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The Spiritual Wisdom of the Gospels for Christian Preachers and Teachers: On Earth as it is in Heaven, by John Shea

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Another example that seems to contradict the emphasis Fuller places on rankism is the story of a gentlemen who mistreated a waitress at a restaurant. In this gentlemen's coming to recognize he was wrong for this mistreatment he states, "I'm now less prone to pull rank when addressing people who are lower rank than I am" (p. 137). The flaw in the thinking is that simply because the waitress is serving the meal she ranks less than the customer. Technically, there is no formal relationship of power here. It is not an abuse of rank; it is an abuse of the waitress's God-given dignity.

In the last chapter of the book, Fuller creates a "Nobody Manifesto," which highlights the essential underemphasized point of the book. "Dignity is innate, nonnegotiable, and inviolate. No person's dignity is any less worthy of respect, any less sacred than anyone else's. Equal dignity requires equal opportunity" (p. 143). This is the true heart of the injustices that Fuller writes about throughout his book. Instead of emphasizing that the human dignity of all people is violated in any -ism, Fuller attempts to portray rankism as the overarching -ism. In doing so, Fuller attempts to force all instances of disrespect under an umbrella that does not actually encompass all -isms present in today's world.

Michael Brennan teaches high school math and computer and is the assistant basketball coach at St. Rita High School in Chicago, IL.

THE SPIRITUAL WISDOM OF THE GOSPELS FOR CHRISTIAN PREACHERS AND TEACHERS: ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN—YEAR A

JOHN SHEA
LITURGICAL PRESS, 2004
\$29.95, 332 pages

Reviewed by Peggy Elson

The Spiritual Wisdom of the Gospels for Christian Preachers and Teachers is the first in a set of four books based on the Sunday Gospel readings in The Revised Common Lectionary and the Roman Missal's Lectionary for Mass.

In addition to Christian preachers and teachers, the intended audience includes all Christians searching for the wisdom found in the Gospels.

In the early 1990s, Shea was invited by Reverend Wayne Prist of the Center for Development in Ministry to facilitate a Scripture study which involved other invited preachers and teachers to focus “on the personal, preachable, and teachable meanings” (p. xi) of the Gospels. As a result of the inspiration acquired from these sessions, Shea developed courses and workshops. It was from the experiences of talking with and listening to these Lutheran, Methodist, Episcopalian, Mennonite, Presbyterian, and Catholic clergy that the author was able to see the wisdom of the Gospels more clearly and decided on the purpose of this book.

Shea felt moved to write a resource book—one with a slightly different focus—as a result of participating in the group. Shea analyzed the manner in which Jesus complimented, critiqued, and praised the characters in the Gospels in order to inspire meditation, reflection, and spiritual development, referring to this approach as “literary-spiritual interpretation.”

Shea has added to and complemented the resources for preachers and teachers by developing spiritual viewpoints which speak to current situations using the literary-spiritual approach. This reviewer found Shea’s effort successful. The book takes a dual approach by analyzing and teaching the Gospel in part I and by reflecting and deepening the spiritual message in part II.

Each entry in the book reflects on a different Sunday’s Gospel in the Year A cycle. Each entry has two parts: The first analyzes the reading of the Gospel text and the second has a teaching that highlights a spiritual insight from the Gospel passage. It is in the second part that the author endeavors to connect the spiritual wisdom with life today.

In each entry, Shea comments on the Gospel reading in a brief yet insightful way. This is followed by a teaching that elaborates on a spiritual idea. Stories or poems are sometimes used to convey the spiritual idea. The connection to culture is sometimes given through Shea’s personal stories.

The third Sunday of Lent’s Gospel is John 4:5-42. The title of this chapter is “Disappearing into the Fullness of Joy.” In section one of the chapter, Shea refers to this passage in John which mentions Jacob and his well and refers to the story in Genesis that foreshadows the major theme of the woman at the well. Shea recounts the story of Jacob when he moved the stone from the mouth of the well so the sheep could drink and then takes each sentence or phrase of the Gospel and reflects on Jesus’ mood. Shea suggests that it is the woman’s thirst that will be slaked by the end of story by the living water of Christ. The ignorance of the disciples, who had gone to the city in search of food, is contrasted with the reception of the woman at the well. Shea’s

analysis shows how Jesus directs the content of the conversation with her and how she then comes to know God and asks Jesus for a drink.

In the reflection piece of the chapter, Shea refers to Mother Teresa's prayer about the fruits of silence, prayer, faith, love, service, and peace, and connects the woman at the well story to this prayer by explaining the patterns of experience that we all must witness in the journey from silence to peace. This experience is similar to the woman's understanding of Jesus as Jew, prophet, and Messiah, "to receiving his revelation of himself as 'I am'" (p. 127). It is in this pattern of experience that one reaches the fullness of joy.

This reviewer finds *On Earth as It is in Heaven* to be a valuable resource for anyone searching for wisdom as it is revealed in the Gospels. Jesus' compassion and unconditional love and mercy are thoughtfully and spiritually presented with a sound foundation in Scriptural knowledge and a fresh perspective in the spiritual wisdom of those Scriptures. This resource would be beneficial for teachers of Scripture and for personal or small group studies.

On Earth as It Is in Heaven is for those still searching for wisdom and who want to more fully realize the promise that Jesus makes in the Gospels.

Peggy Elson is the executive director of the Teacher Advancement Program for the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, IN.

MORE DAMNED LIES AND STATISTICS: HOW NUMBERS CONFUSE PUBLIC ISSUES

JOEL BEST
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS, 2004
\$19.95, 217 pages

Reviewed by Jennifer Ketchum

In a time when we are inundated with information through various forms of media, discerning fact from fiction, truth from lies, and reality from idealism has become a daily task. When confronted with statistics, do we ever think about where these numbers come from, how they are produced, how they are interpreted, or how we interpret them? Best provides us with some