In Lily Tomlin's one-woman Broadway show *The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe*, the first character we meet is Trudy the bag lady. As our guide through the show, Trudy explains that she is helping some aliens from outer space determine whether, in their search for intelligent life in the universe, Planet Earth might not be a likely location. The prospects do not seem too promising!

But not only do we have the aliens' unusual perspective; Trudy herself sees things askance. Speaking of her own madness, Trudy exclaims,

I refuse to be intimidated by
reality anymore.
After all, what is reality anyway? Nothin' but a
collective hunch. My space chums think reality was once a
primitive method of
crowd control that got out of hand.
In my view, it's absurdity dressed up
in a three-piece business suit.

I made some studies, and
reality is the leading cause of stress among those in
touch with it. I can take it in small doses, but as a
lifestyle
I found it too confining.¹

Trudy figures that being "out of touch" with reality isn't such a bad idea.
After all, it's less stressful. And what is reality anyway? Nothing but a
collective hunch.

*Reality Isn't What It Used to Be*
Or to use the title of Walter Truett Anderson's book on postmodernity, we
could say that "reality isn't what it used to be."² Simply stated, the naive
modernist confidence that we know what the world is and that we can

manage and control it by our own autonomous rationality has evaporated
in the heat of a postmodern culture.

To get a sense of this "evaporation"—how our perceptions of reality
have changed—consider Anderson's joke about three umpires having a
beer after a baseball game.³ One says, "There's balls and there's strikes and
I call 'em the way they are." Another responds, "There's balls and there's
strikes and I call 'em the way I see 'em." The third says, "There's balls and
there's strikes, and they ain't nothin' until I call 'em."

So what is reality? Are there balls and strikes out there in the world as
the first ump implies? Most baseball fans and hometown commentators
insist that there are, though some might side with the second ump in his
honest appraisal of his own subjectivity. Many postmodern thinkers,
however, wonder whether the third ump just might have the most honest
position of the three. How do we know, after all, if there is anything "real"
beyond our judgments?

At issue in the joke is not the particular content of the umpires' judg-
ments, whether they believe the pitch is a ball or a strike, but more
fundamentally, the status of their judgments, what sort of calls they are
making. The first ump and the third may agree that the pitch should be
called a strike, but the belief functions differently for each (with the second
ump occupying a position in the middle). The first ump is a naive realist,
believing that human knowing is a matter of seeking direct correspon-
dence between the external world and epistemological judgments. The
second ump knows that access to the external world is always mediated
by the perspective of the knower. He might be called a perspectival realist
(or perhaps a critical realist), since he recognizes that the way he sees the
world invariably affects his epistemological judgments. The third ump
pushes this perspectivalism to its extreme. His perspective is all there is,
or at least all that matters. This radical perspectivalism epitomizes the
postmodern shift. It is, if you will, perspectivalism gone to seed.⁴

While there is a significant difference between the positions of the
second and third umps, it is fair to say that the current predominance of
these positions (both in the academy and on the street) represents the demise of the naive realism of modernity.

Although modernity has never been simply an intellectual movement, the modern project was predicated on the assumption that the knowing autonomous subject arrived at truth by establishing a correspondence between objectively “given” reality and the thoughts or assertions of the knower. To the postmodern mind, such correspondence is impossible, since we have no access to something called “reality” apart from that which we “represent” as reality in our concepts, language and discourse. Richard Rorty says that since we never encounter reality “except under a chosen description,” we are denied the luxury or pretense of claiming naive, immediate access to the world. We can never get outside of our knowledge to check its accuracy against “objective” reality. Our access is always mediated by our own linguistic and conceptual constructions.

Another way to say this is that it is only in terms of some worldview, some overarching, guiding and directing vision of life, that we experience the world. Everyone has a worldview. When we argued this in The Transforming Vision in 1984 it was a potentially controversial point. The fact that the term worldview is now common in Christian literature, general academic writing and the public press is an indication of how much things have changed in a rather short period of time. One of the defining features of the emerging postmodern culture is our growing awareness, with the second ump, of the perspectival character of human life and knowing.

But many postmodern thinkers would go much further than admitting that life is perspectival or that reality is mediated to us by our worldview. Since we have no way of checking to see if our constructions “correspond” to anything external, there is a growing postmodern tendency to side with the third ump. While not exactly denying there is a “world” out there beyond our knowledge, postmodern thinkers typically deny that there are any features of this “world” that could function as independently existing norms or criteria for truth and goodness to which we could appeal. Any criterion we might come up with, explains Rorty, is itself a human con-

struction, and there is “no standard of rationality that is not an appeal to such a criterion, no rigorous argumentation that is not obedience to our own conventions.” We are caught, then, in a hermeneutical circle and impelled toward radical perspectivism.

While this does not mean, for Rorty, that each individual is trapped in his or her own private reality—since we can engage in conversation with one other—it does mean that rationality ceases to be a matter of universal truth. “The application of such honorifics as ‘objective’ and ‘cognitive,’” he writes, “is never anything more than an expression of the presence of, and hope for, agreement among inquirers.” For either reason, then, whether reality is mediated to us by our perspective, or is purely a human construct, the naive self-assured realism of modernity is impossible to the postmodern mind.

But not only is reality a human construct, it is more particularly a social construct. It is always some group’s construction of reality that invariably ends up being the dominant construction that guides social life. If what Rorty called our “chosen descriptions” of reality are, in the words of Trudy the bag lady, nothing more than collective hunches, then we need to ask, Whose reality? Which collective hunch? And the answer is that it is the modern Western construction of reality (the progress myth) that has most effectively dominated the globe and defined what is rational and normative for human life. But since this dominance is not due, on any postmodern account, to strict epistemological success (as if the progress myth is demonstrably “truer” than any other construction), what is it due to? Trudy may well ask of modernity, “Why is it your construction of reality, your collective hunch, that rules?” Why is any one construction of reality given privileged status, thereby marginalizing all others?

