

“BEHOLD I CREATE A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH”
OR
“HANGING BASKETS, BROKEN STRINGS, AND A WORLD RENEWED”

*Anthony J. Gittins, CSSp.
Professor of Theology and Culture,
Catholic Theological Union, Chicago*

CONTEXT, CONSEQUENCES AND CHALLENGES.

Late in August 2005, we all knew it was going to be spectacular; there was a certain fascination in watching the colossal hurricane gather its fearsome strength and set a course for New Orleans and Biloxi. Yet much of the impact depended on where you were when it struck. Most of us only *know about* Katrina through newsreels, but in these two days we will gain a tiny bit of direct experience. We are not here either for educational immersion or tourism; New Orleans has been chosen neither for nostalgia nor guilt-inducement, but specifically as a context for our continuing reflection on the challenge of Mission; how we try to remain faithful to our baptismal call should be refined and refocused this weekend.

Recall the bare facts: Katrina came ashore 1500 days ago, leaving 1,836 people dead, 124,000 homes destroyed, and over \$50 billion in *uninsured and therefore uncompensated damages*, as well as the rank smell of decay and abandonment, and indelible images of the most shameful and the most heroic of human responses. It was a terrible episode whose consequences are still ongoing; and

it is part of our common memory store. But did it impact us in any palpable way? Was it in any sense a call to our own ongoing conversion? Or is it just one more in a never-ending litany of disasters? Hardly a month ago an earthquake in Indonesia claimed thousands of lives, and a tsunami in Samoa hundreds – but what impact did they have on us? How quickly we forget! Ten years ago another earthquake in Turkey took 15,000 lives, and the terrible Christmas Tsunami of 2004 cost a quarter million. Even hurricane Mitch in 1998 killed 11,000. These numbing figures put the near-3000 lives lost on 9/11, and Katrina’s near-2000 victims into some perspective. But whether such disasters strike us personally or not, as people of compassion with missionary hearts we must ask how they challenge each of us: the way we live, and the lives of poor and needy people we encounter daily, or simply avoid. We must reflect and reassess our priorities, life-styles, and commitments to the Way of Jesus.

Our theme is compelling: God says, “I am about to create a new heaven and a new earth”; but God is no Magician or Conjurer, and the promise is partly contingent on our own collaborative response. The quotation is part of an oracle in which Isaiah expresses his prophetic dissatisfaction with the *status quo* and affirms his own dedication: “I was ready to be sought out by those who did not ask; I said ‘here I am, here I am’; I held out my hands to a rebellious people” (65:1-2); then he describes God’s reaction to a faithless people: God warns of dire punishment, saying: “When I called, you did not answer, when I spoke, you did not listen.” But then the tone changes from admonition, as God promises to

cherish the faithful remnant, declaring, “I am about to create new heavens and a new earth,” abrogating punishment for anyone willing to *repent by changing their lives*.

This is where we come in: first, God's abiding faithfulness applies to all who do not lose faith; but God's promise also requires full participation – a repentant spirit – from all who constitute the faithful remnant: as Rudy Wiebe put it, “you repent, not by feeling bad, but by thinking differently.” It is far easier to feel bad and do nothing, than to think differently, act boldly, and change the world. We spend a lifetime learning how and what to think, and in the process we become resistant to change and fixed in our ideas, perspectives and prejudices. But we can only form a Godly vision by discerning what God is asking of us, not by following our own myopic perspective, much less presuming to tell God exactly what we intend to do and then expecting God to be overwhelmed by our generosity and wisdom. So here is my challenge to everyone in this gathering: over the next 24 hours, as you experience, ponder, listen and chat, identify specifically *how you are thinking differently*, and how you resolve to *act differently* when you return home.

WHAT'S NEW ABOUT THE NEW HEAVEN AND EARTH?

