

Personal Reflections

Brueggemann Chapter 1
Christopher J. Kinner
10/8/05

While reading the first chapter it was good for this writer to continually ask what applicability this text holds as it pertains to my life and the ministry that God has called me to. It was easy to agree with Brueggemann that my familiarity with the Mosaic narratives does prevent me from considering the radical and revolutionary social reality that emerged due to the faithfulness of Moses (5). It was also quite understandable that the participants in the Exodus found themselves involved in the intentional formation of a new social community to match the vision of God's freedom (7). Certainly this is God's desired end for all His people.

Brueggemann, however, began making inroads for greater personal application when he spoke of an empire that pressed, urged and invited its members to pretend everything is all right (11). For this writer that is one of the most calculating of Satan's schemes in this world; to convince the people held under his bondage that they are alright and that to cry out to a God of freedom for deliverance would make them both weak and unhappy. Which of course they already are, but the empire of evil is maintained under a veil of false pretense. Risking the freedom of God that can be found in the depth of your true pain and weakness in spite of the will and power of the old regime (12) does mean that God works both sides of the street (15).

When Brueggemann speaks of Moses taking sides with the losers, the powerless and the marginal people (16), this writer can only think of those who he has been called to care for and minister to. The pain faced by Satan's reign in this world is so great, the prophet is definitely needed today to proclaim the power of our God to those strong enough to be weak and cry out in their bondage for deliverance.

Personal Reflections

Brueggemann Chapter 2
Christopher J. Kinner
10/15/05

Brueggemann begins this chapter with the phrase, "Moses was mainly concerned with the formation of a community with a counter consciousness" (21). As a Pastor and leader in God's work, this statement in my experience seems to overlook the value of God's leadership and call. It also ignores the view that many writers have had of the plagues as opportunities for Pharaoh to be humbled before God and the Egyptians to repent and this society to be reformed. Our God is truly "Rich in mercy" (Eph. 2:4) and I would suggest God is not as interested in dismantling human regimes as He is in establishing His rule of peace, mercy and faith. Thus the Mosaic vision that Brueggemann speaks of should, in my humble opinion, be described as God's vision, design and desire for His people. A vision that was communicated to Moses as God spoke through Him.

I do agree with Brueggemann that "a totally free God is essential to a marginal people if they are to have a legitimate standing ground against the oppressive order of the day" (23). However it is important to note it was these very people that clamored for a human king so they might be like other nations rather than trust the leadership, mercy and protection of God as their King. Often human nature can cause us to seek social security by placing power into the hands of other human caretakers who are then corrupted by the position we have asked them to assume. When Brueggemann speaks of the emergence of tax districts, bureaucracy, and educational programs (seeking wisdom) (24), one can only consider the machinery that has been constructed in our own social context that promises to provide care for the marginal and does so with negligible success. The questions that come to mind for this reader is: what is the requirement for the individual to care for others in the social context of society? Also, what is the responsibility of the individual to trust the provision of God? Platitudes of arrogance that judge the state or the humble may not contain the solution of humility and trust our God seeks in our human circumstance.

Brueggemann Chapter 3 Reflection

Christopher J. Kinner 10/23/05

Brueggemann begins his third chapter with several paragraphs that begin with the word 'we.' However as the chapter proceeds, his utilization of beginning paragraphs with the word 'I' returns leading this reader to wonder if this is a literary device being utilized by the author to draw the reader into agreement with his assertions and perspective. Whatever the case, as a critical thinker this reader had one major area of disagreement and one area of agreement with the writer in this chapter.

First to disagree with Brueggemann, he asserts that "We" are all "children of the royal consciousness" (39) and further asserts that the "regime is not interested in what people experience, but in their behavior, which can be managed" (41). He highlights the need for the prophet to retain imagination and creativity in resisting the royal consciousness. This reader wonders if it is truly the purpose of the regime to encourage creativity and imagination of its people for such purposes as retaining the base of power. For those that are truly called of God and dedicated to His kingship, creativity and imagination are dominant features that are generally found in the vital Christian life. However, is it the presence of God that leads the individual from a bland and expressionless existence to a passionate and full life of freedom filled with God's direction or the regime that the lazy and over reliant masses follow that is to blame? For this reader, God should be blamed as the 'difference maker' and the regimes of this world should be noted as providing the masses with the lazy and bland existence that a lost people prefer.

