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Unleashing The Vulnerable Word: Reflections on Ched Myers as a *Provocateur* for a Healing Church*

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ABSTRACT

A re-reading is given of the social theology of Ched Myer's distinctive political approach to St Mark – using a pedagogical workshop on healing, human systems and the church as a case study in contextual exegetics and experience-based learning. An overview is provided of Myers' narrative approach to adult learning and Christian discipleship.

Ched Myers is not a well-known figure in European church or academic circles. He is a forty-something fifth-generation Californian white male. Los Angeles, a city 'oppressed by the hucksters of over-development and quick profit' (his words) is the place he calls home. He is an experienced community educator and social activist. Over the past two decades he has worked with several peace and justice organizations and movements, including the American Friends Service Committee. He has a name that led someone I spoke to recently to mistake him for an actor in a Star Wars movie. His loves include baseball, stand-up comedy, rap, flapjacks, straight-ahead jazz, gumbo and the sci-fi novels of Ursula Le Guin…and, most importantly, the Gospel of Mark. He is currently co-director of Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries in LA, an ecumenical organization promoting biblical literacy, church renewal and action for social justice.

St Mark's episodic recollection of the subversive memory of Jesus has been, you could say, the soundtrack to Ched Myers' life – though that would still underestimate the extent to which this ancient Gospel text has informed, shaped and borne the load of his practical engagement with people, with power, and with those communities which dare to call themselves 'church'.

* This text is a slightly modified version of a paper originally given as one of a Jubilee lecture series on 'Modern Theologians' at St John's Church, Bethnal Green, East London, on 29 February 2000.

A professional theologian concerned primarily with the architecture of life rather than the regimens of academe, Myers has, as the centrepiece of his theological endeavours, produced a commentary on St Mark that cuts new ground both with biblical exegetes and with several generations of Christian activists. *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Myers 1989) has been described by fellow theologian Walter Wink as 'the most important commentary on a book of scripture since Barth's *Romans*'. What I want to do in the first section of this paper is to offer a reason for reading and arguing with it, rather than a simple summary of what it says.

Let us begin by putting that Wink comment into context. Writing in 1919, Karl Barth shocked the theological establishment by largely bypassing the conventional concerns of historical biblical criticism. Instead he unleashed Paul's critique of 'the wisdom and righteousness of the flesh' on the whole fabric of establishment culture, religion and society in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Europe. With hindsight it is easy to dispute Barth's rather uncritical translation of Paul's first century language and assumptions into the dialect and ideas of latter-day German Protestantism. But his work nevertheless represented a quantum leap forward in understanding the New Testament as a dynamic part of the ongoing struggle between liberating faith and suffocating religion, between the purposes of God and the activities of the powers of this world. And when it came to that most crucial moment in recent European history—the German church struggle occasioned by the rise of Nazi Germany and its desire to subjugate institutional Christianity within a racist Aryan creed—Barth's stinging exposition of Rom. 7.7-25 proved a powerful weapon for many confessing Christians against the kind of romanticism and pietism that leeched the critical spirit out of faith.

Both then and since, Barth's commentary has been accused of 'violence against the text' and of 'transgressing the past-ness of the past' (among other things). Similarly, when Walter Wink published *The Bible in Human Transformation* (1973) three decades ago, he was seen as trying to unravel 'the sure gains of the historical-critical method' by polluting it with political, social and psychological concerns.

Ched Myers has learned the lessons of history. In his exegetical work he sets out to maintain a distinction—though not a barrier—between the world we inhabit and the one that produced the Gospel. He is careful to raise awareness of competing interpretative positions ('where we stand' when we make our judgments). He is somehow respectful of inherited understandings even when refiguring or abolishing them. And he seeks to avoid the exclusive claims of any one hermeneutical school by employing a range of tools—sociological, psychological, dramatic, rhetorical

and political—to uncover the core of disturbance in the text, that element in it ('the evangel' or Good News) which seeks to change us, to expose us to things hidden from history, to give us new eyes for seeing. His method is bold and dangerous, but not naïve. As he puts it: 'These ancient texts are cultural artifacts, not easily or accurately interpreted without historical and critical tools. Yet as scripture, they are not *merely* artifacts, for they continue to shape the world as documents of a living ideology and practice' (Myers 1989: xxvi).

