

## BIOGRAPHY

### A BRIEF ACCOUNTING

Walter L. Michel

Chicago: September 2001

---

Walter L. Michel *taught* at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago as a *Professor of Old Testament* (and also in September and the Fall of 1971 as a part-time instructor). As of Sept. 1, 2001 he is a retired professor emeritus.

He was and continues to be a *teacher, lecturer, preacher* and a ceaseless *student* of Biblical Hebrew (in the context of other ancient Near Eastern languages), the Tanakh (which is an acronym for תּוֹרָה *tôrāh*, Torah, = “Teaching;” נְבִיאִים *nēbî’im*, Nevi’im, = Prophets; כְּתוּבִים *kētūbîm*, Kethuvim, = “Writings”), which Christians know as the Old Testament.

He has also *taught at* • The Divinity School of the University of Chicago (1977, 1981, 1982, 1988) • McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago (1977) • Spertus College of Judaica (1989/90, 1990/1991, 1995, 1998, 1999, 2000) • North Park Theological Seminary (1992).

He has *specialized* in the study of ancient Hebrew (in comparison with other Semitic languages (e.g., Eblaite, Akkadian, Ugaritic, Phoenician-Punic, Aramaic, Syriac, and Arabic) in order to understand the biblical text independently and as clearly as possible.

He *earned* the following *degrees*: • M.A. (1967) and Ph.D. (1970) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in HEBREW AND SEMITIC STUDIES (M. Mansoor, advisor). His theological degree is from the University of Vienna • M.Div. equiv. (1959. Work with G. Fohrer).

He has also *studied at* • the University of Heidelberg (1956/57. Work with G. von Rad) • Yale University (1972. Based on his dissertation he was invited to work with M. Pope on the third edition of Pope’s Job commentary, published in the Anchor Bible series, 1973) • the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome (1979. Work with M. Dahood) and • Loyola University in Chicago (1980. Work with M. Dahood).

He is a *member of several professional societies*, e.g., • Catholic Biblical Association • Chicago Society of Biblical Research • Midwest Jewish Studies Association • National Association of Professors of Hebrew • Society of Biblical Literature • World Union of Jewish Studies.

He has been *engaged in* various aspects of the work of the *Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* (e.g., • examining committee, • professional leadership committee, • synod meetings, • transfer of ministerial credits committee).

He was and is in demand as a *lecturer* and *discussion leader* at Adult Forums in congregations and at conferences for pastors. Besides study and teaching this is his most favorite activity because he is convinced that there are millions of interested persons who are willing to break out of their religious, intellectual and spiritual prisons.

SELECTED FAVORITE THEMES INCLUDE: • Genesis 1: Thoughts About Beginnings in the Bible in the Light of other ancient Near Eastern Stories • Genesis 1-2 and Psalms 8 and 104: Creation and God’s Vision for Humanity • Creation and Creationism (there is no “creation-ism” in the Bible nor is there any tension between religious faith and natural science) • Covenants and Commandments: God’s Vision and Expectation for a Wonderful Human Life • Isaiah 40-55 with an Emphasis on the So-called Servant Songs • Prayer and Faith. A Study and Meditation of Selected Psalms • Arguing With God: Emphasis on Psalms, Jeremiah or Job • Job--Challenger of God: Innocent suffering and successful arguing with God based on the בִּיר, *rib*, the law-court pattern prayer, which is also evident in Jeremiah and about fifty Psalms • Song of Songs (or the Most Sublime Song which we humans can “sing”): Human Sexuality & Love Lyrics in the Bible • Proverbs: The Wisdom of the Ancients and Faith (= examples of what it means to live according to God’s will) • Ecclesiastes/Qohelet: Is Everything

Fleeting or Futile? • How the Ancient Near Eastern Religions Influenced Biblical People (Jews and Christians) • How to Name God: Names and Epithets of God • Aging in the Bible • Women of the Bible • Resurrection in the Tanakh/OT and other Jewish Literature • Messiah/Christ and Messianic Expectations • Christian Anti-Jewish Attitudes: A History of Hate. The almost 2,000 year history of Christian teaching of contempt of Jews (including the Jewish Jesus) and Judaism, which prepared the climate in which murders, pogroms and the attempted total extermination of Jews during the Shoah/Holocaust became possible, ... and many other topics.

He was *ordained* by the United Lutheran Church in America (Jan. 15, 1961).

He has served the Evangelical Lutheran Church as

(1) a *teacher of religion* (“*Religionslehrer*”) in public schools in Vienna, Austria (1957-1959. Grades 1-8, for the “*Evangelische Kirche in Österreich*”); (2) as a *vicar* and then (3) as a *parish pastor* in Dixon, Illinois (1960-1962, for the ULCA); (4) as a *campus pastor* at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (1962-1966, for the American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church in America), and (5) as a *Professor* of Old Testament at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (1972-2001).

He has *lived in* Yugoslavia (Slavonia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina), Poland (Warthegau), Austria (Vienna), Germany (Heidelberg) and in the United States of America (Dixon, Ill.; Madison, Wis., New Haven, Conn., and Chicago, Ill.).

He has *traveled* in several countries (e.g., Australia, Israel, Jordan, Italy, Switzerland, France, Finland, Sweden, Canada, Mexico, Indonesia).

