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Cotton Patch for the Kingdom (Book Review)

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patient.” Social learning is primarily associated with Bandura, who reported on the efficacy of modeling by others as a means of learning. Social learning is based on a cognitive-behavioral approach to human behavior that has gained ascendancy in psychological science due to its empirical robustness. While still identifying the importance of interpersonal relations, Bandura and others have also acknowledged the importance of cognitive structures and operations in human behavior. All of these schools suggest issues of salience to Barth’s anthropology, and all of them are excluded from Price’s work when he refers to “scientific psychology.”

It is a significant oversight, not only because it neglects important developments in contemporary psychology, but also because it weakens Price’s assertion that Barth’s theological anthropology provides opportu-

nity for dialogue with the human sciences. In attempting to bridge the gap between the theological and the scientific, Price has selected a psychological perspective that is more speculative than empirical. However, this perspective does provide opportunity for further dialogue between Barthianism and more empirical approaches to psychological science.

Despite its decidedly narrow treatment of scientific psychology, Price introduces a salient point in Barth’s theology that adds insight to the psychological exploration of human relationships. Based in part on his reading of Scripture and his understanding of the Trinity, Barth asserts that we are foundationally relational persons. When psychologists study groups, families, couples, organizations, or individuals engaged in social behavior, they are observing the manifestations of what is ultimately the image of God.

Cotton Patch for the Kingdom, by Ann Louise Coble. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2002. 240pp. Reviewed by Jonathan Warner, Associate Professor of Economics, Dordt College.

Clarence Jordan is probably best known for two things. He was the founder of the Koinonia Christian community in southern Georgia, where an encounter with Millard Fuller led to the formation of Habitat for Humanity. He also produced a paraphrased version of much of the New Testament in the language of the people of Georgia, the “Cotton Patch” version.

Ann Coble, a professor of Christian education and religion at Westminster College, has written a highly-readable account of Jordan’s life and struggles. Jordan, she says, was heavily influenced by his reading of Scripture, and this reading impressed upon him the disconnect between a church that said that “Jesus loves ... all the children of the world” but that had no black members in its congregation and did not reach out to them. He once berated his father for rebuking a black who came to the family’s front door, rather than the back, to deliver their dry-cleaning.

Clarence Jordan was born into a Southern Baptist family in 1912. After graduating from high school, he studied agriculture at the University of Georgia in Athens. While there, he was active in the Baptist Student Union, and heard God’s call to preach. At seminary in Louisville, he studied both Greek and Hebrew, because “I didn’t want some little jackleg preacher tying me up in knots because I didn’t know what the Lord said, and I rooted myself in the Greek language that I might understand” (40). Later, Jordan would preach using a Greek New Testament (rarely did he preach from the Old Testament), translating passages as he went along.

Dr. Coble argues that it was Jordan’s conception of what the Kingdom of God would be like (based most

explicitly on the Sermon on the Mount, and the model of the early chapters of Acts) that led him, in 1942, to found Koinonia farm – a community based on the radical sharing of property and income. The farm, near Americus in Sumter County, Georgia, was to be a demonstration of how this vision could be lived out. Because racial discrimination and the poverty of the rural black population were major features of life in southern Georgia that contradicted the Gospel message, Jordan was concerned to address these issues. As long as this involved teaching farmers (both black and white) more productive techniques, Jordan found no opposition. The story was very different, though, when it became known locally that Jordan was eating with his black co-workers and treating them equally with the whites living on the farm.

At its worst, during the 1950’s, local opposition to the integrationist nature of Koinonia led to the refusal of local businesses to trade with the farm (this refusal led to the development of the mail-order business for pecans and other farm produce, which today remains the main source of revenue for Koinonia). Attacks by the Ku Klux Klan followed, with the farm’s roadside stand being torched twice. The Jordans were disfellowshipped by the local Baptist churches, and were told that they, and the rest of the Koinonia residents, were unwelcome at any of the churches in Americus.

