

Joy in the Word!

A Confessing Christ Newsletter

SPRING
2008

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Contents

"Eternal God..."	1
"Calvin on Responsibility..."	1
"What Good are Snakes?"	2
"A Moral Imperative"	4
Book Review	5
"Resources of a Saint"	8
"The Tree"	8

Edited by

Frederick R. Trost

"Eternal God, whose mercy spans"

(A hymn for the new year)

by Professor Willis Elliott - Kearney, Nebraska

ETERNAL GOD, whose mercy spans
The decades as the days and years,
We who are dust and spirit raise
Our daily praise through joys and tears.

In ages past, as in our youth,
You purposed by a grand design
That life would be allied to truth
And light would through all darkness shine.

And now, with fears of pain and loss,
We pray for courage to endure

with joy the trials we must face,
Sustained by looking to the Cross.

The future is to us unknown,
But we are known, and called by you
To be your servants toward your goal.
Our trust be in your grace alone.

ETERNAL GOD, our Lord and King,
Creator of all worlds, we sing
The Father, Son, and Spirit one,
One power, one love, one hope we sing.

Calvin on Christian Responsibility for Both Neighbor and Stranger

by Richard L. Christensen

Associate Professor of Philosophy and Religion - Lakeland College, Sheboygan, Wisconsin

Reading the commentaries, sermons, and other writings of John Calvin, I am struck by the frequency and forcefulness of his teaching on the treatment of strangers and indeed, of every fellow human being. Calvin lived through a time of obvious turmoil, fierce argument, and religious division that resulted in persecution and outbreaks of war. Refugees from France and England fleeing religious conflict and the threat of death poured into Geneva in the 1550's, almost doubling the population of the city. Yet through all this, the famous reformer showed a remarkable consistency in his insistence that all persons were to be seen as creatures made in the image of God who were due loving care and concern for

their well-being.

Beginning in the Institutes of the Christian Religion, Calvin clearly stated his view of the divine image in humanity and its consequences for human society. Book II, chapter 7 notes that it is the Creator's will that God's own glory be seen in human beings, as in a mirror. We are bound together in human solidarity because we all reflect the image of God. There is a unity to humankind, which cannot be denied. "We cannot but behold our own face as it were in a glass [i.e., mirror] in the person that is poor and despised ... though they were the furthest strangers in the world. Let a Moor [Muslim] or a Barbarian come among us, and yet inasmuch as he or she is a man or woman,

they bring with them a looking glass wherein we may see that they are our brothers and sisters and neighbors" (quoted in R. Wallace, Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life, p. 150). In a sermon on Deuteronomy, Calvin describes his meeting with a stranger who spoke a different language, saying that even though they could not speak to each other, "our Lord shows us today that we will be brothers, because Christ is the peace of the whole world and of all its inhabitants. Therefore we must live together in a family of brothers and sisters, which Christ has founded with his blood." This family extends far beyond those with whom we have normal ties. Commenting on the Sermon on the Mount, Calvin observes, "It

The catastrophes of nature and humankind silence our wisdom. Where God's gracious mind is completely hidden from us, our mind cannot comprehend His ways. We do know, however, that to those who love God, all things work together for good.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Franz Hildebrandt, (Catechism)

That, then is the Christian faith: To know what you are to do and what is given to you.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Franz Hildebrandt, (Catechism)

Calvin on Christian Responsibility for Both Neighbor and Stranger **CONTINUED**

is astonishing that the scribes fell into the absurdity of limiting the word 'neighbor' to those who are friendly. There is nothing clearer and more certain that when God spoke of our neighbor, he meant to include the whole of the human species" (Commentary on Matthew 5:43).