We have two tasks: to identify some features of the new heaven and earth, and to name appropriate missionary responses. The image of a new creation is fairly common in the Hebrew Bible and apocryphal literature: in Isaiah 43, God says,

“Do not remember the former things; I am about to do a *new thing*; now it springs forth; do you not perceive it?” (43:18-19). This is an invitation to move beyond past mistakes with steadfast trust in our faithful and innovative God; but in the promise that gives our Conference its theme, *the new is remarkably similar to the old*. So, life will continue *without* dramatic changes, people will still die, and there is no promise of *immediate* resurrection or immortality. God will not sweep down and create instantaneous and miraculous change. Yet there *is* some novelty: the prophet’s own waking-dream, the burning hope he wants to ignite in his hearers, for a kind of utopia – freedom from grief, from premature death, from oppression and exploitation.¹ This is the ideal we must strive for. We have no exact utopian blueprint for an alternative tomorrow; but we can have what Sallie McFague calls an *atopia*, “an imagined world both prophetic and alluring from which we can judge what is wrong with the paradigm that has created the present crisis on our planet.” But not simply judge: we need to respond with creativity and generosity.

The implications are huge: we must look assiduously for the signs of God’s action in the world. Signs include dramatic awakenings of consciousness (like those that once ended slavery or identified sexism and patriarchy as sinful – though all of the above seem to be alive and well again today). But there are more subtle or modest signs visible in the responses of people like Dorothy Day or Jean Vanier, or in the commitments typical of many of our own communities. Having looked or discerned the signs, though, we must then respond: you and I are personally called to leave here on Sunday, thinking differently and committed

to acting differently, in faithfulness to our missionary call. Otherwise this is just a weekend break in New Orleans. God initiates, and we discern and then respond. But how is the initiative of God's Spirit perceived? In the Creed we say, "I believe in the Holy Spirit, *who has spoken through the prophets.*" Are they just our dead heroes, or are there living prophets amongst us, leading, urging us to take responsibility for a new earth – not an earthly paradise, but a world called daily to become more consistent with God's vision and initiative? Let's explore this.

DIVINE CREATIVITY AND HUMAN COLLABORATION

Susan Classen is a green-fingered Mennonite missionary. Wisdom gleaned from gardening has had a direct bearing on her understanding of mission. Her specialty is hanging flower baskets, things of rare beauty. In the early days she would carefully cut and pare, water and feed her plants every day. Yet after a while they began to wither, and despite her continuing care, many of them died. But cuttings long ago discarded had fallen to the ground and been fed from the overflow of the daily waterings. As some plants in the baskets above were dying, some cuttings on the ground were striking root and flourishing. There was life, but it was not where she expected it, wanted it, or could control it. And for all her care and commitment, she certainly did not create this abundant new life.

Applying the lesson is easy: our passionate commitment is a prerequisite, but God gives the increase, and we must intentionally desist from trying to control the Spirit of God, and just as intentionally address our own expectations, well-meaning initiatives, and impatience with others and with God. Disciple means "a

learner,” one who *responds* to a teacher’s initiative: but ours is a culture of personal initiatives and power or control, rather than of careful discernment and appropriate response. Often we aspire to do what is not ours: to seize rather than yield initiatives, and to refuse to let God be God. In theory, we have moved from a Church-centered mission to a mission-centered Church: but in practice, on both the institutional and individual level, we still rearrange things so that the Church, my Community, or even I myself, cling to a central role. Instead of listening to the Spirit, we muzzle the Spirit or presume to speak on the Spirit’s behalf. Then we wonder why the new heaven and earth seems so far away.

When Church, Community, or individuals act as instruments of God’s mission, then Church, Communities and individuals are at their most vulnerable, risk-taking, and prophetically faithful. But we all suffer from amnesia, and when we forget we are instruments and assume a more central or executive position, we become dogmatic and bombastic, and we hinder God’s mission. Consider the pomp and circumstance that marks the Curia, Episcopal Conferences, certain Episcopal styles – or the current Apostolic Visitation or women religious and the Leadership Conference (LCWR) – as well as certain pastors, confreres or sisters we know, and perhaps have turned into ourselves. We all need to know our proper place, and to seek the action of the Spirit, still trying to speak through the prophets today.