Creating the Community from the Text

Myers' work on St Mark (which we will engage with through seeing how he 'workshops' it shortly) is, nonetheless, unashamedly passionate. As he says, this Gospel was written, in the first instance, for what he calls 'discipleship communities'—gatherings of those who, despite the discouragements of daily life under the strains of imperial Roman rule, were determined to appropriate the hope that had grasped them as they followed—however tentatively, failingly, clumsily or boldly—the new way of Jesus Christ. It would be possible to affirm this even if Myers' own detailed theories about the particular location of the writing of St Mark were wrong—and a good number of people have their doubts about them.

It stands to reason, Myers argues, that it is Christian communities attempting to do the same kind of thing (offer faithful witness) in the very different but surprisingly similar world of today who stand the best chance of being truthful with the text. On the one hand, therefore, his 'reading strategy' for St Mark is patently biased. It proceeds from the agenda of marginalization and exclusion exemplified in the dramatis personae of the Gospel itself—the world of poor blind beggars, despised children ('the least of the least'), lepers pushed aside by the Purity Code, disabled gentile women—those thrice denied by leaders who hold power within the religious system and who use it to maintain a permanent underclass of those who have to be 'cast out'. On the other hand, Myers is all too aware that our world and the world of Jesus in Mark's account are remarkably different. For that reason, he has followed up his Gospel commentary with another volume which looks specifically at the social and spiritual 'stones' (pitfalls) which impede the growth and development of Christian faith in a contemporary world choked by the new—yet somehow very old—gods of money, possessions, power, division and domination.

We will return to that second major work, *Who Will Roll Away This Stone? Discipleship Queries for First World Christians* (Myers 1994) at the

end, as we try to summarize what Ched Myers is saying in and through his continuing conversation with Mark, Mark's Jesus and the challenges of the present. First, though, it is time to experience Myers at work first-hand, applying his reading of Mark in dialogue with a concern which creates a 'bridge' between contemporary communities and those of Mark's day—but without, he hopes, merely settling for gimmicky ways of extracting 'relevance' from the text.

The issue is healing—a theme which, we rapidly discover, is not just about the treatment of physical ailments, but about everything that holds together (or divides) our human bodies, the body politic (the fabric of our common life) and the Body of Christ (God known and rendered in Jesus, and in the community which flows from his crucified and risen life).

Here, then, is the first shock. The huge chasms which much traditional theology allows or even engineers—between thought and practice, academy and street, religion and society, physical and spiritual, 'dead history' and 'real life', Word and world—Myers' approach turns into a critical dialogue. As the discussion moves forward our issues become the 'lens' through which particular chunks of Mark's Gospel are illuminated, and the ancient text, in turn, poses new questions, dilemmas and challenges. Involved with Ched in this risky journey of growth and change are thirty people—medical practitioners, priests, social workers, church and community activists gathered together in the brand new hall at Stephen's Church in Lambeth, South London, back in June 1999.

Right at the beginning of *Binding*, Myers declares his hand: one that will set the context for a consideration of the theme of healing. 'I believe', he writes '[that] the ideology of apocalyptic holds the key to an accurate political reading of Mark—indeed, of most of the New Testament' (Myers 1989: xxvii). Later on (p. 101) he explains that by apocalyptic he means that strand of the tradition epitomized by the book of Daniel, 'a Jewish resistance tract written just before the Maccabean revolt during brutal persecutions under the Hellenistic ruler Antiochus Epiphanes IV'. In Daniel's apocalypse, quoted from in every chapter of St Mark, the socio-political imagination of the oppressed is fused with a vision of a new operational order (narrated as 'the reign of God') leading to an interpretative war (involving myth, history and tradition) against the 'powers that be'. In the Gospel Jesus' every word and action—healings, exorcisms, exhortations, quotations, parables, blessings and signs—becomes a site of struggle for authority over a new community (of 'the last, the least and the lost'—M.M. Thomas). On one side of this struggle stands establishment Temple religion. On the other stands a vision of God's dealings with vulnerable humanity whereby the Sabbath is made

for people, not people for the Sabbath. This is the dramatic setting, then, in which the woundings and healings of life take place.

What *I* am trying to do here is to telescope Myers' overall argument about the nature of the Gospel as a tract about the power to bless or curse, to free the future or to imprison it. What *he* was doing at this point in the workshop was to point out that when a wedge is driven between theology and politics, the result is the domestication of faith and the sacralization of politics. The church, like everything else, is often tempted to become a form of entertainment in advanced capitalist culture, but it is unable to compete with Disneyworld, so it is forced to try something different. A concern for 'healing' is therefore seen as an attractive (safe and 'purely religious') activity in church circles. St Mark, however, forces us to ask a question: if this is so, why did Jesus the healer get executed? How and who he healed provides the beginnings of an answer. This is what is extraordinary about Jesus—not the mere existence of another healer among many in antiquity, surprising though that may be to contemporary, Western society. Since modernity has split off healing into a technocratic, medical discipline we find it difficult to comprehend a whole society of 'healers'.

