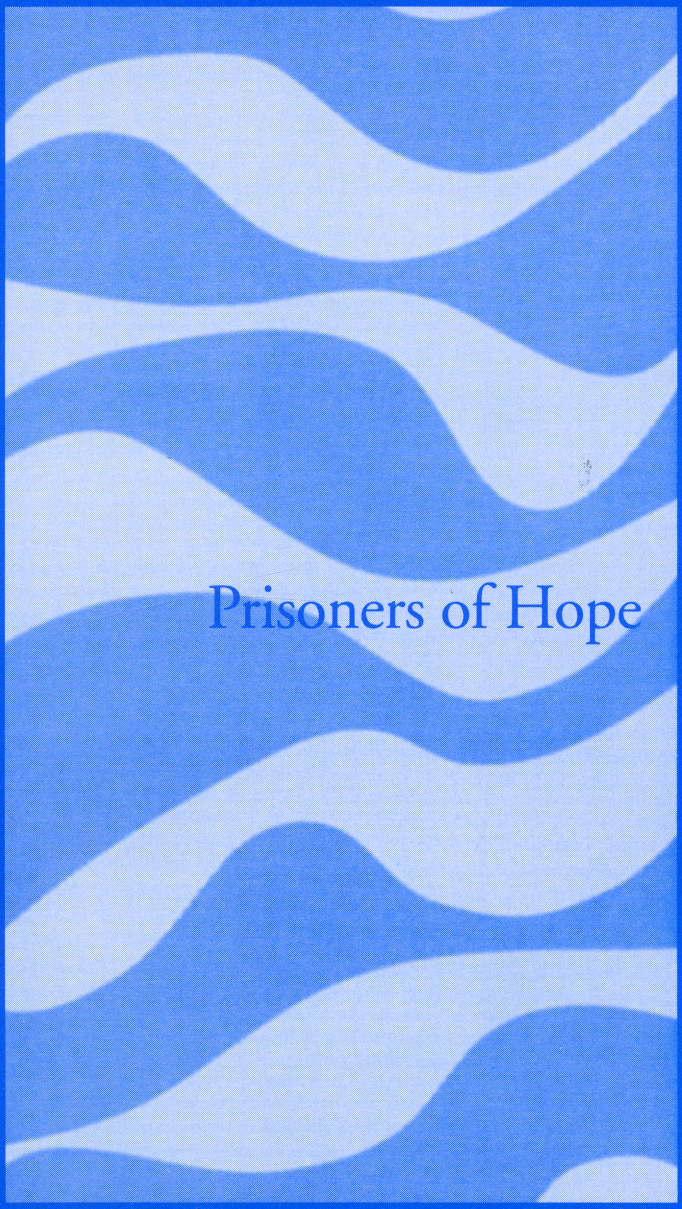
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Prisoners of Hope

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Editor: **Ralph W. Klein**
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago
rklein@lstc.edu
Associate Editor: **Norma Cook Everist**
Wartburg Theological Seminary
ncookeverist@wartburgseminary.edu
Assistant Editor: **Peggy Blomenberg**
pbe@lstc.edu
Editor of Preaching Helps: **Craig A. Satterlee**
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago
csatterl@lstc.edu
Editors of Book Reviews:
Edgar Krentz
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (773/256-0752)
ekrentz@lstc.edu
Connie Kleingartner
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (773/256-0747)
ckleinga@lstc.edu
Craig L. Nessan
Wartburg Theological Seminary (563/589-0207)
cnessan@wartburgseminary.edu
Circulation office: 773/256-0751
currents@lstc.edu

Editorial Board: **Paul G. Bieber, Pamela J. S. Challis, Connie Kleingartner, Randall R. Lee, Richard L. Ramirez, Susan Rippert, Barbara Rossing, Jensen Seyenkulo, Susan Swanson, Vicki Watkins, Fritz Wehrenberg, Vítor Westhelle.**

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Prisoners of Hope

The expression "prisoners of hope" appeared in the first lesson on July 3 and is recorded in Zech 9:11. I suppose we refer more frequently to ourselves as prisoners of fear/terror, or prisoners of our glands/lusts, or prisoners of our past/upbringing. Prisoners of hope are not enslaved by hope but liberated by it. That is, prisoners of hope wait for and even expect liberation; they do not take their imprisonment as inevitability. Prisoners of hope are living, breathing oxymorons. They see things that never were and ask, "Why not?" They are *peccatores* who are also, at the same time, already, *justae* and *justi*. People on an interfaith journey or repentant criminals on Calvary are such prisoners of hope, as we shall see.

Harold Vogelaar tells the story of his own interfaith journey as he invites readers along for the trip. He structures his reflections around the affirmations of the Apostles Creed. The First Article, he finds, makes interfaith dialogue possible, with its confession of God the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth. The Second Article's emphasis on Jesus as God's Son makes interfaith dialogue significant. In our various cultures, languages, colors, and races, we are bound together by the light that shines in the life of Jesus. The Third Article's belief in and dependence on the Holy Spirit helps us grow in our dialogue journey, keeps it on track, and eventually makes what we do fruitful. The Holy Spirit enables us to get out from behind closed windows and locked doors and into the world. Jesus' promise that the Spirit will guide us into truth means that there is a cutting edge to the work of the Holy Spirit. The urge to do things right may sometimes need to give way to doing the right thing.

Robert O. Smith asserts that an integral part of the mission of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land is to develop and nurture Palestinian nationalism. The ELCJHL is a small church, part of the declining Christian population in Palestine/Israel. As Christian emigration continues, the community's moderating influence in Palestinian politics will also depart. Religious nationalism is a factor in both Israeli and Palestinian political considerations. When religious nationalism influences Israeli discourse, Palestinian Christians suffer with all Palestinians the increased intractability of the political situation and the hardening of the occupation. Perhaps the most important witness of ELCJHL members to their Palestinian brothers and sisters lies in their effort to provide excellent educational opportunities for Palestinian students. Beyond the important domestic work of building bridges between Christians, Muslims, and Jews, the Christian communities of Israel/Palestine have reached out to their fellow Christians around the world to garner support for their political aspirations.

David D. Grafton outlines the Pax Romana, which was the context for the earliest Christian mission, and contrasts it with the Pax Americana that prevails today. The advantages Paul claimed through his citizenship are quite different from the liabilities that come with an American passport in many parts of the world today. If North American missionaries wish to provide a faithful witness to the gospel, they must recognize the challenges and problems that come with their association with an imperial power and begin to develop a new mission paradigm. The story of two short-term missionaries in Afghanistan provides a parade example of how not to conduct oneself on the mission field today.

Carrie L. Lewis offers narrative insights into the crucifixion account in Luke. The apparent vulnerability of Jesus on the cross calls into question how this one whom God sent can possibly save the people. Jesus asks for forgiveness for those who crucified him and shows that he still has power in the last moments of life by offering the promise of paradise to the evildoer on the cross. Jesus did not lose hope but trusted in God even in his hopeless situation. In the moment of his greatest vulnerability, when those with earthly power show that they have the power to condemn Jesus to death, God saves Jesus, and through God's saving of Jesus offers salvation to others.

Ralph W. Klein preached on ministry at the opening service for the Institute for Liturgical Studies at Valparaiso earlier this year. In many ways the vision for ministry outlined in Matt 10:24–42 is in radical discontinuity with the ministry to which we are called today. The gap between the first and the twenty-first centuries is matched by the chasm that separates one ministry in the church from another, or by the differences between ministry now and what it was twenty, thirty, or forty years ago. Ministry today is trust in God and God's future, confession of God's acts in Jesus through word and deed, living toward God's future, letting go of material possessions or of fear of what others might do to us, and placing loyalty to God above all other loyalties. God's "I am with you" in the splash of the font, the tastes of the holy supper, and the liturgical work of the people makes such ministry possible.

Ralph Quere writes an extensive and enthusiastic review of a recent book on evangelism: *The Evangelizing Church: A Lutheran Contribution.* This book has seminary professors and deans calling the church to the evangelistic dimensions of its mission. One essay adds the words "for the sake of the world" to the usual "justification by grace on account of Christ through faith." Practical evangelistic advice includes modeling, mentoring, small-group conversation, and public testimonies in worship services. The call for "a new culture of evangelizing" is a call for a new reformation. A Postscript reflects on the evangelistic power of the sacraments.

Kenn Storck enriches us with his poem "Encounters."

"I will return again to you," said the God of the Old Testament to her exiled people. "I am coming soon," says the risen Christ in the Apocalypse (Rev 3:11). Oh, what sweet imprisonment to a revolutionary promise! What a rebuke to those who seem to thrive on naysaying, despair, division, and the past, or who are imprisoned by memories of the good old days! In our cells, standing on tiptoes, we wait for tomorrow because. . . .

Ralph W. Klein, Editor

Treasuring the Treasure: An Interfaith Journey

Harold Vogelaar
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

I want to begin[1] with a story, "Whose Treasures? Whose Voices?" written by Catherine Sepko, about growing up in Appalachia and then leaving as an older adult. "I was taught," she wrote after she had left Appalachia, "that I should rid myself of my Appalachian dialect and accent in order to succeed in the real world. . . . [In doing so] I apparently lost a part of my own cultural identity—an identity that I am not certain, as a young Appalachian, I even knew I had."[2] Sepko writes about her search and the joy of rediscovering her Appalachian identity. She refers to the poetry of Robert Morgan, a professor of English at Cornell University, who grew up in the Blue Ridge Mountains near Zirconia, North Carolina:

> The reader often finds in Morgan's poetry the image of water struggling to burst into the light from the dark, bubbling to the surface from the place where it had been forced to run underground. When the conditions are right, it bubbles up, much like freshwater issued from a newly cleaned artesian spring. . . . Having cleaned out a spring on my family's property for numerous years, I knew the imagery. Suddenly, I wanted to go home to drink anew from my own spring, now long since neglected, its cool, refreshing water replaced by the modern tap water, which often tasted artificial and chemically cleansed. Before I knew it, the water of creative emotion was bubbling through me.

With this image in mind, I begin the conversation about my own journey by raising three preliminary questions: What is the treasure we claim, and is it authentic? Whose is it? To whose voices do we listen?

What is the treasure we claim, and is it authentic?

Sometimes on my interfaith journey, dialogue partners have asked whether the gospel we are sharing is indeed the gospel intended by Jesus. I have always wanted to answer Yes, of course it is!—but I have to acknowledge that it is a legitimate question. When St. Paul said we have this "treasure" in earthen vessels (2 Cor 4:7), what exactly did he mean? What was that treasure, and is it indeed the same treasure we now claim to possess?

In a fascinating article, "Christian Response to Religious Pluralism,"[3] Lars Thunberg argues convincingly that from very

1. A version of this essay was first presented in April at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago Leadership Conference "Treasure in a Garden: Christian Witness in a Multi-Faith Land."

2. Catherine Sepko teaches at North Greenville College, Tigerville, South Carolina. See *http://south-carolina-jobs.com/edu/k12/cet9798/sepko.html.*

3. Lars Thunberg, "Christian Response to Religious Pluralism," *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor* (Chicago and La Salle: Open Court, 1995).

early times Christians felt a need to legitimate the claims of Christianity in relation to both its Jewish background and its appearance as a distinct religion containing a revelation of truth relevant under all circumstances, so that the church as it moved forward and outward could feel confident that the gospel it was proclaiming was authentically consistent with the authorized past—that it had roots deeply embedded in the Hebrew tradition and scriptures and so was genuine.

There were many ways of doing this. One example is that of Eusebius, who, Thunberg claims, presents "a static view of Christianity. . . . His reading of history authenticates Christianity as basically age-old and unchangeable. This took on a doctrinal meaning in Christianity for a very long time." Orthodoxy was considered to be something static, while innovation was heresy.

Few of us, I presume, would any longer want to say that authentic Christianity is static and that all innovation is heresy, as though Christianity were a package neatly wrapped that just needs to be handed down. I think we have moved beyond that. But there is, I suspect, a genuine desire to believe that the treasure we claim to have, the gospel we want to share, is legitimate and authentic, at least not totally other than the treasure of which Paul was speaking.

So I propose that we ponder this question as we think about our witness in the garden: What is the treasure we want to share, and how authentic is it, how biblical, how true to the Christ event? In our attempt to become "relevant," to "succeed in the real world," has the church compromised or even lost its identity? Has the gospel been hijacked to serve one or another particular ideology? Is there, anymore, what we used to call a "normative gospel"? If so, what is it, and is such a gospel still desirable? Have hybrids become the rule rather than the exception? Have divergence, diversity, and crossbreeding now become the norm—and rightly so?

In answering it is well to keep in mind Paul's warning that hawking or taming or tailoring the gospel has a long history (cf. Gal 1:6, 7). We need to keep in mind as well the warning of Jesus to his own religious leaders, to the hypocrites of his day: "you cross sea and land to make a single convert, and you make the new convert twice as much a child of hell as yourselves" (Matt 23:15). These are strong words but important admonitions as we think about what the gospel is for the times in which we live.

Whose treasure is it?

This question is frequently raised in dialogue with people of other faiths. Does God's gift of Jesus belong only to you who are Christians? I've been tempted to say no but then quickly add, yes, this is our gift, because we've laid claim to it, we defend it, we proclaim and protect it; Jesus is our life.

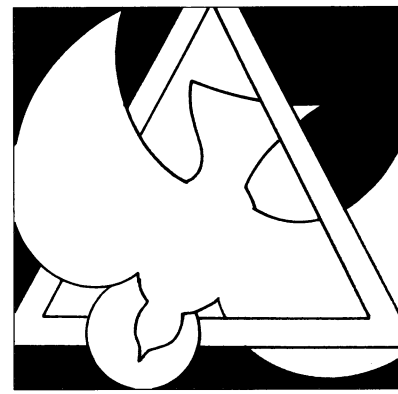
But it is a legitimate question. As I thought about it, I turned again to Paul's comments in 2 Cor 4:7: "We have this treasure in earthen vessels. . . ." Without doubt, "we" here refers to the church, the disciples of Jesus, us. So, yes, as Christians we can claim this treasure. But then Paul says that we have this treasure in "earthen vessels," or, as some translations have it, clay pots. I confess that I used to read this in what now appears to me a distorted way. I always associated the words breakable, fragile, and vulnerable not with the pots but with the treasure! And because in my thinking the treasure was so fragile, so delicate, so easily broken, the pots needed to be almost indestructible in order to protect the precarious content.

Looking back, I think this is how my

religious teachers and instructors really intended it to be. The idea was that if we as Christians would remain strong and firm, even impervious to outside influences, the gospel would be perfectly preserved; the fragile treasure would remain safe. If we kept the church "pure," they argued, the precious, fragile treasure called the gospel would be safe.

I can understand that mentality but now think it was misguided. It's not the gospel that is so fragile but we, the vessels—and it's ok for us to be fragile, to be weak and sinful, to be utterly human. "We have this treasure in earthen vessels to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us," Paul writes. Then he goes on in these moving words: "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed." In other words, the gospel treasure has the power to keep us, the earthen vessels, from falling into defeat, despair, and hopelessness. The strength is in the treasure, not in us; the extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. This kind of vessel vulnerability is something we will want to ponder as we work in the garden.

This still leaves us with the question of whose treasure it is, a question that has surfaced significantly on the mission field. D. T. Niles from Sri Lanka said years ago that the Christianity brought by Western missionaries was like a potted plant, and for that plant to grow in other soil the pot needed to be broken so that the plant could send down roots in new soil and produce its own fruit, which may have a look and a taste different from that in the West. For many of us this was painful to hear, because we were quite certain that the church as we knew it was identical with the treasure. Without the one, we said, you will not have



the other. So we did our best to keep the potted plant intact, even in its outward forms. Churches needed chairs, at least; you couldn't sit on the floor, because that would look too much like a mosque. And churches needed towers or steeples and bells. Or so we thought.

To whom does the treasure belong? This is worth pondering. If it is ours alone, what then of the understanding of Jesus by others? What of Jesus' own vision that the house of God be a "house of prayer for all nations" (Mk 11:18)? Are we as vessels one with the treasure and so indispensable to it? Or are we simply its bearers—feeble, weak, even breakable, and at times necessarily so? The Christian faith, after all, is full of paradox, as Bishop Mark Hanson keeps reminding us. To learn to live with it is a wonderful Lutheran virtue.

To whose voices do we listen?

David Rhoads' book *The Challenge of Diversity: The Witness of Paul and the Gospels*[4] is a wonderful testimony to the rich

4. David Rhoads, *The Challenge of Diversity: The Witness of Paul and the Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996).

diversity of voices found already in the canonical New Testament. In the area of Christian witness, there have been and are many voices, some very much at odds with others. We can, if we want, look at the exclusionary passages in Deuteronomy 13 and people like Ezra and Nehemiah who speak a language very different from Ruth and Jonah and Jesus. We all have our own favorite biblical passages that support the position we hold. In the Christian tradition there are voices that speak a variety of opinions, some broadly open to the working of God far and wide, others wondering what Athens has to do with Jerusalem.

In the Protestant tradition, some of the words of Martin Luther and John Calvin can sound harsh and foreboding, at least to my ears. Luther, for example, "as he looked into the future . . . asked whether Mahomet and his followers were the final Antichrist . . . he answered No. Islam was too gross and irrational for this mighty role. . . ."[5] And Calvin wrote, "When the Turks [Muslims] . . . do not recognize that God is manifested in the flesh, which is one of the principal articles of our faith, then they are guilty of perversities and are leading so many people astray that they deserve to be put to death."[6]

This ominous portent has been picked up in recent times by people such as Tim LaHaye and others from the religious right who have been hurling invectives at Muslims. Islam, they say, is an intolerant religion, and it is clear whose side we should be on in the Middle East; Allah and Jehovah are not the same God; Islam is a Satanic religion; America should "Wake up!" For them a terrible, final war in the Middle East is inevitable. Some of us have family members and know of individuals in our churches who actually think this way. So I do not take these words lightly or dismiss them out of hand.

As a teenager I was fortunate to live next door to a retired missionary who had spent 35 years in Iraq. He helped me to understand the Arab people and taught me to appreciate the Arabic language and the writings of al-Ghazali, an eleventh-century Muslim theologian, poet, and mystic. It was his gentle voice that challenged me to spend many years in the Middle East as a missionary. I met Bishop Kenneth Cragg, a prolific writer and astute student of things biblical and Qur'anic. He used to say that there are many Christian reasons why Muslims ought to take Jesus seriously. But never forget, he would say, there are also many Qur'anic, Islamic reasons for them to do so. To discover these, of course, requires a sound knowledge and deep appreciation of the Qur'an and its teachings, and I believe Bishop Cragg has done this to a degree and in a manner unequaled.

The voices to which we choose to listen and the ones we ignore determine the approach we take toward people of other faiths. A student recently told me that a friend in middle school had asked his pastor whether people other than Christians could go to heaven. He was told they could not, because heaven was reserved only for Christians. The student said that this so impressed his friend that he continues to resent his pastor's answer. He himself had a similar but exactly opposite experience. When he asked the same question, his pastor told him that only God knows, and because God is love it is best to leave it to God. Two very different answers that made

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5. R. W. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Harvard University Press, 1962), 105–6.

6. J. Slomp, "Calvin and the Turks," in *Christian-Muslim Encounters*, ed. Y. Y. Haddad and W. Z. Haddad (University Press of Florida, 1995), 135.

indelible impressions on young minds.

The good thing is that there is room for a wide spectrum of honest opinions. The vessels that carry the treasure do not all need to speak with one voice. As a colleague said recently, when Paul writes in Rom 12:5 that we, "*though* many," are all one in Christ, this could and perhaps should be translated: that we, "being many" or "because we are many," are all one in Christ. It is in the richness of the many, in the diversity of community, the multiplicity of cultures, that we find the real meaning of the treasure we actually have and would like to share.

Having raised these questions about the nature of the treasure and its authenticity, whose it is and to whose voices we listen, I want to shift gears and weave these themes into insights gained from my own journey into interfaith relations. I do so by using the Apostles Creed. Long ago I came to appreciate the structure, if not always the content, of this Creed as a wonderful, faithful guide for interfaith conversation. I say "not always the content" because Jewish friends remind me that an awful lot happened between creation and Christ, and in the creed the whole life of Jesus gets reduced to a comma. Still, it begins . . .

The First Article

"I believe in God the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth." With others in the Lutheran tradition, I believe that this brief statement of faith is what makes interfaith dialogue possible. I see it as setting the stage upon which I can not only affirm but welcome what God has been doing in all of creation; it enables me to receive the gifts God has lavished on all creatures, whoever and wherever they are.

Bishop Lesslie Newbigin encouraged us not to begrudge this generosity of God. I remember listening to him use the story of the prodigal son to make his point. It was the elder son, he said, who just could not accept the generosity and graciousness of his father in welcoming back a lost and wayward brother. This begrudging spirit, warned Newbigin, often takes over when we encounter persons whose faith tradition seems out of sync with what we consider to be faithful discipleship, so we see them and their gifts as a threat rather than as evidence of God's abundant goodness. I remember D. T. Niles saying that he never *took* Jesus anywhere but rather always looked to see what Jesus was already doing in people's lives.

> The vessels that carry the treasure do not all need to speak with one voice.

These simple truths have altered my vision, and, as you know, the eye altered alters all. I can now honestly welcome and affirm, actually seek out, what I believe we have in common. This is especially true in areas of human need, but more and more it is also true in things of the heart and the spirit. Eardley Mendis recently commented, "The train on which my wife and daughter were riding in Sri Lanka, and on which my wife died [when the tsunami hit], was filled with Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, Christians, Tamils, and Singhalese. All of them died together. If we can all be together in death, is it not possible in life to live together in peace?" His good question begs an honest answer.

I think it is possible, but only if we are willing to see that all of us have been gifted by God. In a course titled "Religion in Dialogue," for example, many of our students and I have learned from our Buddhist colleague to appreciate the discipline of being still, of staying focused, of seeing the interconnectedness of all things, and of being committed to nonviolence. I especially appreciate and want to appropriate some words of wisdom from the Buddha, who said that one should win (overcome) anger through kindness, wickedness through goodness, selfishness through charity, and falsehood through truthfulness. This teaching of nonviolence among Buddhists is legendary. Some years ago in Phoenix, Arizona, two thieves entered a Buddhist temple and, in the process of stealing a few gilded statues, ruthlessly shot to death six monks. The community of Phoenix was stunned when the Buddhists refused to seek vengeance.

From Muslim friends I have learned to value the discipline of daily prayer and the restraint of fasting during the month of Ramadan. In my marriage to a Muslim woman, we struggle to learn what it means not just to come together for prayer but actually to pray together. That would be difficult if we did not deeply believe that we are worshipping and standing in the presence of the same God who created us all. Does that mean we always comprehend God in the same way? No, but we share enough understanding to make common prayer possible and meaningful.

In a marvelous little book, *Alive to God: Muslim and Christian Prayer,*[7] Bishop Cragg has compiled a number of Muslim and Christian prayers under the themes of Praise, Penitence, and Petition. This little collection allows us to use material devotionally even when we do not always agree on the meaning of the words. It is not unlike our use of the Hebrew scripture where our interpretation is quite different from that of Jewish friends. Cragg's thesis is that since as humans we have such power in our hands, they need to be uplifted hands, and if uplifted, he argues, why not sometimes joined? Not always, of course; there are times when we simply have to say no.

You have your own stories of discovering the lavishness of God's mercy in the gifts given to people whose faith differs from your own. And in your own way you have learned how to welcome and affirm and even appreciate them. LSTC President James Kenneth Echols has a sign that says: "Truth is freedom; tell your story." Indeed, if you have had good experiences with people of another faith, tell your story. Do not keep it to yourself. These kinds of stories need to multiply.

The Second Article

Our belief in Jesus Christ as God's Son, our Lord, who was crucified, died and was buried, who returned from the dead, ascended into heaven and will come again, is surely the distinguishing mark of the Christian community. If the First Article makes dialogue possible, the Second makes it significant. Our belief about who Jesus is and what God was doing in Christ makes our contribution distinct. As far as I know, no other religious community, no matter how much they may honor Jesus, as many of them do, is willing to tell the story of Jesus or to understand Jesus the Christ as Christians do. This is our task, this is our duty, and no matter how foolishly or wisely we do it, it must be done by us. If we do not keep the story alive, and make it real through our living, no one else will—though God,

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7. Cragg, *Alive to God: Muslim and Christian Prayer* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970).

of course, is able to raise up witnesses even from the stones.

I have frequently been asked why, after studying Islam for so long, and knowing it as well as I do, I do not become a Muslim. Having seen the light, why do I not embrace it? I have learned to reply that if this is a serious query, if you really want to know, let us sit down, sip a cup of hot, sweet tea, and I will tell you why.

Of course, I then have to be able to say why—or, as St. Peter puts it, to give a reason for the hope that is within me. For a lot of Christians this is the difficult part. In many of our circles we assume that everyone knows the story, and there is no real reason to articulate why we are Christian. Some of us grew up in a Christian home; we were baptized and confirmed and have gone to church all our lives; of course we are Christian. Probably we have never considered any other alternative, or even had one for that matter. Now that the garden in which we live is transformed, has become multicultural and interfaith, all of that changes. When I first went to Egypt I saw many Christians with a tattoo of the cross on the inside of their wrists. When I asked why, they said, "It is there to keep us Christian." When alternatives are real, sometimes attractive or even compelling, it becomes necessary to know why we are Christian and want to remain so, and be able to articulate that.

How we do this—how we understand and present Christ and how we treasure this part of the treasure—will differ depending on the church to which we belong and our own personal experience. We know that there are many different Christologies. Not all of us view Christ in the same way or even in the same way we did some years ago. We are all on a journey.

