From Kansas City to Chicago

Donald Cole

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For many years I considered myself a native of Kansas City, and to this day after a lifetime of living elsewhere I like to tell friends that I was born in Kansas City. I am like the apostle Paul who, remembering Tarsus, boasted that he was born "in no ordinary city."

Memories of Kansas City are centered in two places: Chestnut Street, where we lived next door to the Eliases on one side and the Feldmeyers on the other, and Troost Avenue, site of the local Brethren assembly. The Elias family was Jewish, and they were treasured neighbors. They had two sons, David and Arthur -- who was my best friend -- and several daughters.

The daughters were older than their brothers, and they were beautiful. I remember them – dark-eyed, dark-haired girls. To this day, I remember vividly my extreme embarrassment when one of Arthur's sisters – Margaret, I think, a teenager at the time – sewed up a hole in my pants. Arthur and I were horsing around in the living room when, "Donald, come here!" she commanded. I was lucky. Instead of ordering me to take my pants off – to make the sewing job easy -- she laid me across her knees and stitched the hole in the seat.

Mr. Elias was a lawyer employed by the street car company. He was a friendly man who chewed constantly on a cigar. The Elias seniors came from England, and, therefore, for breakfast Mrs. Elias usually gave me an egg in an egg cup, something I had not seen in our home. We Coles were fried-egg eaters, though oatmeal was a staple. We ate oatmeal every day. My grandfather

Ross was born in Aberdeen, Scotland, which probably accounted for oatmeal every morning in our house.

Arthur and I liked to graze like cattle; we often ate breakfast or lunch in one home, then went next door for a second meal. Mrs. Elias was as pliable in the hands of small boys as was my mother. In Africa, where no sensible woman would give another woman's child a morsel of food, lest she be accused of having poisoned him, I remembered the neighborliness of life in Kansas City in the 1920s.

When reading about the Nazi persecution of Jews in Germany, I recalled our family's friendship with the Eliases, and was mystified by Hitler's anti-Semitism. Jews are good people. So are Arabs.

Another Kansas City friend was Jake. He was a friend, though not a soul-mate like Arthur Elias. Jake also was Jewish (his mother called him Jacob). Like Mrs. Elias, his mother also fed me when I turned up at lunch time. On one occasion I remember clearly, she fixed beef hot-dogs and Boston baked beans. Why should such trivia be lodged in my head forever? At the time, I did not know that the Eliases and Jake's family were Jewish, nor did I know what "Jewish" meant. Would it have mattered? Not at all, not unless my parents had been evil and had indoctrinated me in anti-Semitism. I thank God that their heroes were Jewish – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Josiah, Peter, Paul et. al. The list goes on. If not for parents who teach their children hatred or contempt for others, ethnic identities would put no one in harm's way.

I have always been thankful that my parents did not tolerate ethnic or racial hatred. Once, when I was a high school student attending a school with a significant

percentage of Jewish students, I told my mother that I had "gypped a Jew." It was an uncharacteristic comment. Mother was ironing at the time. She whirled around and said sharply, "Your Savior was a Jew." She followed up with a list of apostles and holy women of God who, she knew I loved, and said, "They were Jews, every one of them." To this day, when I recall her rebuke I am ashamed. Anti-Semitism is a mindset of moral midgets.

So is racism. Our son Andrew and his African friend Mordecai were like Arthur Elias and me; they were inseparable buddies, and they did the same boy-things, including double lunches. Nearly every day, they ate lunch first at our house, then went complaining to Mordecai's mother Silipa that they were starving, really starving. If Andrew had been black, Silipa would not have given him anything to eat, but because she knew that we would not suspect of her of having poisoned him she fed the boys. Andrew developed a taste for -- dried minnows and palm oil. Stephanie and Paul also had their special African pals, and they also learned to savor food that most Americans would consider inedible and uneatable.

The Elias house was west of ours and the Feldmeyer's house was on the same side, two houses distant. Victor Feldmeyer owned an automobile repair shop. His German mother-in-law lived with the family. Sometimes she fixed homemade noodles for us. Mother raved about them, but Eddie and I (at the time, Rosie was too small to be asked for an opinion), thinking as children, preferred the thin, flat, slippery tasteless tapeworm-like pasta Mother bought in the grocery store. Recently, for the first time since childhood, I saw those German

noodles in a Bloomingdale restaurant named Schnitzel Platz. Naturally, I ordered them.

Dorothy Feldmeyer was my age. Arthur Elias and I accepted her as an almost-boy. We played together and went to school together. Many times in later years, my mother told me -- laughing, of course -- that our first-grade teacher, Miss Gatewood, had predicted darkly that Dorothy Feldmeyer and Donald Cole would surely come to no good end. After World War II, I saw Dorothy for the first time in 10 or 15 years. She was married to a major in the U.S. Marines, and she was beautiful. We talked about the good old days when we successfully tormented our first-grade teacher. Miss Gatewood deserved to be tormented.

