

## **Paradigm Shifts, Jesus Christ of Nazareth, and the Gospel in the Global Village**

I have been waiting twelve years to give a convocation lecture at united. How can one say it all in thirty minutes after twelve years?

This lecture reminds me of the story of a Lutheran minister in Minnesota. They had a huge blizzard, and when the minister arrived at the church for the service there was only one farmer who had hooked up his sleigh and taken his horses across the drifts to get to church. Now this was a big church. So the minister asked the farmer, "Do you want to have the service?" The farmer replied, "What do you mean, 'do I want to have a service?' I just came all this way with my horses and sleigh for the service." And so, he sat in the middle of the large sanctuary, and the minister did the whole service. You know the Lutheran liturgy. They sang all the chants, they had all the hymns, the pastor read three lessons, a twenty minute sermon verging on twenty-five, and the eucharistic liturgy.

After one hour and fifteen minutes or so, the service was finished, and the minister processed out as the farmer sang the last hymn. The pastor greeted him outside the sanctuary and said, "What did you think?" The farmer said, "Well, pastor, when I go home, I'm going to put some hay on the wagon, and I'll throw some to the horses and cows that are out there in the snow. But I won't give them the whole bale."

That's been my temptation in the preparation of the lecture. I'm not going to give you the whole bale, but it's going to come close.

I want to talk about Jesus and paradigm shifts in the communication of the Gospel. This is a term used by Thomas Kuhn to describe the patterns or models developed by science by which empirical data is predicted, sorted and evaluated.

Let me tell you a couple of stories from a recent video tape by Joel Barker about paradigms. As Barker points out, the problem with paradigms is that at times they can blind us to what is really happening. A young man was driving fast down his favorite country road in his red sports car and approaching a curve. Suddenly an old beat up car came careening around the curve out of control. As he swerved to avoid a collision, the woman in the car yelled, "Pig." He shouted back, "Cow." He felt very satisfied that he got her back before she got away. He stepped on the accelerator, sped around the curve and ran into ... the pig!

What happened? He sorted the data according to his paradigm about aggressive women in old cars and misperceived what was really happening. His paradigm blinded him to the reality of the situation.

### **The paradigm shift in the formation of Christianity**

For the past four years, we here at United have been involved in a research project funded by the Lilly Endowment on Christianity and media. Last year there were two national conferences including the publication of a book, *Changing Channels*. The question we have been studying is whether there is a correlation between major changes in communications technology and changes in western Christianity. In other words, are changes in communications media important for the Christian church?

And the answer is "Yes." There are direct correlations. When new media systems emerge, the community of faith adapts and responds to these changes in a variety of ways. There are paradigm shifts that take place.

I would like to address the foundational question that faces the church in this age. How will we reinterpret the tradition, specifically the traditions about Jesus of Nazareth?

In the context of the media shift of our age, the paradigm shift that we are now experiencing in this century, the communications technology revolution of electronic communications happened. But for the most part, the church has essentially concluded that it is relatively insignificant to its life. We have basically invested our energy in the maintenance of the paradigms that were developed for the communication of the Gospel in literate culture, specifically as Protestants in the culture of print and as liberal Protestants in the context of the culture of silent print, of the Enlightenment. It was in that context that seminaries were founded to train people to communicate the Gospel to people who were formed by the highly internalized literate culture of the study of the Bible as a document. It was in that context that historical criticism was developed to make the Bible meaningful and alive in that communications world.

Our problem, as a seminary .....

To paraphrase Jesus: For the first time, we now live in the history of the Christian church in which a medium other than writing is the dominant medium of communication, and no one puts new wine into old paradigms. New wine is for new paradigms. Let me try to state my own conclusions.

### **Who was Jesus of Nazareth as a communicator?**

What was it that Jesus did in relation to the formation of a new paradigm for the interpretation of the religion of Israel in the context of the literate culture of his age? I would like to explore our understanding of Jesus, and how a reinterpretation and understanding of Jesus in relation to his time can provide a foundation for our task in this age in relation to this new global village culture we face and in which our mission will be carried out.

