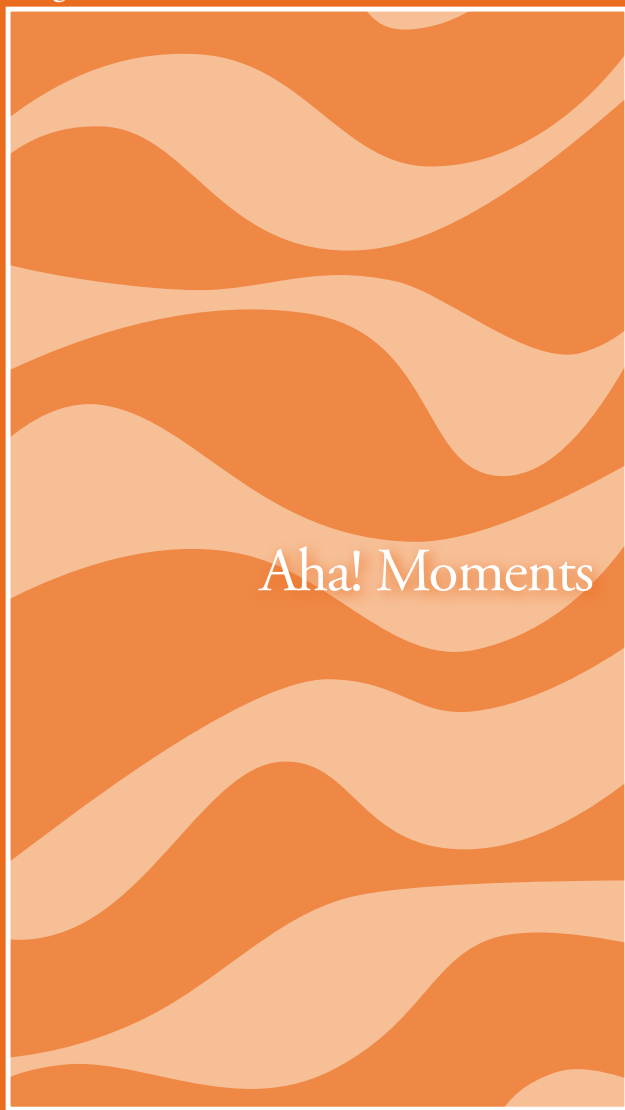


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Aha! Moments

CURRENTS

in Theology and Mission

Currents

in Theology and Mission

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Aha!

Rather than addressing a cohesive theme, the articles in this issue of *Currents* offer a smorgasbord of theological insights that will, hopefully, inspire some aha moments, offer helpful perspectives, and provide practical resources for faithful proclamation and effective ministry. In his interpretative reflections on Martin Luther and the Augsburg Confession, Edward Schroeder argues that Luther's evangelical breakthrough consisted not only of a new understanding of God's righteousness but also of a recognition that the law/gospel dialectic is the hermeneutical key for interpreting Scripture. The Reformer's insight was, therefore, crucial for his future study of the Bible, for the formulation of his evangelical theology, and for his own spiritual journey. Schroeder asserts that Philip Melancthon also employed the law/gospel hermeneutic as he summarized the evangelical understanding of the faith catholic in the Augsburg Confession. Paul Baglyos proposes that the ancient biblical tradition of lament can serve as a helpful spiritual resource for rural communities who face the varied challenges of the farm crisis. He, therefore, urges the incorporation of lament into the liturgical life of rural congregations. Deborah Geweke explores the transformative and relational nature of liturgical spirituality as God encounters believers in the proclamation of the word and the celebration of the sacraments. She emphasizes that such a spirituality must also be nurtured and expressed through loving service, which is an essential aspect of the sanctified life. Robert Saler contrasts two interpretative traditions of Genesis 2–3, that of Augustine and his heirs and that of the rabbinic tradition, of Irenaeus and of Immanuel Kant. He notes that the Augustinian heritage argues for the superiority of the prelapsarian human rational faculties while the alternative tradition considers postlapsarian human reason to be superior to prelapsarian rationality. Saler then examines the epistemological implications of these differing views of reason. Ann Pederson focuses on two reformers who have become instruments of grace in her life, Martin Luther and Joseph Pilates. Luther's bold proclamation of the gospel continues to remind her that God has freed God's people from their frantic efforts to attain perfection and to merit God's favor. Pilates' breathing and exercise regime has taught her that mind, spirit and body working together can bring peace and wholeness in the midst of the stresses and hectic pace of contemporary life.

May your Aha! moments bear blessed fruits.

Kathleen D. Billman

Kurt K. Hendel

Mark N. Swanson

Editors

The Augsburg Aha! A Second Look at Article IV of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession

Edward H. Schroeder

St. Louis, Missouri

Part I. An Aha! for Interpreting the Bible

Thesis 1: The Augsburg Aha! happened first at Wittenberg, an Aha! about biblical-hermeneutics.

That is not the usual description of Luther's reformation Aha! The standard description in Luther scholarship doesn't mention hermeneutics. Here's an example from Jaroslav Pelikan, one of the editors of the 55-volume edition of Luther's works in English:

Luther became the Reformer, he tells us, when he was pondering the meaning of Paul's words (Rom. 1:17), "In [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live.'" How could it be the content of the gospel of Christ, as "good news," that God was a righteous judge, rewarding the good and punishing the evil? Then he suddenly broke through to the insight that the "righteousness of God" here was not the righteousness by which God was righteous in himself (passive righteousness) but instead the righteousness by which, for Christ's sake, God made sinners righteous (active righteousness) through justification. When he made that discovery,

Luther said, it was as though the gates of Paradise had opened.¹

Here Pelikan is drawing on Luther's own words in the year before he died, in the preface for the Complete Edition of His Latin Writings (Wittenberg 1545). But in another place—a few years earlier—Luther describes the same Aha! and highlights the hermeneutical element in it. So which was chicken and which was egg? The Aha! about justification or the Aha! about how to read the Bible? Here's the Aha! about hermeneutics:

TableTalk #5518: Around the time Luther turned sixty someone asked him: What was the primary Bible verse that moved the doctor?

His answer:

For a long time I was confused (misled, mistaken). I did not know what I had gotten into. I knew I had my finger on something, but I did not know what it was until I came to the passage in Rom. 1:17, "The righteous one shall live by faith." That text helped me. I saw just

1. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Illustrated Jesus through the Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 171-172.

what sort of righteousness Paul was talking about. [Because] in the previous verse (v.16) was the word righteousness [of God], so I connected (rhymed) the abstract concept (righteousness in God's own self) with the concrete term (an actual person righteous "by faith"). And I got clarity about what I was doing. I learned to distinguish between the law's righteousness and the gospel's righteousness. Previously I was off-base on one thing, namely, that I made no distinction between the law and the gospel. I held them both to be the same and said that Christ differed from Moses only in historical time and in degree of perfection. But when I discovered the "discrimen" (dividing line, interval, distinction, difference), that the law is one thing and the Gospel is something else, that was my breakthrough. [That was my "Aha!"]

So was the Aha! about the righteousness of faith or about hermeneutics; how the righteousness of God works, or how to read the Bible? Answer: Yes. But Luther uses the "breakthrough" word for the hermeneutical Aha!

Thesis 2: Melancthon then took this Aha! to Augsburg in 1530-1531, where it became the public hermeneutics of Lutheran confessional theology.

Here are the opening paragraphs of Apology IV on justification:

In the fourth, fifth, and sixth articles, as well as later in the twentieth, they [our critics] condemn us for teaching that people receive the forgiveness of sins not on account of their own merits but freely on account of Christ, by faith in Him. They condemn us both for denying that people receive the forgiveness of sins on account of their own merits and for affirming that

people receive the forgiveness of sins by faith and are justified by faith in Christ. But since this controversy deals with the most important topic of Christian teaching which, rightly understood, illumines and magnifies the honor of Christ and brings the abundant consolation that devout consciences need, we ask His Imperial Majesty kindly to hear us out on this important matter. Since the opponents understand neither the forgiveness of sins, nor faith, nor grace, nor righteousness, they miserably contaminate this article, obscure the glory and benefits of Christ, and tear away from devout consciences the consolation offered them in Christ. But in order both to substantiate our confession and to remove the objections that the opponents raise, we need first to say a few things by way of a preface in order that the sources of both versions of the doctrine, the opponents' and ours, can be recognized.

All Scripture should be divided into these two main topics: the law and the promises. In some places it communicates the law. In other places it communicates the promise concerning Christ, either when it promises that Christ will come and on account of him offers the forgiveness of sins, justification, and eternal life, or when in the gospel itself, Christ, after he appeared, promises the forgiveness of sins, justification, and eternal life....

Of these two topics, the opponents single out the law (because to some extent human reason naturally understands it since reason contains the same judgment divinely written on the mind), and through the law they seek the forgiveness of sins and justification. But the Decalogue requires not only outward civil works that reason can produce to some extent; it also requires other works that are placed far beyond the reach of reason, such as, truly to

fear God, truly to love God, truly to call upon God, truly to be convinced that he hears us, and to expect help from God in death and all afflictions. Finally, it requires obedience to God in death and all afflictions so that we do not flee or avoid these things when God imposes them.

The “sources” of “both versions of doctrine” are not differing texts from which the doctrine is drawn—Bible only vs. Bible and tradition—but different ways of reading the agreed-upon text, the Bible. The hermeneutic is the source for the differing doctrine. Change this source and you change the doctrine.

It was that way in Jesus’ own day as he debated the agreed-upon text with his critics. The same for Paul in Galatia. And ever since in church history. Gerhard Ebeling: “Church history is the history of how Christians have read the Bible.”

Thesis 3: So was it a hermeneutical Aha? or a soteriological one? Answer: yes.

I don’t think I learned the hermeneutical aspect of this Augsburg Aha! in my seminary days in St. Louis sixty years ago. Nor even in Erlangen fifty-six years ago where I took Lutheran Confessions from Paul Althaus and Dogmatics from Werner Elert. I must have learned this from Robert Bertram. In the days of the LCMS turmoil about biblical inspiration Bertram wrote an essay—a mere three pages—for the LCMS’s Commission on Theology and Church Relations titled: “The Hermeneutical Significance of Apology 4.” His axiom there was: “Biblical hermeneutics is at no time separable from biblical soteriology.” How you read the Bible is inseparable from how you think people get saved. And vice versa. That’s what Apology 4 says! Which came first, the Aha! about hermeneutics, or the Aha!

about Gospel—chicken or egg?

And that’s why Apology 4 is so long. The many pages of Apology 4 on Justification (60 pages in Tappert, 400 paragraphs!) contrast with Article 4 in the Augsburg Confession (AC) which has only 49 Latin words! Melancthon takes the biblical texts that the Confutators cite—passages that clearly reject “faith alone,” as the Confutators read them—and he uses the hermeneutic of law/promise to show that “these passages support our confession.” He does so by showing the two different soteriologies that are present in the two different interpretations of these disputed biblical texts.

Needed in both the ELCA and LCMS—surely at their seminaries—is a semester-long seminar devoted to these 60 pages of Apology IV. In both the LCMS and ELCA the law/promise distinction is universally affirmed. But it is largely a shibboleth, a mantra, publicly proclaimed and then ignored when it comes to actual biblical exegesis. It doesn’t get “used.” Most likely because people don’t know how to use it. Where in the theology that comes from either place do you [ever] see that hermeneutic practiced? I don’t read everything coming from these churches, but I’m still waiting to see one that does it. Melancthon’s 60 pages say: “Here’s how to do it, how to use it. Learn.”

Thesis 4: That leads to a number of additional Aha’s.

The first Aha: There is only one alternative to reading the Bible with law/promise lenses: reading it as God telling us what to do.

The hermeneutics of “our opponents [is] of these two—law and promises—[to] select the law and by it they seek forgiveness of sins and justification.” That has always been the alternative—“selecting

the law and by it” remedying the human malady. When Luther in 1518 presented his Heidelberg Theses, “Selecting the law and by it seeking justification” was at the center of the theologies of glory which he denounced. The “glory” in glory-theologies seeks God without the cross, because it is also “glorifying” human ability to achieve salvation, if “they would only get busy and DO such and so.” That is with us today. Theologies of glory are achievement theologies. Some belief, some ethical work, some liturgical practice, some spiritual experience, some something, that you could do if you really wanted to is the linchpin for God being merciful to sinners.

The second Aha: Justification by faith alone is the one and only doctrine there is in the Christian gospel.

The rhetorical role of *sola fide* in the AC and in the Apology is different. *Sola fide* does not appear in the AC article on justification at all! Is that a signal that the confessors did not (yet) see that *sola fide* was the “jugular” in their conflict with Rome? The term *sola fide* first appears in AC 6 on New Obedience (ethics!). And here it just “slips in” (no big deal) in a quotation ascribed to Ambrose [actually Ambrosiaster] “Whoever believes in Christ shall be saved...not through works but through faith alone...”

Jaroslav Pelikan taught us this in a confessions class at Concordia Seminary in 1950: According to the AC (Art. 7) there is only one doctrine in Christian theology, the *doctrina evangelii*, the doctrine (singular noun in Latin), namely, the one doctrine (teaching/proclamation) that IS the gospel. The notion of “gospel in all its parts” [a favored Missouri phrase in my lifetime] is not thinking of gospel as the Augsburg Confession/Apology does. How many “parts” are there to a promise?

E.g., to Christ’s words: “Son, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven”? Promises are “simple” one-sentence offers, one-sentence commitments. “I plight thee my troth....” The gospel is simplex, a one-something, not complex, many parts. Jesus’ words too when he passes on the assignment to us disciples: “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven. If you do not, they will not be forgiven.” It’s that simple.

Though only modestly present as a technical term in the Augsburg Confession, faith-alone, trusting that promise, is without doubt the *cantus firmus* of the entire Apology.

Third Aha: If you start with the gospel as promise, faith-alone is the only conclusion you can draw.

Melanchthon “proves” the *sola fide* claim initially with a very simple syllogism. He starts with the simple equation: the gospel is a promise—stated, possibly for the first time in Lutheran “systematic theology” in his *Loci Communes*. Promises do not “work” unless they are trusted. So, “only by faith does any promise work.” The gospel’s promise too. But that syllogism only works when you have had the Aha! Namely, that the gospel is God’s promise. Not a divine “you gotta,” but an offer, a gift, a freebee, a “Here, catch!”

Thesis 5: Even so, we can trace the flow-chart of the Augsburg Aha!—sotto voce, perhaps—through the heart of the Augsburg Confession.

It is my hunch that even when the Augsburg Confession was presented on June 25, 1530, the Confessors, including Melanchthon, did not yet know what the neuralgic point was that would rankle their Roman critics. Not until they read the “Confutation,” the refutation of their confession by their critics, did they learn/

see/know that the *sola fide* was what the fight was all about. That was clearly what the opposition said. Melancthon said in no uncertain terms—I wonder how?—as he composed Apology IV that the fight was about *sola fide*, and that the *sola fide* fight was a fight about biblical hermeneutics. “Biblical hermeneutics is at no time separable from biblical soteriology.” Applied in this case: “*Sola fide* soteriology is at no point separate from law-promise hermeneutics.” That must have been another Aha! after the confessors read the Confutation.

I suggest that all this is implicit in the Augsburg Confession itself, but not explicitly focused on *sola fide* and law-and-promise, which then later were revealed to be the offense for Rome of both the soteriology and the hermeneutics of the AC.

Here is a proposed walk through the AC articles:

Article I says that the Christian faith is about God, the Triune God. [Note: Triune God is not simply the true and correct way to talk about the true God, but the way to talk about God and have it come out gospel]. For example, apart from Christ, God is not Abba, apart from the Holy Spirit there is no access to Christ. Melancthon, possibly for diplomatic reasons, does not accentuate this in Augsburg Confession I. He simply says: “We are Nicene orthodox.” A sample of how Luther speaks of the Trinity as God-talk that is gospel comes at the end of his treatment of the Apostolic Creed in the Large Catechism. Here Luther runs the Trinity in reverse. First we encounter the Holy Spirit in Word and Sacrament, the Holy Spirit connects us to Christ, Christ connects us to God as Father. Monotheism without trinitarianism is not good news. This claim is fundamental for Christian conversation with people of other faiths.

Article II says: with this God we are in trouble. The trouble is that all people come into the world as sinners. They do not trust this God; they do not fear God’s critical evaluation; and they are “concupiscent,” humans curved into themselves.

Article III tells about God’s solution to the problem, Jesus the Christ. He is God the Son, the Word made flesh, crucified, risen, etc., as the Apostles’ Creed says. This Christ-solution continues working through the ages via the Holy Spirit.



Article IV is about faith, describing how sinners (Art. II), when they appropriate the solution (Art. III), become acceptable (righteous before God (Art. I)). The key terms are: forgiveness, by grace, because of Christ, through faith.

Article V describes how this faith happens. God has set up a delivery system [the technical term here is ministry]. Ministry here does not mean the clergy. This delivery system is Gospel-preaching and the sacraments-enacted. The Holy Spirit uses such ministry [as means, or instruments, or agencies, a pipeline] to bring the benefits of Article III to sinners today. When this ministry happens, faith can happen.

Article VI describes the new kind of

obedience, the ethics, the fruits and works that flow from such faith. [The “new” in this new obedience is that (in St. Paul’s terms) it is “the obedience of faith,” not “the obedience of the law.”]

Article VII describes the church as the community of forgiven sinners formed by the ministry of Gospel-and-sacraments.

Subsequent Articles—VIII to XX-VIII—channel the pulse and flow from this theological heart throughout the body of the Christian community and the individual Christian. These articles articulate the gospel hub as it applies to a particular spoke. All 28 spokes of the AC are articles that articulate gospel. Even Article II, on Original Sin, is “gospel-grounded.” Sin is a malady so bad that it takes rebirth through baptism and the Holy Spirit to fix it. Those words articulate what the malady is in terms of the gospel that heals it.

All 28 articles of the Augsburg Confession/Apology “articulate” the Gospel-promise center when the radius is turned to focus on this or that specific spoke, and the “hermeneutics” of law/promise serves as the rim to keep all the spokes anchored in this hub.

Thesis 6: Central to the Augsburg Aha! is replacing the nature/grace axiom (for hermeneutics and soteriology) with the Bible’s own law/promise hermeneutics and soteriology.

I am not enough of a Reformation scholar to know if Luther or Melancthon themselves ever spoke of the law/promise Aha! replacing the nature/grace axiom and its hermeneutical consequences. But that is what Luther is saying in the Table-talk citation above. He used to read “Moses and Christ” as qualitatively the same—with only quantitative differences. In nature/grace hermeneutics both were revelations of God’s grace—Moses incomplete, Christ complete.

The nature/grace axiom (going back to Augustine?) was terminologically a bad idea from the beginning. There is no corollary in biblical vocabulary for “nature.” It comes from Aristotle’s briefcase. And coming as it does as the first term in the pair, it distorts grace (a genuinely biblical term—*chesed* and *charis*), so that grace becomes “a metaphysical medicine, revealed in the Scriptures, now passed down through the sacraments of the church, to heal the damage left by original sin.”

A graduate student back at Christ Seminary-Seminex once traced the term “grace” in Apology IV and discovered that Melancthon does indeed use it frequently, but as the 400 paragraphs unfold, “mercy” [*miser cordia*, *Barmherzigkeit*] takes over as Melancthon’s favored term. And no wonder. If grace is not medicine, but a relationship, then “mercy” compels you to think in I-thou terms, but not about a medicine chest.

You need completely different tools, vocabulary—even “grammar,” Luther said, to articulate law/promise theology in place of nature/grace because there is a subtle (or not so subtle) soteriology that “fits” with nature/grace. The “nature” part—damaged, but still functional—is called upon *facere quod in se est* [to do what it has within it] on the salvation agenda. Then medicinal grace comes in to finish what is still to be done, what damaged nature cannot bring to completion. It is an easy step from nature/grace hermeneutics to the Old Adam’s irrepressible *incurvatus* into Pelagianism—whether full-blown, or just the “semi” Pelagian version of the late Middle Ages.

Thesis 7: A whole new theological vocabulary arises from this Aha! chain-reaction in Apology IV. Especially useful for “gospel-sniffing,” detecting “gospels that are not the Gospel” and learning how to tell the difference.

Some samples from the “new” rhetoric of Apology IV:

A. God’s grace is relational mercy—discussed above. Grace is *favor dei*, God’s favor for sinners, God’s clean-contrary-to-law relationship to sinners in Christ. This grace is not God’s generic goodness encountered in the gifts from a creator’s hand. Of course, these come from God’s hand. But they are gifts from God’s left hand, gifts that obligate us beyond our capacity—or our willingness—“to thank and to praise, to serve and obey him,” as Luther says in the Small Catechism. To make that emphatic he immediately adds the sentence: “This is most certainly true.” That is, our incapacity/unwillingness to meet the obligations that come with such lavish giving on God’s part.

B. “*Lex semper accusat*” (and therefore) “*Christus manet mediator*.” The law always accuses (and therefore) Christ always [needs to] remain as mediator as well. Because of the law’s *semper*, Christ the mediator is needed *semper* too.

C. Rightful and wrongful addition. The Confutators do wrongful addition: adding non-biblical *opinio legis* to biblical *lex*. Rightful adding is: Adding the gospel to a biblical text where there is none. The Augsburg Aha! puts a caveat to the mantra: “Just preach the biblical text!” Not so. Law/promise lenses are needed for every text—before you preach on that text. If the promise is absent, then it is incumbent on the preacher to add it. The preacher’s calling is not “preach the text,” but “preach the gospel.” “Defective” texts need help. “Over and over we say that the gospel of Christ must be added to [texts that] preach the law.” [Apology IV: 257, 260, 263, 287]

D. Checking the “use” of the gospel by applying the double dipstick. Melancthon’s constant complaint in Apology IV

is that opponents “obscure the glory and benefits of Christ and tear away from devout consciences the consolation offered them in Christ.” Misused gospel, or preaching a non-gospel, is both a Christological “heresy” (in “praxis” Christology) and fundamental pastoral malfeasance.

E. Checking the key verbs. Law “requires.” Gospel “offers.” The ease with which “must” becomes the operative verb in today’s preaching vitiates the gospel offer: “Here, catch!”

F. The “saintly” sins. Even promise-trusters are law-defective. “For who loves or fears God enough? Who endures patiently enough the afflictions that God sends? Who does not often wonder whether history is governed by God’s counsels or by chance? Who does not often doubt whether God hears him? Who does not often complain because the wicked have better luck than the devout, because the wicked persecute the devout? Who lives up to the requirements of her calling? Who loves his neighbor as himself? Who is not tempted by lust?” [Tappert, 130, #167] That places front and center before us Luther’s first of the 95 theses: When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said “Repent,” He called for the entire life of believers to be one of penitence. Every day *Christus manet mediator*.

G. When preaching “obedience,” the law/gospel distinction is to be operative: gospel-obedience vs. law-obedience. “We must speak technically because of certain carping critics: faith is truly righteousness because it is obedience to the gospel.... Our good works of obedience to the law can be pleasing to God only because this obedience to the Gospel takes hold of Christ, the propitiator, and is reckoned for righteousness (Rom.8:1). This faith gives honor to God, gives him what is properly his: it obeys him by accepting his promises.” (Tappert, 155, #308-309)

H. From that follows a distinction in worship: Worship of the gospel is to receive good things from God, while worship of the law is to offer and present our goods to God. We cannot offer anything to God unless we have first been reconciled and reborn. The highest worship in the gospel is the desire to receive forgiveness of sins, grace and righteousness. It is so easy to confuse the two yet so easy to detect the difference once you know for what to be listening. Obedience (ob-audiening) is a

because it is so reasonable. It would be madness for good not to be rewarded and evil not to be punished. Law and reason are Siamese twins. Yet when they reign, Christ departs. It is an either/or. “They teach the law in such a way as to hide the Gospel of Christ. The opponents’ whole system is derived either from human reason or from the teaching of the law rather than the Gospel. They teach two modes of justification—one based upon reason, the other based upon the law, neither one based upon the gospel or the promise of Christ.” [Tappert, 150, #286-287].

Melanchthon
demonstrates
how the three “good
news” terms—gospel,
promise, forgiveness of
sins—are all synonyms.

J. In scholastic theology, Paul’s trio of “faith, hope and love” were the virtues that defined a “righteous” person. Obviously you could not be fully righteous with only one of the trio, the faith part. So *sola fide* was nonsense. You were at best one-third righteous with faith alone. With law/promise hermeneutics and theology-of-the-cross soteriology this trio is redefined biblically—as relationships, not as virtues, qualities now “inhabiting” a person, three distinct *habitus*-es, positive habits I now have that I didn’t have before. There is no need to go into a discussion of where hope and love (in addition to faith)—the classical “theological virtues”—fit in. As biblical terms they are not “virtues” at all in the vocabulary of Aristotle, but variations on trusting the promise. Melanchthon demonstrates how the three “good news” terms—gospel, promise, forgiveness of sins—are all synonyms. Faith as the fitting response to any of these three is not a “virtue,” a moral “plus” in the responder. Faith is a “having” of something you didn’t have before—crisply stated in Luther’s epigram: “*Glaubstu hastu; Glaubstu nicht, hastu nicht.*” (When you believe, you have; when you don’t believe, you don’t have.) And what the person of faith “has” is Christ together with all his benefits. Luther’s other favorite synonym for faith—alongside the

listening-to. The verbs reveal to what you are listening—from God’s side “require” or “offer,” from the human side “offer to God” or “receive from God.”

I. *Opinio legis*. [*opinio* = supposition, conjecture] The law “supposes” that the one to whom it speaks can do what it requires. A second supposition is that if you do what is required, you merit some reward, and if you do not, then you get negative consequences. This “conjecture” constitutes the primal theology of every Old Adam, Old Eve. As Fred Niedner puts it: “The most fundamental drive in human beings is not sex, but the drive to be right. If you don’t believe that, just get married.” The conjecture is so compelling

Pauline *fiducial trust*—is St. John’s term, *Christum habere* (having Christ).

