

REDEEMER

R E P O R T

APRIL 2011

THAT'S JUST YOUR INTERPRETATION! REALLY?

BY KATHY KELLER

As a new Christian, my Uncle Bart was my nemesis. While other members of my family received the news that I was now a Christian with varying levels of bemusement or offense (my mother: "You were born in America; of course you're a Christian!!"), my uncle delighted in skewering me whenever he could. His favorite riposte, saved for when I had referred to something in the Bible as "That's just YOUR interpretation!"

At the age of something-teen, one lacks the self-assurance to say "Well, duh—it just came out of my mouth, so of course it's my interpretation," especially to an adult in whose pool one swam every summer. Plus, he had me, hermeneutically. It is true that no individual has the right to declare

that he or she has found the true interpretation of a Biblical text, and that all the church has said about it over the centuries is wrong. It is also true that no individual should think that we can interpret the Bible anyway we like. The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Anglican Church says we may not "so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another." I didn't have enough information to counter his accusation that I might be interpreting the Bible idiosyncratically, and not in line with the historic teaching of the church.

However, my uncle's real point was that there *was* no "right" interpretation of any part of the Bible. We are awash in a sea of subjectivism. No one has any more right to say this understand-

ing of the Bible is more proper than that. Basically, you could get out of the Bible whatever you wanted. Little did I know that my working-class uncle in the 1960s was anticipating the rise of post-structuralism in universities, and the deep mistrust of all language and texts. No one can be sure, they said, of what anything means. We just have to live with infinite interpretations, none of which can claim to be the true one.

As Ecclesiastes says, there is nothing new under the sun. All the major heresies (currently being referred to as "alternate streams of early Christian doctrine") were debated by the entire early church at the major ecumenical councils, and refuted.

(Continued on page 4)

GOOD FRIDAY SERVICES

5:30PM & 7:00PM

First Baptist Church, 79th & Broadway

5:30PM & 7:00PM

All Souls Church, 80th & Lexington

EASTER SERVICES

9:15AM

Ethical Culture Society, 64th and CPW

9:45AM & 11:30AM

Hunter College, 69th & Park

5:00PM & 7:15PM

First Baptist Church, 79th & Broadway

6:00PM

Hunter College, 69th & Park

EASTER SACRIFICIAL OFFERING: SUNDAY, APRIL 24

Please take time to pray and prepare for the special offering to be received for Hope for New York's work at all services Easter Sunday. 100% of the gifts collected at the Easter offering will be given to organizations affiliated with HFNY who serve the poor and marginalized.

You may also donate online at www.hfny.org/ donate or send a donation to Hope for New York, 1359 Broadway, Suite 410, NY, NY 10018 (check payable to "Hope for New York.")



MY SOUL, MY LIFE, MY ALL

BY HOWARD FREEMAN, DIRECTOR OF GENEROSITY

A government worker abused his power, extorting money and growing rich on the backs of his already beleaguered constituency. He was roundly hated, but after a local disturbance involving a celebrity known for his compassion, he paid back all those he had cheated four times over and also gave half his money to the poor.

A woman married a successful businessman. She indulged herself in luxuries and traveled extensively. Little did she think that one day, after meeting a traveling Jewish teacher, she would be using her husband's money—with his permission—to support this teacher and his other students, funding their works of mercy as they went.

An heir to his father's wealth, a man who had never worked a day in his life, became a socially prominent figure. Yet one day he

saw hanging from a cross the bloodied corpse of a traveling Jewish teacher whom he had secretly followed. He knew that he must—he wanted to—give up his expensive burial plot to bury this man's body. He boldly went to the Governor to ask permission, risking everything.

Zaccheus, Joanna, Joseph of Arimathea, their back-stories somewhat fictionalized but not their transformations, are distinguished in Scripture for their generosity. In fact, most of what we know about them is that when they met Jesus, they gave sacrificially.