What Dorothy did to annoy that stringy, stridulous, mean-looking woman is lost to my memory. Perhaps the reason was the little girl's irrepressibly cheerful disposition. She laughed a lot. I vexed the teacher by using my left hand to write and draw. In those days, not knowing that the seven hundred choice men of the tribe of Benjamin who could sling a stone at a hair and not miss were all left handed, teachers tried to correct what they perceived as a defect. It wasn't a defect; it was an advantage. The left-handed men of Benjamin could shoot arrows or sling stones right handed or left-handed, which made them formidable in battle.

Miss Gatewood slapped me a couple of times and once threw an eraser at me for trying to write on the blackboard with my left hand. She threw it well; I remember that the eraser bounced off my forehead. But she lost the battle; though I do nearly everything else with either hand, I still write left-handed. Like King

Saul's fellow Benjamites, I am ambidextrous, or very nearly so.

In Chicago, where we lived about four years, I did not make friends as close as Arthur Elias and Dorothy Feldmeyer. Before I was 25, both were permanently lost to me. Arthur died, and Dorothy married and settled somewhere unbeknownst to me. I cannot recall any childhood friends as dear to me as those two. But I remember other friends whose names are gone. On Grandpa Ross's street lived a boy two or three years older than I who built a crystal set, thereby amazing me and Eddie. He let us listen to it. All we could hear as he fiddled with it was an unintelligible squawking.

The Troost Avenue Gospel Hall

The Troost Avenue Gospel Hall was our life. The Hall, as it was called, looked like a church except that it had no steeple. It was designed and built for the Brethren who, in those days, repudiated "churchy" symbols, including steeples. The Kansas City Brethren were determined not to look like "denominational" churches. But the joke was on them; their architect also designed a Jewish synagogue that looked like a copy of the Troost Avenue Gospel Hall on the outside. If it is still standing, the synagogue is located near 56th or 57th and Prospect.

There is irony in the similarity between the Gospel Hall and that Jewish synagogue, but only because the Brethren eschewed the appearance of formal religion. Theologically, the Brethren had (and continue to have) stronger ties to the Jewish community than do Roman Catholic and most mainline Protestant churches. The Brethren approach to Scripture is commonly termed "Dispensational." This is, among other things, the view that Israel will not cease to exist; it will survive all attempts to exterminate Jews or end their distinctiveness. Brethren reject so-called "replacement theology," the notion that the church has inherited promises made to Israel. Some interpret the "Israel of God" text in Galatians 6:16 as a statement that the Church has replaced Israel. The Brethren protest that elsewhere (Romans 9:6) Paul says flatly that "not all who are descended from Israel are Israel." They understand "the Israel of God" to be a reference to genuine Jews who accept Jesus as the Messiah. They are the Israel of God. God will honor his promises to ancient Israel; they

will continue to exist as a distinct people, and they – not the church – will receive the blessings specifically promised to them. For the Brethren, if there were no other reason for believing as they do, Romans 11 would clinch the case.

Theologians and historians alike acknowledge the link between Judaism and Christianity. Hence the term popular in secular society in these times: Judeo-Christian. The Brethren express the fact that our roots are in Judaism by citing texts such as Romans 9:1-5:

"Theirs (the people of Israel) is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen."

"From them is traced the human ancestry of Christ." The Old Testament privileges listed in Romans 9:4-5 belonged exclusively to Israel, but Christ is not theirs; he is just of them, he came from them. He belongs to all of us. However, there is no excuse for the anti-Semitism that blotted the Church's record for centuries, and endures to the present – as is evident in political support given to Arab nations bent on Israel's destruction. Most Brethren and other dispensationalists are pro-Israel. They are not blind to Israel's rejection of Jesus, or its secularism bordering on atheism, or its harsh treatment of Palestinians. However, the Brethren (including me) believe that Israel will endure, at least until God intervenes in the final acts in world history.

The Gospel Hall in Kansas City was a 2-story dark-red brick building with granite quoins and other

ornamentation on the front. A narrow slab of stone or concrete over the second-story windows still reads, "Gospel Hall." The builder could not resist the urge to dress up the building a little. He installed stained-glass windows, much to the disdain of a few traveling preachers; they had no use for the trappings of the "sects and systems," as they termed other denominational churches.

Inside, on the main floor was the sanctuary (though the Brethren did not use that term) -- a high-domed, wide auditorium with, at the front, a platform nearly as wide as the auditorium itself. A balcony ran along two sides of the auditorium, but on one side doors covered the balcony to create space for Sunday School rooms. The space below the Sunday School rooms was also separated from the sanctuary by a row of doors, providing room for the adult class. Inside, there were collapsible pews like those in the main auditorium. Like all collapsible pews, they squeaked. Eddie and I could raise a terrible racket by coordinating our squirming.