A central element in our understanding of the Gospel is our picture of Jesus, and it steadily changes. But when seen from the perspective of communications

history, our present picture of Jesus is puzzling. The 19th century distinction between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith may have faded but elements of that distinction are very present. Jesus in our present picture was a minimally educated rabbi in 1st century Galilee who never wrote anything except a few words to a woman accused of adultery. His Palestinian Jewish environment was largely separated from the Hellenistic world. Jesus' ministry was more or less exclusively to Jews. He spoke Aramaic and taught about the Kingdom of God in parables and proverbs that were puzzling to many of his listeners. He went up to Jerusalem, had a major confrontation with the leaders of Israel, was crucified, and according to our faith, raised from the dead.

Paul was the great innovator who formed the Hellenistic Gentile church. This development went far beyond the intentions of Jesus and transformed the movement from a sect within Judaism into a new world religion. In this historical process, Jesus became the crucified and risen Christ whose life, death and resurrection was seen as the central act of God's salvation. It was Paul then who formed the new paradigm of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the world.

Yet this conclusion itself is a puzzle. Is it historically probable that there would be such radical discontinuity between the founder of a movement and the movement itself? Was Paul such a charismatic figure that he was able to turn the Jesus movement in a radically different direction from that initiated by Jesus himself?

This puzzle is related to our present picture of the communications situation of the ancient world. Jesus was an oral communicator who, as far as we know, wrote virtually nothing. The formation of Christianity as a distinct religion was related to the development of literacy. From Paul's letters to the churches to the writing of the Gospels, Christianity was based on the composition and distribution of documents. Thus, one of the reasons for our inherent picture of Jesus is that the essential documentary foundation of Christianity was accomplished by others; first Paul and then later, other apostles.

From a communications perspective, therefore, Jesus was at most the oral precursor for the literary movement, which later developed around his memory. Jesus lived his life on the oral side of the great divide between the cultures of orality and literacy. But herein lies a further dimension of the puzzle. In what sense was Jesus of Nazareth the initiator of the communication of the revelation of God? Was it primarily in his climactic christological actions of suffering, death, and resurrection? Or was there a way in which his teachings and actions established the foundation and initiative for the communication of the Gospel which followed later? These are foundational questions that emerge out of thinking critically about our present picture of Jesus.

First, we need to look at the background, the cultural context of Jesus' ministry. What is the context against which the data of Jesus is to be evaluated?

In relation to this question, in the past hundred years a whole new set of data

has emerged about the character of the ancient world, specifically of Galilee, and in recent years in relation from the transition from orality and literacy in the ancient world. To summarize that briefly, from a modern perspective all cultures of the ancient world were predominantly oral. The main systems of communication were dependent upon memory and on people talking with each other.

Prior to the extension of literacy in the period of the 6th-5th centuries BC, ancient culture was almost exclusively oral. Writing was practiced only by a small group of scribes. Beginning in the 5th century with the formation of the literate culture of Athens, the cultures of the Hellenistic world were increasingly dominated by the culture of literacy.

Power and prestige in every area of life were increasingly connected with literacy. The empires of the ancient world were all based (and probably made possible by) the power of the written word for administration, military organization and cultural dissemination. Claude Levi-Strauss has provocatively written, "The primary function of written communication is to facilitate slavery." The empires of the ancient world were all based to a greater or lesser degree on the power of the written word for administration, military organization, and cultural dissemination.

But for better or worse, the Hellenistic era following the campaigns of Alexander the Great was the period of the greatest increase in the levels of literacy. Particularly in urban centers, writing became the preeminent system of communication and culture as the literate minority controlled the instrumentalities of power. This process continued throughout the early centuries of the Roman Empire. Declines in the levels of literacy do not become evident until the last two centuries of the Empire. In every area of life, the styles of communication associated with writing became the engine of social and cultural change.