Violence and the Therapy of Deconstruction
As soon as we begin attending to the relation of reality and representation to marginalization and oppression we have entered that rarified postmodern world known as “deconstructionism.” Jacques Derrida, the French
philosopher most characteristically associated with deconstruction, names the realism of the dominant Western intellectual tradition a “metaphysics of presence.” What is assumed to be “present” in our conceptual systems of truth is a real “given” which exists prior to language and prior to thought but which we have adequately grasped by our language and thought. That is, the Western intellectual tradition, and especially Western modernity, claims to reflect and represent reality so accurately that it simply “mirrors” the way things really are. It is this “mimetic” (i.e., imitative) theory of truth, with its assumption of a substantial convergence between reality and our description of reality, that Derrida and other deconstructionists attack. It is a central deconstructionist theme that we can never get to a prelinguistic or preconceptual “reality.” Instead, deconstructionism insistently attempts to show us that what is claimed to be “present” is really “absent” and that the “given” is itself a construction of human discourse. Through this analysis the “given” is dismantled and we are disabused of our reifications. To “reify” something is to treat it as if it were a thing external to ourselves. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman describe reification as the apprehension of the products of human activity as if they were something else than human products—such as facts of nature, results of cosmic laws, or manifestations of divine will. Reification implies that man is capable of forgetting his own authorship of the human world. By uncovering our reifications deconstruction attempts not to destroy in any nihilistic sense but to play a positive, therapeutic role in the culture of late (and decomposing) modernity. We are to face up to our constructions and to own them as such. But the therapist cuts deep. What is concealed in the realism of the metaphysics of presence and revealed by deconstructionism is the impulse to mastery and ultimately to violence. What is really at stake in our intellectual rhetoric about scientific objectivity and nonbiased observation is nothing less than what Jane Flax describes as the typically Western desire “to master the world once and for all by enclosing it within an illusory but absolute system.” We desire, in other words, intellectual mastery and control. In the famous words of René Descartes, we seek to become “the masters and possessors of nature.”

But the claim to have grasped reality as it really is (beyond the contingencies of history, particularity and change) discloses our desire for another sort of mastery, that over human beings. By granting an aura of universal truth to our local conventions, the Western intellectual commitment to realism serves ideologically to legitimate Western conquest and political superiority. As Trudy’s space chums put it, reality functions as a primitive form of crowd control. Thus Derrida can claim that “the entire philosophical tradition, in its meaning and at bottom, would make common cause with oppression.”

The realist metaphysics of presence is thus an “aggressive realism.” It is a metaphysics of violence. And that violence, explain deconstructionists, is the direct result of seeking to grasp the infinite, irreducible complexities of the world as a unified and homogeneous totality. Since all such “totalizing” seeks to reduce the heterogeneous diversity of reality to a system which I (or we) can grasp, the deconstructionist is suspicious, explains James Olthuis, that the “unity of truth is purchased only at the cost of violence, by repressing what doesn’t fit and erasing the memory of those who have questioned it.” Recognizing that truth is a human, social construction, deconstructionists force us to inquire about what (and who) has been left out, silenced or suppressed in all constructions that aspire toward a “total” accounting of reality. The problem with such totalizing aspirations, argue the deconstructionists, is that they necessarily result in a violent closure of human thought that denies all heterogeneous difference or dissolves it into a homogeneous unity, effectively co-opting, dominating or eliminating that which is perceived as “other.”

We could illustrate the deconstructionist point by reference to traditional U.S. approaches to immigration. Anyone who is not an American is termed an “alien.” For such people to cease being aliens they must become “naturalized” citizens of the United States, since presumably to be American is “natural.” After this initial step, they must then find their way into
the homogeneity of the American way of life by allowing their cultural difference to be dissolved in the great American melting pot.

What deconstructionists are saying is that the sort of homogenizing and naturalizing approach to otherness and difference that is illustrated by U.S. immigration policy has characterized Western thought and culture as a whole and modernity in particular. The differences of women, the otherness of non-Western cultures and the very complex heterogeneity of the world have been dissolved or repressed into a totalizing vision. Such a vision is inherently violent because it necessarily excludes not just elements of reality that do not fit, but any person or group who sees things differently. “When convinced of the truth or right of a given worldview,” notes Kenneth Gergen, “a culture has only two significant options: totalitarian control of the opposition or annihilation of it.”21 Whether or not these are the only options, deconstructionists say this has in fact been the legacy of the last five hundred years of Western history in relation to women, to non-Western, particularly nonwhite, peoples and to the nonhuman creation itself. It is no wonder, therefore, that postmodern author Jean-François Lyotard tells us that modernity has given us “as much terror as we can take.”22 Renouncing the nostalgia for a total scheme of things because it is both unattainable and inherently violent is a characteristic postmodern theme.23

Incredulity Toward Metanarratives
It matters little whether this scheme is an abstract metaphysical system or a comprehensive metanarrative of world history; both are equally suspect to the postmodern mind. It is not just “reality” that isn’t what it used to be; “history” isn’t what it used to be either. Most postmodemists would agree with Christian thinkers Stanley Hauerwas and Alasdair MacIntyre in their attempt to replace the modernist notion of abstract, rational, universal systems of truth with the category of “story” or “narrative,” so long as this refers to the lived, embodied, humanly constructed traditions we find ourselves a part of.24 But if story means anything more, an overarching

metanarrative that purports to portray world history from arch to telos (whether this be the modern progress myth or the Christian account of redemptive history in Jesus Christ), then its totalizing aspirations are apparent. On a postmodern reading, all such “grand narratives” or “master stories” are simply temporally extended versions of the very metaphysical systems Derrida and company have attempted to deconstruct. Just as all totalizing claims about reality are regarded as inherently violent, so all grand narratives are viewed with suspicion by postmoderns. Indeed, Jean-François Lyotard defines postmodernity as “incredulity toward metanarratives.”25

Viewing metanarratives as large-scale interpretations of the whole of history with purportedly universal application, Terry Eagleton says, “Post-modernism signals the death of such ‘meta-narratives’ whose secretly terrorist function was to ground and legitimate the illusion of a ‘universal’ human history.”26 No metanarrative, it appears, is large enough and open enough to include the experiences and realities of all people. Indeed, on a postmodern reading, metanarratives invariably serve to legitimate the power structures that marginalize or trivialize these experiences.

