churchman and scholar, John Henry Newman, reveals a fundamental affirmation of change. An affirmation of change is born of an appreciation of the particularity of the gospel. The expression "particularity of the gospel" in the title of this essay refers to the particular manner in which a particular person or persons experience and express as *good* news a particular action of God through a particular man named Jesus on behalf of particular people in a particular situation. The statement admittedly is a cumbersome one. It contains redundancy in order to make a point. Expressed in simple terms it might sound like this: The gospel is never merely news; it is *good* news. It is "good" news, however, only in relation to a "bad" situation. The gospel is good news because it announces and demonstrates God's amelioration of a pernicious human situation. As the factors which characterize that evil human

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situation change, so accordingly change the factors which characterize God's action as good. What we are considering, thus, is not a timeless, changeless form of the gospel abstractly conceived and appropriate to every time and place, but a proclamation which continues to be good because it continues to change according to time, place, and human circumstance. Such a view of the gospel and its particularity not only liberates men from fear of change but also enables them to affirm change. For change is of the gospel's very nature.

This understanding of the gospel is evident throughout the Scriptures. The term "gospel" derives from an Anglo-Saxon word "god-spell" (a story from or about a god) which rendered the Latin *euangelion*.¹ The Latin, in turn, was a transliteration of the Greek *euaggelion*. This noun occurs 54 times in the New Testament, and only in the singular. It occurs only three times in the Greek Old Testament, and only in the plural. The LXX uses *euaggelia* in a context of royalty, battle, and victory as it designates the good news of victory announced to King David (2 Sam. 4:10,

¹ It is surprising that more attention has not been devoted to the term "gospel" in Biblical research. One of the most comprehensive studies in this area is over 40 years old, Julius Schniewind's *Evangelion, Ursprung und erste Gestalt des Begriffs Evangelium* (1927). With the material of his teacher, Schniewind, at his disposal, Gerhard Friedrich prepared the article on *euaggelizomai* and cognates for the *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, II (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1935), 705—35; English translation: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, II (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1964, 707—37). Among the most recent articles in English is Otto Piper's, "Gospel (Message)," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), II, 442—48.

18:25).² Second Samuel 4:10 is an interesting demonstration of the fact that "good news" is not always absolutely good news. King David instead recalls with bitter irony how one man's meat is another man's poison. "When one told me 'Behold, Saul is dead!' and thought he was bringing good news, I seized him and slew him at Ziklag, which was the reward I gave him for his 'good news.'"

On the other hand, the more frequent occurrence in the LXX of the verb *euaggelizesthai*, "to proclaim good news or glad tidings" (20 times), indicates the Israelite and Jewish community's stress on the *action* with which good news was associated. Here is a most important impulse for the meaning this term assumed in the New Testament. Beyond the original non-theological meaning of "proclaiming victory tidings" (for example, 2 Sam. 18:19, 31; 1 Chron. 10:9; Ps. 67 [68]:11) the verb eventually was given a *theological* connotation, designating the good news of God's delivering (Ps. 39 [40]:9) and saving (Ps. 95 [96]:2) activity. Nahum the prophet relates the glad victory tidings to the announcement of peace: "Behold on the mountains the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace" (Nah. 1:15). Isaiah continues this theme and develops it.

Go up to a high mountain, O Zion, you who proclaim good news . . . O Jerusalem, you who proclaim good news. . . Behold, the Lord God comes with might and His arm rules for Him; behold, His reward is with Him and His recompense before

² Due to the uncertainty regarding the accentuation of the Greek (*euaggelia* or *euaggelia*), 2 Sam. 4:10 is the only certain occurrence of *euaggelion* in the plural in the Greek Old Testament.

Him. He will feed His flock like a shepherd, He will gather the lambs in His arms. (Is. 40:9-10)

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who proclaims good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of good things, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns." (Is. 52:7)

The good news of conquest is the gospel of God's royal victory over Israel's foes, His saving and pacifying action, His shepherd's care, His reigning presence among His people.