“DO NOT RESIST THE HOLY SPIRIT” (Acts 7:51)

Recall another biblical image: God says his servant Isaiah “will not break a bruised reed or quench a dimly burning wick” (Isaiah 42:3). Contrast this with Stephen’s last words: “You stubborn people, always resisting the Holy Spirit” (Acts 7:51). Three images: a crushed reed, a flickering flame, and hostility or violent opposition to the Holy Spirit. God does not crush or quench God’s people, yet God’s people sometimes thwart or frustrate God’s Spirit. How can God’s will prevail in such circumstances, and how will people ever become appropriate instruments of the renewal God so wants? Do we really “believe in the Holy Spirit who has spoken through the prophets”? If we did, our own and others’ lives could be so very different. For many people, the Holy Spirit remains elusive – not the Spirit’s fault but the fault of those who are deaf, blind or frankly impervious to the Spirit’s gently persistent promptings.

It’s easy to pray for the Spirit to “Come, and renew the face of the earth,” but then resist or oppose the Spirit by our unwillingness to collaborate through continuous conversion, or by simply failing to understand *how* and *through whom* the Spirit speaks. Collaboration implies willingness to take orders, to be instruments, to be disturbed or dislocated; yet we covet our comfortable and predictable lives! But the Spirit does try to disturb us – which is why Stephen had to warn the people not to resist but to yield and to trust. Scripture scholar James Dunn says bluntly, “there is a disturbing quality about the urgency of Jesus’ call – a shaking of the foundations – that those who want a quiet life are bound to resent and resist.”²

And over 400 years ago, Sir Francis Drake, newly returned from circumnavigating the earth that many believed to be flat, dedicated himself to further personal discomfort, penning his famous prayer which – strikingly – touches the theme of our Conference explicitly:

Disturb us Lord, when we are too well pleased with ourselves;
When our dreams have come true because we dreamed too little;
When we arrived safely because we sailed too close to the shore.

Disturb us Lord, when with the abundance of the things we possess,
We have lost our thirst for the waters of life;
Having fallen in love with life, we have ceased to dream of eternity,
And in our efforts to build a new earth
We have allowed our vision of the new heaven to dim.

Disturb us Lord, to dare more boldly,
To venture on wider seas where storms will show your mastery,
Where, losing sight of land, we shall find the stars.

We ask you to push back the horizon of our hopes,
And let us meet the future with strength, courage and hope. Amen

A SPIRIT WHO DISTURBS:

Through the paradox of “different and equal.” The bible is quite clear: every person is made in God’s own image; each is a reflection of God, and all of us are constitutive of humanity: so God is refracted or reflected in over 6 billion human faces today. Not only are there no superior races or people (for all are equal before God); difference itself is a reflection of the God’s multi-facetedness. Paradoxically, we are all the same and all different. Because God created difference, difference is good and can never justify division or discrimination. Yet theology has built hierarchy upon difference, opposing what God joined together (women and men) and claiming that its theological formulations precisely capture God’s idea. They do not; and the Holy Spirit has been trying to disabuse us of

our fatal misunderstandings of God, and interrupt and undermine our poverty-stricken cultural and theological constructs for centuries. The Spirit breathes and inspires -- even if patriarchal, hierarchical humanity remains deaf and uninspired.

Jesus was truly inspired – animated with the Spirit – as he reiterated the radical equality of everyone, giving the lie to the bad theology he encountered, both in a system that allowed differences to harden into divisions and in people who basked in discriminatory hierarchy. His own disciples coveted positions of power and honor, while he spoke consistently of service, of the cross, of drinking the cup, and above all, of listening to what he was saying. But time and time again, they failed to listen and to understand his shocking and counter-cultural message. The Spirit was speaking but many ears were closed.

