

Biblical Adventures—1979-1983

Turning to Scripture

Good Friday, 1978, marked a sort of turning point in my life. As I knelt in the darkened St. Thomas Church after the austere liturgy of Good Friday, I remained in my pew, praying for a miracle to save my brother Joe who was dying of a brain tumor. I vowed to God that I would stop smoking if he could live. I kept that vow, but my brother did not recover. He died that fall, just before his 44th birthday.

My brother's illness had hurt me, taking from me someone I loved. He who had been so vital and creative one day, was suddenly dying from a brain tumor the next. He who had been so genial, so charming, so talented, now needed his daughter to accompany him and pay his fare on the bus. (He could no longer drive.) I had looked up to him. In my sadness, I turned to poetry and to the psalms. "In the day of my distress I sought the Lord/ At night my hands were raised without ceasing; my soul refused to be consoled. I remembered my God and I groaned. I pondered and my spirit fainted."

I began going to Mass again, even every day when possible. I spent time with him whenever I could get to Kansas City. Music and poetry, especially the Psalms helped me to grieve. My ever-practical mind suggested enrolling in a scripture class--even though I was still studying interior designer in the evenings and teaching a full schedule at Chicago State. Instead of just weeping to the psalms, maybe studying scripture and the psalms could help me understand the ways of God.

The University of Chicago community where I live is blessed with, among other wonders, a consortium of graduate divinity schools. Scripture is taught as part of the Master's of Divinity curriculum in all of them. One of them, Catholic Theological Union, was only a few blocks away. Carroll Stuhlmueller, a Passionist, was on the CTU faculty, and I knew him from the inspiring lectures on prophets that he gave when I was in the convent at St. Mary's. I told him I wanted to take scripture classes there; he agreed. He thought that studying scripture was a natural progression from my years in the convent. I had only one more year of a three-year course in at Harrington Institute of Interior Design, and after that I would have time for graduate courses in scripture at CTU. I would dive in right away.

To make sure that I do all the work I signed up for credit for the courses. (I was applying for full professorship at CSU and I could add these to my resume.) I could earn a certificate with a certain number of courses. There were so many offerings that I could easily fit one or two with my teaching schedule each term. CTU was on the same quarter system as the U of C, and my schedule at CSU

(then on the trimester system) could work around the courses. I would take classes in the evenings or on my days off.

Only years later did I realize that my vow had been answered, not for Joe, but for myself. From 1979-1983, prime years of my life, I took all the courses I could find at CTU and gave myself over to the study of the books of the Old and New Testament, as well as non-canonical and intertestamental texts. As I look back now on those class notes and the papers I wrote, I realize how blessed I was to have had that opportunity, to study with those teachers, at that time of my life, when my mind was free and disciplined and loved research. The classes afforded me an intellectual and spiritual challenge. I wrote some very interesting papers, which as I look back and reread, I know I couldn't write like that anymore. Grace was leading me; I appreciate that more now than I did at the time.

Old Testament and Psalms

Carroll had advised me to start with Dianne Bergant's **Introduction to the Old Testament**. This course, he said, was required, and would open my eyes. It certainly did. We lost our innocence in that course. Dianne revealed to a large number of us seminarians, nuns and me (I was the only lay person in that course), that the Pentateuch was not in fact written by Moses, as we had all been taught, but that four authorial strains had been detected behind the text: the Yawist (J), Eloist (E), Deuteronomist (D), and Priestly (P) sources. As I had been trained in literature, finding the author behind the work made sense. So many books with so many contrary versions would of course indicate multiple authors with different viewpoints: The Yawist referred to God as Yahweh and was associated with the southern kingdom of Judah (950 BCE); the Eloist referred to God as Elohim and came from the northern kingdom of Israel (850 BCE) The Deuteronomist was interested in the laws and reforms and came from Jerusalem (699 BCE). The Priestly source was written in exile (500 BCE) This was Wellhausen's formula. It was all very exciting. So many new things to learn! This really was an extension of my literary studies. Now we looked at scripture texts, thinking about the *sitz-in-leben* or life-setting, the context—**who** the speaker was, **whom** he was writing for, **why, where and when**. Dianne made the introductory class and exciting discovery. It was like the beginning of a rich journey.



