

Walter Brueggemann's 19 Theses

2004 Emergent Theological Conversation *with Walter Brueggemann*

September 13-15, 2004
All Souls Fellowship, Decatur, GA.

1. **Everybody lives by a script.** The script may be implicit or explicit. It may be recognised or unrecognized, but everybody has a script.
2. **We get scripted.** All of us get scripted through the process of nurture and formation and socialization, and it happens to us without our knowing it.
3. **The dominant scripting** in our society is a script of technological, therapeutic, consumer militarism that socializes us all, liberal and conservative.
4. **That script** (technological, therapeutic, consumer militarism) enacted through advertising and propaganda and ideology, especially on the liturgies of television, promises to make us safe and to make us happy.
5. **That script has failed.** That script of military consumerism cannot make us safe and it cannot make us happy. We may be the unhappiest society in the world.
6. **Health** for our society depends upon disengagement from and relinquishment of that script of military consumerism. This is a disengagement and relinquishment that we mostly resist and about which we are profoundly ambiguous.
7. **It is the task of ministry** to de-script that script among us. That is, to enable persons to relinquish a world that no longer exists and indeed never did exist.
8. **The task of describing, relinquishment and disengagement** is accomplished by a steady, patient, intentional articulation of an *alternative script* that we say can make us happy and make us safe.
9. **The alternative script** is rooted in the Bible and is enacted through the tradition of the Church. It is an offer of a counter-narrative, counter to the script of technological, therapeutic, consumer militarism.

10. **That alternative script has** as its most distinctive feature, its key character – the God of the Bible whom we name as Father, Son, and Spirit.
11. **That script is not monolithic**, one dimensional or seamless. It is ragged and disjunctive and incoherent. Partly it is ragged and disjunctive and incoherent because it has been crafted over time by many committees. But it is also ragged and disjunctive and incoherent because the key character is illusive and irascible in freedom and in sovereignty and in hiddenness, and, I'm embarrassed to say, in violence – [a] huge problem for us.
12. **The ragged, disjunctive, and incoherent** quality of the counter-script to which we testify cannot be smoothed or made seamless. [I think the writer of Psalm 119 would probably like too try, to make it seamless]. Because when we do that the script gets flattened and domesticated. [This is my polemic against systematic theology]. The script gets flattened and domesticated and it becomes a weak echo of the dominant script of technological, consumer militarism. Whereas the dominant script of technological, consumer militarism is all about certitude, privilege, and entitlement this counter-script is not about certitude, privilege, and entitlement. Thus care must be taken to let this script be what it is, which entails letting God be God's irascible self.
13. **The ragged, disjunctive character of the counter-script** to which we testify invites its adherents to quarrel among themselves – liberals and conservatives – in ways that detract from the main claims of the script and so too debilitate the focus of the script.
14. **The entry point into the counter-script** is baptism. Whereby we say in the old liturgies, "*do you renounce the dominant script?*"
15. **The nurture, formation, and socialization** into the counter-script with this illusive, irascible character is the work of ministry. We do that work of nurture, formation, and socialization by the practices of preaching, liturgy, education, social action, spirituality, and neighboring of all kinds.
16. **Most of us are ambiguous** about the script; those *with* whom we minister and I dare say, those of us *who* minister. Most of us are not at the deepest places wanting to choose between the dominant script and the counter-script. Most of us in the deep places are vacillating and mumbling in ambivalence.
17. **This ambivalence between scripts** is precisely the primary venue for the Spirit. So that ministry is to name and enhance the ambivalence that liberals and conservatives have in common that puts people in crisis and consequently that invokes resistance and hostility.

18. **Ministry is to manage that ambivalence** that is crucially present among liberals and conservatives in generative faithful ways in order to permit relinquishment of [the] old script and embrace of the new script.
19. **The work of ministry is crucial and pivotal** and indispensable in our society precisely because there is no one [see if that's an overstatement]; there is no one except the church and the synagogue to name and evoke the ambivalence and too manage a way through it. I think often; I see the mundane day-to-day stuff ministers have to do and I think, my God, what would happen if you talk all the ministers out. The role of ministry then is as urgent as it is wondrous and difficult.

Transcribed from the Mp3 recording of his session. All sessions are available from here http://www.emergentvillage.com/index.cfm?PAGE_ID=42