Most of us are not asked to sacrifice our lives for our faith. But our reputations, our money, our time? It happens every day, yet it seems so hard to act faithfully, let alone sacrificially. Where can we get the power to act like Zaccheus, Joanna, and even

Joseph of Arimathea, giving away the tomb where he himself was to be buried? Where can we find the joy in giving like the hymn writer who sang,

*See, from his head, his hands, his feet,
sorrow and love flow mingled down.
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
or thorns compose so rich a crown.*

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,
that were an offering far too small;
love so amazing, so divine,
demands my soul, my life, my all.*

Joseph saw what we are asked to see: Christ crucified, and his blood, which flowed both because of Jesus' sorrow at our sin and his love in spite of it. So Joseph 'boldly' risked his reputation and social position, and he also gave away something of great material value. Seeing the sorrow and love of Jesus gives us the power to find a gift to give that is greater than if we owned 'the whole realm of nature.'

<https://giving.redeemer.com/giving>

BEYOND ABUSE: DEALING WITH THE WEIGHT OF CHILDHOOD SEXUAL ABUSE

This one-day seminar is for women and men affected directly or indirectly by childhood and adolescent sexual abuse (survivors, loved ones/friends of survivors, leaders ministering to survivors.)

Saturday, May 14 from 9:00AM to 3:00PM

New Song Community Church, 2230 Frederick Douglass Blvd.

\$40 registration fee. Scholarships are available.

Registration information at www.redeemer.com/care/diaconate/seminars.html

REDEEMER REPORT

The Redeemer Report is a publication of the Redeemer Presbyterian Church.

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Kathy Keller

Heather Klein

HUNTER COLLEGE AUDITORIUM

East 69TH (Between Park & Lexington)
services at 10:30AM & 6:00PM

ETHICAL CULTURE

West 64TH and CPW
service at 9:15AM

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

Corner of West 79TH and Broadway
service at 5:00PM & 7:15PM

FINANCIAL SERVICES MINISTRY LEADER TRAINING

BY AMANDA WACHEMUTH

In the continuing aftershocks of the financial crisis, Wall Street has become a by-word for excessive risk, over-compensation, and fallen ethics. As a church where many financial professionals attend, how can we thoughtfully respond to the question: “Does my work have a redemptive purpose in light of the gospel?”

Redeemer’s Financial Services Ministry, one of the larger vocational groups sponsored by the Center for Faith & Work, has moved to address that question in a deeper way. This February FSM launched the second annual Faith & Finance Leadership Class with 22 participants committed to attending six Thursday night sessions, a Saturday class, and a weekend leadership retreat, over an intensive eight-week period.

The class is structured around

Redeemer’s core understanding that the gospel will transform our hearts, community, and world. Each session begins in prayer to “open our hearts” to God’s leading, a mid-class pause for individual and corporate confession, and



February 2011 Faith & Leadership Class

a closing prayerful contemplation of a relevant Scriptural passage. Participants have drafted personal mission statements, brainstormed as a group to contrast the financial services worldview with a gospel worldview, and discussed Biblical

principles of gleaning, Sabbath, and Jubilee. Class members also receive a daily emailed devotional focusing on Biblical reflection on finance.

The culmination of the class is a leadership retreat in the Poconos. This year’s group will join the leaders from last year’s class to form working groups addressing such topics as developing well-structured compensation, truth-telling in a competitive environment, igniting a prayer movement in the financial industry, and connecting people in the industry towards the greater purpose of finance.

We ask you to join us in prayer for a financial industry reoriented to the storyline of economic flourishing and Biblical shalom as our Redeemer financial community grows.

