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Forty Acres and a Goat: A Memoir (Book Review)

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The liberation theology of HW is viewed as necessary due to sexism and prejudice, to lack of recognition by Hispanic Men and their oppression of HW, and to the fact that they have an important contribution to make (3). HW believe that they need to be freed from the oppression of society and culture. They view the church as a patriarchal hierarchy, which often relegates women to a secondary position. HW assert that they, as well as men, were created in the *image dei*, the image of God, and that they need to be liberated from prejudice and oppression. Their struggle focuses on the survival of not only themselves and their children, but also their Hispanic culture, which becomes the vehicle of transmitting their religious convictions.

Hispanic Women Liberation Theology (HWLT) is, therefore, based on the life experience of HW. The authority of HWLT is this experience, rather than the Bible, or Christian tradition (xiv). This personal experience includes feelings and attitudes, some of which arose out of African traditions brought to Latin America by slaves, and out of Amerindian traditions from early Amerindian cultures (64-66). Thus the source of HWLT is formed from a combination of the Bible and the HW's struggle for personal and political liberation (64). When the question is asked whether this fusion of different beliefs can still be called Christian, the authors answer in the affirmative (69), one reason being that it conforms to the core of the gospel message of justice and love.

HWLT is defined as a *praxis* (1), a combination of action and reflection. Rather than being built on the Bible or the church, it is built on action. Actions in the lives of HW determine the theology, and the women themselves, as participants, are viewed as theologians. These women in community, as they struggle for survival of self, family, and community, are the real theologians, in the action aspect of their theology. Reflection, the second element of this theology, operates

Forty Acres and a Goat: A Memoir, by Will D. Campbell. (San Francisco: Perennial Library, Harper and Row) 1988. \$8.95. Reviewed by James C. Schaap, Associate Professor of English.

Will D. Campbell's reminiscence of his own participation in the early years of the civil rights struggle in the South is vividly told in his memoir *Forty Acres and a Goat*. However, what one might expect to be a story of winners turns out not so much an ode to the glorious cause but an honest portrayal of both the heroics of the movement, as well as its petty infighting and, oddly enough, its sad demise.

Even though we think of the civil rights movement as making significant gains for the poor and disenfranchised Southern Blacks, Campbell's story is not one of triumph, but of long, hard battles and a slow and quite painful death.

simultaneously. The women reflect, assisted by those who are academically trained (referred to as "theological technicians"). Together they give leadership, as in writing this book. This praxis of action and reflection has both created the movement of HWLT, and continues to give hope and vision (11) for the HWLT.

Isasi-Diaz and Tarango saw their goal for this book to be to present the views and thought of HW, rather than an analysis. They were "theological technicians," enabling real theologians (HW) to express their thought. A major part of this slim volume, therefore, deals with a nearly verbatim account of a group of HW regarding their understanding of God (chapter 2) and their ethical understanding (chapter 4). The authors place the women's views in focus with a brief statement of recurring themes in each case.

In order to achieve credibility and accuracy, each of the book's five chapters is followed by a brief synopsis in Spanish. The authors state that they wish to be accountable to those they quote, that something is bound to be lost in translation; also, the Spanish was inserted so that all HW, including those whose command of English is limited, may understand the book fully and appreciate its validity.

HWLT is a far cry from Reformed theology. But let this not deter Reformed Christians from reading the book. This reviewer, living in a Third World country which was a Spanish colony for over three centuries, recognizes much of the world-and-life view of HW in America as similar to that in the lives of women in the Philippines. While we may "do theology" very differently from the proponents of HWLT, let us face the fact that this is life. The material presented in this book authentically reflects one strand of present-day American culture. We must attempt to understand this slice of American culture if we desire to face and make an impact on HW. The book is written well, developed logically, and expresses clearly the life and thought of HWLT to its readers.

Campbell, who may be best known as the model for the Reverend Will B. Dunn in Doug Marlette's cartoon strip *Kudzu*, is a deeply serious Christian, although he might appear enigmatic to Christian readers whose eyes have been trained by lenses ground in a Calvinist worldview. He considers himself in the finest tradition of anabaptistic Christianity: "troublemaker, rebel, the left wing of the reformation. That's what we once were." That stance nearly always puts him at odds with whatever institutions tradition has built—business, government, education, or religion. He distrusts institutions because he sees them as soul-sucking vampires created to redirect Christians from the divine path

to the paths designed solely for the perpetuation of those institutions.