A recent example serves to illustrate this point. In the summer of 1989 Francis Fukuyama published in the neoconservative journal The National Interest what has become a famous and widely read article. Entitled “The End of History?” the article discussed the meaning of the demise of Soviet communism.27 The details of Fukuyama’s argument do not need to concern us here.28 Suffice it to say that he offers an interpretation of the events in the Soviet block at the end of the 1980s that has liberal capitalist democracy as the victor in the battle of ideologies. In fact, this victory is equivalent to the “end of history” because history is, according to Fukuyama, driven by the conflict of ideologies. And since 1989 there has been nothing left to fight about. Liberal capitalist democracy is the highest ideological achievement of the race. That this is a metanarrative, there is no doubt.29
But Fukuyama’s reading of history also demonstrates precisely the kind of violent exclusion and marginalization of other perspectives and peoples that postmodernists criticize. Not only is Fukuyama’s analysis blind to the ambiguities of democratic capitalism (manifest in such things as the inequitable distribution of wealth, a geopolitical track record that tends to support authoritarian regimes that are friendly toward capitalist economic interests, and the massive destruction of the environment at the hands of industrial capitalism), but his analysis systematically rules out the insights and contribution of any peoples who are not taken up by the spirit of capitalist democracy. This latter point is especially evident when Fukuyama declares that Western liberal democracy is nothing less than “the common ideological heritage of mankind.” This declaration effectively excludes the vast majority of the world’s population from this “common” heritage and thus constitutes an ideological form of genocide. The grand narrative of Western progress, like all grand narratives, results in the devaluation and suppression of other stories.

But beyond the ideological suppression of stories is the quite literal totalizing violence against persons perpetrated in the name of various metanarratives. Paradigm examples of such violence stretch from neo-Babylonian imperial conquest in sixth-century Mesopotamia, buttressed by the mythology of the Enuma Elish, which saw Babylon as the privileged dwelling of the gods and other nations as the forces of chaos, to the twentieth-century Nazi agenda for supremacy in Europe, legitimated by a narrative of blood, soil and racial destiny. Alongside these examples we might cite the Christian crusades for possession of medieval Palestine, Islamic jihad against infidels, Marxist-Leninist aspirations to world domination and the consequences in Latin America, throughout this century, of the Monroe Doctrine as part of the U.S. narrative of liberal democracy.

And so we find ourselves back with Trudy the bag lady. We surmised that she might have asked the question, “Whose reality and which collective hunch gets to rule?” And we walked the deconstructive path which argues that whoever’s reality and whichever hunch is on offer, if it is framed in totalizing terms it will rule violently and oppressively. And now perhaps Trudy will ask, “Whose master-story and which metanarrative gets to tell the ‘truth’ about world history? And who will be co-opted, excluded or oppressed?”

Now there is a great deal that Christians can be rightly critical of in the movement known as postmodernity, and in deconstruction in particular. Among other things, it is not clear that much is left after deconstruction besides anarchic pluralism, political cynicism and cultural and moral paralysis. Deconstructive therapy, in other words, is so radical that it runs the risk of killing the patient.

Nevertheless, the deconstructive critique of modernity and the postmodern awareness of the totalizing potential inherent in all metanarratives are, in our opinion, important points that Christians need to hear. So, our approach in this paper is not a frontal attack on postmodernity. That is required too (and certainly tends to be the dominant response from the Christian world). We are more interested, however, in facing the therapist—in allowing the deconstructive scalpel (to mix our metaphors a little) to do its work.

Our question, therefore, is whether the biblical narrative of creation, fall and redemption in Jesus Christ (the story in which we, as Christians, are rooted) has the resources to face (and survive) the postmodern charge of totalizing violence. Does the postmodern suspicion of metanarratives apply also, legitimately, to the biblical story? How are we, as Christians, to respond to this question?

The Antitotalizing Thrust of the Biblical Metanarrative

First of all, we need to admit unabashedly that Christianity is rooted in a metanarrative that makes universal claims. This is another way of saying that the Scriptures disclose a worldview in storied form. It is difficult to see how one could take the biblical presentation of creation, fall and redemption as merely a local tale. Indeed, it is difficult to find a grander narrative, a more comprehensive story anywhere. Christianity is undeniably rooted
in a grand narrative that claims to tell the true story of the world from creation to eschaton, from origin to consummation. So, we must admit that, yes, the Christian faith is rooted in a metanarrative of cosmic proportions. And we have no intention of giving this up and opting for a merely local story. That would not be the gospel.

But does this mean that the gospel, as a metanarrative, is inevitably violent and totalizing? The postmodern charge is rooted both in a systematic insight and a historical observation. The insight is that those who articulate metanarratives and worldviews are inevitably finite, fallible (indeed, fallen) human beings. Not only is it quite literally impossible for any human articulation of a metanarrative to be genuinely universal in scope (and thus not exclude, devalue, co-opt or oppress, either explicitly or implicitly), but our fallen human tendency is to use our overarching value-systems as ideologies to legitimate our own interests. The historical observation follows from this, namely that the biblical story has, in fact, often been used ideologically to oppress and exclude those regarded as infidels or heretics. In the hands of some Christians and communities, the biblical metanarrative has been wielded as a weapon, legitimating prejudice and perpetuating violence against those perceived as the enemy, those on the outside of God’s purposes. There simply is no innocent, no intrinsically just, narrative, not even the biblical one.

Having said that, however, it is our contention that the Bible, as the normative, canonical, founding Christian story, contains at least two identifiable, counterideological dimensions or antitotalizing factors. These dimensions do not, of course, guarantee innocence (or justice, or compassion for the other) on the part of those who adhere to this narrative. But these dimensions permit or allow the Christian story to de legitimate and subvert violent, totalizing uses of the story by those who claim to live by it. The first of these dimensions consists in a radical sensitivity to suffering which pervades the biblical narrative from the exodus to the cross. The second consists in the rooting of the story in God’s overarching creational intent which delegitimizes any narrow, partisan use of the story. And these two dimensions, we submit, are intrinsic not only to the content, but also to the very structure of the canon.

The Exodus and Israel’s Sensitivity to Suffering
Our starting point is the central event of the Old Testament, the exodus from Egypt. Yahweh’s deliverance of the Hebrews from Egyptian bondage and their subsequent constitution as a people at Sinai is widely regarded by Jews as the founding and pivotal event in their own narrative and by Christians as the central event in the Old Testament. But the centrality of this event is also evident in the numerous retellings of the story found within the Bible, what Old Testament scholar Gerhard von Rad called the “little historical credos,” embedded in texts as diverse as Deuteronomy 26:1-11 (“A wandering Aramean was my ancestor”), the covenant renewal ceremony of Joshua 24, and Psalms 105 and 106.33

In these (and numerous other texts) we find fascinating evidence of what biblical scholars variously call midrash, the traditioning process or inner biblical exegesis. That is, at some later stage in a community’s development, as they face a changed existential situation, that community remembers, retells and rearticulates crucial aspects of their dramatic narrative as the basis for self-understanding and renewed ethical action in that changed situation. Alasdair MacIntyre is entirely correct here: “I can only answer the question ‘What am I to do?’ if I can answer the prior question ‘Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?’”34 For later Israel to answer the question “What am I to do?” it had first to answer the question “Of what story am I a part?”