One further passage from Isaiah illustrates the concrete and personal nature of the good news while simultaneously providing us a concrete bridge to the New Testament:

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn. (Is. 61:1-3)

The extraordinary importance of this description of the good news lies in the fact that according to Luke 4:16-21 the inaugural address of Jesus' public ministry contains an explicit reference to these verses of Isaiah with the concluding declaration by Jesus: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled by your hearing Me read it." (Luke 4:21)

Against this background the Christian community's frequent and technical usage of the verb and noun to proclaim the saving activity of God on behalf of His people is readily comprehensible. Added to this influence on New Testament usage is also

the significance which "good news" had assumed in the Greek world surrounding Palestine. *Euaggelion* in this milieu was often related to the activities and affairs of a king or ruler. Employed in the terminology of the emperor cult, it took on a sacral connotation, similar to the trend in the latter Old Testament documents. A famous calendar inscription from Priene in Asia Minor about the year 9 B. C. hails the birthday of Augustus in these words: "The birthday of [the] god [that is, Augustus] was for the world the beginning of the good news [which was proclaimed] on his account." Reports by heralds (*keryx*, *kerygma*) of the emperor's appearance or coming (*parousia*), his accession to the throne, and his decrees were all "good news," glad tidings of salvation and peace which had come to the world.

Amid all the similarities between Christian and Israelite or Greek usage, however, one decisive difference stands out. For the Christian community the experience and proclamation of good news is linked inseparably with a particular historical person, Jesus of Nazareth. The gospel is the good news of God's reign (Matt. 4:23; Mark 1:14-15; Acts 8:12; Col. 1:13) and grace (Acts 20:24) proclaimed and manifested by Jesus. It is the good news of peace effected through Jesus between God and man, and between man and his fellowman (Acts 10:36; Eph. 2:17, 6:15; compare Col. 1:20). It is proclamation of God's making Jesus the Christ, the Bringer of the Messianic age (Rom. 15:19), of raising Him from the dead (Acts 17:18) and establishing Him as Lord (Acts 11:20, compare 2:36) of all mankind and Son of God through whom all men become sons of God (Rom. 1:1-6, compare ch. 8). In

fact, as is evident in Mark 1:1 and in Mark's further usage of the term "gospel," Jesus Himself is the good news. To the estranged and the alienated, the beggars and whores, the sick and the broken in spirit, the Gentile "enemy" and the publican Jew, Jesus Himself in word and deed, life and death, is the historical, personal and dynamic manifestation of good news for all men.

Thus the gospel is not some timeless truth, capable of abstraction and reducible to a propositional statement universally valid. To think that it is, would be to confuse the Christian gospel with Platonism, as did the early Christian Gnostics. As long as the good news is conceivable only in relation to Jesus, who is its constant point of reference, that good news must be person-oriented, history-oriented, and action-oriented. Against any attempt to extricate the good news from the entangling web of history and humanity, John the evangelist states: "The word-in-action through which God communicates to man became a human being and pitched the tent of God's holy presence among us men; and we were spectators of His glorious power, glory as of a unique Son of the Father, radiating God's beauty and faithfulness" (John 1:14). In similar rejection of this antihistorical attitude the author to the Hebrews declares:

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself [Jesus] likewise partook of the same flesh and blood, so that through death He might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and liberate those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. . . . For because He Himself has suffered and been tempted, He is able to help those who are tempted. (Heb. 2:14-15, 18)

Declarations such as these make it clear that there is still a further aspect to the early community's conception of the good news. The gospel involves not only God's saving activity and Jesus as the unique agent of that action, but also mankind as the object and recipient of God's deed through Jesus. The gospel is not abstract because the primary Mediator of the gospel, Jesus, is not an abstraction. The gospel, furthermore, is not abstract, because it announces an *action* of God. Finally, it is never abstract, because God's saving action always involves concrete historical human beings.

