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where and who you were." What does this say to you personally?
To your church?

References

- 1 E.g., Gerhard von Rad, Old Testament Theology, trans. D. M. C. Stalker (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), vol.11, p.19.
2. Numbers 11:15.
3. Cf. Exodus 24:18 and 34:28, and Deuteronomy 9:9-11, 18 and 10:10.
4. Hosea 7:8. The term is uncommon, appearing only seven times in the Old Testament.
5. Cf. Exodus 19:18, 33:22, and 34:6.
6. Exodus 19:16, 18-19; 33:18-23, Jo.
7. Of all these, and of all that these may represent, sex in love surely has the best claim. Rosemary Ruether in an essay on Judaism and Christianity tells us that "far from despising sexuality, the rabbis even declared that, since the destruction of the temple, the presence of God existed in two places: in the rabbinic houses of study, and when a man lies beside his wife." Ruether, Liberation Theology (New York: Paulist-Newman, 1972), p.70. Copyright @ 1972 by The Missionary Society of St. Paul the Apostle in the State of New York. Used by permission of Paulist Press.
8. Webster's Third New International Dictionary (Springfield:Merriam Company, 1965), italics mine.
9. Montgomery, The Book of Kings (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), pp. 314f.

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Word Of God - Word of Earth by **B. Davie Napier**

B. Davie Napier, at the time of this writing was Holmes Professor of Old Testament Criticism and Intepretation at Yale Divinity School. He later became President of Pacific School of Religion. He is a minister of the United Church of Christ and an author of several books on the Old Testament. *Word of God -- Word of Earth* is copyrighted to United Church Press, 1976, and published by A Pilgrim Press, a division of United Church Press. This material was prepared for Religion Online by Paul Mobley.

Section 4: The Inheritance

1. Now it happened that one Naboth of Jezreel owned a vineyard
2. adjacent to Ahab's (winter) residence; until one day Ahab made this offer to Naboth: "Let me have your vineyard to use as a vegetable garden, since it immediately adjoins my property. In exchange, I will give you a better vineyard, or, if you
3. prefer, I will pay you its worth in cash." But Naboth replied to Ahab, "Yahweh forbid that I should give you my ancestral inheritance!"
4. So Ahab returned home sullen and seething over Naboth's refusal to relinquish his ancestral inheritance. He lay down on his bed, averted his face, and refused to eat anything.
5. But then his wife, Jezebel, came to him and said, "What has
6. you so upset that you won't (even) eat anything?" So he told her, "I made a proposal to Naboth. I said to him, 'Give me your vineyard for cash or, if you prefer, I will give you a vineyard in exchange for it.' But he said, 'I will not give you my vineyard.'"
7. His wife, Jezebel, answered him, "Do you or do you not exercise rule over Israel? Snap out of it, eat something, and take heart! I will myself

God, it is god with a small "g," an idolatrous experience, self-aggrandizing, titillating, not far removed from the sensuousness of Baalism, over against which Elijah stands.

In any case, how far removed is this self-contented jogger from the authentic apprehension of Word of God and word of earth. Dom Helder Camara, the diminutive Brazilian archbishop who symbolizes Christian opposition to military dictatorship not only in Brazil but throughout Latin America, was awarded an honorary doctorate of laws at Harvard University in 1974. The citation might have read, "For rare and courageous sensitivity and commitment to Word of God and word of earth." It read, in fact, "The most Reverend Helder Camara, Doctor of Laws. A tireless opponent of poverty and injustice, a stalwart Christian leader offering life and hope to the downtrodden and defeated."(4)

It was an event ignored, of course, in Brazil. And even Harvard gave him no chance to deliver the speech he had prepared for the occasion. But *Harvard Magazine* reported it, and *Christianity and Crisis* printed it.(5) His words point out the utter vacuity of the jogger's "religious" intoxication.