So the founding Torah story (the call of Abraham, bondage in Egypt, deliverance by God, the wilderness journey and the gift of the Promised Land) is retold by particular individuals and groups at later stages within the overarching biblical narrative as the explicit basis for ethical action. Even the Decalogue is predicated on the founding story. Hence the commandments open with the following words, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Ex
20:2). In Israel's case, ethical action is narratively formed.

The significance of this founding Torah story is that Israel's narrative memory was shaped decisively by the crucible of oppressive suffering and liberation unto justice. The memory of suffering and God's desire to relieve this suffering was kept alive in the constant retelling of the story.

But it was also kept alive in the numerous psalms of lament which became part of the liturgical repertoire of ancient Israel. Lament psalms, which constitute almost one-third of the Psalter, are abrasive prayers which give voice to pain. Refusing to repress such pain in favor of business-as-usual, these psalms articulate suffering as intolerable and demand redress and deliverance from God. In other words, the paradigm of the Hebrews' agonized groaning and complaining to Yahweh about Egyptian bondage in Exodus 2:23-25 and 3:7-10 found a settled home in the genre of individual and communal lament psalms (like Psalm 22, which Jesus prayed on the cross). These psalms, sung in worship, would have reinforced Israel's exodus memory and further shaped the Israelites' sensitivity to suffering.35

This sensitivity to the suffering of others is further evident in the motivational clauses found in the Book of the Covenant, that collection of laws which follows the Decalogue in Exodus. Two sorts of motivational clauses stand out as the basis for doing justice to aliens, widows and orphans, that is, to those who are relatively powerless or marginal in the community. These clauses both appeal to the exodus story. One says, "You shall not oppress a resident alien; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt" (Ex 23:9). The other says, "You shall not abuse any widow or orphan. If you do abuse them, when they cry out to me, I will surely heed their cry" (Ex 22:22-23).36

What has become clear in recent biblical scholarship, especially since the groundbreaking sociological study of Norman Gottwald, is that the whole purpose of the exodus-Sinai event was for Yahweh to found a community with an ethical pattern of life alternative to that of imperial Egypt.37 Because of the distinctive ongoing story it told, remembered and participated in, this was to be a community which refused to cause oppres-

sion and instead was committed to fostering justice and compassion toward the marginal.38 This sensitivity to suffering is both a major thrust or trajectory within the Bible and constitutes the first of the two counterideological dimensions of the biblical metanarrative.39

Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann has referred to this biblical trajectory as the "embrace of pain," since it involves ruthless honesty about (rather than denial of) suffering. To use a postmodern metaphor, this biblical trajectory does not make false claims to "presence," but instead highlights "absence"—the absence of God, the absence of justice, the absence of shalom. Biblical texts in this trajectory thus critique the unjust status quo in the name of Yahweh, the God of justice and liberation, and call for social transformation in the name of the founding narrative.40

Prophetic Discernment of the Creator's Purposes
Brueggemann also calls this biblical trajectory the "prophetic imagination," since it is the prophets par excellence who give voice to the suffering of the people (and also the suffering of God) and who rearticulate the founding exodus story as the basis both of their critique of later stages in Israel's story (especially the corrupt monarchy) and of their proposal of an alternative, eschatological future.41

It was the unanimous message of the great Old Testament prophets of judgment (Isaiah of Jerusalem, Jeremiah, Hosea, Amos, Ezekiel, etc.) that Israel (or Judah) would be judged by God for its injustice, which was rooted in idolatry, in following not the Yahweh story of exodus from bondage but the Canaanite Baal story of cyclical fertility and guaranteed security. Even when there is no explicit accusation of Canaanite idolatry, the indictment of injustice stands, injustice stemming from the royal establishment's usurpation of power at the expense of the marginal within Israel, which amounts to an abandonment of Israel's founding exodus story.42

Scripture testifies amply to other prophets, judged in the canonical text to be "false" prophets, who, like the canonical prophets, appealed to the
founding exodus story but drew the opposite conclusion. The canonical prophets argued that just as God delivered Israel from Egyptian bondage, so God could (and would) deliver Israel over to a new bondage, the Babylonian captivity. Yahweh was against all injustice, whether Egyptian or Israelite. The status quo prophets (later judged to be false) argued, on the contrary, that just as God delivered Israel from Egyptian bondage, so God could (and would) deliver them also from the hands of the Babylonians, because Yahweh was fundamentally on Israel’s side. Both sorts of prophets appealed to the same narrative, but drew contradictory implications and conclusions.

As we know, the canonical prophets, who were largely dismissed as seditious madmen (Jeremiah, for example, was imprisoned for treason), turned out to be correct. Israel did go into exile and as a result suffered a fundamental crisis of story, identity and life-pattern. In this new, changed situation the dispirited exiles desperately needed a new articulation of their story that would address this crisis. So they cried out to Ezekiel by the river Chebar in Babylon: “How then can we live?” (Ezek 33:10).

And the answer was, as always, we live out of our narratives. James Sanders, a pioneer in the field known as “canonical criticism,” argues that it was the experience of land-loss and exile that engendered a rehearing of the prophets of judgment who had previously been dismissed. And they were reheard not just because they were factually correct or had predictive accuracy, but also because they somehow did not think that exile annulled the story that began with the exodus and the deliverance from bondage. It is not just that Yahweh would, in the fullness of time, again deliver the people from Babylonian exile. They certainly said that (or some of them did). But, more fundamentally, it was the conviction of these prophets that Yahweh’s purposes were not simply to establish Israel as an alternative countercommunity to the imperial tradition of the ancient Near East. Israel’s existence as a nation, even an egalitarian nation, practicing justice toward the marginal, was not ultimately what God had in mind. On the contrary, going back to God’s promise to bless all nations through Abra-
the entry into the land. This should give us pause. The book of Joshua, which tells the story of the entry, is relegated to the second grouping of books, the Former Prophets or Historical Books.49 But the Torah, the founding story, ends with the Israelites still in the wilderness, as poignant testimony to the nonessential (or at least secondary or derivative) character of Israel's settled, national identity.50

Just as the traditioning process of repeating the story in new situations inevitably changed the story in subtle or explicit ways (two very different retellings, for example, are found in Psalms 105 and 106), so the exilic retelling effected a decisive change, reflected in the final shape of the canonical text.51 Sanders cogently argues that only a Torah story that excluded land settlement could have provided a meaningful narrative for landless exiles (especially since it was a distorted narrative of national identity and land possession that had led to exile). Israel learned that even in a chaotic, marginal state of diaspora they could still be God's people and act ethically in accordance with their story. So the first consequence for the canonical shape of this inner biblical monotheizing process (this insight into God as universal Creator) is the exclusion of land possession from Torah.