However, while the literate culture became increasingly dominant, the fact is that the marks of oral culture were always present and remained central for the majority of persons. William Harris' conclusion about literacy in the world of antiquity is appropriately nuanced:

*There occurred a transition away from oral culture. This was, however, a transition not to written culture (in the sense in which modern cultures are written cultures) but to an intermediate condition, neither primitive nor modern. In this world, after the archaic period, the entire elite relied heavily on writing, and the entirety of the rest of the population was affected by it. But some of the marks of an oral culture always remain visible, most notably a widespread reliance on, and cultivation of, the faculty of memory. In these circumstances it seems perfectly natural that nothing like mass literacy ever came into being in antiquity.*

In general, we have tended to overestimate both the character and the extent of literacy in the ancient world. Estimates of the levels of literacy in the ancient world are steadily being revised downwards as the documentary evidence is being

assessed. Thus, William Harris in a recent comprehensive study of ancient literacy concludes that at most 30%, though more likely 20%, of the population of Athens in the period of Plato was literate, and that represented a major increase over earlier periods. Literacy was largely confined to the ruling classes. In the period of the Hellenistic empire, literacy levels gradually increased throughout the countries of the empire. But the great majority of the populations of the Roman Empire including Rome itself remained illiterate. Literacy was largely confined to men, primarily of the upper classes, although at least some slaves and women in the Roman world became literate.

Thus, in the time of Jesus, the levels of literacy in Galilee probably did not exceed 20%. Most of his disciples were illiterate. In Acts 4, the Sanhedrin call John and Peter *agrammatoi*, unlettered, which probably means illiterate. Jesus was then a literate rabbi of the artisan middle class of Galilee. This means that he was part of a literate, relatively elite, minority.

Second, what was the character of Galilee in relation to the literate culture of Hellenism? Perhaps the most startling result of contemporary scholarship is our picture of Galilee. Recent archeological work has uncovered surprisingly extensive evidence of the use of Greek in Galilee. There remains a general consensus that Aramaic was the primary language of the majority of people in Palestine. But the evidence continues to grow that Greek was the primary language of social intercourse and even family use.

The most striking evidence of this is in the ossuary inscriptions. More than two-thirds of these inscriptions on tombs and burial jars that have been discovered in Palestine are in Greek. (These were private inscriptions that were written as a way of honoring members of the family.) As Strange and Meyers have stated, "From a corpus of 194 inscribed ossuaries, 26 percent are inscribed in Hebrew or Aramaic, 9 percent are in Greek and a Semitic language, and 64 percent are inscribed in Greek alone." Therefore, Greek and Hellenistic culture had much more thoroughly penetrated Galilee than we had previously thought.

In the excavation of Beth Shearim, a second century town in Galilee, 33 of the 37 inscriptions discovered in catacombs 12 and 13 were in Greek and only 4 in Hebrew and Aramaic, with an additional 4 Hebrew inscriptions in catacomb 14. And, while there is a pattern of high use of Greek throughout Palestine, the percentages are somewhat higher in Galilee than in Judea. All of this evidence indicates that Greek was widely used even in the highly private context of family burials.

A further surprising indication of the prevalence of Greek is the third letter of the Bar-Kokhba correspondence. Simon Bar-Kokhba was the leader of revolt during 132-135 A.D. It was the last gasp of Jewish nationalism. This letter, written from within the fortress in 135 A.D., asks for palm branches and citrons for "the camp of the Jews" and then states, "this letter is written in Greek as we have no one who knows Hebrew [or Aramaic]." This was written in the camp of the Jewish rebels, where Hebrew was primarily valued, and yet they had to apologize because they had

no one who could write Hebrew or Aramaic. Everyone spoke Greek. This is, if anything, even more striking in relation to the prevalence of Greek since speaking Greek was regarded by many conservative Jews as a sign of defection to the Hellenists.

These are two concrete instances of a pattern. There is widespread attestation of Greek material in Palestine in the time of Jesus. Furthermore, the evidence in regard to Galilee indicates that Greek was, if anything, used even more widely in "Galilee of the Gentiles" than elsewhere in Palestine. That is, Galilee was on the boundary of Palestine and the northern and eastern countries dominated by Hellenistic culture.

So, in this context, who was Jesus?

First of all, Jesus was literate. He was a member of a relatively elite group in Galilee who could read. We tend to take that for granted, but this was a major cultural factor in Jesus' ministry. Less than 20% of the population were literate. Many of Jesus' disciples were not literate.