Behind the pulpit, on the wall where in many churches large wooden crosses are suspended, was hung a wide canvas chart titled Two Roads and Two Destinies. The chart was a pictorial depiction of the history of the world from Creation to the Eternal State, with the Cross of Christ dividing history into BC and AD. The chart showed a time-line that began in the Garden of Eden and led eventually to two alternative destinies: heaven and hell. Two places on the time-line are registered forever in my memory: Calvary, where Christ was crucified, and Death (with a capital D) where the two roads -- the wide road that lead down to hell, and the narrow road that led up to heaven -- diverged and

reached their respective terminus. Hell was depicted as a bonfire.

The chart, which was copied by many evangelists and used extensively around the world, was designed by Caleb J. Baker, a member of the Brethren assembly on Troost Avenue. C. J. Baker was a manufacturer of tents and awnings. My mother, who always spoke of him respectfully, told me that it was at his urging that the Ross family moved to Kansas City from Chicago; evidently he and my grandfather were good friends. C. J. Baker died in February, 1918, and his friend C.W. Ross, our grandfather, published a memoir in a periodical he edited, Our Record. Preachers who knew him spoke of him respectfully, affirming that that C. J. Baker was a "giant," meaning a man of parts, a man of ability.

Mr. Baker undoubtedly knew that the Brethren pioneer missionary William Maitland took one of his charts to Angola and used it in preaching the Gospel in Chokwe villages. Even Ovimbundu people knew about that chart. I remember hearing an Otchimbundu preacher describe it (he didn't have one but had seen it), and warn the audience in stentorian tones that if they didn't believe, they'd end up "right here!" At that, he whirled and smacked a place on the wall where hell would be if the chart were still hanging there. It wasn't, but the preacher didn't need it to scare his listeners. They could "see" hell on the wall. Though dead, like Abel Caleb J. Baker still speaks.

The lower level of the Gospel Hall in Kansas City was the basement, which, like many old church buildings, was used as a dining room during conferences. There was a kitchen and a pantry and, of course, the

"facilities." The men's room was small and chilly (it was always chilly, winter and summer), and the basin (it was more like a sink) had only a cold water tap and a bar of Ivory soap. The soap looked like a tiny glacier with crevasses; it had deep dark cracks. The men's room was not only cold; it was also damp, and it had a distinctive smell. Exhaust fans had not yet become standard equipment in rest rooms. A blind man could have found it easily.

Every Sunday I made a trip to the men's room to see if the soap had been changed and to run icy water over my hands. Curiously, in fancy men's rooms in modern churches, I often have a flashback to the men's room in the Troost Avenue Gospel Hall. What triggers it, I think, is the modern liquid soap dispenser. When dispensing soft, liquid soap, I see that hard, cracked bar of Ivory in the Troost Avenue Gospel Hall.

Uncle Alf

Traveling preachers came regularly to the Christmas Day conference – an annual event. I attended many of them. My favorite preacher was A.P. Gibbs. He was a South African, a twin whose brother married my mother's cousin (Dorothy Fee) and returned to South Africa as a missionary after attending Moody Bible Institute. A.P. Gibbs also attended Moody, but he stayed in the States and, though he never married and had no children of his own, he specialized in children's meetings. When he came to Kansas City, he resided with us, usually for the entire month of December. We Cole children thought he was our uncle and called him Uncle Alf.

Uncle Alf had a knack with children. He liked kids and he didn't believe in thrashing them, as did so many parents in that generation. Instead, he withheld treats. Uncle Alf knew more about children than did many of his married peers. To help us eat our vegetables, he established the Clean Plate Club -- the CPC. Members who cleaned their plates at dinner-time were rewarded with a piece of paper-wrapped hard candy. Members who refused to eat their spinach or other abominations forfeited the candy. Difficult though it is to believe in these days of surfeit, we choked down the most objectionable things imaginable, even turnips. However, I recall a night when Eddie flatly refused to eat his spinach. He sat at the table gagging. After supper, when the candies were distributed to Rosie and me, Eddie had to walk away empty-handed. He looked so forlorn that Dad – who had a soft spot for Eddie – quietly slipped him

a piece of candy. I saw him do it. Uncle Alf did not. He would have protested; he believed in making good on threats. So did Dad, of course, but not necessarily on somebody else's threats.

A much-loved ritual when Uncle Alf came to town was his taking us downtown to see Santa Claus. It was our only acknowledgment of the approach of Christmas. Uncle Alf loved butterscotch candies and bought bags of the flat, round, golden candies for each of us. I cannot recall seeing Santa Claus, but I shall never forget the sticky butterscotch candies and the mess we were when we finally got off the street-car and walked a block or two to our home. Though she knew that Uncle Alf would buy candy for us, and let us eat it as if we were famished, Mother always protested the mess on our jackets. We looked like lost orphans, she sighed. But lifelong bachelor Uncle Alf usually looked worse. One year, he arrived wearing a sailor straw hat and a raincoat he himself had dyed. The raincoat was streaked and the straw hat looked doubly absurd in December. Mother refused to accompany us when we went downtown. Of course, we kids didn't crave her company on those excursions. For that one day of the year, Uncle Alf provided all the parenting we wanted.