K. We need to have some sympathy for the agony of the Confutators. They knew the facts of life: if works don’t merit anything, don’t get rewarded, why will anyone do good works at all? Result: ethical chaos. But that yen to attain merit is not to be satisfied. Rather it is the chronic disease of all original sinners that needs to be exorcised, finally put to death. [Is that what St. Paul was referring to in Rom.7:7 when he tells us that it was the contra-covet-commandment which brought home to him his own sinfulness—namely, he was coveting righteousness, working hard to get it—when the law’s contra-covet commandment finally revealed to him that the very “coveting” of righteousness—even before you received any—was already fundamental sin?] The *opinio legis* covets righteousness; it needs to be crucified. It’s an either/or. Either you keep Christ in the equation, and the yen for merit/rewards gets excised. Or you keep rewards/merits in and Christ must be excised. It is that simple. “By this rule...all passages on works can be interpreted,” that is, not excluding Christ the mediator. [Tappert, 164, #372]

L. Commending works without losing the promise. “The rule I have just stated interprets all the passages they quote on law and works. For we concede that in some places the Scripture presents the law, while in others it presents the Gospel, the free promise of the forgiveness of sins for Christ’s sake. But by their denial that faith justifies and by their doctrine that because of our love and works we receive the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation, our opponents simply abolish this free promise. If the forgiveness of sins were conditional upon our works, it would be completely unsure and the promise would be abolished. Therefore we call

upon devout minds to consider the promises, and we teach them about the free forgiveness of sins and the reconciliation that comes through faith in Christ. Later we add the teaching of the law. And we must distinguish between these, as Paul says (II Tim.2:15). We must see what the Scriptures ascribe to the law and what they ascribe to the promises. For they praise works in such a way as not to remove the free promise.” [Tappert, 132-133, #185-188] “We cannot set any works of ours against the wrath of God, as Paul clearly says (Rom.5:1).” [Tappert, 134, #195]

Part II. An Aha! for Interpreting the World

Thesis 8: If this hermeneutical/soteriological change signals different universes, it will inevitably have equally tectonic consequences for “interpreting the world,” the “stuff” that fills our world(s). In both biblical languages, Hebrew and Greek, God’s word and God’s work are synonyms.

God is at work in the world with two regimes, as the ambidextrous deity of the Scriptures. Lutheran “two regimes” language is about “theo-logy,” about how God operates in our world, not about “ethics,” how humans are to operate in this world. As with all God-operations in our world, our human position is that of responder. We are second in the line-of-action sequence. Key here for responding to both of these diverse God-actions is to respond “responsibly,” a response from us that is “fitting” for the differing divine initiatives that come from God’s left and right hands. Since the two initiatives are different, the same is true for the “fitting” responses.

Part III. An Aha! for Following Christ in the World

Thesis 9: Distinctively Lutheran ethics build on law/promise hermeneutics in using the Scriptures and God's ambidextrous work in the world. The promise always has the last word, even as the law of God is on the screen. The reigning rubric is Melancthon's: to commend good works without losing the promise.

Werner Elert's *The Christian Ethos* is unique among Lutheran ethics textbooks in making this divine doublet—law and gospel—the blueprint for his entire book. Results: 1) Any “third use of the law” is jettisoned. Why? It inevitably “loses the promise” while commending good works. 2) The ethical imperatives in the Bible need distinguishing: law imperatives and grace imperatives differ fundamentally because of the differing “grammars” of law and promise. 3) In place of the law's third use comes a “second use of the gospel” (for ethics). This second use of the gospel commends good works without losing the promise.

Part IV. An Aha! for Being the Church in the World

Useful resources for me on this topic are Richard R. Caemmerer's *The Church in the World* and Part III of Elert's *The Christian Ethos*: “The Objective Ethos of the Body of Christ.”

Conclusion

The gospel is a promise, an honest to God promise. Promises work by “faith alone.”

Today there is lots of talk in our midst about “people of faith.” In North America it is a “pc”-term for believing anything that qualifies as spiritual or religious. Not so the faith that rebirths sinners into God's beloved kids. Augsburg confessors need to be saying that loudly and clearly. Christian faith is case-specific, Christ-specific. And not some “generic Jesus” either, but the cross-marked one offering forgiveness: “Young man, you'll be glad to hear this. Your sins are forgiven.” “Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.” Christ-specific faith trusts Jesus as “wording” God's own voice to us when he offers forgiveness. Should there be some doubt about Jesus' authority for such a task, on Easter God ratifies Jesus as his own voice for forgiveness.

Because human sin and human death are Siamese twins, in order to save folks from one you have to save them from the other. So forgiving sinners and undoing death are equally yoked. St. Paul is emphatic about that (1 Corinthians 15): If Christ did not trump death, then sin is not trumped either. No resurrected Jesus, no forgiven sinners, and any faith in such forgiveness is fiction. Sin, death, law are the DNA triple helix of the “first Adam, a man of dust.”

“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead. The last enemy is destroyed.” The second Adam now has death behind him. So do those who trust him. “God gives us this victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” His post-Easter DNA gets swapped for ours—by faith alone, of course. It's a new triple helix in the genetic code of Christ-trusters: forgiveness of sins, life that lasts, an honest to God promise.

We have God's Word for it.

Lament in the Liturgy of the Rural Church: An Appeal for Recovery

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The Cost of Neglected Lament

Christians in North America gather regularly for worship in the name of the One who cried from the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” evoking the question that heads the 22nd Psalm. Yet that question itself and the cry that evokes it are routinely censored in American churches, except as a detail of biblical recitation. Jesus’ lament may be recalled, and the psalms of lament may be spoken or sung, but lament itself is largely precluded as the substance of worship, as liturgical act, in many North American churches.¹ Many North American Christians are so deeply habituated to the absence of lament in their worship that the absence arouses little attention, prompts few objections, and raises few questions. This inattention imposes a grievous, even if uncoun- ted, cost: where lament is precluded or censored, so are lamenting people.

The cost of this inattention has been

1. A large and noteworthy exception to this generalization is represented by the historic Black churches, which developed a vibrant and sophisticated culture of lament expressed in many forms, including the musical forms of Spirituals and the Blues. See, among other worthy studies dealing with lament in the culture of Black churches, James H. Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues: An Interpretation* (Seabury Press, 1972).

particularly heavy, or heavy in particular ways, in rural churches and the communities they seek to serve. Two decades have now passed since the farm crisis of the 1980s, when the lament of rural people and rural communities attracted widespread attention. Occasions of lament, however, have not passed from rural America. Losses of farms continue, and continue to threaten. Lives and livelihoods hang in the balance as rural communities continue to be buffeted by global forces often beyond their control, their influence or even their comprehension. Every day there are people in rural America who have reason to wonder or ask, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me, forsaken us?”

That is a human question, not a rural question; it is a human question, not a North American question. It forms within the soul of every anguished, suffering human being regardless of nation or demography. But in rural North American communities the question presses upon churches with a particular immediacy, because the wellbeing of rural churches is often more closely bound to the wellbeing of their communities than may be the case for churches situated in larger networks of neighborhoods, population clusters and economic enterprise. Rural churches, therefore, have particular—though certainly not exclusive—reasons to address any habitual inattention to lament and to overcome this inattention by cultivating

new habits.

This essay contends that renewed attention to lament in the worship of rural churches is an urgent pastoral and missiological task, in light of persistent occasions of lament in the lives of rural people. The task is made difficult by what Walter Brueggemann has termed “hegemonic doxology,” or what Matthew Boulton has described as doxological idolatry, associated with the current culture of “praise worship” in North American Christianity. Brueggemann writes: “The church has much praise entrusted to it. But praise taken alone—especially in so-called ‘praise hymns’ that tell no human-divine narrative—is by itself likely to be an act of denial readily aligned with hegemonic ideology. The urgent pastoral task, I suggest, is lament that subverts hegemonic doxology.”² Similarly writes Keith A. Russell, editor of *The Living Pulpit*: “The development in many Protestant churches of the phenomenon known as ‘praise music’ seems to be in direct conflict with the perspective that lament and praise are two sides of the same coin. In many churches that have moved in the direction of praise, there is no room for lament.”³ So also Yale University’s Nicholas Wolterstorff: “The ‘victorious living’ mentality, currently sweeping through American Christianity,

has no place for lament. Likewise, the megachurches have no place for it. Lament does not market well.”⁴

Surely few if any contemporary Christians enamored with praise worship intend their praise for malice, but ill effects do not always require malice aforethought. Hegemonic/idolatrous doxology banishes the anguished sufferer, or at least her anguish and suffering, from the public presence of God. It erects a barrier that admits neither light nor sound to pass between the sufferer and God. God remains on one side of the barrier, shielded from the sufferer’s questions, complaints, protests and accusations, but thereby also indifferent and irrelevant to the sufferer; the sufferer remains on the other side of the barrier, exiled from the company of God and the godly. This essay appeals for vigilance against the barrier erected by hegemonic doxology and for a recovery of lament in worship whereby lamenting people might receive a new welcome in the company of God and the godly without having to check their lament at the gate or acquiesce to an idolatrous demand for praise.⁵

The Witness of Scripture

Biblical witness provides clear indictment against the censor of lament. For example, God tells Moses at the burning bush on Mount Horeb, “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings” (Exodus 3:7⁶). The Bible testifies repeatedly that

2. Walter Brueggemann, “Lament as Antidote to Silence,” *The Living Pulpit* 11 (October-December 2002): 25. Cf. Walter Brueggemann, “Prerequisites for Genuine Obedience: Theses and Conclusions,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 36:1 (April 2001): 40f., and Matthew Boulton, “Forsaking God: A Theological Argument for Christian Lamentation,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 55:1 (2002): 58-78.

3. Keith A. Russell, “Two Sides of the Same Coin,” *The Living Pulpit* 11 (October-December 2002): 1.

4. Nicholas Wolterstorff, “If God is Good and Sovereign, Why Lament,” in *Calvin Theological Journal* 36:1 (April 2001): 42.

5. Boulton, 59.

6. All biblical quotations in this essay

God sees, hears and knows the suffering of people. Moreover, such attention on the part of God is active rather than passive: God sees because God looks, God hears because God listens, and God knows because God inquires. God's attention to the suffering of people is an act of intention on the part of God. Awareness of suffering doesn't simply happen to God; rather, God happens in the act of awareness, in the act of attending to the suffering of people.

The Gospel narratives depict Jesus' consistent refusal to remove God from the suffering of people. It is precisely this refusal that arouses objection to Jesus and leads to his crucifixion. In his encounter with Zacchaeus in Jericho, as he draws near to Jerusalem and the time of his passion, Jesus says, "the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10). Here as elsewhere Jesus identifies himself with God's attention to suffering people, which confounds the idolatrous assumptions of those who would reserve God's favor to the paragons of religious virtue. Jesus' attention to Zacchaeus evokes objection: "All who saw it began to grumble and said, 'He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner'" (Luke 19:7). The terms "lost" and "sinner" are misunderstood if regarded only as moral categories and separated from the larger reality of human suffering. Jesus' attention to Zacchaeus incarnates God's attention to all human suffering, physical as well as spiritual, emotional as well as social. The One whose voice addresses Zacchaeus is the One who, according to the psalmist, "will regard the prayer of the destitute, and will not despise their prayer" (Psalm 102:17). The very scandal of the Gospel

is the radical way in which Jesus fulfills the psalmist's testimony, regarding so profoundly the prayer of the destitute as to make their prayer his own upon the cross, becoming the guest of sinners even to the point of enduring the torment of crucifixion not only as physical pain but as godforsakenness in all respects.

Religious virtue cannot bear this, cannot tolerate it. For religious virtue always intends to enshrine God within the temples of human pretense and to exclude from those temples all whose circumstances disrupt cherished pretensions. Of the Canaanite woman who begged from Jesus mercy for her tormented daughter, the disciples said, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us" (Matthew 15:23). Religious virtue despises the prayer of the destitute and worships a god who similarly despises it; the only shouts permitted in the temples constructed from religious virtue are those that conform to doxological idolatry. Thus does Jeremiah issue his terrible indictment against false priests and prophets: "They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace" (Jeremiah 6:14 and 8:11).

Truth-Telling and the Vocation of the Church

Churches gathered in the name of Jesus Christ are called to embody and to enact God's regard for the prayer of the destitute. This vocation is contradicted when the prayer of the destitute is despised in the Christian assembly. Idolatry is both the cause and the consequence of this subversion of ecclesiological vocation; religious virtue that cannot bear the God who regards the prayer of the destitute must posit instead a god who concurs with human pretense.

The way in which idolatry and human pretense can insinuate upon the vocation

are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

of the church is illustrated in these lines from a "Farmer's Creed" recently printed for congregational recitation in the worship bulletin of a rural church:

I believe that living in a rural area, God calls me to a sacred relationship with the land.

I believe a person's greatest possession is dignity and that no calling bestows this more abundantly than God's call to farm the land.

I believe hard work and honest sweat are the building blocks of a person's character.

I believe that farming, despite its hardships and disappointments, is the most honest and honorable way we can spend our days on earth.

I believe farming nurtures the close family ties that make life rich in ways money can't buy.

I believe my children are learning values that will last a lifetime and can be learned in no other way.

I believe farming provides education for life and that no other occupation teaches so much about birth, growth, and maturity in such a variety of ways.

I believe many of the best things in life are indeed free: the splendor of a sunrise, the rapture of wide-open spaces, the exhilarating sight of the land greening each spring.

I believe true happiness comes from watching crops ripen in the field, children grow tall in the sun, the whole family feels the pride that springs from shared experiences.

I believe that by our toil we are giving more to the world than we are taking from it, an honor that does not come to all people.

I believe our lives will be measured ultimately by what we have done for

others, and by this standard we fear no judgment.

I believe when one grows old and sums up the days, we should be able to stand tall and feel pride in the lives we have lived.

I believe in farming because it makes all things possible through Jesus Christ, my Lord, and I am called to co-create and care for God's gift to me and to those who will live off the land in generations to come. Amen.⁷

It is not difficult to recognize the idolatry in these affirmations. Less obvious, however, is the way in which these affirmations are symptomatic of the habitual neglect of lament in North American churches. The lines of this "creed" echo no cry of dereliction and no prayer of the destitute. They make no appeal to the God who regards human suffering. Instead of lament, the lines of this "creed" utter only the defiance of distressed people asserting their value and virtue in the face of buffeting change. The pastor in whose congregation these affirmations were recited explained that he first discovered this "creed" during the farm crisis of the 1980s, when he was working to provide pastoral care and counsel to farmers and their families who were suffering in the economic collapse of agriculture that led to many farm foreclosures and family

7. My efforts to determine the precise origin of this "creed" have been inconclusive. The wording, spelling and punctuation reprinted here are as they appeared in the church bulletin in which I first discovered these lines. An Internet search reveals the main body of the text (with minor variations in wording) as a posting on several Web sites but no reliable information about authorship or origin. Various other "farmer's creeds" have also been developed for use especially among agricultural organizations and can be researched on the Internet.

displacements. “I don’t remember where it came from or where I found it,” he said, “but I began to share it with people who found it comforting.”⁸

The fact that churches might resort to the “comfort” of a “farmer’s creed” as they minister among people in crisis illustrates the cost of habitual inattention to lament. A god who must be addressed only in slogans of praise is irrelevant to people whose shouts arise from destitution, and a church that has forgotten how to attend to the prayers of the destitute cannot bear witness to the God who becomes a guest among sinners. The “I” and the “we” of the “farmer’s creed” are compelled in the face of any destitution to deny it, not to express it. They are not sinners and they are not lost, therefore they seek no God who seeks the lost. Instead, they seek the god who will measure their lives by their own standards.

Lament is essential to the discipline of truth-telling. Where lament is precluded, so too is truth; where lament is precluded, idols replace God and vanity replaces the gospel; where lament is precluded, a theology of glory replaces a theology of the cross. Martin Luther put the matter succinctly in his *Theses for the Heidelberg Disputation* (1518): “The ‘theologian of glory’ calls the bad good and the good bad. The ‘theologian of the cross’ says what a thing is.”⁹ Lament has to do precisely with saying what a thing is, telling the truth about things. In this sense, lament is akin to the confession of sins. To confess one’s sins is to tell the truth about one’s own fault and the suffering it produces. To lament is to tell the truth

about one’s suffering through the fault of others and—invoking here the full meaning of the word—through the fault, the fracture, of creation. Lamentation involves truth-telling about human experiences

Suffering that
cannot be
named, cannot be
spoken, cannot be told
can neither be healed
nor redressed.

of mourning and despair, grieving and weeping, terror and torment—whether occasioned by the words and actions of other human beings or by occurrences within the natural world. Certainly such experiences are real in human lives; theologians of the cross must tell the truth about that reality, those experiences.

But why? Why must we say what a thing is when that thing involves suffering? Why is silence not preferable? Two good reasons for telling the truth about suffering are healing and justice. Suffering that cannot be named, cannot be spoken, cannot be told can neither be healed nor redressed. Kathleen M. O’Connor has written recently:

The dominant culture in the United States teaches us to deny sorrow and despair, our own and others. . . . Our cultural propensity to deny pain cuts us off from ourselves, our passions, and our inner courage for resistance and praise. It silences our voices. To be open to others’ desperation at home and abroad requires openness to one’s own sorrows. . . .

8. The pastor in question made these remarks to me in a telephone conversation.

9. John Dillenberger, ed., *Martin Luther: Selections from his Writings* (Anchor Books, 1961), 503.

Honoring pain, giving it its due, is not narcissism or egocentric foolishness. It is rather faithful acknowledgment of its power to diminish life. To honor pain means to face it truthfully, perhaps in a long spiritual process. Lamentations invites us to speak the truth....¹⁰

The ultimate reason to “honor pain,” as O’Connor provocatively puts it, is to honor God. To tell the truth about suffering is to recall God’s observation of creation, that “it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). Every expression of lament represents a refusal to accommodate or to acquiesce in a contradiction of the very goodness of God’s creation. Human beings lament in their suffering because suffering contradicts the *imago dei* in which human beings are created. Regardless of the perennial complexities of theodicy, the biblical witness clearly regards suffering and pain as aspects of a broken or fractured creation. Suffering belongs neither to the creative decree of Genesis 1 nor to the prophetic vision of Revelation 21 (see especially v. 4, “mourning and crying and pain will be no more”). Instead, suffering belongs to the drama of labor (Romans 8) by which God’s good intention moves from conception to delivery and birth.

To lament means to call the bad bad, to protest against that which in any way contradicts or diminishes the good. Every act of lament is profoundly theological, in that every protest against what is bad is simultaneously a plea for what is good. Even when no theological confession is intended or consciously undertaken, every expression of lament that cries “no” to what is bad echoes God’s “yes” to what is good. Thus the blood of Abel cries out to God

from the ground upon which it was shed (Genesis 4:10). Creation itself calls upon God to fulfill God’s promise of blessing. The cry that issues from the blood of Abel, like the prayer of the destitute or Jesus’ cry of dereliction from the cross, invokes God as promise and promiser in the face of evidence that God is instead a lie or a liar. In this way, every expression of lament is a kind of witness to the blessing that God pronounces upon creation, because every expression of lament is a protest against the curse of suffering and pain.

Is all human complaint lament, in the theological sense just described? Certainly human beings, sinners all, may complain not only against the bad but against the good as well, as when sinners complain against the good law of God and the judgment that issues from it. Such complaint is echoed in Psalm 2:2: “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and his anointed.” Human complaint in this regard may oppose truth-telling, calling bad what is good. The apostolic injunction, “do not complain” (1 Corinthians 10:10) is relevant here. Perhaps, though, we may distinguish between the complaint that renounces God’s goodness as a threat to human pretension and the complaint that demands God’s goodness in the face of human misery. Even when the demand for God’s goodness is only implicit, arising from no intention of faith, complaint may be regarded as lament on the basis of Paul’s affirmation: “the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words” (Romans 8:26). Some Christians might insist that the intercession of the Spirit occurs only on behalf of those who are in Christ; perhaps these alone are the “saints” of whom Paul speaks in Romans 8. Here too the example of the Canaanite woman

10. Kathleen M. O’Connor, “Comforting the Afflicted,” *The Living Pulpit* 11 (October-December 2002): 9.

bears reflection: the context of Matthew's account suggests that part of the reason Jesus' disciples urged him to "send her away" was because she was a religious outsider, apart from "the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24). The disciples despised her "shouting after us" not only because she was *shouting*, but because *she* was shouting. She and her shouts deserved no attention. Yet she, a godforsaken woman who nevertheless addresses God not unlike Jesus himself will do from the godforsaken-ness of the cross, receives both attention and blessing. Jesus discerns great faith in her. Perhaps the mission of the Christian church requires attentive openness to the possibility of great faith on the part of those outside its household whose shouts may in fact, through the intercession of the Spirit, resound as laments in the ears of God.

Lament in the Ministry of the Church

The church's ministry of pastoral care frequently involves attending to lamenting people. Those who seek the ministry of pastors, priests, spiritual directors, counselors and other caregivers in the church often seek to express some aspect of anguish or dismay from which they are suffering. One of the necessary skills of pastoral care in such situations may be to help render an inarticulate grumble or an unexpressed complaint into lament addressed to God. Caregivers do this by engaging in the sacred conversation that may become also prayer and consolation. Every case of disquiet, whatever its particular details, is a cause of lament. The disquieted person seeks to be heard, to know that the trouble within, whatever it may be, also merits attention and concern without. In the boat amidst the storm the disquieted disciples awaken Jesus and ask him, "Do you not care that

we are perishing?" (Mark 4:38). There is a sense in which this question arises within all human suffering, of whatever description. It is akin to the question Jesus cried from the cross, "Why have you forsaken me?" The suffering "I" cries to a "you" for acknowledgment, for recognition of the suffering, and for compassion in the midst of it. The real horror of any suffering is not just the torment and agony it may involve but the possibility that it occurs within a boundless void of indifference. By receiving or helping to articulate the lament of a disquieted person, pastoral caregivers become participants in protest against this possibility and witnesses to the One who sees, hears and knows the suffering of people. Attending to lament means telling the truth that human suffering does not occur within a boundless void of indifference. Rather than censor or suppression, lament warrants expression to the holy One, the divine You whose Word created human being and alone can fully address its suffering.

Patrick Miller has argued that lament properly belongs only to situations of individual pastoral care because it arises from "those ad hoc cries of people in distress when they are outside community, when they are in the deepest trouble." Lament, says Miller, belongs to individuals and "is not a feature of...worship to be heard by others.... The community is not there."¹¹ Conversely, William Sappenfeld contends that "an individual does not lament.... Lamentation [is] the work of the community."¹² Both claims are extreme in

11. Patrick D. Miller, Jr., "Prayer and Worship," *Calvin Theological Journal* 36:1 (April 2001), 58 and 53.

12. William J. Sappenfeld, "The Church: Voice of Sorrow and Joy," *The Living Pulpit* 11 (October-December 2002): 30.

their exclusion. The anguish that occasions lament may indeed belong to the personal experience of an individual, especially when, as Miller notes, the community itself “is part of the problem.”¹³ To deny that an individual may lament seems patently untenable in light of biblical language—such as in Psalm 22—that expresses lament in the first person singular. To be sure, the language itself arises from and belongs to the community, but that does not mean it is unavailable for individual appropriation. It seems equally untenable in light of biblical language—see Psalm 44, for example—to maintain that lament has no place in community worship. Sometimes the distress that afflicts individuals occurs in the context of their life together in community; it is experienced as a communal reality and warrants communal expression. Lamentation is expressed both in the words of the cross, “Why have you forsaken *me*?” and in the words of the boat, “Do you not care that *we* are perishing?”

The experience of one’s identity as part of a communal “we” is certainly not exclusive to rural places, but people in rural congregations and rural communities may experience this sense of “we” more customarily than people elsewhere. Usually, people in rural settings are less anonymous to their neighbors than is often the case in more urbanized places. The dimensions of relationship between people in rural communities are often numerous and overlapping, more so and more likely than elsewhere. A visit to the local café or hardware store, for example, is likely also to involve an encounter with relatives; school mates or school board colleagues; fellow church members; neighbors from a house close to one’s own; fellow members of a social, civic or vocational organization, and so forth. The lives and livelihoods of people

in rural communities are often closely interconnected and interdependent in ways that shape daily experience and perception. An event or circumstance that brings anguish to individuals is likely to cause reverberations of anguish throughout a rural community and to become, in this way, a communal experience. Rural communities are also more susceptible to the collective anguish that may result, for example, from the collapse of local economy, meteorological disaster or demographic fluctuation.¹⁴ The ministry of the church in rural communities may at times require the articulation of lament, not only in the private sanctuary of pastoral care but in the liturgical assembly of the congregation. In the decade of the American farm crisis Gail Ramshaw addressed an audience at the North American Academy of Liturgy:

There is in our time, as in all human time, the need for communal lament. Recent attempts to reform the Western liturgy of its pervasive character of private penance have led to some extremes in which the Eucharist is a kind of happy hour. . . . The deep cry of human

14. Clearly, events such as the destruction of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, or the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina demonstrate that people in highly urbanized centers such as New York City and New Orleans can experience acute collective anguish that reverberates widely throughout the nation and the world. The point to be made here is not that rural communities are exclusive in their susceptibility to collective anguish, but that relatively smaller events can generate collective anguish more frequently in relatively smaller communities. One recent example is that of Parkersburg, Iowa, a town of c. 1800 people, who suffered the collective anguish of devastation wrought by a tornado that stormed through their town on May 25, 2008, killing or injuring nearly eighty people.

13. Miller, 53.

lament was drowned out by cheerful ditties. We have all come to reject such naïve glee, and we acknowledge the need to find ways in corporate liturgy genuinely to lament.... Our recollection of the history of salvation is merely a selective exercise in ancient history unless it is able to evoke from us that same depth of lament of the weeping individual and the despairing people. We need to find ways that lament is genuinely chanted....¹⁵

Occasions of lament, of course, cannot be fabricated for purposes of liturgical variety or experiment. Genuine lament is always contextual and circumstantial. To cultivate new habits of lament in corporate worship, therefore, requires careful attention to the context and circumstances of communal life so that the possibility of genuine lament becomes again an aspect of liturgical response and liturgical address in the midst of distress.

The Recovery of Lament in the Liturgy of the Community

The biblical psalms of lament are the church's richest resource for a recovery of liturgical lament.¹⁶ Good examples for consideration include Psalms 42-43 and 88. The former pair of psalms is ap-

pointed for use in the Easter Vigil and on the Sunday between June 19 and 25 (if occurring after Trinity Sunday) in Year C of the Revised Common Lectionary, used by many churches. Psalm 88 is not included in the lectionary, but for that reason may lend itself to occasional use outside the calendar and propers of the liturgical year. Commentators usually classify these psalms as individual laments, but a congregation that speaks together the "I" of these psalms thereby ascribes a collective or communal significance to their use of first person singular, as, for example, when a congregation affirms together the "I" articles of the Apostles' Creed.