He said the pessimist in him mocked his receipt of a degree in law when "law is ever more a hollow word, resonant but empty, in a world increasingly dominated by force, by violence, by fraud, by injustice, by avarice -- in a word, by egoism"; when civil law permits "the progressive and rapid increase of oppressed people who continue being swept toward ghettos, without work, without health, without instruction, without diversion and, not rarely, without God"; when under so-called international law "more than two-thirds of humanity (exist) in situations of misery, of hunger, of subhuman life"; and when agrarian law or spatial law permits "today's powerful landowners to continue to live at the cost of misery for unhappy pariahs"; and whereby "modern technology achieves marvels from the earth with an ever-reduced number of rural workers (while) those not needed in the fields live sublives in depressing slums on the outskirts of nearly all the large cities."

Dom Helder speaks of "subwork leading to sublife... of the greed of multinationals that export entire factories to paradises of investment where salaries are low and dispute impossible . . (of) dictatorships of the right or left but also pseudodemocracies turned shortsighted by obsessions such as anti-communism."

Dom Helder Gamara: word of earth.

The speech ends on the note of the Word of God in response to the word of earth:

The degree with which you honor me brings me to ask of God that at this point of life . . . I spend myself to the end in the service of humankind -- as the most secure means of giving glory to our Lord.

God permit that the symbol of my life be a candle that burns itself, that consumes itself while there is still wax to burn; when nothing more remains to be consumed, that my flame, yet an instant, dare to remain alive and afoot, to rumble after, happy in the conviction that one day the force of Right will conquer the pretended right of force.

Word of God, word of earth!

ON ADJACENCY

This Jezreel event(6) of coveted adjacent property and of subsequent treachery and murder for the sake of possession -- this particular crisis of adjacency happened in the middle of the ninth century before our era, well over twenty-eight hundred years ago. With variation, but in essential correspondence of members of the plot, it happened of course throughout the spreading human family in the centuries and years, perhaps even months or days, preceding; and it has most assuredly continued to happen, in its significant essence, with persistence and always accompanying human carnage down to our own time and decade and, who knows, even day and hour. It may be happening even among us today or yesterday or tomorrow, on a simpler scale, of course, with covetousness, treachery, murder, and possession all symbolized in aggression against the psyche of another, an adjacent person. The resultant human carnage in such a case takes the form of a sophisticated psychological increment to a sustained, subtle process of essential dehumanization of a spouse or colleague or anyone in the array of personal relationships.

The recurrent phenomenon may be described as the problem of adjacency. Let us call the two parties A and B. B's property or treasure, B's heritage, B's right, is adjacent, or appears to be adjacent or is declared to be adjacent -- adjacency is a phenomenally flexible term,

subject to interpretation according to what is deemed to be adjacent by the powerful covetor; B's thing which is B's by rights, by inheritance, becomes in its adjacency an object of passionate desire, an obsessive craving, on the part of a more powerful A. In the classical expression of the problem of adjacency, of which the story before us is a splendid example, the ensuing conflict of interest between A and B proves to be irreconcilable, and the weaker B is effectively eliminated as a contender. This is done, in this remarkable human family of which we are all a part, with demonic craft by the powerful, in an absolutely dazzling array of forms (if necessity is the mother of invention, covetousness and lust are the parents of ingenuity), upon well-established but shamelessly fraudulent justification, usually in the broad sense religious and sometimes even specifically theological. The more heinous the perpetuation of violence issuing from the problem of adjacency, the more probable, not to say imperative, the establishment of grounds in essential piety. This is to ensure the crucial support ostensibly of God himself (one suspects A always knows better), but, failing that, at least the consent of the rank and file of God's would-be worshipers.

In practice, of course, problems of adjacency are often resolved by the capitulation of B. I cannot speak for you, but if I had been in Naboth's place I think I would certainly have been tempted to say, What is this inheritance of mine or what do I care about my right when looked at over against what my refusal may cost me, or what I may gain by currying favor with the powerful A, and by striking with him an advantageous deal into the bargain? But this is not Naboth. Allende of Chile may well have been a Naboth. He refused to sell his inheritance and died at the sure instigation of a coalition of Ahabs -- some of them having the initials CIA. History may well adjudge Castro of Cuba to be a Naboth who survived a US/Ahab plot to murder and take possession. Jezebel's Bay of Pigs was successful when ours was not. And Dom Helder Camara, who stands as both a Naboth and an Elijah on behalf of all victims of covetousness and appropriation, may, following some of his associates, suffer Naboth's elimination -- God forbid! If it happens, it will of course be claimed that Dom Helder too had cursed God and the ruling military junta.

