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Why Settle for More and Miss the Best?, Tome Sine

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Jack Reese, Editor

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Rich Christians in An Age of Hunger, by **RONALD J. SIDER**. Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1977. 249 pp.

Ron Sider's book, **Rich Christians in An Age of Hunger**, has been one of the most emotionally difficult books I have ever read. Seated in relative affluence across from a Christmas tree loaded with ornaments, dozens of presents nestled underneath, I read about the needy of the world. Fighting the temptation to snack on holiday goodies and resolving to lose and keep off twenty-five pounds, I read about the starving of this world.

To compound my problem, Sider's words are strong and penetrating, his passion like that of a fiery evangelist. Consider, from the perspective of a comfortable couch, these words: "What should be our response to world hunger, brothers and sisters? For biblical Christians the only possible response to sin is repentance" (p. 165). Sider demands "biblical repentance . . . involving a whole new lifestyle." Furthermore, "If God's Word is true, then all of us who dwell in affluent nations are trapped in sin" (p. 166). Try swallowing those words with your fat Christmas turkey.

Because the book is twelve years old, it is dated in places. ". . . It is estimated by 1985 that . . ." (p. 214). Sider predicted world-wide "wars of redistribution" (p. 130) that have not materialized as he envisioned. Grain shortages causing emergencies throughout the world (p. 216) are now part of world history.

Nevertheless, the basic message of the book is extremely relevant, and clearly so for members of the

Church of Christ. Our people need to hear that "silent participation in a company that pollutes the environment and thus imposes heavy costs on others is just as wrong as destroying one's own lungs with tobacco" (p. 135). I need to re-read and reconsider Sider's "graduated tithe" (pp. 175-180) that permits "reasonable comfort but not all the luxuries." Affluent countries must consider food programs "designed for humanitarian rather than political purpose" (pp. 216-223).

Sider's approach is strikingly honest and sincere. He begins his section on implementing change with a personal accounting. He does not call his readers to an Amish-like retreat but to "remain at the very center of contemporary society in order to challenge, witness against and perhaps even change it" (p. 193). For that stand to begin, I would encourage Christians to read, consider, and discuss **Rich Christians in An Age of Hunger**.

DAVID FLEER
Vancouver, Washington

Why Settle For More and Miss the Best?, by **TOM SINE**. Waco: Word Books, 1987.

The question of how Christians are to respond to the poor is a particularly challenging one in the waning years of this century. The issue goes beyond deciding the amount of one's contribution check. It addresses lifestyle and vocation. It exposes the possibility of our participation, directly or indirectly, in exploitation and oppression. For those willing to face it, the problem of poverty can be rather disturbing—both for the individual and the church.

Tom Sine's **Why settle For More and Miss the Best?** aggressively confronts the philosophies accepted by our contemporary society and also the Evangelical subculture (of which Churches of Christ

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are largely a part). It is a strong and challenging message.

Sine, who authored *The Mustard Seed Conspiracy* in 1981, is a "futurist" by profession. That is, he researches cultural, political, economic, and other trends and advises directions for ministry and mission to various denominations and religious organizations. Though a Presbyterian layman, Sine is not easily pigeon-holed. When it comes to subjects like Jesus' virgin birth or the inspiration of Scripture, Sine is conservative. But when he speaks about the lifestyle of the disciple, his approach is radical. However he is radical in the most positive and challenging of ways.

In his forward, Tony Campolo says, "Sine . . . contends that what Jesus taught two thousand years ago in the Sermon on the Mount is a viable lifestyle that will produce joy and personal ecstasy in the midst of modern America. . . This book is a call to abandon the comfortable, pleasant, attractive, reasonable form of slavery that has come to typify so many of our lives."

Sine calls Christians to connect with the "Story of God." By reviewing the stories of the Bible and church history, he shows how people have linked themselves in the past to the work God is doing in the world. He then inspiringly encourages Christians to join God in His world-changing adventure.

Though Sine spends much time discussing the ideal and dreams for the future, his book is not entirely theoretical. He regularly gives examples of creative ways others are serving the Kingdom and suggests practical steps for anyone motivated to live a life of whole-hearted discipleship. In fact, creativity is a recurring theme that has implications in such areas as parenting, choice of education, political policies, and even interior design (and he isn't talking about putting up "praying hands" plaques).