Psalm 42 includes the question, addressed to God, "Why have you forgotten me?" Psalm 88 asks, "O Lord, why do you cast me off? Why do you hide your face from me?" These questions, like "Why have you forsaken me?" and "Do you not care that we are perishing?" express the anguish of people in trouble or despair or pain. The inclusion of these questions in the biblical Psalter provides the warrant for their use in corporate worship. The church's understanding of scripture as the word of God means that these questions of lament are provided by God for the reciprocal address between God and people. In a sense, God's self bears witness to the divine attention to human suffering by providing the very words by which suffering humans may protest their suffering and address God as answerable for their lives. To offer these psalmic questions for congregational expression as circumstances may require is vital to the church's ministry among suffering people.

The unspecified cause of lament in Psalms 42-43 is the taunt of "adversaries" (Psalm 42:10) and "the oppression of the enemy" (Psalm 43:2). In Psalm 88, lament is occasioned by the psalmist's approach to Sheol, the Pit, the grave, and death,

15. Gail Ramshaw, "The Place of Lament within Praise: Theses for Discussion," *Worship* 61:4 (July 1987): 320.

16. An excellent treatment of the lament psalms, both individual and communal, as liturgical, pastoral and missional resource for the church is the essay by Ann L. Fritschel, "The Psalms: Individual Laments as Communal Hymns," in *The Difficult But Indispensable Church*, ed. Norma Cook Everist (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 23-31.

along with its consequent social dislocation (shunning by neighbors and companions, vv. 8, 18). In the latter case, however, the psalmist's situation is ascribed to God—"your terrors," "your wrath," "your dread assaults" (vv. 15-16). These psalms provide a bounty of language by which suffering people might give voice to their experience, even when it includes an accusation of God as afflicter. Those who engage in the church's ministry of pastoral care know that sometimes precisely this accusation lodges in the heart and mind of suffering people. To preclude the possibility of this accusation, or to deny the opportunity for its expression, not only contradicts the witness of scripture but also precludes the possibility of genuine praise of God from those who have cause to lament. People who cannot address God honestly from the fullness of their experience can neither praise God fully. Honesty of praise toward God requires honesty of all expression to God. The content of psalms such as these, in whole or in part, can be rendered for congregational recitation or chanting, antiphonally or responsively, in corporate worship services that give expression to communal lament. The unspecified cause of lament in such psalms can be supplied by the specific circumstances of congregational or communal experience. The "dread assaults" of God that may be at the forefront of people's perception can be identified according to the specific situation in which the people find themselves. The "adversaries" can be named according to the particular troubles currently endured, and the deepening shadows of the "Pit" can be specified as the causes of present distress.

For example, recalling the farm crisis of the 1980s, congregational worship in the midst of the crisis might have drawn upon the imagery of Sheol and the Pit in Psalm 88 to articulate the sense of despair

many experienced as they faced the loss of their farms and attendant loss of their homes and livelihoods. Many who endured such grievous loss experienced it not only as the collapse of occupation or material sustenance but as the loss of an entire way of life—which means, in a sense, the loss of life itself; "like those forsaken among the dead...they are cut off from your hand" (Psalm 88:5). Many farmers faced with foreclosure also experienced a sense of failure and shame, as if some inadequacy on their part was responsible for the grief they and their families had to endure. Such shame, compounded by the familiar discomfort and loss of words people experience in the face of the suffering of others, breeds the social dislocation articulated in Psalm 88: "You have caused my companions to shun me; you have made me a thing of horror to them.... You have caused friend and neighbor to shun me; my companions are in darkness" (Psalm 88:8, 18). How much more an engagement in the theology of the cross it is to gather people together in order that they might exclaim, shoulder to shoulder, in one voice, "my soul is full of troubles" and "my eye grows dim through sorrow" (Psalm 88:3, 9) than to proffer the vain assertions of "dignity" and "character" in a "Farmer's Creed"! How much more an engagement in the theology of the cross it is to honor the pain (O'Connor's phrase) of those who find themselves overwhelmed as if by waves and flood (Psalm 88:7, 17), especially when they gather in the sanctuary dedicated to the honor of God who separates the waters and stills the storm. (Cf. Psalm 42:7: "Deep calls to deep at the thunder of your cataracts; all your waves and your billows have gone over me.")

Besides psalmody, worship that gives expression to lament may employ also other biblical texts, intercessory prayer, litany, hymns and preaching to articulate

the suffering of people in congregational address to God and to evoke congregational anticipation of God's response.¹⁷ Services of lament might also be distinct occasions of ecumenical cooperation in the ministry of the church, especially when an entire community groans under the stress of some trouble or pain. In such situations, churches of different denominations may find a distinct opportunity and responsibility to bear common witness to the one God who regards the suffering of all people.

To give expression to lament is to commit *insurrection* in the eschatological sense—connected to *resurrection*—that Vitor Westhelle describes in his recent book, *The Scandalous God*.¹⁸ To call what is bad, bad, in plea for the good, is simultaneously to resist the bad and to become aligned with the good. Thus, lament embraces the hope and promise of healing and redress in the face of suffering. This is not to say, however, that lament is merely a therapeutic technique or a methodology of social justice. While lament may result in an experience of healing or effective action to redress injustice, the causes and occasions of genuine lament are likely

to resist all programmatic efforts toward restraint and removal. The lamentation of slaves throughout several centuries and many generations of American history, for example, reminds us that the yoke of suffering is not easily or quickly broken by the cries of those who bear it. Lamentation, however, enables human beings to *endure* against suffering that *perdures*. The continuing crises that buffet rural American communities will not dissipate through the expression of lament in rural churches, but rural people may discover in the expression of lament new power—the strong weakness proclaimed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 1—to live, to live anew, even in the shadow of death that forms so frequently and persistently over their homes, their communities and their congregations.

Because genuine lament tells the truth about suffering, it can also help to ensure the particular truth-telling that belongs to genuine praise. Psalms 42-43 remind us that genuine praise does not preclude lament or require its censor; in fact, and on the contrary, genuine praise on the part of suffering people is predicated on the honest expression of lament. Thus do those two psalms speak—three times—to and from the disquieted soul whose lament has been voiced: “Hope in God; for I shall again praise him” (*sic*).

17. Relevant here, and to this entire essay, is the work by Kathleen D. Billman and Daniel L. Migliore, *Rachel's Cry: Prayer of Lament and Rebirth of Hope* (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1999). Among other topics, Billman and Migliore address the suppression of lament in North American Christianity, biblical witness and theological reflection relevant to a recovery of lament and the importance of lament for pastoral ministry and congregational worship. Observations and suggestions relevant to liturgical lament occur throughout the book, but especially on pages 130-134.

18. Vitor Westhelle, *The Scandalous God: The Use and Abuse of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006).

Woven Whole: Weaving Spirituality through a Lutheran Epistemology and a Liturgical Hermeneutic

Deborah Geweke

Among the most enduring memories of my childhood is the image of my grandmother sitting ensconced within the comfort of her well-worn couch with me beside her “helping” in a task Oma never let on as being tedious—darning socks. My job was to hand Oma each sock in turn, naturally the existing hole was made worse as I jammed my finger through the tattered opening. I never ceased to be amazed by the capacity Oma had to take that which seemed irreparably damaged and repair it with such ease and grace. “There,” Oma declared as she handed me each newly darned sock, “good as new.”

Oma’s lessons were not lost on me. Make no mistake, I’ve never darned a sock in my life. The worn, frayed or hole-ridden socks in my drawer eventually make their way unceremoniously into the trash. No, the lesson I learned from Oma is based not in her skill as a seamstress but in her instinctual practicality borne of lived experience.

I live the life-lessons of Oma in the realm of ministry and theology, wherein I have come to recognize that not unlike the simple and practical image of an old woman making alterations that would render something “good as new,” the task of the church is equally transformative in nature. Ironically, when all is said and done, the task of the seamstress, the Savior, and

his servants is much the same—to bind the broken, to reclaim the irreparable, to draw into one.

Rarely is this reality proclaimed with greater confessional zeal or more emotional poignancy than this very day. As I write, today marks the Festival of All Saints’. I write having been moved once again by the memorial profession of this very day. To be sure, the yearly celebration of All Saints’ is always marked by my own movement to tears. This is often the nature of remembering. I simply am constitutionally incapable of singing *Sine Nomine* without envisioning all of my grandparents, including Oma, being numbered among “the countless host, Singing to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost: Alleluia! Alleluia!”¹ If, however, in its liturgical celebrations the church succeeded only in moving the community of faith emotionally, then the church has failed in its mission as church. For, the greater ecclesial issue is the church’s capacity to move toward transformation in and of the faithful.

1. Lutheran Church in America, and others, *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis and Philadelphia: Augsburg Pub. House and Board of Publication, Lutheran Church in America, 1978). Hymn 174, “For All the Saints.”

The Ecclesial Context of Transformation

Ultimately, transformation is the ecclesial proclamation of this and every day. It is the message borne by those witnesses to the faith who are now at rest from their labors. From them, indeed from all the “sainted” faithful, the proclamation of the church lies within the ecclesial context of *martyria*—that proclamatory witness that draws each faithful individual toward the transformed reality of “blest communion, fellowship divine,” wherein despite our feeble struggle all are gathered into “one within [God’s] great design.”² In its *expression* of transformation, *martyria* serves the church as a confession of faith, an essential action in which the normative ecclesial rule, *lex credendi*, is grounded.

Similarly, it is within the ecclesial context of *leitourgia* that this message of unity is mediated and actualized. In the very experience of word and sacrament, the community of faith encounters the One who affects the transformation of a people who “are knit together in one holy Church, the body of Christ our Lord.”³ Within the context of the church, it is the liturgy in particular, that serves to concretize the lived experience of faith. As the “first among equals,” the *locus theologicus*, the liturgy provides for the communal expression of the word and grounds the communal experience of service as the

normative rule that is, *lex orandi, lex credendi, lex agendi*.

Further, transformation of and in the community of faith is borne by the very actions of the faithful themselves. *Diakonia* is the ecclesial context wherein service functions as the lived experience of faith. Our transformation is incomplete without our service. The epicletic petition within the eucharistic prayer calls for the gifting of God’s Holy Spirit, whose presence is imparted not only on bread and wine but upon the community of faith, effecting the transformation of the community into the body of Christ. In so doing, the church establishes the normativity of *lex agendi*, offering not only our gifts but our selves for God’s usage, in service and dedication “to the care and redemption of all that [God has] made.”⁴

This, then, is the framework for the church’s mission of mediating transformation. Graphically represented, the paradigmatic ecclesial context through which human transformation takes place, might look something like this:

The Tapestry of Faith			
Marks of the church:	<i>Martyria</i>	<i>Leitourgia</i>	<i>Diakonia</i>
Ecclesial “rule”:	<i>lex credendi</i>	<i>lex orandi</i>	<i>lex agendi</i>
Marks of integration:	Expression	Encounter	Experience
Mission of the church:	Word	Sacrament	Service



locus theologicus
 (“first among equals”)

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p. 36, prayer for All Saints’ Day.

4. Ibid., p. 68, Offertory Prayer, “Holy Communion: Setting One.”

Taken as a whole, the elements within the above graphic represent the strands which, when woven together, create a tapestry of faith. Each individual strand is necessarily a part of the whole. The whole, as an articulation of the lived experience of faith, requires each strand. That is, without service, word and sacrament would stand as incomplete within the mission of the church. One might be left to consider the question: in service to and in worship of whom? if *lex credendi* were removed from Prosper of Aquitaine's axiom. It is the liturgy of the church that provides for the communal expression of the word and grounds the communal experience of service. Tattered would be the tapestry of faith if not for the integration of confessional expression and lived experience as established within the very encounter with God.

Toward Transformation in the Community of Faith

"Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:51-52, NRSV). With the Feast of All Saints both the eschatological vision of God's reign and the proclamatory mission of the church are pronounced. Change. Transformation. Conversion. As both eschatological vision and ecclesial mission, transformation—from one reality to another, from one mode of living to another—is both the divine end which the church mediates and the hallmark of "spirituality."

The Transformative Nature of Spirituality

The story of spirituality is complex, even that which is grounded in Christian narrative and practice. Within the flow

and flux of history, the understanding of "spirituality" has itself undergone radical transformation, even, and perhaps especially, within the church. While a more complete discussion of the historical changes within "spirituality" is here neither possible nor intended, I would suggest that it was largely the theological and practical changes within the historical church itself that transformed spirituality from its original epistemic orientation toward the *o/* Other to its contemporary self-orientation, from its early grounding within a liturgical hermeneutic to its present rootedness in individual and subjective normativity.

Yet, in spite of the historical transformation within spirituality itself, it might be argued that the goal of spirituality, the very intention of those who regard themselves as spiritual, remains the same—transformation. Over recent decades this has been the predominant claim of sociologists who, when examining the religious and spiritual tendencies within the American cultural ethos of the baby boomers, have identified this and subsequent generational cohorts as "seekers." The result is a religious experience that is distinctively North American—marked by the proverbial spiritual search resulting from what Kathleen Hughes describes as "a vague awareness that something is missing or something is wrong or something just does not make sense."⁵ The sense that something is "missing" from one's life is that which motivates one to engage in spirituality, participation in which presumes to transform life from empty to full, from broken to whole, from irreparable to restored, from tattered to mended.

Historical theologian Cynthia Jurison describes the transformative nature of popular spirituality as one marked by a

5. Kathleen Hughes, *Saying Amen: A Mystagogy of Sacrament* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1999), 38.

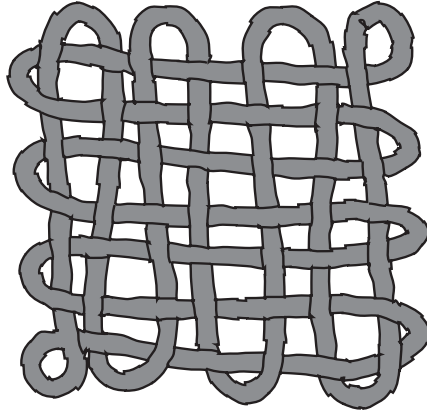
search for meaning. “People are searching for meaning, for purpose, for that which transcends and endures... They have burning questions, questions about their very existence, about the nature of truth and the existence of evil.”⁶ The implication is, of course, that meaning searched for is occasioned by meaning lost. The question that burns within both the social and ecclesial context is: what gives life meaning? Answer this question and all others fall away. Locating that which gives life meaning is the ultimate mark of transformation. Find it, and the search is over.

Ironically, the transformative intention of spirituality is strikingly similar within an ecclesial context. Consider circumstances within the earliest Christian communities, the church at Corinth. Confronted by the apparent conflict between those early Christians who claimed the necessity of abiding by Jewish law and those who did not, Paul distinguishes the new covenant from the old in claiming a clarity that exists within the present Christian community. In the person of Christ, Paul argues, the veil of God’s hiddenness is removed. God is revealed in Christ Jesus—a revelation that takes place by virtue of the Spirit:

when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:16-18, NRSV).

In addressing the ministry of the Corinthian church, Paul grounds spiritual

transformation in the involvement of a very specific spirit. That is, spirituality within the early church is reflected in the biblical narrative which portrays that specific “spirit” with occupies the “spiritual.” For



Paul, the “spiritual” is most consistently used in an adjectival form. *Pneumatikos* as that “adjective formed from *pneuma*, conveys the sense of belonging to the realm of the spirit/Spirit, of the essence or nature of spirit/Spirit, embodying or manifesting spirit/Spirit.”⁷ As such, that which is spiritual is always grounded in its object—*pneuma*. Comprehending the biblical understanding of “spirit,” however, is no easy task. The word occurs almost 350 times in the New Testament, the largest single usage occurring in Matthew 12, relating to an expulsion of demons.⁸ For the biblical writer, there clearly exist multiple spirits, any of which might garner our “spiritual” allegiance.

Paul, however, makes a distinction. In

7. *Pneumatikos*, ed. Colin Brown, The New International Dictionary of the New Testament, V. 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 706.

8. Kenneth Leech, *Experiencing God: Theology as Spirituality*, 1st U.S. ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 113.

6. Cynthia Jürisson, “Pop Spirituality: An Evangelical Response,” *Word & World* 18, no. 1 (1988): 17.

addressing the divisions that existed within the church at Corinth, Paul distinguishes between two distinct groups and identifies that which defines their distinction:

Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny. "For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:14-16, NRSV).

For Paul, those who are regarded as "spiritual" are deemed such because of their relationship with God's Spirit, and through this Spirit with Christ himself. Paul and other biblical writers further identify God's Spirit as that which is "most holy." The association of the adjective *hagios* with *pneuma* occurs multiple times in the New Testament. Its usage directs us to the specific and normative claim of scripture that that "spirit" which renders one "spiritual" is the *Holy Spirit of God*. According to Sandra Schneiders, "The spiritual person is one who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God...the word 'spirituality' has its origin in Christian usage and that its root reference is to the presence and influence of the Holy Spirit."⁹ A spirituality, therefore, that claims the ecclesial normativity of scripture, is one that generates relationship with the Holy Spirit of God. Biblical spirituality, thus, in answering the question "what gives life meaning" directs us to the pneumatological assertion that by God's Holy Spirit we encounter God. That is, meaning is grounded in relationship. From the perspective of the church, spirituality

that is truly transformative is "found" not in the perceived sources of meaning that impel one to search repeatedly because the located source of meaning does not transcend differing circumstances. Clearly, the ongoing nature of this particular brand of spirituality suggests that the source of meaning is found within an orientation to self. Such individual and subjective normativity will never locate a source of meaning that is fully and finally transformative, thereby fulfilling the spiritual search. Ironically, and somewhat unexpectedly, only a spirituality that is oriented toward an o/Other transforms life into that which is meaning full. This is spirituality that is grounded in relationship and framed within a tapestry of faith wherein the very encounter with God integrates both confessional expression and lived experience.

A Liturgical Hermeneutic

Perhaps the greatest irony rests in the utter fallacy of the spiritual "search." The spiritual seeking that characterizes contemporary spirituality is wholly tied to the postmodern presumption that that which is normative is the self. Or to be even more accurate, the postmodern presumption is a multiplicity of Cartesian self-normativity. So it may be most accurate to speak not of contemporary spirituality but contemporary spiritualities. The implication being that that which is normative for you may not be normative for me—that my spiritual search may have little impact on your quest for meaning.

Implicit within this postmodern puzzle is the self's value of the search itself. Only a brief visit to the "religion/spirituality" section of any bookstore is needed to demonstrate the wide variety of prospective answers to the spiritual search for each life's meaning.

As consistent as the language and im-

9. Sandra Schneiders, "Theology and Spirituality: Strangers, Rivals, or Partners," *Horizons* 13 (1986): 258.

age of the spiritual search is, it is wrong! For it is based on the presumption that we each engage the search. It is implied in the “order” of the spiritual quest wherein I recognize that something is missing. I sense the need to fill an expansive emptiness. I, therefore, engage the spiritual search. If I am lucky (or perhaps blessed?) I find God.

There is, however, an *ordo* that claims a different order. It is the sacramental nature of the community of faith that “essentially takes its rise from [the] conviction of being sought by God.”¹⁰ For all our spiritual epitaphs claiming our own loss, our own emptiness, our own holes, we often fail to consider that God yearns for God’s own creation. Nowhere is this expressed with more passion or experienced with greater immediacy than in the community’s eucharistic participation, as it is here that we encounter God. With great vision, Nathan Mitchell describes this encounter, “Only when we ingest a scrap of bread and a swallow of wine so meager they leave us *more* hungry, rather than less so, can we come to understand not our desire for God, but God’s infinite longing for us. Ritual is revelation’s way of coming home to history.”¹¹ It is God’s hunger for relationship with those who have abandoned God that impels God to action. God finds us. God searches us out and comes to us in a very specific way through the liturgical, and particularly sacramental, encounter.

Through the liturgical encounter of the community of faith with God, sacra-

ment effects human reality. In describing the impact of the church’s sacraments in the life of the church, David Scaer asserts that “baptism places the believer in Christ, [and] the Supper makes Christ part of the believer.”¹² In our sacramental encounter with God, transformation takes place. Inasmuch as Creator transcended divine exclusiveness from Creation in God’s bursting forth as incarnate Son and God’s drawing near as immanent Spirit, when the faithful gather around word and sacrament we too are drawn into relationship with the God who exists only as Relationship. “At the heart of the Christian faith,” claims Don Saliers:

is our participation in the dying and rising of Jesus Christ and our being drawn into the triune life of God. This participation itself is the essence of every faithful gathering for worship. In every liturgy of Word and Sacrament we are reoriented toward this life in the Spirit. Such a participation involves conversion and growth in grace toward the fullness of who Jesus Christ is.¹³

Being drawn into the triune life of God is utterly transformative. Indeed, according to Nathan Mitchell, transformation is the very goal of the liturgy:

Indeed, the history of Christian worship is less the chronicle of its ritual and forms than the cumulative impact of changed lives on all participants. Take that away, and one has ideologically driven ritualism rather than worship of a God whose glory is seen in the disfigured body on the cross...it is precisely

10. Ann Loades, “Sacramentality and Christian Spirituality,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality*, ed. Arthur Holder (Oxford; Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 255.

11. Nathan Mitchell, *Meeting Mystery: Liturgy, Worship, Sacraments* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2006), 143.

12. David Scaer, “Baptism and the Lord’s Supper in the Life of the Church,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 45, no. 1-2 (1981): 47.

13. Don E. Saliers, *Worship and Spirituality*, 1st ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 43.

change...Such change is a process “partly conscious and partly unconscious...long term and dialectical,” its agents “more likely to be charwomen and shopkeepers than pontiffs and professors.”¹⁴

Mitchell references the unexpected agents in this process with surprise and subtlety. Charwomen, shopkeepers, and, I might add, seamstresses, all have at least one thing in common—experience. Not the particularity of specific experience, but experience itself, the instinctual practicality that engenders life lessons and points to life’s meaning. “Good as new,” Oma would claim. “Good as new,” our Lord proclaims as we are re-claimed by God and drawn into relationship with the very One who exists as Relationship. Relationship in and with God—Father, Son and Spirit—transforms humanity from the self-orientation that characterizes broken relationship, to the o/Other orientation of relationship restored—with God and one another. Word and sacrament gather the faithful into one body, one faith, one mission. Word and sacrament send the faithful as the body in service, which embodies one ministry and one union in Christ. One united community—human and divine—participating in relationship, as it was intended and toward which the eucharistic feast orients.

The Transformation of the Community of Faith

“Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:51-52, NRSV). There is little doubt

14. Mitchell, 43.

that the transformation of which Paul here speaks is that which is grounded in the ultimacy of resurrection from death to new life. Paul’s comments regarding the transformation that we might anticipate are, however, set within the context of a larger discussion with the Corinthian church regarding not only the resurrection of the dead but resurrection from death, as that which was initiated by “Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:23, NRSV). Paul’s rhetoric may suggest a confrontation with those Corinthians who perhaps questioned the authenticity of resurrection. The task Paul seems to be undertaking, therefore, is to convince these earliest of Christians that to affirm the resurrection of the dead depends upon an affirmation of Christ’s own resurrection from the dead. The eschatological imperative of Paul’s argument grounds a hope that is backwards looking. That is, the faith in which we live is marked by transformative movement toward a goal that is not merely hoped for but certain. Given the crucifixion of the risen Christ (as Moltmann might note)¹⁵ we ourselves, along with Paul, are able to proclaim that “we will be changed” because, in fact, we have been. In Christ’s resurrection from the dead, both past and present are firmly set within the eschatological hope that is our movement in and toward the transformative reality of life, even as that life is set within the reign of God that is both now and not yet, real and anticipated.

This is the very eschatological claim on which hangs not only the theology but the praxis of the community of faith. Often, as the community gathers around

15. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* (London: SCM, 1996). (Cf. the eschatological images Moltmann uses, such as referencing the death and resurrection of Christ “the Coming One.”)

word and sacrament, in order to bury one of its own, the claim of St. Paul provides an enduring message of hope. “We will be changed.” As a text suggested for “Burial of the Dead,” Paul’s words of hope are often the culminating proclamation in our own backward-looking journey of eschatological living. The resurrection of Christ ushers in our own. This certainty enables our proclamatory response from a lifetime of Easters, wherein “Christ is Risen” is uttered with certitude in light of the Pauline claim communally expressed by the propers of that day.¹⁶ Indeed, the assurance of our own transformation marks the very beginning of our eschatological journey. In the outpouring of Christ in the waters of baptism, by which we are grafted to Christ’s own death and resurrection, our own transformation is set in motion. “We will be changed,” because we have been. We have been changed, because we will be!

The Gift of the Reformation— a Lutheran Epistemology

Clearly, the claim and reality of radical transformation is not only in death, but in life as well. In the Lutheran rite of Holy Baptism the opening address images the transformation of humanity that is “join[ed]...to the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.”¹⁷ This joining transforms our reality in that even as “we are born children of a fallen humanity; in the waters of Baptism we are reborn children of God....”¹⁸ It is a transformation that utterly changes our relationships

and, in so doing, the very lived experience of faith.

The trinitarian affirmation by which the rite of Holy Baptism closes establishes our transformed relationships in the form of a greeting to the newly baptized by the community who now welcomes them in. “We welcome you into the Lord’s family. We receive you as fellow members of the body of Christ, children of the same heavenly Father, and workers with us in the kingdom of God.”¹⁹ The mark of baptism transforms individual to communal, self to family. The ecclesial welcome into the church proclaims the divine community in which the community of faith participates, as it is the One who is Relationship—Father, Son, and Spirit—who draws us into the body, adopts us as children, and enables our work in the present reign of God.

Historically, Lutherans have laid strong claim to this—our transformation in Christ, through the Holy Spirit, into a renewed relationship with the Father. This being said, it may be that the language and image with which the Lutheran church has historically identified this transformation may not have always been the most helpful, particularly with regard to the impact on the lived experience of faith.

The medieval context out of which the Lutheran church arose provided a strong claim to the justificatory transformation of creation that was due to the satisfaction of the Creator by means of the sacrificial death of the Son. In contrast, justification by grace through faith was the great awakening of Luther to not only the imputation of gracious love granted in the death and resurrection of Christ, but the very relationship of the beloved with the One who loves as Relationship. That is, the particular gift of the Reformation is a reappropriation of a Pauline hermeneutic

16. 1 Corinthians 15 is among the suggested readings for the Resurrection of Our Lord.