Winter quarter of 1979-1980 was the last semester of coursework for my Interior Design degree. I had thought of working as an interior designer on the side when I finished, but now I wanted to keep taking Scripture courses, so I signed up for one of Carroll's courses on prophets in the winter quarter **Evolving Forms of Prophecy** (late prophets). and for **Psalms** in the Spring of 1980.

Prophets and Psalms were Carroll's two specialties and loves. How fortunate we were to have him for a teacher. He embodied the prophet in my mind. He challenged us to reflect on the prophets and psalms and apply our readings to our lives today. He asked provocative questions and asked us to write reflections, from our readings. I immersed myself in the history of Israel and the many ways it had disappointed Yahweh who had to send his various prophets again and again at different stages of its history to warn it and try to get it to return to Yahweh. In the many study logs that we prepared for class based on our readings I poured out my own beliefs and philosophy. Carroll would always write encouraging comments and sometimes invited me to discuss some reflection further—as if he were worried about me. I didn't take advantage of his offers, fearing I would have to disclose more than I had in my papers. He became a sort of mentor, encouraging me to write poetry, as I sometimes did in my journals, and he published one of my poems (about the woman with an issue of blood who was healed by Jesus) in *The Bible Today*.

1980: My Annus Mirabilis

The year 1980 turned out to be my Annus Mirabilis. I was promoted to full professor of English at Chicago State, **and** in June 1980 I received my degree as an interior designer from Harrington Institute of Interior Design, so I treated myself to a summer in England, Ireland and Scotland, following a Literary Landscapes tour of my own devising. (I have written about them elsewhere in this memoir.)



When I returned from that grand tour, as frequently happens in my life, I launched into another new experience by buying a sailboat. I had been sailing in the summers with my friend Bob, who owned a Rhodes 19, and in the winter over New Year's we usually sailed in the Caribbean on tall ships. We both loved traditional ships. One day in Monroe Harbor, he showed me a sporty little Cape Cod catboat, lying at anchor. It was 18 feet, with a fat mast (that looked like wood), wide beam, wooden wheel, cabin below with bunks, sink and head, lots of teak trim. I fell in



love with it. We left a note in the cockpit: "Are you interested in selling this boat?" with my name and number. Pete Coster called to say, that, of course, every boat was for sale. He had his eye on a bigger boat. Pete took us out in heavy weather, which I could see *Rum Tum Tugger* handled well. I bought the boat expecting that Bob would help me to take care of it, but he had his own boat, so Rum Tum became my responsibility. That October, I put her up at Crowley's Yacht Yard, its home for the next fifteen winters. I would be 50 next year That was how I solved my mid-life crisis.. That fall I resumed my classes at CTU.

Prophets and Inspiration

I had liked Carroll Stuhlmueller's course on the Psalms and prophets so much that I was glad to see he was offering **Prophecy in Its Origin and Early Development** that fall. This was about the early prophets and again we kept journals and logs. A passage in one of my Study Logs (I guess we would put these logs online and call them Blogs today) reflected my enthusiastic mood at the time.

Moved by the Spirit

Whatever we are doing, we can do by inspiration and trust and faith. Are we teaching? Then let us prepare by reading and studying, but when we are actually teaching, let inspiration take over when it will. Are we traveling? Then let us prepare our general itinerary, but let us capture every wind or lift that comes our way. A sudden signpost may make us turn in the opposite direction and discover one of the highlights of our journey. We will find that we are getting much more than we could have ever foreseen or asked for on our own. We must not be "cautious"; rather we must be courageous, expect ever-great-and-greater things from God's goodness. There is no end, no limit to his goodness. The worst fault we can have is not to expect enough, to think "God will not help me."

I loved those courses on the Prophets and all the reading that he set us grounded us in history. Second Isaiah, with his portrait of the Suffering Servant in the 5 songs of Isaiah 40-55, offered me a new understanding of the role of the Messiah as suffering servant, and how Jesus fit that image, as well as comfort, as I was still grieving for the death of my brother. I spent Good Friday of 1981 meditating on those servant songs and psalms, e.g. 22 (which Jesus quoted from while he was dying on the cross) which reflect the viewpoint of the suffering servant. The anawim, or the poor of Yahweh, the remnant that was left after the exile, whom Yahweh comforted, was another concept that I have grown to love. The best book that I read on this was "The Poor of Yahweh" by Albert Gelin, published in 1964. It combines history with a meditation on spiritual poverty. Since I felt spiritually poor, reading that God greatly loved the poor and let his only Son assume the garment of the poor was a great consolation to me and still is.

