

ACTION BIBLE STUDY ON "THE HOLY IN THE COMMON" Willis E. Elliott

One way to put the Seminary's learning-orientation is that only God can work from heaven to earth: man must start from the ground up. This ground is both "Ground" (God himself, in whom we are learning to trust and rejoice) and "ground" (the earth, the turf of man's agonies and ecstasies, the muck and mire of his striving and planting and harvesting, the structures that enable and the structures that impede his humanization, including his celebration of life and praise of its Source)...Of this learning-orientation, the parables of our Lord are perfect paradigms, and his use of them perfect models for case-method learning. His point, which therefore should be ours, is that God calls us to discern [to use the phrase of a current course in the Seminary] "the Holy in the common."

As for the group-method we are about to use, I call it ACTION BIBLE STUDY because it refuses to stop where group Bible study is forever tempted to stop, viz. with talk. Its is the servant stance: Lord, here are my hands....The design is simple: 4 phases of alternating silence and sharing, as follows:

- PHASE 1: [QUESTION-MARK SYMBOL] What did the passage say to its day?
- PHASE 2: [ARROW SYMBOL] How does the passage prick our conscience....?
- PHASE 3: [LAMP SYMBOL] What new light has come during this session?
- PHASE 4: [HAND SYMBOL] What can we do and what should we do in the light of God's dealing with us in this session?

THE SCRIPTURE: LUKE 15. 11-32 TEV There was a man who had two sons. (12) The younger one said to his father, "Father, give me now my share of the property." So the father divided the property between his two sons. (13) After a few days the younger son sold his part of the property and left home with the money. He went to a country far away, where he wasted his money in reckless living. (14) He spent everything he had. Then a severe famine spread over that country, and he was left without a thing. (15) So he went to work for one of the citizens of that country, who sent him out to his farm to take care of the pigs. (16) He wished he could fill himself with the bean pods the pigs ate, but no one gave him any. (17) At last he came to his senses and said: "All my father's hired workers have more than they can eat, and here I am, about to starve! (18) I will get up and go to my father and say, 'Father, I have sinned against God and you (19) I am no longer fit to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired workers.'" (20) So he got up and started back to his father.

He was still a long way from home when his father saw him; his heart was filled with pity and he ran, threw his arms around his son, and kissed him. "Father," the son said, "I have sinned against God and against you. I am no longer fit to be called your son." (22) But the father called his servants: "Hurry!" he said. "Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet. (23) Then go get the prize calf and kill it, and let us celebrate with a feast! (24) For this son of mine was dead, but now he is alive; he was lost, but now he has been found." And so the feasting began.

(25) The older son, in the meantime, was out in the field. On his way back, when he came close to the house, he heard the music and dancing. (26) He called one of the servants and asked him, "What's going on?" (27) Your brother came back home," the servant answered, "and your father killed the prize calf, because he got him back safe and sound." (28) The older brother was so angry that he would not go into the house; so his father came out and begged him to come in. (29) "Look," he answered back to his father, "all these years I have worked like a slave for you, and not once did I disobey an order of yours. What have you given me? Not even a goat for me to have a feast with my friends! (30) But this son of yours wasted all your property on prostitutes, and when he comes back home you kill the prize calf for him!" (31) "My son, the father answered, "you are always at home and everything I have is yours. (32) But we had to have a feast and be happy, for your brother was dead, but now he is alive; he was lost, but now he has been found."