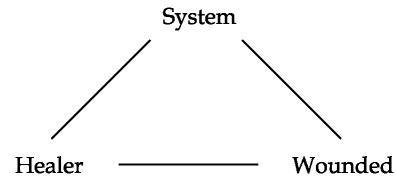
From People to Systems, and Back Again

When we think of health, says Myers, we rarely think of a social fabric that creates, or mediates wounding and healing. We just think of individuals—people who are wounded and people who heal. The first step towards a fuller picture is to recognize that many 'natural' wounds are inflicted or exacerbated within society, and that victimizers (those who inflict wounds) are often victims too. Introjection (displacing pain inwards through self-harm) or projection (displacing it outwards onto others) are the primary ways in which the wounded wounder—which includes all of us to some extent—operates. Mental distress is an example of the former, criminal behaviour of the latter. Similar processes, of course, go on with the healer (who is also wounded, as the Catholic spiritual writer Henri Nouwen is famous for pointing out). This is something we often overlook in Christian circles, where the healer is both elevated as an uncomplicated hero and separated into an entirely different category from the wounded and the wounder.

Most dangerously, says Myers, in this dualistic way of looking at life both healer and wounded are separated from the system (social, political, economic, cultural, religious, symbolic etc.) in which wounding and healing goes on. Our reading of the healing stories in Mark's Gospel must therefore search for the relationship between the wounded, the

healer and the systemic wounding culture in the narrative—and its significance.

This relationship can be pictured (in very simple terms) as a triangle:



Frequently we end up dealing with the healer-healee dynamic, but not the overarching social system. Entering into, say, the family system, or the medical system (and so on) raises a set of issues which is much bigger than just the personal, the intra-personal and inter-personal. The healer has a complex relationship to that system too, for example, though the relationship of the wounded one to it may be most obvious and dramatic.

Myers' contention is that 'Jesus got killed because of his interventions into the antagonistic relationship between the wounded ones and the victimizing system. He operated on behalf of, and along with, the wounded. Every healing story in the Gospel tradition addresses in some way the systemic triangle'.

The most problematic element of this triangle is the structural dependence of the wounded on the client system. Healers face an enormous vocational temptation to participate in the power relationship encoded within this system. To make the client (or patient, or person being pastored) needy and dependent. After all, that is what keeps the system going.

Here ended the workshop discussion. Now it was over to those present—people with expertise and experience in the overlapping discourses involved. In further conversation with Ched we put his theory to the test by seeing how it applies to a series of 'healing' stories from Mark which have usually been understood as entirely 'apolitical'. At this point in my written record, Myers' contributions, rooted (but not stuck) in the exegetical work and style of *Binding*, begin to flow into observations that were shaped by us all. What happened, quite imperceptibly, was that the biblical scholar blended himself into a conversation that began to sprout theologians—good, bad and indifferent, no doubt—all over the place. And what we came up with together, both Ched and not Ched, us and not us, turned out to be definitely greater than the sum of its parts. We had become, for a few fleeting moments, a theological community. I will have to put it crudely to put it at all, but the following is how the analysis developed.

Mark 1.40-45: The Healing of the Leper

This story is often seen as little more than another notch on Jesus' christological belt, a proof of his pre-conceived divine status or relationship. But what if we relocate it within the client system, asks Myers? Note first that the leper (client) took the initiative. He is the one who approached Jesus. The other dynamic at work here is that in some way Jesus made it possible for him to come. The fact that the leper saw something was because Jesus was *proximate* to hurting, broken people. What does it mean to be approachable as a way of life? This is the discipleship question for us at the heart of the narrative. By contrast, notice that often it is the disciples who obstruct the view. The crowd, for example, is always 'in the way' for them. They are a bit of a nuisance. The disciples are trying to 'make a way', but *through* the crowd rather than by *encountering* it. Jesus' priorities, however, are quite different.

On an exegetical point, in the context of this Gospel, leprosy is skin disorder of any kind, not just Hansen's disease. What is at issue theologically, however, is the fundamental relationship between the human body and the body politic. Your stance towards the body (reaction to illness etc.) *always* puts you in some kind of relation to the body politic—to the social order. Race and gender are all about the relationship between physical bodies and the body politic, because people end up getting included or excluded on the basis of skin colour or what is between their legs!