By advocating for women. Paraclete *means* Comforter or Advocate: a Comforter supports the afflicted; an Advocate is what we call a Public Defender – one who represents those whose voice is silenced and who are socially invisible. So the Spirit tries to disturb the comfortable, the loud, and the socially prominent, by advocating for and defending women. In the New Testament, women generally exemplify the faithful disciple, and men typify the negative blueprints: we can learn a lot about how *not* to be a true disciple by following the progress of the men, particularly the inner circle, the Twelve. When Jesus took his confidants Peter, James and John to the Mount of Transfiguration, as they were dumbfounded and babbling, the Divine voice uttered a statement and a

command: “This is my Beloved Son,” it said; and then “Listen to him!” They were as far from understanding his identity as they were from grasping his teaching. But women, first to witness and proclaim the Resurrection, were literally the first *martyrs* and *missionaries*; they also tended to listen much more attentively to his words and put them into practice. Yet their voices were gradually muted and their example marginalized.

The early Church did make a concerted effort to take women seriously, and not only were they the heart of communities of believers, but the laying on of hands – invoking the power of the Holy Spirit and authorization for ecclesial ministry – was, in some cases identical for women and men.³ Mark’s story of the woman who anointed Jesus at the house of Simon the Leper (Mk 14:3-9), tells of an anonymous woman of deep faith, whose patently priestly and prophetic actions Jesus approves of unequivocally. It concludes with the promise – on Jesus’ lips – that whenever this story is told in the whole world, what she had done would be told in memory of her. By contrast, the accounts in Luke and John speak of a sinful woman with a bad reputation – conventionally identified as Mary Magdalen – and they put no such words on Jesus’ lips. Instead of emphasizing the woman’s faith and courage, they note her sinfulness or Jesus’ forgiveness. And the *only* time this deeply faithful woman’s story is publicly told (as given by Mark, the earliest evangelist),⁴ it is not “in memory of her,” because it occurs on Palm Sunday, Year B, at the beginning of the long Passion Narrative, and is so it is virtually never preached on!

Have we truly listened to the voice of the Spirit, advocate and defender of women? We simply must ask the forbidden question: is it really impossible for the Church to change its thinking about the status and role of women, or have the ears of some male theological minds become deaf to the Spirit? Must we conclude that the Spirit is absent from the churches that have been ordaining women for half a century? And where is the Spirit who was invoked for a thousand years every time a bishop laid hands on a woman's head? Jurgen Moltmann, respected ecumenical theologian, says bluntly that the patriarchal sins against women are sins against the Holy Spirit. A characteristic human flaw is the inability to think one's thought is wrong, and its symptoms are all too visible in dogmatic and doctrinaire thinking. In 1997, Thomas Reese SJ, warned, "there is a serious risk that the Church will lose women in the [21st] century the way it lost European working class men in the [19th]." ⁵ In the past dozen years, the risk level has risen from orange to red.

By advocating for marginalized people and "muted groups." Forensically, an advocate is responsible for two categories of people: those who have no voice at all, (called "muted groups"), and those who are not appropriately represented in the wider community. In every patriarchal society – every society we know – unrepresented and muted groups comprise people regarded or treated as less than equal: those impaired mentally or physically; those considered morally deviant according to sexual, criminal, or religious standards; children; and of course, women: and these are specifically those to whom Jesus addressed the

Good News. Some are muzzled or muted, while others may be “represented” – but in a highly inadequate fashion by people designated to “speak for” them. And so the advocacy and voice of the Holy Spirit is effectively silenced or ignored. So how will we respond to the Spirit by advocating for the silenced or invisible; and assure fair representation for under- or un-represented people?

The laity, encouraged and affirmed by Vatican II, remain muted or distanced from the heart of a clerical Church. Dictated to, more often than listened to or spoken with, they are not infrequently put in their place rather than welcomed at the common table; they are sometimes “represented” by those who claim to speak on their behalf but who have little or no understanding of their life-experience and hopes. Despite co-opting the language of “the People of God” – one single people – clericalism still treats laity not only as different but as inferior, and far from being welcomed as peers, the dignity of their difference is often impugned: lay voices continue to be muted, and lay experience and convictions remain under- or un-represented in the Church.