Both this general evidence and specific episodes in the records of Jesus' life indicate that he probably spoke Greek as a second or third language after Aramaic and Hebrew. There are a series of reports of Jesus' conversations with Gentiles in the Gospel records: the centurion (Luke 7; Matt. 8); the Syro-Phoenician woman, whom Mark calls "a Greek" (Mark 7; Matt. 15); and Pilate. It is highly unlikely that any of these persons would have known Aramaic or Hebrew. In the absence of any translators, these conversations were only possible if Jesus spoke Greek. While it may go beyond the evidence to conclude that the Greek words of Jesus' teaching in the Gospels were the original words he spoke, in light of the prevalence of Greek in Galilee among Jews, it is possible that he taught in Greek as well as Aramaic.

This heterodox language situation in Galilee is also reflected in the names of Jesus' disciples: Andrew and Philip are both familiar Greek names; Simon can be derived from the Hebrew Simeon, but was also a frequent Greek name; Thomas can be derived from the Aramaic for "twin," but was also a widely attested Greek name. Thus, Jesus' disciples reflected a wide range of definitions of what it meant to be Jewish, and it certainly did not exclude having a Greek name. These are all signs of the extensive degree to which Hellenistic culture had permeated Galilee in this period. Jesus was then a literate, bi- or trilingual rabbi who spoke Greek and had extensive relationships with Gentiles and the world of Hellenism.

Another factor in the archeological picture is the city of Sephoris. This fully Hellenistic city with colonnades, a theater, and a gymnasium was built during Jesus' lifetime only about 4 miles from Nazareth. As a builder, which is what *teknon* means, Jesus may have worked in Sephoris since that is where the principal building project was being carried out in the area in his lifetime. If so, he was intimately familiar with Hellenistic cities and had lived and worked with Gentiles.

Furthermore, the character of Jesus' traveling seminary is based on Hellenistic rather than Jewish models. As Gerd Theissen has shown in his study of the sociology of early Palestinian Christianity, Jesus' style was that of a wandering charismatic philosopher. Other rabbis in Israel, when they established a school, gathered students around them in a particular place, and they stayed there and studied. Jesus wandered Galilee and required his students to adopt this itinerant lifestyle. The only other itinerant groups like this in Jesus' day were the Cynic philosophers. They too wandered around the countryside teaching and living off the land.

Jesus ate with sinners and tax collectors and healed Gentiles as well as Jews. We know of no other rabbis in this period who crossed these boundaries in order to communicate the Gospel of God. Jesus formed a new communications network that reached out to Jews and Gentiles of his period.

Another distinctive element of Jesus' ministry was his exorcisms. If there was anything that was distinctive about Jesus and got him in trouble, it was that he cast out demons. Why was exorcism controversial in Judaism? Because demon exorcism was related to the traditions of magic in the ancient world. Jesus was accused as a false prophet, as a magician, because he practiced that which was perceived by the Jews as being connected with Gentile magic.

In this picture, who was Jesus? He was radically different than we had thought. He was a person who was steadily building a new communication system and establishing relationships with people from the other side of the boundaries that had been drawn by his context and the traditions of Israel.

However, even if Jesus was literate, spoke Greek, and was in dialogue with Hellenistic culture, how could he have been the seminal figure in the establishment of a movement which participated so rapidly and thoroughly in the culture of literacy without ever writing anything?

In searching for a solution to the puzzle of Jesus' role in the formation of Christianity, Socrates provides a decisive clue. The similarities between these two pivotal figures in antiquity are striking. Socrates was the most influential figure in the culture of Greece in the transition to literacy. Socrates, like Jesus, was an oral teacher who did not write but who trained followers who did write. Furthermore, Socrates was martyred for his role in initiating radical cultural and religious change.

In the writings of Plato, Socrates is the main character of the dialogues, just as Jesus is the main character of, for example, Matthew's Gospel. Plato was his student, his disciple. Socrates anticipated a radically new age for which he prepared his students by the establishment of a new community, the Academy. He did this by forming their minds to think clearly in the context of the age of literacy. Thus, Socrates did not write, but he used oral speech in a new way that laid the foundations for the ways of knowing associated with literacy.