17. Lutheran Church in America and others, 121. Rite of “Holy Baptism,” opening address.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*, 125.

by Luther wherein justification that is affected by grace is effected through faith. In holding to the “doctrine by which the church stands or falls” Luther reframed the traditional medieval hermeneutic of the church, *opus operatum*, in light of the justificatory effect of faith. In so doing, *opus operantis* became the new hermeneutic of the Reformation which claimed a pneumatological christology. Luther’s

axiom in our assertion of *lex orandi, lex credendi*. To be sure, Lutherans “do” word well. Lutherans even “do” sacrament well. Where Lutherans may come up short, however, is in service.

This claim is based on the extensive data collected through the recent Lutheran Liturgical Spirituality survey conducted among congregational members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.²⁰ In evaluating that which is “included within ‘spirituality,’” as the lived experience of faith, only 54.4% of survey respondents included “living an ethical life in service to others, actively opposing injustice and oppression.”²¹ Similarly, in identifying that which “contributes most to your ‘spirituality,’” ELCA Lutherans readily identified: relationship with God (76.5%), personal prayer and devotion (68.1%), and communal and sacramental worship (67.6%), at a rate far greater than: relationship with others (51.4%) and service in the world (45.3%.) This data is reflected even in the Lutheran understanding of God’s presence within the liturgy. As liturgically grounded in word and sacrament, it was of no surprise to see Lutherans reflect the liturgical event in which God is least experienced as: Eucharist (1.2%), prayers (3.1%), lessons

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God is an
encounter with divine
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community.

theology of the cross, therefore, is seen to include not only Good Friday, but Easter and Pentecost as well. This, then, for us becomes the particular proclamation of the liturgy, as it is in word, sacrament, and service whereby we receive transformation in both the grace of God’s forgiveness and the gift of reconciled relationship with the o/Other, both divine and human. From broken to whole. From irreparable to restored. From tattered to mended.

If there is, however, a limitation in Lutheran theology and praxis, it is here. While Lutherans have had a strong tradition of recognizing our restored relationship with God, we have not been so quick to realize the impact of justification on our relationship with one another. That is, Lutherans tend to truncate Prosper’s

20. This survey provided the empirical data upon which my doctoral thesis was based. Over 12,000 ELCA pastors and congregations were contacted via e-mail and invited to complete the web-posted survey. Over 1800 respondents generated the data that make up the Lutheran Liturgical Spirituality survey.

21. As compared to the following inclusions within spirituality: 77.4% – “The experience of God through Word and Sacrament;” 71.2% – “That which gives life meaning and purpose is God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit;” and 62.5% – “That which gives life meaning and purpose.”

(5%), sermon (6.4%). However, the most divergent response in the entire survey is reflected in the 50.7% of responders who “experience God least” in the dismissal, whereby the community of faith is called to “Go in peace. Serve the Lord.”

The implication claimed by the Lutheran Liturgical Spirituality survey is that sometimes Lutherans forget that *lex agendi* is a necessary strand in the tapestry of faith, the exclusion of which creates a hole in which:

doxology and doctrine remain a cozy *ménage à deux*, each partner in the pair defining itself in terms of the other. But the deeper question is not whether faith controls worship, or vice versa, but whether either of them can be verified in the absence of a *lex agenda* (a rule of action or behavior), an ethical imperative that flows from the Christian’s encounter with God...²²

Encounter with God is an encounter with divine Relationship. Father, Son, and Spirit are the God who *is* divine community. Justification which imputes grace enacts forgiveness, a reorientation from the sinful self to the Other and, hence, renewed relationship with God who only exists as Relationship. This is the gracious affect of justification.

Luther, however, recognized justification’s other side—the transformative effect of faith. Sometimes referred to as “effective justification,” Christians in general, and Lutherans in particular, have traditionally referred to this as “sanctification” and have often regarded sanctification as something almost additional and subsequent to justification. The very structure of the liturgical year challenges this presumption, as Pentecost draws the great fifty days to a close. If the sending of the Spirit is, thus, a part of the transformative justification

of God, then the effect of the Spirit must also be regarded as participating in the justificatory process. The implication is, of course, that justification is not only once-for-all, but ongoing, a process in which the faithful participate not only in our renewed relationship with God but with others, in the very transformative reorientation from self to the o/Other. That is, the justificatory effect of faith is not merely the assent of belief but the action of love.

Participation in the justificatory process is our eschatological joining in the present reign of God. The Pauline pronouncement that “we will be changed” is affirmed within the experience of faith wherein we live as having been changed. Ecclesial movement toward transformation insists upon our greater incorporation into Christ who draws history, in its present expression of God’s reign, ever nearer to the fullness of God’s reign. That is, renewed relationship with God, participation in the divine community, claims that “those who share in the life of the Trinity cannot shut out the other who lives in the same life of the Father, Son and Spirit.”²³ As such, the lived experience of faith must include service-*diakonia-lex agendi* within the tapestry of faith in order that the church’s mission of mediating transformation may lead the faithful from the self to the o/Other, both divine and human. From broken to whole. From irreparable to restored. From tattered to mended.

Weaving spirituality through a liturgical hermeneutic and a Lutheran epistemology claims the normative centrality not of the self but of the o/Other, as such spirituality creates an orientation

23. Moira O’Sullivan, “The Integration of Trinitarian Theology and Spirituality,” in *Australian Lonergan Workshop*, ed. William Danaher (Lanham: University Press of America, 1993), 89.

22. Mitchell, 39.

toward both God and the world. It impels the spiritual search, so characteristic of the postmodern ethos, not deeper into the individualism and subjectivity of one's own self, but into the open arms of relationship. Perhaps herein rests the greatest irony, that the meaning which each individual seeks to find, is ultimately located in renewed relationship with one another and all with Father, Son, and Spirit.

There, good as new.

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The Transformation of Reason in Genesis 2–3: Two Options for Theological Interpretation

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This essay will seek to identify a variety of interrelated yet distinct strands within Christian interpretations of Genesis 2–3 as a means of demonstrating the narrative reality of knowledge’s ambiguity in the story. The paper will propose a heuristic schema based on two categories of hermeneutical options. Both depend upon the interpreter’s understanding of how Genesis 2–3 portrays the character of human understanding before and after the expulsion from Eden.

My description of the first option, which for simplicity’s sake I will term the “classical fall tradition,” will begin by identifying the Pauline roots of what would become the Augustinian notion of “original sin.” I intend to trace the impact of this doctrine through representative thinkers in order to show how this tradition gives rise to exegetical strategies that see in Genesis 2–3 the fall of human reason into a degenerate state. I will then investigate a second strand of interpretation that rejects the grounding assumptions of the classical fall tradition. Here I will give a brief description of the interpretive strategies favored by Enlightenment thinkers, in which the knowledge gained through humanity’s act of disobedience opens up felicitous new avenues for rational human existence. I will then argue that the interpretive task

pursued by many contemporary interpreters seeks to appropriate certain aspects of this characteristically modernist position within a post-Enlightenment context. These interpreters bring to Genesis 2–3 a perspective that emphasizes the fact that humanity’s exercise of reason is always shot through with ambivalence (including the potential for disaster).

The Fall of Reason in Christian tradition

The single most decisive event in assuring that the interpretation of Genesis 3 as a thoroughgoing and decisive fall in human history would become dominant in Christian theology was, arguably, the 529 Synod of Orange. Here, almost one hundred years after the death of Augustine of Hippo, a gathering of bishops declared that theologian’s mature views on original sin to be the official teaching of the Catholic Church. The notion that the events of Genesis 2–3 effected an ontological degeneration in all of humanity thus became the defining Christian teaching on theological anthropology.

As several scholars of Jewish literature have suggested, the two figures that loom most prominently in the background of Orange—Paul and Augustine—were not

fully original in ascribing the primeval couple's sin to all of humanity. Rather, this idea seems already to be a presence in the writings of Hellenic Judaism. However, the so-called sin of the primeval couple plays a remarkably small role in the Hebrew Bible itself. The transgression goes unmentioned in the remainder of the Pentateuch. In much of the intertestamental literature, when Adam is mentioned the tone is often hagiographic rather than critical (e.g., Sirach 49:16: "Shem and Seth and Enosh were honored by people, but above every other created living being was Adam."). More importantly, virtually none of the literary traditions preserved in the Old Testament stress the idea that humanity is epistemologically corrupted in any way.¹ However, some gaps in this otherwise imposing silence do appear within the intertestamental literature.

"For the first *adam*, burdened with an evil heart, transgressed and was overcome, as were also all who were descended from him... Oh Adam, what have you done? For though it was you who sinned, the fall was not yours alone, but ours also who are your descendents" (4 Ezra 3:21; 7:118). There is little chance that the book of 4th Ezra, which most scholars date to about 90 CE, was influenced by nascent Christian anthropology. Thus, we are left to conclude that the author is likely drawing upon a tradition within Hellenistic Judaism that regarded the effects of Adam's transgression as having permanently altered humanity's condition before God. This is corroborated by Ben Sira, who was able to include in his extended polemic against evil women the statement "from a woman sin had its beginning, and because of her we all die" (Sirach 25:24) as well by as the Wisdom of Solomon, which likely predates Paul's writings by only a few years: "For God

created us for incorruption, and made us in the image of his own eternity; but through the devil's envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his company experience it" (2:23-4).

These texts reinforce the sense that the idea of a paradigmatic sin through which death entered the world was a presence in the intellectual landscape of intertestamental Judaism. Indeed, it is possible that this notion has even deeper roots in biblical Israel, as some commentators have posited that Ezekiel's lamentation over the king of Tyre (Ezekiel 28:11 ff) suggests that the author had access to a variant on the Eden story that emphasized the sin of pride on the part of its protagonist. Thus, at this point it seems reasonable to give at least qualified approval to James Barr's contention that "Paul's whole concept of sin and death entering through Adam and passing on to all creatures is apparently dependent on the mediation of the Genesis story through Hellenistic Judaism."²

Regardless of this possible Jewish influence, however, Paul's reading of Genesis 2–3 casts the story in uniquely Christocentric terms, and this has crucial implications for the tradition that would come to regard Adam's transgression as the advent of knowledge's corruption. In Paul's theology, Adam the transgressor becomes the rhetorical and theological counterpoint to Christ the redeemer. "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned... death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who

2. Barr, "The Authority of Scripture: The Book of Genesis and the Origin of Evil in Jewish and Christian Tradition," in *Christian Authority: Essays in Honor of Henry Chadwick*, ed. G.R. Evans (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 71.

1. Psalm 51:5 stands as a possible exception to this.

is a type of the one who was to come” (Romans 5:12, 14). Moreover, just as the individual character “Adam” serves as the prototype for all of humanity (*adam*), the individual redeemed by Christ signals a new mode of being human, a “new man” to replace the old: “Therefore, just as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. For just as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous” (Romans 5:18-19).³

The importance of Paul’s understanding of “Adam/*adam*” for subsequent Christian doctrine cannot be overestimated. He advances the theory of original sin in at least two significant ways. First, he preserves a tradition of identifying Adam’s sin as paradigmatic that the subsequent Gospel writers do not include in their portrayals of Jesus.⁴ Second, and more germane to this essay, he renders the consequences of Adam and Eve’s transgression, not simply in terms of human mortality, but also as the starting point for subsequent humanity’s inevitable rebellion and disobedience to God.

While one could reasonably dispute (as the polemicists of the Catholic Reformation certainly did) whether Paul was entirely univocal on this issue, it is

3. Cf. also I Corinthians 15:21-22.

In 15:48, Paul expresses this in terms of a duality between matter and spirit: “As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven.”

4. Indeed, a perennial difficulty facing Christians who wish to argue that Adam’s transgression is the decisive locus through which sin and mortality enter the human experience is the fact that the Jesus of the canonical Gospels nowhere explicitly references this idea.

certainly clear that this is the reading of Paul that most influenced the mature Augustine when his disputes with Pelagianism forced him to fully articulate a theory of original sin. Because this essay is primarily concerned with the tradition of original sin that is generally associated with Protestantism, it is the later Augustine’s view of the fall’s effect upon the human will that is of interest here.

Augustine’s most famous contribution to this topic is his idea that the ontological deficiency in humanity brought about by Adam and Eve’s sin is biologically transmitted through the act of reproduction. However, for our purposes it is essential to note that Augustine understood this effect as an epistemological deficiency as well: while in Eden the primeval couple was *posse non peccare* (able not to sin), after the fall all of humanity becomes *non posse non peccare* (not able not to sin). Prior to God’s fully efficacious and gracious bestowal of regenerating grace upon the sinner, that person cannot even desire to choose the good, much less utilize her rational capacities to achieve it.

The most serious effect of the fall, therefore, is to render all of humanity’s rational capacities fully beholden to sin and thus incapable of any righteous action. The significance of Augustine’s contention that, prior to grace, humanity’s rational capacities cannot even will to follow God’s will is that fallen humanity’s inevitable repetition of Adam’s rebellion is a function of its knowledge and not just its deeds. This was the theme that would be taken up by Luther.

Luther’s understanding of the fall is crucial for his larger theological definition of faith as trust in God’s promises. A defining characteristic of these promises is that they cannot be fully grasped by pre-or-postlapsarian reason; thus, to have faith in God is to grasp the promises even

as they appear patently opposed to rational expectations. Correspondingly, failure to have this faith is not irreligion. Rather, in Luther's theology the opposite of faith is idolatry; moreover, Luther defines idolatry in reference to the deficiencies of human rational expectations. It is nothing other than trust in a human construct that one's fallen reason has fashioned rather than the promises of a largely hidden God.

For Luther, God's command to Adam in Genesis 3:16-17 was a sermon imparting the opportunity for perfect obedience to God's will; moreover, this obedience in and of itself yields a more perfect *wisdom*: "For if Adam had remained in innocence, this preaching [3:16-17] would have been like a Bible for him and for all of us; and we would have no need for... that endless multitude of books which we require today, although we do not attain a thousandth part of that wisdom which Adam had in Paradise."⁵ Luther's notions of Adam's "wisdom" before the fall signals that he is already establishing a contrast between "the knowledge of good and evil" (which, in the context of the fall, represents human reason in all its deficiency) and an infinitely more desirable mode of human knowledge, namely *trust*. This contrast is heightened by Luther's explicit insistence that God provided no rationale to Adam as to why he was to abstain from eating of the tree; thus, the command which cannot be understood in the sense of being justified through reason becomes the supreme

opportunity to demonstrate this trust.

Thus, the serpent's (or, in Luther's reading, Satan's) temptation to Eve is the temptation for humanity to use its nascent reasoning capacities to interpret God's command and to engage the serpent's words rather than remaining true to their trust in God's Word—humanity listens (and speaks) before it eats. The order of the transgressions is important here. Only after humanity succumbs to the temptation to use its rational powers over and against its "irrational" (or, more accurately, supra-rational) trust in God does the physical manifestation of its rebellion take place. Thus, for Luther the real fall in Genesis 3 is almost epiphenomenal in the sense that it is simply the culmination of an antecedent tragedy whereby humanity substitutes "words" (i.e. human reason) for the "Word" of God.

Like Augustine, Luther interprets the effects of the fall in terms of humanity's two intertwined epistemological capacities: the reason and the will. This results in "despair" of the conscience that leads it to adopt "illicit defenses and remedies"—a reference to the need of fallen human reason to construct an idol that can, like any rational being, be appeased through atoning works.⁶ Such is the fate of all unenlightened "religious" whose incapacitated knowledge prevents them from placing trust in the God hidden beyond reason. Significantly, Luther then renders Christ's atoning actions in these same terms: election into Christ's body allows the will to transcend fallen human reason *only enough* to again place trust in God's promises. While this state remains inferior to that of prelapsarian humanity, it is the best that human life can achieve prior to the eschaton.

This strand of interpretation did not go by the wayside once early modernity

5. Likewise, "today there is an infinite number of books for instructing theologians, lawyers, and physicians; but whatever we learn with the help of books hardly deserves to be called dregs in comparison with that wisdom which Adam drew from this single Word." Luther, *Lectures on Genesis 1–5*, vol 1 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), 105.

6. *Ibid.*, 114.

gave way to modern biblical hermeneutics. Indeed, several of the twentieth century's most prominent theologians adopted the fundamental tenets of the Augustinian/Lutheran reading of Genesis 2–3. Karl Barth, for instance, also regarded the fall as an epistemological corruption whose result—original sin—rendered humanity's rational capacities completely disoriented. Rather than casting Adam and Eve's disobedience in terms of trust, however, Barth speaks of humanity's trespassing onto a secret of God, namely that God exists in a state of infinite qualitative distinction from humanity. Somewhat paradoxically, the mode of humanity's prelapsarian knowledge is superior because it does not contain this secret.⁷ The knowledge of good and evil becomes knowledge of humanity's unequal status before God; tragically, Adam and Eve's transgression turns this unequal status into a deficient state for the first time.

According to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, this transgression is rooted in two levels of disobedience, both of which are related to wisdom. On the first level, the transgression appears more innocent in that it represents humanity's desire to increase its knowledge of God: a sort of misguided *fides quarens intellectum* (faith seeking understanding). However, on a deeper level the desire to “go behind” (that is, use reason to interpret and eventually modify) God's will for humanity becomes a grab for power where human wisdom subverts and takes the place of God's commandments.⁸ Wittingly or not, in the schema laid out by Bonhoeffer, humanity's “pious” desire

to amplify and/or defend its knowledge of God vis-à-vis temptation becomes the occasion for humanity's fall from a superior mode of understanding (perfect trust in God's word) to an inferior one: fallible reason, the “fruit” of the knowledge of good and evil.

In sum, the interpretive tradition spanning from Augustine to Bonhoeffer, while by no means heterogeneous in its understanding of original sin, nevertheless posits common tenets in answer to the question of how the narrative portrays human wisdom. First, humanity's wisdom is created in a state of excellence from its very inception. The “knowledge of good and evil” of which prelapsarian wisdom is bereft does not represent a lacuna that hinders Adam and Eve's rational capacities; rather, the narrator wants readers to understand humanity's choice to eat from the tree as a substitution of human reason, apart from God's guidance, for a trust that is superior to such reason. This is the chief substance of its transgression. Second, the Edenic state was a superior environment in which innocent humanity would have flourished to the fullness of its capacity. That being the case, God's statements in Genesis 3:14–24 either enact or describe a less desirable state of affairs for humanity; the departure from Eden is a woeful fall away from an earthly paradise in which there was uninhibited communion between God and humanity. Third, this “fall” is noetic in that it becomes decisive for all of subsequent humanity's epistemological capacities. Fourth, these noetic effects are so thoroughgoing that only the radical and gracious initiative of God (for Christians, the advent of Jesus Christ) can restore humanity to the point where, to reiterate Augustine's terminology, it is “able not to sin.”

Without entering into exhaustive textual analysis, we can assert that a genuine

7. Cf. Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 247.

8. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Interpretation of Genesis 1–3*, trans. J.C. Fletcher (London: SCM Press, 1959), 116–117.

confluence exists between the assertions of the classical fall tradition and certain narrative/linguistic features of the Genesis 2–3 narrative. However, it is important to emphasize that the interpretive strand described above by no means exhausts the Jewish and Christian traditions' reception of the text. In the next sections, I will highlight a counterpoint to the classical fall tradition outlined above that rereads the nature of human knowledge in Genesis 2–3 as a starting point for a different theological interpretation of human reason through the ages.

New Paradigms from Midrash, Enlightenment, and Beyond

I have characterized the classical fall tradition on the basis of shared tenets that its interpreters glean from Genesis 2–3. Within this second strand of interpretation, however, commonalities are apparent, not simply in terms of shared theological conclusions, but more fundamentally in hermeneutical methodology. Specifically, the alternative to the fall tradition that I am interested in interprets Genesis 2–3 in light of the book (and, in some cases, the Pentateuch) as a whole.

The rabbinic tradition has often read the story of Adam and Eve's rebellion, not as a decisive sin in and of itself, but rather as the beginning of a narrative cycle that continues with an episode that decisively demonstrates the brutality of life outside of the garden: Cain's murder of Abel. The absolute nadir of human sinfulness then comes in God's assessment of the generations prior to the flood: "Yahweh saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5).

In this larger narrative, while some postdiluvian rapprochement occurs in

8:21, the most decisive event for the humanity's redemption comes at Sinai, where God's gracious gift of the Torah opens a new chapter in human wisdom. With the Torah, humanity has the chance to display loving obedience to God's law that the first humans scorned. As Gary Anderson suggests, for this particular rabbinic tradition "Israel at Mount Sinai both recapitulates tradition and goes beyond it. For at Mt. Sinai God reveals his most precious possession... The perfection of humanity rests in Torah."⁹ Israel's encounter with God at Mt. Sinai is not without its own tension, however. Just as with Genesis 2–3, the most sublime potential for human wisdom is followed immediately by transgression in the form of the idolatry of the golden calf.

Thus, on this reading, both the renewal and the fall of human wisdom are recapitulated at Sinai. Without too much conjecture concerning the authorial intentions of the redactor(s) of the Pentateuch, we can nonetheless notice that the effect of this homology has cast the anthropology of the Pentateuch in less linear and more circular terms. The status of human wisdom does progress in that Israel's reception of the Torah decisively changes the mode by which human knowledge relates to the will of God; however, the narrative reiteration of Adam's sin at Sinai seems to deny that full redemption of wisdom has been achieved. However, it is in no sense correct to say that this anthropology follows the classical fall tradition by regarding human wisdom as thoroughly corrupted by these various sins against God. For this rabbinic tradition, the Torah is no less efficacious for (and binding upon) God's people for having been narratively

9. Gary Anderson, *The Genesis of Perfection: Adam and Eve in the Jewish and Christian Imagination* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 41

linked to the golden calf episode. Rather, the homologous narratives underscore the fundamental ambiguities—including the propensity to idolatry, domination, and self-destruction—inherent in the enterprise of using one's wisdom to ascertain and follow God's will. Adam and Eve try to defend God and become idolaters; likewise, Israel's reception of God-given wisdom is simultaneous with the most shameful instance of idolatry in the canon. Such is the canvas upon which human knowledge must paint its destiny—until the Messiah who redeems wisdom comes.

Thus, the most striking thing about this rabbinic tradition of interpreting Genesis 2–3 in the context of the Pentateuch as a whole is that it credits these texts with employing a linear narrative of human knowledge (Edenic knowing—knowledge outside the garden—knowledge's enlightenment at Sinai—knowledge's betrayal with the golden calf) to make an atemporal (i.e., universally true) point about the exercise of human knowledge wherever and whenever it occurs. Put differently, the narratives describe humanity's progression through time, but the fundamental goal of the narratives is to make a point that is timeless and normative for all humanity: no Eden without rebellion, no Torah without the freedom and propensity to construct golden calves. Linearity becomes circularity.

At this point, it is important to note that, while Augustine's interpretation of the fall did indeed become decisive for the early Christian tradition, Christian patristic authors were by no means univocal in affirming that the effect of the fall was to substitute an inferior epistemological state for a superior one. For instance, Irenaeus of Lyons spoke of humanity's post-Edenic knowledge in terms of a progression or maturation process, in which humans are created by God as immature creatures

and subsequently develop by means of an increasingly sophisticated knowledge of good and evil. Not surprisingly, minority reports such as these exerted little influence over Christian anthropology after 529.

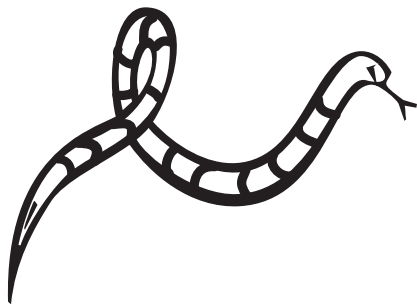
The most influential Christian attempt to make a universal point about human knowledge through a rethinking of human knowledge in Genesis 2–3 came during the Enlightenment. Immanuel Kant highlighted two features that he took to be integral to the narrative. First, to Kant, the *adam's* humanity was substantially incomplete prior to its own appropriation of human reason—a process epitomized by the rebellion against God's prohibition. Second, and contrary to facile dismissals of the Enlightenment as having an unlimited confidence in human reason, Kant regarded this exercise of reason as rooted in sadness as well as joy, as humanity moves beyond the peaceful simplicity of "nature" (symbolized by the garden) into the conflict-ridden world of rational choice.

So long as inexperienced man obeyed this call of nature all was well with him. But soon reason began to stir... The original occasion for deserting natural instinct may have been trifling. But this was man's first attempt to be conscious of his reason as a power which can extend itself beyond the limits to which all animals are confined. As such its effect was very important and indeed decisive for his future way of life.... He discovered in himself a power for choosing for himself a way of life, of not being bound without alternative to a single way, like the animals. Perhaps the discovery of this advantage created a moment of delight. But of necessity, anxiety and alarm as to how he was to deal with this newly discovered power quickly followed... He stood, as it were, on the brink of an abyss. Until that moment instinct had directed him towards

specific objects of desire. But from these there now opened up an infinity of such objects, and he did not yet know how to choose between them. On the other hand, it was impossible for him to return to the state of servitude (i.e., subjection to instinct) from the state of freedom, once he had tasted the latter.¹⁰

Commentators have tended to characterize the Enlightenment's reading of Genesis 2–3 as a *felix culpa*, a “happy fall” that restricts the ambiguities inherent to reason to the “birth pangs” of human rational choice. In Kant's texts, however, it is by no means clear that Adam (or his progeny) are any happier after the fall; they/we are only more human.

That having been said, however, the perspective exemplified by Irenaeus and Kant comprises a genuine alternative to the classical fall tradition's notion of the



effect of Genesis 2–3's events on human epistemology. Rather than positing the Edenic epistemological state as a superior mode of human knowing based on the divine commandments, this tradition regards it as a kind of “immaturity” that

represents a kind of blissful ignorance that is only appropriate in a setting dominated by instinct, not human rational choice. Recall that interpreters amenable to the classical fall tradition tend to seize upon clues in Genesis 2 that suggest that prior to the fall Adam possessed a full (or at least humanly sufficient) understanding of the world. Conversely, this second reading insists that, regardless of how one assesses humanity's post-Edenic knowledge, it represents an *advance* over Edenic epistemology in that possession of rationality independent of subservience to instinct (including having one's decision-making capacities indistinguishable from obeisance to external divine commands) is the only mode of reasoning appropriate to fully realized human nature. It is in this sense that Genesis 2–3 narrates the “rise” and not the fall of human reason.