This relationship between the body and the body politic was understood in antiquity in a way that we have largely lost touch with today, says Myers. So in Lev. 12-14. leprosy is 'resolved', 'dealt with', 'made acceptable' (the politics of perception) by going to the priest and being declared clean after an elaborate process of ritual purification. This is not necessarily *healing*, however. In Mk 1 the leper asks to be made clean, 'if you will' (he feels his dependence)… not 'healed'.

The basic problem, of course, is that Jesus is an unlicensed practitioner. He is not a priest. But the leper is challenging him nonetheless. Jesus is 'filled with compassion' say our translations. Now St Mark is not a psychologist, and rarely refers to feelings. So when he does talk about emotion we can be sure it is important. And our translations are putting it politely. Actually Jesus is *angry* (see the Greek), his guts are being 'ripped apart' (it is an onomatopoeic word). He is being approached to do what he is not authorized to do. The leper knows this. He also knows perfectly well where the priests are. But he has decided to defect from the system and to go to Jesus, because he detects intuitively that Jesus stands in a different relationship to his body and to the body politic than does the priestly caste.

Next, Jesus commits professional suicide by reaching out and touching an unclean person, thus becoming unclean himself. This is a boundary that is inviolable except for the professional class, the priests. (In traditional societies the act of cleansing re-ordered the social relationship *through the priestly class only*, thus producing a client-patient dynamic rather than justice.)

That Jesus is acting as a priest (though in a radically different way) is emphasized by the touching. And the leper is made clean, not just 'healed'. Fine. But, says Myers, always look for the epilogue in Mark. There is a warning not to talk about this, not to send out a 'press release' about this violation of the system. At the beginning of the story the leper challenged Jesus, now the roles are reversed.

How we read the text is that Jesus sends the leper back to the priest in order to 'legitimize' the healing he has just performed. So the status quo is reaffirmed in the end. The church and its priestly system can breathe a sigh of relief. Actually this makes no sense of the story. The phrase in the text says that the leper is 'to bear witness' to the priests, to speak truth to power. What happens is that the leper goes to the priests to pay the bill for a service he doesn't get. What great theatre! Note that Jesus himself doesn't do this. He is playing the priestly caste at their own game, but since the leper had the initial insight *he* is sent back to confront the system. That's empowerment for you. The alternative explanation is that the leper knew more than Jesus did at this point, incidentally.

The leper is now a subject of his own liberation, not a mere client. But this is where things mess up. The leper does, in fact, send out a 'press release'—this is easier than the direct action of confronting the larger problem. It is easier to secure or advertise private healing than to join the process of confrontation with the damaging system. We are not told how the priests reacted, but we see the effect. The queues for Jesus grow—the word is out: 'free healthcare!' So Jesus cannot move about, not because of the people but because the political space of the countryside and the city is controlled by the authorities. (This is perhaps why he is trying to build a movement of animation/empowerment, not merely to reproduce the client-patient system in a slightly modified way.)

In our contemporary 'systems' in the North Atlantic region there are also challenges to the churches regarding the basic choice between animation and patching up client-systems. As privatization and re-trenchment hits healthcare yet further we Christians may end up simply as service providers. The prophetic and discipleship tasks perhaps include the more difficult and demanding one of challenging the spaces 'provided' by the body politic from the perspective and demands of the reign of God, and therefore of the excluded and marginalized.

But there is more to it than that. There is also a challenge to pastoral practice. Note that Jesus both deals with real people in concrete situations *and* gets to the root of the social situation. The personal and the political belong together. It is this that releases the power of God (the spiritual) in what we might call 'the Gospel system'.

The Gospel Dynamic in the Community

Many other examples can be given of this alternative dynamic, both in Mark's context and in ours.

Take, as further instances, Mk 5.21-43, the accounts of the raising of Jairus' daughter and the healing of the woman with the haemorrhage. In the order of the narrative the bleeding woman (the outcast) has to be included before the former can be restored. Jesus is more proximate to the poor woman than to the rich daughter, though his love extends to both. Notice that Jairus approaches Jesus boldly, but the woman comes with fear and trembling. What a difference class and status make—or race, gender and ability: take your pick. However is it not refreshing that Jairus' desire to see the daughter healed is of greater importance than his refined reputation? This explains his boldness.