The image of the remnant being led by God out of captivity also appeared in Jeremiah, another prophet to whom I was drawn, especially to his lamentations. (Inwardly I was drawn to lamentations, quite in contrast from my outward appearance.) But I found that Jeremiah had a consolatory streak too, and wrote a paper for Carroll about Chapters 30-31, in which I could see that the prophet was envisioning a great liturgical procession festively returning to Jerusalem, rebuilt. Carroll kindly published the article, *Jeremiah's Festival of the Remnant* in *The Bible Today*.

For that course, I also wrote a poem imagining my brother in the role of Israel, paraphrasing the prophets, calling it A New Exodus

(Setting: Someone I know and love is dying of cancer and I am talking to him).

How must you feel, my brother,
Now all your strength is gone
Your plans laid aside?
Your forces overthrown by an invader.,
Stripped of all your glory,
Your beautiful body in ruins,
Weak, emaciated, frail, humbled by the Lord?

He has taken you captive,
Led you from your desk.
Your chair is empty,
Your children see their father fallen,
Your wife feeds you like a child.
Friends who visit you visit each other, ignoring you—
you are given up for dead.

What can I say to you, my beloved brother, as I hold your hand?
Can I promise you a new Exodus,
A return to glory?
Probably not.
A deliverance from bondage? Maybe.

Dare I say that the Lord will call you out from your humiliation,
Release you from exile,
Lead you with great signs of power,
In splendid triumph, through the passage,
To the place he has prepared for you?
Will he make a pathway for you,
Lead you himself there,
where there will be no more loss,
Only expectation and hope.
Dare I tell you his thoughts are on you,
That one day he will reveal his plans—
(Your plans he has set aside)
Ransom you from out of all people?
That he has chosen you, you are his beloved,
He will take your right hand?

I believe he will say to you:
“You are my servant, Joseph,
Do not be afraid, I am with you.
I have called you from your brothers,
To give you what I have prepared for you,
I will heal your body,
Give you back the strength I took from you

(strength I myself had given you);
I will restore your mind and your powers,
Give you back the freshness of your youth.
Your life will be renewed,
Your joy and enthusiasm revived.
I will restore to you all I have taken,
Give you back your greatness,
Show you a more glorious home
(I know you love your home)
Give you new work.

Do not be afraid, my son, I am with you.
I will lead you,
Holding you by the hand
And on that day, you will rejoice in Yahweh,
Your redeemer.

Wisdom and the New Testament

In the **1981 Winter** term (beginning in January through March) I took three courses, seminars in **Wisdom Literature** from Dianne Bergant and **Christian Spiritual Traditions** from Patou Burns and Lyn Osiek, and a **New Testament Introduction** from Don Senior.

The Wisdom seminar brought me in contact with the wisdom traditions of Israel—the old Solomonic wisdom traditions, the literary wisdom Solomon imported from Egypt for his officials—“3000 proverbs and 1005 songs”, the Israelite wisdom school from the time of Hezekiah (trying to model his reign upon that of Solomon), and finally the new Yahwistic wisdom. In particular I was interested in Proverbs and all the *fear of the Lord* passages, which seem to me later additions because of their vague, abstract, and above all, pious language. So for my paper I set about searching for an explanation. By whom were the Proverbs composed? What was their *sitz-in-Leben*? What was their redaction history? What brought about the change in the later (as I assumed they were) proverbs. My paper was entitled *The Prophets and Proverbs*, and in it I concluded that the prophets’ condemnations of the disastrous policies of the Kings Ahaz and Hezekiah—expressed as they were in wisdom language and based on consultations with court counselors schooled in the wisdom movement—caused a religious reform in court which extended to the wisdom movement. When Hezekiah’s men transcribed the proverbs of Solomon, they probably added the Yahweh passages stressing *fear of the Lord*. Reading the paper now I think it’s one of the best I’ve ever written; at the time I remember feeling so satisfied as I was writing it, and the separating all the lines of argument. I wish I had published it, when it was still fresh.