This ethic of hospitality is far more than simple fairness in treatment. In a reference to the importance of hospitality in the Christian life, Calvin comments on Abraham's welcome to the three strangers by

saying that it is "no ordinary virtue" to aid strangers from whom no advantage is expected. He goes on to say that the one who is "kind to foreigners and strangers deserves no little praise, since he voluntarily invites as guests unknown men from whom he had received no favors...Certainly nature itself dictates that strangers are to be helped as much as possible – unless we are impelled by our self-love to act only for motives of gain. For none more deserve compassion and help than those whom we see bereft of friends

and homeland...It is inhuman cruelty in our pride to despise those who flee to us and lack the ordinary means of self-protection" (Commentary on Genesis 18:2).

Calvin himself intentionally postponed becoming a citizen of Geneva until 1559, in part to show his solidarity with the foreigners and to demonstrate the point of welcoming the stranger. Commenting on the passages in Exodus and Leviticus regarding the treatment of strangers, he observes, "it is clear that the term 'neighbor' is not restricted to those of the same blood or to those who are the same sort of people, among whom the need of love is more obvious. 'Neighbor' includes the whole of mankind...when God includes guests and resident aliens as well as members of their own families, [the people] know that justice must be practiced always toward all." (Commentary on Exodus 22 and Leviticus 19).

The Geneva reformer challenges Christians in every age when he summarizes his teaching on the Christian ethic of love:

"The Lord enjoins us to do good to all without exception, though the greater part, if estimated by their own merit, are most unworthy of it. But scripture subjoins a most excellent reason, when it tells us that we are not to look at what people in themselves deserve, but to attend to the image of God which exists in all, and to which we owe all honor and love. Therefore, whoever be the person who is presented to you as needing your assistance, you have no ground for declining to give it to him or her. Say it is a stranger. The Lord has given that person a mark which ought to be familiar to you; for which reason he forbids you to despise your own flesh (Gal. 6:10). Say the person is mean and of no consideration. The Lord points him or her out as one whom he has distinguished by the luster of his own image...But if the person not only merits no good, but has provoked you by injury and mischief, still this is no good reason why you should not embrace him or her in love..." (Institutes III.7.6)

"What Good are Snakes?"

Scripture: Numbers 21:4-9, John 3: 14-21 - A Sermon for Lent

by Rev. Dr. Deborah Rahn Clemens

Senior Pastor: New Goshenhoppen United Church of Christ - East Greenville, Pennsylvania

How are you with snakes? If you are like some, you might find snakes to be utterly fascinating. Snakes are fascinating because they look like no other earthly creature yet they are impressively agile, adaptable and capable of many things.

If you are like some you might find snakes thrilling. Snakes are thrilling because some of them may seem to be powerful, mysterious, dangerous, elusive and gigantic. But if you are like most, you find snakes utterly repelling even though

the vast majority of species are harmless, helpful even. (They eat mice!) Snakes are much more endangered by us than we are by them. Mostly people still hate them. They find snakes slimy and creepy and scary.

“What Good are Snakes?” **CONTINUED**

We rarely read from the book of Numbers in Christian worship. Many of the episodes recorded in Numbers strike us either as totally foreign or strangely inane. Our passage fits snugly into both of those categories: foreign and inane. The text begins as the newly liberated Israelites are forced to circle back from Mt. Hor towards the Red Sea. You may remember, that is where they started! Not one bit did they like having to take this detour. Those people had short tempers and sore feet.

So they resorted to doing what we all do so well. They complained and whined and pouted and bellyached. They criticized God and they yelled at Moses. “Why do we have to put up with this wilderness? Why must our living conditions be so harsh? Why can’t we be done with all of this? Why can’t we live as the Canaanites live? Why can’t we live like the Egyptians? We don’t see other people struggling like we struggle. First, we have no food. Then, no water. It’s pathetic. You try eating quail seven days a week!”

