

BOOKMARKS

The Silence of Jesus

ROBERT KOCH

The field of New Testament scholarship - or more precisely, parable scholarship - has been especially fruitful in North America for the last decade or more. Having absorbed the insights of literary criticism, hermeneutics and structuralism, and employing all the tools of historical research, parable scholars have attempted to penetrate the theological frameworks which surround the parables in order to comprehend their original meaning. For the most part, this project has resulted in interpretations which stress the existential and/or poetic character of Jesus' message. Yet the metaphysical assumptions of the new interpretative categories have been retained and, indeed, have not been seriously questioned.

Now the subject matter of Jesus' narrative world is "everyday life." His stories and sayings depict men and women engaged in ordinary activities - cleaning, planting, buying and selling, making bread, giving dinners, going on journeys. Here we encounter merchants, shepherds, landowners, children in the marketplace. To understand such everyday life in reference to the coherence and totality of an interpretative framework - whether it be theological, philosophical, or literary - means to assume that everyday life is nothing in itself. It requires redemption, mediation, aesthetic justification. Historically, these tasks have been taken up by priests, philosophers, artists; nowadays, everyday life is comprehended as a totality by experts. Essentially, the function of the university is to manufacture these experts for the benefit of ordinary social reality - that is, to make it more efficient.

This understanding of the relationship between everyday life and its comprehended meaning has its roots in the primitive experience of the sacred as an expansive, universalizing, cosmological power. But there is another experience of power, long neglected, in which meaning is expressed precisely in terms of its implosive character. This is the power of the "loric." Whereas the sacred constitutes worlds, engenders history, and drives continually beyond itself towards the infinite, the loric is

characterized by intimacy, placehood, particularity, self-enclosure. The distinction between these experiences of power has wide implications. To take one example, a profound issue in contemporary feminism concerns the attempt to recover in all their richness the local and particular modes of thinking and being, hitherto associated with women in their household and domestic roles. Explanations which refer to universals (experts) invariably reduce these experiences to ideology. The question, then, is how one recovers the meaning of the loric as loric, the particular as particular, difference as difference.

In our context, can we understand Jesus' stories of everyday life in its everydayness? And what is the essence of the power manifested therein?

The Silence of Jesus can be read as perhaps the most radical attempt at such an understanding. Professor Breech has pared down the "core material" of Jesus' sayings--i.e. those accepted as authentic by New Testament scholars - in order to "listen to the stories", as he puts it. He distinguishes between eight "kingdom" sayings, seven "photodramatic" parables, and five phonodramatic parables. The most revealing kingdom saying is the following: *But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates. "We piped to you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn." For John came neither eating nor drinking and they say, "He has a demon"; I came eating and drinking, and they say, "Behold, a glutton and a drunkard, and a friend of tax collectors and sinners."*

In this Breech sees the central passion of the historical Jesus. For Jesus has seen the reality of his generation's response to him; it is not simply his eating practices, but his *freedom as a person* which causes their scorn. Along with Nietzsche and Scheler, Breech understands this scorn as an expression of *ressentiment* - the sick, coiling impulse to detract, to compare, to

devalue - ultimately, a mode of being which denies the actual, and worships the ideal it can never have. But for Jesus the ultimate reality is the kingdom of God, i.e. that power which engenders the mode of being of free persons. This power is among us. It cannot be possessed: it can be received only in free acceptance. And in its communication it enables persons to be present to one another. For Breech, Jesus locates the essence of this power in *interpersonal life*. But his power does not go beyond that life, in assurances of rewards, happiness, or eternal life. The longer

phonodramatic parables depict the complexity of the conflict of interpersonal life, the consequences of choosing to live in story as a free person--the imminent violence of evil and the demonic, the impersonal and the non-personal. The shorter photodramatic parables have a different emphasis. Here, Breech claims Jesus opens up a way of looking at our everyday relationships towards things, such that we need not look beyond but at the things themselves; and thereby encounter our own selves as "counter, original, spare, and strange."