He has *published* a number of articles, book reviews, sermons and audio- and video-tapes for interested persons, professional leaders, pastors and scholars.

The title of his DISSERTATION is “The Ugaritic Texts and the Mythological Expressions in the Book of Job (including a new Translation of and Philological Notes on the Book of Job.” University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1970. (Prof. M. Mansoor, advisor, in consultation, e.g., with Prof. M. Dahood of the Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome, and Prof. M. Pope of Yale University). Published on demand by *University Microfilms*, Ann Arbor, Michigan. Order Number: 70-24, 709.

His most important publication is entitled *Job In the Light of Northwest Semitic*. Volume I. *Prologue and First Cycle of Speeches Job 1:1-14:22*. *Biblica et Orientalia* (Sacra Scriptura Antiquitatibus Orientalibus Illustrata)-42. Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1987. XVII, 436 pages.

For *Reviews* of the book see, e.g., • Fensham, F. C., in *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 14 (1988) 229-230 • Kaiser, Otto, in *Zeitschrift für Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 100.1 (1988) 146-147 • Müller, Hans-Peter, in *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 114 (1989) 23-24 • Tournay, R. J., in *Revue Biblique* (1988) 448-449. The most important review is the one by an expert in the field, namely, F. C. Fensham. Among the scholars in the field, who have supported his work, are, e.g., M. Mansoor, M. Pope, M. Dahood, J. Swetnam, F.C. Fensham, D. McCarthy, R. Haak, E. Campbell, and others.

He continues to work on two further volumes: Volume II (Job 15-28) and Volume III (Job 29-42, Appendix: Grammar of Job). He was invited by Professor M. Dahood to pursue this work.

He is also *active in several professional societies* and has presented *scholarly papers* quite frequently (since 1970).

For example, during the Summer and Fall of 1993 he participated and presented scholarly papers at the following meetings: • Eleventh World Congress of Jewish Studies (Jerusalem, Israel. June 22-29, 1993) • Society of Biblical Literature International Meeting (Münster, Germany. July 25-28, 1993) • Colloquium Biblicum Lovaniense (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven. Faculteit der Godgeleerdheid. Leuven/ Louvain, Belgium. August 24-26, 1993) • Midwest Jewish Studies Association (Fifth Annual Conference. Spertus College of Judaica. Chicago. September 12-13, 1993) • Chicago Society of Biblical Research (Xavier University. October 16, 1993) • Symposium on the Theological Interpretation of Scripture (Northpark Theological Seminary. Chicago. October 8-10) • American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical Literature 1993 Annual Meeting (Washington, D.C. November 20-23).

He is *married* to Gundega I. Reinfelds (Professor of Chemistry, Ph.D., Physical Chemistry. Born in Latvia and *very* active in Latvian concerns, nationally, internationally and, since renewed independence in 1991, also in Latvia as the co-founder and director of the Museum of Occupation in Rīga).

The Michels have *two children* (a girl, b. 1970, and a boy, b. 1971). They were raised in Hyde Park in Chicago and they, like their parents, are thoroughly multicultural. They speak three *native* languages (Latvian, German and English). Selga is a civil engineer and Dainis is a composer and conductor.

On a lighter note. During his life in Austria he was very active in a group at the YMCY, which was dedicated to Austrian ethnic dances (some very complicated) and songs. He even earned a certificate as an Austrian folk dance teacher and, of course, also speaks the *very* heavy Viennese dialect. He reads voraciously in many areas ( e.g., Biblical Hebrew, Bible, Judaism, Christianity, World War II, Christian anti-Jewish attitudes, Shoah/Holocaust, etc.), several newspapers and magazines, and, during the summers, also paddles around in his kayak. His days of downhill skiing, regrettably, are over.

WHAT HAVE I LEARNED-IF ANYTHING ... ramblings at the beginning of my retirement

- (1) My studies have clarified much. I yearned for and I gained intellectual and spiritual freedom from stupidity, misinformation and lies.
- (2) Only the knowledge of Hebrew opened the vast spiritual treasures in the Bible for me. The intense study of the Psalms (in Hebrew) makes a lack of spirituality impossible for me.
- (3) Authoritarians are shallow, but dangerous (esp. when in power). They can not be appeased and must be resisted, exposed and deposed. Submission to bullying, hypocrisy, injustice, prejudice, etc., is very dangerous. Living with dignity, courage, truth, honesty and empathy is to be preferred.
- (4) Christian teaching of contempt for Jews and Judaism prepared the climate in which pogroms and then the Shoah/Holocaust became possible. Christians need to eradicate all anti-Jewish attitudes and deeds. No more "conversion" of Jews; no more teaching the racist view that Jews do not have "purity of blood" (*limpieza de sangre*, developed by Christians during the Inquisition, 15th cent.).
- (5) Christianity, the way we have known it, has died in the fires of Auschwitz. Christianity must re-pent and be re-formed, radically, if it wants to be viable ... if that is even possible.
- (6) I try to live in such a way that the more than one million *innocent* Jewish children, who were burned as vermin (some of them thrown into the fires *alive* to save on bullets and gas) do not need to be ashamed of me.
- (7) It is stupid to *expect* any gratitude from anybody.