Wait a minute here! This isn’t all that strange, is it? Citizens complaining. Constituents complaining. Consumers complaining. Congregations complaining. Complaints seem to come to human beings naturally. They come to those of us who are on the receiving end of goods and services and products. They come especially to those dependent (interestingly enough) on the efforts of others to take care of their needs. Ask anybody in the food service business. Some people actually get hysterical if their

entrée comes out a little over done, a little under done or seasoned a little differently. Ask any government official how some citizens go into outrage when the potholes are not filled fast enough, or the snow isn’t cleared, or a sewer line breaks. Ask pastors about congregational expectations of the pastoral office. Or of ultimatums made about worship. The notion of complaining isn’t foreign to us at all! In the case of the Israelites, however, it is inane.

The Israelites had been down and out. They were beaten, hopeless slaves. They had been persecuted under Pharaohs’ control with no chance of relief, when God came through for them. God liberates them from their hellish captivity! And in the wilderness, when they become hungry and complained, God comes through for them; nourishing them miraculously, (quail dung and all). When they are thirsty and complain, God supplies water in the desert for them to drink. And yet? They come back again, for a third time, unsatisfied looking for a handout and casting blame. These people, chosen by God, were convinced that they could do this “freedom thing” much better, much more efficiently by themselves, on their own. They believed they knew better than Moses, better than God, what it was they should be learning; where it was they should be going; how to spend their time and set their priorities. Does this sound familiar? Is it not our story too? The Israelites tell God that God is wrong. Their wandering across the wilderness is all a big mistake. Let

them take charge, then life will improve. They will be happy if God gets out of the way.

But God is not amused. This time, God is not willing to overlook their disrespect, to ignore their thankless fault-finding. This time, God finally comes to the point of saying, “If you don’t like it my way, I will let you do it your way. Go ahead! Get through the wilderness on your own. Figure it out for yourselves. I will not intervene.” May it not be that hell happens when we insist, not “Thy will be done, O Lord” but “My will be done!” and God finally agrees?

Whether God deliberately sent nests of venomous snakes to attack the Israelites out of anger or simply let nature take its course in that rocky desert of the Middle East; whether God stopped protecting those ex-slaves, so “wet behind the ears” well, that’s a matter of theological interpretation or debate. Christians don’t like to think that God would choose to punish the sinner with pain or death deliberately. Be that as it may, let me suggest that there is an indisputable truth in this story, metaphorically speaking. The truth is, whenever human beings disregard the Lord, our Creator, the one and only God; whenever we turn our back on him, or move quickly, defiantly, we are going to get stepped on, bitten, poisoned. This is guaranteed. Without God, we shall all surely die.

The ancient Hebrews started dropping like flies. Reality hit home. They come crawling back. They look like snakes; on their bellies. They beg for forgiveness. They plead for God’s mercy. Now, here comes by

Christ likes us to prefer truth to him because, before being Christ, he is truth. If one turns aside from him to go toward the truth, one will not go far before falling into his arms.

Simone Weil (1909-1943)

You close my eyes with touch so light I sleep at peace till dawning: For He who leads me into Night Will lead me through to Morning.

Jochen Klepper (1903-1942)

“What Good are Snakes?” *CONTINUED*

far the most remarkable part of this story. According to the ancient narratives, once the people repented, the Lord tells Moses to take a poisonous snake and put it on a pole and to raise it up above everybody's head where it could be seen by all there in Death's Valley. God tells him to raise the snake up so that when they were afflicted they could look at that pole and that snake with newfound awe and faith and respect, believing stricken sinners will not die but live to journey on again. And so according to the story, that is what Moses did. He fashioned this serpent out of bronze. He erected it and lifted it up. The snake becomes a symbol of God's compassion, God's forgiveness, God's promise, and God's power over death for wounded Hebrews for generations.

But what do we make of this? What has that pole to do with us? How should this story be interpreted today? Should we write it off as simply too primitive, too ancient, too superstitious? Does our text reflect a weird hangover of paganism: bronze serpents on poles? Misinterpretation here can be very dangerous. It can wrongfully lead us to think

that healing can come through amulets or that serpents or nature ought to be worshipped. In fact, this is what apparently happened centuries later. A bronze serpent hung in a temple in Jerusalem. It even had a name. Good King Hezekiah had it destroyed because he saw that through it the people were breaking the first and the second commandments.