One contemporary philosophical interpretation that reflects the influence of this line of thinking is the work of Leon Kass, who adapts the rabbinic tradition in a Kantian direction to regard the entirety of Genesis as a series of narratives about human wisdom and divine wisdom coming to a point where humans *qua* humans can freely adapt their wills to God's wisdom. Within Kass' schema, the goal of Genesis 2–3 is “a making clear of just what it means to have chosen enlightenment and freedom, just what it means to be a rational being. The punishment, if punishment it is, consists mainly in the acute foreknowledge of our natural destiny to live out our humanity under the human condition.”¹¹ To some extent, this reading synthesizes the two hermeneutical gestures described above by describing Genesis 2–3 as the rise of truly human wisdom, albeit

10. Immanuel Kant, “Conjectural Beginnings of Human History,” trans. Emil Fackenheim, from *Kant on History*, ed. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963), 55–6.

11. Leon R. Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 95.

“in all its pathos and ambiguity,”¹² at the outset of a series of narratives and texts that focus on Israel—and, for New Testament Christians, the followers of Jesus—as examples of both the heights (Sinai, the early church) and depths (the golden calf) that the exercise of that wisdom can achieve. The particular, however, becomes the universal: at the end of the day, these texts portray the theological, anthropological, and epistemological status of all humans living out their existence east of Eden. This is the culmination of the counterpoint to the classical fall tradition that differs from that strand of interpretation, not by denying that tragedies are inherent in post-Edenic human knowledge, but by reassessing how precisely the narrative conveys that message.

Reason and Exile

With this last point in mind, we can return to the narrative itself. As is well known, the classical fall tradition focuses upon the exchange between Eve and the serpent as a tragedy of innovative interpretation whereby humans depart from an epistemology of trust at the urging of a rebellious impulse (signified by the serpent). While I have suggested that this tradition finds some support in the text itself, Genesis' account of this exchange does not lend itself unequivocally to that reading.

More specifically, to read Eve's explanation of the divine prohibition to the serpent in Genesis 3:2-3 as an ill-advised exercise in reckless interpretation already presupposes the idea treasured by exegetes seeking the fall of human knowledge in the story: that prelapsarian epistemology was sufficient to meet humanity's needs in the Edenic setting. The idea that this way of knowing is rooted in trust in God's wisdom and good intentions implicitly

suggests that it is based on God's proximity to primeval humanity, a reading supported by the various exchanges between God and Adam in chapter 2. However, this puts a different valence on the utter absence of God from the temptation scene. If God is not present to respond to the serpent's insinuations, then it is left to humans to construct their own response. Moreover, doing so requires that humans utilize, for the first time, resources other than the “bare text” of the prohibition. In contrast to Francesca Murphy, who suggests that “until [*adam*] eats of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he is not a moral being; he has to obey the religious or sacral injunction of God not to eat the apple,” we can argue that the departure from sacral injunction into moral reasoning occurs from the outset of Eve's (and, by extension, humanity's) need to offer an *apologia* for that injunction;¹³ likewise, we can assert over and against the classical fall tradition that this event is not the act of substituting an inferior reasoning method for a superior one. Rather, on this reading humanity is forced into the act of interpretation precisely because prelapsarian modes of knowing proved insufficient to meet the inherent trials of human existence (trials represented by the serpent's challenge). This makes Eve's response to the serpent and her decision to eat the apple “because it was to be desired to make one wise” of a piece: both are indicative of a growing realization on the part of primeval humanity that a different source (and mode) of human knowledge has become necessary for human existence.

When viewed in this light, Eve's response to the serpent is not so much a departure from the divine instructions as it

13. Francesca Murphy, *The Comedy of Revelation: Paradise Lost and Regained in Biblical Narrative* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 23.

12. *Ibid.*, 89.

is an archetype for the act of interpretation (and commentary) itself. Proponents of the classical fall tradition often argue that Adam was a sage; however, on this reading it is more accurate to regard Eve as the first rabbi. As such, her act of exegeting God's commands in God's absence is no less legitimate than the work of any biblical commentator, as these minds must also carry out their work in the absence of direct proximity to God. Such is the promise and peril of the interpretive enterprise itself, no less so now than then.

What are the results of such works? Following Kant, the text indicates that this initial exercise of human reason occasions shame (3:10); resentment directed toward God, self, and other (3:12 and 13); and the need for further innovation (3:7). On the one hand, Eve's poetic confession to God that the serpent "tricked" her implies that she feels regret over the transgression; however, the reader is struck by the fact that Adam and Eve do not distance themselves from their act once it is committed. Rather, J emphasizes the fact that they seek solace in the results of the transgression by telling us that the couple hid *betok etz hagan* ("in the midst of the trees of the garden")—the same phrase used to describe the location of the trees of knowledge and life in Genesis 2:9. In the face of possible divine sanction, the only recourse for the humans is to physically and symbolically place themselves at the point where an alternative mode of knowledge was gained. This point is emphasized by the fact that, for the first time in the narrative, Adam and Eve are empowered to debate with God in the same matter-of-fact manner that Eve used to address the serpent. Commentators have often been so quick to label Adam and Eve's statements in Genesis 3:12 and 13 as instances of "passing the blame" that they fail to notice that, taken at face

value, these utterances are simply true. Eve did give the fruit to Adam and the serpent was the occasion for Eve's initial action. The narrative does not insist that we gloss these statements with apologetic overtones. Thus, both in their location and in their speech Adam and Eve take upon themselves a new mode of relating to the divine: rational debate with all its attendant boldness, shame, and pain vis-à-vis divine wisdom.

Next, God responds by implicitly recognizing this new mode of human knowing; moreover, because chapter 2 has emphasized God's status as the author of creation, God's responses in Genesis 3:14–24 are imbued with the same air of necessity that characterizes natural processes (such as rain causing plants to grow in Genesis 2:5–6). The expulsion from the garden signifies that the appropriate concomitant to humanity's new epistemological status is a new setting in which the full consequences of human reason must be accepted. As Kass asserts, "[*adam*] learns, through the revealing conversation with God, that his choice for humanization, wisdom, knowledge of good and bad, or autonomy really means at the same time also estrangement from the world, self-division, division of labor, toil, fearful knowledge of death, and the institution of inequality, rule, and subservience. The highest principle of being insists that, given who and what we humans are, we cannot have the former without the latter."¹⁴

This understanding also accounts for God's cutting off humanity's ability to eat from the tree of life at the end of the chapter. Far from indicating divine fear of human immortality or sarcasm, this gesture becomes an act of divine compassion whereby the sign of ambiguity under which humans must carry out their existence will not be prolonged indefinitely.

14. Kass, *Beginning*, 95.

A disconcerting but vivid consolation for life's suffering is the assurance in Genesis 3:24 that life will come to an end and not endure *le'olam* (forever).

This interpretation of the consequences of humanity's transgression has several implications. First, it suggests God's words here do not so much indicate that human wisdom has "fallen." Instead, it has made a lateral rather than vertical motion, a motion that necessitates the movement of humanity from the simplicity of Eden to the troubled land of mature rationality. Second, the inauguration of this epistemological state fraught with peril and potential establishes a precedent for human knowledge vis-à-vis divine revelation that will culminate with the couplet of Sinai/golden calf (and, for Christians, Bethlehem/Calvary). Finally, the scope of the story's subject matter is not restricted to a particular people or narrative trajectory, but rather encompasses all who labor "in the sweat of their brows" with the tools of tension-filled human wisdom, that is, not only the children of Adam but all *adam*.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have endeavored to present two distinct interpretations of the nature of human knowledge and its transformation in Genesis 2–3. The fact that the two lines of interpretation are not fully compatible has, quite understandably, prompted most influential commentators to commit themselves wholly to one line or the other. But must it be an either/or, even if the two options cannot be collapsed into each other?

Could we not imagine instead that the author/redactor of Genesis 2–3 created a similar type of narrative to that of Job, in which ambiguity functions as a positive literary and philosophical feature of the

narrative?¹⁵ Such a celebration of ambiguity would not force us to conclude that the "bare text" of Genesis 2–3 has nothing to say about the state of human knowledge in and after the garden; as Claus Westermann points out, however one reads the narrative one is not likely to miss its linking of sin/pain/fallibility on the one hand and removal/alienation from God on the other.¹⁶

Such is the promise
and peril of the
interpretive enterprise
itself, no less so now
than then.

However, we can assert that the substance of that connection remains substantially undefined in the text, as well it should. One of the many paradoxes of human wisdom is that, regardless of the peculiar resonance of Qoheleth's sigh that there is "nothing new under the sun" (Eccles. 1:9), there remains a sense in which knowledge is dynamic. Thus, the inextricable union between the triumphs of knowledge and its tragedies must be exegetically reconceived by each generation that wishes to take the insights of Genesis seriously. To the extent

15. In accordance with the tenets of narrative criticism, this is less a statement about authorial intention and more an argument that this is a feature of the text regardless of whether it was intended or not.

16. Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 277.

that this is true, the genuine disagreements occasioned by the reception of Genesis 2–3 are not a slight against the book's clarity but rather a testament to its vitality.

The history of Genesis 2–3's reception demonstrates that it is precisely its theological explanatory power that has allowed it to remain a respected (and, in many cases, genuinely beloved) commentary on humanity's use of knowledge. As we have seen, throughout its history the narrative has been employed as support for a variety of theological agendas: fighting against heresy, underscoring of the responsibility that comes with God's Torah, and reminding the proud that even the greatest achievements of human knowledge are always accompanied by the threat of tragic blindness. In a world where nuclear weapons exist alongside space stations and major research universities sit in the midst of neighborhoods racked by poverty and racism, narratives that teach us how inextricably our wisdom is entwined with tragic folly have a great deal to offer.

What accounts for the Genesis narrative's explanatory power? One can make the analogy to another narrative from the Hebrew Bible that has demonstrated enormous appeal throughout history, namely the book of Job. The appeal of this instance of wisdom literature is that it provides a panorama of possible answers to the problem of innocent suffering before leveling both Job and the reader with a

divine discourse that is far too enigmatic to qualify as a decisive (or, given the issue at question, "pat") answer to that question. Were it to offer such an answer, the book itself would simply become like one of Job's "poor comforters," for that sort of answer is always bounded in history and ideology in a way that rarely appeals to future inquirers. Rather, the book invites the reader to take up Job's standpoint in dust and ashes, to allow the text to become a lens through which the reader's own world achieves a profounder hue.

Amidst this imagined strategy of simultaneously hosting contending assertions about the text and its implications for how we view the human noetic situation, one constant would remain. Throughout its reception history, Genesis 2–3 has served to remind Jews and Christians that, at least to some extent, correct knowledge of humanity's reason before God's *Sophia* requires 1) that the inevitable distance (and, oftentimes, alienation) between the two be kept before our eyes, and 2) that we hold in tension the God-given triumphs and inevitable tragedies of our exercise of wisdom until the day that all of our capacities, including wisdom itself, meet redemption. This is the bittersweet lesson that Genesis has long held before humanity's eyes. And as long as it continues to find readers willing to examine their world through its words, humans will possess a valuable source of wisdom for life.

Luther and Pilates

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Two different men in two different centuries are associated with reformation. Both started movements that are associated with change, transformation, and healing. The one reformer has been part of my spiritual life since I was a young child. The other was just introduced to me this last spring. Both have challenged and changed my style of life in different and, yet, oddly similar ways. Let me explain.

I begin with Martin Luther, the great Christian reformer of the sixteenth century. I memorized his Small Catechism during confirmation (and again later in seminary). By my first year in high school, I was reading Luther on my own. One of my first research papers in an interdisciplinary high school humanities course was on his theology. By college, I had taken Reformation history and was still reading Luther on my own. I did not tell my friends about my extensive reading habit for fear that they would find it odd. During my high school and college years, I was constantly pressured about the “state of my faith life” from various religious groups in which I participated. Had I accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior? Did I live the right kind of life and have the right kind of beliefs? Not so unlike the rigidity, dysfunction, and controlling power of the church of Luther’s time, the Christian spiritualities of my youth perpetuated a kind of anxiety in those who did not conform to certain standards.

However, when I read Luther, I knew he had experienced that kind of anxiety and

yet had challenged the sources from which it came. Luther’s reforming spirit disarmed the spiritual tormenters of his time. He thought that the gospel of Jesus Christ should free people from having to labor or pay for their salvation. Pilgrims traveled to great lengths to please God while others stayed put doing knee-bending, body-prostrating penance. And yet these pilgrimages and penances only created more anxiety, tension, and fear. The body of Christ, under this system of working at righteousness, became rigid, inflexible, and fearful. The breath of the Spirit was stifled. Luther realized that such a body of Christ could not exercise this freeing grace of faith that he had experienced. The Reformation began with the simple and hopeful news that God’s grace frees, liberates, celebrates, and is available to all who suffer and hurt under the burdens of working one’s self into perfection (a task that is never complete). Luther’s theology gave me breathing space—a place of retreat from the restrictions of the spiritual pieties of my youth. And it still works that way. Almost 35 years later, I still need to reread Luther to be reminded of that freeing and transforming grace.

However, the spiritual angst of my high school and college years rears its head in new forms. From graduate school through tenure as a college professor, I have bought into the all-American sport of competing as a top-notch workaholic. Many days I could win a gold medal. But the spiritual problem is still the same—

thinking that my worth and wholeness as a human being is dependent solely on what others think of me, of living up to someone else's standards. Like the constricting pilgrimages and programs of penance in the sixteenth century, I had found ways to produce more, do more, and in such a way that it only enhanced my anxiety and exhaustion. Last spring I went to my internal medicine doctor with the problem of recurring, severe headaches. The diagnosis was "that I worked too much." She said to me, "What do you expect me to do about this? I can't just prescribe pills, you know. It seems to me that you have to want to be well, to feel good, and that means you need to change." So, instead of pain killers, I was given a prescription for physical therapy. I have encountered a new reformer who I doubt would have thought of himself as such.

Little did I know that what began as weekly massages and the deep heat of ultrasound would give way to rigorous and exhausting routines on the "reformer," the machine developed by Joseph Pilates. Now, two months into my Pilates regimen I have learned through practice and hard work how to relax, to let go, to breathe more deeply.

Joseph Pilates was born in Germany in 1880 to a mother of German descent and a father from Greece. From his father he inherited the love of gymnastics and from his mother, the knowledge of her naturopathic medicine. As an unhealthy child, he struggled to overcome his physical weakness and began studying and practicing body building and gymnastics to strengthen his body. During World War I he was stationed in a camp in England with other German inmates. There he began to teach them exercise and strengthening techniques. When he returned to Germany, he developed machines and exercises to help soldiers

rehabilitate their bodies from the trauma of the war. One such machine (still in use by those who practice Pilates) is called the reformer. Adapted from his work in hospital units, the machine uses springs and sliding platforms. Joseph Pilates used the equipment available to him at the patients' bedsides in order to develop his programs of exercise and rehabilitation.

Joseph Pilates came to believe that the "modern" lifestyle of his time and its symptomatic embodiments were the problem of sickness and anxiety. For example, he thought that shallow breathing symbolized someone's inability to keep up with the frenetic pace of their life. When stress takes over one's life, one's breathing becomes more staccato and fast-paced. The shallow breathing often accompanies poor posture and an anxious spirit. Seeking to change the people embodying these unhealthy cultural ways of life, Joseph Pilates became a reformer of mind and body. His method of exercise became famous and was soon adopted by dancers (like Martha Graham) and today has become one of the most popular ways to strengthen the body and increase flexibility.

I remember in the 1980s when Jane Fonda's workout routine first came on the market. A friend and I would don our leotards and work for the "burn" that Fonda insisted was a sign of good exercise. The "burn" that one felt deep in the muscles was usually preceded by fast-paced, often frantic repetitions. Ironically, such exercise seemed to mirror the spirit of that decade. While I no doubt had flatter abs and stronger leg muscles, I did not have a calmer spirit. The exercise matched my personal aspirations—to do more, and to do it better.

After a decade of frantic Fonda, new ways of exercising have taken its place. Yoga and Pilates are popular for different reasons than Fonda's workout. Instead of doing

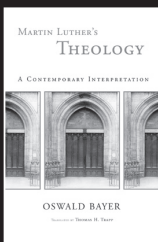
more and more at a faster and faster pace, these exercise disciplines (and in the case of Yoga, spiritual as well) emphasize pacing one's self, breathing deeply, and centering one's body. Pilates practices the following principles: proper alignment of the spine, paying deep attention to the movements, slow and careful breathing, graceful and flowing movements, concentration, and control. Pilates can become a new style of life where the crazy pace of modern culture is counter-embodied with grace, breath, strength, and flexibility.

When I first started Pilates as part of a physical therapy regiment, I had no idea what to expect. Nicole, my physical therapist, began to teach me how to breathe, deeply through my diaphragm and out slowly through my mouth. While I had been taught this earlier in my life while learning to play the flute, I had never thought of this deep breathing technique as the way I should always breathe. All the time, breathing deeply, inhaling into my rib cage, and exhaling just as fully. All of the Pilates exercises rely on this breathing technique. From learning how to breathe again, I moved on to the mat routine which involves focusing on one's core area. I had no idea how difficult this would be. Nicole is not only a physical therapist, but also a high school soccer coach. She wore both hats as my new Pilates trainer. She was gentle with me, but persistent, always insisting that I could do a bit more. When I left those sessions with her, my body felt a new kind of exhaustion. Not the burn of Fonda days, but the total collapse of a deep fatigue. Little things started to change. I began to sleep better, be more

alert during the day, and walk with more confidence. Slowly, my body has trained my mind, and lifted my spirit. Or possibly for the first time in a long while, I am a whole person—body/mind/spirit are as one. In fact, the delight I have found in practicing Pilates is that my muscles teach my mind and spirit. So often I have lived with the opposite notion—that I could think my way into relaxing. Pilates joins the mind and spirit to the body's graceful, slow movements. My muscles and lungs teach me, nurture me, and remind me that strength develops over time, and that grace is a gift that is learned. Breathing deeply counteracts the fast-pace of American culture.

Ironically, I have learned (again and again) that grace doesn't come easily. Many theologians and authors remind me of this. Not only do I think of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's famous critique of "cheap grace," but also Norman Maclean's famous commentary on learning to fly fish as a child. In his small novel, *A River Runs Through It*, he recalls metronomic movements which his father made him practice with fly rod in hand and how they eventually led to the grace of casting in deep trout streams in Montana. The symptoms are the same for our spiritual/physical illness—a tiredness that creeps into one's shoulders, mind, and spirit. This exhaustion deadens one to the joy, spontaneity and pleasures of life. And now, as a spiritual child of Luther's Reformation and a newly won convert to the reforming movements of Joseph Pilates, I am becoming well again, learning to breathe, to be strong, and flexible in my faith in God.

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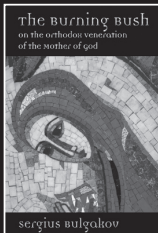
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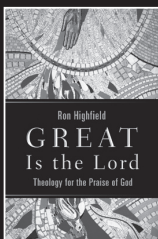
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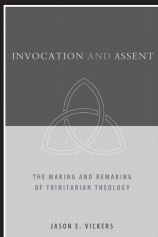
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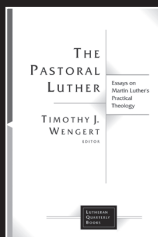
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Book Reviews

Byzantine Christianity: A People's History of Christianity, Volume 3. Edited by Derek Krueger. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006. xx and 252 pages. Cloth. \$35.00.

Night vigils, icon veneration, pilgrimages, and burial rituals all contribute to help make up what we call Byzantine Christianity. Although much of this mystical world is lost on present day Protestantism, many of these practices still remain active in parts of the Christian world. *Byzantine Christianity* is volume three in a series dedicated to presenting Christian history from the view of the laity. The seven volume series, *A People's History of Christianity*, covers a range of historical periods from the Early Church to the twentieth century.

The volume is divided into three sections: "Congregations and Preachers," "Places, Spaces, and Rites," and "Devotional Life and Artifacts," containing a total of ten essays, plus an introduction by the editor. In this introduction, Krueger traces a general outline of Byzantine Christian history, as well as its practices. The ten essays stand independent of one another, producing snapshots of Byzantine Christianity through various practices and time periods. Essay titles include: "Lay Piety in the Sermons of John Chrysostom," "The Cult of the Martyrs and The Cappadocian Fathers," and "Romanos and the Night Vigil in the Sixth Century" (in Part 1), "Shrines, Festivals, and the 'Undistinguished Mob,'" "The Layperson in Church," and "Death and Dying in Byzantium" (in Part 2), "Icons, Prayer, and Vision in the Eleventh Century," "Objects of Devotion and Protection," "The Religious Lives of Children and Adolescents," and "The Devotional Life of Laywomen" (in Part 3). For those interested in how the laity interacted with Byzantine theology, the teachings of John Chrysostom and the Cappadocian Fathers are woven into many essays, adding some familiarity for those who have studied their sermons.

The text reads clearly, containing pictures, excerpts from letters, diagrams, and a helpful eight-page color gallery, located in the center of the book. All of these additions make the text quite readable, and support the Byzantine ideal of the visual. Familiarity with Byzantine history may be helpful for readers, but the volume could easily be used as an introductory textbook for a course on Christianity in Byzantium. Pastors and educated laypersons looking for background on the spirituality of Byzantine Christians will find this volume helpful for both historical and spiritual reasons.

George Tsakiridis
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Anglicanism: A Very Short Introduction.
By Mark Chapman. Oxford University Press. 2006. ix and 157 pages. Paper. \$9.95.

Anglicanism is currently undergoing a seismic shift that threatens both its unity and identity. Its strength has shifted South: while the Church of England has fewer than one million members, for example, the Church of Nigeria numbers an astonishing 17.5 million. Ever-increasing diversity has come to characterize Anglicanism. "Showing how and why this has come to be," the challenges that accompany diversity, "and whether Anglicanism has a future" is the purpose of *Anglicanism: A Very Short Introduction*.

The approach of the book is historical, focusing on the evolution of different parties and theological positions (e.g., Evangelicalism, Anglo-Catholicism), and on the colonial predecessor bodies of today's Anglican Communion. Such an approach fits well with Anglicanism's own historical emphases as a Reformation Church that looks back to the Patristic period for its identity. The drawback of this approach, however, is that most of the book deals with the history of the Church of England, leaving only the final chapter to focus on worldwide Anglicanism and its contemporary situation. Moreover, the author clearly wrote with a British-educated public in mind, thus omitting many details that American-educated readers would need to make historical sense of the events outlined.



The final chapter examines the future of Anglicanism, looking at divisive issues such as homosexuality, which is currently splitting African and North American Anglicans from one another. The overarching problem, as the author sees it, is that of authority: wherein does it lie when there is no central body with decisive oversight of the various national churches, no Anglican "Vatican" or Anglican "Pope"? Chapman's final remarks, in which he proposes three possible futures for Anglicanism, only one of which preserves the Anglican Communion, reveal his own pessimism about the future:

"[D]iversity and comprehensiveness might be at the heart of an Anglicanism that understands itself more as a way of muddling through to the truth than a set of definite judgments. The desire to listen and to enter into conversation requires voluntary restraint and self-denial among the different factions. The problem is that in a world which seeks clear decisions and absolute certainties such Christian humility might not any longer be considered a virtue." (pp. 143-144)

Elizabeth A. Leeper
Wartburg Theological Seminary

1 and 2 Thessalonians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary. By Ben Witherington III. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006. xxxi and 286 pages. Paper. \$30.00.

Witherington follows his now familiar approach: he briefly describes the city's history, religion, and culture; gives date and occasion for the writing; identifies the rhetorical genre (in this case, epideictic); outlines the letter according to oratorical structure; and argues conservatively for the Pauline authorship and the integrity of both letters. He does not do much with the three rhetorical modes of proof, *ethos*, *pathos*, *logos*, and there is no discussion of *lexis*, style, or ornamentation. What rhetorical devices serve the "art of persuasion" in these letters?

Some errors have crept into the text. He suggests that there was constant warfare from 44 B.C. to 31 B.C. (p. 4), which is certainly

wrong. I doubt that the city of Thessalonica could celebrate the Olympic or Pythian games (see p. 6), which were tied to specific locations (Olympia and Nemea). The province Macedonia was not named after the city, as he says on p. 3. The reference to Philostratus of Libanius (p. xiv) makes no sense; I think the "of" should be "or."

More serious, in my opinion, is his suggestion on p. 12 that 2 Thessalonians 2:4 implies a "prediction of the Temple's demise;" it simply is not in the text. (Incidentally, *naos* in 2:4 does not mean the inner sanctum, the "holy of holies;" rather, it identifies the temple building itself as distinct from the sacred precinct, *to hieron*.) He does not discuss the difference in the roles of Christ in the two letters. 1 Thessalonians stresses Jesus' resurrection as the assurance that his parousia will gather the faithful. 2 Thessalonians presents a Jesus whose revelation will be that of a severe judge.

The commentary proper has much that is helpful. One need not agree with Witherington's rhetorical analysis to benefit from much that is there.

Edgar Krentz
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Cities of Paul: Images and Interpretations from the Harvard New Testament Archaeology Project. CDROM edited by Helmut Koester. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005. \$250.00 [\$200.00 if ordered online].

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Professor Helmut Koester of Harvard Divinity School has pioneered in the publication of realia, surviving physical artifacts from the Greek east and the urban environ-



ments in which they were located. He earlier edited two sets of color slides with accompanying descriptive material, the first published by Fortress Press, the second by Trinity Press International. This CD puts all of this material on one CDROM, which one can access to prepare presentations in PowerPoint® for projection via computer.

The CDROM is not immediately user-friendly. The very brief printed brochure accompanying the disk only gives a general description of its contents and instructions for opening it and reading the Greek in the descriptive notes to each illustration. Users should open and print the “Help” file at once and read much of it before attempting to use the material. It would have made doing that much easier if the publisher had included it as an easy download off the CD; instead you have to open the program and then print it off, an unnecessarily awkward procedure. The CD is readable both on Windows-based or Macintosh computers. I ran it on a Mac—and discovered one problem. You must have system 9 on your computer to run the program, even though Macs now are up to system 10.4.11. It would be great if they could deliver a patch to enable running it on system 10.

The 900 pictures cover eight sites: Athens, Corinth, Isthmia, Olympia, Thessalonica, Philippi, Ephesus, and Pergamum. The pictures include maps, artifacts, inscriptions and site photographs. Each picture has a related interpretation that clarifies the significance of the picture or plan and includes bibliographies for more detailed information.