Sine's ideas are quite radical for our world. And though this reviewer is left uncomfortable by Sine's advice, it is quite biblical. He spends time dealing with the importance of prayer, worship, communion, and Bible study. But he also offers less common suggestions for living a life of discipleship. He mentions the importance of Kingdom-centered celebration, and he sets a high premium on recovering true community.

Were this reviewer writing the curricula for our Christian schools and churches, *Why settle For More and Miss the Best?* would be required reading. My fear is that too many will discount the importance of Sine's message because of his denominationally inclusive approach. To do so, however, would be the reader's loss. This book will not be on the best seller list because of its challenging call to whole-life discipleship and its valid critique of the values that too many Christians accept without question. But those who read it will receive insights that are too seldom

mentioned in our brotherhood or in the broader realm of Christendom, and, more than likely, they will be changed.

DAN VAUGHN
Basking Ridge, New Jersey

The Land, by WALTER BRUEGGEMANN. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977.

Brueggemann's book appears in the series published by Fortress Press entitled *Overtures to Biblical Theology*. This series is concerned with uncovering central biblical motifs and discussing how they address contemporary culture. I have read several of these books, and while some are better than others, all have provided rich suggestions for the task of preaching and teaching. The best of the series is Brueggemann's marvelous work, *The Land*. In wonderful, almost poetic language Brueggemann traces this significant theological motif as it weaves its way through the biblical narrative.

In a narrow sense the land refers to the promised land. It is a crucial part of God's promise with Abraham and becomes the stage upon which the covenant people live in righteousness before a covenant-keeping God. But in a larger sense the land is paradigmatic of God's blessings in the life of humankind. This story winds its way from the decrees of creation, through the life of Israel, through the teaching of Jesus, and to a new heaven and new earth. Brueggemann refers to the land as a prism for biblical faith. He asserts that the land may be the central theme to the whole of biblical faith. He makes this claim as he describes the aching need for humankind to have a place in this world with fellow humans and God.

According to Brueggemann, rootlessness is the cause of despair and a sense of meaninglessness in the world in which we live. We are always looking for "space," that arena of life in which we have "freedom," no coercion, no accountability, and no authority. What we really need, however, is "place." Typical of Brueggemann's writing is his description of place.

Place is space which has historical meanings, where some things have happened which are now remembered and which provide continuity and identity across generations. Place is a space in which important words have been spoken which have established identity, defined vocation, and envisioned destiny. Place is a space in which vows have been exchanged, promises have been made, and demands have been issued. Place is indeed a protest against the unpromising pursuit of space.

.The land for which Israel yearns and which it remembers is never unclaimed space but is always *a place with Yahweh*, a place filled with memories of life with him and promise from him and vows to him (p. 5, emphasis his).

The land is the story of God's grace. Grace is not in God's giving us our space. As Brueggemann shows from the biblical narrative, grace is creating for us a place. And so the theme of the land becomes important to the asking of the question, "How are we to live with the grace of God?" The question is pressed even farther by Brueggemann, "Can we live with the grace of God?" As Brueggemann writes, "It is a bold question, as yet unresolved, whether only the hungry will listen, or whether placed people can stay in history with the Lord of history." (p. 52).

Brueggemann traces the theme historically. Individual chapters deal with different land episodes in the life of God's people. Abraham, the Exodus, the giving of the law, the selection of a king, the falling away of Israel, the exile, the post-exilic period, and the teaching of Jesus and the early church are all read through the important theme of the land. Brueggemann concludes the book with several hermeneutical considerations that provide interpretative suggestions that range in scope from church life to the question of a Jewish homeland. All of this is done with a writing flair and skill that readers of Brueggemann have come to enjoy.

Especially evocative are the chapters, "You Lacked Nothing" and "Reflections at the Boundary," which deal with the wilderness experience and the giving of the law in anticipation of receiving the land. In the latter chapter, Brueggemann describes the land as "gift," "temptation," "task," and "threat." These categories bring penetrating analysis and new insight into the meaning of grace and the temptations that such a life presents. Churches that fashion themselves as having left legalism for the freedom of grace need to hear the important lessons that Brueggemann develops.