I grew up in a church where liturgy was a bad word and preaching and personal faith in Christ were everything. I am saved, they said, when I accept Jesus Christ as my personal savior. For them the horizontal dimension of faith was not nearly as important as the vertical dimension of God's transcendence. While participating in the worship and activities of the church was encouraged, it was not essential to salvation. Similarly, acting a particular way in the world was not essential to salvation. Salvation centered on the sincerity of my decision in that moment of accepting Jesus as Savior.

When alternatives are real, sometimes attractive or even compelling, it becomes necessary to know why we are Christian.

I then moved away and worked with Christians who honestly believed that if the gospel we present does not have a strong horizontal component where issues of justice, peace, hunger, health care, the environment, gender and sexual equality, and openness to people of other cultures and faiths are taken seriously, then it is a truncated gospel.

I now have friends who are deeply troubled by the status question: Are you saved? For them the status gained is not so much one of possession ("I have salvation") as one of identity ("I am a part of the

family"), so participation in the life of the church, thought of as the ongoing presence of Christ in the world, is essential. In this understanding, we grow and are nurtured in the faith throughout this life by the sacraments, by service, and by fellowship, until eventually we attain (although do not earn) salvation.

We Christians have many ways of telling the story. With some we might agree, with others disagree. People sometimes wonder what it is that binds us all together, we seem to be so diverse, so fragmented. The story of a friend who some years ago attended Easter Vigil in the thousand-year-old cathedral of Mainz, Germany, offers a clue. Writing of that experience, he said:

> I had gone to the service with two of the other fellows from the institute [in which we were studying]—Chris, a Methodist from Boston, and Piotr, a Russian Orthodox from Tashkent, Uzbekistan. . . .
>
> The Easter Vigil liturgy begins where Tenebrae services traditionally end, in almost total darkness. The light from a single candle, symbolizing the risen Christ, was a bare pinprick in the vast Romanesque expanse of the cathedral. But as the flame from that Christ candle passed from person to person until each of us had a lighted candle—there must have been two thousand of us or more—that pinprick grew into a glow so rich and warm and golden that it felt almost anticlimactic when the electric lights eventually came up.
>
> So there we stood, Chris and Piotr and I, a tiny Orthodox and Protestant archipelago in a sea of German Catholics, with incense billowing above the altar and Gregorian chant echoing off the stone walls . . . and as we passed the peace to each other and those around us I remember thinking to myself, "This is how it really is: choirs of angels, nothing empty except a tomb, and a cloud of witnesses from every nation and tongue. I am a part of this: this feels like home." The stub of that Vigil candle traveled back across the Atlantic with me, and I kept it on my dresser for years.[8]

Yes, the vessels are quite different; we are of various cultures, languages, colors, and races. What binds us together finally is the light that shines in the life of Jesus. Not just the four days leading up to the resurrection but thirty years, three of them lived in the company of women and children, the sick, the poor, the despised, the outcast, in the frailty of a human body, but all of them lived in intimate relationship with God whom he called Abba, Father. He offered this intimacy to all who would take up their own cross and follow him. That small flame from the Christ candle, when handed on from person to person, from generation to generation, illumines the darkness and eventually illuminates the landscape of the entire world. Someone passed that flame on to us; we now need to pass it on to others.

The Third Article

The Third Article of the creed begins with a confession of our belief in the Holy Spirit. If the First Article makes dialogue possible and the Second makes it significant, it is the Third Article, this belief in and dependence on the Holy Spirit, that helps us grow in our dialogue journey, keeps it on track, and eventually makes what we do fruitful.

It has rightly been said that in the area of interfaith dialogue there are not many road signs, no clear indications of what to do or how to do it. People often ask: without signs, how do we know where we are going? It may be good to welcome and affirm the gifts others have received, but what does that mean? How far ought we to go? Are there boundaries we should not cross? I am sure there are, but if we had clear answers to all of these questions, we would not need the Holy Spirit. In my interfaith journey I have developed a healthy

8. David J. Diephouse, "Seeing in the Dark," *Perspectives: A Journal of Reformed Thought* (Holland, MI: Reformed Church Press) 20:3 (March 2005), 13.

suspicion of people who have a ready answer to every question and who feel uncomfortable when they do not. I've learned to appreciate the blessing of ambiguity.

In his book *The Go-between God: The Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission*[9] John V. Taylor gives an amazing description of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit blows where it will, "uncontainable, endlessly surprising, refreshing, creative, never reading the rubrics," "divine energy infusing every living thing." As far as Taylor is concerned, nothing and no one is cut off from this life-giving Spirit, from what he calls this "Beyond in the midst." The Spirit is the relational dimension of God, the "Go-between God." Listen to his description of the chapel in London that he designed:

> The honest, unpretentious use of raw materials, the expanse of windows looking out to the world, will, I hope, say something. At the heart of our activity the chapel will be a pool of silence, as far as the architect can make it. Visually it is not cut off from the rest of the building, and from most points one can look right into it. It is important also that from inside the chapel one can look right out of it, not only back into the corridors and committee rooms, but, more importantly, down into the ceaseless traffic of the Waterloo Road. "Glory to God in the High Street!"

When I look around at this [LSTC] chapel I believe it symbolizes what Taylor must have had in mind. In fact, his description could have been written for this chapel. Visually we in this space are not cut off from the rest of our buildings. From nearly every point one can look right into the chapel. Also from inside we can look right out of it, not only back to the classrooms, the library, and across the courtyard to McCormick Seminary but also onto the ceaseless traffic of 55th Street. We too can say: Glory to God in our own High Street!

But is it enough just to look out the windows of our chapels onto the ceaseless traffic all around us? I remember as a youth that missionaries would come and show us pictures of faraway places and people who looked and dressed differently. Many seemed to be poor, mostly in need of things we thought we had and should provide. So we supported our missionaries generously. But in our own hometown we feared people who were different and did not welcome them into our community. Looking at pictures of other people was fine, but opening our hearts and community to them, that was different.

After Jesus' crucifixion his disciples gathered in an upper room, with the doors locked. They were afraid. The familiar sight of Jesus walking with them was no longer there. Things had changed. No longer did they have a human Jesus providing guidance. The mantle of leadership had passed on to them. As we look out at our busy streets, through the windows of our chapels and churches, things have also changed. Familiar sights, familiar people are no longer present. Sometimes, like the disciples, we allow fear to keep us locked in and others locked out. We do not know what to do when neighborhoods change, when events like 9/11 happen, or when the tethers that moored us to our dock seem to have been cut.

The good news is that Jesus came to those first disciples, through locked doors, and confronted their fears—not with words of anger and rebuke, which they might have expected, but with something quite different. "Peace be with you," he said, and they were relieved and glad to see him. Then he repeated his words of peace and added, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." It is interesting that

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9. John V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God: The Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission* (London: SCM Press, 1972).

after receiving Christ's peace they were sent on a mission and given the Holy Spirit.

Those disciples needed to get out from behind locked doors! They needed to do more than simply look out through windows onto busy streets, onto unsafe neighborhoods. They needed to get out in order to tell the story. Having been with Jesus, having now seen the risen Christ, they had something to share, and because they did we now have a worldwide Christian church.

> Where love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and generosity abound, there is very little room for, or need of, pride and arrogance.

The church began to grow, fear dissipated, people spread into the neighborhoods, they went back to the temple, and eventually, though not without pain and suffering, they met the challenge of implementing Jesus' vision of a house of prayer for all the nations. It was a message that changed the world.

So that is the first thing we can say: The Holy Spirit enables us to get out from behind closed windows and locked doors and go out into the world, a world that may be different, strange, even hostile. But we never go alone. The Spirit goes with us.

Second, I believe that the Holy Spirit works best when there is this kind of outward movement, conversation, meeting of minds and hearts, walking, listening, learning, and sharing with the people who live around us, person to person. Students have said to me on numerous occasions that when they actually sat down to talk with their Muslim colleagues (by which they mean the seven Muslim students currently enrolled in the seminary), they learned many interesting facts, and wonderful things happened. Attitudes changed or at least were challenged. The Holy Spirit is that go-between, the link enabling us to meet others, to love even those we might think of as enemies or even those who are enemies.

Third, Jesus promised that when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide us into all the truth. I have come to see this as meaning that there is a cutting edge to the work of the Holy Spirit. Gently the Spirit nudges us to enlarge our boundaries, even to cross them in order to learn more about the truth that will eventually set us free, the truth of God the Creator, of God in Christ, the truth of others and the truth about ourselves. There is so much we do not know, especially when it comes to interfaith relations. Fears dominate, stereotypes abound. We break the eighth commandment all the time, saying things about others that simply are not true.

My wife and I have conducted scores of workshops over the past years, often just sharing basic, foundational information. There is a hunger among many people in our congregations to know more about Islam and Muslims, to move beyond headlines into the heartlines. When this actually happens, people discover—often to their delight, but not always—that others too have treasure, that no one tradition can claim the exclusive right to speak for God or to have all the divine riches. The discovery of this truth, when it happens, can be life changing, and it is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Let me add another activity I have come to attribute to the Holy Spirit. It has to do with the difference between doing things right and doing the right thing. Sometimes, as we sail together on today's stormy seas of change, it seems terribly important that we do things just right, which gets interpreted to mean the way they were done in the past. It somehow seems safer to remain tethered to what has been than to venture forth into waters unknown. This seems especially true for interfaith endeavors. In such activities, it is argued: Is it not better to stay believers by a tether of authority than try to get our bearing by the compass of our faith? Why take the risk of getting confused, even lost?

The argument is understandable even if untenable. As people of different faiths get to know each other well, they discover, again and again, that doing the right thing makes much more sense than doing things right. For example, when I am invited into the life of a Muslim friend who is dying, it seems that the right thing to do is to affirm, on bended knee, our mutual faith in the oneness of God, and to let God be all in all. In moments such as these, I've come to believe, there is for the Christian a taste of new wine, and to put that new wine into old skins just doesn't seem right. In our move forward we need to learn how to transfer the core of our beliefs and values into new wineskins, seeking always to preserve the best of our heritage while looking humbly to the future. In this endeavor, the urge to do things right, to cling to traditional patterns, may sometimes need to give way to doing the right thing. And when it's done through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, as surely it must, it could just be a small step toward the fulfillment of Christ's promise.

Finally, it has been my experience that what is needed most in interfaith relations are the fruits of the Spirit. According to Paul, these are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, and faithfulness (Gal 5:22). I would begin with the last one first. We need to have unshakable faith in the goodness and mercy of God, but unless we have the fruit of faithfulness, which means being faithful to God the Creator, to God's gracious work in Christ, to the truths as we have come to know them through the life and teachings of Jesus, and to the community to which we belong, our dialogue will soon not make sense, it will lose its way.

That said, we need the other fruits as well. There have been attitudes of superiority, arrogance, sometimes unbridled vindictiveness hurled at others, even crusades. Recently we were reminded at a seminary chapel service that "God has no favorites." The preacher in her homily on that text began with these words: "I know God loves all of you, but I am God's favorite!" Then throughout her sermon she repeated the phrase "God has no favorites." She was simply paraphrasing Peter's exclamation from Acts 10 that "God shows no partiality." It reminds me of when I was a kid at the breakfast table reading on the Post Toasties box, "Just a little bit better." In my context that meant the Christian Reformed always thinking they were just a little bit better than the Reformed. If this is our goal, to see ourselves as always "just a little bit better" than others, as God's favorite, we will not need the help of the Holy Spirit. There are many spirits out there who will rush to our aid. But if we see ourselves as engaged in the work of reconciliation, of being and sharing the peace of God in a broken and disjointed world, the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit will be indispensable. Where love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and generosity abound, there is very little room for, or need of, pride and arrogance.

People often ask where we are heading

People of other faiths will always be challenging us to think more deeply, to pray more fervently, to say more clearly what we mean, and then to demonstrate more truly that we mean what we say.

with this kind of interfaith dialogue. Is there any real benefit to the church and the work of the kingdom? If they mean by this, Will it increase our numbers? the answer is that we do not know, but it might. Dialogue, however, is not and should not be seen as proclamation or preaching. Each has its own proper place. The purpose of dialogue, as I have been defining it, is not to win converts to Christianity, though honest dialogue is always open to that possibility. Conversion, after all, is the work of God. Dialogue allows for and encourages faithful and personal witness. Within the bounds of friendship and respect I have never found it difficult to bear witness to my Christian faith. I have done my best to talk about the love of God incarnate in Christ sitting in Muslim circles, even in al-Azhar. Witness, of course, will always be mutual where dialogue is sincere.

But perhaps the greatest fruit of honest and faithful dialogue, of genuine engagement with other people in the presence of the Spirit, is that it keeps all of us from being satisfied with tasteless tap water, to use the image we began with. I would argue that it can keep us from surface religion. People of other faiths will always be challenging us to think more deeply, to pray more fervently, to say more clearly what we mean, and then to demonstrate more truly that we mean what we say.

Story of dove and sword

I close with an illustration that I have used often in the past, so you may have heard it before. For me it epitomizes how just a few hours of conversation can impact our lives and constrain us to think more deeply about the gospel and our walk with Christ.

It happened, when we were living in Egypt, that a student of my wife invited us to visit his home in the Nile Delta. We gladly accepted his gracious invitation. Once there he showed us his amazing potato field and then welcomed us into his modest home. In one corner of a room were some rolled-up papers, and when we asked what they were he said, "Just some drawings, a few sketches I have made." We asked if he would show us, so he picked one up. It was the picture of a young man, dressed in his galabiyya, kufiyya and aqqal, like a typical Bedouin Arab. In one hand stretching forward was a dove, and in the other, raised high above, was a long sword, barely visible but still there. Stereotypical images of duplicity, swords and violence came to mind. When we asked what he intended to convey by the drawing he said, "As Muslims we must always offer peace first, but if that's rejected, we need the sword to defend ourselves." I couldn't help but think that this sounded almost American.

We then asked Muhammad (this was his actual name) whether he could paint the picture without a sword and with the dove

in both hands. He thought for a moment, then replied: "I could, but in that case it would have to be a picture of Jesus the Son of Mary. Do you know why? If you or I tried it, very soon someone would steal the dove, then they would take everything we have, and finally [gesturing with his hand to his neck] they would take our lives. We would certainly lose everything here. But we would gain everything up there [pointing toward heaven]. On the other hand, if we held the sword in both hands now, we might gain everything here, but we would lose everything up there [again gesturing toward heaven]. So it is better to hold the dove in one hand and the sword in the other; that way we will have the best of both worlds. There will be a balance."

It was an interesting solution to the vexing question of how to achieve peace with justice. The issues he raised are clear: security is of major concern; he has tremendous respect for the person and teachings of Jesus; he also has profound skepticism as to whether the teachings of Jesus will work in our kind of world. Yes, Jesus could do it, but not us!

In many ways that conversation transformed my life. How can I preach the teachings of Jesus and the way of the cross unless I endeavor to live them myself? Some Muslims have written that if Jesus could have raised a militia and defeated his enemies with physical force, he would have done so, but because the Romans were so powerful he could not. That's why he went the way of the cross and why God rescued him from his enemies. I want to say, No, Jesus went the way of the cross because that is God's way of ultimately overcoming evil. In bearing evil redemptively, Jesus bore it away. But to preach that and then to live as if it were not true sends a very mixed signal to people who are not Christian. As a rabbi once said, "Two thousand years of Christian love is about all the Jews can stand."

I am heartened to hear Walter Wink saying that "love of enemies has, for our time, become the litmus test of authentic Christian faith," or John Stoner, "There is . . . no other way to God for our time but through [loving] the enemy."[10] For me that comes pretty close to the essence of the gospel. It sounds not only authentic but life-giving. I know that it is difficult, it always has been, and without the Holy Spirit we do not stand a chance. Good news: you and I have been promised nothing less than the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, that fresh, life-forming and life-giving Spirit of God from whom nothing and no one is cut off.

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10. See *http://www. thinkingpeace.com/Lib/lib080.html.*

Secular and Religious: ELCJHL Contributions to Palestinian Nationalism

Robert O. Smith
Baylor University, Waco, Texas
St. John Lutheran Church, Coryell City, Texas
Robert_Smith1@baylor.edu

Palestinian nationalism is linked intimately to Jewish nationalism. Whereas Jewish nationalism's underlying ideology, Zionism, has been highly successful at organizing Western political powers to establish and maintain the state of Israel, Palestinians—the descendants of persons living in the land prior to organized Jewish immigration—have not been nearly as successful at marshalling support for their nationalist cause. Arab sources of support have themselves experienced political disarray. The project of establishing a secure and independent state of Palestine existing by Israel's side—a goal envisioned by the United Nations partition plan of 1947[1]—remains unfinished. Palestinian Christians, though relatively unknown to their North American coreligionists, have long been involved in efforts to realize the goal of a pluralist Palestinian state.

The ELCJHL—Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land[2]—has discerned that an integral part of its mission is to develop and nurture this still-flourishing sense of Palestinian nationalism. Through regional and local involvement in the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC), partnerships with the Lutheran World Federation, participation in interfaith dialogue with both Muslims and Israeli Jews, and the nurturing of strong ties with Lutherans and other Protestants in Europe and North America, the ELCJHL, though small, has emerged as an insistent voice pleading for a renewal of Christian witness regarding Israel/Palestine and crying out for a just peace enjoyed by all its inhabitants.[3]

With a membership of roughly 2,400, the ELCJHL has five congregations in the

1. See UN General Assembly Resolution 181 (29 November 1947) and its accompanying map.

2. The ELCJHL has undergone many name changes. When it was first recognized in 1959 by Jordan's King Hussein, all of the denomination's six congregations were in Jordanian territory. Thus, until recently, its official name was Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan (ELCJ). With the 1967 war and Israel's subsequent occupation of the West Bank, five of those congregations found themselves in what the UN then recognized as Occupied Palestinian Territory, thus necessitating an informal reconfiguration of the denomination's name. Until early 2005, ELCJ was configured to indicate the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jerusalem (serving in Palestine, Jordan and Israel).

3. Information on the ELCJHL can be found on the denomination's extensive Web site, *http://www.holyland-lutherans.org/*.

occupied West Bank and one congregation in Amman, Jordan. The ELCJHL traces its beginnings to 1841 and the establishment of "an Anglo-Prussian joint bishopric . . . founded in Jerusalem with the intention of alternating bishops between the Anglicans and Lutherans." Before collapsing in 1886, the partnership produced several schools, an orphanage, and a hospital that was the forerunner to the Augusta Victoria Hospital on the Mount of Olives (East Jerusalem). The process of indigenizing the Palestinian Lutheran church, begun when the first Arab congregation was established in 1929, reached fruition with the consecration of the first Palestinian bishop, the Rt. Rev. Daoud Haddad, in 1979.[4]

Now led by Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan, whose offices are in Redeemer Lutheran Church in Jerusalem's Old City, the denomination's principal ministries revolve around educational and cultural institutions that strive to serve all Palestinians: "Five schools and two boarding homes have an enrollment of more than three thousand pupils, nearly half of whom are Muslim." Under the direction of the Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb, pastor of Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem, the ELCJHL has developed "the Dar al-Kalima (House of the Word) Academy for interreligious and intercultural studies . . . and the International Center of Bethlehem, including a media center."[5] These efforts, directly supported by Western Lutheran partners, help foster an independent sense of Palestinian cultural and political expression, necessary components for resisting the material and psychic strictures of military occupation. The ELCJHL benefits from institutional relationships with European Lutheran bodies, including those in Germany, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, and Norway.[6]

Palestinian leadership includes many highly visible Christian individuals.[7] In the United States, the ELCJHL is becoming an increasingly familiar representative of Palestinian concerns. Through their books, speaking tours, and guest appearances at ecumenical gatherings, Younan and Raheb are beginning to impact North American Christian approaches to the conflict in Israel/Palestine. All the while, however, they emphasize the important work they have undertaken in Palestine, pursuing the joint tasks of theological reflection, constructive political engagement, and interreligious dialogue.

Christians in the Palestinian context

Totaling about 400,000, Palestinian Christians make up roughly 4.2 percent of the worldwide Palestinian population.[8] Their geographic distribution closely follows important locations in Christian history:

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4. Betty Jane Bailey and J. Martin Bailey, *Who Are the Christians in the Middle East?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 106–7. The Baileys have produced perhaps the most helpful single-volume resource on Middle Eastern Christianity.

5. Ibid., 107.

6. In addition to material support, these groups often offer mutually encouraging symbols of political and institutional support. See, for instance, Lars Grip, "Lutheran Bishop from Jerusalem Receives Norwegian Award," *Ecumenical News International* (29 October 2004).

7. Among these leaders are human rights lawyer Jonathan Khuttab, theologians Naim S. Ateek and Abuna Elias Chacour, and Palestinian legislator Hanan Ashrawi. An extensive section profiling prominent Palestinian Christian leaders is included in Gary Burge, *Whose Land? Whose Promise? What Christians Are Not Being Told about Israel* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim, 2003).

8. Demographic information regarding Palestinian Christians is difficult to come by. In 2003, the Palestinian Central Bureau of

"About 30,000 live in and around Bethlehem, the city of the Incarnation; about 20,000 live in and around Jerusalem, the city of the cross and Resurrection; and approximately 100,000 Christian Palestinians live in and around Nazareth, the city of the Annunciation."[9] Additionally, "At least 250,000 Palestinian Christians live in the diaspora, more than 60 percent of all Palestinian Christians worldwide."[10] These Christians—whether in the diaspora or still in the land—are fiercely proud of their homeland and its importance for worldwide Christianity.

Christians throughout the Middle East are in demographic decline. The primary cause for this "demographic hemorrhage" is emigration. During the British Mandate period (between the two world wars), when the total population was far smaller, there were more Christians in the Holy Land than there are today. Given this declining population, "even modest emigration can result in a serious loss in percentages." Those who emigrate are generally from the middle classes, leaving in search of educational and economic opportunities. It has been observed that, ironically, "the historical Christian commitment to quality education therefore actually encourages emigration."[11]

Palestinian Christian emigration is linked directly to the founding and present policies of the state of Israel. Hence, they share with Muslim Palestinians a long history of displacement.[12] With Israel's declaration of independence in 1948 and the ensuing Arab war, nearly 712,000 Palestinians were driven from their homes and possessions to become refugees. Most relocated to the West Bank, across the River Jordan into Transjordan, or north into Lebanon. Among these refugees were 50,000 Christians. In 1948, Christians comprised "50 percent of Jerusalem's residents; today, they are not more than 10 percent and a significant number of these are expatriates."[13] The Christians of Palestine are in danger of dwindling to insignificant levels, a matter of great significance for many Christians around the world.

Living Muslim-Christian relations

Many Westerners assume that the relationship between Muslims and Christians in Palestine must be fundamentally antagonistic. Nonetheless, they understand themselves to be bound not only by the land but by their shared history. This history includes al-Nakba ("the Catastrophe") of 1948 and Israel's expansion in 1967. They live under the same threat posed by an overwhelmingly powerful neighbor that is also an occupying military force. But they also live with the same hope of national self-determination. As their numbers wane, however, Palestinian Christians exercise less and less political authority in Israel/Palestine. Their "demographic hemorrhage" must be mitigated if the dream of a

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Statistics estimated that the number of Palestinians worldwide was 9.6 million. Of this figure, 3.7 million live in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, 1.1 million in the state of Israel, and 4.8 million in the diaspora. See Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, "Statistical Abstract of Palestine 5: 9.6 Million the Number of Palestinians at the End of the Year 2003," available at *http://www.pcbs. org/press_r/abstract_e.pdf.*

9. Mitri Raheb, *I Am a Palestinian Christian* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 4.

10. Bailey and Bailey, 156.

11. Bailey and Bailey, 44.

12. Raheb, *I Am a Palestinian Christian*, 15–24, offers an insightful analysis of the special factors impacting Christian displacement and emigration from Israel/Palestine.

13. Riad Jarjour, "The Future of Christians in the Arab World," in Bailey and Bailey, 14.

pluralist Palestinian state—with full participation by Christians, Muslims, and Jews—is to become a reality.

Raheb writes of the symbiotic relationship between the religious communities in Palestine: "Arab Christians and Muslims share the Arabic culture, history, and language; their fate is intertwined and inseparable. Likewise, Arab Christians are an inseparable part of the world of Islam."[14] Among both Christians and Muslims in Palestine, one will likely hear this refrain: "We are all brothers here."[15]

For Raheb, the complexities and hopefulness of relationships between Muslims and Christians in Palestine became clearer during and after the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) siege of Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity in 2002. A few days after the five-week siege ended on May 10, the heads of almost all the churches in Israel/Palestine came to inspect the damage done to the church, both by the IDF from the outside and the 200-plus militants and priests who had been held inside. After the patriarchs and bishops prayed with Raheb on the street outside Christmas Lutheran, heavily damaged in the siege, a Muslim shopkeeper approached him, asking about Father Amjad, a Franciscan friar who lives in the Church of the Nativity compound.

The shopkeeper's son, Muhammad, a Hamas member, had been deported to Gaza for resisting the Israeli incursion into Bethlehem and seeking sanctuary in the Church of the Nativity. The shopkeeper made an unusual request: "Promise to look for Father Amjad at the church and to thank him for me." The man explained that Father Amjad had cared for his son when he had fallen ill during the siege, bringing scarce medicine and returning often to check his progress. The friendship this young Muslim developed with this Christian had cost him some Muslim friends during the siege. Even so, when Muhammad called from Gaza, he said, "You see, Dad, this is why I want you to go look for Father Amjad and thank him for all he did. He saved my life, and I will remain indebted to him."[16]

The relationship between Palestinian Christians and their Muslim and Jewish neighbors is not without its difficulties. When Pope John Paul II made pilgrimage to Jerusalem in March 2000, Bishop Younan was the only Christian leader invited to join Jerusalem's Muslim dignitaries as they formed a receiving line at the Dome of the Rock. Younan was positioned toward the center of the group, and the pontiff must have been puzzled when he came upon this oddity, wearing a black frock and pectoral cross.