Every year, it seems, as I reflect on that period of my life, Uncle Alf showed lantern slides of Pilgrim's Progress. The lantern-slide machine was a crude version of a slide projector. The slides were not filmstrips; they were made of two four-inch square pieces of glass, taped together around the edges. On the "in" side of one of the squares was painted a scene illustrating an episode in the story. Uncle Alf used our bathtub in the process of making slides. I can still "see" the clawfoot bathtub with

glass slides floating or standing in four or five inches of water. But in those benighted times nobody bathed every day; a bath was a weekly occurrence, scheduled for Saturday night, and to permit that ritual Uncle Alf fished his slides out of the water Saturday morning.

The pictures were scary. In fact, much of the story called Pilgrim's Progress is scary. I knew it well. One of the most fearsome was the picture of Appolyon attacking the pilgrim called Christian in the "Valley of Humiliation." Another depicted flames shooting out of the door to hell at the side of a mountain. Hell could not contain the roaring fire. A scene on the television is no more vivid in my mind. But my favorite scenes were those that showed Christian struggling through the icy river of death, and crying out that he was sinking "in deep water where there [was] no standing." He managed to cross the river, and there, waiting for him on the golden sands were throngs of angels who escorted him up a shining staircase, at the top of which stood the throne of God and of the Lamb.

In Uncle Alf's depiction of the last scene, Christian's head was lifted up and his face was filled with rapturous expectation. The armor was gone. He would not need it in heaven.

Pilgrim's Progress in Detroit and Angola

It's not surprising that years later I myself showed filmstrip versions of the story to Mexican fruit pickers in Michigan, and in one or two Brethren churches in Detroit. Later, I learned how to tell the story in Portuguese and in Umbundu. In Detroit, I was introduced to the fruit pickers by a former missionary to Argentina -- an Englishman named Rudolph Hopwood. He was my father's age. Mr. Hopwood led me to a festering tenement near the Detroit River, and on the third floor we found a room packed with Mexican migrant workers waiting to see what they mistakenly thought would be a free movie.

It was free, but it was not a movie; it was a film strip. I showed the pictures and explained them, one at a time, and Mr. Hopwood interpreted in Spanish. The audience listened carefully – to me as well as to Mr. Hopwood. Some of them were learning English, and my "lectures" were free lessons. During the session, I was distracted momentarily when a child ran up to his mother -- who was sitting directly in front of me -- fished around in her blouse, and, standing up, began to nurse. The mother scarcely noticed but for me it was a new experience.

I was moved by the poverty of those transient workers. They were hard workers who were poorly paid – robbed of their wages, James might say – and forced to live in squalid tenements. Yet they were a dignified people who spoke with courtesy and a sense of personal worth. When nobody was looking, I dropped two dollars on the kitchen range and ever after wondered who found them,

and how they were used. Two dollars are not much today, and not much then, but they were all I had in my pockets. I trace my affection and respect for Hispanics to those hours with migrant workers in that squalid Detroit tenement. Remembering those people, I side with politicians and social workers who call for social justice. In my thinking, their attitudes – if not their solutions – are in harmony with the 8th century prophets of Israel.

Angolans loved the story of Pilgrim's Progress but the pictures troubled them; they did not know immediately what they were seeing. They weren't accustomed to pictures, and needed time to recognize what was depicted on the silver screen. To them, ordinary pictures were like Picassos to me – unintelligible unless explained. So I lingered over each scene, describing it and interpreting it, until heat in the projector made the picture pop out of focus. Then we moved to the next. The projector was powered by a small, portable generator, bought in 1952 at an army surplus store during my first furlough from Angola.

I read somewhere that President Abraham Lincoln read very few books, but those he read, he read carefully. It is obvious to those who study his speeches that he read Pilgrim's Progress. In Lincoln's century, every educated person read the Bible and Pilgrim's Progress. Like St. Patrick, I am a poorly educated man. But I have read and reread Pilgrim's Progress, and cannot imagine what my thought-life would be if every reference to that now almost forgotten allegory were deleted. Great English literature and to a lesser degree, perhaps, American literature, are full of allusions to John Bunyan's story of

the man who traveled from the City of Destruction to the Heavenly City.

The Breaking of Bread

The central service in Brethren assemblies was (and is) a meeting for the Breaking of Bread, sometimes called the Lord's Supper. I love these terms; I like them better than Communion, a more popular term in many places. My earliest memories of church are of the Breaking of Bread at Troost Gospel Hall. I can still hear the creaking of the wooden folding pews. The Brethren liked to arrange the chairs or pews in an irregular square surrounding the table on which the bread and wine were placed. The square was called a circle. Later, we joked that of all the thinkers in history, only the Brethren managed to square the circle. When the Lord's Supper ended, the pews were rearranged for the preaching service. To this day, a similar arrangement is made in nearly every Brethren assembly.