In his now classic work, *A Preface to Plato*, Havelock argues that Plato banished the poets from the Republic because he wanted to break the ways of knowing that were characteristic of oral culture. Plato clearly identifies Socrates as the person who established this new way of knowing. In Plato's writings, Socrates is steadily seeking to needle his dialogue partners to reflect on ideas rather than to be involved sympathetically in the recitation of poetic epics. Socrates' questions were a steady invitation to step back from the immediacy of experience and to reflect critically on the presuppositions and ideas that were implicit in the conversation. What Havelock calls the "separation of the knower from the known," in which the known can be examined as an object, is the essential turn of mind that makes it possible to participate in the world of literacy. Socrates and his student, Plato, invited persons to stand back from experience and to think objectively about ideas. Think, ask questions, reflect! In doing this, they established the foundations for the communications culture of literacy over against the culture of orality. Socrates invited people to stand back from experience and become academics. In doing this, they established the foundation for the communications culture of literacy over against the culture of orality.

Did Jesus, in any analogous manner, develop a way of knowing that was seminal in the establishment of a movement within Judaism that became rapidly literate and related constructively to the Hellenistic world? The most important development in 20th century understanding of Jesus' teaching has been the recognition of the centrality of eschatology and, more specifically, apocalyptic. Since Schweitzer's work, the recognition that Jesus' worldview was shaped by the expectation of the end of this evil age and the dawning of the new age of the Kingdom of God has deepened and broadened.

As a way of exploring this perspective, a brief examination of the parable of the rich fool will be helpful (Luke 12:16-21). When heard as an oral teaching, this parable is an experience of shock and confrontation.

The parable of the rich fool leads the listeners into a close identification with the rich man. The description of his internal mental dilemma is developed by Jesus at a length matched in its length and depth only by the description of the prodigal son's meditation in the pig pen (Luke 15:17-19):

What will I do, since I have nowhere to store my crops? I know what I'll do: I will pull down my barns, and build larger ones; and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry!' (Luke 12:17-19)

Jesus' listeners are drawn into the delightful dilemma of the rich man and are then invited to join in his joyful anticipation of being free from any anxiety about the necessities of life. It is the kind of appeal that contemporary lotteries regularly use to induce people to buy tickets. In its oral performance, this section moved from the quiet meditation on what to do to the boisterous celebration of his plan. The structure

of this internal dialogue inside the rich man's mind--question, answer, and address to his soul--leads the listener into a close identification with the rich man.

It is from this psychological place inside the rich man's mind that the listener hears God's judgment:

But God said to him, "Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" (Luke 12: 20)

The shock of this reversal of expectations is psychologically and linguistically violent and is thoroughly appropriate to a war of myths. The judgment of the rich man, the instant and total reversal of his fortunes is an experience of apocalyptic disaster. The moment of the end of the old age and the dawning of the new age in the apocalyptic structure happens for Jesus' listeners in the moment of the word of God: "Fool!"

The meaning of this parable is far more than a point such as "It is not wise to build up money as a strategy for abundant life in the future Kingdom of God." The parable shocks the listeners into reflection on their relationship to the age to come. This reversal forces the listener to stand back suddenly from identification with the rich man and his widely held beliefs. The effect of the parable is what could be called an alienation effect. It creates a high degree of separation or mental distance between the listener and everyday experience. The ones who are seeking knowledge about the Kingdom are suddenly distanced from the object seeking to be known and are forced to think and reflect.

I would propose that this effect, this sudden shock, is precisely the same epistemological move that Socrates made in asking questions of his interlocutors. In place of sympathetic identification with the people of Israel escaping from Egypt as a way of experiencing the Kingdom of God, the experience in Jesus' parables is a sudden reversal of expectations that demands reflection. This effect of Jesus' parables, in the context of Jewish tradition, has the same meaning in relation to knowing the Kingdom of God as Havelock has described as the basic epistemology of the literate culture of Hellenism. It is the same turn of mind from the ways of thinking associated with oral culture to the ways of thinking associated with literacy.