The Magisterium is the Church’s legitimate teaching authority: *magister* means teacher, and its root is *maxi-* means big, significant, special. The opposite of *maxi-* is, of course *mini-*, the root of *ministerium*, or, in English, “ministry” – the small stuff, the ordinary. Ministry is attentive, appropriate, respectful service: whatever meets the legitimate needs of the recipient rather than what the donor determines. Ministry is relatively inconsequential, done by a “little person,” a

“nobody,” offering a service. Dominic Crossan calls the disciples essentially “a community of nobodies,” and Jesus was adamant: *magistry or magisterium* must be counterbalanced by ministry: “Do not allow yourselves to be called Master; you are all brothers and sisters. The greatest must be the servant. If you exalt yourself you *will be* humbled” (Mt 23:8-12). The Holy Spirit advocates for and comforts all who serve as modest ministers to God’s people.

In the early Church people were explicitly committed to living as equals, *under the Spirit*, as Acts 2:44 tells us. But two thousand years on, that model would be utterly dead and buried, were it not for periodic reform movements and the voices of prophets like Denis Hurley, Oscar Romero, Ken Untener or Roy Bourgeois, Joan Chittister, Sandra Schneiders or Edwina Gateley, many of which continue to be muted. Far from rejecting titles and entitlement, our Church relishes honorifics (Lord, Eminence, Excellence, Holiness); and the Spirit’s attempts to disturb such self-importance again fall on deaf ears. But in 1998, at the Asian Synod, a Philippino bishop did beg the *magisterium* to pay far more attention to the *ministerium*: addressing all the bishops, he asked rhetorically: “Did they ever stop to think that distrust of the (ministry of the) laity might also be distrust of the Holy Spirit?”⁶

By challenging the status quo on all fronts. The Holy Spirit disturbs us, even though we resist on a daily basis; still the Advocate tries to raise unresolved matters of justice: the urgency of InterFaith dialogue; the scandal of a Eucharistic

famine and exclusion or of Christians united in one common faith yet divided by one common table; the critical issue of the wider Ecumenism; the crisis of priestly ministry; the abomination of the sexual abuse of children: and many more. But one we must address here, for it touches our theme: the way the God's Spirit – kindler of fire and renewer of the face of the earth – constantly tries to shake and disturb us and elicit a radical response to the plight of the dispossessed.

By making a preferential option for the poor. In a world staggering under the pressures of the population explosion, the fastest growing cohort on earth is the poor. The number of people – images of God and equals of any of us – the number of our sisters and brothers alive now, who struggle every single day of their miserable lives for sheer survival, or who are cripplingly poor and without health care, education or career, is greater than the number of people like us who eat when we're hungry, drink when we're thirsty, and sleep comfortably in our own beds. If today's world were reduced to a community of just 100 people, this is what it would contain: seventeen dying of starvation, a similar number who will be permanently impaired – from their brains to their reproductive organs – and another seventeen or so who have no choice but to beg, steal, or suffer the kind of hunger we literally cannot imagine. That's already more than half the people on earth. Shall we just say, "God help them"; shall we encourage and assure them that God is building a new heaven and a new earth; or shall we do something and respond, today?

Through people in our own neighborhoods

Tom served in Vietnam: one Christmas Eve, in a blizzard, he was sitting on a low wall with his “Veteran” sign, begging. It was 10.00 pm and I was with friends, returning from a shelter with left-over spaghetti meatballs and garlic bread. We brought Tom inside, plied him with Scotch, and fed him a hearty meal. Since then he has become a constant way in which the Spirit speaks, as he sits on the same sidewalk wall begging, and as I get his perspective on life. He disturbs me, and when I listen to him my life gets no easier. But Tom lives in your neighborhood too, as do his brothers and sisters, named or nameless. You see them every day; sometimes, perhaps, you look and speak with them; sometimes, they are invisible and silent: muted, marginalized and completely unrepresented. What hope do they have of a new earth?