Olive Schreiner, an Englishwoman of South Africa, born in the middle of the nineteenth century and surviving well into the twentieth, was in many perceptive ways vastly ahead of her time. Of the sensitive English persons of her own place and generation she wrote, "We know, none so well, how stained is our African record; we know with what envious

eyes the Government of English Ahabs eyes the patrimony of Black Naboths and takes it, if necessary, after bearing false witness against Naboth." (7) The government of US Ahabs has followed and outstripped the English lead. Like the claim of the old British Empire, we too can say that the sun never sets on fields and lands, on kingdoms and governments, on men and women and children, on myriads of Naboths -- all adjacent to us. We play the grim game of adjacency with our own oppressed minorities and, as well, whether with Naboth's capitulation or elimination, with populations from Santiago to Saigon, from San Juan to Seoul. It is a tragedy of as yet unmeasured consequence that all over Latin America Nelson Rockefeller symbolizes the US Ahab; and we have reason to wonder whether the present administration may not be contemplating playing Ahab to the Naboth of the oil countries. In fact, of course, Naboth's vineyard, adjacent to US property, is a global phenomenon, and in devious ways we twist the circumstances to fit the charge, or misinterpret the charge to justify murder and possession-- "Naboth cursed God and the king!"

I do not mean to say that our ruthless invocation of adjacency is anything new. Born and brought up in China, I believed then that China was ours. It was a long two weeks by ship from North America, but at least in spirit and in potential, it was adjacent, and we rather claimed it as our own vineyard. I do not repudiate my parents' work in China--largely in education--in quoting this passage from David Halberstam's *The Best and the Brightest*:

To America (in quoting that term for the United States, I apologize to all other Americans from Canada to Southern Chile and Argentina for this unwarranted appropriation] China was a special country, different from other countries. India could have fallen (he is referring to the collapse of Chiang Kal-shek in 1949), or an African nation, and the reaction would not have been the same. For the American missionaries loved China; it was, by and large, more exciting than Peoria (so that Peoria does not have to stand alone, let me say that my father certainly found Shanghai more exciting seventy years ago than Auburn, Alabama), had a better life style and did not lack for worthy pagans to be converted; add to that the special quality of China, a great culture, great food, great charm, and the special relationship was cemented. The Chinese were puritanical, clean, hard-working, reverent, cheerful, all the virtues Americans most admired. And so a myth had grown up, a myth not necessarily supported by the facts, of the very special U.S.-China relationship. We helped them and led them, and in turn they loved us. A myth fed by millions of

pennies put in thousands of church plates by little children to support the missionaries in their work in this exotic land which was lusting for Christianity. China was good; the Chinese were very different from us, and yet they were like us; what could be at once more romantic, yet safer. The Japanese were bad, more suspicious and could not be trusted. The Chinese were good and could be trusted.(8)

In 1950 Joseph Alsop wrote a three-part series entitled "Why We Lost China." Halberstam comments that "it was not a serious bit of journalism, but rather a re-creation of the Chennault-Chiang line. It set the tone. . . for the conspiracy view of the fall of China.. . The title is worth remembering: 'Why We Lost China.' China was ours, and it was something to lose. . . countries were ours, we could lose them."

And since the adjacent vineyard of China was not, after all, for barter, the US Ahab withdrew, sullen and seething, with face steadfastly averted for more than two decades. It remains to be seen what kind of plot, in detail, we shall resort to in hope of achieving some kind of resurrection of that once beneficent and lucrative relationship. It is already clear that that plot will involve the purchase and planting of false witnesses and the old charge that God and king, religion and democratic order, have been cursed.

We know, none so well, how stained is our national record; we know with what envious eyes our own business and military and political Ahabs regard the inheritance of Third World Naboths and take it, if necessary after bearing false witness against Naboth.

