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Roots and Wings—Reflections on Worship

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Roots and Wings—Reflections on Worship

In April 2011, the annual Leadership Conference at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC) featured a number of conversations about worship and preaching in the life of Lutheran congregations. Conference participants gathered to hear two major presentations, to participate in a variety of workshops on a host of subjects related to worship and preaching, and to worship God together.

In this issue of *Currents in Theology and Mission,* we are pleased to make available the two keynote presentations of that conference, as well as an essay by a chaplain and teacher of college students and an essay by a parish pastor. We are also delighted to offer a taste of the vibrant preaching that occurred at the Conference by including the inspiring and challenging sermon preached at the concluding Eucharist. Readers who desire to worship in ways which are rooted in the core affirmations of their theological heritage and are open to the transforming currents of an ever-moving Spirit will appreciate how each of the voices in this issue wrestle with how to hold these desires in dynamic relationship.

The two keynote presentations were given by the **Rev. Dr. Craig A. Satterlee** and the **Rev. Dr. Maxwell E. Johnson**. In "Wordless Words in Worship," **Craig Satterlee**, Axel Jacob and Gerda Maria (Swanson) Carlson Professor of Homiletics at LSTC and Dean of the ACTS Doctor of Ministry in Preaching Program, contends that Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word, is the power at work in Christian worship—speaking new life into being as the church reads Scriptures, proclaims the gospel, announces forgiveness, eats bread and drinks wine in Christ's name, and celebrates and remembers baptism. By the power of the Spirit, the Word of Life gives grace, faith, forgiveness, the Holy Spirit, justice, vocation, community, and strength. Jesus also resists the power of Word-less words, which seek to rebel against God and make idols of themselves by becoming the most important word in worship. We therefore make *Jesus* the most important Word in worship.

In "What is Normative in Contemporary Lutheran Worship? Word and Sacrament as Non-Negotiable," **Maxwell Johnson,** Professor of Liturgical Studies at the University of Notre Dame, explores the question of whether there is anything normatively authoritative for Christian worship among Lutherans. He contends that questions about liturgy go far beyond mere tolerance for a diversity of "worship styles" in particular congregations. They are, rather, theological/doctrinal questions; thus, the appeal to a liturgical *ordo*, pattern, or structure (one widely-accepted response to what is normative in Lutheran worship) does not advance the conversation about what is normative unless the investigation

also attends to the particular ways in which this *ordo* is incarnated within the particular liturgies *and* in the particular churches from which it is deduced.

Deborah L. Geweke serves as Chaplain, Hospice of Palm Beach County, and as Adjunct Professor in the Department of Theology, Barry University in Miami. Her essay also addresses the subject of normativity, which she describes as a struggle that may be characterized by a seeming dis-integration between ecclesial *identity*—especially that which is engaged when the church liturgically enacts itself in word and sacrament—and ecclesial *impact*—the socially relevant and lived experience of service. In "Ampersand Faith: Re-integrating Liturgy & Life through a Reappropriation of Mystical Theology and Praxis" she proposes that a re-integration of liturgy and life through the reclamation of a more "mystically-oriented" theology and praxis may well serve the struggle for spirituality within the contemporary church that is grounded in the ecclesial mission of word, sacrament, and service.

Clark K. Olson-Smith, pastor of All Saints Lutheran Church in Davenport, Iowa, asks: What might it be like to let the Holy Spirit teach us to worship? As worshipers, how might we be actively present amid all manner of distractions? As worship planners, how can we find a faithful and authentic way through the swirl of worship proposals, opinions, and pressures? Is there more to worshiping contemplatively than enduring interminable silence and inscrutable poetry? Where is this dance of worship going? "Becoming Contemplative Worshipers: Attending to Our Communal Heart" addresses these questions by exploring how the practical wisdom of contemplative prayer may fruitfully inform worship and worship planning, and in what ways its posture and practices, useful for real, human bodies at prayer, can serve the body of Christ gathered for worship.

As noted above, the 2011 LSTC Leadership Conference offered participants the gift of several shared worship services, coordinated by the **Rev. Dr. Benjamin M. Stewart**, who holds the Gordon A. Braatz Chair in Worship at LSTC. We are pleased to include the sermon preached at the closing Eucharist by the **Rev. Dr. Frank A. Thomas**, pastor of the Mississippi Boulevard Christian Church (THE BLVD) in Memphis. Although the written word perhaps cannot fully convey the power of the gospel experienced in the act of proclamation, written words still have power. We hope that "in, with, and under" the written words others will experience the transforming grace that many of us experienced in hearing this sermon. Many of our readers labor faithfully each week to plan worship, preside at Christ's table, and proclaim the gospel. This issue of *Currents* celebrates the quiet struggles of faithfulness that go on week after week in countless ministries that seek to assist the people of God to claim their roots and their wings.

Kathleen Billman
Editor

Wordless Words in Worship[1]

Craig A. Satterlee

Axel Jacob and Gerda (Maria (Swanson) Carlson Professor of Homiletics and Dean of the ACTS Doctor of Ministry in Preaching Program, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

In the classic text, *A Brief History of Preaching*, Yngve Brilioth grounds his discussion of liturgical preaching in "the well-known account of how Jesus taught in the synagogue at Nazareth."[2] More recently, in *Serving the Word*, Melinda Quivik examines the word in worship using the lens of "Luke's story of Jesus post-resurrection appearance on the Road to Emmaus and at the table."[3] In gratitude for and in anticipation of teaching with my friend, Barbara Rossing, I take as my starting point the Gospel of John.

Jesus Christ is the Word in worship

"In the beginning was the Word," the Gospel of John declares, "and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being" (John 1:1–2). God *said*, "Let there be," and there was (Genesis 1:3, 6, 14). And the Word has been speaking life ever since.

To Noah, the Word said, "Never again!" "Never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth" (Gen 9:11). The Word promised to make great nations of both Hagar's and Sarah's sons. To Moses, the Word commanded, "Lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it" (Exod 14:16). God's Word declares, "I will write [my law] on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jer 31:33). And the way God chose to write God's law—God's Word—on our hearts was to give God's Word a human heart all his own. So, "the Word became flesh and lived among us" (John 1:14).

As God declared to Moses from the burning bush, so Jesus, the Incarnate Word, announced to the world, "I AM! I AM!" "I AM the bread of life, the light of the world, the gate, the vine; the good shepherd; the resurrection and the life. I AM the way of the truth that leads to life." In the garden, when we came to kill him, Jesus declared, "I AM he." From the cross, Jesus knowing that all was now complete, proclaimed, "I am thirsty" to fulfill God's will.[4] And speaking words of hope to us, the risen Christ declares, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end" (Rev 22:13).

Yes, "Jesus Christ is the living and abiding Word of God. By the power of the Spirit, this very Word of God, which is Jesus Christ," is the power at work in

1. This paper was originally presented as a keynote address at "Experiencing God through Preaching and Worship," 2011 Leadership Conference, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, Chicago, Ill., April 5, 2011.

2. Luke 4:16–21; Yngve Brilioth, *A Brief History of Preaching* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), 8–9.

3. Luke 24:13–35; Melinda A. Quivik, *Serving the Word* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2009), 2.

4. John 6:48; 8:12; 10:9, 11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:5; 18:6, 8; 19:25.

worship. Jesus, the Word of Life, "is read in the Scriptures, proclaimed in preaching, announced in the forgiveness of sins, eaten and drunk in the Holy Communion, and encountered in the bodily presence of the Christian community. By the power of the Spirit, active in Holy Baptism, this Word washes a people to be Christ's own body in the world."[5]

Luther defined *baptism* as "water enclosed in God's command and connected with God's Word." Luther defined the *Sacrament of the Altar* as "bread and wine set within God's Word, and bound to it."[6] I like to think that Luther borrowed these ideas from Ambrose, the fourth century bishop of Milan. Ambrose said of baptism, "Water without the proclamation of the Lord's cross serves no purpose of future salvation; but when it has been consecrated by the mystery of the saving cross, then it is fitted for the use of the spiritual washbasin and the cup of salvation."[7] And Ambrose declared of the Eucharist, "The word of Christ consecrates this sacrament."[8] For Ambrose—and for Luther—it is clear that the Word, and not anything we do, is the power at work in worship.

While I am quoting Saint Ambrose, hear what this father of church music calls the psalms, and, by implication, singing and music: "A psalm is a blessing on the lips of the people, a hymn in praise of God, the assembly's homage, a general acclamation, a word that speaks for all, the voice of the church, a confession of faith in song.[9] In other words, psalms, music and singing in worship are a means by which the Word speaks through the assembly.

Yet, as much as I adore Ambrose, when it comes to preaching, Luther wins hands down. Luther calls preaching the *viva vox Christi* and the *viva vox evangeli*—the living voice of the Gospel and the living voice of Christ.[10] The Gospel of John helps me to understand this.[11] For John, Jesus is the Word of God become flesh, who from all eternity was with God, and actually is God.[12] John's use of the word *logos* or "word," which means, first of all, something *said*, makes plain how profoundly this gospel writer regards the reading and preaching of Scripture in worship. Jesus is the Word of God as it had been read and preached in Israel ever since the time of Moses, and as it continues to be read and preached in the worship of the Christian church. As the law was given through Moses as the Word of God, so grace and truth are given to us in Jesus Christ as the Word of God. Jesus, then, is "God's sermon preached to us in the living out of

5. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997), 1.

6. Martin Luther, The Small Catechism, The Large Catechism, *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, eds. Robert Kolb and Timothy K. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 359, 467.

7. Saint Ambrose, *On the Mysteries*, 14, in T. Thompson, *On the Sacraments and On the Mysteries, Revised Edition* (London: S.P.C.K, 1950), 128.

8. Saint Ambrose, *On the Sacraments*, 4.14 in T. Thompson, *On the Sacraments and On the Mysteries, Revised Edition* (London: S.P.C.K, 1950), 86.

9. Saint Ambrose, *Explanations of the Psalms* (Ps 1, 9–12), CSEL, 64, pp. 7, 9–10.

10. LW 52,206; WA 12,259, 8–13; WA 10,I,1,265ff.; WA 12,259; WA 12,275.

11. Craig A. Satterlee, *When God Speaks through You: How Faith Convictions Shape Preaching and Mission* (Herndon, Va.: The Alban Institute, 2008), 19.

12. John 1:1–17.

a human life."[13] In the preaching of Jesus, God begets children of God and gives them eternal life. The church's preaching, then, is nothing other than witnessing to, unfolding, and interpreting God's sermon, this Word, that is Jesus Christ.

The Word speaking in worship

So worship is the Word speaking life to us. Take a moment and reflect on worship as the Word speaking life to you, as the Word speaking life to the church, as the Word speaking life to the world. In the congregation where I am a pastor, we begin worship with confession. "Neither do I condemn you," Jesus said to the woman caught in adultery, "Go your way, and from now on do not sin again" (John 8:11). Jesus is even bolder when he speaks to us: "I declare to you the entire forgiveness of all your sins." As the Scriptures are read and as they are preached, we hear Jesus speak to us. That is why we say, "Praise to you, O Christ," and not, "Praise to you, O Book."

When we offer our prayers, God speaks to us as surely as we speak to God. On God's behalf, we ask one another. On God's behalf, we ask ourselves. And God asks us. Stealing from Saint Ambrose: How dare we ask God to do what we are not willing to struggle for ourselves? More than once, I have heard Mark Bangert quip that we need to be ready to be God's answer to our prayers.

Sharing the peace is about more than saying hello. Sharing the peace of Christ is about carrying Christ's reconciling love in your own flesh, about receiving Christ's reconciling love in the flesh of another. "So when you are offering your gift at the altar," Jesus says, "if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift" (Matt 5:23–24). So are we ready for Christ to speak reconciliation through us when someone who sinned against us musters up the courage to extend a hand in peace? Can we imagine being so like the risen Christ that we do what Jesus did "when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week," and seek out a disciple locked away in shame and fear and say, "Peace be with you"? (John 20:19)

As for the offering, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* might want to reduce it from "the 'reasonable service'…of our Christian lives offered in response to God's grace in Christ" to something "primarily practical: collecting material goods for the mission of the church (including the care of those in need)."[14] My grandmother—and the homebound Christians I've served—would disagree. My grandma told me that, when she put an envelope in the plate—and especially toward the end of her life, when she could not make it to church, but handed her envelopes to the minister who brought her Communion, she heard God remind her that

13. Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Church: The Biblical Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), Vol. 1, 137.

14. Lutheran Church in America, The American Lutheran Church, The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, *Lutheran Book of Worship: Ministers Desk Edition* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1978);
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship: Leaders Desk Edition* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 21. See Gordon W. Lathrop, "Justin, Eucharist, and 'Sacrifice': A Case of Metaphor," *Worship* 64 No. 1 (January 1990): 30-48. I discuss the offering in greater detail in *Preaching and Stewardship: Proclaiming God's Invitation to Grow* (Herndon, Va.: The Alban Institute, 2011).

everything we have is from God, that what we give is but a small part of all that God has given us, and that we can gratefully use everything we are and everything we have to participate in God's own work of reconciling the world to God's own self. My grandmother understood *Lex orandi, lex credendi!* Finally, when you come to the table, hear Jesus say to you what he said to the first disciples, when he took the bread and cup on the night before he died: "For you," Jesus said. "For you."

Yes, in worship, the Word does what the Word has always done—speaks life into being. We call the life—the new life that the Word speaks—by many names—grace, faith, the forgiveness of sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit, justice, vocation, community, and strength for the journey. However we name it, in worship the Word speaks into being God's eternal activity of ending the old and beginning the new, of putting to death and raising to life, of God speaking God's promise. In worship the Word actually pronounces, declares and gives God's gift of new life. And the Word does one thing more.

Wordless words in worship

"Save us from the time of trial," we pray, "and deliver us from evil." In worship, the Word does this as well. In worship the Word resists what Charles L. Campbell, who teaches at Duke Divinity School, calls the participation of the powers and principalities, that is, the powers of death at work in the world.[15] These powers and principalities work through concrete, material institutions, structures, and systems—including congregations and seminary communities—to rebel against God by making idols of themselves, and placing their own desires above God's purpose for humanity and creation. The powers use tactics including negative sanctions, rewards and promises, isolation and division, demoralization and diversion, surveillance and secrecy, language and image to secure their own survival, dominate humanity, and bring chaos to the world.

These powers and principalities come to worship in their Sunday finest. To displace and replace the Word of Life, they dress up in other words—words we know, words we love, words that sound a lot like the Gospel, but are not. We can name some of these words, words that seek to make idols of themselves, to become the most important word in worship and in the church—liturgy, hospitality, diversity, and community are but a few. We have experienced the powers and principalities robbing good, cherished, important words of the Word of Life; reducing these beloved, important words to what Barbara Brown Taylor describes as "empty boxes, lying where the wind [of the Holy Spirit] had left them."[16] We have experienced the powers of death at work in the world transforming words intended to point to and celebrate the Word of Life into Wordless words in worship.

I regularly experience Liturgy as a Wordless word in worship. It is as if Liturgy is an angel sitting on one shoulder and a devil sitting on the other. A few years ago, at the Valparaiso Liturgical Institute, I heard, "Liturgy saves us." Talk about giving Liturgy power. When Liturgy becomes the most important word in worship, we are shocked or we snicker when, for example, someone does or does not use incense, does or does not bow before the altar or assembly, does or does not sit attentively through the postlude. When Liturgy becomes the

15. Charles L. Campbell, *The Word Before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 2–3.

16. Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Preaching Life* (Boston: Cowley Publications, 1993), 85.

most important word in worship, we may find ourselves thinking that Jesus came not so much to die on the cross and to rise from the dead as to bring the *ordo*—Gathering, Word, Table, and Sending. Or, we may decide there is nothing valuable in Liturgy at all. Liturgy is outdated. Liturgy is racist. Liturgy does not reflect us. Setting aside what Barbara Brown Taylor lovingly describes as "portraits of those we've never met, inscriptions written in many different hands, bits and pieces of treasured correspondence, favorite recipes, prayers, and remedies—all of them left for us by our ancestors in the faith, who have bequeathed us their manual for approaching God,"[17] setting aside the liturgy, we start from scratch. We create orders of worship that we deem creative, innovative, relevant, and appropriate to us. Whether we cling to Liturgy or dismiss it, Liturgy becomes a powerful but Wordless word in worship.

When Hospitality becomes the most important word, we expect worship to do what no other human social activity can. We expect worship to be something that anyone can immediately fully participate in. We expect worship to be a place where everyone always feels welcome and included. Soon Hospitality is whispering that everyone should do everything and that no one should do what everyone cannot do. This is a far cry from the New Testament understanding of the church as the body of Christ, richly invested by God with a variety of gifts.[18] Or, Hospitality invites us to deem some as superior or inferior to others, some as more or less important than others—say, visitors as juxtaposed to members. Hospitality cautions us to name Jesus timidly, if we name Jesus at all, in preaching, so that we do not offend our Jewish and Muslim brothers and sisters. And Hospitality warns us that God's great gifts of baptism and Eucharist are little more than boundaries, barriers, and borders that exclude people and keep people out. Along the way, Hospitality becomes a powerful but Wordless word in worship.

When Diversity becomes the most important word, we experience worship more in terms of the Diversity that is missing than the Diversity that is manifest. We decide what counts as Diversity and what does not. And so we construct worship services that reflect our notions of Diversity. "In some faith communities, [for example,] worship leaders are selected so that 'worship looks the way we want the church to look,' with little regard for whether worship sounds the way we want the church to sound."[19] Diversity can so focus our attention on celebrating our differences that we forget that "there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). Diversity becomes a powerful but Wordless word in worship.

When Community becomes the most important word, we experience worship in terms of how well we get along, whether we agree, our own level of comfort, and our spiritual and aesthetic disposition. Community becomes something we do, something we make, or something others should do and should make for us, rather than the gracious gift of the Word of Life. When someone breaks community, even when there is repentance, Community cautions us to include or exclude based on our assessment of the breach, the

17. Ibid., 65.

18. 1 Cor 11—14.

19. Craig A. Satterlee, "Learning to Picture God from Those Who Cannot See," *Homiletic* [Online] Vol. 36, No. 1 (13 June 2011) Available: http://ejournals.library.vanderbilt.edu/homiletic/viewarticle.php?id=157

depth and intensity of our hurt, and our need for accountability and punishment, rather than on the basis of the welcome the Word of Life extends in baptism, the reconciliation and renewal the Word of Life tirelessly gives in the absolution, and the unbreakable bond the Word of Life maintains and sustains in the Eucharist. And so, to protect and preserve Community, we include provisions and provisos, caveats and conditions as we proclaim the Word of Life through word and deed in worship, so that we do not make grace cheap or share God's love with people we have determined do not deserve it. And Community becomes a powerful but Wordless word in worship.

"In a world of yearning, brokenness and sin," *The Use of the Means of Grace* declares, "the church's clarity about the Gospel of Jesus Christ is vital… Yet even the church itself is threatened should it fail to claim the great treasures of the Gospel."[20] Thank God that, when the Spirit gathers the church for worship, the Word never tires of speaking life and resisting Wordless words. John declares, "in [the Word] was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it" (John 1:4–5). In worship, the Word of Life nonviolently resists all the Wordless words, all the destructive powers that rebel against God by making idols of themselves and placing their own desires above God's purpose for humanity and creation. Particularly in John's Gospel, nonviolently resisting the powers of death at work in the world is what Jesus did as he was seized in the garden, as he stood before Pilate, and as he was lifted up from the earth and drew all people—all creation—to himself.[21]

20. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *The Use of the Means of Grace*, 2A, 2B.

21. Cf. John 12:32.

Charles Campbell asserts that, as the Word of Life, Jesus embodies God's way most specifically in his choice of preaching as his way of announcing the reign of God.[22] Both the form and content of Jesus' preaching declare who God is and how God works. By using preaching to announce God's reign, Jesus declares that God's way is neither silent passivity and acceptance nor coerced belief, forced agenda, and dominating control. Instead, Jesus' life and preaching allow humans the freedom of decision, choice, and expression. By using preaching to proclaim God's reign, Jesus requires and demonstrates mutuality. Receiving the kingdom involves both the one speaking and the ones listening. Jesus refuses to treat the listener as an object or commodity. Jesus does not coerce or control the outcome.

By using preaching to announce God's reign, Jesus declares that God's way is neither silent passivity and acceptance nor coerced belief, forced agenda, and dominating control.

22. Campbell, *The Word Before the Powers*, 73.

Though other approaches certainly would have guaranteed greater success, Jesus chose to work through preaching, rather than through overwhelming temptation or absolute constraints, in order to inaugurate God's reign.

Like the life and preaching of Jesus, the church's worship and proclamation of the Word of Life does not attempt to control people or to force an outcome. Rather, the church teaches and trusts that the Word of Life is at work in worship. When, in faithfulness to the Scripture read in worship, "the preacher proclaims our need of God's grace and freely offers that grace,"[23] the Spirit touches individual lives with God's grace and power, and gathers and forms communities of faith to witness to Christ's love for the world. The Word of God elicits from those who hear it a response. When the Word of Life—the Gospel—is the most prominent, the most important word in worship, that response is faith—trust in God's love in Christ. Trusting the Word, the church ensures that any other word does not overshadow, undermine, or obscure the Gospel in a way that people feel coerced by the erroneous notion that God's love depends upon their actions. Instead, the church's words speak to people's best selves, appealing to them as God's beloved children, those claimed by Christ, filled with the Holy Spirit, and empowered for service by God's grace.

Attending to the Word

Since God's ultimate revelation is a Word, we can serve God in no higher way than to be ministers of that Word.[24] For John, the incarnation of the Word leads to the proclamation of the Word. In Jesus' High Priestly Prayer, we read, "For the words that you gave to me I have given to them" (John 17:8). Down through the centuries, the church's preaching of the Gospel is nothing other than the Word of God. Thus, Jesus prays, "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one" (John 17:20). Whatever our particular calling and vocation—and here I am speaking not only to what the ELCA calls "rostered leaders" but to the whole church—whatever our particular calling and vocation, John understands all Christians as ministers of God's Word, though the form and location of our "preaching" differ. At their best, all of our words are a response to God's Word in Christ. When our words reflect God's Word of Life in Jesus Christ, they possess the tremendous authority of Christ, the authority of the Word of God, the authority to speak new life into being.

As ministers of the Word of Life, in worship, perhaps the best thing we can do—perhaps the only thing we can do—is to attend to the Word of Life, to make the Word of Life the most prominent, the most important Word in worship. To get us started thinking about how we might attend to the Word in worship, here are four suggestions. Since my topic is the Word in worship, these suggestions are concerned with and confined to Scripture and preaching.

First, we can expect God to speak through Scripture. In worship, Scripture functions not as document or text but as speech—as an experience, as an event, indeed, as God's saving activity. When the Scriptures are read and when they are preached, God speaks to God's people here and now. We remember and celebrate our common story, which is as much present

23. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *The Use of the Means of Grace*, 9A.

24. Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Church,* 152–155.

and future as it is past. In response to this Word, the assembly moves to the table, where it enacts ways of being that reflect and proclaim the coming reign of God. In worship, Scripture should be read as if edification depends upon the reading. The assembly should be taught to attend to the readings as if something powerful were to be revealed there. Of course, we need to pay careful attention to how Scripture is read and to the impact the way Scripture is read has on the assembly. Obviously, readers of Scripture need to practice reading the pericopes in preparation for worship.

Second, we can make the Word in Scripture prominent. The use of a Bible or lectionary of appropriate size and dignity, whether by those who read the Scriptures in the assembly, in procession, or simply standing on the reading desk, visibly suggests the centrality of the Word. This visible association is so strong that those oppressed by scriptural interpretation sometimes report a negative reaction to the Bible being carried into the assembly. Scripture inserts in the Sunday bulletin reduce God's Word to a throwaway commodity. While reading from an iPad or Kindle makes the preacher look cool, it renders the Word a virtual reality. Most important, rather than a community gathered around the Word, the assembly becomes a group of individuals reading their individual inserts and iPods, while overhearing as God's Word is read aloud, often badly. Quality reading leads members of the assembly to lay aside their inserts and devices.

Third, since speaking God's Word within the assembly is perhaps the most easily identified responsibility of the pastor, we can take the power of our words seriously. Words spoken by the pastor, whether the pastor's own words in the sermon or the pastor giving voice to the word of Scripture and liturgy, font and table, are themselves a powerful means of communicating the Word of Life. As William Seth Adams astutely observes:

> Given the preoccupation of the biblical tradition with words and their power, and the power associated with one who speaks, presiders ought to approach the invitation to speak with due reverence, humility, preparation and care. The words that the pastor is privileged to speak are words of extraordinary power, words which, in the company of equally powerful actions, accomplish what they say. Things and people who receive words (and actions) of blessing are blessed, words (and actions) of forgiveness affect forgiveness, words (and actions) intending transformation actually transform. [One who presides] in the liturgy speaks words that change things and people."[25]

Preachers are therefore careful with their words, not only the words they choose, but also how those words are spoken.

Part of taking the power of words seriously involves avoiding making claims that are not incarnate in the flesh of the congregation as it worships. We sing, "All are welcome in this place,"[26] and then people discover they are not. We confess that we are sinners, and then express our shock and indignation when someone actually sins. We tell people they are forgiven, and then shun them as pariahs. If the Word of God does not become incarnate in the flesh of the congregation, our words cast a wicked spell. Doing my own bit of stealing from Saint Ambrose, it is as if we post a sign advertising fresh water and have thirsty people bring their

25. William Seth Adams, *Shaped by Images: One Who Presides* (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1995), 96.