This turn-of-the-ages shock treatment that I have called an alienation effect is characteristic of Jesus' parables. I would identify the following parables as having a similar structure:

1. The parable of the vineyard (Mark 12.1-11/Mt. 21.33-44/Luke 20.9-18/Thomas 65)--For those who recognize and identify themselves as the tenants of the vineyard of Israel and who stand in the tradition of Isaiah, this parable has precisely the shock of recognition of the justice implicit in their loss of the land.
2. The budding fig-tree (Mark 13.28f./Matthew 24.32f./Luke 21.29-31; 12.58f.)-- The fig tree is one of the most sympathetic characters in the Gospels. By the end of the parable of this poor, innocent tree, the need to bear fruit is evident

but the enigma remains and, with the exception of Luke 12.58f., the appeal for repentance is connected with the Temple.

3. The unmerciful servant (Matthew 18.23-35)--As the closing comment on the parable of the great feast, this is a primary instance of identification with one for whom the turning of the ages is bad news.
4. The good employer (Matthew 20.1-16)--The ending of this parable is similar to the ending of Jonah and the prodigal son. The identification with those who have worked all day and are, therefore, highly sympathetic in their anger is the foundation for the owner's angry critique of those who have been his helpers.
5. (Matthew The great supper and the guest without a wedding garment 22.1-10/Luke 14.16-24/Thomas 64)--This parable is a classic instance of an appeal for identification with helpers who end up being enemies of the lord of the banquet.
6. The servant entrusted with supervision (Matthew 24.45-51/Luke 12.42-46)--The parable invites identification with a sympathetic character who is then condemned because of patterns of behavior that are presumably identifiable for the listeners.
7. The ten virgins (Matthew 25.1-13)--This parable appeals for identification with the five foolish virgins who come back to find the door closed in their faces with hostile indifference.
8. The talents (Matthew 25.14-30/Luke 19.12-27)--The one talent servant is a highly sympathetic character who begins as a 'helper' and ends as an 'enemy.'
9. The last judgment (Matthew 25.31-46)--The identification with the sheep is the set-up for the inevitable identification with the goats. Who in Jesus' audience had not known someone hungry or thirsty or naked or a stranger or sick or in prison and did not minister to them?
10. The prodigal son (Luke 15.11-32)--This parable has a unique double reversal of actantial roles in which the prodigal enemy from whom the audience is alienated becomes a helper while the sympathetic elder son/helper makes himself an enemy.
11. The rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16.19-31)--This parable depends on Jesus' extensive appeals for identification with the rich man and ends with an appeal to think back from the future into the present.

In each of these instances, the parable invites or requires the listeners to identify with a character or object (the tree) who is initially sympathetic but who is condemned in the parable's linguistic turn of the ages. The listeners thereby are shocked into making a judgment about themselves and their assumptions about their own beliefs in relation to the coming new age. Thus, Jesus' parables are based on the apocalyptic tradition. But the epistemological structure of apocalyptic has been radically reformed in a way that changes its impact and meaning. For those who identify with the story at the beginning, these parables require reflection from the distance created by the shock of the reversal.

Ernst Kasemann proposed that the origins of theology are to be found in

apocalyptic. To quote Kasemann: "Apocalyptic was the mother of all Christian theology - since we cannot really class the preaching of Jesus as theology." What Kasemann identified as this source was essentially cosmic, holistic thinking. In apocalyptic the key question is: "to whom does the sovereignty of the world belong?" It is the reflection on these cosmic questions that Kasemann identifies as the beginnings of Christian theology. I believe that Kasemann is correct. However, this transition can be identified in the teaching of Jesus.

Jesus' use of apocalyptic in his parables establishes the epistemological foundations for the development of Christian theology. The turn of the ages from the communications world of orality to the world of literacy in the tradition of Israel can be identified in the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth.

Thus, Jesus accomplished a remarkable bridging of the chasms between the worlds of orality and literacy. He developed ways of communicating the reality of God that could be understood by persons on both sides of this watershed in the history of civilization. In his teaching, he made the Kingdom of God present and meaningful for both the illiterate masses and the literate elite of Galilee. He anticipated and sowed the seeds for the later development of theology as the decisive language for the communication of the revelation of God in the more highly literate culture of the Hellenistic/Roman world of the following centuries.