The custom of making a square with the pews had its roots in the King James Version rendering of the words of Jesus in Matthew 18:20: "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." The key words are "gathered together," and "in the midst." Brethren hymns echo nearly every word in that text. A favorite hymn was penned by Robert Chapman of Barnstable, England. The first stanza describes the environment at the Lord's Table:

> *With Jesus in our midst,*
> *We gather round the board;*
> *Though many, we are one in Christ,*
> *One body in the Lord.*

>

When bruised on Calvary;
With Christ we died and rose again,
And sit with Him on high.

>

Faith eats the bread of life,
And drinks the living wine;
Thus we, in love together knit,
On Jesus' breast recline.

>

Soon shall the night be gone,
And we with Jesus reign;
The marriage supper of the Lamb
Shall banish all our pain.

That hymn, like many other hymns sung in the Brethren assembly in Kansas City, is a little compendium of theology. The four stanzas in Chapman's hymn hang together thematically. Probably most hymns written in the 19th century were written as poems or "meditations," and then set to simple music lest the music detract from the message.

One of Mary Bowley Peters' hymns, like Robert Chapman's hymn, also seats us at the Lord's Table in the first stanza:

Around Thy table, Holy Lord,
In fellowship we meet,
Obedient to Thy gracious Word,
This feast of love to eat.

A hymn that was sung often at the Lord's Supper was penned by a woman identified only as Mrs. Thompson (no initial):

Jesus, Lord, we know Thee present
At Thy table freshly spread,
Seated at Thy priceless banquet,
With Thy banner overhead.

>

Precious moments at Thy table,
From all fear and doubt set free;
Here to rest, so sweetly able,
Occupied alone with Thee.

>

Here rejoicing in Thy nearness,
Gladly by Thy Spirit led;
Calmly in the blest remembrance
Of Thy precious blood once shed.

>

Lord, we take each simple token
In fond memory of Thee;
Muse upon Thy body broke
And Thy blood shed on the tree.

>

O what joy it is to see Thee,
In these emblems gathered here!
In the bread and wine of blessing,
Bread to strengthen, wine to cheer.

>

Lord, behold us met together,
Members of our risen Head
Thus to take the cup of blessing,
Thus to share the broken bread.

>

Lord, we know how true Thy promise
To be with us where we meet,
When in Thy loved name we gather
To enjoy communion sweet.

>

Dearer still that looked for promise
To each waiting, yearning heart,
That we soon will be with Thee, Lord
And forever where Thou art.

Mrs. Thompson's hymn expresses as well as any hymn the Brethren thinking about the Breaking of Bread. It recalls the Upper Room and the Lord's command to remember him and his investing ordinary bread and wine with deep significance. The hymn describes the bread and wine as "simple tokens," and "emblems," which we take "in fond memory" of the Lord.

That hymn and many others like it are saturated with Scripture; allusions to Scripture appear in every line, and mature believers in Brethren assemblies know the Scriptural sources. As a child in Kansas City, I knew nothing about hymns or hymnals. Later, as a teenager I came to understand the hymns I had heard all my life and to love them deeply. I still do. Not knowing the Scripture sources costs a worshipper some insights. For example, Isaac Watts' great hymn, "When I survey the wondrous cross…" has been changed to accommodate those for whom the term "offering" may sound archaic. In the stanza, "Were the whole realm of nature mine, / That were an offering far too small; / Love so amazing, so divine, / Demands my heart, my life, my all," the word "present" is substituted for "offering." It is a poor

substitute for "offering" – a word rich in allusions to theological truth. We Brethren are dismayed by the change. A "present" is not the thought intended by the author. It is a dumbing down of the stanza.

At least two complaints about the Brethren way of celebrating the Lord's Supper are legitimate. One is that not much "celebrating" is done; instead, the Brethren focus on the sufferings of Christ to the point where the experience becomes a downer. Occasionally, a meeting is ended with the hymn "Up from the grave He arose…" but the sentiment seems more like a tack-on than a genuinely joyous conclusion to the hour of worship.

From a boy's perspective, not much happened in a Breaking of Bread service. Since nobody was in charge and there was no program, there were long silences. Mrs. Thompson would say the saints were musing. If so, their musings were interrupted every time the Spirit led some of the men to pray or call for a hymn. None of the women were Spirit-led; they had to maintain silence. Whether I knew a rule of silence for women was in place, or not, I cannot say. It would not have mattered; if Aunt Ottie, whom Eddie and I loved to sit with, had stood up to pray she'd have disturbed my musings. When growing up, I never heard a woman preach or pray in public, or "give out" a hymn. [To "give out" a hymn is Brethren jargon, like "taking the funeral," which means to officiate at a funeral.] Much later, it occurred to me that women had gotten even with their male overseers by writing some of the finest hymns in the Brethren hymnbooks.

