

## **Some Words About...**

by Terence Y. Mullins

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### ***Hodegein (to guide)***

In the Septuagint God is said to guide the nation and to guide individuals. The Psalms are especially resonant in thanks for God's guiding (e.g., corporate — 67:4; 77:20; 78:14, 53, 72; 106:9; 107:7,30; personal — 23:3; 25:5, 9; 31:3; 43:3; 61:2; 73:24; 108:10; 119:35). In the Apocrypha it is often Wisdom personified who guides (e.g., Wisdom of Solomon 7:15; 9:11; 10:10,17; 18:3).

#### **The New Testament**

When the Pharisees took offense at Jesus' teaching, he told his followers "Leave them alone. They are blind guides of the blind. And if the blind guide the blind, both will fall into a pit" (Matthew 15:14).

On another occasion speaking to a diverse crowd, Jesus said, "Can the blind guide the blind? Will not both fall into a pit?" (Luke 6:39).

We must not think of Jesus as addressing his teachings to a group of rural peasants secluded in remote villages far from the centers of culture. Luke tells us that Jesus' warning against blind guides was presented to "a great crowd of his followers and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coasts of Tyre and Sidon" (6:17). The people to whom he spoke were subject to the propaganda of Jewish, Roman, Greek, and Oriental influences seeking to guide them in myriad ways, each bit of guiding persuasive, much of it sincere, all of it dangerous.

Jesus told his disciples, "When the spirit of truth has come, he will guide you into all the truth" (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit completes the teaching of Jesus, filling in the details, as it were, and applying those teachings to the different situations in which Jesus' followers find themselves.

We are bombarded by offers of guidance: Your Guide to Financial Security, Success, Happiness, or the Internet. But that is not really guiding. A guide goes with you and shares your fate. These don't go with you; they don't even know you. But the Holy Spirit is a true guide who is with us.

When Philip asked the Ethiopian eunuch if he understood the words of Isaiah that he was reading, the eunuch replied, "How can I unless someone guides me?" (Acts 8:31). Too many people think that they can open the Bible at random and read something that will help them. If they are lucky, past guidance in church schools may enable them to get something worthwhile out of the experience. But guidance, past or present, is important to the understanding of Scripture. The crucial role of Christian education in the life and ministry of the church can hardly be overestimated. Sunday school teachers are the Philips of our day. They are "someone to guide me."

Speaking of the people who had come out of the great ordeal, the elder said, "the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life" (Revelation 7:17).

It is typical of the Book of Revelation that Jesus (the Lamb) is guiding not an individual follower but "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and people and language." The author consistently envisions the drama of salvation as featuring huge masses of people. Jesus here is not searching for the lost sheep but is guiding the whole flock to life. It almost has the scope of the eighth chapter of Romans where the constant emphasis on you-all, we, and us culminates in the salvation of creation itself (8:19–21).

#### **Today**

As clergy parade down the aisle at official church events, I like to see at least one or two wearing business suits, with clerical collar as their only badge of office. It reassures me that we are not saying that flowing robes, cinctures, and gaudy stoles are necessary for guiding God's people in the worship of God. Guides should focus their attention on the goal, not on themselves.

For some, contemporary society with its emphasis on relevance seems eager to have the church assert itself in terms of clearly defined absolutes with awe-inspiring accouterments. There seems to be little patience with the gentle guiding hand of the Holy Spirit or the parish pastor. Mass demonstrations are in; quiet persistence is out. And the analogy of yeast is scorned. Since law and order (and the accompanying uniforms) are popular, guiding has given way to directing, and the church is expected to conform. One is reminded of Elijah in the cave (1 Kings 19:9–13); there are very impressive things going on, but they are not the word of the Lord.

Any rigid enforcing of manmade rules, no matter how solemnly invoked, is Pharisaism. And Jesus said that the Pharisees were blind guides. But we do not have to rely on blind guides:

*If you but trust in God to guide you  
And place your confidence in him,  
You'll find him always there beside you. (LBW 453)*

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