Furthermore, this understanding of Jesus clarifies the lines of continuity between Jesus' ministry and the development of the early Christian church. Jesus established a way of communicating the revelation of God in the history of Israel that was not ethnically exclusive. Gentiles could relate to and understand the parables and other teachings of Jesus as well as Jews. Thus, Jesus' way of thinking and acting communicated with people who were on the other side of the cultural and religious boundaries of the religion of Israel. There is a strong possibility that Jesus' cleansing of the Temple, which led to his death, took place in the court of the Gentiles. It may have been a prophetic protest against the elimination of the court as a place of common prayer for Gentiles and Jews. In his words and his actions, Jesus steadily sought to form a new paradigm of the religion of Israel within the context of the emerging literate Hellenistic world.

Furthermore, Paul's ministry is in direct continuity with what Jesus began. Paul extended Jesus' development of a form of the religion of Israel that was in continuity with the tradition but also was understandable in the emerging world of Hellenistic literacy. Paul was only one step further along in the internalization of literacy than Jesus. He wrote letters by dictating to a secretary. When he wrote a few words at the end of the letters, his large script may imply that he was not a master of the smaller script characteristic of the scribes. Both Jesus and Paul were part of a movement within Judaism to make the God of Israel known in the new communications culture of literacy.

Conclusion: Jesus of Nazareth was the communications pioneer of our faith who formed the essential elements for the communication of God's self-revelation in the

world. One can see what a traumatic transformation this new paradigm was. It was in the aftermath of Jesus' ministry that there was a decisive split in Israel for the first time. Christianity became a separate religion apart from rabbinic Judaism.

We now live in a context where we need to develop a new paradigm. I think God has created electronic communications technology in order to save the world, in order to communicate to the human race. I think that Jesus is continuing to communicate through us to the world. His spirit is present, calling us to communicate in a new paradigm. This is not an easy paradigm shift. The shift to electronic culture and its communication system will require a reinterpretation of the whole of the content of the Christian faith. You can't take new wine and put it in new skins.

The new paradigm is post literate. This means we must reexamine the communications world of Christianity, which was formed in the culture of literacy. This new age will be difficult for Christians and particularly for theology.

### **What are the characteristics of the new paradigm?**

- 1) Global rather than national. Our present structures are organized nationally. We must move to global communications systems and organizational structures.
- 2) Electronic rather than literate. Our present communications and interpretation system as a church is shaped for the culture of literacy. It needs to be electronic.
- 3) Experiential rather than ideological. In the age of literacy it was the coherence of a philosophical/theological system that was determinative. In this new age, the primary criterion of communication will be the vitality of sense experience.
- 4) Narrative rather than theological. In the age of literacy, the stories of God were transformed into theologies. In the electronic age, theology will be shaped by narrative.

We at United are pioneers in the appropriation of electronic communications technology in the world. We are one of two seminaries that has a program in religious communication in which electronic communications is central. The other is in India. What we have been seeking to do here is to pour electronic communications technology into the paradigms of the literate/print cultures in which our tradition has been formed. It won't work. We are losing both the new wine and the old skins. The new wine of the word in electronic media culture requires new skins, a new paradigm. My perception is that God is calling us to follow Jesus into this new age. God is seeking to reform us to communicate the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the electronic culture of the global village.

What is the shape of the new paradigm? There are elements of it that become clear. My basic conviction that has emerged out of this search is that we now live in the midst of the most important period of change since the formation of the religion itself. What we do in this age in response to this radically new situation that we face

in the world will determine the future of our religion.

Basically this is good news. God is seeking to form a new community and to reform our minds so that God's self-communication in Jesus Christ can be made known in the world. Uniquely here at united there is the freedom, the energy and the openness to address this. My hope is that through the power of God we will be able to more radically address this new mission to which God is calling us. In that context, we can look to Jesus as the pioneer and model of what it is we are seeking. It is his primary energy, reaching out across the boundaries of the communication world of his day and forming this new paradigm that can serve both as inspiration and model to which we are uniquely called. Finally, it is God who is the source of the energy and wisdom that will form the new paradigm for the Gospel in the global village. Through discerning together the energy of the spirit of God, we can ride the waves of new life God is sending crashing onto the beaches of the world. Thanks be to God for God's amazing creativity in his desire to communicate with us.