BY VIOLATION AND VIOLENCE

Elijah's successor prophets in the next century decry the lust for adjacent land; and they do so, of course, among a people in whose corporate understanding inherited property is a part of one's "psy- chological totality." (10) Several decades ago, Johannes Pedersen called attention to

the terror ringing through (Naboth's) answer to the proposal of the king.... Naboth cannot part with the property which he has inherited from his (ancestors) without committing sacrilege against himself and his kindred, so closely do kindred and property belong together. . . In all the laws of the Old Testament it is taken absolutely for granted that no one sells . . . landed property without being forced to do so.(11)

It is this sense of the identity of person and property that intensifies Isaiah's denunciation of those "who join house to house, who add field to field [5:8]." And whether the juxtaposition is editorial or not, this cry of woe follows immediately upon the concluding verse of the Song of the Vineyard (5:1-7, RSV):

The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the (people) of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, a cry!

Micah's indictment is characteristically even more passionate (and one almost wonders whether both prophets explode as they do impelled, even if unconsciously, by the then already classical model of the Naboth incident). The New English Bible puts it this way (Micah 2:1-2):

Shame on those (the old "woe" form) who lie in bed planning evil and wicked deeds
and rise at daybreak to do them,
knowing that they have the power!
They covet land and take it by force;
if they want a house they seize it;
they rob one of one's home
and steal every one's inheritance.

It was Jezebel who planned and executed the evil by which not only Naboth's inheritance but his very life was taken. To the brooding king she says, this product of the religion of Baal, devoid of Yahwism's sense of justice and righteousness, "Do you or do you not exercise rule over Israel!" There is an insinuation of incredulity laced with disdain and scorn. The German Roman Catholic scholar A. Sanda admirably paraphrases, "*Du bist mir ein feiner Konig!*" "A fine king you are for me!" (12) Knowing that we Ahabs and Jezebels have the power, and wanting Naboth's land and inheritance, we will take it by force of violence; but we will see to it that our punishment of Naboth fits his "crime" against us. As he in the name of Yahweh refused us the acquisition of vineyard, so we, in the name of that same Yahweh, will do away with Naboth and seize his inheritance.¹³

IN THE NAME OF GOD

It is, alas, all too devastating a parable of our own times and kingdoms; of our own pentagons, war departments, international peddlers of arms; of our own multinational corporations; of our own

and allied governments. In the primary if not sole interest of maintaining and enhancing what we possess -- in this world in truth like a royal residence and grounds in Jezreel -- we plan our evil deeds and rise at daybreak to do them, knowing that we have the power; and what we covet we will take, be it even another's inheritance of life, of dignity, of humanity. We will appropriate what is Naboth's to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, to love and to cherish, till death us do part -- and we will do it ostensibly according to God's holy ordinance. We take it where we will and can, from our own minority Naboths to the Naboths in the Caribbean, in Central and South America, and on the continents of Africa and Asia. We do what we do in the way of appropriation and, if need be, murder with all the craft of a Jezebel. We do it, by cunning, by power and prestige, by elaborately contrived false witness--we too do it claiming the while that it is done in the name of Yahweh, according to God's holy ordinance, even in the name of Jesus Christ, and of course because we are a Christian nation. You know: In God We Trust. And so, wherever we do it, we insist that we do it for you, you who survive our doing it. We do it to make your world safe for democracy (our brand of democracy, of course). We steal or destroy your inheritance to protect you from Godless communism (which of course also threatens our own power and wealth). We do it to help you build airports and highways for your use, of course (but also so that we may the more easily exercise our prerogatives of adjacency).

And dearly beloved, I do not know how or whether we shall stop it until it is too late, even for us.