The other consequence of this monotheizing insight is the placing of the Genesis creation story as the prologue or introduction to the book of Genesis, to Torah and ultimately to the entire Bible. It is noteworthy that while none of the early retellings of the story within the canon start with creation, by the time of the exile (specifically in Jeremiah 32 and Nehemiah 9) creation is explicitly articulated at the beginning of Israel's narrative.52 What this canonical placing of creation does is decisively to reinterpret the exodus-Sinai story in terms of a larger, more comprehensive metanarrative.53 Israel's "election" as the chosen people, which was often treated as election for privilege and elite status (in opposition to the goyim, the nations), is thus reinterpreted in the context of the metanarrative as election for service. Although a nationalistic reading of election is possible (though not required) in terms of a local narrative of exodus to land possession, in

the context of the larger metanarrative this reading is subverted. Instead, Israel is called to be the particular, historically conditioned vessel chosen to mediate a universal story of the healing of the world. As the servant of Yahweh, Israel exists for the sake of other nations.54 It is this monotheizing metanarrative rooted in the Creator's purposes that constitutes the second of the two counterideological dimensions of the biblical story.

It is important to note, however, that these two counterideological dimensions of the biblical metanarrative do not simply exist side by side. On the contrary, they are integrally connected. It is precisely because Yahweh is the universal Creator and Judge of all nations, indeed of heaven and earth, that the marginal and the suffering have a normative court of appeal against all injustice.

This connection is clear in a text like Psalm 146:5-7, 9:55

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
who made heaven and earth,
the sea, and all that is in them;
who keeps faith forever;
who executes justice for the oppressed;
who gives food to the hungry.
The LORD sets the prisoners free... The LORD watches over the strangers;
he upholds the orphan and the widow,
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

The upshot of this twofold counterideological dynamic is that God has an overarching narrative purpose alternative to the many oppressive systems and stories in which we find ourselves. Not only is this God not to be identified with such systems and stories, but as sovereign Creator, God is able to fulfill his purpose of shalom for his creation, a purpose which includes the liberation of the oppressed and the empowerment of the marginal. It is thus crucial to hold together both dimensions of this counterideological dynamic in creative interaction.
A merely one-sided emphasis on God as sovereign Creator without attentiveness to human suffering might well result in an arid, totalitarian view of deity and an ethos of legalism and blindness to the marginal. Attention to pain, on the other hand, without the possibility of appeal to a sovereign Creator may result in either a disempowered theology of suffering and survival or a vengeful sectarian attempt at heroic self-assertion in the face of overwhelming odds.

Jesus and the Biblical Metanarrative
It is arguably this latter possibility which was realized in first-century Israel, with its plethora of messianic revolutionary movements seeking liberation from Roman oppression. In the tradition of the Maccabean rebels against their Seleucid overlords some centuries earlier, many Jews in the time of Jesus positioned themselves in a generalized stance of opposition not just to the Romans, but toward all Gentiles, as outsiders. Even within Israel, as Marcus Borg has shown, a complicated ritual system of clean and unclean (or same and other) was imposed on sociopolitical and economic classes of Israelites, such that vast multitudes of the poor were considered as ritual outcasts, officially non-Jewish, excluded from the benefits of the covenant.

Into this situation Jesus came, mounting a scathing prophetic critique of the religious and political “center” on behalf of the excluded other—the tax-collectors, Gentiles, prostitutes and “sinners” in general. This prophetic stance is pervasive in the Gospels but is indicated significantly by the almost complete absence of the popular first-century religious category “holiness” from the teaching of Jesus. Borg argues that Jesus avoided the term on principle because it had come to function as a category of self-righteous exclusion which betrayed the heart of Israel’s exodus faith. Israel’s election from among the nations, described in Exodus 19:4-6 as a priestly calling to be a “holy nation,” was widely interpreted in the time of Jesus as election unto separation, purity and boundary setting.

Instead, taking Israel’s vocation to be one of priestly reconciliation, Jesus reinterprets holiness as loving inclusion of the marginal, as seen in his replacement of the levitical commandment “Be holy, because I the LORD your God am holy” (Lev 19:2) with “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (Lk 6:36), an injunction he embodied by befriending the outcasts of Jewish society. It thus does not require much argument to show that Jesus clearly stands in the prophetic tradition of the “embrace of pain.” As Walter Brueggemann has profoundly elucidated in his book The Prophetic Imagination, Jesus embodied the counter-ideological dynamic of sensitivity to suffering.

But Jesus also stands in the creation tradition, as James Sanders and Tom Wright have argued. Both Sanders and Wright suggest that Jesus’ essential critique of first-century Judaism was that the vision of the canonical metanarrative, which Wright calls “creational covenantal monotheism,” had become compromised, being reductively replaced by a nationalistic, sectarian narrative of “covenantal monotheism” (period). That is, first-century Judaism had ignored both the creational prologue to the Torah and the exclusion of land possession from the Torah, which resulted in a totalizing form of “justice” both toward Gentiles and toward the marginal even within Israel. Hence, in place of the teaching of Leviticus 19:18 to “love your neighbor” (to which some religious teachers had added “and hate your enemy”), Jesus enjoined his disciples, in a radical, antitotalizing move, to “love your enemies” (Mt 5:43-44). What is more, he specifically grounded this injunction in the example of God’s universal love as Creator, who causes sun and rain to nourish both the just and the unjust, without discrimination (Mt 5:45).