In the **Spring term of 1981** (March through May) I enrolled in the class **Faith and Suffering: Gospel Accounts of the Death of Jesus** given by Father Don Senior, CP. This was a good time to take this course, as it included Holy Week

and Easter. The theme of martyrdom was important during the apocalyptic era in which Jesus lived, a theme with which I had become fascinated while on the trip to England in the summer of 1980. The sight of all the ruined monasteries destroyed by Henry VIII there had led me to read David Knowles' book *Bare Ruined Choirs: the Dissolution of the English Monasteries*. I was thinking of these martyrs--John Fisher, Thomas More and the others when I decided to focus on the theme of martyrdom in the passion narratives, especially in Mark. My paper for the course was *Discipleship Equals Martyrdom in Mark's Passion Narrative*.. (I have appended the paper at the end of this section as Appendix !.)

In the **Fall 1981** term, I took **The Gospel According to John** from Don Senior. Again I focused on the apocalyptic elements for my final paper. I traced the apocalyptic combat myth from its origins in the ancient near Eastern creation myths through its Old Testament forms, in Psalms, Exodus Jeremiah, second and third Isaiah, Daniel, then in Intertestamental apocalyptic literature. I was by then familiar with this myth and in my paper showed how the ritual elements of the divine warrior myth were expressed in the fourth gospel: the cosmic threat or challenge, the herald, the coming or theophany of the divine warrior, single combat (conflicts testing and judging and purging the the evil forces of the age),. the victory proclamation, salvation of the people, rebuilding the destroyed temple, shalom, manifestation of universal reign.

Pauline Theology and Writings from Bob Karris, OFM.

That fall of 1981 I broke up with Bob, whom I had been dating for seven years. He was in the process of changing his profession and was studying nursing. He told me that while he had been changing, I had not changed, implying that while he was growing, I was not. I guess he didn't recognize all that had happened since my *annus mirabilis* I had actually wanted to break up with him after my sabbatical in Italy back in 1975, but he had talked me out of it. Now I was glad to be involved in this rewarding course of studies.

In the **Winter 1982** term, I enrolled for two courses: **The Ministry of Women in the Early Church** from Carolyn Oziek, and **The Experience of God in Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross**.from John Lozano.

Ministry of Women in the Early Church

In Lyn's class we looked at women in society and religious communities in the Greco-Roman world, as well as in ancient Judaism; women in the Pauline texts; women as disciples, apostles, prophets, and teachers in the early Church; early Christian heroines, the virgin, the married woman and the widow, and woman as deaconess and presbyter. We learned that there were probably women apostles, e.g. Junia, Prisca and Aquila. Lyn took the charitable view that Paul, rather than being totally against women as I had



assumed, in fact tried to be open, in Galatians 3:28 (not Greek or Jew, slave or free, male or female, but all are one in Christ Jesus), and in Romans 16, but social constraints at the time were against him. This was probably Lyn's favorite course, for she even gave us copies of papers she had written to help us see how broad the study was. It was a timely course, for we were all trying to make the liturgical prayers more inclusive (referring to women as well as to men). The paper I wrote was intended to be a novel, about Gaudentia, an early Christian martyr, martyred with three others, whose dates and life were unknown, but that didn't stop me. Martyrs had fascinated me since the summer of 1980 when I traveled around England and Ireland, seeing all the ruined abbeys, and after reading *Bare Ruined Choirs: The Dissolution of the English Monasteries*. I imagined her and her family and tried to recreate the world of her time—a time of martyrs. I have never finished it, but I enjoyed putting myself into the time and imagining myself in her shoes.

During those years feminism was our *cause du jour*. Hadn't it inspired my own dissertation on Edna Ferber, certainly a feminist before her time, and my book about Fanny Hurst, not so much of a feminist, but an independent woman who kept her marriage a secret, preferring to live separately from her husband, until their marriage was "outed."