The gospel is not identical with theology. Theology reflects, analyzes, systematizes, synthesizes, abstracts, speculates. The gospel is an object, but never an equivalent of theological analysis. Theology can reflect separately on the characteristics of God, the nature of the Christ, or the general condition of man. The gospel, in contrast, is never good news without relating man to God through Jesus Christ. For this is the sole function of the gospel. It is the announcing, declaring, manifesting, and proclaiming to men of God's changing them and their relation to Him through His act in Jesus. Without man and his particular predicament in focus, the news is never *good* news.

In the New Testament good news is always related to and describes a change in man's evil situation. It is the call to repentance and an about-face from what is contrary to God's will (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 24:46-47; Acts 14:15). It is the announcement of God's demand for change and the gift of His power for change. But the good news is also more particularly defined as the good news of,

for instance, "peace," "joy," "healing," "forgiveness," "salvation," "reconciliation," "access to the Father and membership in the household of God," "new birth through the Spirit," and "rest."³

This constant relation to and bearing upon particular aspects of man's historical-existential situation accounts for the variety and diversity of the good news. As the early Christian witnesses confronted different and changing situations, so their evangelical proclamation altered and varied. Examples of such variation and diversity are as ancient as the Christian tradition itself. Even within the oldest writings of the New Testament, the letters of St. Paul, form-critical analysis has identified still earlier pre-Pauline tradition, such as fragments of creeds (for example, Rom. 1:3-4), hymns (see Phil. 2:6-11), and liturgies (see 1 Cor. 11:23-25) which Paul has uti-

lized and interpreted anew in order to address a new situation.

Thus, to take only one of these as an example, in attempting to rectify the faulty Eucharistic practice of the Corinthians (1 Cor. 11:17-34), Paul quotes the words which our Lord spoke at His last supper (vv. 23-25). He introduces them as tradition (v. 23); Matt. 26:26-29, Mark 14:22 to 25, and Luke 22:15-20 are further examples of this tradition. When compared, each of the four accounts differs from the others and reveals the particular interests of each of the authors who quoted the tradition. The contexts give the reasons why. In Paul's case, the notable difference is the interpretation he gives Jesus' words in two ways. First, in v. 26 he explains: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes." Second, in vv. 27-29 he indicates that a proper celebration of the Eucharist requires a discerning of the Lord's body. With each of these additions Paul was attempting to correct misconceptions and malpractices of the Corinthian church. On the one hand, contrary to their notion that their salvation had already occurred and that they were already reigning with Christ (compare 4:7-8; 6:2), Paul had to remind them that faith, as manifested also at the Eucharist, is still orientation toward the future, toward the *coming* of the Lord. In the present there is no room for boasting or false confidence, but the need for vigilance and faithfulness; in chapters 6:1-11 and 10:1-13 he deals with aspects of the same problem.

Second, against their individualistic understanding of faith and of Eucharistic celebration in particular, Paul counters that

³ Peace: Luke 2:9-14; Acts 10:36; Eph. 2:17, 6:15.

Joy: Luke 1:19, 2:10; Acts 8:1-8.

Healing (of physical malady as well as of the broken relationship between God and man): Matt. 4:23; 9:35; 10:7-8; 11:1-5; Mark 1:39; 3:14-15; 6:12-13; Luke 4:18-19; 7:18-23; 8:1-3, 39; 9:2, 6; Acts 10:36-38; 14:7-10.

Forgiveness: Luke 3:3; 4:18; 8:1; 24:47; Acts 10:34-43, 13:16-41; 1 Cor. 15:1-11.

Salvation: Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 1:17-24; 15:1-2; Eph. 1:13; 2 Tim. 1:8-11, 2:8-10; 1 Pet. 1:10-12.

Reconciliation: Eph. 2:16-17; Col. 1:22-23.

Access to the Father and membership in the household of God: Eph. 2:17-22, 3:6.

New birth through the Spirit: Acts 15:7-8; Eph. 1:13; 1 Thess. 1:5; 2 Thess. 2:13-14; 1 Peter 1:22-25, 4:6.

Rest: Heb. 4:2, 6.