We could not begin to hope to properly interpret this story if it were not for Jesus. He uses it as an illustration, as a prototype, for the crucifixion. Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, Jesus says to us, so must I be lifted up on the cross so that all who come to see and believe in me will have life and life eternally. The reason the Israelites wandered in that wilderness so long was not because it took forty years to get from Egypt to Canaan, but because they kept taking their own detours until they finally learned living in freedom means living by trusting only in God.

It struck me that forty years is about half our current average life expectancy. I wonder if it doesn't take us about forty years (in other words half of our lives at least), going out on detours, venturing out on

treacherous trails away from God? We are so certain sometimes that we are better off doing our own thing. We may spend half of our lives getting stung, being poisoned, wandering aimlessly, but hopefully learning that freedom is being dependent on God completely. Freedom is trusting in our Savior solely. If we walk in obedience to the Lord, because we know the power and we have heard the promise, no question, we are ultimately on God's territory.

In those mixed up times when we are frozen by fear, staring evil right in the face, hypnotized by the sounds of danger lurking, under siege and dying, look for the sign of the Son of Man lifted up. Look at the cross and believe. Behold that symbol that sends the message of how God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son so that whoever believes in Him will never perish.

Like a snake, the cross is fascinatingly unique, it is thrilling in its mysterious power and yet, it is ultimately repelling. Like the snake, the lowest of all creatures, one cursed by God (according to Genesis), doomed to crawl on its belly, it is the very last thing anyone

would expect to be exalted as a sign of God's glory. Jesus, the suffering servant, the lowest on the social scale, the one bruised for our iniquity and cursed by God (according to Deuteronomy) because he is nailed to a tree; Jesus the One who dies hanging on a cross, is the last one the world would expect to be exalted as God's glory. Yet God does know what he is doing. It was by humbling himself, by suffering and dying for us, that God's love was demonstrated to the world so perfectly. And it was by enduring the worst the world could do to him so magnificently, that Christ won his ultimate royal dignity.

Little did his executioners realize that by pushing him aside, shoving him out of their way, by lifting him up on the cross, they were enthroning him eternally. Therefore each time you find yourselves in your personal wilderness... when night descends or danger nears, prayfully, reverently, lift high the cross! Let the cross of Christ always stand as a sign that you will never pass through the deep and dry places in your life apart from the love of God."

A Moral Imperative

by George Hunsinger - Princeton Theological Seminary

The question of prisoner abuse, including torture, is a specter that haunts America. Candidates are forced to debate it, Congress is pressed to legislate on it and the Oval Office finds it necessary to (repeatedly) deny it. Accused of torturing and abusing de-

tainees, our nation has fallen into disrepute. Our record on human rights, once proud but now tarnished, is a matter of growing concern.

As an ordained Presbyterian minister, I would like to offer a Christian perspective on why the United States should not

be engaging in torture and abuse, and why the prison facility at Guantánamo Bay must be closed.

January 2008 marked the sixth anniversary of the opening of Guantánamo Bay. For over six years now, nearly all of the detainees have been held

there without charge, and with no end in sight. The vast majority of detainees have not been charged with, much less convicted of, committing acts of terrorism. In fact, the only detainee convicted at Guantánamo was an Australian who pled guilty as a way to get out

A Moral Imperative *CONTINUED*

of Guantánamo and be sent home. Despite our government's admission that many of the approximately 380 men still held at Guantánamo Bay are innocent, they remain imprisoned.

In 2006, Congress passed and the president signed the Military Commissions Act. This law took away habeas corpus – i.e., the right to hear and challenge the charges against a suspect -- for those held at Guantánamo Bay and elsewhere. It lets any president declare – unilaterally – who is an enemy combatant, decide who should be held indefinitely without being charged with a crime, and define what is or is not torture and abuse.

The cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment being inflicted by our government on the men held at Guantánamo Bay and elsewhere goes against the core Christian conviction that all human life is sacred. Torture and abuse violates the basic dignity of the human person that all religions hold dear. It debases everyone involved – policy-

makers, perpetrators, bystanders and victims. It contradicts our nation's most cherished ideals. Any laws and policies that permit torture and abuse are shocking and morally intolerable.

I write here not about whether torture and abuse "works," nor about what our country's use of torture and abuse might mean for our military personnel when they are captured, nor about the effect, our use of it may have on how the United States is perceived around the world. While I believe the answer to each of these matters leads to a compelling "no" against torture, I write only from a moral or religious perspective. I write, because despite what anyone believes about the effectiveness of these tactics (and I believe the overwhelming evidence is that torture and abuse is not effective), they are morally wrong and should never be used by the United States against anyone under any circumstances.

The urge to humiliate, torment and degrade lurks deep

within every human breast. Under conducive circumstances, no one can entirely withstand it. Sadism is not born but made. That is why criminal means, once chosen, cannot readily be contained, and are soon preferred. Torture and abuse, once chosen, both proliferates and corrupts. Proliferation is its dimension of breadth, and corruption its dimension of depth. Torture and abuse defiles victim and torturer alike. It corrodes the society that permits it. It undermines the rule of law, and then destroys the tyrannies that it spawns. Corrupting the soul, it eventually corrupts everything in its path. Torture and abuse is itself the ticking bomb.

My condemnation of torture and abuse is not based on any political ideology or on the laws or treaties of any nation. Rather, I am guided by a higher law that serves as a compass for all of humanity. As a person of faith – who would value our common humanity and our religious responsibility to treat all people with decency and the due

process protections of civilized law – I would urge our leaders immediately to stop the use of "alternative interrogation techniques," repeal the Military Commissions Act, and close Guantánamo Bay and all secret prisons, without delay.

I am convinced that nothing less than the soul of our nation is at stake in the debate around how we treat those in our custody. It is time for religious people and all people of conscience to break through the barrier of silence.

How can our country lead the world with moral authority if we do not hold ourselves to the same high standards that we demand from others?

How can we hold others accountable for illicit practices like waterboarding if we have adopted them ourselves?

What does it profit a country to gain the whole world but lose its soul?

In 2006, George Hunsinger founded the National Religious Campaign Against Torture ([http:// www.nrcat.org](http://www.nrcat.org)).

"Who Do You Say That I Am?:"

Christology and Identity in the United Church of Christ"

by Scott R. Paeth, *editor*

(A Book Review by Rev. Dr. Richard L. Floyd, Pastor Emeritus, The First Church of Christ in Pittsfield, Massachusetts)

A few weeks after my ordination back in 1975, I heard Robert Moss, then president of the United Church of Christ, preach a sermon in which he told a humorous anecdote about Kenneth Teegarden, the president of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), who upon his retirement

opened his morning Indianapolis Star to read this headline: "Disciples of Christ seek leader!" And we thought we had an identity crisis in the United Church of Christ!

But even though we confess that "Jesus Christ is the sole head of the church" (Preamble to the UCC Constitu-

tion) it does not mean we have settled the questions of who Jesus Christ is, and what it means to be the church of which he is the head.

These are the big questions addressed in "Who Do You Say That I Am?: Christology and Identity in the United Church of Christ." This is an ambitious

undertaking, given the dizzying diversity of views in our church, and the multiplicity of heritages in our history.