> "Lutheran?" he asked. His eyes moved up and down the receiving line, and he spoke softly to me. "The rest, are they all Muslims? And you, a Christian?"
>
> I nodded. "I am Munib Younan, the Lutheran bishop. We have a good relationship in this country between Christians and Muslims."
>
> "Good," Pope John Paul responded. He patted me on the back. "Do everything you can to continue this relationship."

As a Muslim businessman escorted Bishop Younan back to Redeemer Church, their elation was mitigated. "Take off that cross!" An elderly man, presumably seeking to protect the sanctity of this holy site, was shouting after them.

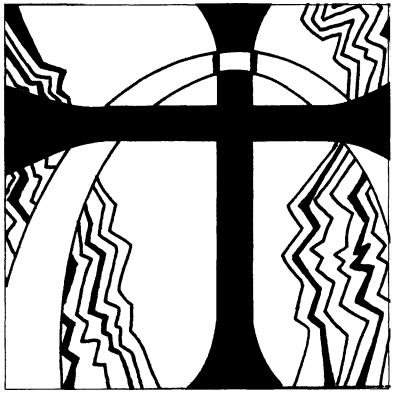
Younan's escort confronted the man: "Be quiet! He is our bishop."

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14. Raheb, *I Am a Palestinian Christian*, 9.

15. Charles M. Sennott, *The Body and the Blood: The Holy Land's Christians at the Turn of a New Millennium, A Reporter's Journey* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001), 87.

16. Mitri Raheb, *Bethlehem Besieged: Stories of Hope in Times of Trouble* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 27–33.



Younan was deep in reflection regarding these incongruent experiences as they walked on, passing into the *souk* (marketplace) connecting the Old City with the plaza of the Western Wall. He did not notice the Jewish settler woman with her four children. "She called out to me and then spat on me several times. 'The cross. The cross. The cross,' she continued to shout as my escort stepped between us."[17]

In Israel/Palestine, theological and religious perspectives have political consequences. As Christian emigration continues apace, the community's moderating influence in Palestinian politics will also depart, leaving any future Palestinian state susceptible to the unchecked influences of religious nationalism (in this case, that of Islam). This political concern provides a backdrop for Charles Sennott's report on the status of the Palestinian Christian community:

> Important international efforts by Christian churches have been gathering strength to counter the trend of emigration. All of us—Christians, Muslims, and Jews—have a stake in their success. The Christian presence in the Holy Land is a potentially important, possibly essential, voice in the dialogue for peace, but it is a voice that has been reduced to a hoarse whisper. Historically, Christianity has provided a kind of leavening in the Middle East, a small but necessary ingredient acting as a buffer between the Arab world's broad Islamic resurgence and the strands within Israel of a rising ultranationalist brand of Judaism. These two fundamentalist movements, which have fused religion with nationalism, increasingly cast the territorial Israeli-Palestinian conflict in religious terms. If the Christians disappear, the Middle East will become that much more vulnerable to this embittered dichotomy.[18]

Riad Jarjour, general secretary of the MECC, notes the importance of the Christian voice in developing the political trajectory of the entire region: "As Christians seek internal renewal and dialogue with Muslims, they raise the spiritual pillars for the integration of Christians into the Arab world, an environment dominated by Muslims. The basic item on their agenda is to discuss how to build a civil society within which all citizens may find opportunity and freedom to engage creatively in building a common future."[19]

Nationalisms, secular and religious

Theological claims made on the land of Israel/Palestine have political consequences, complicating the ability of secular political solutions to comprehensively address the situation. Conceptions of Palestinian nationalism, however, have recognized the importance of Christian claims. In contrast to Israel's Declaration of Independence (1948), which calls for "the establishment of a Jewish state in *Eretz-Israel* [the Land of Israel]," the draft constitution of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)

17. Munib Younan, *Witnessing for Peace: In Jerusalem and the World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), xii.

18. Sennott, *The Body and the Blood,* xix.

19. Jarjour, "The Future of Christians in the Arab World," 21.

contains no reference to religion.[20] The Palestinian Declaration of Independence (15 November 1988) states that its principles "allow no departure from Palestine's age-old spiritual and civilizational heritage of tolerance and religious coexistence."[21] It of course remains to be seen whether these joint values of institutional establishment and religious diversity will result in good governance for all persons in a future state of Palestine.

While Zionism has grown into a consensus position among world Jewry, the Palestinian situation is far more fragmented, oscillating between poles of secular and religious commitment. Fateh—founded in 1958 and now closely associated with the late Yasser Arafat—has sought a secular, political solution to the conflict by engaging Israel as a dialogue partner. Hamas—founded in 1987 by, among others, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and 'Abd al-'Aziz Rantisi (both assassinated by Israel in early 2004)—presents an explicitly Islamist alternative for Palestinian nationalism.[22] These interrelated forms of Palestinian nationalism exist dialectically with the success of Jewish nationalism.

While Western discourse has often dismissed religiously justified Palestinian violence as terroristic and irrational,[23] such actions are not limited to Palestinians. "Here in Israel, we don't like to say this very loudly, but the radical right Jewish groups have a lot in common with Hamas," says Carmi Gillon, head of the Shin Bet department that uncovered the Jewish Underground plot to destroy the Dome of the Rock and chief of that agency when Prime Minister Rabin was assassinated by a young Jew in 1995.[24] An ever-present option when secular political solutions are found wanting, religious nationalism is a factor in both Israeli and Palestinian political considerations.[25]

Recent years have seen a further erosion of political hope. With the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifada in 2000, it was clear that the Oslo process had failed. The fate of Oslo was further sealed with the fitful introduction of the "Roadmap" for peace by

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20. Available at *http://www.pna.gov.ps/Government/gov/The_Draft_Constitution_of_the_PLO.asp*, accessed 5 December 2004. The original draft was prepared by Ahmed Shukairy following an agreement at the Arab Summit Conference in 1963.

21. Declaration of Independence (15 November 1988), available at *http://www.pna.gov.ps/Government/gov/Declaration_of_Independence.asp*, accessed 5 December 2004. See also the draft Constitution for the State of Palestine (third draft, 14 May 2003), available at *http://www.mopic.gov.ps/constitution/english%20constitution.asp*, accessed 5 December 2004. Though establishing Islam as "the official religion in Palestine," the draft constitution states that "Christianity, and all other monotheistic religions, shall be equally revered and respected" (Article 5).

22. *Fateh*, literally meaning "victory" or "conquest," is also a reverse acronym of *Harakat al-Tahrir al-Watani al-Filastini*, Palestinian National Liberation Movement. *Hamas*, Arabic for "zeal," is an acronym for *Harakat al muqawama al-Islamiyya*, Islamic Resistance Movement. An "Islamist" is someone who understands Islam as a system that should influence all spheres of life. Care should be taken to not confuse Islamism with mere militancy or extremism.

23. See Ehud Sprinzak, "How Israel Misjudges Hamas and Its Terrorism," *Washington Post*, 19 October 1997.

24. Jessica Stern, *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill* (New York: Ecco, 2003), 105–6. For a history of religious violence surrounding the Dome, see Gershom Gorenberg, *End of Days: Fundamentalism and the Struggle for the Temple Mount* (New York: Free Press, 2000).

25. For a political analysis of this worldwide phenomenon, see Mark Jeurgensmeyer, "The Global Rise of Religious Nationalism," in *Religions/Globalizations: Theories and*

the Bush administration in April 2003,[26] though this also soon met its demise. Palestinian despondency was heightened yet again by Israel's targeted killings of Hamas leaders Yassin and Rantisi in early 2004 (along with the U.S. non-response).[27] Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's unilateral action to "disengage" from the Gaza Strip in August 2005, though widely touted in international media as a breakthrough step toward a negotiated settlement, was (a) actively resisted by Sharon's base, including extremist settlers,[28] and (b) understood by Palestinians and confirmed by Sharon senior adviser Dov Weisglass to supply "the amount of formaldehyde that is necessary so there will not be a political process with the Palestinians."[29] It is still too early to tell whether the November 2004 death of Yasser Arafat will mitigate or contribute further to this political despondency.

Given this political climate, it is unsurprising that the voices of religious nationalism have again made their presence felt within the Jewish and Muslim communities of Israel/Palestine. These developments worry the Palestinian Christian minority, both within Israel and in the occupied Palestinian Territories. When religious nationalism influences Israeli discourse, Palestinian Christians suffer with all Palestinians the increased intractability of the political situation and the hardening of the occupation. When the trend grows within Palestinian discourse, Palestinian Christians experience the potentially negative effects of what has been called the Islamization of Palestinian identity.[30] Nationalisms built along sectarian commitments naturally exclude or, at best, marginalize religious minorities living within their midst, stated commitments to historically informed religious plurality notwithstanding.

Christian involvement in nationalist projects

Christians in the Middle East have eagerly embraced Arab movements toward secular nationalism. Even before the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after World War I, Christians especially had been drawn to the ideals and apparent successes of Western intellectual values and governmental structures, systems in which their faith would not designate them as second-class citizens. Raheb explains the pull of these ideas for Palestinian Christians: "By calling for nationalism, secularism, and socialism,

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Cases, ed. Dwight N. Hopkins et al. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

26. The full name of the peace plan was "A Performance-Based Roadmap to a Permanent Two-State Solution to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict."

27. Both assassinations resulted from missile strikes launched by Israeli Defense Force (IDF) helicopter gunships. Yassin, a quadriplegic, was in his wheelchair being escorted out of a neighborhood mosque following his routine morning prayers; Rantisi was riding in a car with bodyguards. For the U.S. responses to the first assassination, see Steven R. Weisman, "A Day When the White House Reversed Stand on the Killing," *New York Times*, 23 March 2004.

28. Fears of what happened to Rabin and the peace process in which he engaged inspired a spirited editorial from Jeffrey Goldberg, "Protect Sharon from the Right," *New York Times*, 5 August 2004.

29. Ari Shavit, "The Big Freeze," *Ha'aretz Magazine*, 8 October 2004. The import of Weisglass's comments was recognized internationally. See Terence Neilan, "Israeli Causes Uproar over Status of Road Map," *New York Times*, 6 October 2004.

30. Meir Litvak, "The Islamization of Palestinian Identity: The Case of Hamas," distributed by the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Tel Aviv University, available at *http://www.dayan.org/d&a-hamas-litvak.htm*, accessed 5 December 2004.

Christians were not just demanding equal rights. They were also calling for a new community in which they could take an active political part. The historical background makes it obvious why Arab Christians could not see any contribution that religion could make to benefit the future of the Middle East."[31]

As Muslim thinkers proposed ways for Islam to accommodate the benefits of modernity without assenting to modernity's concomitant privatization of religious commitment, Christians began taking active political roles: "Michel Aflaq, Antun Sa'Adeh, and others became the founding fathers of many secular Arab political parties, such as the Ba'ath party, the Syrian National Party, and others." Later, Christians would play integral parts in forming the PLO, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine. "The PLO's persistent and continuous struggle for a Greater Palestine was activated by its conviction that one should strive only for a secular state in which Jews, Christians, and Muslims enjoyed equal rights and coexisted in peace."[32]

All theopolitical extremism, Muslim and Jewish, must be carefully counteracted. Palestinian Christians and their sympathetic Muslim neighbors are painfully aware of the deleterious effects of religious nationalism in their own context. The question for Palestinian Christians such as Raheb and Younan—publicly visible representatives of a religious community, the ELCJHL—is whether or not religion can contribute at all to peacemaking in this troubled region.

A theology of *martyria*

Palestinian Christians are no strangers to political involvement in Israel/Palestine. As ELCJHL Bishop Younan is fond of saying, the pulpit has moved into the street. But the street can be a difficult place for a Palestinian Christian, as the bishop experienced on the day of Pope John Paul's visit to Jerusalem. That afternoon, when Jerusalem's church leaders gathered with the Pope at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Latin Patriarch Michel Sabbah, having heard of the incidents, comforted Younan with an allusion to the Acts of the Apostles: "We Christians need to take seriously the theology of *martyria*."[33] In Acts 1:8, Jesus commissions his disciples to be witnesses— *martyrs*.

Thus, Palestinian Christians have in Younan's view a crucial calling in their context, their dwindling number notwithstanding. "God calls us to *martyria*, but not to accept the evil that causes suffering. *Martyria* still carries with it a kind of dignity, the same way Jesus' dignity remained intact on the cross." Still, he admits, "Being a minority means being exposed. That is why it is witness in word and deed together; it is witness that exposes one to possible suffering. There is no cheap martyr."[34]

Perhaps the most important witness of ELCJHL members to their Palestinian brothers and sisters lies in their effort to provide excellent educational opportunities for Palestinian students. Though the denomination claims only six congregations, it boasts five schools. More students —about half Muslim and half Christian— attend its schools than its churches.[35] The

31. Raheb, *I am a Palestinian Christian*, 39.

32. Ibid., 40.

33. Younan, *Witnessing for Peace*, xiii.

34. Ibid., 48, 47. Younan's language is reminiscent of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

35. According to Charlie Haddad, director of schools, Jews also are welcome if they choose to attend.

The question for Palestinian Christians such as Raheb and Younan . . . is whether or not religion can contribute at all to peacemaking in this troubled region.

blend of Muslim and Christian students increases familiarity and eases tensions between the two oppressed communities: "All Palestinian Christians certainly do not have the same attitudes toward relationships with Muslims. . . . This trend of Muslim-Christian tension is recent. The younger generation is more susceptible to it than the older people who grew up together." The ELCJHL sees its excellent ministry of education as a crucial investment for creating the cohesion necessary for Palestinian nationalism. "Our challenge is how we can pursue cooperation in future generations in the right way. We do it in Christian schools. With the weakening of ideologies and of pan-Arabism, we are anxious about how this will work out. Those who have lived together know there is another identity, a common identity."[36]

Palestinian Christians have made unique contributions to developing Palestinian capacities for nonviolent resistance, and the ELCJHL supports virtually all forms of these efforts. The denomination's leaders have spoken favorably of organizations committed to nonviolent direct action, including the International Solidarity Movement and the Christian Peacemaker Teams, whose group in the Middle East attends weekly worship at the English-language service of Redeemer Lutheran. Additionally, the ELCJHL encourages its visitors to take advantage of "alternative tourism" resources.[37] The nonviolent resistance embodied in two Bethlehem institutions sponsored by Christmas Lutheran Church—the International Center of Bethlehem[38] and the Bethlehem Media Center[39]—provide resources for cultural resistance crucial for those living under occupation.

Beyond resistance, Palestinian Christians have a long history of engaging their neighbors in interreligious dialogue. Taking seriously Jesus' call to be ministers of reconciliation, Christians like Younan seek to organize and constructively participate in "trialogue"—intensive conversations between Jews, Muslims, and Christians. The trialogue Younan envisions has eminently practical results: "peace education, based on tolerance, equality, and forgiveness." Younan seeks, for instance, to influence both Palestinian and Israeli school curricula and how they conceive of each other. The final two chapters of Younan's latest English-language book detail the intricate matters present for Christians who engage

36. Younan, *Witnessing for Peace*, 131.

37. These "alternatives" include visits to Palestinian territories, meetings with Palestinian leaders, and Palestinian service providers (drivers, guides, hotels, restaurants). One U.S. travel agency that has become well respected for the quality and sensitivity of its work—both with church groups in North America and with Palestinian service providers—is Group Travel Directors (*www.gtd.org*), based in suburban Minneapolis.

38. See *www.annadwa.org*.

39. See *www.bethlehemmedia.net*.

in dialogue with Muslims and Jews separately and in trialogue situations.[40]

Theologizing the political conflict in Israel/Palestine can augment its intractability. Still, the call to faithfully minister to their people will necessarily involve Palestinian Christian leaders in some level of political activity. Thus, Younan understands that his work at structured interreligious engagement has political import. Likewise, the theological reflections of Palestinian parish pastors must be intimately linked to the political realities of their people.

In Raheb's words, "a contextual Palestinian theology is nothing else than an attempt to develop a local theology that is positive, relevant, and important for the future of the Holy Land. It is an alternative both to escaping into religious fundamentalism and to discarding religion for secularism."[41] The revivification of Palestinian identity has become a part of Palestinian Christian consciousness: "The Arabization of the Christian churches, which began with their leaders, has spread to include theology and education. This Arabization will eventually bind the faithful to their church, their society, and their country. At that point they will truly possess the power to be what the Master promised, 'You are the salt of the earth and a light on a mountain.'"[42]

Beyond the excellent domestic work being done by the ELCJHL and other Palestinian Christian organizations—in particular the work of building bridges between Christians, Muslims, and Jews—the embattled Christian communities of Israel/Palestine have reached out to their Western coreligionists, seeking to garner support for their political aspirations. This is especially important work since Zionism and the state of Israel are supported steadfastly by Western (Christian) nations and, more specifically, their governments.[43] Publishing books, traveling widely in Europe and in the United States, and taking part in ecumenical assemblies all become an important ministry for Palestinian Christians as they speak out on behalf of a just peace for all persons and communities living in Israel/Palestine. In North America, along with Naim Ateek and Elias Chacour, Younan and Raheb are counted among the most highly visible Palestinian Christian leaders.[44]

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40. Younan, *Witnessing for Peace*, 125, 128–58.

41. Raheb, *I Am a Palestinian Christian*, 43.

42. Ibid., 25.

43. For a discussion of these concerns see Robert O. Smith, "Between Restoration and Liberation: Theopolitical Contributions and Responses to U.S. Foreign Policy in Israel/Palestine," *Journal of Church & State* 46/4 (Autumn 2004): 833–60.

44. Raheb was an ecumenical participant during the 2004 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), which authorized "exploration of a *selective* divestment of church funds from those companies whose business in Israel is found to be directly or indirectly causing harm or suffering to innocent people, Palestinian or Israeli." See Clifton Kirkpatrick, "Statement from the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)," 20 July 2004, available at *http://www.pcusa.org/oga/news.htm*, accessed 5 December 2004.

Mission Paradigms in the Pax Americana

David D. Grafton
Coordinator of Graduate Studies
Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo, Egypt
grafton@etsc.org

The apostle Paul tells us that Christ died for the ungodly "at the right time" (Rom 5:6). Quoting an early Christian hymn, Paul reminds us, "For 'there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all'—this was attested at the right time" (1 Tim 2:5–6).

Following Pompey's arrival in Palestine in 63 B.C.E., Roman law, culture, and military might ruled from Gaul to the sands of the province of Arabia, called Arabia Felix, and the Persian Empire. It was the right time. It was the time of Pax Romana.

Pax Romana took advantage of what Alexander the Great had begun some three hundred years before. By using the *lingua franca* of Greek and the road systems developed to hold the empire together, the Romans were able to communicate to the far reaches of the empire in ways previously unparalleled. Gone were the days of Phidippides' 26-mile run and subsequent death heralding the victory of Marathon. Now, given the advanced communication systems of the empire, not only could information be transferred more directly through quicker and safer public roads, but, because of the pervasiveness of the Greek language, information could be more easily shared and understood.

Edward Gibbon in his classic work *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* remarks on these two crucial elements of empire.

> So sensible were the Romans of the influence of language over national manners. . . . Whilst they acknowledged the charms of the Greek, they asserted the dignity of the Latin tongue, and the exclusive use of the latter was inflexibly maintained in the administration of civil as well as military government. The two languages exercised at the same time their separate jurisdiction throughout the empire: the former as the natural idiom of science; the latter as the legal dialect of public transactions. Those who united letters with business were equally conversant with both; and it was almost impossible in any province, to find a Roman subject of a liberal education, who was at once a stranger to the Greek and to the Latin language. . . .
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> All these cities [of the Empire] were connected with each other, and with the capital, by the public highways, which issuing from the Forum of Rome, traversed Italy, pervaded the provinces and were terminated only by the frontiers of the empire. . . . They united the subjects of the most distant provinces by an easy and familiar intercourse. . . .[1]

The development of this empire was built upon Roman aggression and occupation of foreign territories and peoples. This is the nature of building empires: domina-

1. Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, abridged ed. (New York: Dell, 1963), 50, 52, 56.

tion and security of its interests. It was at this "right time," Scripture tells us, that Christ came and that his heralds could take to these same imperial roads, using the same imperial language to spread the gospel. Because of this, the gospel quickly spread first to the provinces at the Eastern edge of the empire and to the districts of Asia Minor, then to Alexandria and on to the capital of the Empire itself—Rome. The movement of the gospel also took place outside of the borders of the empire to the East, to the non–Greek-speaking communities of Asia. There developed deep and lasting traditions of Thomas and Thaddeaus, moving east to Edessa and further to the Arabian Gulf and India. The propagation of the gospel outside the confines of the Roman Empire has often been neglected in our general view of early days of Christianity and has only recently begun to interest Western audiences.[2] In any case, our Scripture developed from within the confines of the Roman Empire. Roman culture, language, and politics decisively affected the early formation of Christianity. It is from within the Empire that we have record of the first Christian communities and their evangelists. There is no clearer example of this than the work of Paul.

Given the "green light" by the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:1–35) to represent the faith to the non-Jewish, Greek-speaking world, Paul and Barnabas set off on their second and third missionary journeys to Asia minor.[3] It is from Paul's work and tradition in the Empire that we have received the bulk of our New Testament writings, the Pauline and deutero-Pauline epistles. Yes, Paul has been considered the Christian missionary par excellence.[4] Moving about the empire, sometimes living off the hospitality of others, usually supporting himself through his own tentmaking skills, Paul preached the gospel. His life has been used as a model for mission ever since. Theorists of global mission have looked to Paul for guidance in methods of spreading the gospel throughout the world.

Acts 21 records Paul's return to Jerusalem where he was beaten by a mob for defiling the Temple (21:26–30). The attempt to kill him would have succeeded if not for the intervention of the occupying Roman soldiers who, in an attempt to maintain public order, dragged Paul away (21:31–36). Here Paul invoked his "get out of jail card" to the Roman authorities. "I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of an important city" (21:39). Taken away to the barracks to be disciplined and further questioned, Paul again invoked his international human right as a citizen of the Empire.

"Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who is uncondemned?" When the centurion heard that, he went to the tribune and said to him,

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2. See, for example, Samuel Moffet, *A History of Christianity in Asia: Vol. 1: Beginnings to 1500* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998).

3. The fact that Paul and Barnabas's first journey (Acts 13:1–14:28) raised the concern of the early Jewish Christians, including the community of James in Jerusalem, should be enough to confirm that the first movements of the Christian community were rooted in Eastern soil and identity. The movement west, toward the center of the Empire, was not a foregone conclusion. Much research needs to be done still, building upon the early nineteenth-century studies of early Syriac literature. See for example the recent reprints *Ancient Syriac Documents*, ed. W. Cureton (New York: Kessinger, 2004), and Adolf von Harnack, *Expansion of Christianity in the first Three Centuries* (New York: Wipf and Stock, 1997.

4. It is clear that Paul "the missionary" has been "unparalleled in the profound way in which he presents a universal Christian missionary vision." See David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 170.

"What are you about to do? This man is a Roman citizen" (22:25–26).

Through a series of legal maneuvers Paul made his case before the Roman Governor and then to the Emperor himself.

"I am appealing to the emperor's tribunal; this is where I should be tried. Now if I am in the wrong and have committed something for which I deserve to die, I am not trying to escape death; but if there is nothing to their charges against me, no one can turn me over to them. I appeal to the emperor." Then Festus [the Roman Governor] after he had conferred with his council, replied, "You have appealed to the emperor; to the emperor you will go" (Acts 25:10–12).

The Apostle Paul, a Roman citizen, was able to invoke the rights and duties of a legal member of the Roman Empire. He was able to move about the Empire relatively freely and engage in conversation with citizens throughout the Empire. He was within his own linguistic and political culture of the Empire.

Much of the Western missionary endeavor throughout the twentieth century has assumed methods of operation similar to Paul's. At the height of the colonial period (1880s–1920s), Western missionaries were able to access much of the known world with much more ease than previously known. Because of this, Western mission has been labeled as "imperialist." Stephen Neil's classic work *A History of Christian Missions*, however, clearly demonstrated that the often cited missionary collusion with imperialistic powers is quite often overstated and sometimes downright wrong. There are many examples of Western missionaries who had arrived prior to the colonial powers and who worked to defend the rights of the indigenous peoples against the colonial powers.[5]

American Presbyterians working in the Near East, especially in Armenia, Persia, and Lebanon/Syria, established their mission posts long before there was any American interest in the area. In fact, it was the missionaries who begged the U.S. to step in to stop the Armenian massacres of 1915–1916 in Turkey and to protect the minority communities of the Caucasus. The American government ultimately reneged on its original designs to step into the quagmire of the international debate over what to do with the territories of the former Ottoman Empire.[6]

Another important example would certainly be the work of the Arabian Mission of the Reformed Church, which began its work in the Arabian Peninsula long before there was any hint of petroleum. Communities in Bahrain, Kuwait, and Oman still speak highly of the American missionaries who were present before the Gulf became a strategic place.[7]

The perception among the general populace in the Middle East to this day, however, continues to uphold the idea of missionary collusion with imperialism. The mere fact that during the colonial period Western missionaries were citizens of foreign nations that were involved in the international power struggles of the day has been enough to undermine their credibility—*in retrospect*. The British are still disparaged by the Egyptians for their 74-year occupation of Egypt. Even though the Church Missionary Society of the Anglican Church was working in Egypt long

5. Stephen Neil, *A History of Christian Missions* (New York: Penguin, 1990), esp. 414ff.

6. See Joseph L. Grabill, *Protestant Diplomacy and the Near East: Missionary Influence on American Policy: 1810–1927* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971).