In fact, given his worldview, Campbell would likely appreciate being called a "loose cannon." Using Niebuhr's framework of Christian worldviews, Campbell would scurry off joyfully into the camp of those who see Christ's work on earth as constantly militant against culture.

Reformed people like to talk about "reforming" culture or "transforming" culture. In fact, it may be impossible for Dutch Calvinists, who have Abraham Kuyper firmly tucked in their recent history, to understand a decidedly Christian thinker—and actor—who delights in repudiating culture and denying its authority. In the Netherlands at least, Calvinists have actually *been* the authority.

But all authority, even the church, to Campbell, is suspect, because he believes that any few bricks mortared to an idea will solidify only partial truth and become its own god. At one point in the book he ministers to a dying woman who asks him to make death easier for her. "She had made her confession," he writes, "penance was supposed to follow." But Campbell claims he always had trouble with penance because, "if the gospel, the 'good news,' is a message of unconditional grace, there is no place for penance." What follows is an illustration of how deeply Campbell's antagonism for "church" is set:

The message [of unconditional grace] had become so clear to me that I didn't understand why it wasn't preached from underneath every steeple in Christendom every Sunday. Finally I figured it out. You can't build a steeple on an unconditional message. Not even unconditional grace. There *must* be a club.

It's the club that Campbell constitutionally distrusts. "Can there be a Crusade for Christ," he asks in the book, "or can there be only a Crusade for Crusade?" He hopes the answer is no, but the experiences he recalls in the book seem to answer differently.

The pattern of the memoir is set by events which he recounts from his life—his early thrill at being part of a movement to break the arm of Jim Crow and set the needy free, his acclimation to what became a movement, and his disillusion once the vision became "a club." His story describes that process from the inside, since Campbell himself was a party to so much of American civil rights history. Simply as an insider's view, the book is an interesting contribution, full of marvelous anecdotes, about what happened during the mid-sixties in the American South.

The story includes several characters and a travelogue of places, all of which form a gentle sermon which offers the truth of the anabaptist worldview, for the long and sad process of disillusionment affirms in him once again the basic tenet that

Christ will not and cannot be nailed to a political plank, even though followers on every side of an issue may wish to claim him. What happened to the movement becomes a catechism for that view once the movement became a club.

What separates Campbell from his friend TJ, a black pastor who had resigned his pastorate, he discovers, is a long, abiding familial legacy of white and black in the American South, a legacy so strong neither he nor TJ can, in a single leap, transcend it. There is honesty in the admission of basic differences, a gratifying honesty that shatters some of our most deeply held myths today. As they try to kid about their differences one day, it becomes clear to both of them that what sets them apart is real.

It didn't have to do with the incongruous ring of our precise grammar, our lack of rhythm, any deficiency in Rabelaisian skills or the inane chaff we were gently tossing. Both of us could be barnyard dirty. Either of us could have played the game with some other close friend. But we couldn't do it across the chasm of black and white. We could try to ignore that gulf, pretend it didn't exist. But when it came to white mother and black mother, we couldn't pull it off. Maybe someday we shall overcome. But not yet.

But it's not simply race that sets the two men apart from each other and stymies the common goal of freedom for the oppressed. It's not some indefinable chasm separating the races which accounts for what he considers the death of the movement. Finally, Campbell says it was human strength ebbing—"a body gets weary," he says—and the corporate structures which underlie human relations and keep the poor from being empowered: "all that was going on and had gone on was not a threat to the corporate structures . . . did not deal with the powers and principalities of the present age."

The story finishes without trumpet flourishes. But his advice is not to despair, only to grieve: "Grieve for the soldiers on both sides of a war that was to be a new birth of freedom, and the casualties of great Social Movements, like the ones which have claimed all of my own adult life, dedicated to somehow alter the legacy of original sin." They all may be ultimately destined to fail, but the inevitability itself is no reason, he would say, not to enlist. After all, he tells his friend, "there's always hope."

The story's end is not simply painful disillusionment. There are, as even a Reformed Christian comes to see, more than a few strengths to Campbell's worldview. When one sees Christ in opposition to culture, life becomes very individualistic. And that's not all bad. After all, ideologies will come and go, institutions will certainly fade, but the individual, sacramentalized, remains. The demise of the civil rights movement for

Campbell is no reflection whatsoever on Christ, only on man. There is no reason to lose hope.

