

Preface to the 2010 Edition

Almost four decades have passed since *The Bible in Human Transformation* was first published. What originally drove the book was my desire to change the way people engaged in Bible study in order to bring about transformation in their lives. I think I have been at least somewhat successful in that goal. I have been gratified by the many expressions of appreciation for the approach I take here. I am also heartened by the polemical responses of critics, since these responses demonstrate that they have paid sincere attention to my concerns!

I can honestly say that my desire to enliven Bible reading has not changed in the intervening decades. What *has* changed is that in these decades I have personally experienced the oppression of peoples in South Africa and Chile under dictatorships and have known those who have struggled with poverty and suffering. If anything, these experiences have intensified my desire to open the good news of the Bible to bring freedom and hope to the world. As a result I have concentrated my writing on the encounter between the nonviolent teaching of Jesus and the Powers That Be. This has meant that I deal not only with political issues but also, for example, with the way that social attitudes toward homosexuality amount to psychic “Powers That Be.” All of these endeavors are in the interest of freeing human beings from bondage.

Many others have shared this goal of enlarging freedom for all. What I have come to see is that Jesus’ teaching was not just that we should be free, but that we should be *human*. Oppression, poverty, and suffering inhibit our freedom to move on to the real point of the gospel: to become fully human beings.

As I look around now, I have been gratified by how many pastors, youth workers, and educators are using the

new paradigm that I propose here. I am concerned, however, that this approach to understanding the message of Jesus might become just one more way to study the Bible rather than what I hope will be a genuine paradigm shift. In the first edition I wrote that I wanted to turn my back on the modernist-fundamentalist debate, but that debate continues to distract us from our human quest.

My purpose here is not so much to interact with past responses to the book as to invite the reader to consider anew my plea in these pages for a different way of approaching the Bible. My hope, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, is that the republication of this book will help the reader respond to the questions I posed not only in *The Bible in Human Transformation* but also in my later work, *The Human Being*: Before he was worshiped as God incarnate, how did Jesus struggle to incarnate God? Before he became identified as the source of all healing, how did he relate to, and how did he teach his disciples to relate to, the Source of all healing? Before forgiveness came to be understood solely as a function of his cross, how did Jesus understand people to have been forgiven? Before the kingdom of God became a compensatory afterlife or a future utopia adorned with all the political trappings that Jesus resolutely rejected, what did he mean when he proclaimed the nearness of “the kingdom”? Before he became identified as Messiah, how did he relate to the profound meaning of the messianic image? Before he himself was made the sole mediator between God and humanity, how did Jesus experience and communicate the presence of God? (See *The Human Being: Jesus and the Enigma of the Son of Man* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002], p. 2.)

I wish to thank my friend Dr. Thomas Michael, Professor Emeritus in the Department of Management of Rowan University in Glassboro, New Jersey, for help in writing this preface. I am grateful for all those who have sustained me through a difficult illness. I look forward to you, the reader, joining me in working through these questions.