7. Lewis Scudder III, *The Arabian Mission's Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 417–19.

before British occupation, and even though the British government was actually accused by the Coptic population of favoring the Muslims, the perception persists that Christian mission abetted British imperialism. Brian Stanley's *The Bible and the Flag* reminds us that missionaries, regardless of their piety or social-political leanings, were members of particular nation states; and those nations were involved in international power struggles. The missionaries' "vision was frequently clouded by national and racial pride."[8] By their very nature, then, the missionaries were citizens of two cities—the city of God and the city of humankind; their higher calling and their legal citizenship.

As missiological studies have shown, history is quite harsh on the missionaries who, simply by virtue of their citizenship, were involved in cross-cultural ministry in places where their own countries were involved because of international politics. Their work was mixed up in the nationalistic projects of the world. It is more than likely that in the current geopolitical climate North American church workers, regardless of their vocational goals, will be painted in the same light as the previous "imperialist" British missionaries.

Today we have entered into a dangerous Pax Americana for North American missions. Regardless of whether Americans are willing to conceive of ourselves as the new imperial power in the world, we are certainly perceived that way. And perception breeds its own assumptions on how to respond. Much of the world, and especially the Middle East, has already begun thinking of the U.S. in terms of Empire.[9] North American missionaries cannot afford to assume either that their roles are above and beyond the projects of the world or that their ministries will be beneficently viewed apart from such "signs of the times."

After World War I, Americans moved out of their isolationism and began entering the mission fields in greater numbers than previously seen. Even before that War, the Presbyterians and Congregationalists struggled nobly for various causes of the Christian faith and for the minority communities of the Near East. Since that time, the U.S. passport has allowed American missionaries access to places that are denied to many other nationalities. The blue passport became an entry card into virtually any mission field.

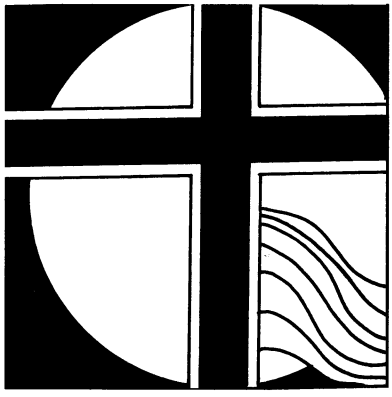
During the Cold War, the Communist countries provided the most substantial obstacle to this. Post-1979 Iran provides another example where American missionaries were kept out or denied access not primarily because of religious reasons but rather for political reasons—because they carried the blue passport.

The Pax Americana of today is somewhat similar to the Pax Romana of the first century. The cultural, economic, and military might of both empires dominated international culture. Whereas Greek provided the *lingua franca* for most of the Roman Empire, English now provides the setting for international business and information. Whereas the roads and sea lanes of the Roman Empire facilitated communication and military transport, the Internet, satellites, Disney, and Hollywood provide for the exportation of American culture and values.

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8. Brian Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag* (London: Apollos, 1990), 184.

9. See Rashid Khalidi, *Resurrecting Empire: Western Footprints and America's Perilous Path in the Middle East* (New York: Beacon, 2004), and Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002).



There are two important distinctions between Pax Romana and Pax Americana, however. The first is that, according to modern international law, independent nation states are (or should be) guaranteed autonomy and sovereignty by the signers of the United Nations Charter. A modern-day Paul traveling from Jerusalem to Asia Minor to Rome in Pax Americana would have to deal with immigration regulations, customs duties, taxes, work permits for his tentmaking business, and language barriers in his attempts to communicate with locals. His confrontations with local communities would now involve local security forces. His appeal to citizenship rights would be subjected to the jurisdiction of the national laws in whatever state he was residing. The tentmaking business just isn't what it used to be.

Second, Rome during the first century was not Christian. The United States, despite its separation of state and religious powers, is a culture that has been based upon Western Christian traditions and literature and is perceived as another Constantinian state spreading the Gospel of Prosperity and Power. While Paul utilized the Pax Romana, the early Christian community remained aloof from the identity and civil religion of the Empire up until the fourth century. Not until Constantine did Christianity become the dominant cultural religion of the Empire, bringing with it concepts of Christendom and conquest. Today, even if the United States is not legally a Christian state, its cultural identity and civil religion are certainly built upon a Christian historical legacy. Recent religious rhetoric from publicly elected officials has underlined this view of the American Christian state in the Middle East. For American Christian missions to ride the coattails of the civil religion of Pax Americana, even unintentionally, is a detriment to the gospel.

As a citizen of the Empire, Paul was free to take advantage of Pax Romana. North American missionaries, however, who live out their vocation in the towns and villages in Egypt often find themselves facing restrictions because of their blue passports. The Egyptian government, desperate to keep track of all foreigners outside of Cairo, goes to great lengths to make sure that additional tourist tragedies do not happen. This often means that foreigners in Upper Egypt are escorted by security forces. The government also wants to maintain the delicate balance of feelings between the strongly nationalistic Copts and a poor Muslim community sympathetic to Islamist designs. Many Evangelical North American Christians interpret this reality as a Muslim state's prohibition of the freedom of religion. In response, some "evangelists" flout security laws and defy government rules by surreptitiously and secretly working behind the backs of the local law enforcement. In the end, when they are discovered, it is usually the local Egyptian communities that are brought into the police station for questioning. Long after foreign church workers have left, the

local communities must suffer the consequences of foreign incursions. Because North American missionaries reside in two cities (the city of God and the city of humankind), their earthly citizenship in this Pax Americana cannot be overlooked.

The case of two American short-term missionaries serving in a Christian "relief agency" in Afghanistan in 2002 provides us with the most dangerous example. In August 2001, Americans Dayna Curry and Heather Mercer, who were working for the organization Shelter Now in Afghanistan, were arrested by the Taliban along with six other Westerners and sixteen Afghans on charges of illegally proselytizing under the strict Taliban regime. Curry and Mercer were what most mission agencies would call short-termers: individuals who spend from a few months to two years in a foreign country or a particular locale, which gives them barely enough time to learn the culture or even the language. These usually are the individuals who are the most enthusiastic about spreading the gospel and can do the most damage in very complex social situations. "They were women in a patriarchal society, didn't know the language (well), didn't know the culture and were counseled against doing this by other Christians," offered one critic.[10]

The two Americans, along with the other Christian workers, were held captive by the Taliban for three months, but after September 11 and the buildup of American forces toward an invasion of Afghanistan the pair were rescued by American special forces. Brought home to cheering crowds as near-martyrs for the faith, their congregation pledged to send out more mission workers.[11] The signal in the Middle East was clear: the U.S. government would use every means available to protect its Christian missionaries. Certainly, the government acted to protect its own citizens, regardless of their vocations. But that is not how it is perceived by most in the region. Not only did the episode paint a picture supporting Osama Bin Laden's version of America's Crusade—Evangelists backed by American military might—but the event jeopardized all relief agencies regardless of their affiliation. These relief agencies were closed down, denying much needed support to the local Afghans. In addition, no one has followed up on the family involved in the arrest or the community that had been associated with Shelter Now.[12]

I fear that history will judge North American missionaries with the same harshness that it has judged British and Dutch missionaries. The earthly citizenship of a foreign church worker is something that cannot be denied, and it is ultimately this citizenship that will determine how their ministries will fare in their chosen field of occupation. To be an American missionary in the Middle East, the land of Paul's sojourns, is to live and work in a very different world than Paul's. The blue passport is a reality with which all U.S. citizens must deal. It is their legal identity. At one point in the history of Pax Americana the passport was a benefit; now it is a liability in many places. Even long-term church workers who gain the trust and respect of local indigenous communities struggle with this.

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10. David van Biema, "Should Christians Convert Muslims?" *Time* (June 30, 2003). See also Deann Alford, "Entrapment Suspected," *Christianity Today* (February 4, 2002).

11. Deann Alford, "Heather Mercer and Dayna Curry Go Home to Waco," *Christianity Today* (December 11, 2001).

12. Their story can be read in Dayna Curry, Heather Mercer, and Stacy Mattingly, *Prisoners of Hope: The Story of Our Captivity and Freedom in Afghanistan* (New York: Doubleday, 2002).

For example, life-long Presbyterian missionary Rev. Benjamin Weir, despite his social-political sympathies with the Palestinians and the Arab cause of the post-1967 era, found himself in the middle of an international conflict in which he greatly suffered. His spiritual, social, and political views and his vocational goals were irrelevant to the kidnappers. His life and witness following the event of his captivity, and his careful attention to maintaining a distance from the Pax Americana, is a great testimony to his perception of the needs of protecting the gospel from nationalistic voices.[13]

In Egypt, Western church workers increasingly face deportation or do not have their visas renewed under the claim that they are endangering the "security of the country." Christian organizations may argue that this is unfair and inhibits the international rights of freedom of religion. Yet, the restrictions of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security have denied foreign citizens entry under the claim of "national security" as well.

So, what are we to do? Abandon the Great Commission altogether under the claim that it no longer addresses the issues of modernity? No, of course not. Christians cannot abandon the missiological aspects of the faith. To believe in Christ is to share the gospel—this is part and parcel of our faith. But as North American Christians we must conform to the dramatically changed geopolitical situations through a renewal of our mission paradigms so that we might "discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom 12:2). There are many ways churches and North American Christian organizations can work in the world with a sense of integrity in the new world (dis)order. The reality is that we must realize we have entered a new paradigm, unlike Paul and unlike Pax Romana, and respond accordingly. Otherwise, like the British (imperialist) missionaries before us, we too will be judged as having imperial designs. As Stanley says, "Their perceptions of the demands of justice were too easily moulded to fit the contours of prevailing western ideologies. In this respect, our predecessors reflect our own fallibility more closely than we care to admit."[14]

We Americans are often blessed with a sense of idealism. This certainly carries over into our faith and has been the basis of our strong witness in foreign missions (in its variety of forms). At the same time, we can be burdened by the curse of naiveté about the complexities of the world. This can lead to what Charles Kimball calls "American Christian triumphalism."[15] By recognizing what is at stake in our decisions regarding foreign missions in the new Pax Americana, and clearly thinking through mission paradigms, we will do ourselves, the world, and the gospel a great service.

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13. Benjamin Weir, Carol Weir, and Dennis Benson, *Hostage Bound, Hostage Free* (Louisville: Westminster / John Knox, 1987).

14. Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag*, 184.

15. Quoted in van Beima, "Should Christians Convert Muslims?"

Narrative Insights into the Crucifixion of Jesus in Luke (23:33–43)

Carrie L. Lewis
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Newton, Iowa
pastorhtlc@iowatelecom.net

In the crucifixion account, Luke 23: 33–43, Luke tells the story of a first-century man from Nazareth through whom God has chosen to make known the power of God to establish God's rule over the world and to call into question the power of the earthly rulers, both religious and political. Who really has power in this world? How is that power manifested? Do the rulers of the world have power over my life? Can I trust this Jesus who is telling me that the power of God is greater?



By the time the first hearers encountered the story of the crucifixion, they had traveled a long road with Jesus, a road that brought them to Jerusalem, where earthly power, both religious and political, was centered, a road that led to Jesus' arrest, sentencing, and now his crucifixion on

the hill called the Skull. Along that road, they had "witnessed" Jesus calling disciples to follow him, breaking the laws of the Sabbath in front of the religious officials by working and healing on the Sabbath, performing miracles among the people of Israel and the Gentiles, and hearing Jesus preach, teach, and proclaim the coming of the kingdom of God. Now they stand at the foot of the cross, seeing Jesus hanging there between two criminals, and wonder how all that had been said and done before could be true. Has the power of the world finally overcome the power of God? Is Jesus really the anointed one?

The answer to these questions begins to be revealed in the episode of the crucifixion through the most unlikely of sources: the soldiers and the evildoers who surround Jesus. Although they do not know that they are speaking the truth and do not intend to be speaking the truth, the truth about Jesus' identity is ironically revealed in the voices of these characters.

In his narrative Luke shows that, through the crucifixion of Jesus, God turns the human understanding of power on its head. For Luke, the crucifixion of Jesus is not a payment for people's sins. He omits Mark's famous quotation "For the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (10:45). Rather, Jesus' healings and offers of forgiveness are a proclamation of God's reign and God's comprehensive saving purpose.[1] Salvation is restoration of God's people through the forgiveness of sins.[2] Jesus' death was the opportunity though which God's authority would be manifest.

Through Jesus' ability to forgive and offer salvation, even at the time when Jesus appears to be powerless, Luke shows us that in the midst of apparent vulnerability and lack of power God continues to exercise authority in the world through Jesus.

The question of forgiveness

For whom is Jesus asking forgiveness? As hearers enter this scene they are told that Jesus is crucified with two evildoers, one on his right and one on his left. Jesus takes the opportunity on the cross to ask God to forgive those who are executing him because they do not know what they are doing. Is he asking forgiveness for the Jewish leaders who have asked for his crucifixion? for the Roman soldiers who have carried out the death sentence? for the crowd who surrounds him but does not know what to say about the events that have transpired?

Jesus has taught forgiveness and offered forgiveness throughout the journey of this story. In fact, it was forgiveness that first caused the Pharisees to question who Jesus was: "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (5:21). Jesus had taught the disciples that if another disciple sinned against them they must forgive that disciple if that disciple repented, and if that disciple sinned seven times and repented seven times the disciples were to forgive seven times (17:3–4). At the crucifixion, however, Jesus asks God to forgive people when there is no sign of repentance. Those who are crucifying Jesus show no faith in Jesus, which has rendered forgiveness for others (5:20; 7:47), and they are definitely not showing any remorse for what they are doing.

Forgiveness for the crowd. It is precisely because of the ignorance of the people that Jesus asks God for forgiveness. If the

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1. Robert Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation. Volume 1: The Gospel according to Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 89.

2. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke,* Sacra Pagina, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, S.J. (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 380.

people had known who Jesus was, they would have repented. However, they neither heeded John's teaching to bear fruits worthy of repentance (3:8) nor understood that Jesus was the one of whom John had spoken when he said "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire" (3:16–17).

Because they did not understand this teaching or who Jesus was, Jesus had to ask for their forgiveness. In the book of Acts, the apostles continue to preach and teach those whom Jesus classified as ignorant. The ignorant are given opportunities to see how God used the crucifixion to further God's plan, to repent, and to turn to God (Acts 2:22–36; 3:17–26), much like the remorse that the crowd who viewed the crucifixion expressed as "they returned home, beating their breasts" (23:48).

The crowd does not know what to think at this point. Luke portrays them as unsure of what is happening before them as they stand in silence watching the one who they thought came with the power to heal them and save them but who now hangs on the cross under the judgment of the worldly rulers. Jesus has been shown the greatest of dishonor. Because Jesus is their leader and has been dishonored in this way, his followers also have been dishonored.[3] The crowd still supports their leader, but, faced with the unexpected, has fallen silent.

Forgiveness for the Jewish leaders. The Jewish leaders understand their job to be preserving and defending God's honor. In their attempt to fulfill this duty, however, they have been blinded to an understanding of what their true role is and who Jesus is. Luke's portrayal of the ignorance of the Jewish leaders runs contrary to the general judgment by the New Testament writers that there was deliberate blindness and malevolence on the part of the Jewish authorities involved in the crucifixion.[4] When Jesus claims to have power to forgive sins (5:21), they fear that Jesus is lessening God's power, thus dishonoring God. When Jesus and the disciples gather grain on the Sabbath (6:1–5), and when Jesus heals on the Sabbath (6:6–11), these actions are seen as a threat to the power of God, as breaking God's laws and showing dishonor to God. The rulers are in awe of Jesus (5:26), some amazed by what he is doing but others waiting to catch him in something that he is saying (11:53–54). As time goes on and Jesus continues to teach and to heal, the Pharisees and the scribes do not recognize Jesus' revelation of God's power, and they grumble even more about what he is doing (15:2). This view of the ignorance of the Jewish authorities who are involved in the crucifixion is echoed by Peter in Acts 3:17.

Forgiveness for the Roman soldiers. Whereas the Jewish leaders lack understanding, the Roman soldiers lack knowledge. They have not had the opportunity to hear the gospel and do not have a frame of reference to understand who this is that they are executing. They only know what

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3. Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey, "Honor and Shame in Luke-Acts: Pivotal Values in the Mediterranean World," in *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation*, ed. Jerome H. Neyrey (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 60–61.

4. Raymond E. Brown, "The Passion according to Luke," *Worship* 60 (January 1986): 7.

Jesus is living out what he has taught. Although he has been wrongly accused, he does not fight back.

others are claiming, and they join with those others in the ignorant ridicule of Jesus. Jesus does not show vindictiveness toward any of these persons. Rather Jesus asks God not to judge them but to forgive them for not knowing that this is God's action.[5]

Why forgiveness now? In his Sermon on the Plain, Jesus teaches, "If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt" (6:29). He goes on to say, "But love your enemy, do good and lend, expecting nothing in return" (6:35). Jesus is living out what he has taught. Although he has been wrongly accused, he does not fight back but receives the beating of his enemies. Throughout Luke's account of Jesus' ministry, "Jesus showed tenderness to the stranger (the widow of Nain) and praised the mercy shown to the Prodigal Son and to the man beset by thieves on the road to Jericho; it is not surprising then that in his passion Jesus shows forgiveness to those who crucified him."[6]

Reactions to the crucifixion

The hearer comes into contact with three groups of people who have been important to Luke's story: the crowd, the Jewish leaders, and the Roman soldiers. Each of these groups has met Jesus at a different point on his journey and come to a different understanding of who Jesus is and why he is being executed. They have different reactions as they stand at the foot of the cross.

Reaction of the crowd. The crowd has been encountered numerous times throughout the story. Although the crowds may not be the same people in all instances, their role is the same. They offer an audience for the teachings of John, Jesus, and the disciples. The hearer first meets the crowd at the Jordan with John the Baptist. The crowd has come to John to be baptized, and they ask him what they need to do to bear good fruit (3:10). John tells them to share their clothing and food with those who have none (3:11). He also tells them that there is one who is greater who is coming after him (3:16–17). When Jesus begins his public ministry, many of those who had been following John begin to follow Jesus, the one who is greater. The crowds continue to follow Jesus throughout the story, seeking him, desiring his healing and acts of exorcism. They are amazed by the power that Jesus exercises, and they continue to seek him out throughout his journey to Jerusalem in order that he might continue to perform these miraculous works to save their loved ones. People, such as those who witnessed Jesus' raising of the son of the widow at Nain, praised God, declaring Jesus a great prophet and saying, "God has looked favorably on his people!"

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5. Darrell Bock, *Luke, Volume 2* (Grand Rapids: Baker Exegetical Commentary, 1995), 1849–50.

6. Brown, "The Passion according to Luke," 3.

(7:16). And again, when the blind beggar receives his sight, he praises God, as do all those around him (18:35–43).

When Jesus declares judgment upon Israel in the synagogue at Nazareth (4:28), the crowds rise against him and seek his death. The people enjoy the power that heals them, but some are threatened by the power that judges them. They do not understand who Jesus is as an agent of God or that it is by God's power and authority that Jesus is accomplishing these miracles. John the Baptist sends two of his disciples to ask Jesus if he is the one who is to come (7:18–35). The people also try to make sense of who Jesus is by claiming that Jesus is John the Baptist resurrected, an appearance of Elijah, or a prophet of old that has arisen (9:7–9).

This confusion among the crowd is apparent at Jesus' trial and crucifixion. This crowd, who has been following Jesus, seeking his healing, and hindering the efforts of Jesus' enemies to do away with him earlier (19:47–48; 20:19; 21:38; 22:2, 6), cries out for Jesus' crucifixion, which the Jewish leaders had plotted (23:13, 18, 23–26).[7] At the crucifixion, the crowd seems to be playing a neutral role.

The crowd simply stands and watches what is going on around them. They are not ridiculing Jesus or defending him. They witness Jesus' death, but they do not mock him. Yet, as followers of this teacher, they are no longer honoring Jesus but are shaming him by their silence. Luke only mentions the passivity of the crowd, putting no value judgment on it. However, having witnessed Jesus' death and heard the centurion's declaration of Jesus as a righteous man (23:47), this crowd realizes what has actually happened before their eyes, and they are prompted to express remorse: "And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts" (23:48).[8] They express grief at the death of Jesus and perhaps also at the death of the hopes that they had had in him. This image of beating the breast takes the hearer back to Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (18:9–14). In this story, the tax collector beats his breast in remorse for what he has done, begging that God be merciful to him, a sinner. So the hearer understands that the crowds are not only expressing their grief but also showing remorse for their actions in contributing to the crucifixion and for their inaction, silence, and dishonor of their teacher and leader.

As listeners, we can sympathize with the crowd. We have been awed by Jesus' actions throughout Luke's story. We have stood before the cross feeling helpless, unable to understand how this could be happening if Jesus is, in fact, the Messiah. At the conclusion of this episode, we turn away from the cross, grieving the death of the one in whom we had such hope.

Reaction of the Jewish leaders. The Jewish leaders include the chief priest, the Pharisees, and those who have consistently opposed Jesus. Now, with method and opportunity joined with motive, they have plotted for Jesus' death.[9] The rulers are no longer threatened by Jesus' words or actions that they believed were showing dishonor to God (5:21; 6:1–11), and they are no longer afraid of Jesus' followers (22:2). They are sure that the power that they wield

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7. John T. Carroll, "Luke's Crucifixion Scene," in *Reimaging the Death of the Lukan Jesus*, ed. Dennis de Sylva (Frankfurt am Main: Anton Hain, 1990), 111.

8. Carroll, "Luke's Crucifixion Scene," 112.

9. Carroll, 111.

as rulers has won the battle against this one who blasphemes. Throughout the journey, the hearer witnesses the jealousy and rage that the rulers have had for Jesus. The rulers have felt threatened by him and by his ability to save, to forgive, and to cast out demons, and they have been offended by his choice to work, heal, and gather food on the Sabbath and to break other laws of impurity. In their opinion, Jesus is threatening God's honor and defying their role as defenders of that honor.

The rulers use the healing acts of Jesus against him by calling on him to save himself as he saved others.

Although Jesus sits at table with Pharisees at various times throughout the journey, teaching and preaching, it is the powerful whom he is rebuking. When he eats with the Pharisees and the lawyers, he rebukes them for their practices, for neglecting God's love, for ignoring God's wisdom, and for hindering those who were entering into God's wisdom (11:37–54). The Pharisees and lawyers became hostile toward Jesus because of his rebuke, and now they see Jesus' crucifixion as their chance to scoff at him in return.

When Jesus appears to be powerless and completely vulnerable the leaders take the opportunity to mock (ἐξεμυκτήριζον) him. This word is used only in Luke's Gospel, only twice, and only with reference to what was said by the Pharisees and the rulers to Jesus—once when Jesus speaks out against their improper use of power and money (16:14), and again here (23:35). It literally means to turn one's nose up at. Previously, the leaders had not felt the freedom to mock Jesus in public because of the crowds that surrounded him, and they had worked in secret to find a way to gain some authority over him (22:2). Now that Jesus is in a place of vulnerability, these leaders are able to "turn their noses up at" Jesus, doing what they see as their duty to defend God's honor.[10] In mocking Jesus, the rulers are shaming him, the one who has been honored by the people and has been putting the rulers to shame. This is their chance to turn the tables, to dishonor Jesus as they believe Jesus has dishonored them, and tear Jesus down in the ultimate act of shame, crucifixion outside of the city.

Specifically, the rulers use the healing acts of Jesus against him by calling on him to save himself as he saved others (23:35). When Jesus is rejected in Nazareth, he says, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Doctor, cure yourself!'" (4:23). Here, at the cross, the rulers are doing just that. They call out sarcastically, "Others he has saved. Let him save himself" (23:35). If Jesus truly is the anointed one, the one chosen by God, should he not be able to save himself? The hearer begins to think that maybe this is how Jesus will conquer the powers of earth.

Reaction of the Roman soldiers. The soldiers standing in front of the cross represent the Roman government, and they have been asked to crucify this man whom people have claimed to be the king of the Jews (23:3). When Jesus was on trial, the sol-

10. Bock, *Luke, Volume 2*, 1851–52.

diers ridiculed Jesus because of this claim (23:11).

These soldiers also mark the end of the hopes of the Jewish people that Jesus would be the one to overthrow the Roman government and gain power for the people of Israel once again. When Jesus was presented as a baby at the temple, Simeon declared God's saving purpose through Jesus:

> Master, now you are dismissing your servant
> in peace,
> according to your word;
> for my eyes have seen your salvation,
> which you have prepared in the presence
> of all peoples,
> a light for revelation to the Gentiles
> and for glory to your people Israel.
> (2:29–32)

Because of the teachings and miracles of Jesus throughout his life, people believed that Jesus must be one chosen by God to free them from Roman rule. Thus, shortly before Jesus' crucifixion, he was welcomed into Jerusalem as royalty. People lined up on the road as Jesus rode in on a colt, and they lay their cloaks on the road before Jesus as they would for a royal procession. The people cried out: "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" (19:38) But now, as Jesus is being crucified, their hope that he will rule as king is being shattered by these Roman soldiers. This one who was to gain power over Rome is being shamed in the most significant way by the soldiers.