26. "All Are Welcome, " Text and Music, Marty Haugen (GIA Publications, 1994).

cups and take a drink, only to end up with a mouth full of mud.[27]

Finally, and those who know me know that it's coming, we can preach the Word of Life. As *The Use of the Means of Grace* so wondrously declares, "Preaching is the living and contemporary voice of one who interprets in all the Scriptures the things concerning Jesus Christ. In fidelity to the readings appointed for the day, the preacher proclaims our need of God's grace and freely offers that grace, equipping the community for mission and service in daily life."[28] Whatever words we speak, whatever other purposes we seek, preaching is first and foremost the promise of God's unconditional love and newness of life in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Preaching is the place where promises are spoken and not the place where Scripture is explained, agendas are served, goals achieved, responses obtained, or lesser words are given the place that belongs to the Word of Life.

Of course, to make the Word of Life the most important word in worship means that we trust the Word in worship to bring life. So my final word is that Jesus will. Jesus will bring life. More than ever before, I have come to understand that Jesus brings *new* life. The life that Jesus brings is not a return to or an improvement of the old. It is not necessarily the new life that we hope for, pray for, long for, or imagine. The life that Jesus brings may not even be the new life we want. Grace is certainly cheap—grace is free, but resurrection is costly. Nevertheless, Jesus, the Word of Life, brings new life.

The new life that Jesus brings is *liturgical*, in that we experience it in patterns, in ways and places we can identify and name—Word and water, bread and wine. The new life Jesus brings is *hospitable*. "On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines" (Isaiah 25:6). On this mountain, the Lord of hosts will make a feast for *all* peoples. The new life that Jesus brings is *diverse*, celebrating the gifts, contributions and perspectives of all created in the divine image. The new life that Jesus brings is *communal*, as surely as Jesus created the first Christian community when he entrusted his mother and the beloved disciple to one another at the foot of the cross.[29]

The new life that Jesus brings is liturgical, hospitable, diverse, and communal, because Jesus, the Word of Life, does not reject even the Wordless words that come to worship to displace and replace him. Instead, Jesus brings them new life. Jesus transforms Wordless words in worship from the nouns they would make of themselves to adjectives that celebrate the gospel, descriptors of the new life that Jesus brings.

As we speak as a church, perhaps we can find power and confidence in the good news that, when we receive the Eucharist, we hear Jesus speak directly to us—"given for you, shed for you"—and we put Jesus, the Word of Life, into our mouths. With the Word in our mouths, we cannot help but speak the Word of Life. And what if we do not? What if we cannot? What happens when, in worship, we are overly occupied with other words, with lesser words, with Wordless words? Without a doubt, Jesus, the Word of Life still brings new life, even if Jesus has to bring new life to some folk outside of worship. You see, Jesus will not allow anything to prevent him from doing what the Word of Life has always done—speaking new life into being.

27. Ambrose of Milan, *De officiis ministrorum*, 2.12.60 (PL 16.118).

28. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *The Use of the Means of Grace*, 9A.

29. John 19:25–27.

What is Normative in Contemporary Lutheran Worship? Word and Sacrament as Non-negotiable*

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I. The question of what is normative in Lutheran worship

Within a few days of each other, three pieces came across my desk, which gave me pause and led me to reflect on the state of liturgical-sacramental life within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Two were written by parish pastors, and the third was written by a now former synod bishop. In the first, Pastor #1, in a short column in *The Lutheran*,[1] as part of his attempt to give a greater emphasis to Pentecost as one of the three great but neglected festival days on the liturgical calendar, described his own practice of creating an actual season of preparation for Pentecost in his parish, which he calls "Prepent." This season of preparation begins on the Sunday before Pentecost ("Prepent Sunday"), i.e., the Seventh Sunday of Easter, and includes even a color change for paraments and vestments from the white of Easter to the red of Pentecost. In the second, Pastor #2 in a short article in *Lutheran Partners*, questioned not only the dominance of "forgiveness of sins" language within traditional Lutheran liturgical-sacramental formulations, but critiqued the way in which the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist themselves have, apparently, come to overshadow, in an *ex opere operato* fashion(!), the primacy of both the word and the doctrine of justification by faith in contemporary Lutheranism.[2] In the third, the former synod bishop not only stated the goal of congregational worship as being "always that the Word of God can be spoken and received and that worshipers are enabled to express their prayers and praise," but argued as well that "each of us Christians must come to worship discussions with the attitude that worship is not only for me, it is also always for the sake of others." Consequently:

> One person would prefer familiar hymns and liturgy from the *Lutheran Book of Worship* every Sunday. Another would feel most comfortable with an informal service that varied each week and incorporated Christian rock music. I think our faith convictions invite the

*Another version of this essay, "Is Anything Normative in Contemporary Lutheran Worship?" appears in Melanie Ross and Simon Jones, eds., *The Serious Business of Worship: Essays in Honour of Bryan D. Spinks* (London; T & T Clark, 2010), 171–184.

1. "The Neglected Festival," *The Lutheran* (June, 2001). This is accessible at http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3942/is_200106/ai_n8957155.

2. "Communicating God's Forgiveness," *Lutheran Partners* 17, 3 (2001). This is accessible at http://www.elca.org/lutheranpartners/archives/forgive.html.

> traditionalist to participate willingly in the informal worship for the sake of the need of others. These convictions invite the one who prefers rock music to participate willingly in the traditional service for the sake of the needs of others.[3]

From these three pieces I learned a great deal about what happens liturgically and how liturgy is actually perceived in some places within the ELCA today. From Pastor #1 it is clear to me that the liturgical year, in which Pentecost is a *plural* title (*Pentecostês*) referring already, by definition, to a "season" of fifty days of paschal rejoicing (i.e., one Great Sunday which lasts for seven weeks plus one day), which begins *on* Easter and concludes on the *Day* of Pentecost as its culmination, fulfillment, or "seal," is for him but a "worship resource" to be adapted and adjusted to local circumstances. In other words, although Pentecost is not a *day* but *already* a season itself called the *Easter Season*, with its own preparatory *season* called "Lent," a time of the year that together stretches "from ashes to fire,"[4] it has become clear to me that such an understanding is far from common. From Pastor #2 I learned, much to my surprise, I might add, that it is quite possible to be an ELCA Lutheran and not really be a "sacramental-liturgical" Christian, something I find absolutely surprising in light of Luther's own comments on the *centrality* of Baptism and Lord's Supper both in the life of the church and of individual Christians.

> In Baptism…every Christian has enough to study and to practice all his life. He always has enough to do to believe firmly what Baptism promises and brings victory over death and the devil, forgiveness of sin, God's grace, the entire Christ, and the Holy Spirit with his gifts.…No greater jewel…can adorn our body and soul than Baptism, for through it we obtain perfect holiness and salvation, which no other kind of life and no work on earth can acquire.[5]

But what I learned from the former bishop is, by far, the most enlightening. That is, according to him, both the "liturgy" of *Lutheran Book of Worship* (*LBW*) and so-called "informal worship" are but personal or pastoral-parish "preferences" and "choices" to be made on, or for, a given Sunday from a wide variety of available—and optional—"worship resources." For the sake of congregational unity, those of us who are more "liturgical" than others are to participate "willingly" in those "informal" services and those of us less liturgical are to participate willingly in "traditionalist" worship.

Although the former bishop, admittedly, does not say this directly, and his concern is with an attitude of tolerance in congregations for diverse liturgical "styles," one other implication seems clear from his approach. That is, for the ELCA and its pastors and congregations there is no such thing as an "official" or "normative" Lutheran (ELCA) liturgy. Whether that of the "authorized" *Service Book and Hymnal* of 1958, the *LBW* of 1978, or, presumably, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (*ELW*) of 2006, none has any real ecclesiastical "authority" in determining the shape of

3. Neither the former bishop's name nor synod will be indicated here.

4. *From Ashes to Fire: Services of Worship for the Seasons of Lent and Easter*, Supplemental Worship Resources 6 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979).

5. Martin Luther, The Large Catechism, in Theodore Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 442.

liturgical-sacramental practice in ELCA congregations. Unlike the mandated use of the *Book of Common Prayer* in Episcopalian congregations or the *Roman Missal* in Roman Catholic parishes, individual ELCA congregations and pastors, in voting to purchase and use the *LBW*, *ELW*, or other "resources," are actually free to pick and choose that which "works" or that which they "prefer" to use to "create" worship "experiences" for their communities.

None of the above approaches to liturgy and sacraments in the ELCA, of course, is very surprising to anyone conscious of what actually happens in Lutheran congregations regarding worship. Individual Lutheran pastors and congregations have often done, and will continue to do, what they choose to do, sometimes in concord with "authorized" worship books of the church and sometimes in spite of those books. And, of course, no pastor or congregation will ever be put under synodical discipline or censure for a refusal to conform to some "official" standard of liturgical-sacramental practice, a groundless fear often expressed especially by those critical of full communion with the Episcopal Church as expressed in *Called to Common Mission*.

If, however, the feasts and seasons of the liturgical year, including, presumably, the Sunday and festival lectionary, and even the "authorized" worship books of the ELCA, are but *options* for use from within an increasing array of "worship resources," including those now published by the "official" ELCA publishing house, then, the following questions might surely be raised. What *is* liturgy for Lutherans and is there anything specific that can be called "Lutheran liturgy"? If so, are there criteria by which one can determine whether *a* particular liturgy is "Lutheran" or not? Is there, then, anything normatively authoritative for Christian worship among Lutherans, or is liturgy itself merely relative, a matter of personal pastoral preference or congregational choice?

II. Attempts at an answer

An increasingly popular answer to these questions is that provided by Lutheran liturgiologist Gordon Lathrop in his compelling studies, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology*[6] and *What Are the Essentials of Christian Worship*?[7] an approach to which I have referred several times in my own publications elsewhere.[8] As is well known, Lathrop has suggested that what is essential, and therefore, central and "normative," for Christian worship is what he calls a liturgical "*ordo*" or overall "pattern" for the scheduled ritual of Christian worship, which is both ecumenical and transcultural. This "*ordo,*" in part, is based on the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus in the New Testament (especially the Emmaus account in Luke 24), the description of baptismal and Sunday worship provided by Justin Martyr in his *First Apology*, as well as traditional confessional documents (e.g., the *Augsburg Confession* V) and current ecumenical convergence in liturgical practice and interpretation

6. Gordon Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1993).

7. Gordon Lathrop, *What Are The Essentials of Christian Worship?* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress 1994).

8. See Maxwell E. Johnson, "Can We Avoid Relativism in Worship? Liturgical Norms in the Light of Contemporary Liturgical Scholarship," *Worship* 74, 2 (March 2000): 135–154; Idem, "Liturgy and Ecumenism: Gifts, Challenges, and Hopes for a Renewed Vision," *Worship* 80, 1 (January 2006): 2–29; and Idem, "The Loss of a Common Language; The End of Ecumenical-Liturgical Convergence?" *Studia Liturgica* 37 (2007): 55–72.

within a variety of churches. "So these are the essentials of Christian worship," he writes:

> A community *gathers in prayer* around the scriptures *read* and *proclaimed*. This community of the word then tastes the meaning of that word by keeping the meal of Christ, *giving thanks* over bread and cup and *eating* and *drinking*. It is this word-table community, the body of Christ, which gathers other people to its number, continually *teaching* both itself and these newcomers the mercy and mystery of God and *washing* them in the name of that God. All of these essential things urge the community toward the world—toward prayer for the world, sharing with the hungry of the world, caring for the world, giving witness to the world.…Around these central things, which will be most evident in Sunday and festival worship, other gatherings of Christians may also take place. [9]

Other elements characteristic of the liturgical assembly, according to him, flow from this central core as well. He continues:

> The very centrality of bath, word, and table, and the very reasons for their centrality…do begin to give us some characteristics of the mode of our celebration. These characteristics…are corollaries which ought not be easily ignored. A list of such characteristics should include *ritual focus*, a *music which serves*, the importance of *Sunday* and other festivals, a *participating community*, *many ministries*, and a *recognized presider* who is in communion with the churches.[10]

Lathrop's ingenious suggestion of an *ordo*, or authoritative liturgical pattern, has been decidedly influential in contemporary Lutheran and ecumenical conversations about Christian worship as well as providing an interpretative structural model of "Gathering, Word, Meal, and Sending" for the ritual action which takes place within the Sunday Eucharist. Such, of course, has been incorporated directly into explaining the ritual structure of the Eucharist in the *With One Voice* (*WOV*) supplement to *LBW* and, now, in the 2006 *ELW* resulting from the ELCA's multi-year process called *Renewing Worship*.

As others have pointed out, however, an *ordo* or pattern apart from its concrete doctrinal, cultural, and textual expressions in actual liturgies simply does not exist in any independent or pure form. That is, an *ordo* or pattern is something deduced or abstracted from already existing liturgies and these already existing liturgies themselves concretize precisely the doctrinal, cultural, and textual expressions of the church's faith for which the liturgy exists to serve and by which the faith and life of the worshiping community is nurtured and formed. In other words, there is no *ordo* apart from the ways in which this *ordo* of Gathering, Word, Meal, and Sending is actually expressed, performed, or "done" in those liturgical assemblies called church. John Baldovin has written that in order to fully understand a particular liturgy in addition to the core, this *ordo* or pattern, one must also know the *code* (the specific *form* expressing the core) and the *culture*; both code and culture are often lacking in the sources from which the *ordo* is deduced. Unfortunately, we lack both *code* and *culture* in the context of Justin Martyr. [11] That

9. Lathrop, *What Are The Essentials of Christian Worship?* 22.

10. Ibid., 23.

11. John Baldovin, "The Church in Christ, Christ in the Church," in T. Fitzgerald and D. Lysik, eds., *The Many Presences of Christ* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1999), 25–27. A further critique of Lathrop's approach is offered by Michael

is, the deducing of an *ordo*, in large part, is a logical construct, an abstraction made on the basis of very minimal descriptions of the patterns of Christian liturgy in the early period. Even Justin Martyr in his *First Apology*, it must be noted, is not necessarily giving us an *ordo* for Christian liturgy for all times and all places but a brief outline for the Roman emperor, Antoninus Pius, of what, perhaps, *one* Christian community at Rome was doing in its baptismal and Sunday worship in the middle of the second century. Hence, to abstract some kind of transcultural, timeless, and ecumenical *ordo* for Christian liturgy from such brief descriptions, in which all the precise details the historian would actually need or want are lacking, may indeed be rather risky business if the overall attempt is to find a normative pattern for what the Church *should* do in its liturgical assemblies as a result.

The great value of Lathrop's deduction of this liturgical *ordo*, of course, is that, ideally, it should promote the kind of tolerance for a diversity of liturgical styles to which the former bishop's comments call us. That is to say, if, ultimately, we are talking about a ritual pattern or structure of Christian liturgy as normative (Gathering, Word, Meal, and Sending), then the *style* of that liturgy, whether "high church" or "low church" (whatever those words mean), whether rock n' roll, classic hymnody and *ELW* or other musical settings, mariachi, gospel music, flamenco, folk, polka, Gregorian chant, Baroque polyphony, "formal," "informal," or even spoken, should not really matter. What should matter is that the liturgical *ordo* itself be done faithfully in our worship!

But the minute we start talking about *ordo* we have to ask: which concrete expression(s) of that *ordo* do we mean? Are we talking about the "authorized" and concrete *Lutheran* expression of this *ordo* in, at least, the liturgical texts, lectionary readings, and prayers of *LBW*, *WOV*, *This Far by Faith*, *El Libro de Liturgia y Cántico* and now *ELW*? Are we talking about a tolerance for diversity in expressing that *ordo* which, in classic Christian (and Lutheran) usage bearing precisely the doctrinal, cultural, and textual developments of history, includes what used to be called commonly the "Ordinary of the Mass," the Kyrie, Gloria in Excelsis, Credo, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei? Or, are we talking about some kind of generic or timeless, even Platonic, pure or ideal *ordo* whose very concrete expression a pastor or parish worship committee creates anew each week, sometimes bearing no discernible relationship whatsoever to the Lutheran liturgical tradition— or, still too frequently, even to the Meal dimension of the *ordo*— itself?

I suspect that part of the confusion often generated over liturgical topics stems from a widespread misconception of what the word *liturgy* actually references, a misconception reinforced by those who make distinctions between *the* "liturgy" and a "worship service" as though they are somehow distinct realities. "Liturgy" is not that "formal" aspect of the service apart from the sermon, the "everything else" we do in the front part of the *book* before or after the sermon. *The* liturgy is not that "formal" setting for "worship" identified exclusively or explicitly with the musical settings of a *book*. To juxtapose "liturgy from the *Lutheran Book of Worship*" to "an informal service that varied each week," while understandable in context as a comparison of worship *styles*, is a misleading juxtaposition and creates

Aune, "Liturgy and Theology: Rethinking the Relationship: Parts 1 and 2," Part 1 appears in *Worship* 81, 1 (January 2007): 46–68; and Part 2 in *Worship* 81, 2 (March 2007): 141–169.

greater confusion about the meaning of the liturgy itself. *Both* "styles" of worship are "liturgy" because, of course, liturgy, *Leitourgia*, is what the Christian community *does* and celebrates in union with Christ, *the* "Liturgist" (Heb 8:6) when it gathers to hear his word proclaimed, share in his Supper, and "offer…prayers and praise" in order to be equipped by word and sacrament for life and mission in the world as his body in that ritually enacted dialogue of divine word and grateful response. Or, better, in the words of Nathan Mitchell:

> Liturgy is God's work for us, not our work for God. Only God can show us how to worship God—fittingly, beautifully. Liturgy is not something beautiful we do for God, but something beautiful God does for us and among us. Public worship is neither our work nor our possession; as the Rule of St Benedict reminds us, it is *opus Dei*, God's work. [12]

A "service" of hymn singing, scripture reading, sermon, and prayer, or morning and evening prayer, or the celebration of baptism, etc., are *liturgies*, albeit different types of liturgical expression from the "liturgy" of Word and Eucharistic Meal. The question is never "shall we do the liturgy or not?" since whatever we do in our congregational worship *is* the *"liturgy"* of this particular assembly at this point in time and place.

But even more than this needs to be said. What we do or don't do in our liturgies forms the community in one way or another. Hence, a community which celebrates and receives Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper every Sunday, attends to the rubrical options and varieties already present in the "authorized" liturgical book(s), faithfully proclaims the lectionary readings, and tenaciously keeps the feasts and seasons of the liturgical year week after week, year after year, will be a different sort of community than one which is continually experimenting with "worship alternatives" and searching for something "better" to meet the so-called "needs" of worshipers and potential seekers alike. And I dare say that the first type of community will, undoubtedly, be more "orthodox," more "Lutheran," in its doctrinal-theological outlook. Why? Because the issue is not simply liturgical "style." The liturgy is not only about expressing our prayer and praise to God or hearing the word of God. Rather, as the very corporate expression of the self-identity and world-view of the worshiping community, the body of Christ in this time and place, expressed concretely in its liturgical texts and liturgical actions, the purpose of liturgy is not to permeate our lives with ritual but to permeate them with Christ for the very building up of his body, the church, and for the salvation and life of the world. [13] The underlying issue in the so-called "Worship Wars" in contemporary Lutheranism, Roman Catholicism, and much of Protestantism today is, I would submit, fundamentally *doctrinal* in its implications and not so apparently harmless as being about mere "styles" of worship at all. And this is why the question is of such great importance in terms of Christian, and specifically in this case, "Lutheran" identity. Let me explain further.

12. Nathan Mitchell, "The Amen Corner: Being Good and Being Beautiful," *Worship* 74:6 (November 2000): 557.

13. See Robert Taft, "What Does Liturgy Do? Toward a Soteriology of Liturgical Celebration: Some Theses," *Worship* 66, 3 (1992): 194–211.

III. Is there a Lutheran Lex Orandi… Lex Credendi*?*

An ancient Christian principle attributed to Prosper of Acquitaine in the context of the Semi-Pelagian controversy, "*ut legem credendi statuat lex supplicandi*," (often abbreviated by *lex orandi, lex credendi*), states that the "rule of praying establishes the rule of believing." That is, the "faith" of the church is both constituted and expressed by the "prayer" of the church.[14] On the one hand, of course, this means that the liturgy itself is the great "School for Prayer." Indeed, it is the very structure and contents of the great prayers of the church enshrined especially *in* the liturgical rites, after all, which provide a model for what Christian prayer is. And that Christian prayer, so proclaims the liturgy week after week, is "trinitarian" in structure and focus. Note, for example, the concluding formula for the Prayer of the Day: "… through your Son Jesus Christ our Lord who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, both now and forever." Or, note the concluding doxology at the end of the Great Thanksgiving: "Through him, with him, in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all honor and glory is yours, almighty Father, now and forever. Amen." Not simply a deduced *ordo* or pattern but the classic way that *ordo* has been and is expressed in the church's liturgy gives us the language and structure for prayer itself.

On the other hand, the liturgy is not only the "school for prayer" but also the "school for faith." Long before there was an Apostles' or Nicene Creed, or an explicit "doctrine" of the Trinity, for example, it was through a Prayer of Thanksgiving over the baptismal waters, through the candidate's three-fold profession of faith in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the context of Baptism itself, and through the Great *Eucharistia* over the bread and cup of the Lord's Supper, consisting of *praise* to God for the work of creation and redemption, *thanksgiving* for the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, and *invocation* of the Holy Spirit, that the church professed its faith in the Trinity by means of *doxology* and *praise*. While not etymologically related, a common modern misconception even among liturgiologists (!), "orthodoxy" and "doxology," right thinking doctrinally and right liturgical expression, do go together. Whether one accepts the theological priority of the *lex orandi* over the *lex credendi* (the traditional Roman Catholic approach) or the other way around (the traditional Protestant approach) matters very little in this context. For, in either case what is done, sung, or said liturgically and what is held, thought, or confessed doctrinally are inseparable. How and what the church *prays* shapes and *is*, in a real sense, how and what the church *believes*. Why else would the Lutheran and Protestant reformers have made attempts at liturgical reformation itself? Even at the congregational level, to change what is done in worship carries with it the enormous responsibility of needing to be aware that such changes may well engender potential changes in the congregation's own self-understanding and faith. If how I pray, sing, and celebrate liturgically is changed, how I believe might also be changed for good or, and this is the danger, for ill.

The "authorized" liturgy of the ELCA in *ELW* and other worship books, authorized at least by the ELCA's predecessor bodies, bears the doctrinal weight and concrete expression of what is recognized by the churches to be a faithful representative of the Lutheran theological-doctrinal tradition in union with the catholic-ecu-

14. See my study of this issue, "Liturgy and Theology," in Bryan D. Spinks and Paul F. Bradshaw, eds., *Liturgy in Dialogue: Essays in Memory of Ronald Jasper* (London: SPCK; Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, Pueblo, 1993), 202–225.

menical liturgical traditions of the church. As Philip Pfatteicher writes in reference to *LBW* in his book *Liturgical Spirituality*: "the liturgy of the church provides a framework within which the deepest mysteries of Christianity await discovery. With the Holy Communion and the Daily Prayer of the church, one has all one needs to know about Christianity. All the essentials are there to be pondered, explored, and acted upon."[15] Can the same be said for other "worship resources" existing in abundance for congregational use today? Perhaps so and perhaps not but that is precisely the kind of question that must be asked.

Questions, therefore, about liturgy go far beyond mere tolerance for a diversity of "worship styles" in particular congregations. They are, at heart, I am convinced, theological-doctrinal questions and, unfortunately, the appeal to a liturgical *ordo*, pattern, or structure does not get us too far with this question unless we attend also to the particular ways in which this *ordo* is incarnated within the particular liturgies *and* in the particular churches from where it is deduced. Here is where I think the notion of an authoritative *ordo* is lacking. Certainly, Arians and Orthodox in the context of the Nicene controversy both followed the same basic *ordo*. But only one of these traditions was recognized as orthodox and the other as heterodox not because of the *ordo* itself but because of their theology of the person of Christ read, in part, out of the liturgical prayers used in that *ordo* (e.g., prayer *to* the Father *through* Christ the mediator *in* the Holy Spirit). And the aftermath of that controversy did not only result in a new creedal formula (the Nicene Creed) but contributed to the ways in which references to the Nicene homoousios abound within Eastern Christian Liturgy today. Similarly, both Orthodox and Semi-Arians followed the same *ordo* in the late fourth century. But it is, again, in the liturgy where the Orthodox coordinate form of the doxology, ascribing equal praise to the Trinity, "Glory be *to* the Father, *with* the Son, and *with* the Holy Spirit," replaced the un-coordinate form of "*to* the Father, *through* the Son, *in* the Holy Spirit" because of its potential Semi-Arian interpretations. When ancient local councils of the church called for specific written liturgical texts to be used in North African churches it did so *not* because the *ordo* wasn't being followed but in order to ensure the doctrinal orthodoxy of the prayers being offered within that *ordo*. And, when Prosper of Acquitaine coined the phrase "*ut legem credendi statuat lex supplicandi*," against the Semi-Pelagians he was referring specifically to the *text* of a liturgical prayer of intercession, which underscored the absolute necessity of divine grace for the accomplishment of any human action.[16] Indeed, because liturgy shapes believing, a faith formed regularly not by variety but precisely by constant repetition, the liturgy is too important to be reduced to a matter of personal taste and preference regarding "style." Put somewhat crassly, if we want "Lutheran" believers we form and inform our congregations with "Lutheran" liturgy. For the bottom line is that whatever we do in terms of parish liturgy we are also doing in terms of parish formation.