If the potential of early Christianity had been realized, and if our ancestors – and we – were true disciples, is it remotely conceivable that there would be so much scar tissue in the lives of so many today? Natural disasters and personal suffering will not vanish, but the last thing Jesus said was: “It is good for you that I go away” (Jn 16:7). He gave two profound and astonishing reasons: one, that he would ensure that the Advocate, Defender and Comforter would come and never leave us (Jn 14:26); and two, that we would both “perform the same works” as he did, and “even greater things than these” (Jn 14:12). What went wrong? If we had remembered, activated and enacted those promises there would unquestionably be more palpable signs of the promised new heaven and earth. It is not too late

even now, because God's promises and mercy endure forever; but unless we, individually and corporately, become significantly more intentional, committed and visible, God's promises cannot be realized because we ourselves (and the institutional Church) will continue to muzzle or resist God's own Spirit.

RESPONDING TO GOD'S SPIRIT; PLAYING OUR PART.

Here are half a dozen signs that would indicate our appropriate response:

1. "Theosis": transformation as agents of the Spirit. Salvation history tells of a God of covenant, collaboration, communication, call and commission. Our faith focuses on a God who desires relationship with us all, and wants us to be appropriate stewards of creation. Everything comes from God and is journeying back to the God who reaches out and gathers in, sends forth and calls home. In Jesus, God becomes human – "like us in all things but sin" – in order to show us how to live. *Theosis*, articulated by the Eastern Church, expresses the rationale behind the incarnation. St. Maximus the Confessor (580-662) said "Jesus will divinize human nature, but without changing it into the divine nature." A subtle point, but critically important: it indicates God's intentions for humanity, and it implies humankind's responsibility to cooperate with God's inspiration: the Holy Spirit. *Theosis* is the transformation of the believer into an instrument of God's Providence, and it helps us understand just how the new heaven and earth will be brought about: through our own conversion and collaboration with God's own Spirit: We pray, "Send forth your Spirit and they (that's you and I) shall be created, and you (that's God) will renew the face of the earth."

2. “*Joie de vivre*”: discovering new wine?⁷ When Mary saw a potentially shameful and embarrassing situation at Cana in Galilee, she turned to Jesus and said: “They have no wine.” What would she say if she came into our Church today; perhaps the very same thing? The “wine” would be the passion and purpose of faith-filled communities, the *joie de vivre* that marks people with verve and hope. “They have no wine” could be a reproach to irresponsible stewards, but also describe the depletion that many of us (guests, family and friends) feel in today’s Church. At Cana it is not clear whether the stewards or the guests have even noticed the impending calamity – but Mary has, and her response is sure: “Do whatever he tells you,” she tells the staff. God’s moment, in Cana or New Orleans, always calls for particular responses from particular people. At Cana, potential disaster was turned to fulsome celebration. The transformation was unexpected and the new wine was of exceptional quality, yet – significantly – it was made from material already available: simple, common, abundant water. There are lessons here for us. And they begin when we hear the words, “Do whatever he tells you.”

3. *Fierce faithfulness: not looking for hope but living in hope.* Sometimes we pray for a miracle when we really should pray for faith. It is faith that makes miracles; miracles rarely make faith, as Jesus discovered: “He could do no miracles [in his home town]; he was amazed at their lack of faith” (Mk 6: 5-6). Sometimes we give up because our resources are running low; but we should use our very last resource with faith that God will keep faith. Sometimes we do

little or nothing because we can't do much or everything; but we should do whatever we can because *that* is the raw material for transformation: "Do whatever he tells you." Jesus comes looking for faith, and when he finds it, miracles happen. So with us, but our faith must be sound, and fierce, and unwavering. Discipleship costs (to quote T.S. Eliot) "not less than everything"; so we must give our lives to the cause. We must have something so worth living for as to be worth dying for. Then, and only then, are we true instruments of the God who is making all things new. But unless we have this commitment, even God's will cannot be done on earth as it is in heaven, because we are blocking the way.