Brueggemann would call us away from an entirely "spiritualistic" conception of the land, and would invite us to a more wholistic conception of how God's salvation would order our world. **The Land** offers rich starting places for teaching on salvation, leadership in the community of the redeemed, God's identification with the poor or "landless," as well as many other pertinent themes for the life of the congregation. This book is a must for the library of one called to proclaim the good news of God's gift in our lives.

MARK LOVE
Arlington, Texas

Parenting for Peace and Justice, by
KATHLEEN AND JAMES MCGINNIS. Maryknoll,
New York: Orbis Books, 1981.

Thirty years ago most Churches of Christ fled any ministry or interpretation of Scripture that might be labelled "social concern" or "social gospel." For example, deep Christian concerns over the civil rights of minorities were almost unknown. Churches, schools, and papers remained strictly segregated. Influential white preachers and writers continued to publicly oppose those courageous few among us who sought to respond to social evil.

Thankfully, circumstances have changed. The "world" pushed the doors of our segregated schools open. The gradual breakdown of our decades-old separatist self-understanding permitted a fairer consideration of those outside our circles who were responding to social evil in the name of Christ. The Old Testament prophets began to be heard as forthtellers. Change has even penetrated our liturgical aids. **Great Songs of the Church** now has an index entry for "social concern"!

But if peace and justice are to become firmly fixed as matters of theological, ethical, and devotional significance, we must address a plethora of questions. What theological priority is found in Scripture for peace and justice?² How, if at all, does "gospel" (and with that, evangelism and church growth) relate to peace and justice?³ How do we pray about the absence of peace and justice?⁴ How do we preach in the presence of violence and oppression?⁵

The verdicts drawn in response to these questions relate to the present generation's struggle with the social dimensions of Christian ethics and ministry. Kathleen and James McGinnis show how to fight against inequity and exploitation by "parenting for peace and justice." Their thesis is compelling: Children taught these central traits of the Kingdom by example and instruction will become adults free in attitude, habit, and spirit to be courageous change agents.

"Stewardship/Simplicity," "Nonviolence in the Family," "Helping Children Deal with Violence in Our World," "Multiculturalizing Our Family Life," "Sex-role Stereotyping," "Family Involvement in Social Action," "Prayer and Parenting for Peace and Justice," and "How the Church Can Encourage Families in Their Social Mission" — each chapter measures the reader's urgency. "Parenting for Peace and Justice" necessitates concentration, self-examination, repentance, lifestyle changes, and wisdom. This all-white, Catholic, middle-class couple humbly invites the reader into their trial-and-error efforts to overcome the obstacles of time, lack of societal incentive, urban fragmentation, and lack of imagination in raising their children — Tommy, David, and Theresa—to love, accept, and for-

give. Their checklists and questionnaires quickly expose the subtle and no doubt unintended ways that children learn the habits of prejudice and violence from adults.

Parenting for Peace and Justice has immediate benefit for adults in natural families seeking to stamp their children with the interests and values of the Kingdom. Much of the book can be easily and profitably adapted by youth ministers, church leaders, preachers, camp workers, authors of children's literature, foster parents, school teachers, orphan home staff, et al. Many congregations are presently accenting the family. However, I have noticed little attention in seminars and film series on the integration of family responsibilities with social ministry. Perhaps the McGinnis volume can be a beginning.

DOUGLAS BROWN
Memphis, TN

¹See Randall J. Harris, "Current Thought in Churches of Christ about Social Concern in Light of Walter Rauschenbusch and Reinhold Niebuhr" (M.A. Thesis, Harding Graduate School of Religion, 1983).

²See for example the writings of Walter Rauschenbusch, Reinhold Niebuhr, Thomas Merton, John Howard Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas, Gustavo Gutierrez.

³See Allen Black and Douglas Brown, "Race Relations and the Mission of the Church," (three-part series), *Gospel Advocate* 128 (Jan. 2, 1986; Feb. 6, 1986; Feb. 20, 1986); Douglas Brown, "The Kingdom of God in the Gospel of Mark," Harding University Lectureship, 1988.

⁴See Walter Rauschenbusch, *Prayers of Social Awakening*; Reinhold Niebuhr, *Justice and Mercy*; Michel Quoist, *Prayers*; Henri Nouwen, *With Open Hands*.