When I was a boy sitting with my grandparents at the Breaking of Bread meeting, my own immature musings

were centered in earthly things: Aunt Ottie's fox fur piece, the aroma of fresh bread and, when the wooden lids on the two chalices were lifted, the sweet smell of wine, a dollar bill folded into a small square that Aunt Ottie let me or Eddie drop into the velvet bag as it passed from hand to hand, and, above all, Mr. MacPherson's prayers.

During the 90 minute service (it was called a meeting) I liked to play with Aunt Ottie's fox fur piece, rubbing its fur, polishing its glass eyes, and snapping its jaws. How well I remember that fox! But there was magic in the air when it came time to break the bread. On the table was a huge loaf of bread. It was a loaf that had risen high in the pan and spilled over the edges, not like the commercial sliced bread we ate at home. If I were an artist doing a still life painting, I wouldn't paint a bowl of apples and pears; I'd paint a big loaf of bread like the bread used in the Lord's Supper in the Troost Avenue Gospel Hall.

The minutes dragged until time to break the bread. But when one of the men -- an elder, I suppose, though I didn't know an elder from a janitor -- stood up and gave thanks for the loaf the pace picked up. An elder moved to the table, picked up the loaf of bread and broke it in half. I loved to watch the breaking of the loaf. The man doing it moved as deliberately as the high priest entering the Holy of Holies. All he lacked was a robe with pomegranates and golden bells sewn on the hem. He placed the bread on silver plates, as delicately as if he were handling eggs, and he handed the plates to men assigned the job of delivering them to the rear pews on each side of the table. As the plates passed from hand to hand, each adult took a morsel of bread. It was just a

pinch, not enough to eat, just enough to suck until ready for swallowing. I watched the plates pass, knowing that the meeting was winding down. Eddie and I knew also that the bread was not for us. We were little sinners – not saved and not baptized.

Mr. MacPherson

For me, a high point in the Breaking of Bread service was prayer by Mr. MacPherson. He inspired awe. Mr. MacPherson had snowy white hair and a craggy face that commanded attention. But he was blind and his arms ended at the elbows. I remember his sleeves pinned up lest, empty, they dangle and flap as he walked. Before the accident that blinded and maimed him, Mr. MacPherson was a mining engineer in Colorado. He was inspecting a charge of dynamite when it blew up in his face, destroying his eyes and ripping off his arms.

The blast also seared Mr. MacPherson's lips, so that he could not read Braille with his lips. Instead, he read with his tongue. I once saw his Bible -- a huge stack of very thick volumes. As Mr. MacPherson grew old reading the Bible, his tongue thickened, giving his voice a muffled quality. In my ears, though distinct and as easily understood as anybody else's speech, Mr. MacPherson's voice sounded as if it were coming from deep inside a cave, or like the rumbling of far-off thunder at the beginning of an African dry season.

The quality of his voice caught everybody's attention, but what held attention was the content of Mr. MacPherson's prayers. He knew the Lord, as the Brethren put it, and when he gave thanks for the bread or the cup he talked to God. Though I was only a boy, I sensed that Mr. MacPherson knew God. Even now, remembering him, I feel a rush of emotion. I have known great men and women of God in my lifetime.

My mother told me that Mr. MacPherson was once persuaded to stand on the platform at a Sunday night gospel meeting. Mother never forgot the occasion. There he stood, bent -- as are many blind people -- a man with a deeply lined face and a voice like muffled thunder. But it was what he said that lodged most deeply in her memory. He talked about darkness. He told how, when he awakened in the hospital, his face was bandaged. He could see nothing, only feel the pain of a man whose eyes had been blown out of their sockets. And when the bandages were removed, he knew that what he had feared was true: he would never see again. He was blind; he lived in perpetual, total darkness. And darkness, he said, "the outer darkness," was how the Bible portrayed hell.

The last time I saw him – shortly after World War II, I think -- I was inordinately pleased to hear him say that he remembered us Cole children. "You were good boys," he said. Blind Mr. MacPherson had never seen us tearing around the place. But perhaps he was thinking about Rosie. She was only five years old when we left Kansas City.

Until my Ross grandparents died, we visited Kansas City every year, usually during Christmas week. The Brethren did not believe in the usual Christmas celebrations. Not until I was a teenager did my mother buy a Christmas tree. Yet our parents did not deny us Christmas presents or, as noted already, the thrill of seeing Santa Claus with Uncle Alf. On Christmas morning, we found presents – articles of clothing, usually, but they were not under a tree and they were not wrapped. We found them in the parlor on the sofa or one of the arm chairs. After breakfast, we went to a

conference "meeting" at the Gospel Hall, the first of many until the final meeting on Sunday night.

The Move to Chicago

In 1932, when I was nine years old, we moved from Kansas City to Chicago. The nation was gripped in a severe depression, and Dad needed a job. I still recall the telephone call from Chicago, offering him a sales job for a paint manufacturer in Chicago. When the telephone rang, my mother answered it and called Dad to the phone. The caller was Uncle Will, who would be Dad's boss. Dad was in the bathroom giving Eddie and me a bath -- two at a time. He left us to soak while he answered the telephone. I was only nine then, but I remember his elation when he came bounding up the stairs. He was so happy he told us we were clean, which was a stretch.