The "we" that I've been using -- the first -- person pronoun plural--deserves a word. Of course it is not you and I who are the instrumental perpetrators of covetous adjacency with its attendant treachery, murder, and seizure. It is not we who in any direct sense perform the act of the theft of the inheritance. I suspect that we are by and large among those whom our contemporaries on the far right call bleeding hearts, and they do emphatically mean that term pejoratively. They would also say of us, the bleeding hearts, that we--to exchange one metaphor for another--shed only crocodile tears. We would respond, most of us, that we do in fact bleed, that we know both outrage and anguish for what, for example, our treachery (on two fronts) and our arrogant power inflicted and

continue to inflict on the lands and people of Cambodia and Vietnam; or, still a lot of us, for what we see as our unconscionable role in the overthrow of Allende. ITT and other previously thwarted covetors of Naboth's vineyard in Chile are right now reaping the fruits of murder by taking economic possession again.

Despite the tendency of the Elijah narratives to disparage Ahab, the facts about him clearly return the impression of a man and monarch of exceptional stature. 1 Kings 20 and 22 see him in rather better light than 17-19, 21. Except as viewed exclusively from the perspective of Yahwist fundamentalists or fanatics, he was a person of outstanding ability, integrity, and courage. He of course desperately wanted Naboth's inheritance. He was persuaded that he needed it. He no doubt convinced himself that he deserved it, that it was somehow his right, even as advertisers, from McDonalds to airline companies, seek to convince us that we deserve a break which is their product or service. And however acquired, he hoped that once possessed the whole matter of the vineyard could be forgotten.

Jezebel goes to work and Ahab stands by, as too often too many of us do. But in this democracy of ours, pseudo or real, the arrangements for the act of possession and the essential steps of pious subterfuge, false witness, indictment without defense, and finally violence and murder-all this is, in a manner of speaking, done in our name and sealed with our seal. It is done by leaders whom we elect (Gerald Ford and Nelson Rockefeller being marked recent exceptions), with the expenditure of our tax dollars, and, often with careful particularity, in alleged and ostensible concern for values purporting to be cherished among us in the religious establishment.

It is my simple and direct submission that in common practice in organized religion in the United States we have let our Jezebels set the stage for the effective dispossession of the inheritance of land, resources, productivity, and human dignity of weaker neighbors declared to be adjacent to us all around the globe. The vast majority of us in the church are able to live like relative Ahabs because Jezebel is scheming schemes and working works around the clock-in our name and, as it works out, also to our profit. And we do not want to look too closely; we cannot bring ourselves to renounce the ways of Jezebel even when we know that Naboth's vineyard is ours by treachery, violence, and murder. But woe are we, dearly beloved, we are undone, we are lost, if the church is silent, if no powerful, corporate, prophetic protest is

made when in this Jezreel palace of ours there is violence instead of justice, a vast cry (increasingly bitter and militant) from the world's dispossessed instead of righteousness, and the practice of the right of force instead of the force of right.

The Question And The Questions

Was it really Jezebel who did it? Ahab knew, Ahab knew. Ahab always knows. *Jezebel wrote letters in Ahab's name, sealing them with his seal.* We know, we know. And Ahab always receives the word that Naboth's inheritance is his for the taking with grotesquely mingled feelings of satisfaction and dread. Jezebel said to Ahab, "*Go ahead now; take possession of Naboth's vineyard which he refused to give you for cash. For Naboth no longer lives: he is dead !*" Naboth is dispossessed. His inheritance is yours.

What is the word of earth? This is the word of earth -- that Naboth is legion; that Naboth's essential inheritance, land, work, creativity, human dignity, is daily seized by the strong -- and that we are among the strongest of the strong!

But the Word of God occurred, and spoke to Elijah: "Be on your way now to confront Ahab king of Israel; you will find him in Naboth's vineyard where he has gone to take possession of it. You will give him this message: Thus says Yahweh: Having murdered, do you even now take possession? In the place where the dogs licked Naboth's blood they shall lick your blood!"

Question: To whom are we, church people of the United States, to whom are we preponderantly more analogous, Elijah or Ahab?

Question: Which is the more influential altar among us, that of Yahweh or of Baal, God or mammon, Christ or possessions?

Question: Is it not true that as a people we have in our whole history repeatedly and down to this present day murdered, in body but also spirit and psyche, in order to possess?

Question: Is it not true that by and large we of the church have been in consent, if not always with our ballots, then by our silence.