⁵Gusto and Catherine Gonzalez, *Liberation Preaching, the Pulpit, and the Oppressed*; Martin Luther King, *Strength to Love*.

Clear Pictures: First Loves, First Guides, by REYNOLDS PRICE. New York: Atheneum, 1989. 304 pp. \$19.95.

Reynolds Price, novelist and part-time professor at Duke University, has published his memoirs in *Clear Pictures: First Loves, First Guides*. The author presents the first two decades of his life focusing on the persons who molded him.

The book begins "One of the stranger days of my life came in March, 1987, when I passed the age at which my father died." One is immediately impressed with the possibility of the depth with which Price will explore his environment. The reader will not be disappointed.

The work is enhanced with photographs of the

individuals in the author's life. Apt descriptions accompany the pictures. Baby Reynolds is held by his father in one scene. This explanation follows: "It's only with my birth that [my father] appears in the albums again, holding me with the winning edginess of a fledgling member of the bomb-disposal squad. But by then, in his early thirties, he's taken on weight. It looks like bloat and, worse, there's a blurring glaze on the once-hot eyes. Half-smiling still, thoughtful and protective as he is, by now there's a presence in his life even more demanding than his wife and first son."

Price is a novelist, a skilled arranger of words. His sentences, by themselves, engage the reader. In the description of an accidental childhood shooting, this line appears, ". . . into his parents' bedroom. There the standard Southern household-pistol ticked like a bomb on the high mantleplace." Concerning food and family he writes, "My parents were hearty eaters, and I gladly fell in line." Of his Southern farm relations he remembers, "So many country people were chatterboxes, wild to talk after days of silence" and "In those days, any country person's first aim was to get home by dark." Examples abound. This autobiography is well written!

In his search for origins and formations Price writes with a gratitude not often found in autobiographies of our time. This is not a bitter man with skeletons to thrash. "After decades of listening to the confessions of others, I have to say that I spent a lot less time than most people in feeling anger or resentment toward my parents." Yet Price writes honestly of alcohol, sexuality, and racism. ("My parents' racial convictions were socketed in an unthinking acceptance of tradition.") This true but not vindictive approach helps make Price's memoirs a collection of well-told stories. In addition to all of this, *Clear Pictures* should interest the reader for its discussion of God and church. Secular reviews have noted Price's consistent and positive use of biblical imagery (*Los Angeles Times*, August 4, 1989, for example). But just as important is the lengthy chapter "Credible Light" devoted to a discussion of God in Price's Southern environment. Price recalls that baptism was the subject most frequently argued at family gatherings. "If you got mad at your Episcopal sister, you could always remind her that she wasn't really baptized and was thus bound for Hell, which you weren't — though you'd miss her in Heaven."

Price describes his father's "bargain with God," the nightly devotion of kneeled prayer, and his "secret homemade mysticism." He explains, "It was no private magic-set or the threadbare mumbo-jumbo that passes today as New Age Mysticism but, unknown to me, I'd stumbled on a downright traditional mysticism."

The chapter reveals a pilgrimage toward God. "The Hound of Heaven had begun to bay at me." In his youth Price discovers that "everything is made by a

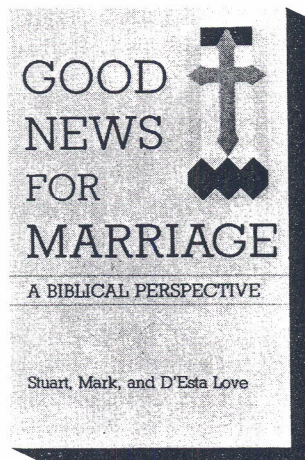
single maker; but I am most surely not he. I can work to know him — I must." This journey into a relationship with God is exhilarating reading. It parallels the best of our religious conversion stories.

But Price's religious story does not have a happy ending. Price decides to leave the church. He gives, with emotional detail, all his reasons for severing his Southern church heritage. His indictment is this: The white church was silent against the evil or racism. The author, comfortable with the Bible and the

teachings of Jesus, cites Matthew 25:31-46.

Herein, for the reader of this journal, lies the greatest justification for reading and contemplating the book. Today the church is being asked to address social issues. How shall the church respond to Reynolds Price's indictment?

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