This brings me, more directly, to the question of "authorization" and what constitutes an "official" liturgy of a church. It is interesting to compare what is said for congregations regarding worship materi-

15. Philip H. Pfatteicher, *Liturgical Spirituality* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1997), 22.

16. See Paul de Clerk, "*lex orandi – Lex credendi*, Sens original et avatars historique d'un adage équivoque," *Questions Liturgiques* 59 (1978): 193–212, and my essay, "Liturgy and Theology," 222–225.

als in the current ELCA constitution with the constitutions of the former Lutheran bodies making up the ELCA. While the former constitutions were clear in that only "authorized" or "appropriate" worship books were to be used (*LBW*, *SBH*, and, presumably, worship books of other predecessor bodies) in congregations, the ELCA constitution is completely non-directive when it comes to worship, saying only that the church is to "worship God in proclamation of the Word and administration of the sacraments and through lives of prayer, praise, thanksgiving, witness, and service,"[17] and to "provide services of worship at which the Word of God is preached and the sacraments are administered,"[18] without specifying any worship books whatsoever. With such lack of guidance one can only conclude that *LBW* or *ELW* are now only possible worship "resources" among potentially several others. Such would appear also to be the former bishop's position in his comments. If so, does this mean, given the ELCA's full communion with the Episcopal Church that liturgical texts, including the four Eucharistic Prayers, from the *Book of Common Prayer*, are also suitable for ELCA usage? If so, given the ecumenical nature of the church, what about optional offertory and post-communion prayers from other sources, or additional Eucharistic Prefaces and the solemn seasonal blessings from the *Roman Missal*? Or, what about liturgical texts from Eastern Christian liturgies or from the more recent Presbyterian *Book of Common Worship*, especially given the situation of full communion between the ELCA and various Reformed churches in the United States? And, if all of these are suitable for ELCA liturgical usage, as I would argue they are, then what about resources from so-called "non-liturgical" or, more accurately, "free churches" as well? On the one hand, the answer is very simple. In all cases, what determines suitability for use, apart from other possible considerations, must be, again, *theology* and consistency with the Lutheran doctrinal tradition. Does the particular text in question reflect a theological position or orientation, which is consonant with the Lutheran doctrinal confession and the Lutheran liturgical tradition? If so, one would imagine that it is suitable.

On the other hand, however, if there is no *official* ELCA Lutheran liturgy, apart from multiple resources, it becomes next to impossible to appeal to the structure or texts of the liturgy in any kind of authoritative way to determine if another "resource" is, in fact, consistent with the Lutheran liturgical tradition. Those texts, after all, are not *official*. Within an ecumenical context as well, especially within dialogues between ELCA Lutherans, Anglicans, Roman Catholics, and Eastern Orthodox who share, supposedly, a relatively common liturgical sacramental tradition, this can become especially complex. In such a situation may an ELCA Lutheran actually make an authoritative appeal, for example, to either the rite for "Holy Baptism" in *ELW*, including the postbaptismal rite of pneumatic handlaying and optional chrismation/sealing, or to "The Holy Communion" in *ELW,* as demonstrating what the ELCA actually believes, teaches, confesses, and celebrates in Baptism or Lord's Supper? Or, must such an appeal always employ some disclaimer about the fact these rites are only reflective of "some" ELCA Lutheran liturgical practice?

It would appear quite difficult to assert that *ELW* is the *official* worship book of the ELCA. And, as such, if there is no

17. *Model Constitution for Congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America 2007*, C4.02.a.

18. Ibid, C4.03.a.

authoritative standard of Lutheran liturgy, then, newly and locally created rites for Baptism or the Lord's Supper, alternative but equally permissible services of "worship," the creation of new seasons like "Prepent," or the moving of Advent to a "more appropriate" location in November,[19] or, for that matter, of finding or creating another, more relevant alternative to the calendar of feasts and seasons itself, is precisely what is to be expected. Liturgy becomes—as it has become in many places—simply the local creation of pastors and congregations.

But must the situation remain here? I think not. Although there is at present no officially authorized "Lutheran" liturgical book for the ELCA there **is** an officially authorized, approved, and authoritative Lutheran statement on the practice of Word and Sacrament called *The Use of the Means of Grace*[20], which has vast liturgical implications. Note the following examples:

Baptism:

Principle 25: We seek to celebrate Baptism in such a way that the celebration is a true and complete sign of the things which baptism signifies.

Principle 26: Water is a sign of cleansing, dying, and new birth. It is used generously in Holy Baptism to symbolize God's power over sin and death.

Principle 27: A baptismal font filled with water, placed in the assembly's worship space, symbolizes the centrality of this sacrament for faith and life.

Principle 28: The laying on of hands and prayer for the Holy Spirit's gifts, the signing with the cross, and the anointing with oil help to appropriate the breath of meanings in Baptism. Other symbolic acts also are appropriate such as the clothing with a baptismal garment and the giving of a lighted candle.

Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist:

Principle 6: Sunday, the day of Christ's resurrection and of the appearances to the disciples by the crucified and risen Christ is the primary day on which Christians gather to worship. Within this assembly, the Word is read and preached and the sacraments are celebrated.

Principle 7: The public reading of the Holy Scriptures is an indispensable part of worship constituting the basis for the public proclamation of the Gospel.

Principle 9: The preaching of the Gospel of the crucified and risen Christ is rooted in the readings of the Scriptures in the assemblies for worship. Called and ordained ministers bear responsibility for the preached Word in the Church gathered for public worship.

Principle 10: The assembled congregation participates in proclaiming the Word of God with a common voice. It sings hymns and the texts of the

19. See Susan K. Wendorf, "Let's Move Advent," *Lutheran Partners* (1991). See also my response, "Let's Keep Advent Right Where It Is" in Maxwell Johnson, *Worship: Rites, Feasts, and Reflections* (Portland: The Pastoral Press, 2004): 237–242.

20. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997). All of the following principles are taken from this document. The appeal to this document as an authoritative text for what is normative in Lutheran worship, rather than to a worship book, is based, in part, on a comment that Gordon Lathrop once made to me in a conversation at a meeting of the North American Academy of Liturgy. One could make similar appeal here to the ELCA's *Renewing Worship: Principles for Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 2002), based, in part, on *The Use of the Means of Grace*, but only the *Use of the Means of Grace* itself was officially approved by a national assembly of the ELCA.

> liturgy. It confesses the Nicene or Apostles' Creed.
>
> *Principle 33:* Because of the living Word of God, Christian assemblies for worship are occasions for intercessory prayer. On the grounds of the Word and promise of God the Church prays, in the power of the Spirit and in the name of Jesus Christ, for all the great needs of the world.
>
> *Principle 34:* The two principal parts of the liturgy of Holy Communion, the proclamation of the Word of God and the celebration of the sacramental meal, are so intimately connected as to form one act of worship.
>
> *Principle 35:* According to the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Lutheran congregations celebrate the Holy Communion every Sunday and festival. *This confession remains the norm for our practice* [emphasis added].
>
> *Principle 43:* The biblical words of institution declare God's action and invitation. *They are set within the context of the Great Thanksgiving. This eucharistic prayer* proclaims and celebrates the gracious work of God in creation, redemption, and sanctification [emphasis added].

Anyone who follows what is stated above as principles regarding Baptism, Word, and Eucharist (including even the preferred liturgical use of a Eucharistic Prayer) will easily come to the conclusion that the very liturgical life *officially* envisioned by the ELCA for its congregations is *precisely* that which is expressed already by the very contents of *LBW*, *WOV*, *ELW*, etc. In other words, what Lutherans have here is a *lex credendi*, an official theological stance and about the ELCA believes regarding the centrality of Word and Sacrament, which, as adopted in 1997 to provide "guidance and practice,"[21] for congregations, implies, presupposes, and is actually based upon a particular *lex orandi*, i.e., not just a classic liturgical shape, *ordo*, or pattern, but a specific liturgical-doctrinal content already expressed in the "liturgy" of the various Lutheran worship books.

Conclusion

So, is anything normative in contemporary Lutheran worship or are Lutherans to be left with congregational creativity? I would argue that there is a great deal that can be interpreted as constituting a norm and that, indirectly, at least, this norm can be located precisely in *LBW* and/or *ELW*. That is, *The Use of the Means of Grace* may well be an official theological statement on liturgy in the ELCA. But, at the same time, the statement itself is little other than a commentary on liturgical practices based on what already exists in *LBW* and/or *ELW*. Hence, in the context of the so-called modern "worship wars," those of us who advocate the classic shape and contents of the historic liturgy of the church actually have official support from the ELCA itself. As *The Use of the Means of Grace* makes clear, the Mass, the Eucharistic Liturgy, the Lord's Supper, the Holy Communion, whatever name is chosen and whatever liturgical "style" may be employed, is central in ELCA Sunday and feast day worship and the very structure of that liturgy—including even the Eucharistic Prayer—is exactly what is presented in *LBW* and/or *ELW* as a "resource" for liturgy. In fact, if there were no *LBW* or *ELW*, *The Use of the Means of Grace* suggests that someone would have to invent them.

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21. Ibid, 2.

Ampersand Faith: Re-integrating Liturgy & Life through a Reappropriation of Mystical Theology and Praxis

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It was a conversation not meant for me to hear. Having recently received the final evaluation of their "Service Learning Projects," two of my freshman students could be heard offering the following reflection:

"At least they have us doing something useful."

"Yeah, not like making us go to church or something."

Among the requirements of the introductory theology course at the Roman Catholic university at which I teach is a project emphasizing service learning. It is a theology "lab" designed to provide students with an intentional integration of theological theory and praxis. Both the lab and the evocative reflection of two unsuspecting students reflect something that is not particularly new news within the church—that within the ecclesial context, something of a dis-connect exists. It is a dis-integration, moreover, not only among the traditionally suspect cohort of young adults but even among my older, life-wise hospice patients who, when asked to identify their religious preference, are more likely than not to reflect a similar lack of integration: "Oh, Chaplain, I'm not really religious, but I am spiritual," or "We don't go to church, but we do live a 'good' life."

These are the stated claims of ecclesial dis-integration. They are reflective of the existing and known struggle within the church for spiritual normativity wherein "who we are" and "how we are to live," as a people of faith are often times dichotomous. It is, in effect, a *dis*-integration between ecclesial identity—particularly that which is engaged when the church *liturgically* enacts itself in word and sacrament—and ecclesial impact—the socially relevant and *lived* experience of service.

Christianity is most faithful when it is both—the intentional ecclesial integration of identity and relevancy, religion and spirituality, liturgy and life. While these dichotomies themselves are not recent revelations within the church, it is my intention, in this article, to consider a *ressourcement* of that which is perhaps an historically more integrated ecclesial reality and proclamation. It will be my contention that a reappropriation of the church's tradition of mystical theology and praxis may serve as a point of *re*-integration for numerous dichotomies which, when considered as a connected "both/and" serve to compel our mission and ministry as those *who* gather around word and sacrament, as the identity of faith, for the *purpose of* being sent in service, as the impact of relevancy.

This is the nature of what I have labeled our "Ampersand Faith." It is a characterization that I hope engenders an image of all those matters of theology and praxis that the church necessarily holds in

tension as "both/and." Linguistically and typographically, the ampersand sign is a "ligature," a joining together of two first century Roman letters "e" and "t," which, when either written out or *bound* together as a ligature, signified "and."

Toward this end, this article will focus on three elements which contribute to a faith that binds together identity and impact: an understanding of justification as *both* forensic *and* mystical; the impact of mystical tradition on the *Theologia Crucis* of Martin Luther, particularly as it relates to the *simul justus et peccator* claim of his theological anthropology; and the specific reintegration of liturgy *and* life by means of epicletic eschatology.

Two little words: Re-integrating justification

Two little words. It would seem that much of the history of Christian spiritual thought can be comprehended in two little words—"up" and "in." Historically, comprehending the Sacred has often been expressed in theological conversation as movement that is either upwardly or inwardly oriented. In effect, it is a question of how we approach God. Depending on the historical era, movements within history, social and cultural context, and a host of other factors, the faithful have tended to "locate" God either upward—in affirmations of God's apathetic transcendence—or inward—in often highly emotive and deeply personal experiences of God's immanence. Indeed, "the truth is," according to Phyllis Tickle, "that in actual practice most of us see the sacred as both 'in' and 'up' anyway (although not simultaneously), and we move freely back and forth between the two conceptualizations at will and with no apparent sense of contradiction."[1] I would agree with Tickle, but only to a point. Perhaps this "back and forth" movement is the ideal. Integration, however, is key. Theological and spiritual conceptions of God as *either* transcendent *or* immanent fall far short of normative Christian claims, and this is notwithstanding the virtual absence of asserting God *incarnate*!

While not explicit in its terminology, creedal confession of God has always implicitly apprehended the Divine as panentheistic. The trinitarian nature of God necessitates an orientation of God to the world as transcendent, immanent, and incarnate. While this has historically been the creedal claim by which God is professed, it has not always been the experience among the faithful. The historical development of "spirituality" is often reflective of this reality. Historically, spiritual experience has engaged God on something of a continuum—God as either upwardly transcendent, inwardly immanent, or somewhere in between. Typically, theological expression has followed spiritual experience. Theological language and theory associated, for instance, with atonement is marked by the differing experiences of God's distance or intimacy. The model of atonement as "forensic" tends toward an image of God as the distantly all-powerful Divine who forgives the impudence of sinners counting the cost of our disobedience against the Son. According to Wolfhart Pannenberg, "In theological terminology this was called *imputation* of the justice of Christ or *forensic justification*, because it consisted of an act of divine *judgment*."[2] This model of atonement reflects the historically conditioned spiritual experience particularly within the medieval church, which was predominantly concerned with the question of human guilt. Given that the medieval spiritual

1. Phyllis Tickle, *Re-Discovering the Sacred: Spirituality in America* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1995), 66.

2. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Christian Spirituality*, 1st ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 21.

experience focused "increasingly on the awareness of sin and guilt as a condition for genuine faith, [one] could be certain of salvation precisely to the extent that one identified oneself as a sinner completely dependent of the grace of God…."[3] Thus, forensically oriented justification reflects the spiritual experience of the medieval as guilt-ridden sinner, utterly dependent on salvation *extra nos*.

Mystical theology

Along the continuum of spiritual experience, however, there exists another experiential and theological reality—one that, when considered alongside the forensic, allows for a greater integrated ecclesial reality of spiritual experience and theological expression. Rooted in the experience of the early church is the mystical tradition of Christianity. Describing the experience of God among early Christians, Elizabeth Johnson claims, "For them, God was utterly transcendent, but also present enfleshed in history, while also immanent in their community experience. In shorthand, we might say that they experienced the saving God in a threefold way, as beyond them, with them, and within them."[4] Given this experiential reality, while not exclusive to the apostolic, post-apostolic or patristic eras, the encounter of God among the earliest Christians was an integrated experience. In the early church "the spiritual is connected with the active presence of God and not primarily with extraordinary inner experiences, though God's presence may certainly arouse such feelings"; spirituality is, therefore, "not something the believer *has* but is a new pattern of personal growth taking place in the community of those who have been sought out, converted and cherished by the risen Christ."[5] The *communal* context of the spiritual experience is what provides for the integral and integrated experience of God as panentheistic.

Moreover, it is this community, which assembles for worship, that provides the foundation for a spirituality that is theologically, religiously, and spiritually oriented around the liturgy. According to James Dallen, "During Christianity's first centuries the community assembled for worship, particularly for Eucharist, and this was the basic 'school' for Christian spirituality."[6] Unlike a spiritual experience associated with a predominantly forensic soteriological orientation, an experience that is oriented toward an *integration* of both the forensic and the mystical provides a communal context for spiritual experience, which reflects an ecclesial *integration* between identity and relevancy, religion and spirituality, and liturgy and life. Contrary, however, to contemporary presumptions, Christian "mysticism" is not characterized by an exclusively inward orientation. Indeed, "Christian mystics have always seen themselves as practitioners of Christianity, shaped in all their experiences, perceptions and insights by Christian scripture, worship and teaching."[7] This is how scholar in the area of mystical theology, Mark McIntosh, characterizes the Christian mystic. McIntosh, moreover, characterizes mysticism less as a singular, intense experience and more as an awareness, wherein "while it is true that there comes to be a most intense moment of encounter with God,

3. Ibid., 17–18.

4. Elizabeth Johnson, "Trinity: To Let the Symbol Sing Again," *Theology Today* 34, no. 3 (1997): 303.

5. Mark Allen McIntosh, *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1998), 6.

6. James Dallen, "Liturgical Spirituality: Living What We Sing About," *Liturgical Ministry* 4 (1995): 49.

7. McIntosh, 31.

which we might be tempted to think of (not quite correctly) as mysticism proper, this moment is really part of a life-long spiritual journey…"[8] It is this journey that characterizes mysticism. McIntosh, therefore, upholds the definition of mysticism as offered by Bernard McGinn, "the mystical element in Christianity is that part of its belief and practices that concerns the preparation for, the consciousness of, and the reaction to what can be described as the immediate or direct presence of God."[9] The "mystical" practices that generate "mystical" beliefs are precisely those around which the early church was oriented—proclamation of word, celebration of sacrament, and participation in service.[10] The model of spiritual experience thus expressed among the earliest Christians upholds the sacramental liturgy as that which provides for the communal expression of the word and grounds the communal experience of service.

Following the presumption that theological expression follows spiritual experience, the theological language and theory of atonement within the church's *mystical* tradition is marked by experiences of God's present nearness. Atonement as "mystical" tends, therefore, toward an image of God who, by love, calls us into knowledge of and *relationship with* Godself.

In describing the spiritual experience and theological expression of mystics as varied by time and place as Evagrius (4th century, Egyptian), Eckhart (13th century, German), and John of the Cross (16th century, Spanish), Louis Bouyer addresses mystical justification in his now classic *Introduction to Spirituality*. According to Bouyer,

> What they wanted to say, it would seem, is that since mystical knowledge and union lead us to know and love God in Christ as He knows and loves Himself, so far as this is possible to man, they lead us to transcend all purely human modes of knowing. The mystical life is simply the development of life in Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, dead and risen. In consequence, the mystic ceases to consider Christ as if from without, to reach His divinity only beyond His humanity and, as it were, behind it. The man who can say of himself, "It is no longer I who live, it is Christ who lives in me" has not thereby ceased to know that Christ is God made man. Quite the contrary, he enters into this mystery better than anyone else, as he begins to some extent to participate in the viewpoint that Christ Himself has of it.[11]

Bouyer's description begins to apprehend a mystical dimension of justification in adopting language associated with participation. Indeed, in referencing the Pauline image of justification from Galatians, Bouyer actually holds, with Paul, to an integrated understanding of justification, wherein both the forensic and the mystical are appropriated. Paul instructs the church at Galatia that:

> we know that person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by

8. Ibid., citing Bernard McGinn.

9. Ibid., 30.

10. Cf. Acts 2:42, 44–45 which illustrates the integration of word, sacrament and service, at least as *this particular* community participated in "teaching," "the breaking of bread and the prayers," and "distribut[ion of] proceeds" from the collection and sale of "common" goods.

11. Louis Bouyer, *Introduction to Spirituality* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1961), 305.

> doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law. But if, in our effort to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have been found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! But if I build up again the very things that I once tore down, then I demonstrate that I am a transgressor. For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Galatians 2:16-20).

Pauline theology of justification is complex. Depending on the ecclesial correspondence, Pauline soteriology can be interpreted along the lines of numerous models. The church has, throughout history, appropriated Paul and developed soteriological hermeneutics along three distinct images of atonement: victory, divinization, and sacrifice. It is the latter two in particular that serve the predominant theological claims of the two historical expressions of the Christian church. The Greek church upholds a theology of divinization. As such, it is the Pauline image of participation that serves this soteriology. "Christ in me" communicates the principal metaphor of mystical theology—the Athanasian claim that "God became man so that man might become God" (cf. *De Incarnatione*).

While no soteriology is *absolutely* definitive of any one particular historical era, there are models of atonement which typify the spiritual experience and theological expression encountered within the historical situatedness of the church. In contrast to the Greek model of atonement, the Latin church maintains a primary theology of sacrifice and expiation. The Pauline image of justification in Christ who "gave himself for me" serves this soteriology. Within the western understanding of salvation, it is the image of *Christ's* cross that communicates the principal metaphor of forensic theology. This will become particularly evident in the theology that develops within the Scholastic and Reform movements of the church, vis-à-vis Anselm (particularly as interpreted by Aquinas) and Luther respectively. Within a forensically oriented theology it is the imputation of God's grace *extra nos* that effects the exchange of divine righteousness and human sinfulness. "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21). This Pauline statement to the Corinthian church is often upheld as demonstrative of the theological assertion upon which forensic justification is founded. Luther calls it the "happy exchange." In his death, Christ Jesus takes on the sin of the world, effectively becoming *maximus peccator*. In exchange, humanity necessarily receives the very righteousness that is held by the divine Son of God.

It is, however, a western irony that the above Pauline statement on "exchange" is set within the context of his comments on reconciliation. In addition to the implied "exchange" resident in Athanasius' mystical claim cited above, implicit within the language of "reconciliation" in Paul is a justificatory orientation that includes both the forensic and the mystical, understood as: restoration, communion, and even union.

Even Augustine, the father of western theology, considers salvation from an *integrated* perspective. According to Augustine, the goal of salvation is the restoration of the image in which we were created. As the *imago Dei*, humanity is, therefore and according to Augustine, "to be restored to its archetype, the triune

God"[12] within which humanity lives in radical relationality with the Divine.

Relational ontology

God created humanity in God's own image. Throughout its history the church has struggled with this notion not so much because it has struggled with *anthropology* but because of its struggle with *theo*logy. To comprehend who *we* are and how *we* are to live as creature necessitates understanding who *God* is and how *God* lives. Despite evidence for integration in the writings of Augustine, the primary comprehension of God within Augustinian neoplatonism is God *in se*. As such, and through the more characteristic substance ontology of scholasticism, the western church in particular has relied upon an expression of God that effectively separates God from God's creation. That is, "while it is the distinction of substances or essences that clearly differentiates God from the cosmos, this distinction also implies the impossibility of the union of God and the cosmos since ontologically distinct substances are not interpenetrable."[13] As such, in order to apprehend God as being involved with God's own creation, a paradigm shift is needed—a shift from *understanding* God to *encountering* God. This is realized in the shift from a predominantly substance ontology to a greater emphasis on relational ontology—that understanding of God which claims the primacy of relationship within the Being of God and the impact of Divine Community on the nature of God.

According to Jürgen Moltmann, the classic text affirming the *trinitarian* experience of relationship and community is the Johannine "high priestly prayer" of Jesus, in which Jesus prays that "they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21). The Johannine image of Divine Community reflects the understanding of God as being-in-relationship, which reflects not merely substance ontology but *relational* ontology. This is reflected in the attempt of contemporary theology to reappropriate the paradigmatic experience of God within the early and Patristic church. As described by Catherine LaCugna:

> A relational ontology understands both God and the creature to exist and meet as persons in communion… The meaning of to-be is to-be-a-person-in-communion…God's To-Be is To-Be-in-relationship, and God's being-in-relationship-to-us is what God is. A relational ontology focuses on personhood, relationship, and communion as the modality of all existence.[14]

Thus, "God does not exist *except* as Father, Son, Spirit," LaCugna professes, "[a]part from the divine persons there is no God."[15] As first and foremost "being-in-relation," the Trinity exists as "the mutual indwelling of the equal divine persons: Father, Son, and Spirit."[16] This is how Moltmann de-

12. Andrew Louth, "Augustine," in Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edward Yarnold, eds., *The Study of Spirituality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 143.

13. Gloria Schaab, "The Divine Welling up and Showing Through: Teilhard's Evolutionary Theology in a Trinitarian Panentheistic-Procreative Paradigm," *Teilhard Studies* 55 (2007): 5–6.

14. Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*, 1st HarperCollins ed. (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 250.

15. Catherine Mowry LaCugna, "The Practical Trinity," *The Christian Century* 108 (1992): 681.

16. Jürgen Moltmann, "Perichoresis: An Old Magic Word for a New Trinitarian Theology," in Douglass Meeks, ed., *Trinity,*

fines *perichoresis*, a theological concept that was first used in Cappadocian theology by Gregory of Nanzianus. In addition to its appropriation in the theology of God, it is absolutely essential in apprehending the theological anthropology of the *imago Dei* as that which integrates identity with impact—who *we* are with how *we* are to live. That is, in perichoretic relationship with the One who *is* Relationship we live *within* the *intimacy of* relationship with God via the Son and the Spirit who serve the divine economy of salvation.

According to LaCugna, that "form of language that best serves and illuminates God's economy is *theology in the mode of doxology*"[17] wherein the making present of God in Christ by the Holy Spirit, mysteriously draws *us* into radical relationship with the One in whom we participate. This is the anamnetic reality of sacrament, wherein, "the once-for-all crucifixion of Jesus and the sacrament are not two separate events or occasions but one."[18] While not magic, it is mystery. Paschal mystery. Our apprehension of which is not as we come to understand it, but as we come to *experience* it.

"Mystical" Luther?

The Lutheran church is in an unexpected position to contribute to this recommended re-orientation toward integration. I say "unexpected" because of the perception that the Lutheran church has a history of upholding an almost exclusively forensic claim on justification. Yet, I would venture that this claim is only partial. Engaging the theological writings of Luther himself will reveal that a mystical orientation is not as foreign as one might think, either in the Reformer or within the Reformation tradition. A more mystical Luther creates the possibility of a theological and spiritual reality within the church that is grounded in the very real encounter with God that is relational, participatory, and unitive.