The soldiers cast lots for Jesus' clothing, leaving Jesus to hang naked, the most shameful of conditions, on the cross.[11] The soldiers then begin to mock Jesus in both action and word. They offer him sour wine to mock his royalty, and, like the religious leaders, call to him, "If you are the king of the Judeans, save yourself!" These outsiders are mocking Jesus by calling him a king.[12]

The charge for which Jesus was killed was that he opposed Roman rule by establishing himself as king over the Jews.[13] This understanding of regal kingship takes the hearer back to the examination by Pilate (23:3), who asks if Jesus is the king of the Judeans. It is then repeated on the sign that is hung over Jesus' head on the cross (23:38).[14] It appears to the soldiers that this one who was to have such power over them has no such power. The soldiers have been given the authority to remove this problem from their midst, and in this action they are also showing the Jewish people that, as Roman soldiers, they are the ones who truly have the power and the authority. This increases the tension within the hearer who struggles with the abuse of authority by the Roman soldiers and with the hearer's own desire for Jesus to save himself in this critical hour.

Reaction of the first evildoer. The tension continues to build as one of the criminals being crucified with Jesus derides him as well. "Are you not the anointed one? Save yourself and us!" Because he calls Jesus "the anointed one," it can be inferred that he is of Jewish descent. But, because of the sarcastic tone with which he speaks to Jesus, the hearer understands that the evildoer does not really believe that Jesus is the anointed one. Because of this callous disrespect for Jesus, Luke remarks that this evildoer is blaspheming Jesus.[15]

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11. Bock, *Luke, Volume 2*, 1850.
12. Bock, 1853.
13. Richard J. Cassidy, *Jesus, Politics and Society: A Study of Luke's Gospel* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1978), 72.
14. Bock, 1853.
15. Bock, 1854.

The question of salvation

Can Jesus save his own life? The unifying factor among the Jewish leaders, the Roman soldiers, and the first evildoer is that they are challenging Jesus' power and authority by taunting him to come down from the cross. Luke makes it clear through their language that these people do not believe that Jesus can actually come down or cause anyone else to do so. Through this use of language, Luke sets the hearer up for the greatest action of God. Because the hearer does not yet know what this action of God will be, the sarcastic attitude seems to contradict the expectations of Jesus as Savior heard in the first chapters of Luke. There the angel Gabriel announces to Mary that "'[Jesus] will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end'" (1:32–33). But here, on the cross, Jesus is losing his life.

"The paradox revolves around the fact that if Jesus would have saved his life, he would have indeed lost his life."[16] For in telling his disciples what becoming his followers would entail, Jesus said to them that "those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it" (9:24). In Luke's view, it is precisely the fact that Jesus cannot save himself that makes him "The Anointed One," the "King of the Judeans." For Luke, "the proof that Jesus is God's Christ lies precisely in his rejection and death."[17] Luke repeatedly states that it is necessary for the Son of Man to die (9:22, 17:25, 24:7), but for Luke what is most important is to identify Jesus as "The Anointed One" as was claimed at the announcement of Jesus to Mary (1:31–33, 35). Therefore, Luke argues that "the Christ must suffer (24:46; Acts 3:18; 4:25–28; 26:23), and this is according to God's providence, "according to the Scriptures" (Luke 24:26–27, 45–47; Acts 18:28). According to Jerome Neyrey's understanding of Luke, "Jesus *cannot* escape death since he is holy and appointed. If he is truly God's Christ, he cannot save himself." Even if Christ cannot save himself, "it is unthinkable that the Christ is not saved." God saves Jesus ultimately by raising him from the dead. "The person whom God vindicated was God's designated 'Leader and Savior' (Acts 5:31). Jesus' heralded role as 'Savior of Israel' (Luke 2:11) is vindicated by God's saving him." Jesus could not be the Savior for others had God not saved him. "His holiness and obedience, which constitute him as God's Christ, will ultimately be salvific for himself in his resurrection and will constitute him as Savior of others."[18]

The irony of the salvation challenge. The words of the Jewish leaders, the Roman soldiers, and the first evildoer, although spoken sarcastically in an attempt to shame Jesus, prove to be true. Jesus has saved others, and the hearer soon will find that Jesus saves the evildoer who repents. As God's chosen one, Jesus has the power to heal and rescue others, and he does so as is evidenced throughout Luke's narrative of Jesus. Jesus is proved to be the Christ only if he does *not save* himself, and yet by *not saving* himself he will in fact save others.[19]

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16. Joan Mueller, *Is Forgiveness Possible?* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 12.

17. Jerome H. Neyrey, *The Passion according to Luke: A Redaction Study of Luke's Soteriology* (New York: Paulist, 1985), 141.

18. Neyrey, *The Passion according to Luke*, 141–42.

19. Neyrey, 142.

The rebuke of the second evildoer. The second criminal reframes what the reality of the situation is. Jesus has done nothing wrong, and the second evildoer recognizes this. He also recognizes that he and the evildoer who rebuked Jesus are receiving what they deserve based on their action, or they are receiving their "just" sentence (δικαίως). This idea comes back to the hearer a few verses later when the centurion offers another confession of Jesus' innocence as he declares Jesus' righteousness (δίκαιος) (23:47).

The promise of paradise

The request for remembrance. The second criminal does not ask to be saved from death. He also does not address Jesus by a title or function as the others had. Instead, he calls Jesus by name, an action of sincerity and intimacy, "an address used elsewhere in the Gospels in a friendly manner only by the blind beggar of Jericho."[20] He asks Jesus to remember him when Jesus comes into his kingdom. To "remember" (μνήσθητί), according to Jewish tradition, was something that was asked of God on behalf of the dead. Many funerary inscriptions ask for the dead to be "remembered" or to be placed with the righteous at judgment.[21]

With this understanding of "remember," this second evildoer may understand Jesus as being from God. He seems to understand that Jesus has power, even though he does not understand how that power will be manifest. He declares faith in Jesus even if Jesus does not perform a great act of earthly salvation at that moment. He declares Jesus innocent, demonstrates the fact that Jesus has power to save, and connects power to Jesus' future kingdom in spite of his shameful death on the cross. Once again, it is through an outcast that believers are shown unique insight.[22]

The second evildoer declares Jesus innocent and connects power to Jesus' future kingdom in spite of his shameful death on the cross.

"Some saw Jesus raise the dead, and did not believe. The [evildoer] sees Him being put to death, and yet believes."[23]

Jesus responds to the plea for remembrance. Although this evildoer has done something deserving of death, Jesus promises that he will find a place with him "today" in paradise. In contrast to having to ask God for forgiveness of those who have not repented, Jesus is able to forgive this one who has repented. "In the midst of [Jesus'] suffering unto death we hear a personal and transformative promise."[24]

When is "today"? The use of time in Luke's narrative is very important. In many cases, Luke takes great pains to give us a time of reference for when things are

20. Brown, "The Passion according to Luke," 7.

21. Bock, *Luke, Volume 2*, 1856.

22. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke*. 2 vols. The Anchor Bible Commentary (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 2:343.

23. Bock, 1856.

24. John W. Ehman, "Luke 23:1–49," *Interpretation* 52 (January 1998): 75.

occurring, especially with relation to who is in governmental and religious power[25] and where on the timeline of the Jewish calendar things are happening.[26] However, there is also a sense of immediacy that can be found in Luke. For example, the angels declare to the shepherds that "to you is born *this day* in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord" (2:11).[27] In addition, Luke's use of the word "today" portrays the immediacy of God's actions through Jesus.

Throughout the story, when Jesus declares a work of God, what Jesus says happens in the very act of speaking. For example, when Jesus reads from Isaiah, he sits to teach the people and says, "*Today* this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (4:21). In Jesus' reading of the scripture, Jesus was anointed to bring good news to the poor and to release captives. Again, when Jesus visits Zacchaeus, Jesus proclaims, "*Today* salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham" (19:9–10).

But it is not only for the living that salvation is granted in the here and now. In Judaism, deliverance will come at the consummation of God's reign.[28] However, in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (16:19–31) the hearer comes to know that the dead also have immediate rewards and punishments. Lazarus is immediately taken to Abraham's bosom upon his death, and the rich man is immediately sent to Hades to be tortured. The evildoer had no expectation of a reward to be given that day but rather at the time of judgment in the *parousia*. Because of the evildoer's confession of faith in the face of imminent death, Jesus granted him a place of honor that he would receive that same day. So, for Luke, salvation is not simply a radically future experience but an experience to be had in the present.[29]

Where is paradise? The word paradise, or garden, came into Greek from Persia and initially had no eschatological context. Later it came to have the connotation of an eschatological garden or the "abode of the righteous."[30] Thus Jesus is granting this evildoer precisely what he had asked for, to be with the righteous, including Jesus, when he came into his kingdom. The twist comes in that Jesus grants that request today. In confessing Jesus as the righteous king, this evildoer experiences victory in the midst of his greatest trial and immediate deliverance through this king. Herein lies the ultimate irony: the one who showed sincerity and hope in his confession not of salvation in the here and now but of the remembrance of Jesus in the future is the one who receives the reward of salvation after Jesus' death.[31]

This declaration of Jesus also gives the hearer hope. The one who could not save himself but could only be saved by God has the power to save even to his dying breath. Jesus is the one who holds the power to save, even when it looks like all of his power has been revoked.

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25. For example, "In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness" (3:1–2).

26. For example, "After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child" (2:21).

27. Other examples of immediacy in Luke can be found in 5:26; 13:21–33; 22:34–61.

28. Bock, *Luke, Volume 2*, 1856.

29. Neyrey, *The Passion according to Luke*, 138.

30. Bock, 1858.

31. Bock, 1858.

The hearer is left with hope

At the end of this episode, the hearer is still hoping that Jesus will find a way to get down from his cross. Jesus does not deserve to die. And yet, in this episode, the criminal, who may never have known Jesus before that very moment, has shown faith in him. He has recognized Jesus as the righteous one and sincerely made a difficult request—for an eternal reward, being remembered in Jesus' kingdom, salvation. Jesus sees the sincere repentance of this evildoer and shows compassion to him, promising him a place in paradise. The hearer is able to relate to this evildoer, the one who deserves the sentence that Jesus is suffering but who realizes his evil doings and asks to be remembered. The hearer can then sincerely turn to Jesus as the evildoer did, repent, and ask to be remembered in Jesus' kingdom. Jesus promises to be with that evildoer and with us, and in that promise there is hope—the hope revealed to us in Jesus' resurrection in the final chapter of Luke's Gospel.

The apparent vulnerability of Jesus on the cross calls into question how this one whom God sent can possibly save the people. It seems that the powers of the world have overtaken the powers of God. And yet, this episode offers hope. Jesus asks for forgiveness for those who have crucified him and shows that he still has power in the last, painful moments of his earthly life by offering the promise of paradise to the evildoer. Jesus did not lose hope but trusted in God even when it appeared that he was in a hopeless situation. All hearers, therefore, should not lose hope but trust in God. Jesus has made good on his promises, bringing good news to the poor and offering healing to those who are in need. In the moment of his greatest vulnerability, when those with earthly power show that they have the power to condemn Jesus to death, God saves Jesus, and through God's saving of Jesus offers salvation to others.

The one who could not save himself but could only be saved by God has the power to save even to his dying breath.

Ministry This Year

Ralph W. Klein
Christ Seminary-Seminex Professor of Old Testament
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago
Editor of Currents in Theology and Mission

Sermon at the Institute for Liturgical Studies, Valparaiso University, April 4, 2005

Part of my job as a professor at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago is to interview seniors in the ELCA process that leads to approval of candidates for ordination. In addition to evaluating students' internship experience and their understanding of Lutheranism, we ask them about their understanding of ordination and the pastoral office.

Over the years I have found it helpful to give students a list of synonyms for the pastoral office and ask them to expound on why this particular "take" is attractive to them. The list goes something like this: prophet (most take this in a social justice sense), priest (confession and absolution, presider at the font and table), pastor (usually understood in the pastoral-care dimensions of ministry), playing coach (a frequent favorite, especially with male candidates, perhaps because they suspect it will please me). Also included in the list, though never chosen by the students, are two understandings high on my own list: official spokesperson for the apostolic faith (after all, we're always only a generation away from docetism, Gnosticism, pelagianism, and even Manichaeism), and rabbi (I wish more pastors coveted the role of expert in the church's Scripture, tradition, and even dogma).

This conference of the Institute for Liturgical Studies is attending to ministry this year, with explicit connection to mass (last year) and mission (next year). Of course, I have not yet mentioned those many ministries, other than the pastoral office, richly represented in this audience, some of which are rostered while others are not. I speak especially of cantors and church musicians, who share their musical gifts in composing, arranging, performing, and getting the rest of us who don't breathe right to make acceptable, even wondrous, music of praise and thanksgiving.

I think too of youth ministers and of Christian educators, both so central to the church's present relevance and future survivability. Other ministers perform their ministries in the church in the form of administration or serving as church secretaries. Still others perform word and service instead of word and sacrament. They may be community organizers, social workers, chaplains, or midwives. The titles of these ministries are varied: deacons and deaconesses, diaconal ministers, associates in ministry; some even lack titles or rostered status. All these ministers are essential to the church's health and wholeness.

And when it comes to ministry, I have so far omitted the 95 percent of those faithful ministers whose ministry is ministry in daily life, those dear brothers and sisters who are neither rostered nor paid by the

church but who volunteer for the church's programs and who live out the gospel as computer programmers, nurses, farmers, parents and other caregivers, university professors, truck drivers, children, retirees, citizens, and thousands in other roles and occupations.

These three categories of ministers—ordained, rostered lay ministers, and ministers in daily life—are what will occupy us in the three days of this conference, as they will continue to occupy us when we return home to the mass and mission in our home towns and in the world. All of these ministries are fed and nurtured by mass, by font and table; all of them lead to mission to, in, and for the world.

As I began to work on this sermon I was shocked to see the Gospel lesson that was picked for this occasion. The passage from Matt 10:24–42, of course, has a great deal to say about ministry and even mission since it reports the selection of the twelve apostles and their dispatch into ministry and mission. But it has nothing to do with Easter, celebrated eight days ago, and it is divided up into two Sundays, Propers 7 and 8, of Year A in the three-year cycle. Many of the presuppositions in this passage do not apply to the church of the twenty-first century. Consider the following eight disconnects:

1. The mission in this chapter is *only* to Israel. In the Jewish-Christian dialogues that I have been part of over the years, that is a definite no-no. Targeting of Jews in mission work is seen as a sure sign of supersessionism and denial of the ongoing validity of the Old Testament covenant promises. While there might be disagreement among us about the appropriateness of an ongoing mission to Israel, we all would agree that such a mission is not the exclusive, let alone the primary, mission of the church of the twenty-first century in North America. Rather, we have been trying to break out of the North European box, already exclusively gentile, and we have been making strenuous and appropriate efforts to include people of color and people whose primary language is other than English in our ministries and in our mission. But Matthew 10 requires that the mission be only to Israel.

2. The central pronouncement of Jesus in this passage is shocking and countercultural: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." Yet we hail Jesus as the Prince of Peace, and was it not yesterday's Gospel that found Jesus in the locked room with the disciples saying "Peace be with you"? Christians have always worried about whether they could ever serve as soldiers, and many of us in the last two years have—in the name of Christ—opposed the ventures of the United States in Iraq and the ever-expanding "defense" budget. How out of touch this word of Jesus seems to be when he says he comes not to bring peace, but a sword.

3. Matthew 10 imagines that ministry, or even being a Christian, runs a high risk of martyrdom or persecution: "Whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me." As one wag put it, if you are going to be a follower of Jesus, you had better look good on wood. Of course there have been Christian martyrs in my lifetime—missionaries who have been killed, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the people who risked social disadvantage or even imprisonment under the communist system, and many more—but for the vast majority of Christians in the West, and in attendance at this conference, martyrdom and persecution are at best remote possibilities.

4. A good number of people at this conference depend for their livelihood, their income, on the church and their job with the

church. In Matthew 10 Jesus says, Take no gold or silver or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals. Laborers deserve *only* their food. Some of us complain about what the church pays us, and what it pays us does not come close to matching what our skills would gain in compensation in the secular world. But we have hardly settled for "food for survival." No, by the standards of the vast majority of people in the world we are recklessly rich.

5. We are told to "shake off the dust of our feet" when our message is not received. If truth were told, our witness is regularly ignored, occasionally even rejected. If we were to shake the dust off our shoes whenever our witness is rejected, we would have the cleanest shoes in the world! Shaking the dust off our shoes as a sign of eschatological judgment might raise eyebrows in our community or even get an invitation from a bishop for a pastoral chat.

6. We all know that a heart attack could come at any time, and even those who are young recognize that the biological clock is ticking. Those of us somewhat longer of tooth know that the American denial of death is futile and deceitful. But Matthew 10 supposes that Jesus will be coming back before the disciples go through all the towns of Israel. Two thousand years have flowed past since these words were penned, and while our personal endpoint remains a moment of great imminence, few of us expect the return of Jesus either today or tomorrow.

7. We often picture our congregations as families and see a primary concern of ministry today to be about sustaining and supporting the severely threatened estate of marriage in North America. We do not assume that the call to discipleship sets a person *against* his or her father or mother or son or daughter, or even a man or a woman against his or her mother-in-law. We all have known families who have opposed the choice of ministry by one of the family members, and even rare cases where a person's Christianity is mocked or opposed by the rest of their family. But we tend to dismiss these as dysfunctional families. Most families are happy if their kids stick with the church or even choose to minister.

8. Perhaps the unkindest cut of all is the verse in Matthew 10 that says that those who love father or mother, son or daughter, more than me are not worthy of me. The expectation in this verse seems to be that disciples ought to be worthy of Jesus, and, all of us conclude, that is the last thing we would claim. Luther agreed when he said that anything we fear, love, and trust more than God is our God.

I mention these eight drastic points of departure from Matthew 10 to highlight and underscore the differences. If ministry has changed so much from New Testament times, can such a changed conception of ministry as we follow today still be called Christian ministry? Well, of course it can. But the gap between then and now shows that the topic of this conference is no idle question. The gap between the first and the twenty-first centuries is also matched by the chasm that separates your ministry from mine, your ministry and my ministry from the job descriptions that supposedly define our ministry, or your and my ministry now from what that ministry was twenty, thirty, or forty years ago.

Our ministries are not usually controversial in our communities. We are tolerated, patronized, sometimes even held in high esteem by the powers that be. Why are our ministries so easily tolerated by society? Is it because we are doing nothing objectionable, nothing to upset the empire,

nothing to challenge consumerist society, nothing to interrupt the demonic status quo? Do we offer a gospel without a cross, a discipleship with very little cost?

I remember hearing a Jack Benny episode on radio years ago, when he was held up by a mugger. "Your money or your life," the mugger said. After a tension-filled pause, Benny, a notorious miser and tightwad, said, "I'm thinking, I'm thinking." What if someone said to us, "Your faith or your life?" Would we say, I'm thinking, I'm thinking?

If Matthew would address ministry today in all its forms, in North America, in the twenty-first century, what might he have to say? Christian life and ministry is:

• Trust in God and God's future. Surely such trust in God and in God's promises is no easier and no more important today than it was in the 80s of the first century when Matthew wrote. God's future is still rushing toward us, calling into question and transforming all of our compromises with mammon, jobism, and the possible. God's promise is held out to us for us to grasp.

• We are called by Matthew 10 and by the gospel in general to confess God's act in Jesus in word and deed. Whether that word is spoken or sung, whether that word is written in a scholarly article or parsed in a way that a child or a person in the early stages of Alzheimer's can understand, the centrality of that word—by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith—needs to be said and sung again and again. And that word needs to be lived. In visiting the sick and the imprisoned, in welcoming the stranger and the "other," in beating swords into plowshares, in doling out cups of cold water, in reminding ourselves that our wealth does not consist in the abundance of things we possess, in caring for the very young and the very old, in finding alternatives to violence, in volunteering for the common good, in working for social and political change, in honoring and learning from people of other faiths, in conserving the environment and practicing stewardship with the earth, and in being generous to all, our deeds announce the one who did not think equality with God was something that had to be hoarded but who emptied himself and took the form of a servant.



• Matthew 10 ministry is ministry living toward the eschaton, God's future, with a concern for mission in, and transformation of, this world. We want and need to invite others to the faith, but we also need to see this world as our workshop, our arena, our challenge. Where poverty, racism, sexism, and violence are rife, exactly there is our place of mission, our ministries, our life.

• Matthew 10 ministry means letting go of material possessions. Everyone who finds their life will lose it, Jesus said. "Finding" one's life in this context refers to affirming one's own life on one's own terms, within one's self-centered framework, apart from allegiance to and discipleship for Jesus. Finding one's life is a synonym for obtaining life or finding life

for oneself. It's still true that in finding life one loses it.

• Ministry à la Matthew 10 means letting go of the fear of what others might think about us or do to us. Life in the United States after September 11, 2001, has been largely a life of fear and revenge, of protecting ourselves, distrusting others, and wrapping ourselves in our duct-taped cocoons. Have no fear, be not afraid, Matthew urges us. Do not fear those who can only kill your body but cannot take your God-given life.

• We are all called by Matthew 10 and by the Easter gospel to place our loyalty to the God revealed in Christ above all loyalties, even the deepest loyalties of home and family. Sins against the first commandment, not the sixth, are still our most frequent failure. Yes, we do love our self, our spouse, our son, our daughter, our ministry, and our achievements more than God. We are indeed by any standard unworthy of Christ. And yet, we remind ourselves, those persons are truly worthy and well prepared for the Lord's Supper who have faith in these words: "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins."

Such Matthew 10 ministry, such Christian life, is in fact possible because of God's abiding care for the least of God's birds, the sparrow. In God's eyes we are worth many, many sparrows. Therefore, we are told, do not be afraid.

Do not be afraid, the Easter gospel proclaims. Mary Magdalene was asked by the angels within the tomb and by her Rabboni, Why in the world are you weeping? We are all addressed by our baptismal names by the risen Lord and invited, like Mary Magdalene, into a relationship with God our Mother and Father, into a relationship with Christ's God and our God. Mary Magdalene was the apostle to the apostles. She told them what she had seen and what her Rabboni had said. He may have come to bring a sword, but his word to us yesterday, today, and forever is "Peace be with you." His word is: "As God has sent me, so I send you."

Matthew 10 is not Matthew's or Christ's only word, let alone their final word. The final word in Matthew 28 is spoken by the one who claims "all authority" in heaven and earth. But we have come to know that the Son of Humanity has authority on earth to forgive sins, that God's almighty power is known chiefly in showing mercy.

This resurrected Lord says to all of us ministers, "Go." We are the people called, the people sent; we—all of us are—the official spokespersons of the apostolic faith.

We are sent to make disciples. We are reminded once again that the church exists primarily for those who are not yet part of it. We are sent to the font to baptize in the name of the Trinity and to the classroom to teach everything Christ has commanded.

And the simple word that we speak is God's "I am with you." I am with you because I accept you. I am with you to empower you. I am with you in the splash of font and in the tastes of the holy supper, yes, also, even, especially in the "work of the people," in liturgy—this liturgy, every liturgy.

Is it really mass last year, ministry this year, and mission next year? No, of course not. It's mass, ministry, and mission every year.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

A Book Worth Discussing: *The Evangelizing Church: A Lutheran Contribution*

Ralph Quere
Wartburg Theological Seminary
rquere@wartburgseminary.edu

The Evangelizing Church: A Lutheran Contribution. Edited by Richard H. Bliese and Craig Van Gelder. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005. xiv and 176 pages. Paper. $18.00.

Hail the evangelizing church! This is the book I've been awaiting for three decades. I was talked into coordinating a course on evangelism my first year of full-time teaching at Wartburg Seminary in 1973. Members of the ALC evangelism staff had agreed to teach this course in our January interim. Well, "something came up" and they didn't show up, so I was stuck with teaching it, trying to fly by the seat of my pants. I have to admit it was poetic justice on several levels: I had dumped the evangelizing of a new trailer park on my parish assistant, Curt Miller, who was helping me in my rural congregation. Now Curt was in my class looking for more help than I had ever given him before. The other level of poetic justice was that I had opted out of courses at Trinity Seminary both on the Formula of Concord and on evangelism—both of which I was now teaching. Maybe it was even divine retribution!

Searching frantically for resources, I was dismayed to find that no major work had been done by Lutheran theologians since T. A. Kantonen's *The Theology of Evangelism* (Muhlenberg) in 1954. For practical resources, Lutheran churches were turning to—sometimes in modified forms—D. James Kennedy's *Evangelism Explosion* (Tyndale, 1970). The critical question was: If you were to die tonight and God would ask you, 'Why should I let you into my heaven?'—what would you say? One can perhaps defend this question, since it was attempting to discern whether the person trusted anything other than Christ for salvation, which is certainly a Lutheran concern. The form of the question raises all sorts of other concerns, including pastoral care for those who are struggling with "assurance." It also suggests certain brands of Pietism that insist that without a "decision" resulting in a conversion experience, faith is not real or saving. After visiting several congregations where the Kennedy plan was in use, there was a consensus of class and instructor that something different was needed.

My *Evangelical Witness* was published by Augsburg in 1975 and made into a lay training course for ALC in the early 1980s. Meanwhile members of the Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary faculty produced

for lay training in evangelism an in-depth course with a strong biblical component, *Word and Witness* (LCA Division for Parish Services, 1980). This was fairly widely used in the 1980s. However, neither these nor other resources affected enough pastors or laity to energize a significant movement within ALC or LCA. In clear frustration, an ALC convention in the late 1980s attempted to mandate a required evangelism course at all ALC seminaries and set aside funds for the task. Seminary faculties resisted being directed what to teach. Wartburg Theological Seminary at least tried to fulfill the spirit of the "law" by means other than a *required* course. The Wartburg publication *Forming an Evangelizing People* (2005) is an example of how Wartburg did and does attempt to meet this need and also provides a response to the ELCA Evangelism Strategy.