For Breech, the power of the kingdom of God is essentially love of neighbour--love of the *other*. This is not new. What is new, however, is the conviction that the other *must remain an other*. In other words, it must provide the grounds for its own interpretation. As Breech says, the context of this interpretation is silence--the word that is not spoken, the power that will not reveal itself when pressed for transcendence and universality. All this is simply to say that it is in the stories of everyday life, and nowhere else, where Pilate's troubling question is answered.

Earle's changing dance

PAULETTE PEIROL

In a retrospective of his work at Toronto Dance Theatre, choreographer David Earle shows how he takes raw emotions and refines them into subtle, persuasive dance.

Quartet explores the geometric possibilities of four dancers intertwined and linked by a long rope. Although they escape this bondage for short periods to dance as couples, the performers are continually faced with the rope, and its restrictions. The dancers were best with their individual movements, since the group segments did not always harmonize.

Bugs is a comic, kaleidoscopic picnic of critters who seem to have orgiastic fun. Although the dancing is coy and the beach costumes extravagant, the choreography retains insect-like movement qualities. Karen du Plessis' slug was the highlight of the piece and contrasted nicely with the spastic movement of her lovebug, danced by Julian Littleford. Two male bugs, with their crash helmets, sunglasses and long-johns, gave the audience a hearty laugh.

Graham Jackson began *Frost-watch* by reciting "Like a red leaf in autumn, the human heart cannot bear too much pressure." Lacking music, the piece relies on the dramatic ability of its two dancers. Grace Miyagawa has it, fortunately. She is also a fine dancer and incorporated deep emotion into her

simple movements. However, Luc Tremblay, lacked sufficient emotional involvement, making the piece static and monotonous.

Baroque Suite, set to Corelli, Bach and Vivaldi lacked lustre in the first two segments, entitled *Duet* and two segments, entitled *Duet and Mirrors*. Although pleasing to watch, the lyrical dancing lacked focus and motivation. The finale, using the entire company, was much more rewarding. Earle uses harmonic movement and lively variations within the pattern. The eye has a general focus, but is drawn to various movements which are unsynchronized. The finale effectively balanced this simplicity and differentiation.

Legend explores the Native American roots of dance, finding its origins in the 'music' of nature and animals. The piece was developed in a series of workshops, and has been reworked many times by the

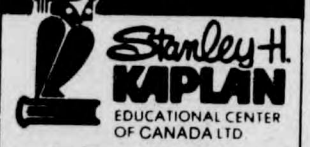
choreographer. Earle uses instruments such as hand drums, and wooden blocks, to recreate rhythmic tribal music. Instruments representative of the Snake, Deer and Bird, inspire the Boy who is fasting in the woods as part of his ritual passage to manhood. The Snake and its Spirit were danced mesmerizingly by Julian Littleford and Lucie Boissinot. Their sleek, refined movement was haunting.

Christopher House, as the Boy, illustrated Earle's exploitation of a dancer's acting skill. House's transformation from naive fear to spiritual ecstasy was convincing, if not overwhelming. Unfortunately, the animals giving instruments to the Boy was unnecessarily literal.

Profiles of Dance continues at Toronto Dance Theatre until March 5, featuring the works of Patricia Beatty and Peter Randazzo. Earle, Beatty and Randazzo are the artistic directors of Toronto Dance Theatre.

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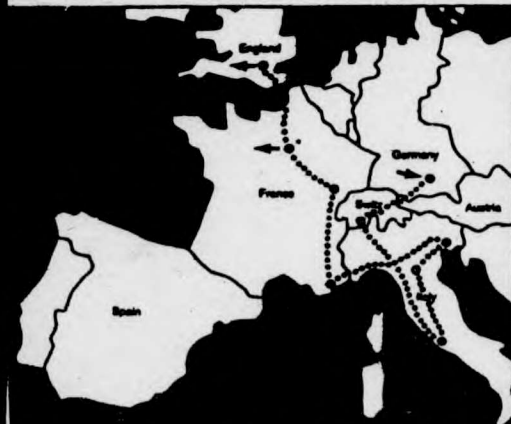
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