Luther's spirituality—grounded in experience

Luther is, at his core, a practical theologian, albeit without knowing it. Whether considering his theological writings, pastoral guides, devotional tracts, sermons, hymnody or even his personal correspondence, all point to the experiential nature of his theology. Even as an impressionable youth, Luther's experiences served to form the foundation of his contextually medieval theology. "The young Luther was sent to school in Magdeburg operated by the Brethren of the Common Life whose '*devotio moderna*…advocated an eminently interior piety based on self-analysis achieved through meditation and the use of the confessional.'"[19] This stern upbringing may have contributed to Luther's choice to enter an Augustinian monastery after a perceived brush with death during a thunderstorm. Among the "strictest religious houses" Augustinians practiced great austerity and asceticism, both of which were "unquestionably a significant aspect of his striving to answer the question, 'What must I do to be saved?'"[20] In asking this question, Luther was no different than any other medieval. The question of medieval guilt worked on

Community, and Power: Mapping Trajectories in Wesleyan Theology (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 114.

17. LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life,* 320.

18. Carl Volz, "Holy Communion in the Lutheran Confessions," *Word & World* 17, no. 1 (1997): 11.

19. Citing Frank Senn in Bryan Hillis, "Spirituality and Practice: Luther and Canadian Lutheran Spirituality," *Consensus* 19, no. 1 (1993): 56.

20. Ibid.

Luther in greater and greater proportion even as Luther worked on resolving it. According to Finnish Luther scholar Kirsi Stjerna, "His passion was to find a merciful God and sense of forgiveness, and the *vita spiritualis* that had been practiced by the monastics for centuries seemed the most assured path to spiritual perfection. He tried, overachieved, and failed."[21] The result was a spiritually bereft Luther, fearful of God's impending judgment and increasingly ineffectual in avoiding God's wrath that would surely come.

This was the nature of Luther's well-known *anfechtungen*. For Luther, all his actions served only to heighten the futility of realizing that "it seemed all too possible that one's best efforts in cooperation with grace would prove inadequate…No one could love God as required when one knew that God stood ready to condemn and destroy."[22] Luther's realization tormented him. Until, that is, his scholarly work as a biblical theologian intervened.

The doctrine by which the church stands or falls

It was Luther's apprehension of Pauline theology that led to his critical "discovery" of the hallmark Lutheran doctrine of "justification by grace through faith." According to Luther's own reflection on his understanding of divine "justice" in Paul (cf. Romans):

> I meditated night and day on those words until at last, by the mercy of God, I paid attention to their context: "The justice of God is revealed in it, as it is written: 'The just person lives by faith.'" I began to understand that in this verse the justice of God is that by which the just person lives by a gift of God, that is by faith. I began to understand that this verse means that the justice of God is revealed through the Gospel, but it is a passive justice, i.e. that by which the merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written: "The just person lives by faith." All at once I felt that I had been born again and entered into paradise itself through open gates.[23]

In this justificatory recognition, Luther engaged a spiritual awakening that continues to have profound impact for the way in which theology is proclaimed and religion is practiced. Luther, it would seem, realized that:

> he was engaged in more than a reclaiming of Pauline theology alongside the removal of a few religious abuses. Indeed, within four years, Luther had issued radical condemnations of the kind of Christianity practiced by most people around him as well as the kind of Christianity he had tried to practice himself. At the same time, Luther set about to install a new piety, that is, a new way of living and practicing the Christian religion.[24]

Luther's awakening to justification by grace through faith called into question the principal hermeneutic by which the medieval church (including Luther) functioned. Scholastic justification was

21. Kirsi Stjerna, "Rethinking Lutheran Spirituality," *Sewanee Theological Review* 46, no. 1 (2002): 31.

22. Philip D. Krey and Peter D. S. Krey, *Luther's Spirituality*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 2007), xxi.

23. Martin Luther, "Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther's Latin Works (1545)," in Otto Clemen, ed., Bro. Andrew Thornton, trans. *Luther's Werke* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1967). http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1519luther-tower.html [accessed December 15, 2007].

24. Scott Hendrix, "Martin Luther's Reformation of Spirituality," *Lutheran Quarterly* 13 (1999): 252.

oriented around *ex opera operato*. Luther's justification by grace through faith reorients the medieval hermeneutic away from an objectivizing of justification—that medieval understanding that "the gospel and the sacraments are taken to confer justification by their sheer ritual performance, magically altering the condition of the sinner without any involvement on the sinner's part."[25] In contrast, Luther's soteriological orientation becomes one inclusive of a *lived faith*. Luther employs the hermeneutic *Opus Operantis*, which claims that:

> The promise of the gospel aims to accomplish something between the Triune God (the real promise-maker) and the hearer of the promise, and this aim is reached if, and only if, the hearer of the promise embraces it in faith. The preaching of the word and the celebration of the sacraments do not justify merely by their sheer ritual performance. They justify and confer salvation insofar as they evoke the faith which relies on what they promise.[26]

In this description of the Reformation hermeneutic, David Yeago addresses the Reformation twist on justification. It is *all* an act of God—grace *and* faith. The Reformation hermeneutic asserts that justification is offered via God's grace and received in faith as the Spirit enables reception. In this integrated hermeneutic, justification and sanctification are each a part of the *one* paschal promise, necessarily present in *both* forensic *and* mystical justification.

25. David Yeago, "The Promise of God and the Desires of Our Hearts: Prolegomena to a Lutheran Retrieval of Classic Spiritual Theology," *Lutheran Forum* 30, no. 2 (1996): 22.

26. Ibid., 23.

Luther's Theologia Crucis

> Be sure of this: there is no creature ever made by God who can set you free or help you; only God can do it. Run about as you will, search high and low the whole world over, you will never find the help you need anywhere except in God. If the Lord chooses to use an instrument, man or angel, to achieve this, He can; but He must do it and no one else.
>
> Seek this help inside yourself, the depths of your soul; stop running around, stop searching up and down the countryside; be still, be calm, stay where you are, in Egypt, in darkness, until the angel comes to call you. Joseph was asleep when the angel called him (Johannes Tauler, German Mystic).[27]

For Luther, one need only search as far as the cross. Having identified the action of God in his recognition of justification by grace through faith, Luther takes up a task that he would carry on throughout his entire life—proclaiming the *means* by which God acts. For Luther, there is perhaps no more central proclamation than that of the cross. So central is the cross to Christian faith and life that Luther allows it to "speak" for itself. It is said that in guiding young preachers, Luther advised them to place a cross next to the pulpit. In this way, should their preaching stray from the gospel the faithful might simply look upon the cross of Christ to have the gospel proclaimed.

Luther's theology of the cross is first and foremost an expression of Luther's claim that by the cross, we come to know God. According to Frank Senn, the theology of the cross developed as a response to Luther's desire for "knowledge of the God

27. Mary Coelho and Jerome Neufelder, eds., *Writings on Spiritual Direction by Great Christian Masters* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982).

who is both hidden and revealed (*Deus absconditus et revelatus*) in the suffering and death of Christ."[28] The impact of mystical theology, particularly that of the Rhineland Mystics, perhaps generated this desire in Luther. The writings of Johannes Tauler, Meister Eckhart, and the anonymous *Theologia Deutsche* in particular guided Luther through his spiritual search. Ascetic and pietistic practices being ineffective in guiding Luther toward knowledge of God, it was only in his recognition of the Reformation "justification" dictum that Luther came to a full awareness of both who God is and, by virtue of this, who he himself was. For Luther, both the grace *and* faith of justification are the claim of the cross. By this realization, Luther affirmed the assertion of Tauler and other mystics, that "only God can do it." Only God saves. Only God reveals God.

This realization has a dramatic impact on Luther's theological anthropology. In 1518 Luther published a text of which he claimed, "Next to the Bible and Saint Augustine no other book has come to my attention from which I have learned—and desire to learn—more concerning God, Christ, man, and what all things are."[29] The published book to which Luther was referring was the anonymous *Theologia Deutsche*. The impact of this mystical text on Luther is apparent in the Reformer's well-known anthropology. In defining sin, *Theologia Deutsche* expresses the theological anthropology that Luther would adopt:

> The Scriptures, the Truth, and Faith proclaim that sin is nothing but a turning away on the part of the creature… This is to say that the creature turns from the Perfect to the imperfect, to separateness, to the partial, and preeminently to itself (Chapter 2).[30]

The mystical text takes into account the sin of *self*-orientation in addressing the action of God as a restoration to right relationship, which "does not mean an obliteration of self but rather a reduction to nothingness of 'I-dom' and 'self-dom,' the self-centered ego of our temporal existence, the 'lower self.'"[31] God's action in restoring humanity to right relationship (cf. Paul's image of reconciliation) directs us to consider a secondary expression of the theology of the cross—declaring *how* God acts.

Over the past thirty years, a group of scholars in the Finnish Lutheran Church have endeavored to re-read Luther in light of their work engaging the mystical theology of the Orthodox church. While American theologians read this "new Luther theology" with an appropriate level of caution, it does provide new mystical insights into a theology that has for almost 500 years presumed to be primarily forensic in orientation.

Among the most noteworthy contributions of the Finnish theologians has been their interpretation of Luther's theology of the cross as an expression not only of the *means* of God's justifying action but the *method* as well.[32] In considering *how* God acts in the death and resurrection of Christ to justify humanity, three elements in particular are highlighted: God's nihilizing work, the happy exchange, and God's grace & gift.

28. Frank C. Senn, "Lutheran Spirituality," in Frank C. Senn, ed., *Protestant Spiritual Traditions* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 18.

29. Bengt Runo Hoffman, *The Theologia Germanica of Martin Luther* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 54. From Luther's Preface.

30. Ibid., 61.

31. Ibid., xii.

32. The "means" and "method" of God's justifying action are my characterizations.

God's nihilizing work

It is the claim among the Finnish theologians that:

> Before God gives himself to a person in his Word (which is God himself), he performs his "nihilizing work"—he makes the person "empty" and "nothing." This *reduction in nihilum*, of course, does not imply a total annihilation of the person. It refers only to the destruction of the individual's constant effort to make himself god and to justify himself.[33]

While language associated with God's nihilizing action may sound somewhat foreign to western ears, it is principally based on two more common theological precepts: Luther's concept of nothingness and *kenosis*.

Sounding increasingly mystical, Luther's understanding of "nothingness" is based upon his theological anthropology of the righteous versus the unrighteous person. Eberhard Jüngel takes up Luther's argument in claiming that for Luther:

> the unrighteous person is…a sinner who, lacking the free will which belongs to God alone, cannot make him or herself righteous thru any human act. As a sinner, this already unrighteous person is one whose being is the radical negation of the being of the righteous person, not simply logically but ontologically. This means, however, that there is the most radical antithesis between the unrighteous and the righteous person, which can only be adequately stated as that nothingness which we have to consider as the antithesis of creation. Indeed, the *homo peccator* has to be lost in this nothingness, if and when God declares a person to be righteous. Formulated anthropologically, this means in Pauline terms that the old (outer) person perishes, whereas the justified (inner) person is daily renewed (2 Cor 4:16; cf. 5:17). Luther considered this state of affairs to be the work of God grounding in the essence of God, in saying that 'it is the nature of God first to destroy and tear down whatever is in us before he gives us his good things.' For, 'God destroys all things and makes us out of nothing and then justifies us.'[34]

It seems that present in the writing of Luther is some understanding that the self-orientation of the human is that mark of sin that characterizes the unrighteous. In order to affect the "happy exchange" that God initiates, whereby the unrighteous becomes righteous, all that which is the antithesis of God is purged from the unrighteous person. In comprehending the "nothingness" of the unrighteous, as the nihilization of self-orientation, Luther, with the mystical tradition of the church, recognizes the purgation that is necessary in order to shape spiritual growth.

Having emptied us, God then fills us. This is the kenotic effect of both incarnation and justification. Luther's soteriology recognizes that in taking on the sins of humanity, Christ becomes *maximus peccator*. In this way Christ exists as a kind of "collective person" (*maximus persona*). This perception of Christ is:

> of central importance for [Luther's] theology of incarnation and his doctrine of atonement…After the Logos has

33. Tuomo Mannermaa, "Why Is Luther So Fascinating? Modern Finnish Luther Research," in Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds., *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 10.

34. Eberhard Jüngel, *Theological Essays, 1* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989), 106–107. Quotations are respectively from Luther's "Lectures on Romans" and *"Die zweite Disputation gegen die Antinomer."*

> become flesh and immersed in all sins, all sins are immersed in him, and there is no sin anywhere else that is not in his person. This idea is the beginning point for Luther's doctrine of the atonement.[35]

By the incarnation of the Son, God empties Godself in putting on humanity. In taking on our sin, Christ empties us of our unrighteousness, making room for that with which we are subsequently filled.

The happy exchange and God's grace and gift

What a joyous Christmas decree it was in 1514. It was on this particular celebration of the birth of Christ that Luther proclaimed, "The *Logos* puts on our form and pattern, our image and likeness, so that it may clothe us with its image, its patterns, and its likeness," and "he takes what is ours to himself in order to impart what is his to us," and "God becomes man so that man may become God" (Luther's Christmas Sermon, 1514).[36] On this occasion, Luther preached what his theology had expressed that "grace and gift are in Christ and they become ours when Christ is 'poured' into us."[37] In the death and resurrection of Christ, we are "filled" by God in a two-fold manner. Luther asserts in *Sermo de duplici iustitiae* (1518) that "the righteousness of Christ becomes our righteousness through faith in Christ and everything that is his, even he himself, becomes ours…and he who believes in Christ clings to Christ and is one with Christ and has the same righteousness with him."[38] In this brief and relatively unfamiliar reference, Luther lays out the method of God's justifying action as expressed in his theology of the cross.

The cross, Luther claims, is that means by which God, in Christ, pours out to us God's grace. The method by which this takes place is Luther's "happy exchange."

> In becoming *maximus peccator* Christ takes on our unrighteousness and imputes to us his righteousness. God's grace, as imputed righteousness, is the very declaration of our justification before God. It is, in effect, that forensic event by which (Scholastic theology would claim) God's wrath is satisfied and we are declared forgiven. Thus, Luther's theology of the cross comprehends the sacrifice of Christ as an imputation of God's grace within which occurs the happy exchange of our unrighteousness with Christ's righteousness.[39]

In this theological expression Luther appropriately reflects the *forensic* effect of God's justification of the sinner, as divine grace imparts forgiveness vis-à-vis the work of Christ's death and resurrection.

And yet, Luther is clearly also influenced by the church's *mystical* tradition, as is evidenced by his claim that, "everything that is his, even he himself, becomes ours."

35. Tuomo Mannermaa, "Justification and Theosis in Lutheran-Orthodox Perspective," in Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds., *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 30–31.

36. Mannermaa, "Why Is Luther So Fascinating? Modern Finnish Luther Research," 11.

37. Simo Peura, "Christ as Favor and Gift (Donum): The Challenge of Luther's Understanding of Justification," Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds., in *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 43.

38. Tuomo Mannermaa and Kirsi Irmeli Stjerna, *Christ Present in Faith: Luther's View of Justification*, 1st Fortress Press ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), xiii.

39. Deborah L. Geweke, "Easter 'Event': Paschal Proclamation—Paschal Participation," *Liturgical Ministry* 18, no. Summer 2009 (2009): 110.

Here, Luther speaks remarkably about becoming one with Christ.

> Like the grace that is poured out upon us in Christ's death and resurrection, so too is God's gift. The difference, however, is that where grace is the *work* of Christ that is imputed, gift is the *person* of Christ in whom there is participation! This is the mystical (sometimes called "effective" among Lutherans) nature of justification. For Luther, both forensic and mystical justification exist simultaneously in his theology of the cross.[40]

For Luther, it is the cross that stands at the unifying center of faith. In the cross, both forensic *and* mystical justification are bound together. To the cross, our own human reality, as simultaneously sinful *and* forgiven, is tied. And by the cross, we are united in relationship with God and each other by means of our Lord's ongoing presence through his Holy Spirit—through whom we have faith to receive divine grace.

Liturgical integration

Sometimes the arena of theological expression forgets the message of liturgical experience. In the church's liturgical celebrations, Pentecost is the fiftieth day of Easter. The two events are not separate, distinct or isolated. Indeed, the paschal mystery includes both the Christ- and the Spirit-event. The death of Christ, the resurrection of Christ and the outpouring by Christ of the Holy Spirit draw us into encounter with God. Such encounter, grounded as it is *pro me* in word and sacrament, impels the entire community of faith to service, thereby and effectively reintegrating liturgy and a *living* faith.

Liturgy and *life*

It has been my contention that the sacramental understanding of the church follows that the self-revelation of God—as Father, Son, and Spirit—in whose image we live, is most complete in the economy of God's salvation, as engaged by the person and actions of Christ Jesus. The church, as mediating the ongoing presence of Christ, actualizes the self-revelation of God, through Christ, in the particularity of word and sacrament, whereby the Holy Spirit *enables the faith* by which God's people both apprehend God and themselves re-present the Divine in their historical and eschatological service to others. In this re-presenting of God in Christ by the Holy Spirit the community of faith reorients itself, vis-à-vis the church's sacramental participation, around the "Reformation hermeneutic"—*Opus Operantis*. This is the particular contribution of Lutheran theology to the mission and ministry of the church, whereby the proclaimed justificatory paradigm includes both the forensic *and* the mystical. That is, the Reformation dictum of justification by grace through faith reorients the church's operative hermeneutic away from the objectivizing of justification characteristic in the fundamental scholastic understanding of atonement as the "work worked" (*Opus Operatum*). By contrast the orientation of theology and praxis among the Reformers, particularly Luther, is a soteriology grounded in both grace *and* faith—salvation by means of grace *offered* by God in Jesus the Christ and *received* through faith as enabled God's Holy Spirit.

In this *integrated* hermeneutic, the *one* Paschal promise is paradigmatically present in both the forensic and the mystical, in both justification and sanctification, in both the imposition of God's unmerited grace and forgiveness *and* the very gift of God's own relational Self. As such, paschal living is wholly integrated within word, sacrament, and service.

Through the sacramental and anamnetic participation of the faithful in the

40. Ibid.

paschal mystery, in the divine economy of salvation, the community is drawn, as the *imago Dei*, into perichoretic relationship with God and with one another. Such participation suggests that it is the sacramental encounter of the faithful with God, in Christ, through the Spirit, that the divine love which originates within the Trinity is so great as to explode outward beyond itself to others. It is, as such, in the *imago Dei* that Christian identity and the impact of ecclesial relevancy meet up.

Epicletic eschatology

While it is the cross that is central to Luther's, and all subsequent Lutheran, theology, it is perhaps most accurate to understand Luther's soteriology as grounded in a *pneumatological* Christology. Without the effect of the Spirit, Jesus remains dead, and so do we. There is, however, a tendency among Lutherans to dis-integrate the unitive reality of the one event of salvation. Because Lutherans have historically tended toward a characterization of justification as forensic—that once-for-all imputation of God's grace and mercy vis-à-vis the singular event of Jesus' cross—there is a correlative propensity to regard sanctification—the transformative effect of the Holy Spirit on life lived—as something separate from or even in addition to the death of Jesus. Such interpretation truncates the Paschal Mystery. Among the implications of an understanding of justification as both forensic *and* mystical is the confessional, theological, and pastoral claim offered at the 2009 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America that it is "at the foot of the cross, where God is faithful, where Christ is present with us, and where, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are one in Christ."[41] While perhaps offered prayerfully, there is in this affirmation a proclamatory certainty based upon the transformative effect of the Holy Spirit, through whom God has acted in Christ Jesus.

By the power of the Holy Spirit God remains a faithful *presence* in our lives. Sacramental transformation effects our Lord's re-presenting in not only bread and wine but within the community of faith as well. As such, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the faithful community becomes one body in Christ—whose own re-presenting gathers us and binds us together.

This is both the epicletic prayer and proclamation of sacrament that, "with your Word and Holy Spirit," God might:

> bless us, your servants, and these your gifts of bread and wine, so that we and all who share in the body and blood of Christ may be filled with heavenly blessing and grace, and, receiving the forgiveness of sin, may be formed to live as your holy people (Eucharistic Prayer I.)[42]

Within the anaphora is reflected both the forensic and the mystical, both God's grace and God's gift, both proleptic eschatological anticipation and present reality. By the power of the Holy Spirit the people of faith, having been mystically drawn into the divine relationship of love, are dramatically sent forth to re-present that love in lives formed and transformed into the image of God that is *even now* relational, participatory, and unitive within the present reign of God.

A (re)-appropriation of mystical theology and praxis engages an eschatol-

41. Mark S. Hanson, "Remarks to the Eleventh Churchwide Assembly," in *God's Work. Our Hands, 2009 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* (Minneapolis, Minn: 2009).

42. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 109.

ogy that is participatory in the sense that by the Holy Spirit, the community of faith engages the reign of God in *its own* perichoretic relationship with the community of the divine Trinity. Such perichoretic participation draws the faithful into the one salvific event that consists of both justification and sanctification. The sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit (i.e., "*effective* justification") draws the fullness of God's reign ever nearer as our own lived experience of divine love—*real*ized in the gift of Jesus' indwelling presence—engages creation in the process of God's reign moving toward greater perfection. For Luther, this is effectively the making holy of the people of faith. "The Holy Spirit," writes Luther, "sanctifies them daily, not only through the forgiveness of sin acquired for them by Christ…but also through the abolition…of sins, on the basis of which they are called a holy people."[43] For Luther, "holy people" refers specifically to those faithful who serve within the reign of God:

> to the end of the world, so that there is always a holy Christian people on earth, in whom Christ lives, works, rules, *per redemptionem*, through grace and the remission of sin, and the Holy Spirit, *per vivificationem et sanctificationem*, 'through the daily purging of sin and renewal of life,' so that we do not remain in sin but are enabled and obliged to lead a new life, abounding in all kinds of good works…"[44]

The Spirit thus enables Christ in us. Transformed into the body of Christ, those in whom the Spirit dwells re-present Christ—mediated within the particularity of word and sacrament and communicated in eschatological service to others. In so doing, epicletic eschatology becomes the ampersand of both theory and praxis, binding together:

Jesus & his Spirit
Easter & Pentecost
justification & sanctification
forensic & mystical
grace & faith
liturgy & life
now & not yet
religion & spirituality
identity & impact
God & us
you & me

43. Martin Luther, "On the Councils and the Church, 1539," in Helmut Lehmann,e d., *Luther's Works: Church and Ministry III*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 143–144.

44. Ibid., 144.

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Becoming Contemplative Worshipers: Attending to Our Communal Heart

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Worship is the living heart of the body of Christ. Gathered on Sunday morning, or maybe Saturday night, around a handful of scriptures and a bit of bread, with a few songs and each other—*this* is our communal heart. The pulse of worship gives life to every congregation's ministry and witness. Worship is God living for us, the living heart of God. So how can we attend to this heart, not in poetry but practically speaking? What might it mean to take the pulse of worship, of our true selves together, of God? Can we describe a method, a set of communal practices, for hearing and getting in rhythm with God?

The Christian contemplative tradition offers similar wisdom for individual pray-ers. This is practical wisdom for listening, in the tangled flesh of our human hearts, for God. We may receive it also for the sake of our communities in worship. Because what God does in prayer is what God does in worship is *what God does,* a contemplative posture and practice may inform us as we worship and plan worship. In other words, we may become contemplative worshipers, discerning more closely God's "small and unassuming"[1] movement within our communal heart.

After briefly describing contemplative prayer, I will explore the relationship of worship and prayer. Then, I will suggest ways the contemplative tradition may guide us—worshipers and worship planners alike.

What makes contemplative prayer contemplative

Contemplative prayer is prayer of stillness, prayer of love. It takes its cue from Psalm 46—"Be still and know that I am God." Stillness, sometimes called solitude, is at the heart of contemplative prayer. It is a stillness or solitude that is wordlessness before God.

In our human relationships, such wordlessness is both common and rare. Lovers looking wordlessly into each other's eyes. A loved one keeping silent vigil beside another's hospital bed. A lull over coffee that speaks in its own special way. We may experience these moments as holy or awkward, strange or natural, comforting or threatening—sometimes all of these at once. Since we almost never seek these experiences with human others, it may never occur to us to seek them with the divine Other. But with God, as with each other, there is a sharing beneath and beyond words. Without conversation we touch the communion always but subtly present.

Needless to say, stillness in prayer is God's gift, elusive even when sought—just as with rare and wordless moments with people. There are no formulas and no

1. Craig A. Satterlee, *When God Speaks Through Worship: Stories Congregations Live By* (Herndon, Va.: The Alban Institute, 2009), 15.

guarantees. In other words, what we do when we pray does not make our prayer contemplative. Instead, it is our posture. All prayer can be contemplative as we pray "leaning into solitude."[2]

Wordlessness before God involves ceasing, surrendering, resting in the presence of God who is love. God stills us; we cannot still ourselves. But we can, so to speak, lean into it. Leaning into solitude is an inner posture independent of our outward practice of prayer. It is a spiritual watching and waiting. God's love matters much more than how we pray. So however we pray, we "lean" until God's love catches us and we forget all but Love. One contemplative calls such prayer "loving self-forgetfulness"—not *doing* but simply *being*, becoming "*being-in-love.*"[3]

What God does

Worshipers may similarly "lean" in worship and learn from the whole of contemplative wisdom, because what God does in prayer is what God does in worship is *what God does*. When we both worship and pray, we may distinguish what we humans do and what God does. Always what God does is primary. Such is the witness of the scriptures and of pray-ers and worshipers alike. Compare both pray-ers and worshipers to a child feebly reaching for its mother. "Because of his mother's faithfulness, the child of the loving mother soon becomes convinced that his reach is sufficient, and in a way he's right, isn't he? In the same way, all I need to do in order to reach God is to reach *for* God."[4] So whether we are worshiping or praying "*the principle actor…is not us but God.*"[5] By God's grace, we can cooperate with God, but we cannot do what God does. And what God does is what really matters.