Of course, many more passages could be cited which refer to the nine terms or phrases mentioned above. The list is restricted to the texts where *euangelizesthai* and its cognates are *explicitly* employed.

through eating the body and blood of the Lord the community *is* the body of the Lord. Proper Eucharistic celebration requires that the body of the resurrected Lord be discerned in the body of the Lord's confessing community. This "body of Christ" theme runs through 1 Corinthians like a golden thread.⁴ It is Paul's particular means of preaching good news to a people who through their dissension and division, egotism and pride had demonstrated their inability to comprehend God's act of salvation as an act of reconciliation and unification of men into a new community—the body of Christ. Paul's second letter to these one-track-minded individualists again describes God's saving deed as a reconciling activity. (2 Cor. 5:11—6:2)

The Colossian church had at least one thing in common with the Corinthians. Both groups failed to realize the relation between the Christ and the cosmos, between God's redeeming and His creating activity. Therefore to both Colossians and Corinthians Paul announces salvation as an act of re-creation (1 Cor. 15:20-28; see also 8:6; Col. 1:15-20). In Corinth this despising of earthly and human substance led to a disdain of human community and a denial of the resurrection of the human, fleshly body. So Paul's good news to them is God's re-creation of the flesh through the resurrection of His Son and His reunite-

ing of all their bodies in the body of the Christ. At Colossae, on the other hand, the predicament had assumed a more cosmic or spatial dimension. Man felt alienated not only from his fellowman but from the universe and its structuring order as well. He considered himself a helpless pawn at the disposal of cosmic powers. The only chance for security and survival lay in his appeasing these "elemental spirits of the universe" (Col. 2:8,20) by strict observance of festivals (2:16) and regulations such as "do not touch, do not taste, do not handle" (2:21). For such a community only that would be good news which could liberate them from their fear of demonic dominance and overcome their alienation and lostness in a hostile world. With his proclamation of the Son of God as agent of creation as well as redemption and the cross as His instrument of peace and victory over all the powers of the universe (1:15-23; 2:9-15), this is precisely the good news Paul brought.

"Peace" is also an important theme in Paul's gospel to the Romans. Here, however, "peace" describes the union which believing men have with God as a result of God's declaring them righteous on account of Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1-11). The occasion of this statement is not the Hellenistic conception found in the later letter to the Colossians. It is rather Paul's particular Jewish conception of "sin" as alienation from God, because sin is a "transgression" of God's law. The law, because of sin, was ineffective as the medium and maintainer of the union between God and His people. The human predicament is viewed from the Jewish perspective. The law is the Torah. Sin is that which distorts and destroys the law's function. In order

⁴ Note the frequency with which *sōma* or *sōma (tou) Christou* occurs in 1 Corinthians, as well as the strategy of Paul's argumentation: 6:13, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20; 10:16, 17; 11:24, 27, 29; 12:12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23; 12:12-27 (14 occurrences); 13:3; 15:35, 37, 38, 40, 44. The erroneous style of life and reaching which Paul's employment of the "body of Christ" theme was meant to combat is mentioned explicitly at the outset of the letter, 1:10-17.

to live before God, man requires freedom from the claim of the law and the power of sin.

Accordingly, the good news is also presented in Jewish terms. The gospel is God's overcoming the alienating power of sin (that is, "forgiving" sin) and establishing peace and unity with man not through the law but through His Son, Jesus Christ. In the stead of the law under which men die because they cannot obey (1:18—3:20), God has united Himself to man through Jesus Christ, under whom men live because they can believe. (3:21 to 8:39)

In this connection perhaps the understanding of the gospel as the "forgiveness of sins" deserves a further comment. For the western Catholic Church, including the Lutheran tradition, "sin" has come to be understood as the term par excellence for describing man's "bad situation," his self-centered and rebellious attitude toward God and his alienation from God and man. However, in the New Testament "sin" is not as prevalent an expression for man's evil situation as might first be assumed. Five writings contain not one reference to the term "sin."⁵ Some of these and others also never employ the verb "forgive" or the noun "forgiveness."⁶ This certainly does not mean that those documents which have not used the particular terms "sin" or "forgiveness" have not proclaimed the good news of God's saving of the world through Jesus Christ! What it does indicate, however, is that use of these terms was made

only when it was meaningful to do so. When man's evil predicament and God's saving action could be proclaimed more comprehensibly and effectively through other language, the apostolic authors under the guidance of the Spirit obviously did not hesitate to do so.