Lee Barrett, sums up the challenge succinctly when he writes, "At times this variety may seem more like a curse than a blessing, leading to the suspicion that "Jesus Christ" has

*Wash us with hyssop
inside and out,
Hang us up and drain us
dry of sin.
Pin our ears to the
wisdom-post,
And make our words
sledge hammers of
truth...*

James Weldon Johnson
(1871-1938) [adapted]

Who Do You Say That I Am? *CONTINUED*

become nothing more than a blank screen upon which the proudly autonomous individual can project anything that tickles one's fancy. Frequently, it seems that the Christ who was supposed to be center of the United Church has become the "wax nose" feared by Luther that could be twisted any way one wants, leaving the denomination centerless." (p. 42-43)

Or as editor, Scott Paeth puts it in his introduction: "Talking about Christology in the United Church of Christ is akin to wrestling an octopus." (p. 9) He describes the purpose of the book as making a contribution to "the task of interpreting Jesus Christ in the United Church of Christ." (p. 16)

The first three contributors all argue for the usefulness of the historic threefold office of Jesus Christ as Prophet, Priest and King. Max Stackhouse argues in his chapter, "The Offices of Christ from Early Church through the Reformers," that the Reformed understanding of the offices of Christ, with its preeminent place for Prophet, has contributed historically to the empowering and emergence of the laity. This engaging essay displays Stackhouse's typical historical reach and cross-cultural breadth as he argues that these motifs can be useful today in facing the complexities of the new globalization. He contends that few Christian pastors and theologians have adequately taken the measure of globalization. It has no common religion, government, or prophetic vision, yet, he argues, many of the agents of this process have been shaped by the Judeo-

Christian understanding of the world and of life. "What do we have to offer these leaders of globalization—and to the more who do not get it, and thus do not know how morally to react to it?" (p. 40)

Lee Barrett does a masterful job of tracing the Christological traditions of our church in his chapter "Christology in the Continental and English Reformation." After noting "the dizzying kaleidoscope" of understandings of Jesus Christ, he argues that the variety in our traditions is not infinite and contains some common threads. Barrett concludes by affirming that the varying, and sometimes contradictory Christologies in our traditions, are "more than complementary, they mutually require one another . . ." for the richness of Christ cannot be capture in a single metaphor or theory. (p. 64)

Gabriel Fackre rehearses the historic texts of our church and puts them in a narrative framework in his chapter, "Jesus Christ in the Texts of the United Church of Christ." He asks how a denomination with eyes fixed on the horizon can avoid losing sight of its rich heritage? He makes a persuasive case that the UCC cannot be adequately understood by anecdotes or defined by ethos or style, but rather identified by thick tiers of texts, that from the founding of the UCC were explicitly Christological, and are rooted and grounded in Scripture, the source of Christian faith.

Lydia Veliko outlines some of the opportunities and challenges of talking about Christology in our complicated

world, and turns to various voices in the Reformed tradition.

John Thomas offers an extended reflection on the themes of presence and recognition in the Eucharist, utilizing his rich ecumenical experience to draw on the resources of decades of ecumenical dialogue on these matters, particularly between Lutherans and Reformed.

Mary Schaller Blaufuss uses the story of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, which she calls a Christological encounter in the midst of cultures of death, to reflect on mission and Christology in a pluralistic context. She rightly calls for openness to other faiths, but risks a postmodern move from claiming the truth of the Gospel to a preference for it. There are limits to how much parity the religions can share with the Gospel, which is, in Leslie Newbigin's phrase, "More news than views."

Deirdre King Hainsworth contributes an essay that should be put in tefillin and bound on the wrists and foreheads of every General Synod delegate. She has read every GS pronouncement (bless her heart) and discerns a pattern in the Christologies there present. She divides Christology into two foci: Jesus as example and Jesus as event. She finds the GS texts almost exclusively allude to the former, what Jesus said and did, but rarely to the latter, who Jesus was and is as the incarnate One. Her argument is persuasive that our ethical discourse and proclamation would be richer and more faithful if we would spend more time and thought

Who Do You Say That I Am? *CONTINUED*

on this latter, higher Christology.

Theodore Louis Trost's "The Passion and The Compassion of the Christ" is a tour de force of cultural analysis and deep exegesis. He begins by examining the Christologies implicit in both Mel Gibson's movie *The Passion of the Christ* and the UCC's *Still Speaking* Campaign, then moves to the riches of the Mercersburg theology as a resource for Christological retrieval, and ends with an exegesis from Mark on the Syrophenician woman's conversion (and seemingly Jesus', too) that is a model for how to find new meanings in old

texts.