I salute *The Evangelizing Church* because it has seminary professors and deans calling the church to this evangelistic dimension of its mission, which, the writers confess, Lutheran churches have not done well, if at all. With respect to Christ's mission commands, Dean J. Paul Rajashekar quotes a Philadelphia colleague (p. 92) who said the command many Lutherans and congregations have never broken is Jesus' word to the cured leper: "Say nothing to anyone!" (Mark 1:44). The cover story in the August 2003 *Lutheran* asked the question pointedly: "Do Lutherans Hate Evangelism?"

Just in case the answer is "Yes," the writers propose a new designation: "evangelizing." Richard Bliese, then dean and now president of Luther Seminary, notes the caricatures of evangelism that "cancel out the necessity of evangelizing" for many. Others "romanticize" evangelism by reducing it to just listening or loving actions without any verbal proclamation (pp. 1f.). Bliese's challenging "Sevenfold [Babylonian] Captivity of Word and Sacrament" and his seven (thankfully!) theses mirror Luther's early works. The most controversial of the theses (pp. 46f.) is "Release the Evangelizing Power of the Eucharist." The only precedent I can think of is frontier evangelism in the nineteenth century (see Postscript below).

Craig Van Gelder adds to the Augustana's doctrine of *justification by grace on account of Christ through faith* the phrase "for the sake of the world," meaning everything and everyone everywhere (pp. 51–54). He also documents how Acts *is* interested in "numbers" (pp. 55–58) since every *one* is important! Wyvetta Bullock makes the same point: ". . . we are interested in numbers. After all it is the people represented by numbers that interest God." Focusing on "growing deeper in faith" becomes "a convenient way to avoid dressing growth in numbers" (p. 90).

Surprising insights into Lutheran confessions and liturgy come from Van Gelder's Reformed perspective (pp. 60–65).

Rajashekar has a fascinating discussion of the *sola gratia, sola fide, solus Christus* as Lutheran *exclusivism* regarding the absoluteness of the Christian claim. He sees this balanced by the *inclusivism* of the law/gospel dialectic as primarily "analytic tools." He sees the *simul* as a kind of bridge between Lutheran exclusivism and inclusivism, opening up a "theology of engagement" (pp. 98–101). He presses the concept of simultaneity beyond its usual uses to support his thesis.

More problematic is Rajashekar's interpretation of John 14:6, which he interprets: "The way to the Father is the way of the cross." This is also a "call to his disciples to follow the way of the cross that Jesus has shown them." The text is not about imitating or obeying Jesus but, as one

of the many I AM statements in the Fourth Gospel, it is a claim about Jesus' *person: God-in-the-flesh* as the only saving access to the Father's presence. Rajashekar wrongly asserts that John 14:6 is "not intended as a universal statement denouncing any other way to God the Father" (p. 97). If anyone anywhere comes to God, it is through Jesus the Way. That does not condemn those who have never heard—really heard—the gospel. The text asserts that Jesus is the world's only redeemer, reconciler, and Lord.

Similarly, Rajashekar's interpretation of the "no other name" text (Acts 4:12) is inadequate (pp. 97f.). The text is not *simply* about physical healing. The evangelistic context in Acts 3 and 4 makes it clear that this amazing and undeniable public "*sign* of healing" (4:16–22) becomes the occasion for Peter's sermon about faith in Jesus, the holy and righteous author of life, who was rejected and crucified but raised by God. The desired response to Peter's invitation is to repent so "that your sins may be wiped out" (3:12–19; cf. 4:1–10). The similar "sermon" to the Sanhedrin the next day ends with an implicit call to *repentance* for rejecting the "cornerstone" and to *faith* in "no other [saving] Name," i.e. person or power (14:7), than the healing and rescuing name of Jesus.

Rajashekar's insights on evangelizing in a postmodern world are enlightening and helpful (pp. 107–12).

The suggestions of Wartburg dean Craig Nessan about the "culture changing" practices (pp. 130f.) needed to become an evangelizing church are wise counsel: modeling, mentoring, small group conversation (a *method* as old as Lutheran pietists and Wesley's "methodists"), and public testimonies in worship services (learned from modern Evangelicals and Pentecostals) (pp. 120f.).



Nessan's Epilogue summarizes most of the agreed theses of the book—from linking law and gospel to "simultaneously justified and a sinner." The *solus Deus* (p. 98) is focused on "God as the chief actor in all our evangelizing efforts" (p. 134), epitomized in the doxology *soli Deo gloria!* That "Worship is an evangelizing activity" (p. 135) is a word that needs to be heard as "Renewing Worship" is also on ELCA's plate. Since Word and sacrament are means of grace (i.e., media, or, as Augsburg Confession Article V says, "instruments" or tools of the Spirit), how can worship *not* be an evangelizing event (pp. 134f.)? Because the United States is now the world's fourth largest mission field (p. 86), all laity must be trained and regard themselves as missionaries. Nessan's summary points to the need for a larger and stronger adult membership program (p. 137; cf. chaps. 3 and 5). The *Alpha* series* could be a start and a part of evangelizing and catechizing. Omitting or clarifying some parts of *Alpha* would help adult converts understand that their "decision" was rooted in God's deci-

*See *http://www.alphaministries.org/alphaseries.htm.*

sion. As Luther says, we cannot by our own reason or strength, understanding or effort, brain-power or will power believe in Jesus Christ. Only the Spirit can enable faith. Only Jesus can attract all people to faith (John 12:32). As Jesus told his disciples, "You have not chosen me. I have chosen you" (John 15:16).

Of all the "reformations" announced in the last century and the present one, the call for "a new culture of evangelizing" (p. 137) is the most critical.

Postscript

Arthur Cochrane makes an interesting case in *Eating and Drinking with Jesus: An Ethical and Biblical Inquiry* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974). He interprets the Lord's Supper in relation to Jesus' other meals, from those with tax collectors and sinners to his feeding miracles. Arguing that the Lord's Supper might best be celebrated as an "act of love" in an agape-like meal (pp. 78–100), he has made several not necessarily consistent points about faith. "God permits and commands men to eat in order that they may come to faith and confess that Jesus is the Bread of eternal life and in order that their eating may be a sign and proclamation of his death" (p. 31). However, Cochrane also expresses agreement with Zwingli that eucharistic eating and drinking neither create nor even strengthen faith, since they are not means of grace. Calvin, on the other hand, affirms the Lord's Supper as a sacrament and a means of grace and calls Zwingli's view "profane."

Cochrane is clear that "faith is man's recognition and acknowledgment that Jesus Christ has offered his flesh for the life of the world and that all men have been guilty for the shedding of his blood" (p. 65). Even though Cochrane calls the Eucharist an act/good work of faith, the case he makes for the sacramental meal—and virtually all of Jesus' meals—suggests that not only Word but also sacraments have evangelistic power. Lutherans de facto acknowledge this in baptismal theology and practice. Is it not possible that unbaptized persons who, in sermonic and/or eucharistic proclamation (1 Cor 11:26), hear and believe the good news (Rom 10:8–13) might be invited in a Lutheran "altar call" to come "worthily" to eat and drink "with Jesus," indeed to receive Jesus " in his body and his blood"? Luther made it clear in the Small Catechism that faith in these words, "given for you" and "shed for you for the forgiveness of sins," is all the preparation one needs for receiving Christ at this Table.

Encounters

Kenn Storck
Gloria Dei Lutheran Church
Rockford, Illinois

Out of the cradle endlessly rocking . . .
—Walt Whitman

Prologue
Out of the waters endlessly churning,
Out of the primordial ocean floors,
The Spirit stirs water and forms a new creature
Christ steps forth upon the shore.

I
Out of the waters endlessly churning
Large clay jars filled to the brim.
Once were water but in the Spirit
New wine for a wedding friend.

II
Out of the waters endlessly churning
Nicodemus walks deep in the night.
Questions the Kingdom born of the Spirit
Leaves puzzled and awed by new insights.

III
Out of the waters endlessly churning
In from the depths a living well.
A woman of Sychar meets the Messiah
With a sorrowful story to tell.

Out of the waters endlessly churning
Christ shares the promise of living hope.
And the young woman so often married
Discovers new life in that ancient moat.

Out of the waters endlessly churning
Christ bears witness to God on high:
"Worship the Father through the Spirit
Anytime, anywhere—cry to the sky!"

Out of the waters endlessly churning
The Spring of Sychar fashions love.
Samaritans flock to the life-giving waters,
Proclaiming that Christ is the One from Above.

IV

Out of the waters endlessly churning
Spittle and mud create new sight.
Primordial liquid touched by the Spirit
Brings one born blind into the light.

Out of the waters endlessly churning
Streams flow to the pool of Siloam.
Blind man cleans his muddy eyelids
Wanders and wonders in the synagogue alone.

Out of the waters endlessly churning
Jesus, the Prophet, embraces the lost.
Living waters restore sight to the sightless
New life is hidden in the cross.

V

Out of the waters endlessly churning
Into the caverns that suffocate life.
Lazarus hears the voice of the Savior
Steps forth bravely into daylight.

Epilogue

Out of the waters endlessly churning
You and I are born again.
Breath of the Spirit, one with Messiah,
Crucified and freed from sin.

Out of the waters endlessly churning
Wombs of the Spirit birth new life.
God's new creation—promising, healing,
Walks the earth, for Christ is alive.

Book Reviews

Reading Mark: Engaging the Gospel. By David Rhoads. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004. xviii and 270 pages. Paper. $20.00.

This collection of essays offers readers the rich fruits of more than three decades of Rhoads's fascination with the Gospel of Mark. In the preface he chronicles his journey from an early focus on the historical context of Mark to his shift toward literary and narrative criticism, followed by forays into cultural anthropology, performance criticism, and, finally, the ethics of reading. All but the final essay have been previously published.

Unlike many collections of previously published essays, this one has little repetition, as Rhoads explores distinct terrain in each. The first two chapters, "Narrative Criticism and the Gospel of Mark" and "Narrative Criticism: Practices and Prospects," offer an excellent introduction to the method and terminology of the various aspects of narrative criticism. Rhoads describes the early insights of narrative criticism and then sketches the developments that have sharpened and broadened the method along the lines of reader response, rhetorical, reception, genre, orality, and performance criticism. He shows how speech-act theory, attention to social location, social science criticism, ideological criticism, and performance criticism further shed light on the discipline. These two chapters offer one of the clearest and most comprehensive explanations of narrative method I have found.

In the subsequent chapters Rhoads puts the method to work on select topics: "Losing Life for Others in the Face of Death: Mark's Standards of Judgment," "Jesus and the Syrophoenician Woman," "Network for Mission: The Social System of the Jesus Movement in Mark," and "Crossing Boundaries: Purity and Defilement in Mark." Each offers rich insights for both biblical interpretation and pastoral praxis.

In chapter 7, "Performing the Gospel of Mark," Rhoads describes his method and experience in having memorized and performed this Gospel for more than two hundred audiences in the past twenty-five years. I have had the privilege of experiencing some of Rhoads's performances and can attest to the powerful way in which performance interprets and transforms.

In the final chapter, "The Ethics of Reading Mark as Narrative," Rhoads urges readers to be aware that all interpretations are "relative, value-bearing, and particular in nature" (p. 203) and that the interpreter has an obligation to read responsibly, with a view toward proclaiming the text "in ways that bring life, and not death to the world" (p. 219). Toward this end, he rightly advocates reading with others, particularly from races, cultures, and genders other than one's own. In sum, this collection is a splendid entree both to narrative methods and to engagement with the Gospel of Mark.

Barbara E. Reid
Catholic Theological Union
Chicago, Illinois

The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary. By Francis J. Moloney. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002. xviii and 398 pages. Cloth. $29.95.

Moloney, professor of religious studies at Catholic University of America, has written a unique commentary on the first Gospel—unique because it is a narrative description. Moloney has taken his cue from such narrative critics as David Rhoads, Elizabeth Malbon, and Werner Kelber (for a more complete list see pp. 9–10). In simple terms, the Gospel of Mark is a story, written as a congruent, self-contained narrative meant to convey a certain message to the early church.

While Moloney does not reject source criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism, or textual criticism, they are subjected severely to his presentation of Mark's narrative (pp. 2–6). Such observations, if they appear at all, are normally found in the footnotes. In his commentary Moloney wishes to tell the story as the author of Mark intended it.

Moloney's programmatic analysis (p. 21) of the Gospel brings no surprises: Prologue (1:1–13); Definition of Jesus (1:14–8:30); His Suffering and Vindication (8:31–15:47); Epilogue (16:1–8). His understanding of the intent of the Gospel, however, does surprise us. The male disciples continually failed Jesus (14:50; see p. 350), and finally, in contrast to the other Gospels, even the female followers fled with fear (16:8; see pp. 350–51). Jesus himself seemed to be a failure. This story of failure addressed readers who recognized failure in their own lives. The same readers also heard the promise that Jesus would meet "them" (his followers) again in Galilee (14:28 and 16:7). That promise of a resurrection created the new beginning — the faith community (pp. 351–54). The text does not say this, but the narrative does. "The realization of Jesus' promises is not found in the text. The existence of the Markan community and its story of Jesus indicate that it is taking place among the readers of the text, in the experience of the original readers and hearers of the Gospel of Mark" (p. 353). And it is so even today.

This commentary is well written and documented. Like most of us, Moloney uses those arguments that best fit his thesis. For example, from the beginning the story must be that of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Therefore he opts for the less attested reading of υἱοῦ θεοῦ in Mark 1:1 (p. 29). In order to preserve Mark's unity he accepts the authenticity of sections many of us would consider later redactions— e.g., the interpretation of the parable of the sower (pp. 91–93) or the much-maligned little apocalypse (pp. 248–51).

Those who want exegetical help in the interpretation of a specific text (i.e., the lectionary text) will discover that this commentary marches to a different drummer. At the same time I found his interpretation of the woman with the flow of blood and the raising of Jairus's daughter (5:21–43, pp. 106–11) one of the most insightful I have ever read. In any case, every reader of the New Testament should wrestle with Moloney's method: the narrative is more than the words of the text.

Graydon F. Snyder
Chicago, Illinois

Faithful Conversation: Christian Perspectives on Homosexuality. Edited by James M. Childs Jr. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003. viii and 132 pages. Paper. $9.00.

The presidents of the eight ELCA seminaries write in the foreword to this helpful volume that it "contributes to the quest for understanding and exhibits our commitment to public witness" (p. vii). They expected the contributors to argue and disagree; the presidents' expectations were met. However, more noticeable than the contributors' differences and more inspiring than their scholarship is their faithfulness to the conversation. Childs notes in the introduction that the authors may express a bias—and some most certainly do!—"but to the extent that is true, their viewpoints are offered in the context of the kind of give-and-take dialogue that holds the greatest promise for mutual edification" (p. 3).

Mark Allan Powell examines the biblical accounts that bear upon this issue and considers how these passages and the biblical witness might be considered. If you read only one essay in this book, read this one. It offers an excellent example of the kind of deliberation and consideration of all angles, viewpoints, and perspectives that the seminary presidents hoped for and provides an inspiring model for us to follow as each of us wrestles with the challenges of homosexuality. James Arne Nestingen carefully examines the central themes of the original Lutheran documents (justification and Christian discipleship) and considers their application to sexual ethics and their implications. He concludes that the affirmation of homosexual relationships is tantamount to idolatry and justification by works (p. 56). Martha Ellen Stortz argues that our conversation ought not to revolve on our sexual identity but on our "primary identity" as baptized people. She concludes that "if baptism functions as the central orientation of a Christian, a Christian sexual ethic should be equally binding on all Christians, both homosexuals and heterosexuals" (p. 77). Richard J. Perry Jr. and José David Rodríguez argue that we need to move beyond a "monocultural" perspective that assumes static understandings of "family" and "orders of creation" to a multicultural perspective (pp. 85–86). Daniel L. Olson notes that the

scientific literature on homosexuality is inconclusive. More interesting to him are the effects of anger on community. If the church is to be the church it needs to deal effectively with anger among its members. It needs to practice hospitality—we need to practice hospitality—to those with whom we disagree (p. 100). The church's mission can be fulfilled if we can disagree with each other without hating each other.

This book is a valuable resource for pastors to use in their conversations with each other. The model of dialogue and deliberation that it provides is invaluable and inspiring.

David C. Ratke
Lenoir-Rhyne College
Hickory, North Carolina

Adam, Eve, and the Genome: The Human Genome Project and Theology. Edited by Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003. xvi and 200 pages. Paper. $20.00.

This volume assembles informative articles addressing the basics of the human genome projects and pertinent theological opinions. Based on lectures and materials of the course "God, Adam, and Eve: Theology and Science in the Genome Age," this book "is an attempt to provide theological reflection on the human being by means of a dialogue with the newer advances in human genetics, the Human Genome Project" (p. xii). Beginning with a primer on the speckled history shared between religion and science, the first chapter provides the reader with a fundamental understanding of Mendelian and post-Mendelian genetics.

In chapters 2 and 3, theological issues are addressed. Chapters 4 and 5 discuss theological anthropology and the etiology behind the genome. Chapter 6 enters into the African-American perspective on the Human Genome Project and the American medical system's history of racism. The last two chapters by Thistlethwaite give the reader important points to ponder on determinism and freedom, dualism, grace, and community.

First structured as a course and then transcribed into a book, this is an excellent introductory text into the theological viewpoint of the Human Genome Project. Its clear and coherent writing makes it accessible to the pastor and lay leader, providing material for group study in the congregational setting.

Joe Gaston
Chicago, Illinois

Bethlehem Besieged: Stories of Hope in Times of Trouble. By Mitri Raheb. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004. viii and 157 pages. Paper. $13.00.

In times of crisis you can only tell stories. Stories can draw readers who stand at a safe distance into the crisis context. Stories can grip hearers in ways logical discourse does not.

In *Bethlehem Besieged*, Mitri Raheb tells stories of life under Israeli occupation. Raheb, a Palestinian Christian, is the pastor of Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem and author of the book *I Am a Palestinian Christian* (Fortress, 1995). The book is divided into three parts. Part 1 contains five brief chapters describing life "under siege" during the Israeli army's incursion into Bethlehem as part of the military offensive called "Operation Defensive Shield," launched by Israeli Prime Minister Sharon in April 2002. Raheb describes his family's fear as soldiers forcefully entered and ransacked their house as well as the standoff between the army and Palestinian gunmen in the Church of the Nativity.

In Part 2, Raheb includes five chapters to describe "Life under Occupation" for himself and others. He is autobiographical in demonstrating how Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza—an occupation going back to 1967 and hence the longest one in our times—affects every aspect of life. For example, he poignantly describes how inadequate hospital care in Bethlehem and the delays of getting his father-in-law through military checkpoints contributed to his death within twelve days of reaching a Jerusalem hospital.

Part 3, "Glimpses of Hope," includes a number of "stories of hope in times of trouble"—for example, the Advent 2000 nonviolent march in Bethlehem of 2,500 people; the exhibition of local artists depicting "Christ in the Palestinian Context" prompted by Church of Sweden's request in November 2002; the "Bright Stars"

programs now involving over 1,000 Palestinian children in art, music, sports, communication and environmental clubs; and the activities sponsored by the Lutheran Church through the International Center of Bethlehem—Dar al-Kalima School, the Cultural and Conference Center, and the Dar al-Kalima Health and Wellness Center.

Despite all the incredible hardships under military occupation, those who travel to Bethlehem in solidarity with the Palestinian Christians discover ongoing activities that sponsor hope among the people there and those who visit.

James L. Bailey, Professor Emeritus
Wartburg Theological Seminary
Dubuque, Iowa

Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way. By Walter Wink. Minneapolis: Fortress/Facets, 2003. 119 pages. Paper. $6.00.

The Fortress Press Facets volumes have become a sort-of Lutheran "mini-series," with some episodes stronger than others. In *Jesus and Nonviolence*, noted Auburn Theological Seminary Professor of Biblical Interpretation Walter Wink admirably compresses a life's work as a scholar-activist into a volume that is the best brief introduction to Christian nonviolence on the market. This is one of those potentially life-changing books. It deserves to be widely read by theologically interested citizens, both clergy and laity.

Wink tackles directly the concern of many who are devoted to the classical Lutheran formulation of the two kingdoms, namely, that nonviolence does not contend adequately with evil. Wink argues, in contrast, that we have now had several thousand years of evidence to show that evil cannot be effectively countered by violence. He suggests that nonviolence is a *reasonable* political or civil alternative to dependence upon force. Of course, he also contends that this political approach has roots in the teaching of Jesus and at times betrays a tendency to equate adherence to nonviolence with orthodoxy: "love of enemies has, for our time, become the litmus test of authentic Christian faith." He reaches this conclusion by contending that if the problem of Luther's time was to rediscover a God who offered people freedom from guilt through grace, the problem of our time is to answer the question "How can I find God in my enemy?" At times this problem pushes Wink toward despair: "Either we find the God who causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, or we may have no more sunrises" (pp. 59–60).

More often, though, Wink avoids apocalyptic doom and succinctly traces the biblical, theological, and practical contours of militant Christian nonviolence. Nonviolence, according to Wink, is an alternative to either of the "natural" responses to evil—fight or flight. Jesus' "third way," as Wink sketches it, neither mirrors the violence of power as domination nor flees the scene in passive submission. The third way seeks rather to engage the "powers and principalities" with imaginative forms of civil disobedience, community organizing, and public ritual. These nonviolent means seek not simply to replace power with power but to move closer to the democratic ideal of the rule of law in which justice is built into the fabric of human arrangements, and where human flourishing is structurally insured for the greatest number possible.

Drawing examples from India, Poland, Czechoslovakia, South Africa, his own experience in the U.S. civil rights movement, and his expertise as a biblical scholar, Wink shows how eminently biblical and eminently practical militant nonviolence has proven itself over the past half century or so, especially in contrast to the record of carnage associated with state-sponsored and/or "revolutionary" violence in the twentieth century.

My only suggestions to improve this extraordinarily helpful little volume is that Wink could have included titles for each chapter to help orient readers and a longer list of agencies that can provide practical training in nonviolence for Christian congregations and individuals, beyond the address of the Fellowship of Reconciliation included on the book's last page. Each chapter has "Questions for Discussion," which makes this book an excellent choice for a congregational or small-group study.

Jon Pahl
Lutheran Theol. Seminary at Philadelphia

Image and Spirit: Finding Meaning in Visual Art. By Karen Stone. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003. 171 pages. Paper. $16.99.

Stone, instructor of art at the University of Texas at Arlington and art specialist for the Fort Worth Independent School District, offers here a helpful and delightful book. Whether you think you know a lot or only a little about art, you have much to gain from this book. As a handbook it clues us in to those criteria by which the guild of artists judge their works, thereby helping us all appreciate art better. She brings this discussion to bear upon the desire to interpret art, especially as any given artifact might offer a spiritual-depth dimension. Her book is limited to the visual arts; it does not deal with music or theater.

In attempting to bridge art and religion, her goal is not to help us understand "religious art" but instead the religious dimension to a work of art, if one can be discerned. Her quest is appropriate and plausible, because religion embraces ritual and symbol; it is enmeshed with images that tell more compellingly than historical fact or dogma the significance of the mystery of our existence (p. 8). Following Augustinian sacramental theology, she notes that art is a kind of embodiment, a visible word (p. 9). Art reaches to the depths of time, truth, suffering, and joy (p. 11). Even if any given artist did not intend a spiritual meaning or truth to a work, "nothing forbids our experience of it spiritually" (p. 12). Indeed, for Stone, art is a form of practical theology.

Stone helps us interpret art by initiating us into the standards of the art guild that judges art. She informs us of the many purposes of art, such as stylization, expression, decoration, imitation, and formalization (pp. 37–43) in which art can offer narratives, teach, commemorate, and socially change the world. She shows us how to describe art, label it (in terms of information about the artist), and seek its content, or subject matter (p. 64). She shows the relation between technique and content—line, shape, value, color, texture, and space (pp. 72–73). When interpreting art we need to ask: Is the artifact more naturalistic or more abstract? Does it show more similarities to reality or more differences? The heart of interpretation can be found in questioning art (sometimes in its reciprocal questioning of ourselves), free association, comparing and contrasting, investigating, eliminating, suggesting, testing, and reflecting (p. 101).

The volume is particularly helpful in that it offers a glossary and glossy reproductions of images discussed in the text.

Stone helps us move from images to mystery, a depth dimension that art suitably conveys. She moves us from a private understanding of art to a community (What does art do in and for the community?) as well as the prophetic nature of art. It is art that addresses us and not we who manipulate art.

Art is a central component of worship in iconic traditions. Given that fact, this book merits wide attention. It is recommended for a general audience, interdisciplinary courses on college, university, or seminary campuses, and adult parish education groups.

Mark C. Mattes
Grand View College
Des Moines, Iowa

Shopping Malls and Other Sacred Spaces. By Jon Pahl. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2003. 288 pages. Paper. $19.99.

We learn that God acts in history and saves in Time. Admitting this, Pahl turns his theological eye to that other dimension in which God is active: Space. Has the Christian tradition forgotten its Place by looking for God across Time and eternity? *Shopping Malls and Other Sacred Spaces* gives Space a chance to tell us what it knows about God's work in creation.

As serious as this project is, Pahl approaches it by exploring our ties to seemingly harmless and beloved American spaces: shopping malls, amusement parks, and suburban lawns. One question in particular shapes the discussion: *Does God wear clothes?* Through this question of God's clothing we are invited to reimagine God's presence in both nature and "man-made" places. Asking what God's clothing has to do with our spaces, Pahl opens side doors into theology, ethics, and life together. "God Naked," the central chapter, preaches to the crowds at the intersections of space, sin, and salvation.