In the Church, all my women friends were fervent feminists. "Inclusive" became a code word by which we understood "no more patriarchal ideas in the Church." In the spring of that year I went to Grailville, Ohio, with a friend, Jeanne Foley, also a former religious, for a weekend on Women in Ministry. It was my only visit to this "center for retreats, spirituality, women's empowerment, the environment, and good old peace and quiet." Leontine Kelly, the first United Methodist woman bishop, presided. We held services together, presided over by a woman bishop! It was an experience of what the Church might be like if it were run by women. Since I had been in religious life already, a world run by women, I wasn't interested in returning to an all women's world, but it's been obvious to me for years that women could do all the things that men do in the Church, and probably do them better. I doubt if the pedophile disaster would have been allowed in a church with women in the hierarchy.



Mystical Theology

By taking the course on **The Experience of God in Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross** I was hoping to learn the secrets of those two great Spanish mystics. "Prayer" had always had a mystical connotation for me. It didn't mean vocal prayer but meditation and contemplation, which these two saints exemplified. Both had written classics of mystical prayer, which I had read in the convent, along with many other devotional works.

The course was taught by Father John Lozano CMF, a Spanish Claretian who was an expert on spirituality, and a member of the Vatican commission determining whether the writings of candidates for canonization are theologically correct or contain doctrinal errors. The writings of Teresa and John, both doctors of the Church, became the standard by which the writings of others on the spiritual life are judged, for Lozano referred to them as “systematic” theologians—they were “made” systematic, he said.

He took us through the whole 16th century, showing the development of the idea of experiencing God—which the Platonic Carmelite John of the Cross treated symbolically as an ascent (up Mt. Carmel), and the Augustinian Carmelite Teresa treated as an entry (into the Interior Castle). They wrote the most systematic treatises on the experience of God in transforming union. She analyzed her own experience to help the nuns in her convent, while he wrote his like commentaries (on his own poems) “for the library.”

Lozano’s description of the history of prayer in the 16th century was fascinating. Is individual devotion preferable to communal prayer in the Office or the Mass, he asked. *Devotio moderna*, “I and Thou” prayer, was a new idea at the time, influencing Protestants like Luther and Catholics like Teresa and many others. Recitation of the psalms in the Divine Office was no longer enough. The Church at the time regarded individual prayer as a Protestant heresy; Catholics weren’t taught to pray or meditate. They were advised just to go to Mass, keep the commandments and take Communion once a year. Carmelites were the first to promote individual prayer life, practicing being in the presence of God, like Elijah, their “founder.” The Church was suspicious of people who “meditated” alone. The Dominicans attacked Teresa for teaching meditation to her sisters. But *devotio moderna* became so popular that everyone was setting aside a set number of hours a day for prayer and writing about methods of prayer,. At the courts everyone was talking of mysticism—Spain has always had a fascination with mysticism. Ordinary people were encouraged to have spiritual lives, to meditate and do spiritual reading of manuals of prayer. The writings of Teresa and John were filling a need. Private devotion was so popular it was feared that people would neglect their business.

The Church had trouble with anyone dealing directly with God. All this privatizing of one’s relationship with God had to be sorted out. “Wherever there was emphasis on interior prayer over exterior, the Inquisition smelled Protestantism.” Teresa had trouble finding a sympathetic confessor who understood her, and she was scrutinized by the Inquisition, as were many saints. Heads rolled, fortunately not hers or his, though she was denounced by the Inquisition. “Under the influence of the devil,” they said, and John was imprisoned, tortured, and expelled from his order. Despite the Inquisition—which was against people who prayed, Lozano said, not against theologians—personal devotion remained strong. “We” disappeared from prayers and didn’t return for many centuries until Vatican II.

“Mysticism means becoming conscious of God.” That’s what I wanted. I wanted to be continually living in the presence of God. My earliest inclination had been toward the contemplative life—I had decided that it wasn’t for me—I am too restless and always looking for something new, so I had entered an active order. Still I wanted to experience life on two levels— I aspired to be Martha as well as Mary. Could I be outwardly a scholar/artist/sailor, etc. while inwardly immersing myself in my inward castle? This was not easy, and over the years I have struggled with an inner life. Saint Teresa said that “Mental prayer in my view is nothing but frequent and friendly and solitary intercourse with him whom we know loves us.” Affection, respect, high regard—“The important thing is not to think much but to love much,” she wrote. Pray before the closed door”; God is behind the door.