What is God doing? God is drawing all creation into living, loving community with God and each other. Always and everywhere, it is that simple. In fact, William Barry calls the kingdom of God, "God's one action." This *one thing* God does in history, creation, and individual human lives is "creat[ing] an environment where all persons can enter into God's very own community life."[6] In other words, *what God does*—God's one action—is to draw all creation into living, loving community with God and each other.

Drawing us and all things into God-centered community is none other than what God does in worship. Craig Satterlee echoes Barry's idea of "God's one action." "God's people worshiping in the midst of the world enact and signify God's own mission for the life of the world. Rather than being distinct yet related activities the church engages in, worship and mission are God's *single activity of reconciliation*."[7] In other words, when we worship, God reveals what God is always doing, and God does it in and through us. In worship, as when God works invisibly in the world,

2. Mark E. Thibodeaux, S.J., *Armchair Mystic: Easing Into Contemplative Prayer* (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2001), 46, 50.

3. William Johnston, S.J., *Being in Love: A Practical Guide to Christian Prayer* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1999), 70.

4. Thibodeaux, *Armchair Mystic,* 16; emphasis in original.

5. Lorraine Brugh and Gordon Lathrop, *The Sunday Assembly: Using* Evangelical Lutheran Worship, *Vol. 1.* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2008), 37; emphasis in original.

6. William A. Barry, S.J., "The Kingdom of God: What Role Do We Play?" *America* magazine, (September 23, 1989): 165.

7. Satterlee, *When God Speaks Through Worship*, 5; emphasis mine.

God reconciles. Period. God creates and recreates loving community.

What is more, God does the same *in prayer*. William Johnston speaks of prayer as God seducing us, leading us to fall in love, so that we become a fountain of God's love for others.[8] So in contemplative prayer, even when we lean into solitude, we in fact lean into community.

> All prayer is social. From the very beginning of prayer, we see that even our most intimate inner life is inhabited by other people and what we have made of what they have shown us. When we pray for others, we not only seek something for them but we also acknowledge our dependency on them.[9]

In other words, there is no such thing as praying alone. Through prayer, God draws us ever deeper into love with God and each other. In worship, in prayer, in the world itself, God does this one, marvelous thing. Because God is one, God unifies what we experience as separate arenas of life or realms of the world through God's "oneing" work.[10] Everywhere and always, living, loving community is simply *what God does*.

Our bodies, and The Body

Of course, worship and prayer are not exactly the same. Indeed, God's one action finds fuller, richer expression in worship. In worship it, and God's own self, is *made flesh in us*. For in worship, God literally gathers us into a living, loving community—the body of Christ. "We can eat and pray alone, but we must come together in order to be and experience the body of Christ. That is, our coming together is more than functional or efficient; it is *necessary.*"[11] None of the comforts and assurances of individual prayer can match what we see with our own eyes and feel with our own bodies in communal worship—God deeply and lovingly involved with us and our world. Unlike in prayer, in worship God reveals—through the mystery of the broken, human body gathered around broken bread and poured wine—God's own living self and the loving future for which God died and rose again. In worship, God makes external in the body of Christ God's internal movements within our individual bodies in prayer.

So it's about bodies. Because it's about bodies, we may worship contemplatively as well as pray contemplatively. As our individual bodies matter deeply when we pray, so does the gathered body when we worship. Contemplative wisdom is no more or less than wisdom about what God does in, with, and for *bodies*—bodies God fills with God's own living, loving self and draws into community in the one body of Christ. So we may lean into solitude in worship. We may also find in discernment the prayerful key to our vocation of planning worship. Becoming contemplative worshipers, we remember what we habitually and ritually forget: worship is about bodies, and prayer is about the body of Christ.

How then might we begin?

Leaning into stillness in worship

Contemplative worshipers lean into solitude in worship. It will be a different thing

8. Johnston, *Being in Love*, 134.

9. Ann and Barry Ulanov, *Primary Speech: A Psychology of Prayer* (Louisville, Ky.: John Knox Press, 1982), 85.

10. cf. Rose Mary Dougherty, S.S.N.D., *Group Spiritual Direction: Community for Discernment* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1995), 13.

11. Brugh and Lathrop, *The Sunday Assembly,* 25; emphasis in original.

in worship than in individual prayer. It will be *social* solitude. Being-in-love-*together*. We do well to call this social solitude "stillness" and to affirm, as contemplatives do, that solitude or stillness is not the same as silence. While "those who long for a state of solitude when they pray must first become accustomed to silence,"[12] stillness in worship is not the absence of noise. Silence in worship is a gift from God—both a blessing and, especially, beyond our control. All of our pauses may and probably will be filled, at the very least, by shuffling bulletins, coughing people, and anxious, wandering minds.

Instead, contemplative worshipers see stillness in worship as stillness *in our spirits*. Contemplative stillness in worship will be the utter ceasing of our attempts to prove ourselves to God and each other. It will be the calm surrender of trusting God's unfailing love to uphold us through all things and beyond death. It will be the rest of accepting ourselves, our families, and our lives *as they are*—bathed in God's abundant love. So, contemplative worshipers lean into stillness even as our bodies move and our voices sing. We lean with Mary who sat at Jesus' feet while Martha worked.[13] In this spiritual stillness, we become aware that "everything we do [is] a *royal waste* of time. *Nothing* that we do, no matter how wonderful we are as [worshipers] or as persons, will change one whit how God feels about us!"[14]

12. Thibodeaux, *Armchair Mystic,* 41.

13. Luke 10:38; cp. Thibodeaux, *Armchair Mystic,* 43.

14. Marva J. Dawn, *A Royal "Waste" of Time: The Splendor of Worshiping God and Being Church for the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 13–14; emphasis in original.

Dealing with bodily distractions

Of course, leaning into stillness, contemplative worshipers must deal with distractions. As in prayer, this is the key to contemplative leaning in worship. For the body of Christ is no different than our individual bodies. It, like our own bodies, is full of distractions. When we pray by ourselves, what can we do with an itchy toe, a backache, or a wandering mind? We do well when we accept these in prayer, ignoring the meaningless ones and letting the significant ones become our prayer. These bodily distractions in prayer humble us, show us Christ in the flesh, even amuse and enliven us. In dealing with them, Thibodeaux warns emphatically, "*My anxiety, distress, guilt and anger about the distractions are far more detrimental to my prayer than the distractions themselves.*"[15] In other words, what ruins prayer are not distractions, but how we see and respond to them.

The same wisdom holds in worship. Shouting babies, restless children, anxious adults, and loud-whispering seniors are the bodily distractions of worship. They are us, and our corporate distractions are best received and accepted as God's gifts of humility and life, some meaningless and others quite significant—like the possessed man who interrupted Jesus' first sermon.[16] What truly distracts us is how we ourselves perceive and react to them. When anger rises up within us in response to loud children, for example, that anger and the anxiety that birthed it is *a spiritual problem far more detrimental to our worship than the children's noise itself*. For having distractions in worship, as in prayer,

> is not a mark of inadequacy or inability. It simply means that [we are] human.

15. Thibodeaux, *Armchair Mystic,* 120; emphasis in original.

16. Mark 1:21ff.

> [We] need not worry about the various distractions that come and go, because God, the creator of [our] wandering spirit[s], will have no problems getting around and through them. [God] may even be the source of these distractions, calling [us] to refocus [our] prayerful attention on them.[17]

Contemplative worshipers lean into stillness in the midst of distractions. Above all, contemplative worshipers embody humility and enact God's patient love for us all, gently making room in worship for us when *we* are that most obnoxious distraction.

Two of Thibodeaux's prayer exercises,[18] adapted for worship, offer help for leaning into stillness through distractions. The first deals with distractions that come from within our own selves; the second with those that come from the body of Christ, our sisters and brothers gathered for worship.

Offering Up Pesky Distractions

1. Once I have decided that these distractions simply won't go away, I change strategies and now focus on them. I imagine myself quietly, reverently carrying each distraction to the communion table. Even if many of the distractions are silly and meaningless, I offer them all up to the Lord.

2. I smile and say to God, "Well, Lord, this is the best I can do today. Please accept these meager gifts."

3. All the while that I am placing these distractions on the table, I use the mantra, "Totally yours," telling God that all in my life—even these silly little thoughts—are God's.

People Distractions

This exercise begins with the presumption that I am in the middle of worship and am having trouble quieting myself because of some distraction coming from a person in worship.

1. Once I have decided that this distraction is worth praying over, I change strategies and now focus my heart and mind (not my eyes!) on the person distracting me. I ask God to show me that person through Christ's eyes. I continue reflecting on God's perception of this person as long as I am able.

2. I ask God to show me Christ's perception of my relationship with this person. For example, if I am glad to be with my family or friends in worship, I ask for God's impression of the relationship: "Is my love for them Christ-like love? Am I helping them become more compassionate disciples of Christ? Have I let these relationships block me from showing love to or making friends with others in the congregation?" Or, if I am frustrated with a parent and their restless child, I ask for God's impression of the relationship: "Am I right to be angry, Lord? Am I being fair, here? Does this parent see me as someone who can lovingly and discreetly help them with their child? What can I do to welcome this child as Jesus himself welcomed children? How do I want this child to remember me?"

3. I spend some time thanking God for the life of this person (even if my present feelings toward the person are very negative) and I ask God to help me to carry God's own perception of this person throughout my day. If I've made some decision about how to act today and feel that the action is the right thing to do, then I ask God to give me the courage to do what needs to be done.

17. Thibodeaux, *Armchair Mystic,* 127–128.

18. Ibid., 124, 126–127.

Leaning into stillness in worship means sitting in love with the distractions of the body of Christ. In this way, contemplative worshipers let worship be a place where noisy and anxious people may learn of God's loving presence.

Worship planning as discernment

Contemplative worship planners listen for God. Worship planners serve the whole body by prayerfully attending to the body's worship—not only its styles and practices but also its spirit, *the* Spirit. Contemplative worship planners are the ears of the body: what they hear shapes what they plan.

Listening for God means listening again. Contemplative pray-ers call this "discernment." Discerning God in our prayer means reviewing recent prayer experiences, noticing words, images, themes, questions, and moods.[19] Thibodeaux calls these "graces" because they are from God—they *are* God, speaking and acting through our prayer. Noticing graces is already discernment, but deeper discernment comes in sharing them. Thibodeaux suggests five simple ways: sharing the graces with God in prayer, journaling about them, and sharing them with a friend, a spiritual mentor, and our faith community.[20] Such sharing of graces is no more or less than telling the story of our prayer—discerning the story *God* is telling *through* our prayer.

Discernment about worship is really no different, only communal—a continually unfolding conversation. Contemplative worship planners discern by telling stories about God's graces in worship and listening to the new stories they evoke.

In doing so, they may find help in Ignatian Examen prayer.[21] Reflecting on the day past, examen pray-ers consider two questions: When did I feel closest to God today? When did I feel farthest away? Contemplative worship planners might likewise wonder: When did I feel closest to God *in worship*? When did I feel farthest away? Then they might start a coffee hour conversation like this: "Let me tell you when I felt closest to God in worship today"—continuing, "How about you?" Or they might host a post-Easter potluck, where table conversation involves examen reflection on the whole of Lent, Holy Week, and Easter Day worship. This kind of conversation—storytelling that invites others' stories—is discernment, because it helps all of us listen again and notice God in worship.

Noticing God in worship

Contemplative worship planners are thus not experts on liturgy or music or the like, but instead lead noticers. When worship begins, they make like Zaccheus: caring more about catching a glimpse of Jesus than about the plans they made. Satterlee's advice to all worshipers is especially useful for planners. "Notice what you and others are *doing*, because worship is action." Notice, moreover, the particulars. Since "worship is always a concrete event at a specified place and time involving particular people who have their own way of doing things," focus on "the specific, concrete event we experienced or witnessed." Finally, notice God. "God is more than the audience, the One to whom we address our prayers, praise, songs, and confession. God is the power at work in worship."[22]

Such noticing is deeply intertwined

19. Ibid., 94.

20. Ibid., 109–117.

21. Dennis and Sheila Fabricant Linn and Matthew Linn, *Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives You Life* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1995).

22. Satterlee, *When God Speaks Through Worship,* 128–130; emphasis in original.

with the stillness contemplative worshipers lean into. "We worship *well* when we worship joyfully and expectantly because we trust that God will speak and act through worship. We worship vigilantly because we are eager to hear what God is speaking and to participate in what God is doing."[23] Leaning into stillness involves this same joyful expectance, just as worshiping well involves contemplative prayer's same letting go of self.

In fact, worship planning committees may seek members who worship well, who grasp intuitively what it is to lean into stillness, and who talk about what they have seen. For contemplative worship planners are first contemplative *worshipers*—contemplative worshipers who tell stories. Their stories need not be grand or marvelous. Instead, "the best stories are small and unassuming" because they "spark a new story in the mind of the listener. This new story, which listeners create for themselves, connects with them emotionally and leads them to act. In fact, this new story becomes a story they live by."[24] Moreover, these new and multiplying stories are the stories contemplative worship planners *plan by*.

The Holy Spirit as lead worship planner

Contemplative worship planners let the Holy Spirit teach us how to worship. Practically speaking, they let a congregation's stories of God speaking and acting in worship set the planning agenda. This is the key to becoming contemplative worship planners. They wonder not, "What are *we* going to do in worship *this* Sunday?" but, "What did *God* do in worship *last* Sunday? In light of that love, how might we worship God *next*?" Contemplative worship planners let our stories about God speaking in worship become the stories we all live by together.

In this way, they are like the two dejected disciples who walked to Emmaus on the first Easter.[25] Seeing the resurrected Jesus in the breaking of bread—in other words, in worship—they ran back to the others in Jerusalem and told the story: how the crucified One, now risen, appeared to them in worship. In the telling, Jesus appeared again to all of them. This story forever changed the way Jesus' disciples worshipped. We live by it to this day, every time we break bread together.

Consider what Rose Mary Dougherty says about what discernment is and, especially, what it does.

> Discernment on prayer is really prayer about our prayer. In this prayer we open ourselves to God's gaze, looking with God at God's desire for us, our desire for God, noticing how our prayer reflects these desires. Gradually, almost imperceptibly, our prayer becomes an expression of what we have come to know about God and ourselves through this looking.[26]

Contemplative worship planners do this for worship. Discernment on worship is really prayer—communal prayer, prayerful conversation—about worship. Contemplative worship planners aim, not to manage complaints and balance preferences, to force stubborn worshipers to change, or to check tasks off a list, but to help open us all to God's gaze. Looking with the congregation and with God at God's desire for us, our desire for God, contemplative worship planners help us notice how our worship reflects these desires. Gradually, almost imperceptibly,

23. Ibid., 128.

24. Ibid., 127.

25. Luke 24:13ff.

26. Dougherty, *Group Spiritual Direction*, 27.

our worship becomes an expression of what we have come to know about God and ourselves through this looking. In other words, yielding the lead to the Holy Spirit, worship moves like lovers dancing. So how will we worship next? How will we and our worship move?

Spontaneous worshipers

Leaning into the perfect stillness of God's love, worship becomes *being-in-love-together*. Listening again to God who is love, the worship we plan moves toward *loving self-forgetfulness*. In other words, we and our worship reflect the utter release of knowing ourselves completely grasped by Love. We become more spontaneous worshipers, more flexible worship planners, and worship itself becomes richer and more varied.

Contemplative worshipers become more spontaneous worshipers. In contemplative wisdom, the theme of spontaneity emerges from others like wonder, surrender, ecstasy, immediacy, and presence. Spontaneity is the dance of joy that comes when God "awaken[s] love in your heart."[27] Spontaneity is the "opening" or "enlivening of self" that comes as an answer to prayer, as when we are "pulled into the world by our prayer and find ourselves *suddenly involved and active in it.*"[28]

> Believing that the Lord is capably in charge of the universe, we merely try to sit in God's presence with an attitude of trust and acceptance; we let go of our planning and rely on God's providence. This attitude helps us to live in the present, and not be dragged off from prayer by an anxious and calculating mind.[29]

Our spontaneous selves emerge from stillness and solitude in prayer and from the surrender to our trustworthy God. Forgetting ourselves, we simply go with the Spirit's urgings, surprising ourselves with what we say and do and feel.

Contemplative worshipers find themselves spontaneously caught up in the action, and they honor the spontaneous responses of other worshipers. Spontaneous worshipers are the young girl dancing between the pews as the congregation sings "This is the Feast," the man having his feet washed for the first time on Maundy Thursday when he had no such plans twenty minutes before, and the parent choking up while proclaiming Isaiah's Advent promise of a child. For

> worship is a verb. "To worship" is to invoke God's immediacy—God's awesome "nowness" in which divine presence is subjectively apprehended. Although worship's primary purpose is doxological, worshiping also marks us objectively as people to whom something subjective has *happened*: the inward conviction of faith, the subjective knowledge that Christ loves us enough to die for us. In the practices of worship, Jesus reveals his mystery as often as his message, and invites us—by playful, ecstatic, and sacramental means—into the passionate love of God.[30]

In other words, contemplative worshipers know worship is neither a bulletin nor a worship book but an event—not of ideas but *bodies*, people in motion.[31] They be-

27. Johnston, *Being in Love*, 131.

28. Ulanov, *Primary Speech*, 100–101; emphasis mine.

29. Wilke Au, S.J., *By Way of the Heart: Toward a Holistic Christian Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 107.

30. Kenda Creasy Dean, "Moshing for Jesus," in Brian K. Blount and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, ed., *Making Room at the Table: An Invitation to Multicultural Worship* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminister John Knox Press, 2001), 134; emphasis in original.

31. William T. Cavanaugh, "The Social

gin to worship like Paul and Silas, whose spontaneous singing and preaching in jail released prisoners and jailer alike and gave way to spontaneous baptism and communion, God's joyful catharsis of washing and eating.[32] Such is the holy, bodily nowness of worship. Contemplative worshipers simply wait for God to draw them in.

Children can be leaders of spontaneous worship. Maybe this is why Jesus invited children into the center of his circle of disciples.[33] Worshiping with children, we may learn to worship differently. We may hesitate to so quickly shush or restrain children, especially when they are responding to what is happening *in worship*. We may move more freely and use our voices more often. We may come to see worship in a whole new light. Maybe what the pastor is saying is *not* the most important thing happening right now. Maybe we can be at rest *and* on the move at the same time. Maybe reverence means *running* to receive communion.

There is no planning or implementing spontaneity. All contemplative worshipers can do, perhaps, is practice *being present*—which this exercise, adapted for worship, may help them do:

One Minute Practice of Presence[34]

Receive any moment of quiet in worship—perhaps before the prelude begins, after the sermon ends, as the offering is collected, or even standing in line for communion. Wherever you are—wherever you are—*is a place of presence.*

+ Make it simple. Today you do not need fancy words or lofty feelings. Just you and however you can show up, right now. The cosmos is big enough for all your joy, and all your pain. Just show up.

+ Breathe. Simply breathe. Notice the texture and temperature of the air you inhale. Breathe enough oxygen to feel movement in your body. Expand your chest and your belly.

+ Exhale. Let go. Let go of everything that does not serve you or the integrity of the other. The universe knows what to do with *let-go's*. We don't have to do anything except let go.

+ Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe out. Breathe in. Allow each inhale to go deeper, every exhale deliberate. Feel energy move and shift in your body as your cells oxygenate.

+ Awaken your senses. Be present to yourself and your surroundings. Notice what attracts your attention, and stay with that. Simultaneously turn your attention to your breathing. Continue for as long as you desire. What do you notice?

+ Draw in the deepest breath of your day. Perhaps the deepest breath of your life. Breathe gratitude. As you exhale, let go into the present moment.

Contemplative worshipers bring to worship the quality of presence this exercise suggests, and then they wait with Ezekiel, watching for the Breath that will make these dry bones dance.[35] For worship, as prayer, is not about mastering techniques—doing it "right"—but about showing up, fully and truly.

Flexible worship planners

Contemplative worship planners become more flexible. Contemplative pray-ers also discover the need to be flexible: "Rigidity

Meaning of the Liturgy" (paper presented at the Institute for Liturgical Studies, Valparaiso, Ind., March 31–April 1, 2008).

32. Acts 16:11ff.

33. cf. Mark 10:13–16; Matt 19:13–14; Luke 18:15–17.

34. "Five Minute Practice of Presence." *Listen*, January 2008, Volume 2: Issue 1.

35. Ezek 37:1ff.

can turn a commitment to regular prayer into an oppressive burden; flexibility, which a rich repertory of methods makes possible, is needed to integrate prayer peacefully into the day."[36] Rigidity in prayer is a symptom of assuming

> prayer is something to master the way we master algebra or auto mechanics. That puts us in the "on-top" position, where we are competent and in control. But when praying, we come "underneath," where we calmly and deliberately surrender control and become incompetent. "To pray…means to be willing to be naïve."[37]

Flexibility is itself a symptom of God's love. "Real prayer comes not from gritting our teeth but from falling in love."[38] Contemplative worship planners likewise plan worship from underneath, naively in love with God and the congregation. Not experts expertly adhering to the rules, they let worship be our childlike reaching for God.

Enriching our worship repertory may mean introducing new songs, liturgies, musical instruments, storytelling, art, prayers, table practices, or language for God. It may mean seasonal variation in the formality of worship, the arrangement of the worship space, even the location of worship (for example, seasonal out-of-doors worship). Through discernment, the heart of their vocation, contemplative worship planners let God reveal which new treasures to introduce.

This will mean considering a congregation's worship sensibilities. In prayer, "our religious sensibilities" are "the peculiar ways we find ourselves responsive to the mystery of God's presence. [For t]he Lord draws people to intimacy with different strings of love."[39] As individuals have religious sensibilities, so congregations have worship sensibilities. In the body of Christ, our worship sensibilities are varied, even contradicting. Contemplative worship planners recognize our worship repertory must be at least as rich as the body is diverse.

Paul's judgment against Corinthian worship was this: "One goes hungry, and another gets drunk."[40] So contemplative worship planners attend to the varying hungers of the body. They notice, for example, that what feeds adults in worship may leave children still hungering for God, or what fills middle class worshipers may leave both more and less wealthy worshipers starving. Contemplative worshipers and worship planners alike trust that God's loving presence in worship is enough for all of us. Gently they yield to the worship sensibilities of their brothers and sisters, so worship may be a rich feast for truly all who gather. In this way, rich and varied worship is a communal act of love, a practice of loving restraint.

Centered in God

Of course, love also reveals flexibility's limits, and contemplative worship planners become more centered in God. For the abiding, life-shaping power of worship and prayer alike is in constant repetition not endless variety.[41] As in individual prayer, limits for flexibility in worship are neither absolute nor universal but emerge within each congregation's unique tradition, history, and character. Of course, "[s]ometimes people do not value their own

36. Au, *By Way of the Heart*, 92–93.

37. Richard J. Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (New York: HarperOne, 1992), 7–8.

38. Ibid., 3.

39. Au, *By Way of the Heart*, 93.

40. 1 Cor 11:21.

41. 41 cf. Maxwell Johnson, LSTC Leadership Conference, 3 April 2011: "Liturgy shapes believing not by variety but by constant repetition."

religious experience enough. They want to pray the way others pray, not in their own way."[42] But contemplative worship planners persist in the conviction that a congregation's own way to worship will be a unique repetition, generous and rich, not repetitious but nonetheless a repetition. They let what we do again and again, and how we do it, reflect the way God meets us, of all people, and the specific strings of love God tugs.

Contemplative worship planners discover a congregation's own way to worship through seeking God's will for worship, not our own. For we are not the center of worship, God is. As

> we keep God as the center of our worship life and worshipful lives…we will find countless possibilities, endless resources, innumerable ways to encounter and express God's infinite presence. If our congregations enter the adventure of weekly gatherings to waste time royally as we explore God's unceasing revelations, then we will stop fighting over the wrong questions, the marketers' opinion, cultural pressures, unbiblical solutions.[43]

Focusing on a congregation's complex and shifting worship sensibilities finally only feeds rigidity. Instead, planners find flexibility in being generously grounded in God.

Contemplative worship planners may write a congregational worship statement to help them stay richly and flexibly centered in God.

> Each congregation has enough conflicting opinions and preferences to create unsettling confusion unless those who lead provide clear direction. Worship planners confront suggestions and ideas today that they had never anticipated. In addition, we need to reflect our denominational identities, our congregational personalities, and our growing awareness of the richness of ecumenicity. Leadership [may] develop a carefully formulated statement of the convictions and values that shape worship.[44]

What is our theology of worship? The purpose of worship? Who are the participants and what are the practices of our worship? By what process do we plan worship? While requiring several months of study and conversation, a statement addressing these questions can be a powerful tool for discernment, not to mention formation, evaluation, and education.[45]

With or without a written statement, contemplative worship planners provide such clear and gracious leadership. They do so, trusting that, when the risen Christ appeared in their midst, the disciples surely said, "We never worshiped like *this* before." Alive to the living and "infinite center"[46] of Christ among us, contemplative worship planners prepare us for the day when we and our worship will never be the same.