Finally, and obviously, we cannot avoid the significance of the fact that Jesus is made unclean by the woman with the haemorrhage (a woman's period not 'purified' through contact with the priestly system means 'uncleanness' for 12 years, and becoming the most unclean of the unclean). Strictly speaking this also makes the contact with Jairus' daughter impossible. But 'the reign of God system' operates to quite different values and assumptions at this point.

In further discussion and exploration we noted in our workshop that the woman with the haemorrhage has a voice and a story, but Jairus' daughter has neither—in the text anyway. (Often poor people only get to talk to themselves.) What has the system done for the unclean woman? Not much. In fact it has made her what she is. For Jairus it gets his daughter some access to help, but she dies while waiting for the woman with the hemorrhage to tell her story to Jesus ('Boy, those doctors were a real pain…'). When Jesus is touched in the story he *loses power* and it goes to the woman. Power is redistributed. As she becomes important to Jesus, the woman with the haemorrhage becomes a daughter, while the daughter at the beginning of the story (Jairus') dies. The poor one is 'raised up' first. There is divine reversal of 'normal expectations', even in what turns out to be a universal blessing. So it is with the Gospel.

Note, also, says Myers, the potent parallel of the 12-year-old daughter and the woman with a haemorrhage for 12 years. This is not a random number, of course, but the symbolic rendering of the tribes of Israel. That

tells us that this is a story about the healing of the nations too. It is not just about individual problems. Until it is seen that all must be healed, in a certain sense no one can be healed.

Lastly, there is the matter of that prohibition on telling the story. This is directed not to the woman with the haemorrhage, but to Jairus—what we might call 'an equalization of press relations'. But note that there is something additionally ironic here too. How can you keep a story this big out of the media? Yet if the news gets out there, the story of the woman with the haemorrhage will be told too—how unbearable for those respectable, *Daily Mail*-reading classes!

Temptation and Denial

But we should stop for a moment. Isn't this becoming a little too easy? Here, at the very point where our reading of the Gospel may be in danger of turning into another ideology (Jesus as the 'politically correct' icon), a further startling and uncomfortable text trips us up. Consider the performance of this leper-loving, law-turning Messiah in relation to the Syro-Phoenician woman in the region of Tyre (Mk 7.24-30). Her 'unclean spirit' is dispatched, but at what immense cost to her dignity?

It is important to consider this story in the context of 'the system', too. The whole situation is awful in terms of social propriety—an encounter between these two persons, the rabbi and the gentile woman, represents a total interruption of society, class and culture. Jesus also suffers the indignity of replicating in his interaction with this woman the very thing he has apparently been criticizing in his co-religionists—the breach of table fellowship. He tells her that it is acceptable that she sits under the table. Then he says to the woman that she is a 'dog', a terrible curse from Jews to Gentiles—the modern equivalent of calling a black woman a 'nigger' *and* 'a bitch'. Here is Jesus mirroring the dominant culture, and defending his own honour. But all is not lost. She trumps him. First this anonymous woman argues, and then she mirrors his logic and turns it back on him. Dogs, she implies, are people too!

All this is very difficult for the conventional Christian. Is Jesus out of character here? Calling dogs those he had previously invited into relationship? We are tempted to send in the theological rescue squad in order to save the Saviour from an apparently indefensible piece of behaviour, suggesting (for example) that he is being deliberately ironic. Nonsense. It is hugely problematic to construe the text as suggesting anything other than that he really did get it wrong. So learning becomes the *ultimate act of service*. Jesus proves teachable. The healer has to be healed, the teacher taught. The woman shares his Messiahship in this

otherwise ghastly moment—a gentile, of all people. Jesus, remember, is operating on a patch way out of his usual orbit, with the consequent (realized) potential for disaster. But christologically we learn a great deal from this painful incident. Jesus' Messiahship emerges from precisely such an intimate relationship with 'the other'. If we have a problem with this it is because we have preconceived, patriarchal notions of 'Lordship' and 'Messiahship' which involve superiority (absolution from the need to learn or grow), removal from relationship and didacticism. But God's way is different. The 'sinlessness' of Jesus turns out to be a matter of triumph through endurance rather than escape through victory.