Jordan’s response to the civil rights movement puzzled many. While he obviously opposed segregation, he refused to take part in acts of co-ordinated civil disobedience, sit-ins, or boycotts. “We’ve been on the other end of a boycott. I know first-hand how much a boycott hurts. I can’t participate in the boycott and be doing unto others

as I would not have them do unto me. I've had it done to me, and I didn't like it one bit" (162), he said. Jordan's pacifism, born when he discovered Jesus' injunction in Matthew 5:43 to be inconsistent with shooting at human-shaped targets while in the College ROTC, reinforced his stance (although Sumter County locals took it as further evidence of crypto-communism).

In the mid-1960's, Millard and Linda Fuller visited Koinonia farm, intending to stay for lunch. They ended up staying for a month, and then returned to the farm in mid-1968. Clarence Jordan and Millard Fuller discussed theology as they worked on milking the cows; Jordan's vision, combined with Mr. Fuller's organizational and business skills, led to the founding of an organization to improve the quality of housing in the area. Thus Habitat for Humanity was born, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Jordan spent time in the 1960's making his own translation of the New Testament. The earlier translations (of Hebrews and James) were relatively straightforward renditions into southern American English; the later translations (Luke/Acts; the letters of Paul; Matthew and John 1-8) moved the scene of the action from first century Palestine to mid-20th century Georgia. Thus Paul's epistles to the Corinthians are entitled "'to the Christians in Atlanta"; the opposition to Jesus' ministry – the religious establishment – is dubbed the First Church of Atlanta. The disciple Peter becomes Rock Johnson. The down-to-earth nature of Jordan's theology led him to use "comparison" for parable. The racial theme also comes out in Jordan's reworking of much of his translation work:

Now all the 'nigger-lovers' and black people were gathering around him to listen. And the white church people and Sunday school teachers were raising Cain, saying, "This fellow associates with black people and eats with them." (Luke 15:1-2)

As Dr. Coble points out, the identification of the oppressed and excluded as black doesn't always work, as in "The Letter to the Churches of the Georgia Convention" (Galatians 3:28-9):

No more is one a white man and another a Negro...

For you all are as one in Christ Jesus. And if you are

Christ's men, then you are true "white men"....

But few African Americans would want to be "true white men."

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the priest becomes a white preacher, the Levite a song leader (also white), and the Samaritan (inevitably) a black man. The questioner is, of course, a leader from a respectable, white church. It ends thus:

[Jesus asked,] "Now, if you had been held up by the gangsters, which of these three – the white preacher, the white song leader, or the black man – would you consider to have been your neighbor?"

The teacher of the adult Bible class said, "Why, of course, the nig – I mean, er ... well, er ... the one who treated me kindly."

Jesus said, "Well, then, you get going and start living like that!" (Jesus' Doings [Luke] 10:36-37).

Here, the teacher's last line nicely captures the original – the continuing reluctance to see the benefactor as such because of his race.

The "Cotton Patch" versions remain in print to this day, along with Jordan's commentary on the Sermon on the Mount. The former inspired a musical retelling of the life of Jesus, *The Cotton Patch Gospel*, which is still performed regularly, and is available on videotape.

Jordan died suddenly of a heart attack in 1969 while working on his translation of John's gospel. Unlike many Christian communities, Koinonia Farm has lived on after the death of its founder, although its recent history has not been entirely happy. Two of the elements of Jordan's vision have been achieved: the Civil Rights movement succeeded in desegregating Americus, and Habitat, still headquartered there, has eliminated all substandard housing in Sumter county. Dire poverty has been removed, leaving Koinonia searching for new ways to model the living-out of the Sermon on the Mount.

Dr. Coble's is not the first book on Clarence Jordan. In fact, she relies heavily on Dallas Lee's *The Cotton Patch Evidence* (1971), P. Joel Snyder's *The "Cotton Patch" Gospel* (1985), and Tracy Elaine K'Meyer's *Interracialism and Christian Community* (1997), which cover much of the same ground. She has, however, included the fruits of her researches into Clarence Jordan's papers, now at the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia. This synthesis has produced a most enjoyable introduction to Jordan's life and work, helping the reader to understand something of his driving motivation and fervour for living out Christ's call on his life.