I wrote a lot of poetry that term and did a lot of journaling—I realized what a blessing God was giving me in the opportunity to study the scriptures and spiritual writings of doctors of the Church. I felt so much a part of that world that I wondered what I was doing teaching English.

Intertestamental Literature

In **Spring, 1982**, I took a seminar on **Intertestamental Literature** from Les Hoppe, OFM, an expert in the history and archaeology of the Holy Land. The interaction of Judaism and Hellenism, especially in the diaspora affected the literature profoundly. The Jews viewed themselves more and more as a persecuted minority, and the apocalyptic spirit grew. Here was another opportunity to immerse myself in apocalyptic literature, which seemed to predominate in those times. I focused on Suffering in the Qumran Hymns for my paper, (and was happy that we exchanged papers among class members, for now I have a sampling of what we were after in that class.) Again the suffering of the martyrs (as the Qumranians saw themselves to be in their prayers) preoccupied me. Suffering was the sign of election, the way of perfection, the metaphor for separation from unrighteousness, the promise of salvation.

Sabbatical in Israel

I took another leap into the unknown in 1982. I asked for a full-year sabbatical (at half-pay), beginning in September, in order to participate in CTU’s Israel Study program. But meanwhile there were many things going on in my life. Our family was very active. After classes were out in mid May, (before I could launch Rum Tum Tigger), I went to Kansas City to attend my niece Therese Miller’s wedding to Richard Greene from St. Louis. While I was there, Brian Connor—who had had a life-changing illness as a sophomore and would soon decide to enter the seminary-- graduated from the University of Kansas. I was able to be present for both family celebrations. I returned to Chicago on Monday, May 17, and on Wednesday put the boat in, none too soon, for Brian arrived with some of his KU friends and wanted to stay with me and then go sailing. A lot of drinking

went on that day, and pictures show some bleary-eyed grinning boys. The next weekend I drove down to South Bend for my 30th class reunion from Saint Mary's, with my college roommate, Cynthia Kelley Bayless.

Back home, I threw myself into sailing, determined to get as much as I could out of her before I had to put her up early in order to leave for Israel September 1. I was now a resident member of the Jackson Park Yacht Club, and that summer, judging from the many pictures I have, I must have invited everyone I knew to go out sailing with me. As frequently happens, when I had passengers, there was no or little wind, and on windy day, there was no one to go, so I ended up getting really good at single-handing that summer.

Among the friends with whom I sailed, a few--George Gecas from our building and Len Kraft from our parish--made good crew, but most of those who came along had never sailed and only went to oblige me, out of curiosity at what all my boat talk was about. Old friends like Patricia and Ted Kowalski; colleagues from CSU like Alice Barter and her friend Jean, and Sherwood Snyder and his partner Roger Olson; friends from CTU like Jack Cannuli, Joe Boyle and Edwina Gately, with some of her Volunteer Missionaries; even some CTU faculty like Lyn Osiek were cajoled into joining me. Everyone was a good sport, even when the fog was so thick we couldn't see anything. I probably sailed more that summer than ever before or after because I knew I would be taking the boat out early to go to Israel.

It's a wonder I sailed so much as I was teaching two writing classes that summer on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. My journal is full of theme assignments. I dashed through the summer, and final exams were on August 9. After several last sails--single handed and with Sandy someone and a visit to traffic court (on Friday 13), I took the boat out with the help of Roger, George and Sherwood on Saturday and moved it into Crowley's Yacht Yard on August 14. The following Tuesday I covered it with the tarp and said good-bye until next spring.

One more thing remained before I could concentrate on Israel. My nephew Sean Miller was marrying Karen Huss at the end of the week--August 21, in Denver. I was there, meeting all Karen's family for the first time, watching Sean and Karen exchange their vows, partying with the family on Saturday. On Sunday I returned and began packing and cleaning house and preparing to be away for a semester. Gerda Schild would take care of my poor cat Feather. After a final luau at the yacht club that Saturday and a tearful farewell to Feather and Gerda, I left September 1 for Athens, via Rome. Alitalia would allow me to stay over for two weeks in Rome on our return in December. I would be in Rome for Christmas!