This is a major resource for interpreting the religious and cultural setting of the New Testament. It deserves wide use.

Edgar Krentz

Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

A Brief History of the Doctrine of the Trinity in the Early Church. By Franz Dünzl. Translated by John Bowden. London: T&T Clark, 2007. xii and 148 pages. Paper. \$21.95.

No matter what your Christian persuasion, understanding the doctrine of the Trinity is

difficult. Although most readers are familiar with the Councils of Nicaea in 325 C.E. and Constantinople in 381 C.E., the crucial years in between are somewhat fuzzy, despite the fact that the development of Trinitarian doctrine was forged in these critical years. Franz Dünzl has provided readers with a detailed, yet readable account of the years leading up to these key councils.

The book is divided into fourteen chapters, beginning with the centuries prior to Nicaea (chapters 1-5). This is followed by a discussion of Constantine, the Council of Nicaea and its aftermath (chapters 6-7), the theological debates before Constantinople (chapters 8-12), and finally the Council of Constantinople itself (chapter 13). Chapter 14 looks at the Trinitarian doctrine with a contemporary eye, adding a thoughtful reflection to the doctrine forged by the first four centuries of the church.

Specifically, this text shows how doctrines are formed through dialogues in conjunction with historical context. Modern readers often expect clarity of doctrine to be decided by confessions and biblical texts, but the “clarity” these offer is often determined by a prior hermeneutical lens. This text gives the reader a deeper view of the crucible in which a key doctrine of Christianity was forged. The roles of Athanasius and Marcellus are delineated more explicitly than in some other texts, especially in chapters 8-11. In addition, the discussion in chapter nine of the failed council of Serdica in 342 C.E. shows that attempts at reconciling doctrine did not always come to fruition for the Early Church.

Dünzl has provided readers with an excellent history of the formation of Trinitarian thought, especially in the fourth century. The writing is quite accessible and should appeal to both pastors and academics. Andrew Louth may have said it best in the foreword, “Dünzl has written one of those rare books that functions both as an elementary textbook and makes a distinctive contribution to present-day theological reflection.” This text should be required reading for all seminarians studying Trinitarian development.

George Tsakiridis

Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago



1 Thessalonians 2 Thessalonians. By Victor Paul Furnish. Abingdon New Testament Commentaries. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007. 204 pages. Paper. \$20.00.

Victor Furnish's commentary on the Thessalonians letters is impressive. It covers all critically significant topics in clear fashion, e.g., the authenticity of 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16, the contemporary implications of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, the authorship of 2 Thessalonians (he opts for pseudigraphy), and the like. His comments also speak to the contemporary world, helpful to pastors preparing to preach or teach these letters and eminently comprehensible to lay people. I wish he had commented on the omission of the cross and resurrection in 2 Thessalonians; Christ's significance there is entirely related to the future.

This is a model of commentary writing for a broad audience. 1 Thessalonians provides the second lesson for Propers 24-28 in year A. It is the second lesson for Advent 3 in year B, while 2 Thessalonians is the second lesson for Propers 26-28 in year C.

Edgar Krentz
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Dating Acts: Between the Evangelists and the Apologists. By Richard I. Pervo. Polebridge Press, 2006. xiv and 514 pages. Paper. \$47.50.

A long-time student of Acts, Richard Pervo submits here the proposal that Acts was written about 115 C.E.—maintained in nine chapters by all possible arguments. Whether every reader of Acts and of this book will be in agreement is another question. Appendix II lists the various dates for the writing of Acts proposed by authors in scholarship from 56 (F. Blass) to 140 (J. Townsend); there is no agreement among commentators and writers.

Pervo in Chapter One discusses in general the issues and methods of investigating sources and determining a *terminus a quo*. Throughout the book one finds tables in which parallels to Acts to various other writings are tabulated.

Chapter Two discusses the range of time in which Acts might have been written. According to Pervo, Polycarp, writing in the fourth decade of the second century, may have known Acts, while Papias and Hege-sippus show no knowledge of Acts. While Marcion uses the Gospel of Luke, there is no evidence that he knew Acts. Pervo believes that Luke and Acts were written by the same author, though the two works may have been distant in time. Pervo accepts the *terminus ad quem* as 150, possibly 130.

Chapter Three discusses the Septuagint and the Gospel of Mark as sources for Acts.

Chapter Four "Acts among the Apostles," the longest chapter (almost 100 pages) deals almost exclusively with the Pauline letters. It has always been a puzzle that Luke in Acts does not mention the Pauline letters. Pervo provides some evidence that Acts was familiar with the Pauline letters—although the parallels sometimes are very slight, e.g., between Acts 9:20 and Gal. 1:16 or between Acts 2:33 and Gal. 3:14, to mention just two. It is strange that Pervo believes that 2 Corinthians was not composed or compiled before the last decade of the first century or even later. Tables toward the end of the chapter provide a statistical summary of specific passages.

In Chapter Five, Pervo compares passages from Luke/Acts with the writings of Josephus. Again, the similarities are very slight, sometimes just names, but Pervo draws the definite conclusion that Luke is familiar with Josephus, especially the closing books of the Antiquities so that Acts must be written after 93/4. He also deals briefly with the objections to this theory.

In Chapters Six and Seven, Pervo turns to the Apostolic Fathers. He discusses the supposed parallels in interesting subheadings: Institutions and Organization; Leadership; Succession; etc. Again, the parallels are often very slight: shepherd, wolf, flock; greed, faithful manager, righteousness and holiness, to name just a few from Chapter Six. In Chapter Seven, he lists alphabetically Greek terms which occur somewhere in the Apostolic Fathers and in Acts. Of course, one might say that the large num-



ber of these slight parallels cumulatively should be convincing, but how can one write a Christian essay or sermon without mentioning some of these general terms? According to Pervo, all these trends belong in the first third of the second century. Before closing this chapter, Pervo takes a look at the ending of Mark, Ephesians, the Pastoral Epistles, 1 Clement, Barnabas, the Didache, and Polycarp. Pervo's suggestion here is also that Acts is later than these writings. He concedes that it is possible that Polycarp and Acts (following Haenchen) both work with a stock of contemporary formulae held largely in common.

In Chapter Eight, Pervo attempts to show that Acts fits in the context of the first decades of the second century. He believes that the organizations of bishop, presbyters, and widows are anachronisms that show that it must be a second century writing. Acts also reflects the separation of "Christianity" from Judaism. However, he concedes that there is no definite proof in these "anachronisms" for this late date; they could very well be explained as belonging to the late first century. He also states that Acts uses similar arguments as the Apologists. Particularly, Pervo argues against Hemer's early date for Acts with detailed statements.

Chapter Nine (four pages) presents the conclusion reached by Pervo: because Acts uses the Pauline letters (see Chapter Four), it must be later than 100 when Paul's letters were first collected. Church organization: "Luke is a collaborator with the emergent catholic church." On the basis of all his investigations, Pervo concludes that Acts should be dated c. 115, thus accounting best for the various social and ideological orientations of the book.

There are four interesting appendixes, as well as a list of works consulted, an index of ancient authorities, and an index of modern authorities.

Although the arguments are well presented, many of them are quite small matters which even in accumulation do not necessarily convince. However, there also is no fact which can unequivocally disprove Pervo's opinion. The book is not free of misspellings

and other slight mistakes. Positively it must be stated that the whole work is permeated by Pervo's fine sense of humor. Reading the book is a pleasure.

A main criticism pertains more to the publisher than the author. The book has 90 pages of notes, at the end of the book! It is aggravating to have to turn back and forth in order to read the notes, sometimes full of content, while perusing the main text. Why are these "foot" notes not printed at the foot of each page to which they pertain? This would improve the readability of the work tremendously.

Wilhelm C. Lins

Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

The Messiah in Early Judaism and Christianity. Edited by Magnus Zetterholm.

Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007. xxvii and 163 pages. Paper. \$18.00.

This book contains five lectures from a conference at Lund University on messianism. John Collins surveys pre-Christian Jewish messianism, showing that the expectations were not uniform; Adela Yarbro Collins deals with 'Son of God' as a messianic designation in the Synoptic Gospels; Magnus Zetterholm argues that Paul downplays the Jewish aspects of Jesus as the Messiah for his Gentile readers; Karin Hedner-Zetterholm shows how rabbinic literature connects Elijah and the Messiah with Torah observance rather than with apocalyptic expectations; and Jan-Eric Steppa explores eschatological and Christological developments in the post-apostolic church. The book serves as a comprehensive historical introduction to a subject often prone to mistaken assumptions from a Christian perspective. Students, pastors, and anyone interested in an up-to-date but non-technical review of messianism will find this book very helpful. A map, timetable, and glossary add to the usefulness of the volume.

David W. Kuck

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Kingston, Jamaica*



The Trinity: Global Perspectives. By Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007. xxii and 409 pages. Paper. \$39.95.

This book provides a thorough evaluation of the depth and breadth of scholarship on the doctrine of the Trinity. Refining the format utilized in his previous texts on ecclesiology and the doctrine of God, Kärkkäinen's text is divided into five sections. The first section probes the biblical roots of the doctrine of the Trinity. The second section surveys the formation and reformation of the doctrine of the Trinity from the Patristic writers through Augustine and Aquinas. The third portion delves into the varieties of Trinitarian scholarship in the West. While this section focuses on Western theologies, Kärkkäinen takes great care to include theologians from the Eastern, Roman Catholic, and Protestant traditions, both male and female theologians. Part four highlights theologians from Latin American, Asian, and African contexts. These theologians illuminate the multiple ways in which culture and gospel are always intertwined. The final section provides a loose synthesis of the various perspectives as well as Kärkkäinen's commentary on some of key contributions presented in the text.

Kärkkäinen's text is a bountiful banquet of theological perspectives on the doctrine of the Trinity. He remarkably balances a need to provide a solid historical basis in the biblical and patristic texts with a desire to display the rich variety of contemporary theological discourse. Additionally, Kärkkäinen's extensive use of footnotes is invaluable for future scholarship. While his writing style is very accessible, the sheer depth and breadth of the volume may be intimidating. Nevertheless, I found this text to be one of the most comprehensive single volume works on the doctrine of the Trinity.

Jennifer L. Baldwin
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

The Resurrection of Jesus. By John Dominic Crossan and N.T. Wright in Dialogue. Edited by Robert B. Stewart. Minne-

apolis: Fortress Press, 2006. vii and 220 pages. \$18.00.

The heart of this work is an oral dialogue between Wright and Crossan on the topic "The Resurrection: Historical Event or Theological Explanation" (pp. 16-47). The dialogue and subsequent responses occurred March 2005 at the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, a conservative Southern Baptist institution. The dialogue between these two famous, personable scholars was most informative, though any literal transcription of a discussion will always leave some questions about what was said. In this case the respondents helped illuminate some issues. Ted Peters, of Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, in his article "The Future of the Resurrection" (pp. 171-186) especially helped clarify what the two had said. In the public eye there has been considerable misrepresentation of both scholars. In contrast to some popular opinion, Wright does not believe in a literal resurrection. He says that the Gospels, and even some prior oral traditions, describe an empty tomb and a resurrected Jesus who exhibits bodily characteristics. Faith in this Jesus created a community, the Christian church, in which the Gospel narratives were collected (pp., 30-32; 154-155) The worldview behind this new faith was mutated into a new worldview (the resurrection). Likewise many readers assume Crossan does not believe in the resurrection. That is not true either. Crossan believes the historical Jesus developed a community of disciples. With them he did healings and ate in common (commensality). When he died the community continued and described their new life with Jesus as the resurrection. This faith resulted in the Gospels with the metaphorical empty tomb and bodily appearances (pp. 154; 172).

The respondents to the dialogue were quite varied. Craig Evans, of Arcadia Divinity College wrote, with the whimsical title "In Appreciation of Dominical and Thomistic Traditions" (pp. 48-57). He reflects on how the two thinkers viewed the historical Jesus. Stewart himself describes the hermeneutics expressed by the dialogue partners (pp. 58-77). Gary Habermas, of Liberty University,



analyses the several current philosophical positions taken regarding resurrection—that is, in categories of natural or supernatural (pp. 78-92). R. Douglas Geivett, Biola University, writes on the epistemology of Wright and Crossan (pp. 93-105). Crossan's metaphorical view of God makes impossible for him Jesus' literal bodily resurrection. Charles L. Quarles, Louisiana College, questions whether, as suggested by Crossan, the Gospel of Peter was the primary source for the passion narrative in the Synoptics (pp. 106-120). Although Alan Segal, Professor of Jewish Studies at Barnard College, could not be present for the verbal responses, he contributed a very interesting response entitled "The Resurrection: Faith or History." In contrast to Wright he argues that the earliest New Testament resurrection material comes from Paul, not the Synoptics. So the empty tomb and bodily resurrection are a later church redaction (pp. 121-138). William Lane Craig, Talbot School of Theology, follows the Wright argument that belief in the resurrection by early Christians occurred because the disciples discovered the empty tomb and experienced the postmortem appearances of Jesus (pp. 139-148).

Graydon F. Snyder
Chicago

Blessed to Follow: The Beatitudes as a Compass for Discipleship. By Martha E. Stortz. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2008. 112 pages. Paper. \$12.99.

This work skillfully and poetically takes up one of the most problematic passages of Scripture, the Beatitudes. Martha Stortz focuses on the rendering of this portion of Jesus' inaugural sermon from the Gospel of Matthew. Each chapter deals with one of the eight beatitudes, which the author characterizes as follows: "The first four beatitudes target people in situations of suffering. . . . The second four beatitudes target people who help those who suffer. . ." (12). Each chapter concludes with "Questions for Reflection" and "For Further Reflection."

The power of this work is derived from three sources: Scripture itself; numerous,

concrete and daily illustrations; and quotations from the history of the church's great theologians and sufferers. Stortz dedicates this work to her deceased spouse, William C. Spohn. This dedication serves as an important road sign to the contents of the work in which the author weaves poignant and powerful personal remembrances to illustrate her thinking about the power and meanings of the beatitudes.

Each of the beatitudes is prefaced by a definition—sometimes multiple definitions—of the dynamics under discussion. For example, regarding "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy," Stortz writes: "...mercy, the disposition that enables forgiveness. Mercy is an unnatural act: every instinct strains toward vengeance." (66) The discussion of each beatitude involves an assessment of the curse or anti-blessing against which the particular beatitude makes its claim.

This work has multiple uses. The chapter divisions facilitate easy use for study groups. Its theological and scriptural work makes it a valuable source for the preacher who approaches the pulpit for the All Saints commemoration or the other lectionary appointed readings of the Beatitudes. The author has created a work that is both lyrical and reflective of the intention of the Beatitudes!

Susan K. Hedahl
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Cross-cultural Paul: Journeys to Others, Journeys to Ourselves. By Charles H. Cosgrove, Herold Weiss, and K. K. (Khiok-Khng) Yeo. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005. vii and 293 pages. Paper. \$25.00.

This volume is a collection of six articles, two by each of the authors. Each author provides a piece on Paul from his own cultural perspective and a piece on Paul from a cultural perspective other than his own. These articles are framed by an introduction and a conclusion. The introduction includes autobio-



graphical sketches by the authors. All three authors currently teach at institutions in the greater Chicago area.

Weiss contributes "Paul's Journey to the River Plate" and "Paul's Journey to Russia." The River Plate region shared by Argentina and Uruguay is the land of his birth. His ancestors immigrated there from Russia. Weiss's presentation of his native Latin American culture draws heavily on twentieth century novelists Carlos Fuentes and Eloy Martinez. Weiss's primary conversation partners in his discussion of Russian culture and theology are the nineteenth century Feofan the Recluse and the twentieth century Nicholas Berdyaev.

Cosgrove contributes "Paul and American Individualism" and "Paul and Peoplehood in African American Perspective." According to Cosgrove, self-reliance, human rights, and freedom, which he terms "focal centers" of American individualism, contain points of comparison and contrast with Paul's theology of interdependence and equality. In his contribution from an outside cultural vantage point looking in, Cosgrove concludes that African-American strivings for freedom and identity, and experiences of suffering, resonate with Paul's image of Christ crucified.

Yeo contributes "Paul's Theological Ethic and the Chinese Morality of *Ren Ren*" and "Christ and the Earth in Pauline and Native American Understandings." A loving person (*ren ren*) reflects the ideal, fully human person in both the Confucian and the Pauline ethical systems, since the ethical life is inherently relational, claims Yeo. Yeo is optimistic about points of contact between Chinese morality and Pauline thinking about human beings as relational beings; but he finds more tension between Paul's thinking and the perspective Native Americans, particularly with respect to Paul's view of humanity's relationship with creation.

Most *Currents* readers would find this volume fun to read and a stimulus for lively discussion. A prior volume edited by Yeo, *Navigating Romans Through Cultures* (T&T Clark, 2004), may also appeal to interested readers.

John Roth, Pastor
Faith Lutheran Church
Jacksonville, IL

Torture is a Moral Issue: Christians, Jews, Muslims and People of Conscience Speak Out. Edited by George Hunsinger. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008. 272 pages. Paper. \$26.00.

"Anyone who has been tortured remains tortured . . . the abomination of the annihilation is never extinguished." Thus writes Dianna Ortiz, a torture victim who suffered at the hands of the Guatemalan military (p. 25). Ortiz's story is part of a collage of views in *Torture is a Moral Issue: Christians, Jews, Muslims and People of Conscience Speak Out*. This volume is the compilation of presentations delivered at the 2006 Princeton Theological Seminary Conference on "Theology, International Law, and Torture," organized by George Hunsinger, founder of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture, who also serves as the book's editor.

The work is divided into five sections. The first section is composed of first-hand accounts of torture by both victims and perpetrators. The second, third, and fourth sections include Christian, Jewish, and Muslim perspectives on torture, respectively. Of special note is the inclusion of the 1981 Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights that includes the "Right to Protection Against Torture" (p. 191). The final section underlines the responsibility to take moral stances against torture. Thus, it is clear that this work does not intend to engage in ethical or moral debate about torture, but is a clear articulation *against* it. Hunsinger's Foreword and final chapter provide clear parameters for the work: Religious communities have a moral responsibility to end torture.

The inclusion of the views of two retired former judge advocates in the U.S. military, who speak about their "concerns" about torture, is unfortunately suspect, as they did not contribute full-fledged chapters but only edited statements. Thus their contribution to the work is muted. However, the concluding words by Scott Horton provide a compelling reminder of the importance of the conference: "torture always comes home" (p. 261). His statement reminds us again of what the title clearly articulates. Torture is not some-



thing done “over there” in a war zone, but is an issue that reveals the tears in the moral fabric of a society.

David D. Grafton
Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia

Constantine's Bible: Politics and the Making of the New Testament. By David L. Dungan. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007. xii and 224 pages. Paper. \$17.00.

This is really two books wrapped into one. In discussing canon, David Dungan, on the one hand, sets the establishment of the Christian canon into the framework of the process of scripture collections among world religions (chapters one and seven), and, on the other, provides a clear and concise historical presentation of the development of the Christian Bible through the time of the Emperor Constantine (chapters two through six).

Those conversant with *The Da Vinci Code* might give pause with Dungan's subtitle, especially the word “politics.” Yet his experience and expertise (35 years at the University of Tennessee teaching a course “The Making of the New Testament”) brings insight and nuance in understanding this newly sensationalized topic.

Yes, politics did play a role in forming this collection that shapes the Christian identity. In many of the world religions there is no such concept as canon as scripture accumulates over time. Boundaries are fluid and less concerned with self-identity. Yet within Christianity, Judaism, and Islam the stage was set between the third and seventh centuries for a unique understanding of a canon of Scripture.

Dungan shows how the particular developments of early Christianity, influenced by the Greek mindset within the *Polis* with its demand for precision, clarity, and order, then responded to a rapidly expanding church with all its diversity (and heresy). As Eusebius points out, it was the establishment of a structure of bishops and councils that partnered with the growing political power of Constantine that naturally developed into

orthodoxy with its self-limiting and self-defining concept of canon.

This unique timing led to a similar understanding within Judaism in the codification of the *Mishnah* (though not earlier at Jamnia as previously assumed) and within Islam in the *Qur'an*—setting the three monotheistic religions apart from other world religions.

This book includes over fifty pages of footnotes, but is written in a way that will appeal to lay study groups and college students. A timeline of figures and events supplements the text, as do three appendices providing references to Eusebius; a complete list of early Christian writings; and a list of Nag Hammadi titles. Resources also include a short topical bibliography and an index.

Fred Strickert
Wartburg College
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The Word Leaps the Gap: Essays on Scripture and Theology in Honor of Richard B. Hays. Edited by J. Ross Wagner, C. Kavin Rowe, and A. Katherine Grieb. Grand Rapids: Wm/ B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008. xxii and 732 pages. Cloth. \$70.00.

Richard Hays' scholarly scriptural and churchly interests provide the unity to the thirty-three essays in this huge Festschrift. Hays has published much on the intertextuality of Paul (he reconstructs an Old Testament narrative that underlies much of Paul), on Christology and soteriology, based on his interpretation of $\pi\sigma\tau\iota\varsigma$ $\chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\upsilon$ as Christ's fidelity to God, on moral teaching in the New Testament, and on interpreting the Bible in and for the church. Hays set the agenda for many New Testament scholars in the last thirty years.

These themes run through the contributions to this volume. I can mention only a few that struck me as I read. Stanley Hauerwas defends himself against Hays' critique of his interpretation of the Bible as he does his ethical reflection in “Why ‘The Way the Words Run’ Matters.” (pp.1-19) James Dunn argues against Hays' interpretation of “the



faith of Jesus,” arguing for the objective genitive, “faith in Jesus.” (pp. 351-66) While I do not think that Paul must use the phrase in the same sense everywhere, I think Hays interprets correctly in many passages. N. T. Wright’s “Faith, Virtue, Justification, and the Journey to Freedom” and Markus Bockmueh’s “The Conversion of Desire in St. Paul’s Hermeneutics” (pp. 498-513) pick up Hays’ interest in ethics, while A Katherine Grieb (“The Bard and the Book: Shakespeare’s Interpretation of Scripture,” pp. 543-71) and Leander E. Keck (“Is Matthew Arnold Also Among the Prophets? A Victorian Critic Interprets Paul,” pp. 572-98) pick up Hays’ interest in methods of interpretation.

This is a very rich volume. Many other articles by outstanding scholars deserve mention. But the last is also fascinating. Richard and Judith Hays coauthored “The Christian Practice of Growing Old: The Witness of Scripture” (pp. 649-64). As one some twenty years older than Richard, I appreciated his words a great deal. I urge the reading of this volume to all interested in the New Testament.

Edgar Krentz
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

The Gospel of John and Christian Theology. Edited by Richard Bauckham and Carl Mosser. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008. xxiv and 381 pages. Paper. \$28.00

This volume of essays, which attempts to bridge the growing gap between biblical studies and theology, results from a conference at the University of St. Andrews, Scotland, hosted by Richard Bauckham, Professor of New Testament at the University. These essays focus on the Gospel of John, a noteworthy subject, given its central importance in the emerging theology of the Christian church. All of the scholars are known for their grasp of both historical studies and the broader philosophical and theological issues with respect to the New Testament. Among the topics are these: John and Our Pluralistic Context (Johannine Dualism), History and Testimony in John, John and “the Jews,” Perspectives on the Raising of

Lazarus, Christology, and Using John in the Theological Task Today.

While all the essays were done with great care and insight, several deserve special attention for their depth and practicality. “The Lazarus Story: A Literary Perspective” by Andrew Lincoln demonstrates the centrality of the raising of Lazarus in John’s Gospel. Readers get a feel for the entire Gospel in his astute literary analysis. No better summary of the Gospel is found than in this chapter. On Christology, the renowned New Testament scholar, Martin Hengel, probes “The Prologue of the Gospel of John as Gateway to Christological Truth.” Contrary to some interpreters, Hengel views the prologue as part of the original Gospel. He then brilliantly develops the prologue as the source of the church’s creedal confessions of Jesus, as both divine and human and as the revelation of God in the Word made flesh. The volume ends with reflections by Jürgen Moltmann, the well-known German “theologian of hope.” His title, “God in the World-and the World in God” discusses what he names “Perichoresis in Trinity and Eschatology.” By “perichoresis” he means God’s indwelling in the Trinity, and he closes his words with the hope of God bringing the whole creation to its promised fullness.

On some issues, there is considerable disagreement. Some suggest the problematic “dualism” in John is only apparent and not real. There is no uniformity on the original author(s) of the Gospel, with some even suggesting the “elder” who wrote I John as the final editor. The witness of the “beloved disciple” is disputed. The question of historicity is at the fore, especially with the raising of Lazarus, but does not receive adequate discussion. There is a good challenge to the claim of “objectivity” by modern scholars. But the question of anti-Judaism and “the Jews” is done with sensitivity and moderation.

In sum, the collection fulfills its promise of promoting a necessary dialogue between exegetes and Christian theologians. Pastors will read with much profit.

Walter Pilgrim
Pacific Lutheran University



Technology and Human Becoming. By Philip Hefner. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003. xi and 97 pages. Paper. \$7.00

In this brief and at times poetic book Philip Hefner gives us a well-thought argument about the roles of technology and religion in the evolution of human nature. In the case of technology, Hefner walks the fine line between a view of technology as an enemy of nature and technology as a much-needed transformation of nature for humans' sake. In either case, we humans have been not only affected but also transformed by technological developments since the beginning of culture and civilization.

Hefner speaks of "human becoming" rather than of becoming human because of his belief that being human is not necessarily a final destination. Human nature is always in process, ever becoming, and we should think of it as finality. The journey that encompasses this process of ever becoming is a religious reality, one that is conducive to, as well as conducted by what Hefner calls "spirit." The spiritual dimension is disclosed through whether we support the development of technology or go against it. Unfortunately, argues Hefner, the insistence of having to choose between one way or the other reflects warfare thinking that is basically dualistic in character. For many, technology is either a good or a bad thing, which does not grapple with the question of the proper use of technology and the role that it plays in shaping what we are or can become.

The question arises: what are we becoming with our technology? Technology is seen as part of our evolutionary becoming. Here Hefner refers to the distinction between the adolescent and the adult as a possible way of explaining different attitudes toward technology. In spite of the question of whether this heuristic appeal to human development is the most helpful, Hefner's reasoning is essentially sound in claiming that our understanding of technology and our personal becoming go hand in hand.