Question: Whose inheritance now sustains the life of relative wealth and plenty that is ours, our own (which we've spent and overspent) or that of a plurality of Naboths?

Question: Can we yet turn back the judgment that we too will die in our own blood where and because we have shed the innocent blood and seized the cherished human heritage of myriad, uncountable, unsung, powerless, and dispossessed Nabaths -- red, black, brown, yellow, and white?

Question: Can we revive and recreate Elijah among us; can the church, and we of the church, be prophet as well as priest to king and nation and world?

Ahab said to Elijah, "Have you found me, O my enemy?"

Elijah replied, "I have found you."

Georg Fohrer best returns the sense of it:

"Hast du mich gefunden?" -- hast du mich endlich bei einem Verbrechen ertappt?

Und Elia antwortet: "Ich habe dich ertappt!"

And as Fohrer adds, *"Mit diesem Hohepunkt schloss die alte Erzählung."*(14)

The original narrative closed with this dramatic exchange. Ahab knew, he knew. He knew all along it wouldn't wash with Yahweh. We Ahab's always know; but there will be no confession, no turning, no cessation of the ways of Jezebel, no restitution, no redemption of the vast, total human inheritance except by the happening of the Word, its speaking again to Elijah, us, and Elijah's ministry, ours, to Ahab and Jezebel and the hordes of the always oncoming Naboths.

Have you (Fohrer's sense) at last caught me in the very act, O my enemy, my old enemy, my old friend, my old dreaded and cherished prophet; after all this, have you really uncovered me; after drought, after that contest of altars on Mount Carmel, after your flight from us in terror that took you all the way to your cave on Horeb -- after all this have you

caught me, exposed me, apprehended me by the Word of Yahweh, judged me in that same Word -- and so, perhaps, in spite of judgment, opened the only possible way to my redemption? Have you found me, O my enemy -- O Word of God, O Word of God incarnate?

And so the literal reading is best after all: I have found you. I think Ahab knew. Question: Do we? For it is only in being fully found by the Word of God that we may be saved, that we may hear and understand and heed the anguished, bitter, raucous, critical word of earth, and that the inheritance of us all may be preserved and enhanced to the glory of God and to the service of God's children of the earth.

Study Guide

1. Why did Naboth refuse to exchange or sell his property to Ahab?
2. What would be so precious to you that you would not let any Ahab take over?
3. Where in your experience or knowledge has Ahab moved in on Naboth? (List on newsprint.)
4. When might it be right for Ahab to move in on Naboth?
5. Is your church more like Ahab (who stood by while Jezebel murdered Naboth) or Elijah? List the ways in which it has acted like Ahab, the ways it has acted like Elijah.
6. What does Dr. Napier mean when he has Ahab say, "Have you at last caught me... O my enemy, my old enemy, my old friend, my old dreaded and cherished prophet; after all this, have you really uncovered me... exposed me, apprehended me by the Word of Yahweh, judged me in that same Word -- and so, perhaps, in spite of judgment, opened the only possible way to my redemption"?

References

1. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, trans. M. D. Herter Norton (New York: W. W. Norton, 1954, 1962), p.23.
2. *Ibid.*, p.72.
3. *Guideposts*, Carmel, N. Y., August 1974, p.19 (*italics mine*).
4. *Harvard Magazine*, vol.76, no.11 (July-August 1974), p.63.
5. Reprinted from the August 5, 1974 issue of *Christianity and Crisis*, pp.175-77. Copyright © 1974 by Christianity and Crisis, Inc. Used by permission. Richard J. Barnet and Ronald Muller, *Global Reach: The Power of the Multinational Corporations* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), p. 184, give specific content to Dom Helder Camara's words: "Global companies have used their great levers of power -- finance capital, technology, organizational skills, and mass communications -- to create a Global Shopping Center in which the hungry of the world are invited to buy expensive snacks and a Global Factory in which there are fewer and fewer jobs. The World Manager's vision of One World turns out in fact to be two distinct worlds -- one featuring rising affluence for a small transnational middle class, and the other escalating misery for the great bulk of the human family. The dictates of profits and the dictates of survival are in clear conflict."
6. My own reasons for seeing all the action as occurring in Jezreel are discussed in "The Omrides of Jezreel" in *Vetus Testamentum*, vol.9 (1959), pp.366-78.
7. Quoted in *A Track to the Water's Edge: The Olive Schreiner Reader*, ed. Howard Thurman (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. xxvii, from her Thoughts on South Africa, p.345.
8. David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (New York: Random House, 1969), p.143. Copyright © 1969, 1971, 1972 by David Halberstam. Used by permission of Random House, Inc.