While the material offers a daring reconsideration of God's activity in Time and Space, Pahl writes with equal risk and creativity. In the introduction Pahl describes this as his "fun book." Unfortunately the fun leads to stylistic inconsistencies. The reader must shift abruptly from personal stories to systematic arguments, from pop cultural musings to historical research. The same stylistic license, however, gives Pahl the opportunity to model his preferred clothing for God: a rhetoric of participation.

Shopping Malls and Other Sacred Spaces flows with the rhythm of a conversation, full of anecdotes, asides, and conviction. His many vignettes may also stimulate good group conversation. In the end, Pahl's "fun book" cannot remain simply that: it betrays itself as an act of love, aimed at beautifying the landscape of America's religious life.

Martin J. Lohrmann
Epiphany Lutheran Church
Toledo, Ohio

The Ways of Our God: An Approach to Biblical Theology. By Charles H. H. Scobie. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. xviii and 1,038 pages. Paper. $45.00

In this weighty volume Scobie sets out both to bring together Old and New Testaments for a biblical theology based on a Christian canon of scripture and to bridge what he sees as a gap between the living Word of the church and the Bible of the academy.

He divides the volume into two parts: (1) an argument for his methodological approach and (2) a thematic exploration of the theology of the Bible. In the first section, Scobie lays out his methodology, which he calls an "intermediate" biblical theology. His method takes shape against the background of two characterizations of previous attempts at biblical theology. The first is an "integrated" approach roughly covering biblical theology prior to the advent of the Enlightenment, an approach that the author asserts did not suffer from the bifurcations of Old and New Testaments or the separation of biblical witness and dogmatics. The second characterization is what he calls "independent" biblical theology. Scobie argues that this approach, in place since the Enlightenment, looks at the Bible as an historical specimen separate from the contemporary theology of the church.

Scobie's "intermediate" biblical theology is an attempt to bridge the best of the integrated and the independent. He wants to retain the historical study of the Bible and bridge it with the reality that the Bible is the authoritative scripture of the living, breathing church. Undergirding this agenda is Scobie's plainly stated theological assumption that "the Bible conveys a divine revelation, that the word of God in Scripture constitutes the norm of Christian faith and life, and that all the varied material of the Old Testament and New Testament can in some way be related to the plan and purpose of the one God of the whole Bible" (p. 47).

The second portion of the book is the arena in which Scobie thematically outlines his biblical theology. These mere 900 pages are divided into four sections: God's Order; God's Servant; God's People; and God's Way. Each chapter within these sections is divided into four parts: OT Proclamation; OT Promise; NT Fulfillment; NT Consummation.

An example of this is chapter 2, "The Lord of Creation." The chapter begins with a discussion of God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, where the author traces the created order as variously portrayed in the OT, the place of God as sustainer of creation, the relationship of humankind to God and God's creation, and the corruption of creation. The second portion, OT Promise, looks at eschatological expectations, cosmic upheavals, and the Day of the Lord in the OT. He then turns to the NT fulfillment including the place of the Cosmic Christ and realized eschatology. The chapter ends with a return to the eschatological expectations of the NT. The author follows this pattern for the twenty chapters that comprise the second portion. At the end of the book (pp. 928–48) he provides a detailed outline of part 2 that is very helpful in navigating such volume. This outline also may function as an index to the many theological themes that Scobie addresses whereby the discerning reader could use this book as a reference work.

In a work this large, how does one begin to critique? First, Scobie displays a commitment to the church and the ongoing revelatory character

of the Bible within the Christian community. For this he is to be respected. But what community is Scobie addressing? The impression is that of an open or progressive (neither term is sufficient, and both betray the bias of this reviewer) evangelical. His use of inclusive language (though not for God), his concern that the church has fallen short in erasing the divide between male and female (Gal 3:28), and his concern for justice issues suggest progressiveness.

Second, Scobie's oversimplification of the plurality of canons among Christian communions is symptomatic of a Protestant bias and an oversimplification that is inherent in his project.

Third, the lack of engagement with theologians and dogmaticians from the early church through the twentieth century (not one reference to Barth, Tillich, or Moltmann, and no significant reference to liberation theology, feminist theology, or postcolonial theology) leaves holes in the argument. This lack of dialogue with theologians suggests that the ongoing witness and theological work of the church over the past two thousand years is of no use to the church, as "what is contained in Scripture [is] sufficient to guide the church in any age" (p. 647). Then what of the faith and interpretive work of theologians, biblical scholars, clergy, and laity over the last 2,000 years?

Finally, one must ask what a thematic approach to biblical theology encompassing both Old and New Testaments does to the plurality of voices in scripture. For example, what of the fourfold witness of the Gospels?

In the end, Scobie's challenge to the academy and church both to bring together Old and New Testaments and to maintain a commitment to scripture's authority and its historicity is important. Can it be done without ignoring Tradition? Scobie certainly has made a valiant effort.

Samuel D. Giere
St. Mary's College
University of St. Andrews, Scotland

The Reform of Baptism and Confirmation in American Lutheranism. By Jeffrey A. Truscott. Drew University Studies in Religion 11. Lanham, MD, and Oxford: Scarecrow, 2003.

This is not a book for light reading. However, it is essential reading for pastors and seminarians and anyone else interested in the topics of Holy Baptism and confirmation (Affirmation of Baptism) in the Lutheran perspective, and, more particularly, in their development in the *Lutheran Book of Worship* (*LBW*). The book is a revision of Truscott's doctoral dissertation under Maxwell Johnson at the University of Notre Dame. At present he is instructor in liturgics at the Japan Lutheran College and Theological Seminary in Tokyo.

Sometimes pastors or laity will ask, regarding a given rite, "Why did they do it this way or that way?" This is the book to answer such questions regarding Holy Baptism and confirmation in *LBW*. The volume begins with a look back at Luther's work (and the Church Orders) on Baptism, followed by an analytical description of the baptismal work of the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship (ILCW) and how they reflect or differ from Luther's work. This is followed by a comparative analysis of other pre-*LBW* Lutheran baptismal rites, specifically those in the LCMS's *Lutheran Agenda* (*LA*) and the *SBH*'s *The Occasional Services* (*OS*—and distinguished from the 1982 book without the definite article as part of the title). Then comes a look at the theological and historical revision of the first ILCW draft and its successors, and response to that work. Chapters 5–8 deal with the thorny issues related to confirmation. The book concludes with what the author calls "post-baptismal developments and continuing questions." Helpful indices at the end of the book provide the analyzed texts: *LA*, *SBH* (with its separate orders for adults and infants), first draft of the ILCW rite, the *Contemporary Worship 7* rite, the *LBW* rite, the *LA* and *OS* confirmation rites, and so on. In various places throughout the book are helpful comparative tables.

Among the issues analyzed are the question of one versus two rites (separately for infants and adults); the mode of Baptism (submersion or

immersion versus sprinkling or pouring*); the question of "emergency" Baptism; baptismal festivals versus single baptisms; the timing of Baptism (*LBW* clearly prefers the Easter Vigil); the question of communion and Baptism (if the first communion is at Baptism, does the neophyte continue to be communed, or is there a delay of future reception until an older age?); the renunciation and profession; baptismal architecture ("the font should be of a size sufficient to call attention to itself," p. 53); the texts of the thanksgiving prayer over the water; controversies over the epiclesis in that thanksgiving; the ancillary actions of anointing, handlaying, garment, and candle; and many problems related to "confirmation." Truscott covers not only the texts and revisions in detail but also the critiques, official and otherwise.

Detailed attention is given to the work of the main drafter of the ILCW baptismal rite, the late Hans Boehringer, and to the ILCW project director, Eugene L. Brand. The dialogue between the two (correspondence is often quoted) is central to the final order. The author concludes that "What Boehringer proposed . . . was not simply a new rite but an entirely new understanding of Baptism. Inherent in his proposal was a theology of Baptism focusing on conversion rather than the removal of original sin" (p. 41). One wishes there had been more attention to the paschal, ecclesiological, and eschatological dimensions of Baptism.

Throughout much of Lutheran history there has been controversy about confirmation, and this book gives that controversy detailed attention. Truscott covers the varied understandings of confirmation, of which Affirmation of Baptism is only one. He gives attention to the theology of confirmation not only in *LA* and *OS* but also in the 1964–70 study by the Joint Commission on the Theology and Practice of Confirmation.

Chapter 9, while brief, is very important, because it is focused on the future. It covers the post-*LBW* development of the adult catechumenate, the suggested changes in the rites of the ELCA's current Renewing Worship (RW) project, the role of confirmation, first communion, and the role of the bishop in Christian initiation.

Truscott has written a very important tome, vital for anyone interested in Holy Baptism and related rites. The book deserves wide readership. One wishes it had been published earlier so that the RW committee could have had more input from it.

*Submersion involves the entire candidate, including the entire head, being placed under the water. In immersion the candidate stands or kneels in the font while water is poured over his or her head. The former suggests Baptism as drowning, while the latter suggests washing. Pouring and sprinkling do not have much symbolic meaning.

S. Anita Stauffer
Melrose Park, Illinois

A World according to God: Practices for Putting Faith at the Center of Your Life. By Martha Ellen Stortz. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004. xv and 184 pages. Cloth. $21.95.

Stortz invites readers to rediscover the power of the practices of Christian discipleship. She describes these practices as imitating the example of Christ, providing places to encounter Christ, and forming us into Christ's body. Stortz contends that practices have the power to redirect our vision and emotions to see and feel from God's perspective, and thereby place our lives in a new context.

Stortz identifies six practices of Christian discipleship: Baptism, the Lord's Supper, prayer, forgiveness, remembering the dead, and fidelity. She describes these practices in ideal form, as though transformed lives necessarily follow for those who practice them. As a former student of Stortz's, I looked for and did not find the question with which we wrestled in her class: How do we account for persons who participate in the church's practices but show no signs of discipleship in their ethical conduct? Stortz focuses on the work we do upon ourselves and that which is done upon us by God. For example, she writes that forgiveness includes remembering wrongdoing, but not that we help one another recognize what we are accountable for.

While Stortz is Lutheran, *A World according to God* is ecumenical. This is evident in the

list of practices Stortz settles on. Roman Catholics will easily recognize her descriptions of fidelity and remembering the dead. The chapter on fidelity, for example, refers to religious vows as well as marriage. Protestants may be surprised by Stortz's omission of the practice of sharing the Word in scripture. Stortz's definition of Christian practice is broader than that of narrative theologians, so it is not clear how sharing the scriptures falls outside it, particularly since her book is thoroughly grounded by biblical texts.

The scriptural grounding, practical nature, and accessible language of this book make it useful for small groups and adult education in congregations. The chapter on forgiveness is particularly important for U.S. Christians today in light of our sense of grievance following September 11 and the increasing vitriol with which we express political divisions in our nation and our churches.

Bruce P. Rittenhouse
University of Chicago Divinity School

Remembering Jesus: Christian Community, Scripture, and the Moral Life. By Allen Verhey. Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2002. xii and 526 pages. Cloth. $35.00.

In my judgment, this book represents the best attempt to link biblical studies with contemporary ethical issues from a Christian perspective. Verhey teaches at Hope College in Holland, Michigan. His study on New Testament ethics, *The Great Reversal* (Regent College, 1993), demonstrated his careful biblical scholarship and grasp of ethical themes. This volume continues his critical, creative use of scripture as the canonical witness of the church.

Verhey has written extensively in the area of medical ethics, his specialty. Yet he is an expert guide on all the topics discussed. Of special significance is his motif, "Remembering Jesus," as the way to do Christian ethics, coupled with his profound understanding of Jesus as the proclaimer of "the good future of God"—Verhey's marvelous translation of "the kingdom of God"—and the "not yet" of the good future. The biblical witness of both Testaments is central to "remembering Jesus," but the early church and the current ethical scene are in ongoing conversation. The author seeks to include the whole Christian community within the conversation, hence the subtitle "Christian Community, Scripture, and the Moral Life." There is good reason the *Christian Century* (January 2003) listed this study among the top in Christian ethics.

Part 1, "Choices, Churches and Scripture," provides an introduction for doing ethics "by way of reminder." Here the author provides a model for Christian communities to become places of moral discourse. His chapter 2 would be a useful resource for adult classes or pastoral studies. On the role of scripture, he is keenly aware of problems and abuses in its use. Nor is scripture the norm that silences other sources such as experience or natural science. He insists that biblical injunctions need to be tested and validated by the community's experience and discernment. He especially opposes the use of scriptural prohibitions as sufficient for the justification of a contemporary ethical judgment. His call is to enlist the whole community as the place for moral conversation.

In the remainder of the book Verhey focuses on four ethical topics: medicine, sex and gender, economy, and politics. Each subject is examined with care using the same format: opening chapter introducing the topic; scriptural survey of OT and Gospels; remainder of NT; current discussion of ethical topic. This format proves effective, though it tends toward repetition.

Part 2, "Remembering Jesus in the Strange World of Sickness: A Continuing Tradition of Care for the Suffering," explores a Christian approach to sickness and healing. Verhey creatively employs a conversation between a Christian physician dying of cancer and a chaplain to discuss life-and-death matters. Chapter 7 on "watchful caring" for the suffering, with its profound proclamation of Christian hope for the dying, should be read by all Christian caregivers. The author is also sensitive to the limits of medical care and the need to say No when that moment appears.

Part 3, "Remembering Jesus in Gilead: A Continuing Tradition of Liberation and Chas-

tity," probes with courage and sensitivity the provocative topics of gender and sexuality. Verhey frames the discussion with Margaret Atwood's novel "A Handmaid's Tale in Gilead," a chilling vision of a patriarchal future. Against this background, he does an honest job of interpreting the all-too-patriarchal world of the Bible, including the NT. He sets forth the story of Jesus, "the handmaid's son," as the breakthrough moment. "Jesus challenged the patriarchal world of Palestine and envisioned a different future than Gilead" (p. 180). He recognizes the contributions of feminist scholarship. The chapter "A Continuing Tradition of Good Sex" builds on the creation story as the foundation for the mystery and mutuality of the one-flesh union of good sex.

He also looks at homosexuality with much honesty and sympathy. While not calling it good in light of the one-flesh union of male/female, he notes the need to consider the reality that some people have a sexual orientation to the same sex that they do not choose but discover. While singleness and chastity are options for both hetero- and homosexuals, it may not be a "gift" for all. He concludes: "If we allow divorce . . . for the sake of protecting marriage and marriage partners, and if we allow remarriage . . . then we must also consider allowing homosexual relations for the sake or protecting fidelity and mutuality and the homosexual partners" (p. 239). He rejects all homophobia in the church.

Part 4, "Remembering Jesus in the World of Adam Smith: A Continuing Tradition of Justice and Generosity," calls for a subversive vision against the dominant economic order. He knowingly surveys the oppressive world of patronage, peasantry, and Temple in the time of Jesus. He finds Jesus' call to the kingdom to involve good news to the poor; he taught no anxiety, to give generously, and to always remember the poor. The chapter on the NT and its attitude toward possessions concentrates on Luke-Acts, Paul, and James but is weak on the Pastorals and Revelation. The final chapter attacks the cult of affluence and the goal of creating wealth as the supreme economic good. The memory of Jesus lifts up a countervision: blessings for the poor, a sustainable quality of human life, and a sustainable natural environment.

Part 5, "Remembering Jesus in the Strange World of Politics: Revisiting Theocracy," argues at length for a revised understanding of Christian theocracy. Because God in Jesus is Lord also of politics, he thinks we have no other option. His chapter "Theocracy is a Four-Letter Word" recognizes the violent history of misuse in the name of God. A careful reading of the OT shows its ambivalent attitude toward authorities, both honor and suspicion.

The chapter on Jesus' theocratic politics sparkles with insights. He accepts a political reading of the exorcisms and finds Jesus to be neither a Zealot nor a pacifist. The politics of the early church examines the rest of the NT and their differing attitudes toward Rome and those in power. Here the writings of Walter Wink and Richard Cassidy and my own *Uneasy Neighbors* (Augsburg Fortress, 1999) would have strengthened his arguments. A closing chapter attempts to interpret a Christian theocracy in the context of a pluralistic culture. Verhey also provides a respectful critique of John Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas and pacifism. The book ends with a case history on universal health care that serves as a model for discourse, deliberation, and discernment in the church.

This study represents the best of a biblical theologian and Christian ethicist at work. Some important studies are missing, particularly on the Gospels. Written from a Reformed perspective, the author seems unaware of the Lutheran two-kingdom tradition, even though his thoughts express the dual world in which we live. Most unfortunate is the lack of a complete bibliography, something a revision should include. Otherwise, read and study and use this book with pleasure and profit.

Walter E. Pilgrim
Pacific Lutheran University
Tacoma, Washington

Briefly Noted

Stephen Westerholm's ***Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics*** (Eerdmans, $35) calls into question the so-called "new perspective" on Paul. After summarizing Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and Wesley's interpretation of Paul, i.e., justification by faith because God declares sinners righteous apart from works (the "Lutheran" interpretation), he traces twentieth-century evaluations of the "Lutheran Paul." He then turns to justification and the law in Paul's thought to conclude that the stress on Judaism and Paul in the "new perspective" does not rule out the stress on "grace abounding to sinners." A massive rewrite of his earlier *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith: Paul and His Recent Interpreters* (Eerdmans, 1988), this is an important book that deserves reading by pastors. *Edgar Krentz*

Sacra Pagina, the excellent New Testament commentary series, is nearing completion on schedule (The Liturgical Press). Recent volumes include ***First Corinthians*** by Raymond Collins ($39.95), ***Second Corinthians*** by Jan Lambrecht ($29.95), ***Colossians and Ephesians*** by Margaret Y. MacDonald ($39.95), ***Mark*** by John Donohue and Daniel J. Harrington ($39.95), ***1, 2, and 3 John*** by John Painter ($39.95), and most recently ***1 Peter, Jude, and 2 Peter*** by Donald P. Senior and Daniel J. Harrington ($39.95). These volumes all reflect the editorial guidelines of the series. Let me take the commentary on the Johannine Letters as an example. After an extended introduction (pp. 1–113) that treats early interpretations and all the questions of introduction, literary form, relationships to other New Testament texts, and so on, Painter gives for each unit of the text a new translation and then, in "Notes," careful discussion of details of the Greek text, followed by a section titled "Interpretation," essentially an essay on the literary form, theological content, and significance of the passage. The Interpretation stands alone; pastors will find this section very helpful in preparing to preach. The authors of these commentaries, all Roman Catholic biblical scholars, are known as meticulous interpreters. Lutheran pastors will find them very helpful aids to preaching and unusually good resources for adult forums on biblical themes. You will not find radical new interpretations; you will find clear, helpful guides to the meaning of the texts. This is an excellent series that deserves wide use. *EK*

In ***Born Divine: The Births of Jesus and Other Sons of God*** (Polebridge, $22) Robert J. Miller uses miraculous birth stories from the Greco-Roman world and noncanonical gospels to produce a postmodern reading of Matthew 1–2 and Luke 1–2. He concludes that the infancy stories are not historical, that the virgin birth is drawn from a prior conviction about Jesus' unique being. His interpretation will enrage some and encourage others, as he radically modernizes the stories for the contemporary world. *EK*

The Call to Discipleship. By Karl Barth. Trans. G. W Bromiley and ed. K. C. Hanson (Fortress, $6). This is a twenty-page excerpt from the section in Barth's *Church Dogmatics* VI.2 dealing with the doctrine of sanctification. Hanson interprets the Hebrew, Greek, and Latin phrases from the original for a wider reading audience. The infamous fine print has been enlarged, and chapter divisions have been inserted where Barth begins a new point. This is seminal reading. *John Flett, Princeton Theological Seminary*

The Truth Will Set You Free (Concordia, $9.99), the brief autobiography of Samuel L. Hoard, the second black pastor to graduate from the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod seminary in St. Louis, tells the story of his struggle against racism in academy, church, and society. Educated through high school in segregated, academically poor schools in St. Louis, he struggled with languages but conquered them. He served as a parish pastor and a military chaplain. While he makes clear that he is committed to the close communion and Biblicism of his denomination, nonetheless he worked with many denominations in the struggle

for racial justice and shows how evangelical ministry triumphed over denominational legalism (my wording) while a military chaplain during the Vietnam War. I read this with interest, since my father secured financial aid for him while in college and seminary. It adds a human-interest story to the history of the battle for racial equality in America. *EK*

Lamentations. The Old Testament Library. By Adele Berlin (Westminster John Knox, $39.95). B.'s commentary focuses on issues of poetry, vocabulary, and imagery rather than on historical questions. She notes the patterning of words and sounds and plays on words and sounds. Living in a world whose order has been disrupted, the poet constructs his order by the orderly progression of the Hebrew letters in the primarily acrostic poems. In chapter 1 the suffering is borne by a city personified as a woman in several roles—a widow, a betrayed lover, and finally a bereaved mother. The book does not try to explain suffering but to recreate and commemorate it, to relive the tragedy so that disobedience will not happen again. B.'s powerful new translation ends in despair: "You reject us completely,//you are angry with us, so very much." In Jewish tradition, one repeats the second last verse on a book that ends on a low note, which is a necessary strategy here: "Take us back, LORD, to yourself; O let us come back.//Make us again as we were before." *RWK*

Virtues and Values: The African and African American Experience. By Peter J. Paris (Fortress, $6). P. provides a resource to those interested in African and African American virtues and values as they center on God, community, family, and person. These virtues and values are upheld through different festivals, rituals, and ceremonial rites to attain a corrective social shared responsibility. Virtues that P. analyzes in the book include beneficence, forbearance, practical wisdom, improvisation, forgiveness, and justice. He provides the examples of Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King Jr. as individuals who exhibited these virtues and values in their lives. P. helps the reader to understand that African and African American virtues and values are teleological, as they preserve and promote the individual and the community. P. writes with a simplistic clarity so that a novice in the subject can easily move through the text. The book may serve well the clergy and the laity interested in understanding African and African American virtues and values in an introductory level. However, it is important to remember that Mandela and King were confined by space and time and that numerous ethnic groups in Africa celebrate their virtues and values differently. At the same time, with the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 and the crisis in Sudan today, one wonders whether the virtues and values that P. provides are compatible with contemporary African and African American experiences. *Peter Mageto, University of Evansville*

Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch. Edited by T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (InterVarsity, $50). This massive, 954-page dictionary contains articles on the books of the Pentateuch, its characters, theology, chronology, concepts, and history, with quite a few articles on methods (source criticism, textual criticism, social scientific criticism, literary or narrative criticism, etc.). Bibliographies are full and the discussion quite evenhanded and moderately conservative, with open discussion of the problems that face Mosaic authorship, history of the flood, and the like. While most of the contributors are evangelical or conservative, they do not pursue a hard line, and I detected four Lutherans among the contributors: Fretheim (Exodus) and Olson (Numbers) from the ELCA and Heck (Benjamin, Issachar, and Tamar) and Steinmann (cherubim, hardness of heart) from LCMS. The article on Deuteronomy argues for a premonarchical date (unconvincingly, in my judgment), but not on the basis of doctrinal presuppositions. An otherwise fine article on creation that honestly explores the relationships between Genesis and the ancient Near East studiously avoids discussion of how one is to relate Genesis to modern science. Overall, however, there is much of value here, which I will return to many times. I will steer students here also. It would make a fine addition to church libraries. *RWK*

Genesis, the Movie. By Robert Farrar Capon (Eerdmans, $28). C. writes a commentary on Genesis 1–3 by "watching" the Bible as a historical movie whose director is God. He thus attempts to get beyond the battles over historicity by comparing the readers' experience to that of the viewers of movies. Each section of the commentary begins with a printout of the Hebrew, Septuagint, Vulgate, KJV, RSV, and NRSV, that sort of blunts the movie metaphor for me, as do the frequent, long Hebrew, Greek, and Latin citations. C. draws on Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Julian of Norwich and from a host of modern poets and adds his usual spunky comments. *RWK*

Donald Juel, a Lutheran scholar who devoted himself to Mark, taught at Luther and then Princeton Seminary. He stressed the significance of the unusual ending at Mark 16:8, as his essay printed as chapter 1 in ***The Ending of Mark and the Ends of God: Essays in Memory of Donald Harrisville Juel,*** edited by Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Patrick Miller (Westminster John Knox, $24.95) makes clear. Twelve colleagues and friends expand on Juel's insight in essays on Mark, John, Romans, baptism, Genesis, Deuteronomy, and modern theology. A fitting tribute to a scholar who died too early in life. *EK*

Breathing Space: A Spiritual Journey in the South Bronx. By Heidi B. Neumark (Beacon, $25). N., who preached the installation sermon for Bishop Mark Hanson, recounts her nineteen-year ministry at Transfiguration Lutheran Church in the South Bronx. As pastor of an African American and Hispanic parish burdened by poverty, drug use, and attendant miseries, N. mixes anecdotes filled with hope and pain with biblical commentary and a rich knowledge of the giants of spirituality, both ancient and contemporary. She has learned to live "threatened by resurrection." The people she mourns, celebrates, and loves will not allow her to live as though they have not lived. In an Epilogue N. announces that she has taken on a new call at Trinity Lutheran Church in Manhattan. I cannot imagine a better example of the ELCA's program "in the city for good." RWK

Judges. By J. Clinton McCann (Westminster John Knox, $24.95). M. notes that the issue throughout the book of Judges is whether Israel will be faithful to the covenant, and the book is largely a rehearsal of the people's failure to worship Yahweh alone, ending in the utter chaos of chaps. 17–21. But God also repeatedly delivers an unfaithful people in Judges in what amounts to a series of new exoduses. The book of Judges joins other prophetic books in warning the people of God in every age of the deadening results of unfaithfulness. Its call to repentance is grounded in the conviction that God will be lovingly faithful to unfaithful people. Part of the Interpretation commentary series, this volume fulfills its promise to help the church with its preaching and teaching ministries with chapter headings such as "Samson and Culture Wars, Then and Now" and "Chaos and Crisis, Then and Now." *RWK*

The Reformation Reader on CD-ROM by Denis R. Janz (Fortress, $31) and ***Christian Theology Set with CD-ROM***, ed. Peter C. Hodgson and Robert H. King (Fortress, $59). The release of these invaluable volumes on CD-ROM does not mark any substantial revision of the print versions. *The Reformation Reader* includes some additional material (e.g., some selections from Erasmus, Luther, Calvin, and Teresa of Avila); there is nothing new or different in the *Christian Theology Set.* The advantage of these CD-ROMs are the supplementary aids, which students especially will appreciate: "How to Research and Write a Theology Paper" (in both sets), discussion and study questions, and links to related Web sites (for example, on Calvin and the Catholic Reformation). Pastors and teachers will also like the ability to cut and paste as well as print texts of their own choosing. *David C. Ratke, Lenoir-Rhyne College*

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Preaching Helps

Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost—Thanksgiving Day, Series A
First Sunday in Advent—Fourth Sunday in Advent, Series B

Garrison Keillor and the Second Coming

Two words uttered from any pulpit automatically cause me to stop listening—"Garrison Keillor." Yes, Garrison Keillor. I developed an aversion some years ago, during the weekend I traveled from upstate New York to New York City to preside at a wedding. My driver, whom I can only describe as a Lake Wobegon fanatic, played tapes of *A Prairie Home Companion* nonstop there and back. In two days of travel I heard thirty-four installments; we repeated my driver's favorites. He quoted lines. The water torture effect (Drip! Drip! Drip!) that any mention of Keillor has on me compounded over the years as preachers, determined to become Keillor-like storytellers, inserted the previous Saturday's tale from Lake Wobegon into their sermons, supposing that a room full of Lutherans hadn't heard it the night before.