Waiting in the body in love

Worship is the living heart of the body of Christ, because God's love is what happens there. God's love pulses through worship, giving life to the body. Contemplative worshipers attend to this, our communal heart—not that they find worship always magnificent and transcendent. In fact, becoming contemplative worshipers may

42. Au, *By Way of the Heart*, 94.

43. Dawn, *A Royal "Waste" of Time*, 8–9.

44. Norma deWaal Malefyt and Howard Vanderwell, *Designing Worship Together: Models and Strategies for Worship Planning* (Herndon, Va.: The Alban Institute, 2005), 69.

45. Malefyt and Vanderwell, *Designing Worship Together*, 72–73.

46. Dawn, *A Royal "Waste" of Time*, 8.

mean becoming more aware of how ordinary, fragile, tense, boring, and down-right *human* worship can be. How much, frankly, like our own bodies. Contemplative pray-ers learn this of prayer as well, and the deepest wisdom of the contemplative tradition bids pray-ers and worshipers alike simply to wait even there, in the body, for God. For "like the stories we tell, God's activity in worship is often small and unassuming. We therefore need to remain patient and to celebrate the small changes."[47] Becoming contemplative worshipers is about nothing more or less. Attending to worship, we wait in love for God.

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Also, special thanks to instructor and spiritual director Barbara Martell, the Worship and Music committee of St. Stephen Lutheran Church in South Plainfield, New Jersey, and the Writer's Group in Davenport, Iowa.

47. Satterlee, *When God Speaks Through Worship,* 131.

Amazing Grace: John 9:24–25

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> A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God by telling the truth," they said. "We know this man is a sinner." He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" (John 9:24-25, NIV)

This text brings into bold relief the true realities of blindness and seeing: some are blind, and yet they see, and some see and yet they are blind. What I want to suggest is that seeing has to do with believing, and if you do not believe, then you do not see. Some would suggest that you see first, and then you believe. I want to suggest that we believe first and then we see. I want to suggest that we see what we believe. And if we are not careful, we will only see what we already believe, which will leave us narrow, rigid, inflexible, and unyielding. What we believe cannot change, and therefore what we see cannot change, and then, as this text so clearly illustrates, we are blind. The human condition is that more often than not, we are blind, not because we do not see, but because it is so very difficult for us to either change or update what we believe.

Indicative of our human condition, in this text, a man is born blind. This person might represent all of us. We are born blind; we enter a world and are indoctrinated into beliefs and systems of thought both in our families and in the cultural, religious, political, economic, and social systems of the world. And these systems that we come to believe in directly shape what we see. Many of us are blind; blind to true love and true relationship offered to us; blind to deep caring by another human being; blind to the demands of justice and equality; blind to the wide distribution of wealth between the rich and the poor; blind to anyone and anything outside of the interests of our little group, and especially blind to our own faults and shortcomings.

In our text, Jesus stepped in; put mud on the eyes of the man, the man washed in the pool, and then he could see. You would think that this would be a time of victory and celebration, but this is the point when the real trouble started.

After the miracle, the neighbors are so surprised that the man can see that they enter a debate as to whether or not it is really him. They ask, "Is this the one that was blind and went around begging?" Some said yes and some said no, and several of them said, "But it looks just like him." He kept saying to them, "I am the man." They asked for details. "Who healed you and what happened?" He told them exactly what happened. They asked where Jesus was and he said that he did not know. The neighbors took the man to the Pharisees.

Now the first problem that the Pharisees had was that Jesus healed the man on the wrong day. Jesus healed the man on the Sabbath. We notice that they are blind already; what they believe will not let them see a miracle and they make a big deal about the day rather than the healing. They interrogated the man and he told them that Jesus took mud and smoothed it over his eyes and when it was washed away, he could see. Some of them said that Jesus could not be from God because he healed on the wrong day. Others said, "But how

can anyone do these signs?" There was deep division among them. The Pharisees again questioned the man: "Who do you think that he is?" The man replied, "I think that he must be a prophet."

The Jewish leaders would not believe that he had been born blind, so they called his parents. They asked them, "Is this your son? Was he born blind? How is it that he can see?" They verify that this is their son and that he was born blind. They did not know how he could see or who healed him. They said, "He is of age, ask him." They were afraid of the Jewish leaders who had announced that anyone saying Jesus was the Messiah would be expelled from the synagogue.

So for the second time, they called the man in and said, "Tell the truth because we know that Jesus is a sinner." Again, you see what you believe. The man said," I do not know whether or not he is a sinner, but what I do know is that I once was blind but now I see." That should have settled the matter, but they still asked, "What did he do? How did he heal you?" The man said, "I told you once. Didn't you listen? Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to be one of his disciples too?" They cursed him and said, "You are one of his disciples, but we are disciples of Moses. We know God spoke to Moses, but as for this man, we don't know anything about him." The man said, "That's strange—he healed me and you say that you do not know anything about him? If this man were not from God, he would not be able to do it." They said, "You were born in sin and you are trying to teach us?" And they threw him out of the synagogue.

This is the human condition, blindness based in limiting beliefs, inaccurate assumptions, and false interpretations. They did not believe, so they could not see. They believed that he healed on the wrong day—that was their limiting belief—the belief that limited their ability to see anything other than their narrow interpretation of the Law and the Sabbath. They then followed with inaccurate assumptions: he must be a sinner. If he heals on the wrong day, he is a sinner. Then they made false Interpretations: he cannot be from God. And even when confronted with the testimony of a blind man who was healed, when confronted with eyewitness testimony, the evidence standing right in front of them, because of what they believed, they could not see.

Our nation believes that capitalism is the best economic system that the world has ever seen and any evidence to the contrary we cannot see. We cannot see that under capitalism, regardless of how the economy expands, it cannot and will not eradicate poverty. And so, we do not even really see poverty in this country. We are blind to the fact that we, as a nation, have no common purpose, no centrality that holds us together, no common vision and no common destiny—just a rugged individualism and mercenary profit-making so that we bailed out banks and foreclosed on the homes of the tax payers that gave the banks the money and see no contradiction in that. We give tax breaks to the rich and demonize teachers, teachers' unions, and the working middle class in the name of balancing the budget. And even beyond that, many are blind in relationships—blind to the fact that of the deep love of our families for us while we, as clergy, run around ministering to the needs of everyone but them. We are in fact the Pharisees in this text.

But I thank God that we are also the blind man in this text. This text is about whether our belief systems can handle new revelations; about whether we believe that God is done revealing Godself, or if God continues to reveal; if what we believe can be amended, adapted, and adjusted by the one who is fully humane—the one we might call the human one or the one that the Bible calls the "Son of Man," "the Son of God." Jesus says, I have come into the

world to judge the world—to give sight to the blind and to show those who think they see that they are blind. This human one looks at the heart—this human one looks at what you believe in your heart.

Jesus comes into our lives and puts mud on our eyes—tells us to go and wash in the pool of Siloam and when we wash the mud off our eyes we can see. Did you ever receive a touch from Jesus and then wash in the pool and you could see? Have you ever stood flat-footed and just plain told God that you were wrong? I do not mean for small sins and small infractions, for insensitive actions or impure thoughts. I mean told God that you were wrong at the level of limiting beliefs. Have you ever told God that you were wrong about what you believed?

Can I get to the heart of it now? Have you ever told God that you were wrong because what you believed was based in fear? I am continually reflecting on the role of fear in our lives. There is a poem entitled, "Gremlin Poem" by Lou Tice:

I am Fear.
I am the menace that lurks
in the paths of life, never visible
to the eye but sharply felt in the heart.
I am the father of despair,
the brother of procrastination, the
enemy of progress, the tool of tyranny.

Born of ignorance and nursed on
misguided thought, I have
darkened more hopes, stifled more ambitions,
shattered more ideals and
prevented more accomplishments than
history could record.
Like the changing chameleon,
I assume many disguises.
I masquerade as caution.
I am sometimes known as doubt or worry.
But whatever I'm called, I am
still fear, the obstacle of
achievement.[1]

My blindness is really fear. My blindness is that my beliefs are based in fear. I am afraid of change; afraid of being different; afraid that I have been wrong all this time. The voice of fear reminds me that I am inadequate; I am not smart enough; I am defective and cannot be fixed. And because of this fear, I have been clinging to my belief and it cannot change.

The joy is that once you tell God you were wrong about what you believed, then you can see. When I changed what I believed, I could see. When I admit to God that I was wrong, then it dismisses the fear. When I tell God that I was wrong, it is like Jesus putting mud on my eyes and telling me to go to the pool and wash. When I tell God I was wrong, I can see.

When I told God I was wrong, I woke up one morning and saw my wife for the very first time. Saw how much she loved me and how much she cared for me and saw how much I cared for and loved her. I woke up and saw the poor and saw that I was one of them and all of my middle-class striving was not for my own security but for the purpose of helping people. I woke up one morning and saw that our nation needed fundamental change and so did the church. I woke up one day and realized that I have fewer years left than the ones that have gone by and in fact, that I was going to die and I had better appreciate every moment. I woke up one day and was more fully human, more humane, more like the son of man. And I was able to say with the songwriter:

Amazing grace how sweet the sound
that saved a wretch like me –

I once was lost, but now I am found,
was blind but now I see.

1. http://174.120.18.8/~livingou/images/lauren/GremlinPoem.pdf

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Book Reviews

Cross Talk: Preaching Redemption Here and Now. By Sally A. Brown. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008. ISBN-10: 0664230024. ISBN-13: 978-0-664-23002-9. 167 pages. Paper. $19.95.

What percentage of your sermons over the past three years addressed the crucifixion and death of Jesus? As I read Sally A. Brown's opening observation that pastors in mainline churches have developed a growing aversion to preaching about Jesus' death, I realized that my own preaching about the cross is woefully inadequate, considering that the percentage of lectionary texts referencing Jesus' death ranges from 30–50 percent, depending on the year.

Pastors will find this poignant and deftly written book helpful in understanding the history of atonement theories and why they are problematic. Most theological interpretations of sacrifice, violence, and suffering can be quite damaging and offensive, though they remain prevalent among many modern-day churches and Christians. Candidly addressing the reality of "radical suffering" and violence in our world, Brown provides new perspectives on the cross through examinations of the varied metaphors found in the Bible, as well as fresh images for preaching which she has collected from a wide range of homiletic styles and voices. A chart in the appendix lists all the lectionary texts that reference the death of Jesus.

Chapter six could provide fodder for a sermon or study series on the topic of "sacrifice" within biblical texts contrasted with the traditional theories of atonement alongside contemporary renderings of "sacrifice." Pastors will be led to responsibly address the topic of Jesus' death in their sermons, hymn selections, and Bible studies without implicitly sanctioning the violence therein. Full of nuanced, ethical, and sophisticated critiques of atonement, as well as alternative metaphors for preaching about the cross, this is a must-have book for pastors looking to understand and communicate the full significance of Jesus' ignominious, excruciating, and yet redemptive, crucifixion in a way that underscores the heart of our faith.

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What Christians Can Learn from Buddhism: Rethinking Salvation. By Kristin Johnston Largen. ISBN-13: 975-0-8006-6328-5. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009. xii and 171 pages. Paper. $9.99.

What Christians Can Learn from Buddhism is an exemplary text for learning the art of interreligious theology. Kristen Johnston Largen, who teaches at Gettysburg Seminary, articulates a method and then creatively demonstrates that method in relation to the meaning of salvation in Christianity and Buddhism. Beginning with the hermeneutical theory of Gadamer, which imagines the act of understanding as the "fusion of horizons," the author emphasizes how our own self-understanding is altered by serious encounter with an Other. This approach leaves no room for dogmatic defensiveness, rather the anticipation of becoming transformed by interreligious encounter. Do we dare to enter into interreligious work with readiness to be changed?

Chapter Two presents an overview of the Christian doctrine of salvation, both a summary of classical atonement motifs and systematic proposals about the meaning of salvation today. The three classic treatments of atonement include Christus Victor (Irenaeus and Luther), satisfaction (Anselm), and moral influence (Abelard). Of particular note are the author's references to the work of J. Denny Weaver on nonviolent atonement in the discussion of Christus Victor and her rehabilitation of Abelard's often summarily dismissed model. Facets of a defensible contemporary view of salvation include its fitness to context, cosmic scope, "now/not-yet" character, individual and communal dimensions, acknowledgement of both God's work and

human work, implications for both Christians and non-Christians, and balancing both God's grace and human freedom. Clearly, this approach values dialectic and tension in the pursuit of religious truth.

Following an introduction to Buddhism in Chapter Three (a treatment of the biography of the Buddha, his teachings, and the historical development of Buddhism—itself worth the price of the book!), Johnston Largen delves into the heart of this project, an exploration of the meaning of *nirvana*, with special reference to the thought of Nagarjuna. Of particular importance are the concepts of *sunyata* (emptiness), *pratityasamutpada* (dependent origination), and *samsara* (the cycle of rebirth). What does it mean when Nagarjuna asserts "there is no distinction whatsoever between *samsara* and *nirvana*" (105)? Thereby *nirvana* must not be deliverance to another realm but rather a change in "our disposition toward [*samsara*] and our understanding of it" (107). Toward this realization Buddhism recommends spiritual practices to attain "mindfulness": forms of meditation, *mandala* (symbolic diagrams), and *mantra* (sacred invocations). Through the Buddhist community, *sangha*, one is guided in right practice toward *nirvana* and dissuaded from false practice.

What might Christian theology learn about the nature of salvation from this encounter with Buddhist teaching? Chapter Five proposes three specific accents to be reclaimed as a result of the fusion of Christian and Buddhist perspectives: 1) salvation is not exclusively or even primarily individualistic but communal, 2) salvation pertains to our interdependent existence and involves the culmination of life in relationship, and 3) salvation occurs proleptically in the "now" as well as awaiting ultimate consummation. Johnston Largen concludes the book with an admittedly speculative reflection on the possibility of universal salvation, based on extrapolating the extent of God's grace in Jesus Christ. With von Balthasar, the author allows for the hope that all will be saved, even if this cannot be asserted as dogma.

The book includes a glossary of key terms and suggestions for further reading. This work is a major and innovative contribution to both the method and practice of interreligious theology. It now awaits a Buddhist counterpart to demonstrate how the Christian view of salvation also transforms Buddhist understanding.

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Resistant Hope: Fighting Back against Suffering. By Elaine G. Siemsen. Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2008. ISBN-10: 1-55635-287-5. Paper. $14.00.

This thoughtful book explores that terrain most mysterious to human existence, the reality of suffering. Appealing to the universal experience of human suffering, Siemsen introduces the reader to a wealth of classical approaches to the problem of evil in the world. Following Levinas, she identifies three core markers of suffering: it is un-welcomed, forces submission, and is useless. Inevitably, the problem of suffering raises the question about its origin, the question of God, theodicy. The author examines the tendency for theologians to seek to defend God in the face of suffering. There are four conventional explanations for the existence of suffering/evil: as punishment for sin, as part of a greater plan, as a method of education, and as preparation for heaven. Siemsen is disquieted by each of these arguments, especially as they implicate God as the perpetrator of human suffering. Their prevalence in the Christian community is disturbing.

Chapter three is devoted to the interpretation of biblical texts, with special attention to Genesis 1–3 and the letters of Paul. In Augustine these texts found powerful exposition that has shaped all subsequent theology, whereby fallen humanity suffers under the curse upon Adam. Siemsen introduces the thought of Irenaeus as an alternative to the prevailing theological paradigm. The work of Christ recapitulates the human experience in its entirety, including the reality of suffering, as God's act of salvation: "Jesus the Christ shows humanity the way to move forward

through suffering. Second, through the resurrection of Christ, humanity learns that life does not end with the horrors of human actions" (57).

Moving beyond the conventional explanations of human suffering, Christians are offered the way of "resistance through hope." The Christology of Irenaeus offers a particularly creative resource for re-imagining faith in the face of suffering/evil. As we await the eschatological resolution of suffering, "humanity must live with and through the power of Jesus present in the world to name suffering and act out against its attempts to dehumanize others and us" (69). *Resistant Hope* is an accessible guide to reflection about the problem of suffering at the heart of the human experience and includes a study guide at the end of each chapter for congregational use.

Craig L. Nessan

The Making of Paul: Constructions of the Apostle in the Early Christianity. By Richard I. Pervo. ISBN-13: 978-0-8006-9659-7. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010. xv & 376 pages. Paper. $21.12

Pervo sums up his objective in writing on Paul this way: "…to describe how this protean apostle came to take his shapes." (x). This work is a thorough, comprehensive, and well-documented view of a variety of biblical, pseudo- and post-Pauline works which have historically had a significant say in defining Paul.

The document's collections which Pervo assesses include an initial overview of the genuine Pauline letters in the Bible. Pervo then discusses the pseudepigraphic Pauline letters; the epistolary Paul in early Christianity; Paul in various "Acts of….;" those who wrote against Paul (surprise!—the Gospel of Matthew is one such example!); and Paul as interpreted by various patristic authors.

One of the interesting and helpful parts of the book are the eleven Tables which look at Paul's works from various perspectives, including the differences between Paul and Jesus and a fascinating table which charts how the Book of Acts construes the parallel "passions" of both Jesus and Paul (Table 9). Pervo also includes an Appendix: "A Pauline Family Tree," which charts the dates and evolution of Paul's works and those who comment on him.

Pervo fine-tunes the way in which he will address the "protean apostle," beginning his work in this fashion: "Even among the mainstream of traditional, Western, interpreters there is no reigning consensus about the center of Paul's own theology, and this tradition can no longer claim either objectivity or exclusive authority. The thrust of the following pages is towards defining profiles of Paul and Paulinism in terms of the needs, questions, and values of the persons, groups, or movements represented in various texts." (xii)

Pervo succeeds splendidly in accomplishing this monumental task. This is a superlative work and one that should particularly inform those who teach biblical studies, patristics and homiletics.

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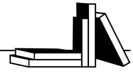
Greed as Idolatry: The Origin and Meaning of a Pauline Metaphor. By Brian Rosner. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007. ISBN-13: 978-0-8028-3374-7. 214 pages. Paper. $22.00.

In this book, Brian Rosner investigates the connection between the moral teaching against greed in Jewish and Christian tradition and the biblical theological prohibition against idolatry. The phrase "greed is idolatry" is found in Col 3:5 and Eph 5:5. Although the correlation between greed and idolatry is found only in these two Pauline passages, Rosner's claim is that it is a more pervasive biblical theme. He begins with a history of interpretation of the expression detailing the various ways interpreters from the rabbis and early church fathers to Karl Marx regarded greed as a form of idolatry. Axiomatic to his argument is that the expression "greed is idolatry" is a metaphor: greed is not literally idolatry. In this regard, a fundamental question raised by Rosner is: In what sense do the greedy worship their possessions



instead of God? Of the various perspectives surveyed, he is most resonant with Luther's notion that greed and idolatry are ultimately a matter of mistrust.

The central thesis of the next three chapters is that the connection between greed and idolatry is pervasive in the Jewish Scriptures and early Jewish moral teaching and hence has its origin in the biblical tradition. In this respect the breadth and depth of Rosner's study is greater than the focus on the two occurrences of "greed is idolatry" in Colossians and Ephesians would suggest. He provides a good summary of the various conceptions of both idolatry and greed in Jewish and Christian usage. Although Rosner deals with a number of different texts and interpretations, he regards the golden calf episode as paradigmatic in forging a link between gold and idolatry. Gold came to be associated with both greed and idolatry.

This is a richly textured and nuanced discussion of the meaning of idolatry and its correlation to greed. At the risk of over simplifying the many facets of idolatry as it occurs in a variety of texts and contexts, Rosner seems to adopt a core definition of idolatry as "an attack on God's exclusive right to our love and trust." After a thorough discussion of what he regards as the typical behaviors of the greedy and of idolaters, he sums up the rhetorical impact of the metaphor "greed is idolatry" as "teaching that to have a strong desire to acquire and keep for yourself more and more money and material things is an attack on God's exclusive rights to human love and devotion, trust and confidence, and service and obedience" (173).

Greed as Idolatry is an incisive discussion of these two important biblical concepts that seems to be caught between two genres. On the one hand, Rosner provides an in-depth exegetical study of two verses in the Pauline corpus that define greed as a preeminent form of idolatry. However, it becomes clear as the argument develops that he is more interested in a biblical theological understanding of the connection between idolatry and greed and its implications for contemporary communities of faith. In this respect, what is a fine detailed exegesis of Col 3:5, Eph 5:5 and numerous other texts dealing with the theme, might have been made accessible to a wider audience if a more expansive approach was maintained throughout. Rosner does make some timely suggestions toward the end about the significance of his study for church and society today. Nevertheless, as it is, this is a detailed textual analysis of the meaning of idolatry and greed that will mostly interest students, teachers, and pastors looking for biblical resources on the topic.

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Many Forms of Madness: A Family's Struggle with Mental Illness and the Mental Health System. By Rosemary Radford Ruether with David Ruether. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010. ISBN-10: 0800696514. ISBN-13: 978-0-8006-9651-1. 200 pages. Paper. $22.00.

Four of us happened to share a lunch table at a theological conference. In the course of the conversation, one person spoke of a family member with a severe mental illness. Within moments, each of us at the table had shared a similar story. All of us lived in families impacted by mental illness, but we had not known this about each other until one person dared to break the silence.

The most important thing about *Many Forms of Madness* is that a theologian as prominent as Ruether has written such a book. She reflects honestly on her experiences of and frustrations with the mental health system as the mother of a son who has struggled with schizophrenia for thirty-five years. The book is interspersed with poems and journal fragments written by her son David.

Ruether's account is both compassionate and realistic. She neither blames nor attempts to justify. She offers a powerful theological description of unconditional grace shown toward a family member with mental illness, while simultaneously upholding the importance of limits to protect the health and well-being of other family members. Such passages have great pastoral value as a resource for addressing familial guilt.

Ruether provides an important history of mental illness, supplying troubling details of how we have understood the nature and causes of mental illness over time, as well as what has been deemed appropriate treatment. Her thesis comes toward the end of the book. She advocates for a mental health system based on recovery rather than maintenance, insisting that developing an appropriate level of autonomy and engaging in productive work are essential for the well-being of individuals with mental illness.

Ruether argues that the primary challenge in responding to mental illness is not a lack of resources but a lack of vision. To this I say: Yes and no. Ruether's frustrations with psychiatrists who medicate without dialogue and with residential facilities that are custodial rather than developmental are not uncommon but they are also no longer universal. At times, Ruether's criticism of the over-medication of mental illness is so strong that it borders on dismissal of the value that psychiatric medications do have for many patients. While appropriate care for the mentally ill is a nationwide problem, there are communities where county case managers are effective bridges between clients, residential facilities, medical professionals, and sheltered work programs; the vision exists, but the lack of adequate financial and human resources is a serious limitation.

Pastors will benefit from better understanding the challenges and frustrations faced by their parishioners. All will do well to heed Ruether's call to advocacy on behalf of individuals with mental illness.

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Lex Charitatis: A Juristic Disquisition on Law in the Theology of Martin Luther. By Johannes Heckel. Translated and edited by Gottfried G. Krodel. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010. ISBN-13: 978-0-8028-6445. xxiii & 566 pages. Paper. $24.00.

First published in German nearly six decades ago, this text raises the bar for Luther scholarship. Thoroughly documenting its conclusions, endnotes make up 53 percent of the text while appendixes, taking up matters not directly dealt with in the text's body, count for 26 percent of the book. The overall topic of this volume is Luther's understanding of law. Written by Johannes Heckel (1889–1963), erstwhile Professor of Public Law at the University of Munich, the book serves as a bridge between theology, legal history, and Reformation history. Heckel shows that while the early Luther scorned jurists and burned canon laws, the mature Luther over time reformed medieval and scholastic understandings of law resulting in an impressive political theology. Given the exactitude of Heckel's study of the primary sources, any serious interpretation of Luther's view of law must deal with this book.

Right away Heckel identifies the target of his work: the views of Rudolph Sohm. Sohm argued that since the Kingdom of God is governed by freedom and love, then it is free of law. "Law resides in the world, that is, among mankind which had fallen from God and declared its independence from him; the church is the manifestation of God's kingdom on earth and, therefore, has nothing in common with law" (7). Indeed, for Sohm, ecclesiastical law contradicts the essence of the church. For Heckel, Sohm's view secularizes Luther's view of law. Ecclesiastical law then is nothing other than the secular law for religious matters. For Heckel, Sohm's view is wrong because he ignored Luther's understanding of "divine law." For Luther, law, when properly understood, is both secular *and* sacred. The way to get at Luther's view of law is to raise the question of which concept of "law" is presupposed by the doctrine of justification by faith alone. In Heckel's perspective, the answer to this question will be nothing other than a legal doctrine of the theology of the cross.

For Luther, the divine law is universal righteousness—it demands the entire human heart. Given that we are sinners, we cannot wholly obey it and even, as sinners, are God's enemy. Ultimately, this law demands the impossible of sinners. Sin perverts human nature: "Man places himself above god; he cre-

ates an image of God which is equal to that of man. God becomes the image of man instead of man being the image of God" (27).