That Jesus could both side vigorously with the marginal within Israel (pervasively evident in his frequent clashes with the Jewish religious and political center) and at the same time resist the allure of militant messianic movements which sought, on behalf of the marginal, the violent overthrow of Rome (evident in his persistent refusal to be acclaimed “king” by the crowds) is testimony to a profound discernment on his part of the fundamental contours and intent of the canonical metanarrative.
This discernment is illustrated in what was perhaps his most controversial and subversive action, the so-called cleansing of the temple, when he overturned the moneychangers' tables (Mt 21:12-16; Mk 11:15-18; Lk 19:45-46), an action following directly on the heels of what has come to be known as the Triumphal Entry.

As the Gospel text has it, Jesus had entered Jerusalem during the Passover week to shouts of messianic acclaim ("Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"). In response to the growing expectation that he would throw off the yoke of the Romans and liberate Israel (an expectation which always ran high during Passover, when Israel celebrated the original exodus), Jesus entered the temple and decisively called into question the heart of Jewish self-understanding. Whereas Israel as elect nation and the temple as symbol of that election (representing God's presence among the chosen people) were meant, in the context of the canonical metanarrative, to be a vehicle for the reconciliation of the world, both nation and temple had become impediments to this overarching narrative purpose. Quoting two Old Testament prophetic texts (Is 56:7; Jer 7:11), Jesus declared that the temple, which should have been "a house of prayer for all the nations" had become instead "a den of robbers" (Mk 11:17).63

Since the term robbers (lēstai) acquired, possibly as early as 40 B.C., the technical connotation of militant brigands or insurrectionists resistant to Roman rule, it is significant that when Jesus was crucified between two lēstai by a Jewish-Roman coalition, it is Barabbas, a true lēstēs, who goes free in his stead (Mt 26:55; Mk 14:48; Lk 22:52; Jn 18:40). It is further significant that what precipitated Jesus' arrest, leading eventually to crucifixion, supposedly on charges of insurrection against the Roman state, was precisely his challenge to Jewish self-identity in the temple.64

The irony is thus complete. The very one who discerned the anti-ideological thrust of the canonical story, that Israel is God's servant to bring blessing to the nations (including the Romans), and who attempted to restore Israel to that vocation, is sacrificed on the altar of Roman and Jewish self-protective ideology. Jesus quite literally suffers for the sins of the (Jewish and Gentile) world.

In this he fulfills a vocation adumbrated in the Old Testament both of Israel and the prophets as the "servant of Yahweh," rejected by those to whom they are sent. Here we have the historical basis of the New Testament claim about the atoning sacrifice of Jesus' death. It is not simply that Jesus rightly discerned the thrust of the canonical metanarrative, evident in his antitotalizing critique of the "center," but that through his passion and death he recapitulated in his person the suffering of the rejected prophets and of exilic Israel before him. Jesus, in other words, paradigmatically embodied the central biblical trajectory of embracing marginality and pain, on behalf of both the margins and the center, as testimony to his trust in the Creator of both center and margin, who is able to bring life even out of death. The person of Jesus, and especially his death on a cross, thus becomes in the New Testament a symbol of the counterideological intent of the biblical metanarrative and the paradigm or model of ethical human action, even in the face of massive injustice.65

But the cross of Jesus is not merely symbolic in the New Testament. Christians confess that in the death of this marginal one we find (paradoxically) the "center" of the biblical metanarrative. In Jesus' voluntary submission to death on our behalf and in his vindication by God through resurrection, the fundamental plot conflict introduced by human sin is in principle reversed. The cross-resurrection event is thus the denouement or climactic turning point of the entire story. Although the conclusion of the story is still future, Christians confess that in Jesus the Kingdom of God (decisive plot resolution) is at hand (see Mk 1:15; Mt 4:17).

Concluding Questions
In conclusion, two potentially troubling questions raise themselves. First of all, is our reading of the biblical text in light of postmodern questions a distortion of the biblical message, a sellout to the pluralistic spirit of the age? This is a serious question, one that cannot be simply ignored. It is a
question that anyone attempting to do apologetics must struggle with. In our case, we must admit that the encounter with postmodernity (not just as an intellectual movement, but by living in a postmodern culture) has indeed influenced both our reading of Scripture and our ministry in the church. Nevertheless, we believe not only that our rearticulation of the biblical story is faithful to the text and intent of Scripture, but that postmodernity has been immensely helpful in focusing our attention on dimensions of the text that we might otherwise have missed.66

The second question to be considered is whether we have adequately addressed the postmodern charge. Does the biblical metanarrative escape the accusation of totalization and violence? On the one hand, we believe our analysis shows that the biblical story contains the resources to shatter totalizing readings, to convert the reader, to align us with God’s purposes of shalom, compassion and justice. On the other hand, however, such transformation is never guaranteed. It is not a mechanical function of the text, but depends on our response, who claim this text as canonical. It means we must take the text of Scripture seriously, more seriously even than our theology, which is often subbiblical. It means that we must be willing for the biblical text to judge our constructions, to call us into question, to convert us. In one sense, then, the charge of totalization addressed to Christianity can only be answered by the concrete, nontotalizing life of actual Christians, the body of Christ who as living epistles (2 Cor 3:1-3) take up and continue the ministry of Jesus to a suffering and broken world. That is the only postmodern apologetic worth bothering about. If our articulation of Scripture as nontotalizing and counterideological can contribute to the empowerment of the church in the exercise of its mission in a postmodern world, perhaps that is adequate.67

3Ibid., p. 75.
4N. T. Wright describes this postmodern epistemology as a form of phenomenalism: all I can really be sure of are the phenomena, my own sensory experiences, not anything external to which those sensory experiences correspond. The result is solipsism: private reality is all there is. See the methodology section of Wright’s The New Testament and the People of God (London: SPCK/Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), esp. pp. 33-35, 51-53.
7For further discussion of “worldview” in relation to Christian higher education see Brian J. Walsh’s “Worldviews, Modernity and the Task of Christian College Education,” Faculty Dialogue 18 (Fall 1992): 13-35.
9Rorty, “Pragmatism and Philosophy,” p. 60.
10Richard Rorty, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 325. As the title suggests, Rorty is concerned to debunk the classic notion of the human mind functioning as a mirror of nature. If there is any “mirroring” going on in human knowing, the postmodernist is suspicious that it is a conjuring trick.
14Berger and Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966), p. 89. In The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1967), chap. 4. Berger describes alienation as forgetting that this world was and continues to be reproduced by humans. He says, “Men then live in the world they themselves have made as if they were fated to do so by powers that are quite independent of their own world-constructing enterprises” (p. 95). The irony of Berger’s career is that his later insistence that capitalism needs no legitimation because it has the “normative power
of facticity” on its side falls into precisely the alienated reification he warned against twenty years earlier. See his *The Capitalist Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), pp. 207-8. We are indebted to a former student, Iskandar Saher, for bringing this irony to our attention in his master’s thesis at the Institute for Christian Studies.