Another advantage of Campbell's view is that changing one's mind about things becomes a fact of life. "A foolish consistency," Emerson once wrote, "is the hobgoblin of little minds," and Campbell would heartily agree. Institutions and traditions tend to rob us of our ability to think freely since they keep us from changing our minds—about anything. Once we ally ourselves with a political party or movement (say a pro-life or pro-choice movement) we've given up our freedom—so the doctrine goes.

By refusing to be a part of any institution, Campbell does attain a kind of freedom which allows him to change his mind quite readily about anything. In one interesting passage of the book, he confesses his distaste for Billy Graham; then, on meeting him and recognizing the media trash that has followed him, he sees he was perhaps mistaken:

Since 1947 when he stood in a California tent and almost equated the Communist cause with the devil, America with the Kingdom of God on earth, and William Randolph Hearst had passed the word to his newspaper empire to "pump Graham," I had thought of him as the worst of the religious and political right. But as I sat with him on a balmy summer evening thirty years later and thought of those who had replaced him, the electronic soul molesters hurling their satellites around the globe with a gospel of "Praise the

Lord and send me the money," "Take up your cross and relax," courting annihilation in the name of Jesus, while Graham had turned to denouncing nuclear proliferation, I found him a man of honor and integrity. Everything, I suppose, is relative.

What the long passage amply demonstrates, in addition to the changing current of his regard for Billy Graham, is Campbell's ability to write. No matter what one feels about Campbell's view of culture or Christ, readers will enjoy the vibrant style, the surprise cornered in most every sentence. He's entertaining, full of the gift of humor—earthy, yet devout in a mix that might seem to some more than slightly irreverent.

Yet there's certainty in his appraisal of the world in which he lives, and that certainty comes from the comfort Campbell receives from knowing, with a deeply embedded faith, that the Lord is in control and that His way is the only right way.

Campbell's *Forty Acres and a Goat* is a serious religious memoir that offers readers an insider's view of a difficult era in American history, an era which took on a problem that still seems far from solved. And it's an inspiration too to see this Will D. Campbell, the Christian Lone Ranger, lugging the Spirit into troubled times, then disappearing with only a prayer—no bricks, no mortar, no movements, no institutions, a preacher without a church, who sermonizes delightfully between the covers of a very fine book.

The New Testament Background: Selected Documents, by C. K. Barrett (San Francisco: Harper and Row) 1989. xxix + 361 pp. Paperback \$14.95. Reviewed by Gerald W. Vander Hoek, Assistant Professor of Theology.

This book sets out to provide selections from ancient authors which in some way elucidate the world of the New Testament. It is a revision and expansion of a 1956 edition. While Barrett has omitted very little from the earlier edition, his second edition has grown by 85 pages, especially with more Gnostic and Qumran literature. The revised edition also has a friendlier format.

In addition to Gnosticism and Qumran literature, Barrett includes chapters on the Roman Empire, Papyri, Inscriptions, Philosophers and Poets, Mystery Religions, Jewish History, Rabbinic Literature, Philo, Josephus, Septuagint and Targum, and Apocalyptic Literature (including Mysticism). Barrett furnishes brief introductions to the primary sources he cites and comments on parts of the sources that might not be clear to a 20th century person. He also provides references to modern authors who discuss some of the areas covered by the book.

However, the introductions are uneven in scope and quality. While some introductions inform the reader about the value of this area as background for the New

Testament (e.g., Qumran, Gnosticism), the reader is left in the dark in other areas (e.g., Mystery Religions). For some areas, Barrett informs the reader of introductory secondary sources (e.g., Targums), but for others there is no mention of any secondary sources (e.g., Philo). A complete lack of any reference to recent critical study of rabbinic literature (e.g., Jacob Neusner) is also striking. Not all of the cited rabbinic texts are early enough to be considered as background for the New Testament.

Nevertheless, Barrett's collection of texts is very useful for understanding the first century world. I would recommend it for pastors, for theology students, and for people who wish to learn more about the world of the New Testament. It does presuppose, I might note, quite a bit of knowledge of history, philosophy, and religions by the reader. For the reader who needs some background to use Barrett's work profitably, I would recommend supplementing Barrett with a good introductory discussion, such as Everett Ferguson's *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987).