The law exists for the sake of properly ordering the human. Luther borrowed scholastic views of law, but markedly revised them. Hence, for the scholastics, a theologian approaches the question of law by beginning with natural law, then one moves to interpreting the Decalogue, and finally one specifies the requirements of Christ's law. However, Luther reverses the direction here. First, we must love God perfectly—be conformed to Christ's law—and then see the value of the Decalogue and the natural law. Radically departing from the ancient and medieval conviction that humans possesses a *synteresis theologia*, a spark of the divine from which a jumpstart of grace can initiate the pilgrim toward the heavenly journey, Luther affirms that it is God's grace and love which properly order us to God. Ultimately, Luther's doctrine of law is eschatological: at the end of the world God will judge the legal order. The ontological basis of the law is love. Hence, the dynamic of divine law is nothing other than the Golden Rule. Divine law is best understood as the law of love (*lex charitatis*) "with its two commandments, love God, love the neighbor…" (88). "*In the development of this personalistic aspect of the divine natural law as law of faith Luther's doctrine of law culminates*, just as justification by faith alone is the central dogma of his theology. Compared with the Middle Ages, the emphasis in the theological view of the divine natural law is shifted from the material to the personalistic aspect, from dong to believing" (88). At the core of Luther's view, self-love is displaced by self-denial, the center of the person is found not in self but in God and in the neighbor's needs.

Heckel's is a masterful study which no true Luther scholar can afford to bypass. It merits the attention of thoughtful pastors and teaching theologians.

Mark Mattes
Grand View University

Briefly Noted

In ***God's Word in Human Words. An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship*** (Baker, $28), Kenton Sparks takes the negative connotations away from historical criticism and concludes it means little else than reading texts contextually. He writes: "To insist on an inerrant Bible in a naïve sense, which denies the full humanity of Scripture, will only paint the evangelical church and Christian scholarship into a corner—the same corner in which the Catholic Church now stands because of its claim to ecclesial infallibility." While this book is addressed primarily to "evangelicals," it can be profitable for Lutherans too in its attempt "to assimilate the useful methods and reasonably assured results of biblical criticism to a healthy Christian faith." The honesty of Sparks and his pastoral concern shine out on every page.

Ralph W. Klein
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

In ***Holy Restlessness*** (Augsburg Fortress, 2009, $15.99), Paul Dovre presents a collection of homilies delivered over twenty-five years as president of Concordia College, Moorhead, Minnesota. A lay person, Dovre became the spiritual leader on campus. His homilies, covering a broad range of time-specific topics, speak clearly to issues of any era. While of greatest value to graduates and other constituents of Concordia, the book also has a broader audience. On "Faith and Politics" (pp. 38–43) he quotes Paul, Aristotle, and Reinhold Niebuhr in calling Christians to political activity in discerning justice and working for the common good.

Norma Cook Everist
Wartburg Theological Seminary

Preaching Helps

Pentecost 16 to Thanksgiving Day, A.D. 2011 (Cycle A)

Preaching Stewardship from the Lectionary

In many congregations, October and November are stewardship months. For many of us, the preaching task sometime during October and November is to preach the Bible, the New Testament, or at least the appointed or selected readings from a "stewardship perspective." As I write this essay and edit this set of preaching helps, I am waiting expectantly for the release of my newest book—*Preaching and Stewardship: Proclaiming God's Invitation to Grow* (Alban, 2011). One of the things I propose is allowing the lectionary to determine when the stewardship sermon is preached, so that the message grows from, rather than being imposed upon, the Scripture read and heard in worship. Then, the preacher and congregational leaders can honestly say that to preach the Bible on this Sunday means talking honestly about money. Preachers daring enough to follow this suggestion will discover that the readings appointed for Pentacost 18 and Thanksgiving Day will yield a powerful stewardship sermon.

For me, the thrust of both stewardship sermons is gratefully remembering God, God's goodness, and all that God has done for and given to us. In the Gospel reading appointed for October 16 (Matthew 22:15–22), Jesus cleverly invites his hearers to remember God this way. The appointed preaching helps summarize the point this way:

> "[Give] to God the things that are God's"? As New Testament scholars have more recently observed, the answer surely lies in Jesus' prior question about the tax coin, "Whose head (Gk. *eikōn*, 'image') is this, and whose title?" (v. 20). The coin bears the emperor's image and so is due him, but, as Jesus' hearers surely knew immediately, it is *humanity* that bears the image of God (Gen 1:26–27). The real punch of the exchange, therefore, is not our behavior on April 15th, but at every moment, as we give ourselves, wholly and holy, to God.

Two of the congregations that I served as a pastor held annual Thanksgiving Day or Thanksgiving Eve worship services. While I would never make those services about asking people to pony up to meet the congregation's budget, I am honestly stunned that I missed the unmistakable connection between a day of thanksgiving and stewardship. The Old Testament reading appointed for this year's Thanksgiving Day (U.S.A.) includes these powerful words: "Do not say to yourself, 'My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth.' But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors, as he is doing today" (Deut 8:17–18). Again, from the preaching helps:

> [How] perceptively [this reading] speaks to twenty-first century A.D. Americans, whether one holds that we live in the Golden or Silver Age of our nation's history.

> This truly is a land of milk and honey (and so much else besides). Moses reminds the generation that is about to enter the Promised Land—and us—that prosperity can be worse than want, when it comes to mindfulness that material wealth, too, is grace.

Turning to the Second Reading for Thanksgiving Day (2 Cor 9:6–15), the preaching helps challenge us:

> For every preacher who is skittish about "preaching about money," the Second Reading provides a welcome model (in fact, I dare say, one could do much worse on Stewardship Sunday than simply to read this passage, sit down, and let the Spirit work on hearts and minds for a full five minutes of silence).... Paul's opening metaphor of giving as sowing seed provokes a more profound challenge for our consideration: that we conceptualize giving not as "charity" from our surplus, but as investment from our substance. So conceived, Paul assures us, giving is an act of worship, and like all worship it is a grace-filled response to the prevenient and "postvenient" and in all ways overwhelming grace of God.

These powerful words come from the keyboard of George C. Heider, Chair and Associate Professor of Theology at Valparaiso University (Ind.). After nearly twenty years devoted to senior academic administration, Professor Heider turned his attention to re-engagement with the vocation of teacher/scholar in 2004. He finds his interests have broadened from the technical scholarly issues that one focuses on early in one's academic career to broader matters, such as the application of biblical scholarship to the life of the church and meaningful conversation among people of various religious traditions and convictions. Dr. Heider nevertheless retains a particular passion for the canonical Scriptures of the Old Testament and finds special interest in worship leadership and preaching and so engages regularly in both.

As I think about preaching the annual stewardship sermon from these passages, I am grateful to Professor Heider for confirming my conviction that the best way to preach about stewardship, and money in particular, is when it comes up in the lectionary. The nagging question, of course, is whether I actually have the nerve to do it, particularly on Thanksgiving!

Wishing you good courage as you proclaim the gospel into real-life issues!

Craig A. Satterlee, Editor, Preaching Helps
http://craigasatterlee.com

Pentecost 16 (Proper 22) October 2, 2011

Isaiah 5:1–7
Psalm 80:7–15
Philippians 3:4b–14
Matthew 21:33–46

GOTCHA! Today's readings lead with an element of surprise that intends to catch their hearers off-guard. Since "making the familiar strange" is one of the prerequisites for good preaching (at least among those who may think that there's not much new in the old, old story), we do well to pay close attention to how these three readings use surprise as a strategic tool to communicate their message of warning and hope.

The First Reading from Isaiah illustrates well why that prophet is the biblical master *nonpareil* of the Hebrew language. He seems to start out harmlessly enough, with a "love-song"—perhaps for the harvest season—about a certain vineyard. But, despite all the pampering preparations one could hope for on the part of the owner, the project disappoints, yielding wild grapes (cf. the "sour grapes" of last week's Old Testament reading, Ezek 18:2). So, the singer turns to the audience and asks, what's to be done? Wherein, if at all, were the owner's attentions lacking? Speak now, or forever hold your peace! Very well, in the absence of any such shared blame or extenuating circumstances, the judgment falls on the vineyard: it is to be devoured, trampled, a waste, overgrown, parched. To the extent that the hearers might suspect that the prophet is telling some kind of agricultural fable with a meaning beyond the literal and extending to the human sphere, the audience is lured into nodding its heads at the rightness of the outcome. *Schadenfreude* (delight in the misery of others) is never far from the human surface.

But then "Snap!" goes the mousetrap: "the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are his pleasant planting." The hearers have convicted themselves, as surely as did David in 2 Sam 12:7. They had passed on their chance to play legal offense against God, just as they did in the "covenant lawsuit" in Mic 6:3 (Isaiah's contemporary!). All that remains now is the explanation of the verdict: God had expected justice (*mišpat*) from his people, but saw bloodshed (*miśpach*), instead; God had sought righteousness (*tsedāqâ*), but heard a cry (*tse`āqâ*). Here Isaiah shows his linguistic finesse: he is not merely punning; rather, the vineyard's produce is a twisted perversion of the planting. Aural form serves theological function.

Given that Jesus' hearers knew their Scriptures (i.e., our Old Testament) better than we do, there's no surprise left in his use of the vineyard as a trope for Israel in the Holy Gospel (as, indeed, was the case last week, too, in the immediately preceding pericope from Matthew). So he adds a twist: it's not the vineyard *per se* that is the focus of concern, but its tenants. The latter bear a disturbing resemblance to Joseph's brothers in Gen 37:19–20: "Here comes this dreamer [lit., 'lord of the dreams']. Come now, let us kill him." But what the brothers merely discussed, the tenants actually do to those the vineyard owner sends to them, first slaves, then the owner's very son. In this case, the hearers are invited to convict not so much themselves, but their leaders (as the latter realize quickly enough, v. 45). Yet even the hearers will bear the fallout: quoting from a festival (*Hallel*) psalm (118:22–23), Jesus declares that the kingdom of God will be taken away and given to another people "that produces the fruits of the kingdom" (v. 43).

To say that the Christian preacher treads in a minefield with this parable is to undervalue minefields. There seems little question, at least among New Testament scholars, that the way Matthew sets up and relates this parable reflects the struggle for the soul of Judaism that was taking place at Matthew's own time between the only two significant Jewish groups left standing after the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in A.D. 70: the "Jesus Movement" and the Pharisees. It was the latter who won the battle, leading to rabbinic Judaism as that religion's normative shape. But as for the war? Two thousand years of oft-acrimonious relations between Judaism and Christianity may tell a different story, and the history of Christian anti-Semitism is ugly (indeed, horrific). No good purpose is served by the Christian preacher's employing the original setting of this parable to bash Pharisees in specific or Jews in general.

What we do well to remember is the old preaching adage that if, upon reading a text, we reflexively find ourselves on the side of Jesus, we've misread the text. But surely Christians have not seized, beaten, killed, or stoned first God's prophets and then the Son himself—or have we? Otherwise put, if the church is, as the New Testament claims, the "New Israel," then we cannot avoid taking Israel's place in parables such as Isaiah's and Matthew's. In which case we do well to watch out for falling rocks, even cornerstones. We are the vineyard; we are the tenants. To us comes the call to produce sweet grapes and a fair share of the produce of our hands.

"The Gospel of the Lord" reads my copy of the lectionary at the conclusion of the parable. "The Gospel of the Lord?" replies my mind. What good news does either Isaiah or Matthew offer today? Not much, at least on the surface. As is often true in life, the long way around is the shortest way home. In this case, we'll get to the good news in the other two readings via a surprise in the Second Reading from Philippians.

Paul begins with a recitation of his credentials, i.e., of all the reasons he has for self-esteem and confidence in his standing before God. Yet all of these "gains" (*kerdē*) are really "loss" (*zēmia*), yea "crap" (*skubalon*)—surely, Paul would brook no euphemism here—by comparison with knowing and being known in Christ (vv. 7–9). Paul readily concedes that he is a work-in-progress, as his life's work now consists in fully realizing what he already is by grace ("I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own," v. 12). The key is to "know Christ and the power of his resurrection *and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death*" (v. 10; emphasis added).

Wherein, then, lies the good news this day? Let's return to the Gospel reading, specifically to the quotation from Psalm 118: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing." In rejection, in loss, in recapitulating the path of Christ—"sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death," as Paul put it (v. 10)—indeed, even in receiving in humility the well-earned judgment of God comes the grace and peace of knowing that we are irrevocably chosen, planted, and protected, even given the kingdom. At one level, it makes little sense, but it's the gospel truth and the biggest surprise of all: "Gotcha!" becomes "I've got you." For good and all. GCH

Pentecost 17 (Proper 23) October 9, 2011

Isaiah 25:1–9
Psalm 23
Philippians 4:1–9
Matthew 22:1–14

With the increased emphasis on and frequency of the celebration of the Eucharist in recent years, our auditors have become more and more accustomed to hearing and singing of "feasts." Given the meager portions actually served on such occasions, one could hardly blame the thoughtful participant for asking, "This is the *feast* of victory for our God?" Today's readings help us explain how it really is such. Moreover, while no one wants to return to the days of near self-flagellation in preparation for the sacrament, there is salutary caution here against presumption on the grace of God.

That caution comes near the end of the Holy Gospel. The preponderance of the reading is yet another parable of the kingdom, this time transposed from vineyard to banquet hall. It's a royal wedding banquet on an order that the British royals (say, William and Kate last April) would envy. All is in readiness, and the king sends out his slaves (once more, surely the Old Testament prophets) to gather the invited guests. Scholars of biblical culture tell us that the problem lies not in the repetition of the call—such would be expected—but in its cavalier rejection and certainly in the treatment of the messengers. Perhaps the burning of the city is, historically speaking, a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem by Roman forces in A.D. 70. In any event, the "B-list" of guests is likely enough the Gentiles. Yet even among those who do show up, there is occasion for worry: one caught without the requisite attire is expelled with "extreme prejudice," as the CIA might put it.

What's to be made of all this, especially for the modern hearer? As was true last week, a direct transposition of the intra-Jewish debate that lies behind the text historically is hardly helpful. What seems far more worthwhile is to employ the text to communicate the obverse and reverse of a single coin: God calls all and sundry to the feast, and bids them welcome in the washing and clothing of baptism (cf. Gal 3:27: "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ"). Yet no one stands before God on his/her own merits, apart from the faith engendered by that washing and girding, and to think that one does is to court disaster.

The First Reading puts meat on the bones (as it were) of the language sung in one setting of the Offertory, that the Eucharist is a "foretaste of the feast to come." The reading, drawn from Isaiah's "Little Apocalypse," not merely describes that feast, but details the occasion: the death of Death. Canaanite myth (at least as we know it from Ugarit) had described Death's swallowing up the god of life (Baal), at least seasonally (according to some scholars); Isaiah portrays the once-and-for-all Great Reversal: "[God] will swallow up death forever" (v. 7). Even the grammar reinforces the point that in the (literally) final analysis it is God—and only God—whose mighty acts count: every main verb in the description of the banquet has God as its subject (vv. 6–8). Given that death is *always* the "elephant in the room" for humans, whether or not so acknowledged, this text offers the hope that people need to see them through the horrors of the meantime: "Lo, this is our God; we have *waited* for him, so that he might save us" (v. 9, emphasis added).

It is Paul, writing in the Second Reading from Philippians, who offers both sage advice and encouragement for us who wait for the feast to begin in earnest. He risks triangulation to bring peace between coworkers who are at odds (and, I might add editorially, if "Blessed are the peacemakers," that goes double for those who serve that function within the church). Counter intuitively (given that he is in prison), he might be heard as echoing the lyrics of a popular song from a few years ago, "Don't worry; be happy," but he knows why: "The Lord is near" (v. 4). Now "near" (*engus*) can be read either (or both!) as referring to space (even now) or to time (i.e., the Parousia; cf. BDAG, p. 214). Paul even dares to cite himself as an example, but only as a link in a chain of teachers, as he calls on his hearers to *paralambanein* ("receive"; v. 9), a veritable one-word summary of Goethe's great dictum (from his *Faust*): "What you have received as gift, you must take as task." All of this commendation and advice Paul subsumes in a promise beloved to generations of Christian preachers and their hearers as the concluding "*Votum*": "And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (v. 7). GCH

Pentecost 18 (Proper 24) October 16, 2011

Isaiah 45:1–7
Psalm 96:1–9 [10–13]
1 Thessalonians 1:1–10
Matthew 22:15–22

Two views of history contend within the Bible itself, which may be summarized as follows. Sometimes (and for most of the Old Testament) God is depicted as in charge of history and working through the world's powers for the sake of the goals God would achieve through (or sometimes despite) God's people (we'll call this the "eschatological" view). Thus, Isa 10:5 can speak of "Assyria, the rod of my anger," and Habakkuk can look on with horror, as God says, "I am rousing the Chaldeans [i.e., Neo-Babylonians]" (1:5). Each empire struts its time upon the stage, advances God's plan, and receives its due come-uppance, as God moves on to the next historical tool. By contrast, especially in the later Old Testament and apocryphal literature, one encounters another view that has essentially given up on history: all earthly powers are irredeemably evil, opposed to God, and persecute God's people, so that at the moment of God's own choosing, God will break into history to judge the powers of this world and establish God's rule (call this the "apocalyptic" perspective). New Testament scholars have argued for years over whether one or the other side predominates especially in the Gospels (there's little doubt which way the wind is blowing in a book like Revelation, a.k.a. the Apocalypse of St. John). But like many paradoxes (or truths in mutual tension) within theology, neither is complete or final in itself; both sides must be retained and proclaimed, if one is to speak "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27).

Today's readings tend heavily (although not exclusively) toward the former viewpoint. This is certainly so in the reading from Isaiah. The setting is well into the fifty-year-long Babylonian exile, and the hopes of the exiles are at a low ebb. By the theo-logic of the times, the exiles' god had been defeated, perhaps killed, by Marduk, the god of the victors. The prophet audaciously propounds an alternative claim: far from dead, YHWH,

the God of Israel, is the only god who even exists! (Indeed, an entire sermon could be devoted to how it is that only in the depths of Israel's worst trauma that they come to the full acceptance of monotheism.) Isaiah pushes this paradigm to its logical extreme to ensure that his point is clear, as YHWH claims authorship even of darkness and woe, as well as light and weal (v. 7). Moreover, the wheels of history are about to turn again, and God has selected a new tool, only this time not to judge God's people but to deliver them. Isaiah is under no illusions that the Persian is even aware of his master (v. 4). But like God's anointed kings of old, Cyrus is designated *messiah*, as he owes his position and his role to YHWH. The history of the world is about to turn a corner, just so an obscure people (from the world's vantage) can go home.

In its own way the Gospel reading takes much the same view. With a clever trick question (or what recent New Testament scholars would term an "honor challenge"), the religious establishment of Jesus' day tries to get Jesus either to discredit himself by endorsing the rapacious Roman taxation system or to set himself up for charges of sedition by counseling tax evasion. At least on a first (and still the most common) reading, Jesus seems to slip the trap nicely with the famous line, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's" (v. 21). The first clause suffices to avoid sedition, and it fits with the aforementioned view that this world's powers have God-given authority. Thus, Jesus' statement has often been understood primarily as counseling due submission to the IRS in specific and the government in general.

But what is one to make of Jesus' second clause, "[Give] to God the things that are God's"? As New Testament scholars have more recently observed, the answer surely lies in Jesus' prior question about the tax coin, "Whose head (Gk. *eikōn*, "image") is this, and whose title?" (v. 20). The coin bears the emperor's image and so is due him, but, as Jesus' hearers surely knew immediately, it is *humanity* that bears the image of God (Gen 1:26–27). The real punch of the exchange, therefore, is not our behavior on April 15th, but at every moment, as we give ourselves, wholly and holy, to God.

It is precisely this kind of wholehearted, public display of affection for God that Paul commends in what are quite likely the chronologically earliest words in the New Testament. Facing unspecified persecution for their faith (v. 6), the Thessalonian church has become an example throughout Greece of hospitality and fidelity to the worship of the true God. Although one risks over-interpreting the evidence toward the end of the text, it may be that Paul is at least alluding to the "apocalyptic" view of history described above, as he praises his audience that they "wait for his Son from heaven…Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming" (v. 10). Be that as it may, Paul examples a practice that is too often ignored by preachers: praising the congregation when they have done well. Of course, *soli Deo gloria*, *sola gratia*, etc. But faithful imitation of Christ is worthy of public affirmation, as surely as it entails taking up one's cross and following the crucified and risen one. (For further warrant of sharing the joy around a bit, cf. Luther's angels in *Von Himmel Hoch*, who sing with "pious mirth"—a felicitous phrase, if ever there was one.) At the very least, we preachers would do well on occasion simply to make Paul's words our own: "We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers" (v. 2).

To sum up today's readings, then: so much gospel, and (in view of the immanent eschaton or apocalypse, as may be, to say nothing of the increasingly common ten-minute sermon) so little time. *Carpe diem* (*atque Deum*). GCH

Pentecost 19 (Proper 25) October 23, 2011

Leviticus 19:1–2, 15–18
Psalm 1
1 Thessalonians 2:1–8
Matthew 22:34–46

Today's readings bristle with paradox and challenge, yet close examination yields rich insights into the Christian life and Christian preaching.

Take the reading from Leviticus. In a few verses (separated by a twelve-verse lacuna, to be sure) we confront a fundamental tension within the mission of God's people that endures to this day. "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy" says verse 2. That is, the people of God are to be something special, separate, and obviously distinct, as surely as the creator God is to be distinguished from anything created (cf. the first or "Priestly" creation account in Genesis 1). "Holy" cautions Israel of all times and places against blending in with the surrounding culture, especially to the point where they are influenced by their context more than influencing it.

Yet "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (v. 18). While in its original context this would not necessarily entail conflict with "holy," given that one's "neighbor" surely refers to a fellow-Israelite, even Leviticus extends the principle to "the alien who resides with you" (19:34), and both later rabbinic and Christian reflections absolutely put the kibosh on slipping the punch so easily (cf. "And who is my neighbor?" in Luke 10). To love necessarily entails engagement with the "other."

So which is it to be, distinct or engaged? Leviticus wants it both ways—and so, I dare say, does the rest of Scripture. Yet, how easily one could write a history of the church (and, in my fallible opinion, of current American Lutheranism) as the whole-hearted embrace of distinctiveness at the expense of engagement, or *vice versa*.

Paradox and challenge continue as leitmotifs in the Holy Gospel. Once again, we have a war of crafty questions and answers (or "honor challenges") from Matthew between Jesus and the Pharisees. A canon lawyer tosses a deceptive softball at Jesus: "Which commandment in the law is the greatest?" It's a curveball, actually, as the experts in the Torah had identified some 613 commandments in the law, such that any answer could provoke an argument that might potentially undercut Jesus' authority as a teacher (or at least entangle him in a distracting dispute). As is his wont, Jesus doesn't really answer the question. At least, here he offers a "two-fer": first, a quotation from Deuteronomy 6 about the love of God; second, a quotation from today's reading in Leviticus 19 about the love of neighbor. Something like the great Jewish sage Hillel in commenting on his version of the Golden Rule, Jesus adds, "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets [i.e., the entire Scriptures]," or, to quote Hillel, "Everything else is commentary." No argument from the lawyer.

Then it's Jesus' turn on the mound, and he offers up a wicked slider. Having obtained his opponents' statement that the messiah is the son of David, Jesus quotes Psalm 110 (which explicitly is at-

tributed in v. 1 of the Hebrew to David as author): "The Lord [= YHWH] said to my [= David's] Lord [= the messiah], 'Sit at my right hand….'" If the messiah is David's son (i.e., descendant), how is it that David calls him "Lord"? Such would be unthinkable in the culture of the day, and Jesus' opponents are therefore stumped. Dialog between the parties has ended, and the next act of the Pharisees, according to Matthew, is to plot violence (26:3–5). By the rules of the "honor game" in the culture of the day, they have thereby lost.

The paradoxes and challenges presented by these two readings provide us a valuable reminder: in theology (and, for that matter, in life) if a question is utterly beyond our grasp, it is quite likely a sign that, to paraphrase J. B. Phillips, our god is too small. Otherwise put (to use Luther's categories), likely as not we're caught up in a Theology of Glory, rather than the Theology of the Cross. The only god who can adequately guide us through paradox and challenge (and ethical dilemma) is the God who emptied himself of all "positional authority" (to use modern leadership jargon) and washed feet like a slave and died likewise. Paul grasps these truths in the epistle reading, as he presents himself to the Thessalonians not with apostolic authority, but "like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children" (v. 7). Nurses get right in there with their patients. They often do the grunt work (and bear the risk) of dealing with unpleasant bodily fluids and late-night summonses to bedsides.

To be sure, such gentleness is not to be identified with passivity. Paul explicitly foreswears not merely trickery, but also flattery and praise-seeking. "Speaking the truth in love" is not to be confused with telling people what they want to hear. Rather, real preaching is *agapē*—self-giving love—that is proved genuine to the hearers by a congruent relationship outside of the pulpit.

The attentive preacher might notice that today is also listed on Church Year calendars as the Commemoration of St. James of Jerusalem, the brother of Jesus. While, thanks largely to Luther's views of the epistle that bears his name, we often think of him in antithetical terms to Paul, on this crucial point they are in absolute harmony. There is no sign whatsoever that James employed his "positional authority" as Jesus' sibling to enforce his views. Rather, at least according to Josephus (*Antiquities* 20.200), James followed his Lord's road as a martyr, thereby witnessing to the ultimate form of simultaneous distinctiveness, engagement, and servant-love. GCH

Reformation Sunday
October 30, 2011

Jeremiah 31:31–34
Psalm 46
Romans 3:19–28
John 8:31–36

A curious inversion has transpired in my lifetime. When I was a youth in the 1950s and '60s, we always celebrated Reformation Day (on the nearest Sunday, if necessary), sometimes even with multi-congregational, afternoon "rallies." Such services were never in my experience an occasion for Catholic-bashing (or even "We thank you, our God, that we're not like those papists"). But they did serve to establish clearly that we were on the Protestant side of the great Western Christian divide. By contrast, All Saints' Day was not a major observance; in fact, I'm reasonably certain that no notice was taken of it, unless it happened to fall on a Sunday.