The discipleship challenge here, perhaps, is that what ought to be a coalition for change (the Body of Christ gathered in memory, word, deed and sacrament in our today), can all too easily become a 'togetherness' based upon an ideology of 'our God makes us better than you' and a Jesus whose Lordship reduplicates the domination system. But the actual stories of Jesus subvert this tendency again and again. In the overall scheme of Mark, Jesus is not trying to solidify the religious system, but to heal the divisions of humanity. This requires a kind of Messiahship which is very different to our expectations. It is not about religious superiority, domination or didactic aloofness. It is about worldly solidarity, proximity and learning, together with the wild autonomy of the Holy Spirit.

Now against all this it might be argued both that Myers and I have overreached the text in our political reading, that there is too much 'black and white' here, and that critical questions about the Gospel narrative (Did it really happen like this? Can we ever know? How may we establish appropriate boundaries between reader and read? Is it ever really possible to move from the ancient to the contemporary?) are sidestepped too easily. There may well be truth in these criticisms. But I would still hold that the overall trajectory of Myers' liberating dynamic is faithful to the continual rediscoveries that both exegetes and disciples are making about the 'divine reversal' affected by the Gospel in mutual tension with aspects of the contemporary world.

The Rolling Stone and the Vulnerable Word

There is so much more that could be said about Ched Myers as praying subject, political analyst, exponent of the Great Economy (his borrowed term for the reign of God), theological educator and—above all—*agent provocateur* for a way of being church which seems so hopelessly discontinuous with what many of us will experience (or even offer) Sunday by Sunday, week by week. As I mentioned earlier, his second major book—

a collection of writings drawing on over twenty years of experience in street and academy—is called *Who Will Roll Away the Stone?* It is intended to pick up the story where *Binding* leaves off, and it is where I wish to rest (uncomfortably on the precipice) this introduction to Myers' work.

In place of the three seductive 'modern certainties' of instrumental rationalism, autonomous subjectivity and textual fundamentalism, *Who Will Roll Away the Stone?* offers a different way—the way of *interrogation*. Myers' explorations in this book are structured around a series of questions, drawn from St Mark again, which challenge us to look afresh at the blockages we experience as we seek to journey with Christ in modern western societies. Economic bribery, memory-loss, the culture of 'the techno-fix', information overload, grandiosity, depression, compulsion, consumption and the spiral of retributive violence: all the potential and actual idols are there in full technicolour, personal-and-political glory.

The title question—which is the last interrogation to appear in Mark's Gospel—is the key one. The resurrection possibility for the First World's church lies in surrendering control and receiving the unexpected gift of God. The stones that surround Christ's threateningly empty tomb are ours to move. And the biggest, perhaps, is silence. In the midst of Mk 9.14-29 (the story of the boy who could not hear or speak), Jesus invokes his followers to 'test the resistances'. Or to put it another way, 'if you don't understand, *go there*'. Mark's Gospel is full of great failure stories of 'the disciples who couldn't'. They were not strong enough (not patient enough, not wakeful enough, not present enough, and so on). This story begins with the disciples arguing with the scribes and ends with them back in the safety of the house. You would expect them to be toasting the outcome of Jesus' encounter, but instead they are stuck with their own impotence and they are lamenting. So there is what Myers described to that South London healing workshop as 'a Zen-like ending' from Jesus: 'Ah yes, this sort can only be solved by prayer'. He understands the deeper forces at work. This is a life and death struggle about *silencing*.

Why are the great Christian masses silent on injustice? Are we possessed by the same demons that we are trying to cast out? Are we under occupation by the great spirit of silence? Do Christians do nothing because they see nothing wrong? Silence, says Myers, is the major affliction of affluence. Our churches are locked in insular piety. They are mostly not engaged with public life. And those who *are* engaged are in danger of being cut off from the Spirit, trapped in a cycle of activism without genuine in-spiration (the coming in of the Spirit). This is the 'evangelistic challenge' of a political reading of Mark. Yet there is hope—there is the possibility of a new community of word, prayer and deed—

for that is what the Gospel creates, and what Ched Myers invites us to explore in the latter half of *Who Will Roll Away the Stone?* Where he is weaker, perhaps, is in the area of how to link this eschatological horizon with the unyielding realities of economy and polity: the 'wise as serpents' end of Jesus' famous aphorism. Without that we are in danger of being left with apocalyptic protest disconnected from immediate possibility.

The last word, however, is perhaps best left to Ivan Illich, who is quoted at the very beginning of the book:

> I feel almost unbearable anguish when faced by the fact that only the word recovered from history should be left to us as the power for stemming disaster. Yet only the word in its weakness can associate the majority of people in the revolutionary inversion of inevitable violence into convivial reconstruction (Illich 1994: x).

Even so, come vulnerable Word.

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