We contemporary preachers might well take a lesson from our first-century counterparts. From the biblical vantage point, the good news is more inclusive and comprehensive than the concept of the forgiveness of sins. To announce the forgiveness of sins is indeed one of the many important ways of declaring good news to anxious and alienated men—but it is also only one of many. To a man contemplating suicide or to a paranoid fearing that the world is his enemy there is a good news of God as life and as love which is much more salutary in these particular situations than would be the expression "your sins are forgiven." For as we have seen, that is *good* news which ameliorates man's *particular evil* predicament.

A study of the gospels confirms this principle once more. The first of the evangelists, Mark, was writing to a community beset by persecution, uncertain in her faith, anxious regarding the implications of the Jewish-Roman war. What was expected of a Christian in such times and why? Who could make sense of the ambiguity of existence? Mark's good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God (1:1), was an acknowledgement of that ambiguity and a call to faith. God confronts man in mystery and veiled epiphany. He reigns and saves, conquers evil, and restores creation through a Son who went the way of the cross to become servant of all. Those having ears and eyes of faith hear and see the

⁵ Philippians, Titus, Philemon, 2 John, and 3 John.

⁶ 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, 1 and 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and Jude.

invitation to discipleship and life. Faith and discipleship alone enable man to endure the ambiguous present while man is still only man and God is God.

Matthew, writing a decade or more later, addresses a church which has experienced the bitter break between Christians and Jews. Is there any link, any continuity, between the church of the Gentiles and the Israelite heritage from which this church ironically had its birth? What is to be its teaching and pattern of living? Matthew's answer is in terms of concrete instructions and injunctions. Preeminently, however, the good news is the proclamation of the universal fulfillment of the divine promise. Jesus of Nazareth, the authentic Son of Abraham and David, is the Lord of all nations. The Messianic Fulfiller of Israel's heritage is God's offer of salvation to all men who confess His lordship.

For Luke's predominantly Gentile audience the good news is that through a historical being God has broken the vicious circle of history and given it a beginning and end, whose midpoint is the history of Jesus Christ. To the man for whom there was "nothing new under the sun," trapped by the unchangeable course of human events and mercilessly threatened by the devices of his fellowmen, Luke told of a God who cares for the most lost and most lowly by moving in history among them. Jew and Gentile are now one through the One in whom God unites and directs the history of both.

Coming to grips with history and the historical character of the good news was problematic for the audience of the Fourth Gospel also. Separated from the events of Jesus' life and death by more than 60 years, John's Asia Minor community wrestled

with threats to its faith on at least two fronts. On the one hand, Christianity seemed on the verge of being transformed from a historical event into an idea. Christians wondered whether salvation was not really liberation *from* history rather than redemption *in and through* history. Is it not the object of man's yearning to be released from the prison of his body and have his "higher self" reunited with its divine source? If the body of man is inherently evil, how could Jesus Christ, a human being, be God's agent of salvation? On the other hand, the delay of the Lord's final coming in judgment led people to deny it altogether. Jesus promised the Parousia within the first generation. There they were in the second generation already with no sign of its coming.

In the face of this situation John's Gospel assumed quite a different form and content from that of Paul. Whereas Paul's stress was on the crucified Christ, John emphasized Jesus as the incarnate Word. God has saved human beings by wrapping His own Word in human flesh and blood. Jesus, the Apostle of God, was at the same time the most human of men. Salvation is not a process of man's escaping from history to God, but of God in history embracing man. If many of Paul's audiences disputed the place of the cross in the course of history, then John's discounted the place of history in the course of the cross.