By contrast, it is now All Saints' Day that gets the emphasis. We Lutherans are "evangelical catholics," a "confessing movement" within the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church—in fact, in many ways "closer to Rome than to Geneva." Above all, there's a renewed vision that we are part of a "great cloud of witnesses" traversing space and time. For what it's worth, I find this enhanced stress on All Saints' Day quite amenable, theologically speaking.

What's not quite so positive, again in my fallible opinion, is what I perceive as something approaching embarrassment that we hang on to a festival so particularistic as Reformation Day. I say this, as I believe that we are of greatest service within the church when we overtly (and humbly) bring to the table such charisms (to borrow a term beloved by Roman Catholics) as receive special emphasis in our ecclesial tradition.

All of this is by way of preface to some brief comments on the readings prescribed for the day (interestingly, but one set, vis-à-vis the three series for All Saints' Day). The preacher serves no one, if s/he implies that these readings come from some peculiarly Lutheran part of the Bible. As has been stressed repeatedly in these notes, the full word of God—law included—needs first to be applied in a mirror. *Ecclesia semper reformanda* ("the church always needs reforming") starting with us.

What these readings share among themselves is an affirmation of the importance of "to know." But the key lies in the direct object of the verb. While Lutheranism is historically by no means innocent of the tendency common in the West to over intellectualize the faith (and even to make faith itself a cognitive work), the readings guide us firmly away from any such gnostic tendency by insisting that it is not a *what* that we need know so much as a *whom*. Jeremiah, for example, looks forward to the day when "No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me." Such knowing will lie at the heart of the "new covenant" (v. 31; the ultimate source of our "New Testament") in which God's *torah* ("instruction") will be fully internalized, and the heart of the old covenant ("I will be their God, and they shall be my people") will be realized in forgiven iniquity and forgotten sin. (So much, by the way, for the Marcionite "God of wrath" in the Old Testament who still seems to lurk in the Christian consciousness!) In few places in Scripture is the "now/not yet" of our faith so lucidly apparent. The "new covenant" has come among us; in fact, we literally drink it regularly. But still *lex semper accusat* ("the Law always accuses"), as Melanchthon put it, and we remain self-centered slaves to sin.

The Holy Gospel reiterates the point about "whom": "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." It is no cognitive construct that liberates (although, as Jesus-quoting-Deuteronomy reminded us last week, we are called to worship the Lord with our minds!). Rather, it is the Son who works real freedom (v. 36). Discipleship consists in "if you continue (*menein*) in my word," i.e., *logos*—in John's Gospel surely a personal matter, as much or more as propositional. John's Jesus returns to the point in his "Upper Room Discourses": "Those who abide (*menein*) in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing" (15:5).

Indeed, such continuation, such discipleship, is the work of God within us. That is the affirmation of Paul to the Romans in the epistle reading. Again,

the reading leads with an affirmation of what we "know." But this time it's not a person, but a fact: no one makes it before God on his/her own. God's law shuts every mouth that would pipe up to the contrary (v. 19). Then flows from Paul's pen the clearest possible statement that righteousness and justification—all those beloved Reformation words—are God's gift, plain and simple, simple and free. Soon enough (in Romans 6) Paul will get around to spelling out that "free" doesn't mean "cheap" (to cop a line from Bonhoeffer), much less license to "sin that grace may abound." Nor does the Christian life consist in waiting around for the upward call (see Romans 8). But sufficient unto this day is the one affirmation at the heart of all: in the favorite words of my late colleague, David Truemper, "God loves us for Jesus' sake and will never let us go." GCH

All Saints' Sunday
November 6, 2011

Revelation 7:9–17
Psalm 34:1–10, 22
1 John 3:1–3
Matthew 5:1–12

The very assortment of readings in Cycle A of the three-year lectionary reminds us that this is a festival of the risen Christ: just as in the Easter season, there is no Old Testament reading, but two from the New, then the Holy Gospel. But unlike the Sundays of Easter, the First Reading for All Saints' Sunday is drawn not from Acts but from Revelation. Today the focus is not so much on the spreading ripples of Easter in the life of the early church. Rather, our eyes are drawn to the *Telos*, the End (both temporally and in terms of God's goal), and even a bit beyond it.

The First Reading depicts the lead-up to the Great Easter. As was true the first time, a crowd is gathered, palms in hand. But now there is no "Ride on, ride on in majesty; in lowly pomp ride on to die." The Lamb lives! A countless multi-everything multitude has gathered for an eternal liturgy of singing and feasting (vv. 15–16). They are robed in white, "washed in the blood of the Lamb." (I've always felt it counterintuitive to describe blood as bleach, but it now occurs to me that bleach is the one agent that kills even the deadliest agents of disease—or washes away the worst of sins, as the case may be—perhaps one could make a point of that.) "These," the seer is informed, "are they who have come out of the great ordeal."

The message of this reading is the message of the larger book: a word of comfort and challenge to those still in the "church militant" (to use a term in some disrepute these days) that there *is* a far side to the present distress. "We feebly struggle; they in glory shine," as a hymn that does still enjoy wide usage puts it. Our worship now is one with their worship; indeed, our worship now *draws us toward* their worship. This is "blessed assurance," both for our hearers who hurt now from their own tribulations and for our hearers who hurt now over the death of loved ones.

The Holy Gospel is the first dozen verses of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's Gospel. If we recall that Matthew is depicting Jesus as recapitulating the life of Israel and that the Sermon on the Mount is a deliberate parallel to Moses' relation of the Torah from a mountain, then it is helpful to compare this reading to the beginning of the Sinai revelation. In Exodus God speaks the Ten Words (the only portion of the law that Israel

hears unmediated by Moses); in Matthew God-in-Jesus speaks the Beatitudes. The Christian (especially Lutheran) preacher must take care not to leap to a Law/Gospel dialectic here between Exodus and Matthew. In their original setting and intent the Ten Commandments were statements of fact as much as directives, explaining just what it meant to be the chosen and rescued people of God. (For this reason Luther could in good conscience lead off his catechisms with the Ten Commandments and their explanations.) They are, to be sure, idealistic from a human perspective; but they are given as the way of life and blessing for God's people. Just so the Beatitudes: like Jesus' commentary on other portions of the Law later in the Sermon on the Mount, these commandments are, if anything, more radical and more difficult than what Moses handed down. Unaided, we are no better able to "obey" the Beatitudes than we are the Ten Commandments.

Yet, like the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes transcend their theological function as Law to set before the people of God a vision of what God desires for God's people—and, given what we know from elsewhere in both testaments—what God will indeed bring to be. The Beatitudes, somewhat like the book of Revelation, commend those who have spurned the values of the world (so as to be "holy" in the sense described above under the Leviticus reading from Pentecost 19). Blessed (or "happy") are they, and blessed they will be (the Greek doesn't specify the tense, inviting an omni-temporal reading) for choosing the way of the prophets, those "slaves" of the several parables of the kingdom heard in earlier weeks (v. 12). In fact, they own the place (both in the sense of possession and in the older sense of "own," to acknowledge and believe in).

The Second Reading explicitly draws together the present and future dimensions of the other two texts: "Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed." Yet what we do know of what will be is very good, indeed. "What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is." No more "in a mirror, dimly," but "face to face" (1 Cor 13:12). We will look on God and live, for we will be purged of the sin that has meant death to all mortals previously (cf. Exod 33:20; Isa 6:5). Indeed, "we will be like him." Western Christians aren't used to talking this way, but here surely is support for the Eastern notion of *theosis*, as St. Athanasius wrote to Macarius (= "Blessed") in *De incarnatione*: "The Son of God became man, that we might become god." Of course, we're up against the limits of human language here, but the reading tells us that such is to be expected. For now, it will have to do that "we are God's children." And that will do just fine. GCH

Pentecost 22 (Proper 28)
November 13, 2011

Zephaniah 1:7, 12–18
Psalm 90:1–8, [9–11], 12
1 Thessalonians 5:1–11
Matthew 25:14–30

"Now concerning the times and the seasons"—Paul's opening words to the Thessalonians in today's Second Reading capture the theme for the day. On this, the second-to-last Sunday of the Church Year, the read and preached word draws us to the finitude of our world and of ourselves within it. As surely as the year draws to a close, so surely do our lives in the present age and all creation as we

know it. The Bible says little or nothing about the "how" by which this will happen, so that speculation has varied among what we termed under Pentecost 18 "eschatological" means (human agency), "apocalyptic" ones (divine intervention), or some combination thereof as the true "end of history." One can indeed find wisdom in pondering representatives of both perspectives, whether in Walter Miller's 1960 science-fiction classic, *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (emblematic of the former), or the famous phrase from the Negro spiritual "Mary, Don't You Weep" that inspired James Baldwin's 1963 apocalyptic plea for racial harmony, *The Fire Next Time* ("God gave Noah the rainbow sign, no more water, the fire next time").

Equally beyond our ken is the "when" of this consummation (to the great disappointment of many who have attempted to predict it). The Second Reading uses the similes of "a thief in the night" and of labor pains. Elsewhere, Jesus says, in effect, Don't even try (e.g., Acts 1:7). In any event, "there will be no escape!" (v. 3).

That horrific tone dominates the First Reading and the Holy Gospel. Writing a generation before the greatest trauma in the Old Testament, the destruction of Jerusalem and of Solomon's Temple by the Babylonians in 587/6 B.C., the prophet Zephaniah waxes baroque on the theme of "the day of the LORD" that was first introduced by the prophet Amos (5:18) a century earlier. Much of Zephaniah's oracle sounds positively medieval, calling to mind the hymn *Dies irae* ("Day of Wrath") in the Requiem Mass that his words inspired (v. 15) or the tympanum carved above many a cathedral door that depicts Christ in judgment (for a later, more familiar version, think of Michelangelo's "Last Judgment" in the Sistine Chapel). While these remain powerful images for those of us fully immersed in Western Christian art and music (such that I recall a beloved college professor reciting *"Dies irae"* in Latin and concluding, "It brings tears to the eyes"), the vast majority of (post-)moderns will not easily relate to "fire and brimstone" preaching in any form. Another way into this powerful text must be found.

One such entrée, I believe, is in v. 12, where the prophet warns, "those who say in their hearts, 'The LORD will not do good, nor will he do harm.'" Here Zephaniah has caught hold of the real problem of his age and ours, the sense (surely more common in our own day than his) that God is simply irrelevant to the world and to our lives. At most, one can choose to be "spiritual, but not religious," if that contributes to one's self-realization, but do have the courtesy and sense to keep it to yourself. In the meantime, the race for the most toys is on. To this *Weltanschauung* Zephaniah responds with an extended description of what Jesus expressed in a single line of a Lukan parable: "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" (12:20). The prophet expresses the same sentiment in a reversal of the promises given to Israel before they entered the Promised Land: "Though they build houses, they shall not inhabit them; thought they plant vineyards, they shall not drink wine from them" (v. 13). Or, as the modern saying has it, there are no hitches on hearses for U-Haul trailers. And the same could be said, *mutatis mutandis*, of any attempt to make our mark in the sands of this world (think of the fate of the monuments erected by dictators of every era, so memorably parodied by Percy Bysshe Shelley in his poem *Ozymandius*).

For its part, the Holy Gospel is a veritable "text of terror" (to use Phyllis

Trible's phrase). As New Testament scholars now emphasize, it is the third servant who has acted prudently by safeguarding what was entrusted to him, while the other two have engaged in arguably speculative behavior, and the master's words are clearly "over the top," as they call for the biblically (and classically, as in Aristotle) forbidden practice of usury. For his pains the prudent servant is thrown into "outer darkness," joining the ill-clad wedding guest from Pentecost 17.

What we have here is what by now we should expect from even the most familiar parables of Jesus: a radical reversal of expectations. While it would be arrogant to suggest a "solution" to the parable for all times and places, I dare to stake this claim: Jesus is not here calling for his followers to bone up on derivatives and arbitrage; rather, he is calling his followers to the wise use of the things of this world in view of the values and needs of the world to come. Given the likelihood that Matthew's Gospel was written within a generation after the great historical trauma that hangs over the New Testament (the destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Temple by the Romans in A.D. 70), we ought not to be surprised to find an emphasis on recalling what Jesus had said that was applicable to the end-of-the-world-as-we-know-it. Among the greatest challenges facing the Christian preacher is to impart some sense of that perspective and the corollary urgency that it brings to life.

Again, the way there is not via "fire and brimstone." Paul's words in the Second Reading provide an alternative model. After warning the Thessalonians via the aforementioned similes that the day of the Lord will come without warning (like a nocturnal thief) and with great force (like labor pains), the apostle states as fact (not command!) that "you are all children of light and children of the day" (v. 5), armed with faith, hope, and love (v. 8—sound familiar?). As such, he calls on them to be vigilant, but the preponderance of his words are of promise: "For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him" (vv. 9–10). So we're in this together—together with God and with one another. Paul does command his hearers to "encourage one another and build up each other" (v. 11), but even here he assures them that they are already doing this.

Paul has absorbed a lot of abuse in recent years, but in this text, he's clearly brought his "A-game." Not many preachers could (or would dare) to proclaim the End so clearly and purely as gospel, but Paul does. The "Day of Wrath" is "O Day Full of Grace" (*ELW* 627) for the children of the light and of the day. Such is the occasion not for triumphalism (or, even less, yet again, for *Schadenfreude*), but for evangelism in its purest and most literal sense: bearing witness to the Light in how we speak and how we treat others (including other children of the light). GCH

Christ the King: The Last Sunday after Pentecost November 20, 2011

Ezekiel 34:11–16, 20–24
Psalm 95:1–7a
Ephesians 1:15–23
Matthew 25:31–46

"The LORD is my shepherd." These are arguably the most familiar words in the entire Bible to most Christians. Given the repeated use of the divine shepherd

theme in today's readings, it would be no surprise to find Psalm 23 as the Psalm of the Day, but such is not the case. Rather, it's Psalm 95:1–7a (known from the Office of Matins as the *Venite*), concluding as it does with the affirmation, "For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand."

It is indeed that collective sense of God's care for and authority over the entire "flock," rather than the individual comfort of Psalm 23, that is expressed repeatedly in the First Reading and the Holy Gospel. Ezekiel 34 is the *real* "Good Shepherd chapter" of the Old Testament, going on at length about the care with which God will seek out and gather those who have been scattered on the *dies irae* of which we heard from Zephaniah last week: "As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among their scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered *on a day of clouds and thick darkness*" (v. 12; emphasis added). Coming immediately after the turning point of Ezekiel (33:21: "The city has fallen"), this reading pursues at length the metaphor of God as gathering, feeding, and healing shepherd. Moreover, the promises of old (2 Samuel 7) are renewed: "I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David" (v. 23). But the centuries-old debate over who is king in Israel has been resolved: "I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince (*nāśîʾ*, not *melek*, "king") among them" (v. 24).

We meet up with the ultimate Davidic shepherd-prince in the Holy Gospel. Here he appears in terms and title known from the apocalyptic vision in Daniel 7, as the "Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven" (v. 13; recall that the "clouds of heaven" refer to the Shekinah, or "glory" that made visible the dwelling of God in tabernacle, temple, and Transfiguration). Speaking on the day before his betrayal, arrest, and trial (at which he would cite the same vision; Matt 26:64), Jesus describes the moment when he will not stand as accused, but rather sit enthroned as judge. All nations will be "gathered," but not all for restoration from exile, as in the preponderance of the First Reading. Rather, as in Ezek 34:16b and 20–22 (and still more clearly in the omitted verses, 17–19), "I will judge between sheep and sheep" (Ezek 34:17, 22) or, in Matthew's words, "he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats" (v. 32).

Much has been written (and rightly so) on what differentiates the two, namely, how they treated "the least of these who are members of my family," viz., the hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, sick, and prisoner. For, the Son makes clear, in their dealings with such as these, they were truly providing (or not) for the judge himself.

Permit me, then, to lift up two other points for consideration. First, it is striking how much this description of the End bears resemblance to a Wisdom Psalm, particularly Psalm 1. There are two ways of life, that of the righteous and that of the wicked. The way of the righteous is typified by devotion to *Torah* (Ps 1:2), including "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 19:18; cf. Pentecost 19). The way of the wicked is "doomed" (so *LBW*'s felicitous rendering of Ps 1:6), for "the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous" (v. 5). *Tertium non datur*: there is no third way!

Second, note that, despite the many parallels (with negatives added, to be sure) between the judge's words to the sheep and the goats, there is at least one very substantive difference. The sheep are invited

to "inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world," while the goats are consigned to "the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (vv. 34, 41). Only the kingdom was part of God's eternal plan. My purpose here is not to provoke speculation into supra- or infralapsarian cosmology, nor to engage myself in the currently raging (so to speak) debate over the nature and population of hell, but simply to suggest that Jesus is subtly affirming that it is the kingdom of the blessed, not the eternal fire, which lies at the heart of God's "proper work" (to quote Luther) and God's will for all from eternity.

This affirmation leads smoothly to the serene majesty of Paul's depiction of Christ the King in the Second Reading from Ephesians. Paul describes the elevation, rule, and glory of Christ over all things as accomplished fact. The key word in the text is "power." The same power of God that raised Jesus from the dead and enthroned him "far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come" (v. 21) is even now at work among us with "immeasurable greatness." In what might be seen as a flip of sorts on the Holy Gospel, Paul affirms that the church is "[Christ's] body, the fullness of him who fills all in all" (v. 23). That is to say, when the church (or the individual Christian) reaches in love to one of those in straitened circumstances who is described in Matthew 25, we are the hands of Christ touching that one. Christ gives (so Ephesians), and Christ receives (so Matthew); in sum, we are both Christ and serving Christ in the world. Luther's *fröhliche Wechsel* ("happy exchange") becomes an unending cycle of love—akin to Augustine's conception of the Trinity. Dante thought that vision a wondrous way to conclude his *La Divina Commedia*. For us, it's not a bad way to wrap up a Church Year or a life, for that matter. GCH

Thanksgiving Day (U.S.A.)
November 24, 2011

Deuteronomy 8:7–18
Psalm 65
2 Corinthians 9:6–15
Luke 17:11–19

It is perhaps ironic that the one day of the year in which, by common accord, we as a nation "gather together to ask the Lord's blessing" and to render thanks is, in fact, not a Christian holiday at all. While it has roots as a harvest festival on both sides of the Atlantic, it was President Lincoln who first issued a proclamation declaring a national day of thanksgiving in 1863 in a frankly political effort to unite the fractured Union. Beyond any antiquarian interest, the origin of the holiday reminds us from the opposite side than we usually experience it that we dare not segregate too firmly the sacred and secular in our lives. Even a call to thanks as generic as that required by the U. S. Constitution and embedded in American civil religion can serve as a prod to prayer without ceasing to the God whom we worship as Giver of "every good and perfect gift."

The First Reading was addressed to Israel in the thirteenth (or, if one prefers a more critical dating, the seventh) century B.C. Yet how perceptively it speaks to twenty-first century A.D. Americans, whether one holds that we live in the Golden or Silver Age of our nation's history. This truly is a land of milk and honey (and so much else besides). Moses reminds the generation that is about to enter the

Promised Land—and us—that prosperity can be worse than want, when it comes to mindfulness that material wealth, too, is grace: "Do not say to yourself, 'My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth'" (v. 17). Four times, at the beginning, twice in the middle, and at the end, Moses rings the changes on the theme: "The Lord your God is bringing you to a good land" (v. 7); "You shall eat your fill and bless the Lord your God for the good land that he has given you" (v. 10); "Take care that you do not forget the Lord your God" (v. 11); and "But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth" (v. 18). Within this structural chiasmus Moses states that the key to giving credit where it is due is *remembrance*. Remember the exodus, when God and God alone rescued you. Remember the wilderness when God and God alone saw you through hard times "to humble you and to test you, and in the end to do you good" (v. 16). Remember, because God's grace is an act of remembrance on his part: he remembers "his covenant that he swore to your ancestors" (v. 18), and God keeps his promises.

To be sure, unlike ancient Israel (*pace* attempts since Pilgrim times to establish such a likeness via "American exceptionalism"), we have no national covenant as the people of God. But Christians do. Not as Americans, but certainly as Christians who happen to be Americans (along with the people of God of all times and places). In the particularity of our time and place, Moses' call comes to us. Give credit. Give thanks. Remember, for God remembers you. (After all, Isaiah reminds his exiled countrymen, God has "inscribed you on the palms of my hands" [49:16; cf. John 20:27].)

The Holy Gospel, like the First Reading, takes place in a liminal space. For Moses, it was the plains of Moab, on the boundary between the wilderness and the Promised Land. For Jesus, it is "the region between Samaria and Galilee." Both venues call to our minds the borderlands in which we live, between sacred and secular, between past and future, between hope and fear, even between life and death. In the "region between" through which Jesus travels this day he encounters ten people who are, for purposes of their culture, almost literally the living dead. Only with their voices do they dare breach the space to the land of the living, most often to warn the living away ("Unclean!"), but on this occasion to plead for the mercy of God.

And mercy comes in abundance. "Go and show yourselves to the priests," Jesus says, in keeping with the Torah's command (Lev 13:2–8). Nine of the ten hasten to obey. Once again, we face a surprise: Jesus commends the one who disobeys. The Samaritan. The Other. Before seeing to his rehabilitation as a member of society, this one gives thanks and glory to God. Having done so, he receives his word of restoration not from a priest but from the Priest, the one who has mediated the grace of God to the straitened one, now straightened.

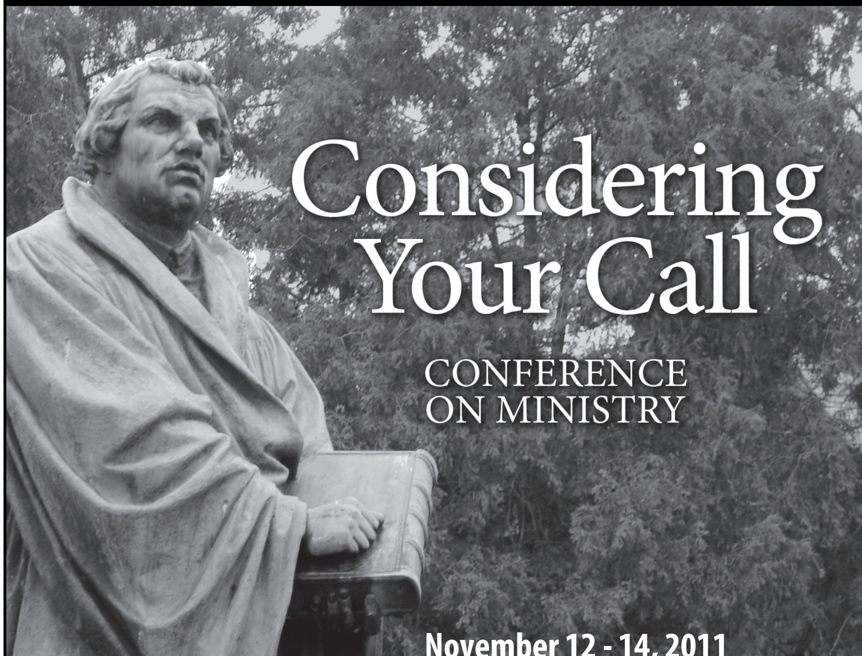
For his part, Jesus has modeled the intention of God's mercy to come upon all—ALL—who seek it. Jesus did not compel him to recite the Shema (or the Nicene Creed) as a condition of healing. He didn't even make him listen to a sermon. And in fact, we know next-to-nothing of the content of "your faith" that our Lord declares "has made you well." He simply healed; the Samaritan thanked God; Jesus commended. This isn't all that the Bible has to say about evangelism. But it's a start.

For every preacher who is skittish about "preaching about money," the Sec-

ond Reading provides a welcome model (in fact, I dare say, one could do much worse on Stewardship Sunday than simply to read this passage, sit down, and let the Spirit work on hearts and minds for a full five minutes of silence). The original context is a collection for the benefit of the church at Jerusalem. It's worth asking ourselves how a text from such a specific set of circumstances could serve so well as authoritative Scripture across time and space (a question, to be sure, that well applies to any passage of one's choosing). Part of the answer, surely, is that even two thousand years later we live in an economy in which the fruits of labor are portable as money and can be both donated and converted for the use of others in need. But Paul's opening metaphor of giving as sowing seed provokes a more profound challenge for our consideration: that we conceptualize giving not as "charity" from our surplus, but as investment from our substance. So conceived, Paul assures us, giving is an act of worship, and like all worship it is a grace-filled response to the prevenient and "postvenient" and in all ways overwhelming grace of God.

It is surely no accident that in the midst of his remarks Paul quotes from Psalm 112, like Psalm 1 a Wisdom Psalm (see discussion under Christ the King Sunday, above). To be sure, "God loves a cheerful giver" (v. 7). But to be generous and cheerful in our giving is also prudent, Paul would dare say. As numerous others have testified, you can't out-give God. Moreover, it's not merely a matter of wise stewardship as measured on a balance sheet. Paul promises, "You will be enriched *in every way* for your great generosity" (v. 11; emphasis added). Exactly what does he mean by that? He takes a few stabs by way of illustration. But then he does what he so often does when he has reached the end of human understanding (including his own): he throws up his hands (and pen) and says, "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!" (v. 15; cf. Rom 11:33–36 for a particularly powerful additional example). The upshot is that one cannot rationally explain the divine economy (in the modern or archaic sense of the latter word). But one can, by the grace of God, give it a go. GCH

Wartburg Theological Seminary



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