4. *Giving every possible effort, even with a broken string.* Itzhak Perlman, a great contemporary violinist, battled childhood polio and needs crutches and leg-braces. Crossing the stage is a struggle, but he does so imperiously and with a huge smile. At his chair, he lays his crutches down, unfastens the clasps on his legs, pushes one foot back and extends the other. He bends down, takes his violin, tucks it under his chin, nods to the conductor, and begins to play. But at a concert in 1995, catastrophe. After just a few bars there was a sudden crack like a pistol shot, a violin string snapped, and he was left with three strings and no replacement. The performance would have to be abandoned. Perlman closed his eyes, gathered himself, waited a moment – and then signaled the conductor to start again. To everyone's utter amazement, he played with unparalleled passion and touch. Rational people and musicians know that it is impossible to

play a symphonic work on three strings. But that night Itzhak Perlman did not know that: he modulated, changed and recomposed the piece, staying faithful to the composer, and even seeming to de-tune the strings; and he produced music of such purity and majesty as no-one had ever heard before.

He finished. The silence in the auditorium was electric. Then the people rose in a standing ovation, and an extraordinary burst of applause, cheering, screaming and jumping up and down filled the entire house. The still seated Perlman beamed, wiped the sweat from his brow, raised his bow to quiet the ecstatic audience, and in hushed, reverent and reflective tones, spoke: "You know," he said, "sometimes it is the artist's task to find out just how much music you can still make with what you have left." Serious physical impairment and a near-useless instrument were no deterrent to a man with great imagination, practiced skills, and the fine wine of *joie de vivre* and indomitable faith. Transformation *requires* basic raw materials: in this case, a musician, an instrument, and a composition or vision. But it does not happen spontaneously and it cannot happen unless the potential for the outcome is hidden within the raw materials.

5. *Midwifing the new creation: God's handiwork into our hands.* You and I, people of missionary faith, have the raw materials, and we do know how to make music. We have made music before; we must continue to do so, and with all we have at hand. Even if what we have is depleted, we must make music with what remains, so that God's Will and Providence *will* be done on earth as in heaven.

Then, with our passionate commitment and unflagging cooperation, God will indeed continue to renew the earth. But we must stay focused; we must identify the poor, the dispossessed, the muted groups, the unrepresented in our neighborhood, constituencies, country and wider world. Where are they; where are we in relation to them; what difference do we make; how will we respond?

“You repent, not by feeling bad but by thinking, and acting, differently.” So, this is absolutely no time to stop dreaming, imagining, visioning a world of justice and equity. This is no time to be a rut: a rut, says David Bosch is “a shallow grave.” Our actual grave will greet us soon enough. Meanwhile it’s time to rise up. We are not dead yet and there is work to be done. The new heaven and new earth are groaning in labor. We cannot just stand around, helpless. We must midwife the new birth. “Midwife” originally meant simply, “a with-woman” – one who attends the mother, be it a male or female, doctor or nurse. Either way, midwives can make a huge difference, and be a critically important presence, even though they are not giving birth themselves. What is coming to birth is born of God; but we are invited to be involved, and urgently, for “Now is the acceptable time; and this is the day of salvation” (2 Cor 6:2). “Maranatha. Come, Lord Jesus”; and “Come, Holy Spirit, and renew the face of the earth.”

ENDNOTES

¹ John Collins, *The Collegeville Bible Commentary, Old Testament*. Liturgical Press, MN 1992: 451.

² James J.G. Dunn. *Jesus' Call to Discipleship*. Cambridge University Press, 1992: 16.

³ See the website of John Wijngaards: www.iol.ie/~duacon/wompr.htm; and Gary Macy, "The Eucharist and Popular Religiosity," in *Treasures From the Storeroom: Medieval Religion and the Eucharist*. Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN.: 1999: 172-195.

⁴ In Mary Ann Fatula, *The Holy Spirit, Unbounded Gift of Joy*. Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN.: 1998: 102.

⁵ Thomas Reese, "2001 and Beyond: Preparing the Church for the Next Millennium." In *America*, June 21, 1997: 10-18. This quote, p.13.

⁶ Cited in *The Tablet*, May 2, 1998: 565.

⁷ I think I owe this idea to Ronald Rolheiser. If so, I acknowledge his contribution.