9. Ibid., p.144.

10. See Johannes Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture* (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), vol. I-II, p.81.

11. Ibid., pp. 82f. Nevertheless, as H. Seebass has recently remarked in "Der Fall Naboth in 1 Reg. XXI," *Vetus Testamentum*, vol.24 (1974), pp. 476f., there had to be conditions under which Naboth's vineyard was saleable or exchangeable, since otherwise Ahab's straightforward request and his response of bitter disappointment make no sense.

12. *Die Bucher der Konige*, 2 vols. (Munster: 1911); quoted in Montgomery and Cebman, *The Book of Kings* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p.331.

13. For this insight I am grateful to Seebass, op. cit., p.481; "*Von einem Urteil nirgendwo die Rede ist. Dagegen hatte Isebel die Cenugtuung, dass Naboth (scheinbar zu Recht) im Namen der Religion gesteinigt wurde, wie er im Namen der Religion den Konige zuruckgewiesen hatte*" (italics his).

14. Georg Fohrer, *Elia*, vol.53 in the series *Ahandlungen zur Theologie des Alten and Neuen Testaments* (Zurich, 2d ed., 1968), p.28.

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Question: Is it not true that by and large we of the church have been in consent, if not always with our ballots, then by our silence.

Question: Whose inheritance now sustains the life of relative wealth and plenty that is ours, our own (which we've spent and overspent) or that of a plurality of Naboths?

Question: Can we yet turn back the judgment that we too will die in our own blood where and because we have shed the innocent blood and seized the cherished human heritage of myriad, uncoun- able, unsung, powerless, and dispossessed Naboths -- red, black, brown, yellow, and white?

Question: Can we revive and recreate Elijah among us; can the church, and we of the church, be prophet as well as priest to king and nation and world?

Ahab said to Elijah, "Have you found me, O my enemy?"

Elijah replied, "I have found you."

Georg Fohrer best returns the sense of it:

"Hast du mich gefunden?" -- hast du mich endlich bei einem Verbrechen ertappt?

Und Elia antwortet: "Ich habe dich ertappt!"

And as Fohrer adds, "Mit diesem Hohepunkt schloss die alte Erzählung. "

The original narrative closed with this dramatic exchange. Ahab knew, he knew. He knew all along it wouldn't wash with Yahweh. We Ahabs always know; but there will be no confession, no turning, no cessation of the ways of Jezebel, no restitution, no redemption of the vast, total human inheritance except by the happening of the Word, its speaking again to Elijah, us, and Elijah's ministry, ours, to Ahab and Jezebel and the hordes of the always oncoming Naboths.

Have you (Fohrer's sense) at last caught me in the very act, O my enemy, my old enemy, my old friend, my old dreaded and cherished prophet; after all this, have you really uncovered me; after drought, after that contest of altars on Mount Carmel, after your flight from us in terror that took you all the way to your cave on Horeb -- after all this have you caught me, exposed me, apprehended me by the Word of Yahweh, judged me in that same Word -- and so, perhaps, in spite of judgment, opened the only possible way to my redemption? Have you found me, O my enemy -- O Word of God, O Word of God incarnate?

And so the literal reading is best after all: I have found you. I think Ahab knew. Question: Do we? For it is only in being fully found by the Word of God that we may be saved, that we may hear and understand and heed the anguished, bitter, raucous, critical word of earth, and that the inheritance of us all may be preserved and enhanced to the glory of God and to the service of God's children of the earth.