16. This is Albert Borgmann’s description. See *Crossing the Postmodern Divide* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 27.

17. The classic discussion of totalization is found in Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Extremity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, Penn.: Duquesne University Press, 1969). This is a very dense and complex philosophical text, but see pp. 17-18 of the introduction by John Wild for a succinct summary of what Levinas means by “totalization.”

18. James H. Olinius, “A Cold and Comfortless Hermeneutic or a Warm and Trembling Hermeneutic: A Conversation with John D. Caputo,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 19, no. 4 (1990): 351. This is an important article which attempts to articulate Christian sympathies with, yet ultimate divergence from, a philosophy of deconstruction.


21. This theme is summed up well by Gary J. Percesepe in his article “The Unbearable Lightness of Being Postmodern,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 20, no. 2 (1990): 118-35.


25. Walsh has discussed and criticized the article at length in chap. 3 of *Subversive Christianity: Imaging God in a Dangerous Time* (Bristol, U.K.: Regius, 1992/Medina, Wash.: Alta Vista College Press, 1994).

26. Fukuyama is clear that this is a metanarrative, citing as his guide G. W. F. Hegel (well known for his historical scheme of the evolution of world spirit) and the Hegelian scholar Alexander Kojève.


28. The oppressive function of the Babylonian metanarrative is evident especially from the sixth century b.c., when neo-Babylonian kings assumed the part of Marduk, the head of the Babylonian pantheon, in the liturgical reenactment of the Enuma Elish at the Akitu festival every new year. In this reenactment Marduk’s primordial conquest of chaos was identified with the human king’s political conquest of his enemies, thus legitimating Babylonian imperial supremacy. See Paul Ricoeur’s insightful analysis of the Enuma Elish in *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon, 1969), pt. 2, chap. 1.

29. Note that we are limiting our response to the ethical challenge of postmodernity. For the beginning of a response to the epistemological challenge of postmodernity (that is, how we are to account for a genuine preconceptual world, a reality given prior to our constructions), see J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used To Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995), chap. 7.


33. For other statements of these two motivational clauses, see Exodus 22:21, 27; Leviticus 19:34; Deuteronomy 5:15; 10:19; 15:15; 16:12; 23:7; 24:19-22. Such statements amply testify to the paradigmatic nature of the exodus story for Israel’s ethical life.

34. Gottwald has argued in many places, but especially in his massive work *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 B.C.E.* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1979), that the distinctiveness of Yahweh vis-à-vis the gods of Egypt and Canaan is inextricably linked to the distinctiveness of Israel’s egalitarian form of social organization. He describes the formation of Israel as “retribalization,” a conscious sociopolitical rebellion against the oppressive hegemony of Egypt and the Canaanite city-states. Whether or not the details of Gottwald’s historical and sociological reconstruction will stand the test of time, his central insight into the connection between Israel’s God and its egalitarian form of life is clearly supported by the biblical data.

35. Charles Taylor has addressed the centrality of this attitude toward suffering in our Western inheritance, although he traces it only as far back as the New Testament. See his Sources of the Self: *The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 12-13.

36. Eloquent testimony to that sensitivity is found in the contemporary tradition of Jewish Passover celebration, the Seder supper, in which the exodus narrative is remembered and reenacted. During the course of the meal, wine is ritually spilled in compassion for, and solidarity with, the suffering caused to the Egyptians by God’s deliverance of Israel at the exodus. While this suffering is realistically recognized as part of the process of historical and political liberation from a brutal regime, it is nevertheless mourned, since God does not


42 This indicates that alongside the prophetic trajectory of the embrace of pain (a trajectory that goes back to Moses, regarded in Deut 18:15 as the first prophet), there is another trajectory, which Brueggemann names both the “imperial consciousness” and “structure legitimation,” since it is typically the role of kings, at least in the ancient Near East, to enforce order (see Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, chap. 2, and “A Shape for Old Testament Theology, I: Structure Legitimation,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 47 [January 1985]: 28-46). For some time now it has been widely agreed by biblical scholars that the Old Testament prophets (as far back as Elijah and Elisha in the ninth century and Nathan in the tenth) arose largely in response to the abuses of the Israelite monarchy. In one way or another the prophets all condemn the policies and practices of Israel’s kings as essentially a recapitulation of Egyptian bondage. The narrative of 1 Kings 3-11 (in the Hebrew canon, part of the Former Prophets) itself portrays Solomon’s grandiose reign in terms similar to the empire of Egypt. Its description of a large harem, a standing army of horses and chariots, the proliferation of wisdom literature railing that of Egypt and the introduction of the corvee or forced labor for building the royal palace and the Jerusalem temple portraits, in George Mendenhall’s vivid phrase, the beginning of the “paganization” of Israel. Solomon was a new pharaoh, and Israel was returning to Egyptian bondage (see Mendenhall, “The Monarchy,” *Interpretation* 29 [1975]: 160).

43 The vivid accounts of the opposition Jeremiah encountered (from priests, other prophets and the royal establishment) are recorded in Jeremiah 20, 26-28 and 37-38. See also the prophet-priest conflict recorded in Amos 7:10-17.

44 The substance of our entire analysis of prophecy, exile and the shape of the canon is indebted to J. A. Sanders’s important essays “Adaptable for Life: The Nature and Function of Canon” and “Hermeneutics of True and False Prophecy” in *From Sacred Story to Sacred Text: Canon as Paradigm* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987).

45 Prophetic texts that speak of Israel’s mission to the Gentiles include Isaiah 42:5-7 and 49:6, while texts that speak of the restoration of the nonhuman creation include Isaiah 55:12-13 and 65:17, 25.


47 This monotheizing insight was also the basis of the so-called prophets against the nations, collections of judgment oracles found in every major canonical prophetic book (Is 13-21, Jer 46-51, Ezek 25-32) and in some minor ones (besides Amos 1:2-2:3, the entirety of Nahum and Obadiah are directed against foreign nations, while Jonah tells the story of a prophet’s mission to Nineveh, the Assyrian capital). Whereas judgments against Israel could cite infringements of the Sinai covenant laws, judgments against other nations could be rooted only in God’s purposes and claims as Creator.


