



Shall a Dry Tree Flourish?

By means of an allegory the prophet Ezekiel once expressed God's promise to plant a cedar, the branches of which would provide shade for the beasts and nesting places for the birds. In this passage the Lord promises that in his good time he shall "make the dry tree flourish" (17:24). This is a vision of the messianic era, in which the whole creation shall be reclaimed by its Creator, and God's children shall dwell in peace and security.

The promise that the dry tree shall flourish has been confirmed proleptically in the crucified Christ, "who on the tree of the cross gave salvation to all," as the Preface for the Passion in the liturgy declares. The tree has flourished at Calvary.

Yet the promise of the flourishing tree directs us still further to history's end. When John of Patmos portrays the new Jerusalem, he speaks of a tree of life in the city. This tree yields its fruit, and its leaves are "for the healing of the nations" (Rev 22:2). The flourishing of the tree is still a future hope for the human family.

The church is the community which proclaims that the saving promises of God have been confirmed in the cross of Jesus Christ. Yet the church is located in the world, for which the healing portrayed by John remains a future hope. To be truly in the world, the church must relate itself to the common human venture. That means that it must make common cause with social, moral, and intellectual movements within the common venture which seek to transform society and the world for the common good.

Shall a dry tree flourish? Is there any possibility even in history for humanity to share a common venture toward wholeness, peace, and security? Such questions prompt us to ask about the nature, possibilities, and limitations of the human being and the human race. That is to enter directly into questions of anthropology. Traditional Christian anthropology—once called the "doctrine of man"—has to be re-examined by going back to its sources in Scripture in response to current movements—the feminist movement, the peace movement, theologies of hope and liberation—and anthropological insights from the sciences. And what is the role of the church in this venture? The question thrusts us directly into questions of ministry, particularly in its prophetic and pastoral roles. In these respects, high on the agenda is the question of how the ministry of the

church can be involved in peacemaking. There is also the question of how the ministry of the church can interpret the situation in which many find themselves in everyday work and existing class structures, and enable such persons to speak and gain a sense of participation in the human venture.

This issue of the journal is devoted to "the human venture" as a theme. The articles which follow take up questions of anthropology and those facets of ministry mentioned. *Paul*

Sponheim has been asked to analyze the articles and enter into dialogue with them. Many of the issues raised are particularly of interest to him, and his discussion goes beyond what can be offered in this cursory introduction to the issue. *Robin Scroggs* presents a study in Pauline anthropology (which he calls “personology”), showing how the apostle’s message, once appropriated, transforms one’s perception of God, world, and self. His conclusions are both surprising and refreshing. *James Childs* uses the language of perception too. How we see ourselves (anthropology) has a direct bearing on our world-view. Going to biblical and theological resources, Childs sketches out an anthropology and social ethic, which he calls an “ethic of anticipation.” *Patricia Wilson-Kastner* treats the question of how contemporary feminism affects (or should affect) Christian thought. Her discussion of trends in feminist theology is valuable by itself, but she goes on to suggest important ways in which our understanding and speaking of the human can be enriched—and ought to be—if the church is to be involved in the search for wholeness and the common good. *Loren Halvorson* reminds us that the human venture must be sustained by primary social structures (family, friendship, and support groups). It follows that the congregation (normally classified as a secondary structure, along with other institutions) should seek to build primary community, rather than draw persons and energies away from it. *Lowell Erdahl* shows how conventional views supporting the present arms race are obsolete; he commends new modes of thinking—more fitting, and certainly more justified by Christian theology—and suggests specific ways in which the church can be involved in peacemaking.

The Resources section contains an article by *Donald Capps* on how current literature in sociology of religion can contribute to Christian anthropology. *Karen Bloomquist* analyzes self-perceptions of the working class and suggests a way in which theology can enter into that world and aid in its reconstruction. *James Burtness* provides an orientation to the vast literature by and about Dietrich Bonhoeffer. As usual, reviews of significant books for theology and ministry round out the issue.

With this issue the journal is being published under the new name of its sponsor. On July 1, 1982, Luther Theological Seminary and Northwestern Lutheran Theological Seminary were merged to form Luther-Northwestern Theological Seminary. The new name is only slightly different from the name in use since 1976, when the two seminaries were unified and subsequently called Luther-Northwestern Theological Seminaries. Now the change from plural to singular has taken place, further reflecting the oneness of our common work at this (one) theological school.

A.J.H.