A FANTASTIC FREELANCE GIG

BY CHRISTIAN WOLFE

This morning I sit at a conference table in a design studio in Soho. Hot dog. I am working with two dudes I’ve gotten back into contact with. It’s a product of the action my coach prescribed in the Redeemer Job Search Skills Training (www.redeemer.com/jobsearchskills/training) through the Diaconate* ministry. Met somebody for coffee. Let them know what I was doing. Was interested in what they were doing. Followed up with an email. Several weeks later a call from a mutual friend. A few email exchanges. A lot of prayer. Then BOOM!—A fantastic freelance gig: an international fashion brand and retailer is opening two stores

in New York City, one on 5th Ave. and one in Herald Square. The client needed advertising, communications, and events for the launches. The creative director and strategist needed a suit: a guy with a background working with international clients, with managing disparate groups of people toward a common goal, and generally putting the matchbox out of reach on the top shelf so the house doesn’t get burned down (or putting feet to the fire when stuff needed to get done). With the help of contacts, the support of Redeemer’s incredible Job Search Round Table and extraordinary Skills Training, and by God’s grace—as His hand is all

over it—I’m employed. God willing, this contract continues through Christmas. And I know that about three months before it’s up, another email will go out letting people know what’s up, just like what I learned from the Job Search Skills Training. God bless Redeemer and my fellow job seekers.

**The Diaconate is Redeemer’s ministry of mercy addressing the needs of those in our church family experiencing hardship. The Diaconate is our response to God’s calling to be merciful, to love and care for one another in practical ways. If you need practical assistance, please call the Diaconate Helpline, (212) 726-1334.*



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...INTERPRETATION! REALLY? (CONT'D FROM PAGE 1)

That's where the Apostle's Creed and the Nicene Creed and the others come from: the wisdom of the early church, confirmed over and over in subsequent centuries. Today, however, many are resuscitating those old heresies and pretending that they have just as much a legitimate a claim to "orthodox Christian belief." This is not only to overturn the wisdom of generations of Christians, but the guidance of the Holy Spirit as well. Didn't Jesus promise that the Holy Spirit would guide his disciples into all truth? When the church created the canon of documents that we now know as the New Testament, that was nothing less than the Holy Spirit at work in the decisions made by prayerful believers.

It's only been as the years and decades have rolled by that I have discovered how weak my uncle's assertion actually was. First, there is the common sense level. When he said, "that's your interpretation" he expected that I could understand him, that he wasn't telling me to go and kick my father in the shins. When it comes down to it, we *do* believe that it is

possible to convey meaning through language. To treat the Bible as a mysterious, cloudy document that says heaven-knows-what is to treat it unlike any other communication that we receive.

Simple, clear language may not be artificially made cloudy and complicated because the clear teaching of scripture collides with our culture's values or my feelings or your aspirations. A dear friend of mine, a brilliant woman, nevertheless feels free to say: "Yes, it's quite clear that the Bible forbids homosexual practice. But God made me with an attraction for other women, and I'm gay, so He's just going to have to figure it out." No, not really. If God has forbidden something in his Word, then we're the ones who have to figure out a way to bring our lives in line with his commands, rather than looking for a way to wriggle out of the command.

Yet today I meet what seem to be ever-increasing numbers of people who are apparently content to assert that there's no telling, really, what the Bible has to say about this or that doctrine or practice. This allows them to

come to the convenient conclusion that anyone who has a strong feeling one way or another ought to be able to follow that feeling into practice without being made to give up the claim to orthodox belief. The biblical talk of Hell makes you uncomfortable?—then don't believe in it. Jesus as the only way to be saved sound exclusive? Rather than work out that if Jesus's death wasn't necessary for salvation, then the incarnation, humiliation, agony, death and resurrection were a nonsensical waste of God's time, instead of an expression of his cosmic love, simply assert that it isn't so.

After all, that's just YOUR interpretation, right? No, unfortunately, it's not just my interpretation, or that of a few backward souls; we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses that we had best consider how to use our red editorial pens on our lives, rather than on God's Word.

PS – In the "God always has the last word" department: years later my Uncle Bart became a Christian, the only one of my parents' generation that I am aware of having done so.