To agree with Brueggemann, this reader much appreciated his insight on the double grief of Jeremiah. As a pastor, the insight he offers here is comforting for me as I ache for those under my watch care that reject God's desires for their lives and live lives of fear and struggle rather than to fully trust in the full goodness and grace of our true King. God does have "time for His people and God insists His people take His time seriously" (48). Therefore the grief of our Father over sin, separation from Him and death is real and intense. In ministry, truly grieving the loss of God's intentions for how we are to live is paramount to turning hearts and ears to Him. Truly through Jesus we see that "only those who embrace the reality of death will receive the new life" (56). The loss of the thrones of this world is imperative to the uncontested kingship of God in this world and while we should not grieve for the loss of worldly kingdoms, this writer would suggest that we should weep that they exist at all.

Brueggemann Chapter 4 Reflection

Christopher J. Kinner 10/30/05

Brueggemann begins chapter four of his writing by confirming his assertion that Jeremiah "was concerned with radical criticism" (59). Although for this reader this assertion should regard the Lord God as the key instigator of Jeremiah's vision and radical approach to ministry among God's people. To be sure Jeremiah was a grieving prophet, who God chose to reveal the true nature of His heart for his people. Brueggemann asserts his governing hypothesis that "the alternative prophetic community is concerned both with criticizing and energizing...To show the royal consciousness will indeed end...and [bring] fresh forms of faithfulness and vitality" (59). This reader would, however, deny this general assumption and seek to elevate the rhetoric of Brueggemann's logic to a deeper comprehension of human interaction and social comprehension. This assertion would suggest 'God desires the individuals of the kingdom to return to a faith that is vital and energized and that such a faith among the masses would revitalize the entire kingdom from the least to the greatest.' In support of such a statement would be the very work of the prophet that Brueggemann describes later in his chapter; a work that does not support his thesis that the least in the kingdom were indeed powerless victims who the royal consciousness had victimized, but rather the very individuals who had sought comfort, support and become overly reliant and lazy under the 'royal consciousness' they had clamored for.

As a minister of the Gospel this reader did greatly appreciate Brueggemann's assessment of the ways the prophets "penetrated despair" (63) through the utilization of symbols (mining the memory and use of words), the public expression of hope and yearning and the clear explanation of the "newness that redefines." In these ways the modern prophet joins in with his ancient counterpart; not with the desire to bring an end to the "royal consciousness," but in order to energize individuals to active citizenship in the Kingdom of God. These words along with this writer's discussion of the "language of amazement" (67) reminded this reader of the importance of the discipline of the homiletic endeavor each Sunday as I speak God's word and bring His vision to His people. Certainly the new song, new birth and nourishment are needed each week as a support for God's people who like the Hebrews must be reminded that becoming lazy is a grave sin that the individual will be held accountable for (Hebrews 6:12).

Brueggemann Chapter 5 Reflection

Christopher J. Kinner 11/30/05

Through Brueggemann's perspective, "the destructive rage of the pseudo-king" (Herod's murder of the children) and Rachel's subsequent grief each mark the struggle of the existing rulers attempt to hold onto power. For this reader the strong message that was found in Brueggemann's discussion makes a point that is very preachable. Why would a child born in a backwater town such as Nazareth in rather poor circumstances constitute such a strong threat to this king? How would this Jewish child threaten the strength and veracity of this king? As with 'evil kings' of our time, this king "will take with him those he can who appear to be those that threaten him" (84). Jesus' entry to earthly living is one that is marked by the acknowledgement of King Herod that Jesus indeed will bring an end to all worldly kingdoms and with this ending bring a new kingdom to power.

