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# Notes and Reflections

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## Remembering Gordon Harland

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Gordon Harland died suddenly early Monday morning, December 8, 2003.

Gordon Harland was a champion of social justice and Twentieth Century Theology, but closest to his heart was teaching. He could not give enough and students simply could not get enough of this man's full-orbed ability. Dr. Harland graduated from Drew University and was called to found the University of Manitoba Religious Studies Dept. where he taught Historical Theology and Contemporary Christian Thought. He has also taught at The University of Calgary, Pennsylvania and briefly at Duke. Dr. Harland also wrote The Thought of Reinhold Niebuhr (Oxford: 1960) and Christian Faith and Society (The University of Calgary Press: 1989), along with many articles, including regular contributions to "Touchstone: The Journal of the United Church."

My acquaintance with Gordon Harland began when I was a student at Providence Theological Seminary, Otterburne, Manitoba. Reinhold Niebuhr became an interest of mine while at Providence, and David L. Smith, the academic dean of the seminary at that time informed me there

was none better to help me understand Niebuhr than Dr. Harland, who happened to be in close proximity. I made an appointment to see Dr. Harland at the University of Manitoba and expected to gain a short hearing and at best, a second visit. We proceeded to spend several hours walking through the labyrinth of tunnels that tie the many buildings of the university together. It was underneath the science building, though they all buildings look alike from an underground vantage, he challenged the conservative Calvinist doctrine of the resurrection, “you couldn’t take a picture of the resurrection!” Indeed, it was not a Kodak moment.

Gordon Harland considered himself a liberal-evangelical and enjoyed giving correctives to the evangelical movement. Much of his later life was spent as an adjunct teacher at William and Catherine Booth College in Winnipeg. Here he taught a course on Twentieth Century thinkers and always coloured it with personal experiences of these people.

Donald Burke, speaking of Gordon Harland at his memorial, said he “could embrace the ambiguities of life in a manner that I have experienced in no other. He acknowledged the tragic dimension of human existence, knowing well the human capacity for evil. He knew that many times public life calls for difficult, ambiguous decisions where the outcome would bring evil as well as good. . . . but was deeply convinced that humans were capable of profound good. He knew the depths of human sinfulness but spoke more often of the boundless grace of God.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> William Neville, cites Donald Burke in “Gordon Harland a Man of Decency,” Winnipeg Free Press (Friday December 19, 2003): A11.