There are multiple examples of the merging of technology with our bodies and spirits, from medicines to implants to com-

puters. For Hefner, being "technologized" is about human becoming, the formation of our self and our self-image. Selfhood matters, since nothing is more sacred to us individually. All that said, the movement between the techno-world and techno-self creates alienation for us. There is a gap that is hard to bridge. Moreover, this gap is probably at the root of our ambivalence towards technology in general.

Hefner's most compelling argument is that technology mirrors human realities, dreams, and desires. Technology is a mirror for creation and evolution. It reflects, whether reliably or not, our hopes for survival and salvation. This hope feeds our imagination, which is a powerful force for life and freedom, as important to technology as to the rest of human life.

Imagination and its manifestations are conveyed to us in stories. Stories underlie both the conception and the uses of technology. Stories contextualize technology; they also convey meaning. We weave facts into our stories, or stories with facts. In a sense, they become inseparable. Because of its role in human becoming, religious stories are integral to this weaving of facts with stories about the world. We cannot eliminate the religious dimension from technology because of the latter's importance for human life, for by doing so we would be eliminating depth from the human experience. There is a place for spirituality here, especially in its capacity to imagine the good, including non-human nature.

Nelson Rivera

Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia

War, Peace, and God: Rethinking the Just-War Tradition. By Gary M. Simpson. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2007. 111 pages. Paper. \$10.99.

This slim volume outlines a contemporary Lutheran approach to the just-war tradition. It is robust in its ability to assess the current prospects for that view in today's church. Unlike pacifistic Anabaptists, Lutherans, along with the wider Catholic tradition, maintained



the possibility of rendering retributive justice in a “just-war.” Simpson is helpful with tempering this tradition in light of the violence without parallel in the past and which we experience today.

In the just-war tradition, a just-war is contingent upon ten factors: (a) just cause, (b) legitimate authority, (c) right interests, (d) the end as peace, (e) last resort, (f) proportionality of ends, (g) probability of success, (h) public declaration, (i) noncombatant discrimination, and (j) proportionality of means. Simpson presents the development of the tradition in Cicero, Ambrose, Augustine, and Aquinas. Augustine’s view, that a Christian ruler might need to correct subjects by fear, even though it is better for citizens to be guided by love, is found wanting by Simpson.

Simpson notes that Luther read the just-war tradition through the dynamic lens of law and gospel, in which the law curbs sin but cannot cure it. In Luther’s view, a ruler “can exercise” one’s “vocation in the office of prince according to a twofold mandate from God: on the one hand, to represent God by implementing God’s just law and, on the other hand, to serve the vulnerable neighbor rather than self.” Likewise, counter to Augustine, political authority should not be used to force conversions. Wars are earthly contests of power, not heavenly, and thus there can in principle be no holy war, not even against the threatening Islamic Turks. Luther also establishes the possibility of selective conscientious objection.

Some of these ideas are paralleled by Francisco de Vitoria, a Spanish Catholic contemporary of Luther. In response to the Spanish conquest of the Americas, he affirmed that imperial expansion violates just cause and that holy war against the native Americans likewise violates just cause. This is echoed now in Pope John XXIII’s position that the use of atomic power in war is not a fit instrument for repairing a violation of justice.

The “pacifist turn” in Lutheran circles as it has developed over the last century through commitment to social renewal is affirmed by Simpson. In light of current American worries, Simpson notes that terrorism should not be identified as a “military tactic, only

immoral” since “terrorism is primarily social and political violence within a larger social and political strategy, policy, and ideology,” targeting civilians “in order to generate fear and panic in society.” It is best seen as “theater and propaganda by means of deadly deeds.” Likewise, in light of imperial ambition, the United States should follow more closely the convictions of Abraham Lincoln to seek a “just, and lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations” and to do so “with malice toward none; with charity for all.”

This is a remarkably helpful book since it presents the historical development of the just-war doctrine while critiquing it in light of the excesses of modern warfare and imperial pride and greed. This study is accessible to most laity and provides a good overview for both rostered leaders and scholars.

Mark Mattes
Grand View College

Briefly Noted

Beverly Lanzetta has edited the brief volume (108 pages) *40-Day Journey with Joan Chittister* (Augsburg, \$11.99), providing a meaningful devotional journey for readers. The book begins with guidelines for using the book and on journal-keeping, as well as an introduction to Joan Chittister, a Benedictine sister who is a thoughtful presenter and researcher on contemporary spirituality. Each day presents a reading from Joan Chittister, which is matched with a biblical text and psalm fragment. Silence for meditation, questions to ponder, journal reflections, prayer suggestions, and a one-sentence prayer are also included. I worked slowly through each day’s offerings and experienced myself on a deeply meditative and centering journey. I highly recommend this volume for pondering.

James L. Bailey,
Wartburg Theological Seminary



True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary. Edited by Brian K. Blount *et al.* (Fortress. \$30). Students of the Bible have gained much from publications like *The Women's Bible Commentary* and *The Global Bible Commentary*, and that will surely be true of this volume written by 21 contemporary African American scholars. Race and socio-cultural space matter, and the writers listen for New Testament themes that speak to African American space. Before the commentary proper, there are essays on slavery in the early church, Africa and African imagery in the Bible, Paul and African American biblical interpretation (the "outsider" apostle has much to offer a people too often relegated to the American margins), orienting biblical interpretation around the African American self, womanist biblical interpretation, African American preaching and the Bible, and African American art and biblical interpretation (a number of paintings and sculptures appear in color throughout the volume). Naturally, the book of Philemon holds particular difficulty for African American readers, but Lloyd A. Lewis suggests that Paul is asking Philemon to experience the disquieting nature of the gospel and accept a vision of the church in which equal status before God is the norm among members. Brad R. Braxton argues that in Gal 3:28 Paul argues for the eradication of dominance, not the erasure of difference. Ethnic unity implies the maintenance of ethnic distinctions. Braxton is also prophetic toward his own community: "How can African American churches proclaim a liberating gospel and still place shackles on women?" The African American interpretive tradition shows that there are no "neutral" or "disinterested" readings of the Bible. The universalist themes in Acts have certain limits, for example, with respect to women and slaves. As Demetrius K. Williams insists, this "double message" of Acts deserves further attention. All who read the Bible need to ponder the rich insights of this book.

Ralph W. Klein

Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters. Edited by Donald K. McKim (IVP Academic, \$45). This is the second, much expanded edition of exegetes from Abelard to Zwingli. Generally you have to die to make it into this book, but there are notable exceptions: Walter Brueggemann, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, George Mendenhall, and Phyllis Trible, each of whom has contributed significantly to the current exegetical scene. But where are Frank Moore Cross, Helmut Koester, and Krister Stendahl, also highly significant and still with us at the time of publishing (though Stendahl has subsequently died)? In addition to the more than 200 entries on individual scholars, there are six survey articles on biblical interpretation from the early church to the twentieth century. William Rainey Harper, the first president of the University of Chicago, graduated from college at the age of 14 and summed up his life this way: "You understand that my special business in the world is stirring up people on the English Bible. The University of Chicago is entirely a second hand matter." Two-thirds of the marginal notes in Tyndale's first English New Testament were taken from Luther—this was pointed out by L. Franklin Gruber, whose rare book collection is one of the treasures of LSTC. These meaty mini-biographies can teach much about biblical interpretation—and the Bible!

Ralph W. Klein

The TNIV Reference Bible. (Zondervan, \$34.99). This Bible excels at what it promises—more than 100,000 marginal cross references. This volume also has a 70-page concordance, an eight-page dictionary of biblical terms, and eight maps.

Ralph W. Klein

Preaching Helps

Proper 22—Thanksgiving

The Logic of the Lectionary

Henry J. Langknecht¹

I love the lectionary: the logic of it, the way it weaves in and out of the church year, and the feast of scriptural images and metaphors by which it engages my imagination. I am also bemused that the logic of the lectionary is thwarted by our performance practice. The thumbnail logic of the lectionary is that a reading from one of the four Gospels is chosen first, then a first reading (usually from the Old Testament) is chosen on the basis of its thematic connection to the gospel reading. Then a psalm is chosen that responds in some way to that first reading. During the seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent, and on major festivals, a second reading is chosen from the New Testament to further complement the liturgical theme. During the season of Easter and ordinary time, the second reading is chosen according to a different logic: excerpts from a New Testament book are read over some numbers of weeks in canonical order so that the church can hear a bit of that book's argument or narrative arc.

During Sunday worship my experience of hearing the readings from Scripture varies from the ideal. Because the psalm directly follows the first reading, I do occasionally catch some of its thematic resonance. I do not then, however, prepare for hearing the second reading by remembering, "okay, this reading has nothing to do with the first reading and psalm; this is picking up the story where the second reading left off last week..." Rather, the second reading layers on more images and words to those already in my mind from the first reading and psalm. Then we hear the gospel reading (chosen first, read last!). On Sundays when the first reading's intended relationship to the gospel reading is focused on a distinct character type (e.g., a "widow") or a key theological concept (e.g., "forgiveness" or "judgment day") or concrete human experience (e.g., "marriage"), the first reading may come back to my mind with some clarity as I hear the gospel read. But if the connection is subtle, or if the first reading and gospel reading are separated by a hymn or children's sermon (in addition to the psalm and second reading), or if I am distracted by the Cheerio-noshing child

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in the pew in front of me, the lofty goals of the lectionary are thwarted.

Perhaps it is lamentable that the reality of Sunday morning worship means that we miss the lectionary's logic (not to mention access to the literary context of the books from which the passages come, the rich arguments of which they are component, or their place in the whole sweep of the biblical story). And over the years of my preaching ministry I have often used precious sermon time trying, in many and various ways, to force the passages retroactively back into any or all of those important contexts, because these literary, canonical, and historical contexts are appropriate and are to be valued in their place. However, they are not the *only* appropriate contexts for passages of the Bible and the metaphors, characters, and images contained therein; and they are not the most important contexts for preachers.

More and more I am encouraged by this article of faith: how the Bible bursts on the scene in its oral performance in the divine chaos of worship is of fundamental theological importance for preaching because this is how the church receives its Scripture. We may lament a lot of things—biblical illiteracy, naïve accommodation of appealing verses, or the lectionary's clumsy editing—but Scripture is quintessentially Scripture when it is being read to the church in worship. Time spent in the sermon explaining the (supposed) experience that a first century listener might have had when hearing a parable is time spent ignoring and devaluing the living experience of the church hearing the parable now—a hearing just as inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit as the original.

This is the gift preachers receive when they rise to preach: the Bible's words, images, and stories are strewn across various species and conditions of rock, thistle, path, and soil. And this is the challenge preachers accept: before raw materials of these texts are properly sorted, labeled, and stowed by the well-catechized minds of the faithful or discarded as irrelevant and archaic by the skeptics, the sermon will gather some of those elements and give testimony to how *these* passages read to *this* gathering at *this* incomparable moment in time help carry revelation from God.

So, as I reflect on these nine lectionary occasions, I do so as a preacher, a teacher of preachers, and also as a worshiper who will on those future occasions be constructing something of my own "lectionary narrative" (more likely "lectionary collage") out of the brief bits of Scripture that are the appointed passages. Within me I carry all of my catechism, my seminary training, and everything I know about Luke, Moses, and theories of redaction. But in worship, these passages speak to me as self-contained gems, bits of theological "poetry"...or poetic theology.

Craig A. Satterlee, Editor of Preaching Helps
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Proper 22 October 4, 2009

Genesis 2:18-24

Psalm 8

Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12

Mark 10:2-16

First Reading

It's nearly impossible to read and hear Genesis 2 without being aware of the freight the faith community has asked it to carry. But a simpler reading of just these seven verses would follow a simple story arc: God expresses concern that "the earthling" is alone and needs a companion; suspense builds as animals and birds are created from the dust and brought to the earthling for consideration, but are rejected; resolution is delayed as God puts the earthling to sleep and extracts bone and flesh; then the suspension is finally resolved in the earthling's climactic proclamation of relief: At last! One lonely earthling has now become two complementary companions!

Already the final verse of the reading begins to shape the story's significance. Therefore in marriage, "separated" flesh is reunited and a sketch of human community begins to take shape as individuals leave their birth homes, cling to one another, and establish new homes together. It's a lovely, hopeful narrative.

The general rule of the lectionary is that the psalm is chosen to respond to the first lesson. Psalm 8 is filled with references to creation and the relationship God establishes between God, humans, and animals. But the human dominion language of the psalm resonates more clearly with Genesis 1:27-30 than this day's first reading. The psalm unfolds along a simple trajectory: contemplation of the infinite scope of the cosmos

and then wonder and praise that human beings should be given any attention at all by God (let alone the honor of being chosen as chief stewards of the earth).

We don't expect the second reading during ordinary time to relate thematically to the others, and the first part of the reading from Hebrews is true to form. It begins with an excerpt from chapter one that contains a thumbnail Christology. The second part of the reading, though, quotes Psalm 8 and develops the psalmist's amazement that God has given humans honor and dominion. But human dominion falls short necessitating the entrance of Jesus. The passage does not say why human dominion failed; what it does suggest is that Jesus' dominion succeeds because he deigned to suffer for others and was unashamed by his humbling identity.

The reading from Mark jars us back to the issue of human relationships, and specifically marriage. After a brief back and forth with the Pharisees, Jesus declares God's intent that the joining of two into one flesh should not ever be undone. After this the disciples alone hear a further intensification of God's intent ending with the line that will ring out into the congregation where you are preaching: whoever divorces and then marries again commits adultery.

The final scene involves people bringing children to Jesus. The iconic scene of Jesus blessing the children is a blank canvas on which many sentimental and then decidedly anti-sentimental pictures have been drawn. What does it mean to be childlike? Whatever it means, the velvet promise has an iron fist inside: whoever doesn't manage to be childlike does not get in. Yikes.

Pastoral Reflection

Psalm 8 and the second reading open

up the possibility of a sermon that begins with jaw-dropping wonder at creation and wonder's accompanying dark side: "Why is there anything? Why are we here?" The sermon could intensify the ontological angst by pondering why God has even noticed the hairless bipeds on the third planet from the sun. This pondering also has a shadow side: "What does it all mean? What is our purpose?" Following then the brief trajectory of Psalm 8:6ff and Hebrews 2:9ff, you might sketch the outlines of human purpose as exemplified and empowered by Jesus—God's companionship and dominion, yes; but dominion characterized by suffering, humility, service, and accompaniment.

However, I believe a conspiracy of factors—the familiarity of the Genesis reading; the uncompromising teaching of Jesus about marriage, divorce, and adultery; and denominational conversations around human sexuality—places a burden on you to address marriage and divorce.

When I'm sitting in the congregation on October 4, here is what I'd like to hear: What do we believe about human relationship, companionship, and marriage? Our culture expresses family, covenant relationships, and community in so many ways, how far do the promises and warnings of these texts stretch? Is the mystical language of Genesis and Mark (two becoming one flesh) helpful (I still remember college classmates excited and nervous about finding "my rib"). Do we really believe that every act of sexual intimacy creates a spiritual or physiological bond? Or is the more prosaic language of vocation a better way to talk about marriage and singleness both?

Framed in a certain way—admittedly a way not sustained even by its last verse!—the first reading is about simple companionship and community; it would

be fun to try and capture the playfulness of its simplest shape. Was the earthling in on the game? If so, what was it like to be a player, to be the judge of God's attempts to create (literally) community? "No, sorry, the palomino is great, but not what I'm needing. Definitely not this... let's see...what shall I call it?...this iguana!" And what was it like for the earthling to finally behold "the one"?

As fun as this might be, the yoking of Genesis 2 to Jesus' teachings in Mark compels a serious consideration of marriage. Some, when hearing Jesus' teachings, will take vindictive pleasure in thinking that it's good for people to be "stuck with each other." Others will revel in the grand vision that the love of a couple bears a special witness to the unconditional accepting love of God. Still others would like to see the church out of the marriage business all together relegating all "unionizing" to the civil realm. Many will be confused as they consider the ambiguity of the marriages around them. And how do we talk about the great promise of marriage in a way that honors the vocation of single people?

I'd also like to hear about divorce. No one is "in favor of divorce" and some communions of the body of Christ take the excommunicative effect of divorce with utter seriousness. Most Lutherans do not. But what word of law are we willing to proclaim? Divorced individuals already know that God intended a different outcome—as did they. They know that sin was at work; there is no risk surprising them with the news. How might you bring these Scripture passages into contact with the living testimony around us (and perhaps in your own life!) of second marriages and step-families that are apparently and really sources of God's creative life and health, or of women or men who have escaped deadly marriages

and who are now clearly in recovery toward health.

Finally, I'd like to hear God's vision for human families, companionship, and community. And I thirst to hear how God acts to bring that vision to bear. HJL

Proper 23 October 11, 2009

Amos 5:6-7, 10-15
Psalm 90:12-17
Hebrews 4:12-16
Mark 10:17-31

First Reading

The reading from Amos begins with direct condemnation leveled at the people of God who ignore the mandate to care for the poor; and at the people of God who fail to do justice; and at the people of God who are dishonest and greedy, even though they have no reasonable motive for greed—they already have more than enough: houses and vineyards. The picture is of well-to-do, well-fed worshipers of God exploiting and extorting and taking advantage of their humble righteous brothers and sisters.

After the storm of accusations, right at the point where the reading turns toward exhortation (v. 14), there is a gem of a phrase that could be voiced as biting irony or as nearly tearful pleading. "Seek good and not evil, that you may live; and so the LORD, the God of hosts, will be with you, just as you have said." *Just as you have said!* Amos is talking to worshipers who week after week share the familiar dialogue: "The Lord be with you. And also with you." Amos is saying (with sarcasm or pleading?), "this is a lovely sentiment, but you may not glibly assume that just because *you* say

it, it is true." This is a favorite rhetorical strategy of Amos, forcing the people of God to consider the deep meaning of their treasured piety. Very soon (5:18) he will remind them that they ought not to be planning a community picnic on the "day of the Lord."

The response made by Psalm 90 is a sharp and provocative contrast to Amos. The appointed psalmody is 90:12-17. Verses 1-11 of the psalm recount expressions of God's anger that are similar to those we hear in Amos. The specific sins of the people are not enumerated, but it is clear that God's absence—meaning that the LORD is, in fact, *not* "with you"—means death. The success of the psalm as a response to Amos lies in capturing a sense of repentant desperation in the imperatives, "teach us..." "return, O LORD..." "be gracious..."

This lectionary set provides an occasion where the second reading extends the lectionary narrative arc established by the first reading and psalm. The Word of God sees and pronounces the truth (as Amos demonstrates): both the truth of our sin and the truth of God's desire for our obedience and covenant relationship. Before that Word we are helpless and naked because we know that we are found wanting. But we also know that the source of that Word is our life. If the tone of Amos is, "judgment is coming, watch out!" and the tone of the psalm is "repentant desperation," pleading with God to return and teach us; a wonderful shift takes place starting at Hebrews 4:14. The tone of Hebrews is one of utter confidence rooted in our relationship with our resurrected high priest who knows and understands our desperation. Through Christ we boldly *request* the surgery of the word knowing that while the painful process of judgment and repentance may destroy us, even that de-

struction transpires inside God's mercy and grace. The one who judges us is also the one who most completely knows us, is also the one who raises us again.

In the gospel reading the same Jesus who knows and loves us (see how v. 21 of this reading resonates with Hebrews 4:15!) picks up a bit of Amos's trajectory. Right relationship to God involves reciting the commandments *and doing them* (here it is the dual instruction to care for the poor and to clarify your relationship with "mammon"). The man fails. A striking detail of that failure is the man's sorrow.

A more important detail of that failure is the sense that Jesus knew its inevitability, "How hard it will be..." This second section of the reading (vv. 23-27) ends with the tough acknowledgment of human inability ("with mortals it is impossible") and the lovely promise of divine creativity ("with God all things are possible."). But, is this true? Is it really possible for God to separate *you* from that which you hold dear? Perhaps; but this is not a "wave a magic wand" promise. The line "with God all things are possible" should be read in such a way that it captures the agony of the division of joints from marrow.

In the third section of the reading (vv. 28-31), Peter approaches the "throne of grace" with boldness and is rewarded (as Hebrews suggests he should be). Amos promised that those who did seek God would live and would enjoy the real presence of God. Jesus' development of the themes of Amos continues in the assurances he gives to Peter. And yet there is a hook: there will be persecutions and even after we have received the promise we will still be prone to confusion over status and honor—does that mean the whole cycle starts over again?

Pastoral Reflection

When I'm sitting in the congregation on October 11, I'd be interested to have my weekly liturgy deconstructed using the strategy of the prophet Amos. How do the familiar phrases of our liturgy convict us? "For the peace of the whole world..." "Forgive us as we forgive..." "Go in peace, remember the poor. Thanks be to God!" Intense focus on familiar words and deadened metaphors has potential to bring them to life and allow them again to bear God's Word of conviction and promise. We know that the world is broken and that we are complicit, so don't be afraid of sharp analysis—perhaps start by quoting one of the many business columnists who acknowledge that our culture is too greedy!

I would also appreciate being drawn into identification with the character of the man who approaches Jesus. We all know the grief and sorrow of our inability to be faithful disciples. What happens next for him? How does God, through Christ, make it possible for him to get through to the other side of the needle? The gospel side of this trajectory is to revel in the amazing relationship that exists between a guilty person and an empathetic judge. HJL

Proper 24 October 18, 2009

Isaiah 53:4-12
Psalm 91:9-16
Hebrews 5:1-10
Mark 10:35-45

First Reading

How striking and disorienting to hear this familiar servant song during October—half a year away from the crucifixion! The familiar Good Friday version

begins at 52:13, with the words, “See, my servant shall prosper, he shall be exalted and lifted up...” And within the context of the liturgies of Holy Week, it is inevitable that we would hear the passage referring to Jesus. Maybe if the passage is read in October there is a chance for a fresh hearing and for a referent other than Jesus (God’s people, the disciples, us!). However, because this version of the passage begins at v. 4 with, “Surely he has borne our infirmities...” identification with Jesus is guaranteed.

The recollection of this chosen one’s suffering obedience feels familiar and strangely comforting except at two places. The first is in v. 9 where the poetic parallelism suggests that “wicked” and “rich” are near-enough synonyms! The second jarring moment (and perhaps more so than on Good Friday?) is the stark declaration of v. 10, “it was the will of the LORD to crush him with pain.” This is followed (though hardly balanced!) by the promise of light, satisfaction, and the servant’s promotion to ranks of the great and the strong. (Many will hear some echoes of the “Christ hymn” of Philipians 2.)

The response of Psalm 91 seems to pick up the uplifting promises of Isaiah 53:11-12, but taken with the whole first reading, the psalm is almost comically contradictory. Is it God’s will to crush the servant with pain or is it the case that if the LORD is your refuge *no evil* will befall you, no affliction? Apart from this odd conflict of themes, the psalm recites a moving accumulation of blessings, benefits, and powers for those who know the name of God.

As we work through readings from the book of Hebrews we remain aware that the book has a mild supersessionist tone, which will resonate with naïve contemporary notions of the “insufficiency”

of temple Judaism (and therefore the need for Jesus and a new expression of faith). It is notable that in this reading from Hebrews, the ministry of the human high priest, and even the person of the high priest himself, is quite sympathetic. The priest is portrayed as humble, gentle, called into service by God in part because his own sin makes him empathetic to those whose sin he atones for his offering of sacrifice. (What a contrast to the portrayal of the high priests, scribes, and Pharisees in the Gospels!) In keeping with the rhetorical strategy of Hebrews, Christ is shown to be the epitome of this priestly service (vv. 5-6). The last part of the reading (vv. 7-10) will be heard as an extension of the Isaiah passage. Because of his submission to suffering, Christ was heard when he cried and he learned obedience and was made perfect thereby.

Isaiah and Hebrews talk in poetic and lofty terms about the vocation of servanthood; the reading from Mark tells the story about how hard these concepts are to grasp in real life. Reading this story aloud means giving James and John their attitude as they make their request and are then engaged by Jesus in a deepened understanding of what is entailed. James and John (and by extension the other disciples and we ourselves) will be suffering servants; they will drink the cup and seem willing to do so. But then Jesus delivers, what must have been then and continues to be now, a surprise: this sacrificial, suffering servanthood is not instrumental to attain some later recognition or glory; the servanthood itself is the point.

Pastoral Reflection

When I’m sitting in the congregation on October 18, I want to hear about suffering service, the inescapable theme of these readings. Though it will be hard, lead us into the Isaiah passage as though

the referent were the church or the individual disciples called to service by the Lord of the church. The servant of God is crushed and is sustained and learns through obedience about life. Tell me what I will learn when I am empowered to take up this cross!

The homiletical challenges here are many. First, the promise that suffering service opens us to knowledge that lies near the heart of God must be proclaimed even if it extends beyond the tepid witness of the congregation or of the preacher himself or herself! Another challenge is encouraging us toward this style of service without rewarding passive aggressive martyrdom (no matter HOW much work those folks get done in the congregation) or encouraging innocent victims to acquiesce to abuse. HJL

Reformation October 25, 2009

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Psalms 46

Romans 3:19-28

John 8:31-36

First Reading

The opening clause of the first reading evokes the promise, tension, and ongoing re-creation that are the backdrop for our experience of life with God: "The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I *will...*" God is the ever-creative one who is constantly in motion responding to our response to God's call to covenant relationship. A new covenant is in the works because we broke the old one. When we break the new one a newer one will come. And when we break that one, God's urgency to be in relationship ("I took them by the hand...") "I was their husband...") will compel the creation of

yet another.

No details are given here about why or how the previous covenant failed (and I've already suggested that a supersessionist reading is simplistic). The implication is that it had to do with mediation through others: "no longer shall they teach each other...for they shall all know me." What causes the breakdown in communication here? The final verse of the reading is worthy of consideration: God's confidence that the people "will know me" is directly related (in English by the word "for") to the forgiveness of sin. To know God is to experience reconciliation and freedom; to experience reconciliation and freedom is to know God.

The strict lectionary rules do not apply to the selection of the psalm for Reformation Day. Lutheran lore claims that Psalm 46 was the inspiration for Martin Luther's best known hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God." The psalm makes it clear that God only is God. A striking element of the psalm, which might suggest an antiphonal performance, is the sharp contrast between explosive energy and calm. Refuge (v. 1) gives way to earthquakes, storm surges, and volcanoes (vv. 2-3), which give way to the peaceful city on the river (vv. 4-5). Then the nations rage and God responds by decisively ending war (vv. 6-9) which brings us to stillness, peace, and praise (vv. 10-11).