Brueggemann also made a fine point regarding Jesus' interruption in the way the Sabbath was viewed. Certainly Jesus did not recognize the Sabbath as a place to maintain the social order and thus allow the pure to benefit through its use. Rather Jesus viewed this time of worship not as a manager, but rather as a 'mystic.' In Larry Crabb's book, "The Safest Place on Earth," he devotes a chapter to this dynamic as it works in our lives and churches today. In my life I am learning to pursue the deep well of relationship with God and derive my actions from this well. Through this relationship, I desire to be like Jesus in Luke 13 as He healed a woman on the Sabbath after calling her to Him in the synagogue. A radical change that showed those in attendance a true picture of what the new kingdom, the kingdom of God is to look like. This was certainly a kingdom that ended the power of those men who were managing faith and counting citizens. This was a new kind of kingdom.

Brueggemann Chapter 6 Reflection

Christopher J. Kinner 11/30/05

Brueggemann begins this Chapter recapitulating many of his thoughts from the previous chapter. One such thought that stood out to this reader was Brueggemann's assertion that "this new one from God could not and would not be counted" (103). This sounded reminiscent of Ecclesiastes 1:15, "What is twisted cannot be straightened; what is lacking cannot be counted." Certainly Jesus is what creation was lacking. He as Messiah, Savior and God with us served a purpose that straightens our paths and provides exactly what Solomon was searching for in what was an empty world.

As we enter into the Christmas celebration this year I found much encouragement from Brueggemann's insight that the birth of a new king brings with it "Jubilee from old debts, an amnesty from old crimes and a beginning again in a movement of freedom" (103). When I reflected on the opportunity this brought to Shepherds and others that were socially marginalized, I also remembered how young David as a marginalized shepherd was provided the opportunity by God to display his faith and trust in God as he went before Goliath. As God called upon the hearts of these shepherds to seek His son, was He celebrating His love for David? Just as earthly kings took note of the significance of Jesus' birth, those who were after God's own heart took notice as well.

Finally, I do want to make mention of Brueggemann's observation of the resurrection. For this is the definitive end to the systems of this world. When we realize that our God has power over death and sees no defeat in its apparent threat to us or our kingdoms, this does free us to be radical members of His new kingdom of life and joy. Even as we grieve the loss of the old ways, the new kingdom has come and come through the very means that the old kingdom fears. Death provides no sting or fear in the new kingdom that God has provided through His Son.

Brueggemann Chapter 7 Reflection

Christopher J. Kinner 12/06/05

Brueggemann's final chapter contains a note on the practice of ministry with regard to the duties of the prophet as described throughout this text. While this chapter is quite short and simply recapitulates the main themes of his work, Brueggemann does make one point that this reader found to be exceptional. His assertion that radical faith is a gift, as Brueggemann observes the unsettling nature of uncertainty and observes that "our ministry will always be practiced through our own conflicted selves." Further suggesting that "such radical faith is not an achievement... Rather, it is a gift, and we are left to wait receptively, to watch and pray."

This assertion reminded me of the growth and encouragement to prayer that Jesus brought to His disciples. In Luke 11 we find the disciples observing Jesus at prayer and asking Him to teach them to pray; Jesus does so and adds in verse 13 the encouragement that they seek in prayer to receive the Holy Spirit from God. Later in Luke the disciples are seen to lack the fervor for this prayer in Luke 22:46 as they fall asleep rather than to seek the Holy Spirit. Luke 24:44-49 finds these same men encouraged to wait in the Holy Spirit after having their minds opened so they would understand the teaching that Jesus had provided them with. Finally Acts 2:33 finds the disciple Peter preaching to the crowd of the availability of the Holy Spirit to all those who believe.

Brueggemann does not really seem drawn to the dynamic presence of the Holy Spirit as a catalyst for change in the life of the prophet. However I am convinced that this is the source of the prophetic voice and the resulting internal conflict that seems to arise. Paul describes in Romans 6:6 the "old self" that struggles to resist the coming of the kingdom of God. God's Holy Spirit within the believer seeks to transform us into something entirely new and different that the world no longer will recognize. This is the true source of the Prophetic Imagination.