49 The Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings) and the Latter Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Twelve) together form the Nev’im (Prophets), the second major grouping of books in the Masoretic Text (MT) of the Hebrew Bible. The Septuagint, although grouping and ordering the books differently (an order followed by Christian Bibles), nevertheless agrees with the MT in beginning its next major section (the Historical Books) with Joshua.

50 It is fascinating that Gerhard von Rad, arguably the greatest Old Testament scholar of the century, disregarded explicit canonical shape and regarded the Hexateuch (Genesis to Joshua), rather than the Pentateuch, as the basic textual unit of the Old Testament (see his “The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch,” in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*).


52 Besides Jeremiah 32:17 and Nehemiah 9:5-6, Psalm 136 includes creation as the start of the story. Unlike the Jeremiah and Nehemiah texts, this psalm is not obviously exilic or postexilic, since it ends the story with the entrance into the Promised Land, whereas both Jeremiah 32 and Nehemiah 9 bring the story right up to their contemporaneous exilic or postexilic situation. Nevertheless, the designation of Yahweh as “the God of heaven” in Psalm 136:26 is consistent with a late dating, since this phrase is used for God in Nehemiah (1:4; 5:24; 20), Ezra (1:2; 9:11-12; 6:9-10; 7:12, 21, 23), Daniel (2:18-19, 37, 44) and 2 Chronicles 36:23. Even those occurrences that are set before the exile speak either to pre-Israelite (Gen 24:5, 7) or non-Israelite (Jon 1:9) situations, suggesting that the phrase designates Yahweh as the true God in contexts where Israel confronted other nations with their gods.

53 It is significant that von Rad not only disregarded the canonical ending of Torah before land possession but also devalued the theme of creation in the Bible and regarded the placement of creation at the narrative beginning of the canon as theologically unimportant (see Gerhard von Rad, “The Theological Problem of the Old Testament Doctrine of Creation,” in *Creation in the Old Testament*, ed. Bernhard W. Anderson [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984], p. 54). By misreading the shape of the canon, von Rad fundamentally misconstrued the point of the story, resulting in his assessment, “presumptuous as it may sound,” that the Hexateuch functioned ideally to legitimate Israel’s election and land possession (see von Rad, *Theology of Israel’s Historical Traditions*, vol. 1 of *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker [New York: Harper & Row, 1962], p. 138).

54 We are not arguing that this interpretation of election originated in the exile. Rather, the canonical placing of the creation story at the start of the metanarrative highlights what is already implicit, and often quite explicit, in the Bible and functioned to correct self-serving, nationalistic readings of election which had arisen in Israel. For a “creational” analysis of election, see Terence E. Fretheim, Exodus (Louisville, Ky.: John Knox, 1991), pp. 13-14; Terence E. Fretheim, “The Reclamation of Creation: Redemption and Law in Exodus,” *Interpretation* 45 (October 1991): 358-59, 365-64; and Terence E. Fretheim, “The Plagues as Ecological Signs of Historical Disaster,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110, no. 3 (1991): 392.

55 Other biblical texts that connect these themes include the song of Hannah in 1 Samuel 2:1-10, the exilic pronouncements of Isaiah 40:21-31, and Psalm 22, a prayer of lament that combines the experience of marginality with acknowledgment of God as Creator (vv. 9-11) and as Lord of all nations (vv. 27-28). Not only did Jesus quote Psalm 22 on the cross (Mt 27:46).
but the story of Jesus’ death in Mark 15:22-37 contains numerous references and allusions to this psalm.

This is a pronounced tendency in some Reformed or Calvinist theology, with its central emphasis on God’s sovereignty. An extreme contemporary example may be found in the Reconstruction movement, which seeks to restore America to an ideal Puritan-like theocracy. For the two most important articulations of this ideal see Roussas John Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law* (Nutley, N.J.: Craig, 1973) and Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (Nutley, N.J.: Craig, 1977). For a good brief overview of the movement, see Rodney Clapp, *The Reconstructionists*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1990).

This may be seen as a tendency in some early liberation theology from Latin America. It is significant that Pedro Trigo, himself a Latin American liberation theologian, understands faith in God as Creator as an important antidote to both disenfranchisement and vengeful self-assertion. See Trigo, *Creation and History*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1991), pt. 2, pp. 69-108.


See Borg, *Jesus*, pp. 129-42; and *Conflict*, pp. 129-29, 133-34. It is intriguing that even Matthew parallels the Luke 6:36 text, which reads “be perfect” (or possibly “mature”), does not use the language of holiness (Mt 5:48). In both cases the context makes it clear that the holiness, perfection or mercy in question consists in loving one’s enemies, as God does.


For, see, for example, the suggestive article by John Hardwig, “The Role of Trust in Knowledge,” *Journal of Philosophy* 88 (December 1991): 693-708.

As Rorty suggests, we should reject the “Cartesian-Kantian picture presupposed by the idea of ‘our minds’ or ‘our language’ as an ‘inside’ which can be contrasted to something (perhaps something very different) ‘outside,’ “ for there is “simply no way to give sense to the idea of our minds or our language as systematically out of phase with what lies beyond our skins.” See Rorty’s *Introduction to Objectivism, Relativism and Truth* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 12.

For a fascinating account of the development of the language of “objectivity” and “subjective,” including the way in which these terms have almost completely reversed their meanings, see Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 308-12.


Ibid., p. 63.

Ibid., pp. 63-64.

Sire’s strange insistence that Rorty must answer the truth question in terms that are satisfactory to Sire suggests that he does not recognize the way in which certain philosophical traditions hold him captive. Rorty is calling for a paradigm shift that would no longer consider the questions raised by the Platonic-Cartesian-Lockean-Kantian tradition as necessary or even fruitful. As Rorty admits, “Pragmatists see the Platonic tradition as having outlived its usefulness. This does not mean that they have a new, non-Platonic set of answers to Platonic questions to offer, but rather that they do not think we should ask those questions anymore” (introduction to *Consequences of Pragmatism* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982], p. xiv). It is noteworthy that Sire acknowledges Rorty’s claim that he is not a relativist but refuses to accept it, commenting that “it is difficult to know what else to call a person who holds that we should be content to call ‘true’ whatever is accepted by an open society in open conversation” (Chris Christman, p. 65). Rorty addresses precisely this issue in his article “Solidarity or Objectivity?”: “It is not clear why ‘relativist’ should be thought an