The second reading dovetails nicely with the trajectory established by the reading from Jeremiah. The external law "speaks," it "says" things to us (Jeremiah: "no longer shall they say...") but it fails to justify because it brings knowledge of sin. If this way of putting it suggests that the law *teaches* us about sin, it might be more helpful to put it this way: the law focuses our consciousness on sin. As in Jeremiah so in Paul: it is direct appropria-

tion and experience of God (God's forgiveness in Jeremiah, God's righteousness here) that moves us beyond our enthrallment with the law. God forgives and then moves directly into our hearts, changing our hearts so that we might begin to live out of a relationship that is situated, as it were, prior to the law.

Boasting is excluded because we don't establish this new life; God does by God's direct and active presence in our hearts. And boasting is not the only thing that is excluded: so also is worry and fear because this foundation for our new lives is rooted in God's faithfulness and righteousness rather than our own. If we fall (or backslide) we fall (or slide) right back into God.

The gospel reading contains a classic Gospel of John misunderstanding, here on the word "freedom." The Judean disciples hear Jesus' offer of freedom and are unimpressed, thinking that "freedom" is of use only to those who are in political, or perhaps, economic slavery. Their boast of never having been in slavery is hyperbolic (cf. Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, even Rome); it is hard to tell whether they (or the gospel author) also intend it to be ironic. Whatever the case, Jesus reveals the deeper meaning of the "freedom" he offers. And if everyone who commits sin is, as Paul claims, everyone indeed, then the Son's offer of freedom has universal implications. What Jesus does not spell out is exactly *how* sin exercises its mastery over us.

Pastoral Reflection

When I'm sitting in the congregation on Reformation Sunday, here is what I'd like to hear: Remind us that the Hebrew faith of the Old Testament was not mired in works righteousness. Grace abounds from creation to Exodus to the gift of the Law to the provision of a land to the

return from Exile to the promises of a messianic fulfillment. The temptation to self-secured righteousness is in us all—whether that manifests itself in hypocrisy (that attempts to hide or deny our falling short) or idolatry (where we reset God's law—thereby replacing one God with another—so that its demands are within our reach). The promises of God spoken through Jeremiah, Paul, and Jesus are for all of us at all times.

Jeremiah offers two lovely images that might bear the freight of gospel proclamation. First he speaks of God "taking Israel by the hand." The image could seem a bit sentimental (whether because it evokes parent/child or lover relationships) but its evocation of God's caring enough to offer God's own self through direct aid is powerful. The homiletical challenge will be to find credible (and I hope non-sentimental) evidences of God's involved care in our lives. Second, is the image of God writing the law on our hearts. This is the essence of baptismal grace: that God enters in and changes the configuration of our hearts and lives so that we are no longer burdened with trying to seek for a sustaining relationship with our creator. Instead, we are able to move into mission in creation from the security of that relationship already established and sustained by God.

Or pick up on those enigmatic law-gospel words from Jesus: "everyone who sins is slave to sin" and "if the Son sets you free you are indeed free." Fill in what Jesus leaves blank: name our sin-masters and reveal to us concretely and really how they bind us and put us to work in their service. And then imagine how Christ would come and what remedy he would give. Such specificity is hard because "real life" is ambiguous and slavery is contextual. Maybe the best you can do is testify to times and places where you or we have

enjoyed short bursts of freedom. But don't be afraid to tell the truth about our slavery for you also can tell us of Christ and his power to set us free, even from death. HJL

All Saints November 1, 2009

Isaiah 25:6-9

Psalm 24

Revelation 21:1-6a

John 11:32-44

First Reading

The Isaiah reading begins with an image of the great eschatological feast where all people will be gathered. Even if contemporary worshipers don't know what marrow is or why one is expected to like the idea of "food filled with marrow," the performance of this description in v. 6 should induce some mouth-watering. Then comes this amazing juxtaposition: in v. 7 God is destroying the shroud, the pall, the sheet of mortality that covers all people. So, while we are enjoying food and wine, God is over yonder unwrapping death—as though death were as insignificant to God as an Atomic Fire Ball (that's my favorite candy, you should pick your own...maybe a Dove square?)—popping it in God's mouth, and then swallowing it forever.

This scene is followed by one of exquisite tenderness when the Lord GOD "wipes away the tears from all faces..." and removes all causes of disgrace. Then the people are invited to consider the scene in light of all the promises that have sustained them. When they do, they come to this succinct conclusion: We waited, we knew God would come, God has come, now let us rejoice!

In terms of the "lectionary narra-

tive" Psalm 24 seems to take a step backward chronologically to consider who may ascend the mountain of the LORD. The image is of hosts of humble, faithful people ascending to the mountain (and if Isaiah is right then also to a feast!). Their faithfulness, patience, and trust in the promises have finally been vindicated. And in their joy the people command the gates to open so that the King of Glory may enter in. I don't know where those gates are or what they look like, but I know they are big and imposing and that they don't open for just anyone.

The second reading adds a new layer and dimension to the image of the final gathering. First, the geography is reversed. Instead of God's humble people ascending to the mountain to celebrate their vindication, God brings the celebration—and the city in which dwells the life of the party, the Lamb—down to a new earth. It's not "heaven on earth" as there is still a heaven, but the reading lets us know that if your goal is to "go to heaven when you die" you'll be missing out on spending eternity with God; God dwells here among mortals. I had to read the passage three times to overcome my assumption that a wedding banquet was being described (it's only that Jerusalem is decked out like a bride). But the feast of Isaiah is echoed in two ways, first by God wiping away every tear and second by God destroying death.

Some preachers might be drawn to the grand canonical *inclusio* evoked by this passage. The "first" creation begins with the Spirit moving over the formless, chaotic void of waters. This is a new creation: chaos and seas are no more and, to quote himself, the one on the throne asserts: "It is done!"

The reading from John provides one of those cases where, after the first three readings have presented lofty theol-

ogy or eschatological visions, the gospel provides a concrete, real-life exhibition of where the eschatology meets the road. Lazarus is dead and people are grieving. They believe in the resurrection but have not grasped yet that resurrection is not a theological concept; it is an essential component of Jesus' being and it accomplishes things.

Contrary to the idea that "Jesus began to weep" provides proof of Jesus' humanity in that he grieves, it seems more likely that it provides proof of Jesus' humanity in that he aches—indeed cries in frustration—for the people he loves to open their eyes and see what it means that he is here. We know that Jesus is not weeping for grief because the observers think that he *is* weeping for grief and in the Gospel of John such observations are almost always wrong and become the occasion for Jesus to open people's eyes to the truth of his being (e.g., Nicodemus and being "born again" or the woman at the well and "living water"). Jesus weeps because the grief and confusion being expressed gives a lie to their confession that Jesus is the resurrection and the life. The performance of this text could profitably capture this frustration as it is intensified in vv. 37 and 38 (where Jesus is greatly disturbed) and then again in v. 39 where we see Martha unable to imagine beyond the stench. The lector/preacher has an opportunity to consider Jesus' humanity and essence as he or she considers how to give voice to the command in v. 43, "Lazarus, come out!" Power and love and grief (or perhaps even disgust over their unbelief) and authority mingled together!

Pastoral Reflection

When I'm sitting in the congregation on All Saints' Day, here is what I'd like to hear. I want you, preacher, to bring me face to

face with death and remind me (convince me?) that death is the enemy. Certainly feel free to welcome all of death's extended family (sin, despair, brokenness, division) in order to make your case, but keep the focus on death, on mortality and the threat to our sense of meaning, purpose, and value. Even under the best of circumstances, when the funeral takes place at the perfect moment between "why did she have to die so soon" and "why did he linger so long," death is the enemy. The war has been won but the fight is not over and death is still a fearsome frontier. Help us to feel our shame and tears as you confront us with our fears about mortality and loneliness and not knowing what's next. And then proclaim to us the risen one who stands with God to wipe away those tears and secure us so that we are never put to shame.

I would appreciate testimonies and stories that tell about Jesus, the resurrection and the life, standing outside dark, fetid, places in our world and calling forth life. Show us where God is freeing people from death—not so that they can go to heaven, but so that they can serve (Lazarus hosts a meal just a chapter later!) and be witnesses (even nettlesome witnesses that make others want to kill them again!) to the life-giving power of God.
HJL

Proper 27 November 8, 2009

1 Kings 17:8-16
Psalm 146
Hebrews 9:24-28
Mark 12:38-44

First Reading

Whether or not this information about literary context makes its way into the

sermon, you the preacher should note that this story about Elijah comes just seven verses after he has been introduced into the narrative. In 1 Kings 17:1 he arrives on the scene, tells Ahab that there will be a drought, is commanded to live by a wadi where he is fed by ravens (because of the draught) and then is commanded to move to Zarephath. In broad strokes the story in vv. 8-16 tells of God's ongoing protection of Elijah and also of the one who gives food and refuge to Elijah—in this case a destitute widow, mother of one son, who is also a foreigner. In the story directly following, (1 Kings 17:17ff), the widow's son dies; she takes Elijah to task, Elijah takes God to task, the son is brought back to life and she finally acknowledges that Elijah is a man of God who tells the truth.

The appointed story is fairly bleak—though it's possible to imagine a lector giving the woman's voice a bit of a spirited (sarcastic?) edge as she responds to Elijah's request for help. I am curious as to why she doesn't seem to know that he's coming. In v. 9 the LORD says to Elijah, "Go...to Zarephath...I have commanded a widow there to feed you." She does acknowledge Elijah's God, but Elijah has to persuade her with a miraculous promise of sustenance in order to get a simple cake. Depending on the audience, some hearers might hear in this story an echo of the care God takes of Hagar and her only son Ishmael (Genesis 21) and of God's provision of manna in the Exodus wilderness.

The linguistic connection between this story and Psalm 146 is in v. 9, "The LORD sustains the orphan and widow," though in 1 Kings the widow is sustained in order that God might sustain Elijah through her. The psalm begins with praise (vv. 1-2) and then warns us not to trust mortal human rulers (vv. 3-4) but rather to find our help and hope in the creator

God (vv. 5-6). Then, beginning in v.7 the psalm recites the *missio Dei*. What is God up to in the world? God is up to justice, bread, freedom, sight, lifting up the lowly, love, hospitality, welcome, and frustrating the "way of the wicked." Hallelujah!

The second reading begins with the word "for" which has the simultaneous effect of sounding jarring (what argument did we miss of which this is the outcome) or engaging (the Bible just assumes we know what's going on!). In fact, I think we do know what's going on...sort of. Most of us have pieced together some logic about blood and sacrifice through our singing of hymns and reciting of eucharistic liturgies; worship as sacrifice is not bred in the bone for us as it is for the Hebrews. The poetic and theological metaphor of Christ as "high priest" may not hold up under sustained homiletical treatment, but the overtones of Christ's sacrifice and sufficiency still resonate with some power.

In this passage, Christ is compared to two human "types." First, Christ's one-time priesthood and sacrifice of self are declared superior to the year-after-year sacrifices offered by the high priest. Then Christ is compared to mortals. Mortals die once and then are judged; Christ dies once (for sin) and then lives again, "not to deal with sin, but to save...!"

The gospel reading from Mark has two parts with an intriguing and troubling connection. In vv. 38-40, in what could almost be a riff on Psalm 146:3 ("Put not your trust in rulers, in mortals in whom there is no help."), Jesus warns about the self-serving scribes who will be condemned for their love for "show" and their simultaneous cynical lack of mercy—specifically to widows. The second part of the reading (vv. 41-44) tells of the poor widow who donates two small copper coins—all she has—into the treasury.

While this widow bears some resemblance to the widow in 1 Kings 17 (she is poor and is in some relationship to the LORD), she serves as a model of humble faithfulness rather than as a sign of God's provision for the lowly (or the prophet).

The juxtaposition of vv. 38-40 with the widow's offering brings into stark relief the ambiguity of institutions and systems and the demands of faithfulness. Not only does the widow "give more" than the wealthy because what she gives is a higher proportion of her total worth, she gives in spite of the fact that the institution to which she gives (broadly speaking) devours poor widows' houses! She may be a model of giving—but in such paradoxical circumstances!

Pastoral Reflection

When I'm sitting in the congregation on November 8, I'd be curious to hear a sermon that develops along one of these trajectories. First of all, depending on your context and the specific nature of the hypocrisy in the community you serve, it would be powerful to preach into the first part of the gospel reading. We'd like to identify ourselves with the widow of vv. 41-44, but most of us North American Christians are the scribes of vv. 38-40. Even if we live simply, we enjoy products and infrastructures whose provision devours the lives of the poor in the world. There is no way to untangle us from our complicity (certainly no simple way) but we can and must, in Christ, bear the "greater condemnation" of honest judgment and discernment.

A second trajectory might head directly into the guilt and ennui brought on by affluence. When I read the story of the widow's offering, I'm ashamed to admit that my private meditations usually travel something like this road: What is the point of my small acts of faithful-

ness in the face of the systems in which I am complicit? Why bother? Even if I liquidate all my assets and give them to the poor, I might provide enough for one small soup kitchen to feed 100 homeless for a week. But then what? I sit in the food court in the mall and watch as bag after bag of trash (containing aluminum cans and plastic bottles) are loaded up and then taken to landfills. Why do I bother recycling my two six-packs per week of diet cola? Does my vote count? What does it take for this widow to perform this amazing act of faithful giving? How can that faithfulness be sustained in us? Can the risen Jesus help me, preacher? HJL

Proper 28 November 15, 2009

Daniel 12:1-3

Psalm 16

Hebrews 10:11-14 [15-18] 19-25

Mark 13:1-8

First Reading

The reading from Daniel begins by identifying an undisclosed future time when a relatively little-known prince-protector (Michael) will arise coincidentally with a time of great anguish and judgment. The judgment will be rendered with the help of "the book" that contains the names of the saved. The reading predicts a simple two-pole judgment: either "life" or "shame and contempt." The passage gives no information about how the judgment will be made, and seems to assume that those who hear this prophecy will be saved. Verse 3 contains a surprising play on our usual expectations of judgmental dualism, it contrasts those "who are wise" who will "shine like the brightness of the sky" with "those who lead many

to righteousness” who will shine like “the stars.” Hard to say which of those two groups I’d rather be part of; they both sound great!

In the current culture it’s hard to predict how people hear the predictions made by apocalyptic literature. The underlying message of apocalyptic prophecy is that in the great final battle in the cosmic realm, God will prevail over the evil one. The effects of that victory will be manifest even in our earthly realm as the residual powers and influences of the evil one lose their momentum and energy source. Those whose worldview accepts the reality of a connection between the cosmic and material realms will find these promises compelling because the same God is in action in the “same” cosmos and history. The question is whether more existentialist and materially-minded Christians will dismiss apocalyptic as too quaint and mythic.

The response to Daniel rendered by Psalm 16 is a more personal affirmation of hope. The psalmist’s foil here is not the cosmic force of the evil one but the temptation of the culture to worship other gods (though the plea for protection and refuge makes sense in light of Daniel’s prophecy of “extreme anguish” between nations). Psalm 16 gives testimony to the delights to be found in steady faithfulness and daily study of the ways of God.

A favorite rhetorical device of the writer of Hebrews is to use existing theological understandings or liturgical practices as a reliable and useful “type” of which Christ then is the “proto-type” or fulfiller of the type (e.g., in Chapter 2—Proper 22—Jesus becomes the prototype human). While the author is candid about the insufficiency of existing liturgical practice, there is no sense of disdain or ridicule; the author wishes

rather to help us see beyond the existing landscape toward that place where Christ fulfills all things. This passage teaches us that Christ has, through the singular act of sacrifice in which he was both victim and priest, accomplished our reconciliation. In light of this, Hebrews calls us to be a redeemed people who are bold, freed from concerns about our evil hearts, and called to meet in a community of accountability and support.

The reading from Mark returns to apocalyptic prophecy. Jesus uses a disciple’s awe at the temple as a prompt for reminding them all that even these amazing edifices are temporary. Later the disciples ask for dates and omens. Jesus’ response is to describe—though not in an obviously predictive way—the signs of the end. Embedded in his description is the simple exhortation, “do not be alarmed.”

Pastoral Reflection

As tempting as it might be to have you employ the device of the author of Hebrews and remind us of the christological potency of our liturgical actions, when I’m sitting in the congregation on November 15, I’d like to hear about the end. You, preacher, can decide how literal, spiritual, or metaphorical you want to be about the “end,” but the Christian faith is a linear faith (as opposed to a cyclic faith like Ba’alim). God is taking things somewhere into the future. But as we hear these scriptural passages about the end how shall we bring them into conversation with our notions? Are we talking about the cosmic end of all things when the sun burns up millions of years from now (and whether there will be humans there to see it)?...or the end of the earth’s ability to sustain human life, whether through Armageddon, natural cataclysm, or human misman-

agement of ecology?...or the end of a certain cultural “way of life” (free-market capitalism, mainline denominationalism, or Western-style democracy)? And as you try to discern which “end” weighs on the people to whom you preach, consider for whom this “end” might be the best news there could be and for whom it might be the worst. Where do we find our connection to Daniel’s assurance that God’s people will be protected or to Jesus’ simple, “do not be alarmed”?

But even as you enjoy figuring out which of these possible “ends” to play with, remember that of all the readings from today’s lectionary set, the passage from Hebrews most closely reflects our “place” in faith history. That is, unlike the implied hearers in Daniel or Mark who are hearing about an unknown future, we and the implied hearers of Hebrews already know that our hope is secure: Jesus is risen and is sitting at God’s right hand.

I don’t want the foil for the preaching on this day to be the work of Tim LaHaye or Hal Lindsay. At worst you will sound like a bully. Even if you are charitable and are able to acknowledge the social woundedness and impotent anger that causes some people to turn to apocalyptic paraphrases, you will sound, well, like a caring but patronizing bully (like I just did, right there!). I want the foil for apocalyptic to be the evil one, either as personified in the cosmic devil battling with God (whom I find compelling and instructive regardless of my views about his “real existence”) or the evil one in the form of evil systems in which I am complicit. HJL

Reign of Christ November 22, 2009

Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14

Psalm 93

Revelation 1:4b-8

John 18:33-37

First Reading

Just when you thought that maybe the idea of God as an “old man in the sky dressed in white” had been excised from the church’s imagination, here comes Daniel with his description of an “Ancient One” (though perhaps the further description, which focuses on flaming holiness, will mitigate the cartoon image of God somewhat). The scene is of a heavenly coronation where eternal dominion, glory, and kingship are given to “one like a human being” who will now be served forever by all peoples, nations, and languages. For Christian congregations on Reign of Christ Sunday, the one given dominion will be understood to be Jesus, the risen one. It is generally presumed that apocalyptic literature is written to communities suffering literal occupation or oppression. And yet, even those of us who live in relative comfort politically and economically can be moved by these visions; there is a sense in which all earthly distinctions are flattened in the face of God’s holiness.

The psalm responds by affirming God’s rightful place on the throne over all creation. Verses 3 and 4 establish a fetching image of a shouting match (really a roaring match) between the ocean swells and the voice of the LORD.

Even if we (appropriately?) waffle on whether the “human one” in Daniel is Jesus, there is no question about the identity of the one who comes in Revelation. Jesus is the faithful martyr, the one

who is raised, the ruler over all rules, the Alpha and the Omega. Christ is praised here for what he has done for us: made us (unworthy though we are) into a people, ordained us priests in service to the world. Even those who “pierced him” will see him. And while Revelation will later testify to their damnation, it’s hard to imagine that they are not wowed by the spectacle of the pierced one being given dominion. Note that this means that in Revelation the material realm (where Christ is pierced) and the cosmic realm (where the “great battle” will take place) are united by Christ.

In terms of the “lectionary narrative” the reading from John is difficult, jarring us back into the concrete world where, nevertheless, the battle between worldly conceptions of ruling and cosmic ones are played out. Jesus is cagey about labeling himself a king (though he claims a kingdom!). The issue is not the label but rather the mission of giving testimony to the truth. And for Jesus, and now for us, the deepest issue is “being” the truth, incarnating the truth. In this arrangement of the passage, Pilate’s question, “What is truth?” is not included, thus leaving us with a strong assertion of Jesus’ shepherding kingship. This means that while Jesus is affirmed as the cosmic king described in apocalyptic passages, he turns out to have a vulnerable, empathetic heart that none of us expected (unless we’ve been listening to the readings from Hebrews over the last several weeks!).

Pastoral Reflection

When I’m sitting in the congregation on Reign of Christ Sunday, I’d appreciate being led directly into the metaphors of kingship and dominion. What does it mean for Christ to “rule in our hearts”? Homiletical helps often reflect on how contemporary urban and suburban

Christians struggle to enjoy the richness of Scripture’s agricultural metaphors. How much more are Christians living in the United States clueless about “rule by divine right” (rather than by consent of the people) and the importance of “royal bloodlines” (knowing that the President pro tempore of the Senate is third in the line of ascendancy to the presidency is just not the same)? When monarchs command, subjects obey without question. Outside of those who have experienced military service as enlisted personnel, who knows what it means to operate in this way? I’m not inclined to replace “Christ the King Sunday” with “Christ the President Sunday” but I can’t deny that I regularly claim “conscientious objector” status when Jesus calls me to service.

Then press the royal metaphor further; help me with the implications of the fact that the one with dominion over my life is *this one*: Christ the suffering servant, the human Son of God, the one who knows us in our weakness, the shepherd king. In a way it’s a shame that the lectionary doesn’t continue the sequential readings from Hebrews into this festival for the Hebrews readings have reflected so beautifully on this question (though on the priestly rather than the royal trajectory). Though the gospel reading for this day only points us toward the crucifixion, it would not at all be a stretch to remind us why in John’s Gospel Christ’s crucifixion *is* his enthronement, his moment of victory. It is on the cross that the “Lamb who was slain has begun his reign.”

Does Jesus reign or not? And what does it mean to say that he does when it means (with John) affirming that the cross is the throne. The trick here is not to be tricked by Jesus saying “my reign is not of this world.” Don’t let it take us into a non-material spiritualized cosmic thing...HJL

Thanksgiving November 26, 2009

Joel 2:21-27
Psalm 126
1 Timothy 2:1-7
Matthew 6:25-33

First Reading

The passage from Joel begins with promises made first to the soil (the soil!) and then to the animals (with implied promises to wild and cultivated vegetation). What a wonderful entry into Scripture on Thanksgiving Day! Those who listen carefully to the reading will know in just a few verses that these promises are God's response to a locust plague sent by God as judgment against the people. But even before we know that, we can give attention to the performance of these first two verses celebrating that God's care and mission extend beyond the human realm to a restoration of all creation (no matter who causes the plague!).

After expressing care for earth and animals, Joel delivers God's promise to "the children of Zion." You, preacher, will have to discern how the promises of abundant rain (expressed here in the past tense) will sound in your context (as I write these words in May, farmers in central Ohio would like the rain to stop for a bit so they can finish planting!). But apart from the details about precipitation and the potential stumbling block in v. 25 (where God takes full credit for the plague) the passage opens out into a promise to God's people of abundant food and abundant protection from ever again being put to shame.

Psalm 126 responds to Joel by now remembering when that future promise to Zion came true. It is almost as if the psalmist is remembering a future that has

not yet come: "The Lord has done," but also "restore us O LORD." The play of tenses—past, present, and future—are worth considering as guides for performance. Were different readers or singers to render vv. 1-2 (past), v. 3 (present), and vv 4-6 (future) this play of tenses would be emphasized.

It may seem that the 1 Timothy reading is included because of the word "thanksgiving" in v. 1, but in v. 2 we hear of a broader agenda: the well-being of the church of God is connected to the well-being of rulers and those in authority. Context again will weigh heavily on how this text is heard by those in worship. Wherever Christians are leading "quiet and peaceable lives" their prayers of thanksgiving for effective governance flow freely. But often one people's peace is at the expense of others. For Christians suffering persecution or oppression, as might be the case for Timothy's congregation, the call to pray for kings and the "high-ly" is a hard, scandalous word. Truly, the tone of voice used to read vv. 2-3 will be a strong political statement! The latter part of the second reading touches themes of God's mission (that everyone be saved) and Christology—Christ as human mediator and giver of self as ransom.

The gospel reading begins with the word, "therefore" so the preacher will have to decide whether to refer back to the previous verse (about serving two masters!) or section. But consider how an "unexplained therefore" has the surprising implicit power to condemn us for all our various idolatries! In other words, Jesus is saying to the gathered worshippers who start at v. 25, "it doesn't matter to me what past idolatrous means you've used to try and secure a future, from now on..." Like Joel and the psalm, this teaching from the Gospel of Matthew

“leans forward” into the future of God’s promise. The *NRSV* uses the verb “strive” instead of the verb “seek” in vv. 32-33. Both verbs impel us toward the future; “strive” is more compelling because it is not the verb we expect and because it suggests that moving into God’s “remember future” is bound to be a struggle.

Pastoral Reflection

When I’m sitting in the congregation on Thanksgiving, here is what I’d like to hear. These lectionary passages establish a useful tension between the “present tense settled-ness” of 1 Timothy and the pleading, striving, forward movement of Joel, Psalm 126, and Matthew. Thanksgiving as most North Americans celebrate it resonates more with the former. It’s an overgeneralization to say all our faithfulness problems *begin* when we start to feel settled, but perhaps now, a full year into tough economic times, we are prepared to move from where we are into a new future.

I’d like to be invited to think of this Thanksgiving as Passover. The plagues are over (echoes of Exodus and Joel) but

the land is ravished and we can’t stay here (metaphorically speaking). Let us eat with our coats on and our staffs in our hand because God is calling us beyond the American “dream” of consumption and acquisition in order to lead us to a new place. Envision for me a new “swarm” when, like an army of locusts, the Christian church will pour out over the earth spreading justice, mercy, love, and acceptance in its wake.

The homiletical challenge will be to take us directly into Jesus’ admonitions to “not worry.” Jesus sets a high bar here and I don’t want it diminished by a preacher who bails out and says, “Jesus isn’t saying we shouldn’t have pension plans...” I want to hear testimony of the concrete ways in which God provides for those who strive for righteousness.

The homiletical joy will be to build on the imagery of Joel and Psalm 126 to envision the world of plenty that is promised to all people. Help us see the future—the spiritual future and the material future—but more important help us to “remember that future” since it is already, also, ours in Christ. HJL

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