My father rarely rebuked us. I can recall only one occasion in Kansas City when Dad cut a willowy switch from a bush in the backyard and stroked us with it. Eddie has a better memory than I; he says there were other unpleasant moments. I do remember conspiring with Eddie to "hold out" on Dad. If he punished us, he soon came seeking reconciliation -- as if he were the offender and we the offended party. I remember his telling us how much he loved us, and how much he disliked punishing us. But we pretended to be grievously hurt, when in fact we were enjoying his obvious misery.

I sometimes recall Dad's seeking forgiveness from us bratty sons when listening to Bible teachers wrestle with questions about reconciliation. Who does the reconciling, they ask, or who is reconciled, God or the sinner? In my mind, the answers are so obvious that I wonder how anyone could think of such questions.

On several occasions, many fathers would have punished their sons for doing what we Cole boys did. When I was seven or eight years old, an older neighbor told me he would teach me how to fire a B.B. gun. He let me shoulder the gun, and he pointed it at my father's Dodge car. I fired it and lo, the pellet hit the rear window on the curbside and shattered it. Without my telling him that I didn't mean to break the window, Dad understood what had happened, and said nothing. I can still remember riding in the rear seat, looking out that glassless window until Dad had it fixed.

The pitching of a whole bushel basket of ripe tomatoes on the front porch at boys passing by on the sidewalk was probably a punishable offense, but I cannot recall being punished. If I was punished, that was one of the unpleasant moments that Eddie alone remembers. Mother would have said simply that if boys found an unprotected basket of tomatoes, being boys they must throw them. "It's the nature of the beast," I heard her say more than once.

Because she was there all the time, Mother was the family disciplinarian. She was pathetically soft. Dad traveled a lot, even when as general sales manager he could have handled much of the business from headquarters. He was usually gone three or four days a week, from Monday until Thursday or Friday afternoon. Mother was left in charge. For at least two reasons, the arrangement was not threatening: Mother was not a severe disciplinarian, and Dad had one inflexible rule: no reports of misbehavior upon his return.

My father was not so naive as to think we never misbehaved in his absence. The rule was intended to

keep Mother from threatening us with discipline by Dad upon his arrival, and from telling him what he did not want to hear -- that we had been wicked (one of my grandmother Ross's words) during his absence. "I'll take care of them when I'm home," Dad said. "You take care of them when I'm gone." Behind that rule, which Mother observed perfectly, was the memory of his childhood. It was frequently made bitter by the certainty that when his father came home after work, his mother would report that Paul had broken a commandment of some kind. Dad once told me he could remember kneeling in prayer with his sister Louise, asking God to stop their father from coming home. They knew there would be a whipping with a belt. But only Dad would be whipped. My grandfather Cole was extremely partial. Once, when settling a dispute between Dad and Louise, Grandpa said, "Right or wrong, I'm for Louise." Dad never forgot that atrocious statement. As a parent, he was careful to be fair. And he wanted his children to anticipate his arrival with joy, not dread. Hence the rule that, unlike Joseph who told on his brothers, Mother could not give Dad a bad report of our doings.

Thrashing children with belts or sticks was commonplace when my parents were children; past generations believed that references to a "rod" in the Book of Proverbs implied that children should be beaten. Accordingly, the rod -- whether leather or wood -- was applied freely. If my grandfather Cole did not exaggerate, he himself was sometimes whipped until blood ran down his legs. Though Grandpa Cole did not draw blood from his children, it seems not to have occurred to him that there might be a better way to train children than to lay on with a belt. It didn't occur

to him because he, like nearly everybody else in the history of the world, was a child of his times.

No doubt, we also are children of our times. I worry about it; I do not wish to share the limitations or excesses of this age, whether in secular or religious matters. Hence, from time to time my wife Naomi and I discuss two questions: first, what are we doing now that, five years from now we will regret having done? Second, what should we be doing now that we are not doing, but which, five years from now we will regret not having done? Inevitably, we recall the painting by Ivan Albright of a weather-beaten old door with a wreath on it. The fingers of a hand are pulling the door shut. The inscription is telling, "That which I should have done, I did not do."

My father did not want his children to dread his appearing. Nor did we dread his appearing; we respected him, but we were not afraid of him. We knew that his arrival at the house on a Friday afternoon did not herald a spoiled weekend. Dad seems to have understood that the Bible does not command that children be beaten. He sensed or knew on the basis of exegetical reasons that the subject of a beating in those passages about "a rod for the back" is a grown-up fool, not a child.