Similarly, in addressing the problem of eschatology and the delay of the Parousia, John diverges significantly from Paul. The latter, as is evident in such letters as 1 Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians, anticipated the Parousia within his own lifetime. Whereas Paul conceived of time "horizontally," John thought of time "vertically." Or

we might say, as Paul spoke in terms of quantity of time, John spoke of time's quality. Paul anticipated an end-time and final judgment that was yet to come. John predominantly stressed that in Jesus the end and the judgment are already occurring.⁷ His gospel portrays eternal life as the result of a confrontation with Jesus and the response of faith. Confrontation with Jesus brings a crisis ("judgment") situation. Belief in Him as Mediator of God's glory means life. Rejection of Him results in self-condemnation. The disciples, Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, the blind man, Lazarus—all are types of "Everyman" confronting the majesty of God in Jesus Christ. Life and death hang in the balance. The good news is that God wills life, not death, for His creatures. (John 3:16-19)

In summary, what we have seen throughout the New Testament is that good news is always expressive of change in a particular historical and human situation. Sometimes the action of change is made explicit, as in the call for a repentant "change of heart" or in the declaration of God's "changing" (*katallassein*) the relation of enmity to one of peace. More often it is implicit in the variety and diversity of ways with which the early church proclaimed the good news and its central figure, Jesus the Christ. As the manner in which Israel knew her God changed according to time and circumstance (Elohim; Yahweh; Lord of hosts; God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; Holy One of Israel), so

the same can be said of the early church's alteration in her confession of Jesus as Messiah, Lord, Son of God, Son of Man, and Savior. Each title ascribed to God coincided with what Israel intended to say about God's saving action on man's behalf. The church maintained the variety of Israel's confession but particularized it even further by linking the divine subject and the human object of salvation inseparably with Jesus of Nazareth. The soteriological question (What does God do for man through Jesus?) and the Christological question (Who is Jesus?) are inseparable. When soteriological formulations vary and change in order to appropriate new circumstances of thought, language, and experience, Christological terms change also. As a result the gospel comes to different expression.

On the basis of the New Testament evidence, therefore, we can say that the gospel is and must always remain good news in particularity. The reason for this is that good news announces to man particular actions of God mediated through a particular historical person, Jesus, which can overcome and resolve his particular evil situation. If his situation is one caused by an oppressive sense of guilt and wrongdoing, then the good news declares the divine forgiveness of his sin. If it is one of estrangement, then the good news announces God's reconciling embrace in Jesus Christ. To those who consider themselves worthless, the good news is God's affirming outreach through the Son of His love. To those "tired of livin' and scared of dyin'" the gospel declares the sustaining and prevailing gift of life through the resurrected One. For anonymous thousands turning daily to horoscopes and Ouija boards to

⁷ The Gospel according to John, of course, does refer occasionally to a future coming, and Paul occasionally to a divine judgment occurring already in the present. We are speaking here of a predominant emphasis or orientation.

discover the powers running the cosmos, the good news is of God's creating and ruling activity manifested in the victory on the cross.

For every new and changing situation the expression of the gospel will change because the good news contains the ingredients of change. It is dynamic, historical, personal, and relative. The gospel is *dynamic* because it proclaims the *dynamis* of God effecting salvation (Rom. 1:16); *historical* and *personal* because this divine saving action is effected in specific historical situations through a particular historical person, Jesus, and for particular historical persons, in whom God's saving action announced in the gospel effects a new sound, integral *relation* between God and man and man with his fellowman.

An appreciation of these dimensions of the gospel, all of which contribute toward its particularity, ultimately will effect not only a Christian attitude toward change but also the Christian's role in these changing times. A changing gospel should make a church chary of preferring propositional absolutes when society is wrestling with the relativities of history. A gospel affirming change as the mode of God's saving and healing action, on the other hand, should encourage and strengthen Christians in converting confessions into actions and ideas into personal relationships. For the dynamism of the good news is the power to transform people fearing change into agents of change. The gospel is the good news of reconciled reconcilers and renewed men on a renewing mission.