The final essay is Stephen G. Ray, Jr.'s, "Living Christology and the Unfinished Business of the United Church of Christ." Ray wants to locate the source of Christology in living with Christ, privileging context over text. Ray says, "We live our Christology," and, "We, like our brothers and sisters in Hebrews 11, are ever looking forward in hope, living forward in Christ." This living Christology is a journey, with seemingly, nary a backward glance.

The strength of this whole volume may just be the snapshot it provides of the Christological contest going on for

the soul of the United Church of Christ. The debate seems to be between those who think that our heritage is a burden to be sloughed off, and those who see it as a rich treasure that still gives life today. Hats off to United Church Press for publishing a book of such theological substance, another sign of hope that they have grown out of their preferential option for the ephemeral.

This is an important book, not just for theologians and theological hobbyists, but for everyone who loves the United Church of Christ and cares for its future. At stake is

whether we fulfill the vision of our founders of a united and uniting church taking our place within the broad and deep ecumenical Church, or whether we become the first mainline church to evolve into a new American post-Christian sect.

[Dr. Floyd is the author of "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross: Reflections on the Atonement"]

Confessing Christ
Lakeland College
Mission House Center
P.O. Box 359
Sheboygan, WI 53082-0359

E-mail:
Coordinator
@confessingchrist.org

Website:
www.confessingchrist.org

"Joy in the Word" is a publication of the Confessing Christ movement in the United Church of Christ. We are attempting to publish the newsletter as well as the Confessing Christ "Occasional Papers" ("Life Together: Under the Word") several times annually. Gifts in support of these publications and the Confessing Christ "Lectionary, Prayers and Resources" can be sent to: Confessing Christ, Lakeland College, Mission House Center, P.O. Box 359, Sheboygan, WI 53082-3059. Each gift in support is deeply appreciated.

The Confessing Christ Steering Committee
Prof. Lee Barrett, convener

"The Resources of a Saint"

With blunt eloquence, Reinhold Niebuhr, reflected years ago on a false kind of humility that can invade the ministry of the Church and lead it down blind alleys. Niebuhr's words strike me as well worth taking to heart as we seek to avoid spiritual bankruptcy in the Church today. "Here is a minister making a confessing in his weekly paper: 'Last Sunday night' he writes, 'I was at my worst and unfortunately there were many strangers in the audience. I tried, but I could not get the ball over the

plate. I had taught a Sunday-school class, preached over the radio, gone out to dinner, entertained a guest at supper, met with a committee and failed to get rest after Easter. I will try to do better next Sunday, so come then.'

"It is all very nice and humble, but there is an implication of professionalism in the whole thing that is appalling. The idea that he did not put on a good performance, 'didn't get the ball over the plate.' There you have the whole weakness of a professional ministry,

striving each Sunday to make an interesting speech. It simply can't be denied that the business of furnishing inspiration twice each week, on a regular schedule, by a person who is paid to do just that and whose success is judged by the amount of 'pep' he can concentrate in his homilies, is full of moral and spiritual dangers. To follow such a program without running into spiritual bankruptcy requires the resources of a saint." Frederick R. Trost, editor

"The Tree"

There was an old gentleman, nearly ninety years of age, it is said, who wanted to plant a tree. Shovel and rake in hand, he dug down into the fertile earth, and placed a fragile stem in the ground. He hoped that stem someday might bare leaves and branches and ripe fruit.

Three young boys are said to have passed by. They were

amused by the old man and his shovel and the stem planted in the earth. They said to each other, "We could understand if he was doing something useful. But to plant a tree at his age?"

Years passed. The boys, now young men, passed by that stem, now grown into a sturdy tree. They delighted in the trees ripe fruit which they

picked and ate and savored to the last bite, but without a thought of the one who had planted the tree. Or to the One who had let the sunshine and the rain gently fall upon upon its leaves.