Still, my parents often scoffed at Aunt Ottie's theories about child-rearing. Aunt Ottie, who was the first member of the clan to graduate from the university, had taken courses in psychology. But she was helpless in the hands of children. After we were grown, Aunt Ottie was offered a job as superintendent of the Adelaide Christian Home for Children in Los Angeles. Two months after she

began her work, she appealed to Dick and Mary Matthews -- who lived in Kansas City at the time -- to come work with the boys in the home. In unpublished memoirs written for his children, titled "My Story," Dick recalls his early experiences in the Home. The children were out of control. "Ottie was a dear soul," Dick writes, "but she was lost when it came to bringing order to the situation. A disciplinarian or organizer of any kind she was not."

We loved her dearly. When I was eight-years-old and still lived in Kansas City, Aunt Ottie caught me smoking a cigarette. It was only half a cigarette -- a butt I had found in a gutter near our grandparents' house, where we were playing. She knew that Grandma Ross would be horrified. If she called us little sinners when we were behaving normally, by our standards, what would she say to a depraved eight-year-old smoker? Aunt Ottie took no chances. She hurried into the kitchen and found an apple, brought it out to me and told me to eat the apple and ride her bicycle around the block a few times. The apple would purify my breath. Nobody would know that I had sinned -- not Grandma and not my mother. I suspect that if Grandpa had caught me he'd have laughed.

Chicago

In Chicago, as in Kansas City, we lived in three different houses. Mother loved to move, which was one of my father's reasons for renting, not buying a house. The first house was on Massassoit, between Chicago Avenue and Augusta Boulevard. It was a two-flat, and we lived on the first floor. A girl about my age, who lived upstairs, once leaned over the banister on the rear stairs and spat on me. I rushed up the stairs but she skipped into the kitchen and slammed the door before I could punch her. That girl, whose name I cannot recall, confirmed my conviction at the time that girls were a species to be avoided.

I don't know why my parents rented that house, unless it was the location. The house was near the Simpsons and near the Austin Gospel Hall, which was our church as long as we lived in Chicago. It was also near Byford School, which my mother had attended as a small girl. Amazingly, my fourth grade teacher, Miss Kinsella, had been mother's fourth grade teacher about 30 years earlier. Mother said Miss Kinsella looked no older than when she was her teacher. I thought she was as ancient as the hills around Jerusalem, about which we heard descriptions in Sunday School.

Because Kansas City schools were better than Chicago's, within a few weeks of arriving in Chicago, I was skipped half a grade to fifth grade. My new teacher's name was Miss Moynihan. In that period of America history, most teachers were unmarried women, like Miss Gatewood, Miss Neeley, Miss Kinsella, and Miss Moynihan. I liked Miss Moynihan. Though unmarried, she was

grandmotherly. But a week after the move to her class, she threatened to send me back to fourth grade. She learned that I had been fighting with another boy in the class. She threatened, but she did nothing; I was allowed to remain in class.

The long-range effect of that early move from fourth to fifth grade was graduation from high school in mid term, when I was seventeen years old. Whether it was a good move or not, I cannot say. Some educators discourage the skipping of grades. The children, they say, should stay with children of the same age. I cannot recall struggling to keep up with the older children. What I recall most vividly about beginning fourth class and then being skipped was the requirement that I fight two boys -- first as a fourth-grader, then as a fifth-grader. A newcomer's pecking order in the society of his male peers in Chicago was determined by duking it out on the playground with the class bully. Miss Kinsella's opinion that I was ready for fifth grade had to be tested on the battlefield. I had to fight to prove that I was not a sissy.

I was a good fist-fighter. I liked to fight. In Kansas City, my Chestnut Street friend, Arthur Elias, had encouraged me to fight other boys as often as possible. Arthur was a great trainer to have in my corner. If I got hurt, as I often did, he would say "Buck up, Donnie, buck up!" and I bucked up. I loved Arthur Elias and, not many years after we moved away, was terribly saddened by news of his death. Arthur died in his late teens – a year or two before he might have died in battle during the war. His brother David became a well-known surgeon in Kansas City.

My mind returns often to Kansas City, even when I am writing about Chicago. We returned to Kansas City every year, usually at Christmas time. On Christmas Eve or a day earlier, Dad tied our suitcases to the luggage rack on the driver's side of his Ford, and early in the morning we set out on a two lane highway past the state prison near Joliet and through Illinois until we crossed the Mississippi at Quincy or Hannibal. We boys usually begged to cross at Hannibal. We wanted to see Tom Sawyer's fence again. It's odd that I should remember so much trivia about the annual journey to Kansas City: starting out on snowy days with a little fan to keep the windshield clear of ice, and blankets to keep our feet warm in the back seat. I remember swollen rivers, cocoa in a heavy white mug in a restaurant in Chillicothe, the bridge over the Mississippi and eventually the sight of the Missouri River -- our river. Soon we would be home in Kansas City.

Notes

1. Acts 21:39.

2. Judges 20:16.

3. Psalm 69:2.

4. James 5:4.

5. Genesis 37:2.

6. Proverbs 10:13, etc.

7. Richard B. Matthews, My Story, (Privately published) December 1996.