I am not disparaging Garrison Keillor. After two days in a car listening nonstop to tapes of my own sermons, I would most likely never preach again! The multitude that spends Saturday evenings glued to radios, listening to NPR, not to mention the Lake Wobegon Store my wife dragged me into during our recent visit to the Mall of America, make clear that it's my problem, not Keillor's.

As we end one liturgical year and begin another, the appointed texts invite us to utter two other words from the pulpit that will affect some of our hearers the way "Garrison Keillor" affects me. Those words are "second coming." Yes, second coming. Surely, many in our pews are eager to hear about Christ's return. They watch the signs and decipher the codes in order to determine the day and the hour, which, Scripture tells us, only the Father knows (Mt 24:36). Others let the experts do the deciphering and decoding for them so that they are not left behind. For still others, talk of the second coming is something they simply do not want to hear, so they stop listening. These persons are not afraid of the future or unconcerned about tomorrow. On the contrary, they are occupied with the world and their lives, deeply concerned with the here and now. These hearers wait for Jesus to return and make the world right rather than snatch the righteous out of the world. Not worried about being left behind, they are concerned about all of those people, about how much of creation, both church and society have left behind. For these folk, peppering our preaching with *parousia* and preparedness will cause them to

automatically stop listening if there is too little "already" and too much "not yet." So how do we preach apocalyptic texts and Advent pericopes so that people will listen? Do we conclude that listening is our hearers' problem and move on?

Carey Gardiner Mack, who offers this series of Preaching Helps, looks at the readings and asks "Where is the grace?" Carey admits that grace is sometimes hard to find, and then she sets out to discover it. Carey finds grace in Jesus' parable about the bridesmaids, because there is, in fact, enough light for all. There is enough room for everyone to greet Jesus. At other places in these readings she finds grace in the realization that Jesus is as concerned with our societies as he is with our souls. And in these weeks from Thanksgiving to Christmas, Carey finds grace in the call to enjoy creation rather than consume it.

Carey describes herself using places—"Watertown (as in Wisconsin), Valparaiso (as in University), Chicago, Boone (as in North Carolina), Chicago, Watertown, Ann Arbor. . . ." In Watertown, Carey was born, baptized, introduced to public radio, and educated, and began more than a passing interest in all things U2. In Valparaiso, she earned a B.A. in American Studies in 1996, received the Outstanding Leadership and Service Award, and joined the ELCA. "In Chicago," Carey writes, "I went to seminary. Enough said." (As a seminary professor, I wonder what that says about the lasting impact of my ministry!) In Boone, she served as a Horizon intern at Grace Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Campus Ministry for Appalachian State University. After graduating from LSTC in 2000 and ordination in 2001, Carey moved to Ann Arbor and served her first call at Zion Lutheran Church. She played softball with John Rollefson (a recent contributor to Preaching Helps), got a gold membership to the Michigan Theater (a place I frequented long ago), and participated in the Pastor Theologian Program through Princeton Seminary's Center for Theological Inquiry. In 2005 she completed both a unit of CPE at St. Joseph's Hospital in Ann Arbor and Intentional Interim Ministry training. She currently serves as interim pastor at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Monroe, Michigan.

As I see it, the preaching challenge these weeks is to find the grace in apocalyptic texts and Advent pericopes and to preach it in such a way that our hearers do not shut down at the sound of "second coming." That the Christians gathered around these readings on Sunday mornings outnumber the multitudes glued to their radios on Saturday nights suggests to me that grace is to be found here. What is the grace of Christ's second coming for you, your family, your congregation and community? How does Christ's grace-full promise to come someday impact your life today? How are you going to preach it? How do you suppose Garrison Keillor would preach it? If he tells us on the radio, please let me know. I must confess, I won't be listening.

—Craig A. Satterlee, Editor of Preaching Helps (csatterl@lstc.edu)

Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 27) November 6, 2005

Amos 5:18–24
Psalm 70
1 Thessalonians 4:13–18
Matthew 25:1–13

Restlessness, Rapture, Revelation, and Rossing

First Reading

Today's readings contain awesome apocalyptic calls. Amos reveals the hypocrisy of those who offer, as they perceive it, perfect worship of God, but do not work for justice. "I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps" (Amos 5:21–23). Amos provides an alternative vision for the Israelites. "But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (v. 24). The image of an ever-flowing stream pointed to something rare for those who first read or heard this text. Dry riverbeds were commonplace in Palestine. Runoff from a large storm meant life and liberation from the toil of searching out other water sources, or life without water.

1 Thessalonians is just as dramatic in its revelation of the *parousia* and is probably the most hopeful and comforting of all of the texts for this day. Paul's central message in this section of 1 Thessalonians is that the deceased faithful in Thessalonica will share in the Lord's *parousia*, when God will raise all from the dead and bring the deceased forth. This passage is also interesting inasmuch as some frequently use it to talk about "the rapture." In *The Rapture Exposed* (Boulder: Westview, 2004) Barbara Rossing addresses the origins, flaws, and negative consequences in rapture theology. In another venue she explains 1 Thess 4:17 like this: "The people in Thessalonica were worried because some of their relatives had died before Jesus' second coming. They wanted to make sure that they would not be separated from their relatives. So Paul wrote that when Jesus returned to earth, the dead in Christ will rise. This is the passage: 'We who are alive who are left will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air.' That is why Christ is returning to earth. This is Jesus' second coming. The emphasis is that all of us participate in going to greet Jesus. But it's not a rapture or a snatching of people up to heaven for seven years" (John Whitehead, "God So Loved the World That He Gave Us World War II," *The Rutherford Files: oldSpeak*, The Rutherford Institute, 4 June 2005, *www.rutherford.org/oldspeak/articles/religion/oldspeak-worldwar3.asp*).

From Matthew we have the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Bridesmaids. The theme is obvious: prepare for the second coming of Christ, which could happen at any time. A key quality of apocalyptic literature is allegory. Scholars disagree on whether or not this parable came from Jesus. They generally do agree that, in this particular parable, the virgins represent the church that is waiting for the second coming, the bridegroom is Christ, and the wedding feast is the moment in which Christ comes for the church. The delay of the bridegroom means that there will be a delay of the second coming, the bridegroom's arrival in the dark of night is the second coming, and the closing of the door is the final judgment. Scholars do not all agree about the meaning of the oil. In other parables within or near the

twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew, the texts define *oil* (being prepared) as working faithfully for the Lord (24:46). In the Parable of the Talents, being prepared means using well what God gives us (25:23). In the Judgment of the Nations, the Son of Man defines preparation for the second coming as feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, taking care of the sick, and visiting the prisoner. To summarize, having oil means being prepared. Being prepared means obeying Jesus' teachings in the greatest commandment, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (22:37).

Pastoral Reflection

These texts challenge us to find grace. The place where God reveals our brokenness seems obvious—we go through the motions of a religious life in a culture that many experience as unjust, we are not faithful, and we are not prepared (despite, I suspect, some of you having been Boy Scouts). Even if suffering from unfaithfulness and unpreparedness, most members of our congregations will be familiar with the famous words paraphrased by Martin Luther King Jr., "until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream." King loved this passage and used it often. For example, King used the same paraphrase of Amos 5:24 in December 1955 at the beginning of the Montgomery bus boycott; in a 1961 commencement address at Lincoln University; in his last presidential address to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1967; and in the sermon that he gave on April 3, 1968, the night before he was assassinated. Today, one can still find King's paraphrase in Montgomery, inscribed on the Civil Rights Memorial.

Did you know that you cannot find "mighty stream" in any contemporary translations of the Bible? Like the New Revised Standard Version, contemporary versions recognize that the Hebrew *nahal 'etan* means something like an "ever-flowing" or "everlasting" stream. Consider this. An unfailing water source surely gave hope to Amos's ancient Israelite audience, who generally gazed upon dry streambeds that filled with water only on the occasions when they carried runoff from a heavy rain. Grace exists in the exegesis of "ever-flowing" and "everlasting." The human feeling at the root of most sin is the feeling of fear. How does it change your perspective, feelings, or behavior to think of an eternal supply of something? I relax. I am more generous. I am less worried about hoarding my own privilege, money, or time. Even more significant is the source of all we have—God. God makes unlimited room at the table (or drugstore counter, in historical parlance). God makes unlimited space for all to participate in going to greet Jesus.

In my childhood, my family lived all over the United States and, at different times, all over the world. So, when a relative would come to visit my parents, or when we would travel to visit our relatives, my brother and I would compete in trying to greet Grandpa first. Remembering that feeling offers me a glimpse of participating in greeting Jesus. Where is the grace in the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Bridesmaids? First, being one of the bridesmaids in this scenario does not entail wearing a floppy hat, or a dress that will work well as a couch cushion cover when you are through or that works only on women who are a size 2. Second, there is grace in our unlimited supply of love. In addition, we prepare for Jesus' coming by giving love away. There is already enough to go around, to light the world, to bring the warmth of Christ to all creation, until Jesus comes again. CGM

Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 28) November 13, 2005

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

"By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return." —Gen 3:19
"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" —Matt 6:25

First Reading
Zephaniah 1:2–3:20 originated in the early years of King Josiah, and the writer intended to support Josiah's reforms. The material in today's reading warns the people of the consequences of failing to seek God. Zephaniah's message was that God's ultimate goal in judgment was to transform God's people into a poor and humble people among whom God could live.

Psalm 90, perhaps the most abundant and definitely the most visceral of all the texts for this day, comes from the voices of the community. People pray in a certain aesthetic and patterned manner in this petition hymn. The community prays about the essential and permanent difference between God and humanity. The difference is God's transcendence and humanity's hopelessness (particularly as expressed in this psalm). Those praying this psalm know the experience that Garrison Keillor describes in his book *Wobegon Boy* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1997). "My dad, Byron, was a little edgy, expecting the worst, saving glass jars and paper clips, turning off lights and cranking down the thermostat to keep our family out of the poorhouse. . . . Mother was well composed, a true Lutheran, and taught me to Cheer up, Make yourself useful, Mind your manners, and above all, Don't feel sorry for yourself" (p. 1). Byron gives voice to the experience of those punished by life. Mother consoles herself by reciting words in a poetic fashion. "[The hopelessness that humans experience] is a curse," David Robertson writes, "but to state it poetically is to go much the way of bearing it" ("Literary Criticism of the Bible: Psalm 90 and Shelley's 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," *Semeia* 8 (1977): 48). In our contemporary sacred world, we hold not just Mother and Keillor but the Lord's Prayer, the 23rd Psalm, and Reinhold Niebuhr's Serenity Prayer.

Then, we move on to the sweet words of Paul. This is a passage of hope. While Paul challenges the people of Thessalonica to think about the second coming in a vigilant and sober way, he at the same time attempts to comfort the early Christian community and guide them in a way that inspires hope. Eugene Peterson paraphrases vv. 9–10 well: "God didn't set us up for an angry rejection but for salvation by our Master, Jesus Christ. He died for us, a death that triggered life. Whether we're awake with the living or asleep with the dead, we're alive with him!" (*The Message Remix: Bible in Contemporary Language* [Colorado Springs: Navpress, 2003]).

Finally, Matthew pulls no punches. Almost at the end of year A, the lectionary gives us one of the most challenging, in my humble opinion, of all parables—from, in my humble opinion, the most challenging version of the Good News. Jesus "may well have aimed [this parable] . . . at those religious circles in his own Jewish community who were so concerned for the law of Moses

to be preserved in all its purity, that they hedged it round with all manner of extra rules and regulations. . . . The truly faithful servants . . . are . . . those who actually go out . . . they meet a wounded man on the Jericho road, . . . they meet the poor, the lame and the blind and the forgotten ones of the land" (Keith Clements, "Trustworthiness: More than Preserving the Past," *The Ecumenical Review* 1 (2004): 63–67).

Pastoral Reflection

The word that comes to mind throughout all of these readings is the word *anamnesis*. If one were to summarize the meaning of anamnesis, one could describe a ritual act kept now, that makes a truth, and that which God sets apart, present in *kairos* and today.

The Holy Spirit brings about anamnesis. Remember who you are. Remember your Creator. Remember your Redeemer. Remember this parable, which God preserved from the teachings of the early church and included in the gospels, just at the time when the Christian community was moving out of its Jewish context into the wider world of the Roman empire, Europe, and eventually North America. In order for the church to keep the gospel, the church entered the market places of Corinth, Athens, Rome, and Ann Arbor, Michigan—no easy task. With the Spirit, the church had to take the gospel into the new frontiers of ideas and beliefs that those Christians were encountering.

This day, some of our frontiers are geographic. At the same time, as they were in the earliest days, our frontiers are philosophical, epistemological, and, always, missiological. CGM

Christ the King
November 20, 2005

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

"Whoever I am, I am thine."
—Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 1906–1945

First Reading

Gerhard von Rad in *The Message of the Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965) reminds us that the writer of Ezek 34:12 refers to the day of Yahweh in connection with a past event, rather than the way we commonly speak of the "Day of the Lord" as a future eschatological event. Chapter 34 is part of the exile and contains statements of hope and new possibility—of a return to former glory and security. In Ezekiel, these statements offer hope that the people in exile will receive the newness of God and act on the new historic possibilities. In 34:1–10, Ezekiel presents a harsh analysis of the shepherds (i.e., kings) who used their power and office in exploitative ways. In contrast, Ezekiel announces a new rule in which the shepherd will genuinely care for the sheep.

In Matthew, the "Son of Man" will hold the community and leaders accountable for their fidelity to Jesus' teaching. The Son of Man will also hold the church accountable, judging both the church's instinctive response to the gospel and how the church proclaims it. In other words, it's what people do that shows their fidelity.

So, on Christ the King Sunday, this is what we might preach: Fidelity to Christ holds amazing hope.

Pastoral Reflection
In addition to the biblical texts appointed for this day, we also hold the story of the historical context in which Christ the King Sunday came into existence. Christ the King Sunday is a relatively new development. It does not bear the history of many long-held church traditions such as All Saints or Christmas or Easter and does not possess the deep and traditional biblical backing of these celebrations. Pope Pius XI brought Christ the King Sunday into the church's liturgical year in 1925. He was attempting to do several things, but mainly to advance the message of God in Christ over and against that of the political forces moving in the world at that time—people like Mussolini and Hitler.

It was a time of focusing inward and rebuilding after the first Great War. People regarded some humans as saviors. The pope thought that the time was right for a refocusing on the One who is ultimately the king in our lives as people of faith. We, then, celebrate Christ as our king in order to help us realize that it is, first, Christ whom we serve. Further, we cannot serve some entities at the same time that we serve Christ. What do those contemporary golden calves look like? The economy? Soccer? Hate? Fear? Are you aware of the Last Six Words of the Church, "We've never done it that way before"?

On Christ the King Sunday, we preach of the future. We preach Jesus in this way. When Jesus describes himself as shepherdesque, he echoes the images of Ezekiel 34. In that prophetic passage God declares, "I myself will search for my sheep . . . I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness" (34:11–12). This divine shepherding turns out to be exercised through a restored Davidic kingship (the hopeful connection to history): "I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David . . . he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them" (Ezek 34:23–24). Is it any wonder that Jesus excited messianic speculation by claiming to be the good shepherd? His language was and is not simply that of a shoulder to cry on. Nor is it the language of one who promises simply to care for the souls of those who believe. Jesus' language was and is political talk. CGM

Thanksgiving Day
November 24, 2005

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

"If you want to kiss the sky, better learn how to kneel." (U2)

First Reading
Just to summarize, the section of Deuteronomy that we read this day is the section that deals with how one lives in the covenant with God. The land is important in this covenant. Moreover, keeping the land depends on faithfulness to God and God's law. This section follows the section of Deuteronomy in which Moses restates the Ten Commandments and encourages the Israelites to love and fear God. The main message seems to be about repentance. The writer encourages the people to trust God's promise, which will not fail, and—here is the interesting part—the repentance part is God's gift. Psalm 65 expresses such repentance. The whole people (together with the king, presumably) and all creation (the meadows and hills are singing as well), concede their guilt and celebrate God's forgiveness.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul struggles to keep

this important congregation faithful. Paul is writing to this congregation because opposition against his ministry developed, instigated by foreign missionaries who invaded the Corinthian church. Ministry is difficult, and Paul shares these relevant words with the embattled congregation: "You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God. Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others" (2 Cor 9:11–13).

Finally, we continue the theme of thanksgiving in the midst of challenge with the passage from Luke—the healing of ten lepers after which only one comes back to thank Jesus. In his comprehensive study of Luke, Fred Danker reminds us of several things. First, this reading from Luke is part of the "journey to Jerusalem" section. Second, this passage is about the faith that is necessary for participation in this climactic phase of God's kingdom action. Finally, this thanksgiving constitutes saving faith (Frederick W. Danker, *Luke* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986]).

Pastoral Reflection

There are many links to contemporary life in these texts. Deuteronomy provides us with some wonderful environmental images. God gives us rich land with expectations. One could write an entire sermon on the trouble in our world around our environmental issues. The challenge, for me, would be to find the grace around that issue. A starting place for the grace is simply in the creation that we get to enjoy, rather than consume. This would certainly be a salient topic as people get ready to face the challenge of consuming on all sorts of levels before Christmas.

One might use the reading from Psalms to add a nonanthropocentric dimension to God's salvific presence. Further, if we are honest, we find ourselves in situations very similar to those of the Corinthians. Who or what is trying to steal you and your flock away from the gospel? In a recent column at *www.theooze.com* Mike Perschon gets to the heart of the matter. "After working in youth ministry for fifteen years, I have yet to meet a devout Christian turned Satanist. I have, on the other hand, met more than a handful of greedy, materialistic Christian teens whose church experience not only condones their lifestyle and behavior, but reinforces it in the name of ministry" ("Counter Consumer Culture," *The Ooze: Conversation for the Journey*, July 9, 2005).

Finally, so many in our world look for God but do not find God. Luke suggests that faith begins in gratitude for the healing that each one of us has received in the work of Jesus Christ. Or, as Bono sings, "If you want to kiss the sky, better learn how to kneel." CGM

First Sunday in Advent
Series B
November 27, 2005

Isaiah 64:1–9
Psalm 80:1–7, 16–18
or Psalm 80:1–7, 17–19
1 Corinthians 1:3–9
Mark 13:24–37

"God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." —1 Cor 1:9

First Reading

Isaiah 64 is a lament that begins at 63:15. All of chapter 64 communicates a deep sense of unworthiness of Israel's past conduct and a desperate hope for some signal from God to indicate that God knows, understands, and will respond to the needs of God's people. We understand from the use of "Father" in verse 8 that there was a split within the community. Those in religious power, the Zadokite priests in this case, claim "we have Abraham, we have Israel for our father." Those in power assert this to those who are excluded from power, those specifically outside the power structure, who nevertheless claim to be spokespersons for God. The writer is making a counterclaim that it is God who is our father.

In Isaiah 64, humanity looks like this—exiled, yearning for God to come to them, yearning for God to make a shelter among them, remembering God's previous deliverance of them, remembering God's steadfastness towards those who place trust in him, confessing sins, unrighteous, dependent, and at the same time loyal. William L. Holladay argues that these people of Isaiah 64 are the people who allow no divergence from true monotheistic belief and expect loyal adherence to the covenant and the prophetic word (*Isaiah: Scroll of a Prophetic Heritage* [Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1978), 170–73, 184.

We don't usually preach on the psalms because, as Walter Brueggemann writes, we fall prey to a "frightened, numb denial and deception that does not want to experience the disorientation in life" (*The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984], 51). Lonora Tubbs Tisdale argues in favor of considering preaching on Psalm 80: "Psalm 80 . . . require[s] . . . the church to name the places where we as a body experience and question God's judgement and God's absence" ("Psalm 80:1–7," *Interpretation* 47 [1993]: 396–99). The psalmist looks up at a nation, formerly a glorious nation, in ruins. As in Isaiah, God seems unmoved and distant. This is our Advent journey, in which we move, as Tubbs Tisdale writes, "from wail to wonder."

Pastoral Reflection

December 1 is World AIDS Day. According to the United Nations, 12 million children orphaned by AIDS live in Sub-Saharan Africa. Your own research will turn up additional statistics. The first Sunday of Advent is a good Sunday to hear the voices of those infected by HIV/AIDS. The voice of the orphaned and the images of communities devastated by AIDS embodies a contemporary experience of yearning and exile.

In her poem "In Blackwater Woods" Mary Oliver writes,

> Every year
> everything
> I have learned
> in my lifetime
> leads back to this: the fires
> and the black river of loss
> whose other side
> is salvation . . .

(*New and Selected Poems* [Boston: Beacon, 1992], 177–78).

This is how we begin. CGM

Second Sunday in Advent December 4, 2005

Isaiah 40:1–11
Psalm 85:1–2, 8–13
2 Peter 3:8–15a
Mark 1:1–8

First Reading

The approach of the prophet who composed the poems and oracles found in Isaiah 40–55 is similar to some contemporary therapies for people who are, in particular, second generations in exile—whose memories of what once was are even more vague than the first generation's. Through various genres of poetry, the "Second Isaiah" counseled the exiles to reframe their pessimism about Israel, YHWH, and their future. The exiles' psychological distress provided impetus for the poetry of one of early Judaism's most creative thinkers: the prophet known often as the Second Isaiah (Isaiah 40–55). Throughout the various genres of poetry, deliverance with more than adequate forgiveness (e.g., 40:1–2) by a universally powerful deity is promised to servant Israel who has an exalted destiny in the divine nation. Similar attempts at reframing are visible in the poetry of the Second Isaiah. Indeed, one could claim that one of the primary impulses of the prophet's ministry is to offer the captives a new sense of self and a new vision of Israel's God. (See William S. Morrow, "Comfort for Jerusalem: The Second Isaiah as Counselor to Refugees," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* [2003]: 229–32.)

Some argue that the witness of John the Baptist is the beginning of the Good News. The complete Good News will not be revealed until more time has passed. Most important, though, we are at a beginning that declares that we are not captive to many things, including precedent. John the Baptist announced this.

Pastoral Reflection

Preaching on the text from Isaiah, Heidi Neumark raises the central tension in this text: "When will this be?" When will Isaiah's words come true? ("Advent," *Christian Century* 118 [2001]: 6–8). Neumark describes her husband's work at the Dean and Deluca in Soho, a high-end retailer of gourmet and specialty food, in which he sells caviar and foie gras. At the same time, the food pantry in her congregation has run out of staples such as canned tuna and powdered milk.

In my context, I observe an injustice: there are a disproportionate number of people from certain demographic groups serving in Iraq right now. Neumark continues, "the lions and the lambs are not too close yet either." I read the newspaper, and the letters to the editor point toward the distance, the anger, and the hurt between those that live in the United States.

Neumark continues, "During Advent I am always in sync. Advent unfailingly embraces and comprehends my reality. And what is that? I think of the Spanish word anhelo, or longing. Advent is when the church can no longer contain its unbearable, unfulfilled desire and the cry of anhelo bursts forth: Maranatha, Come, Lord Jesus! O Come, O Come, Emmanuel!"

We long for that which we once knew. "Somehow I too believe we all passed through the heart of God on our way to where we are . . . the only way to come close to [the heart of God] is to live as closely as possible to God now—to try to be at one with the heartbeat of life, to love and

to be true, just, kind, and good—to try and nudge the mountains and valleys into an embrace that heals the breach."

Isaiah describes the heart of God, the mountains and valleys nudged into an embrace that heals the breach between God's hopes and desires and the world. Again, as we contemplate the witness of John the Baptist as the incomplete Good News, we can connect it to this idea of the heart of God. John the Baptist offers a step toward wholeness. Isaiah offers one more. CGM

Third Sunday in Advent December 11, 2005

Isaiah 61:1–4, 8–11
Psalm 126
or Luke 1:47–55
1 Thessalonians 5:16–24
John 1:6–8, 19–28

First Reading

"God sent me to pardon all prisoners" (Isa 61:1 *The Message*). Whenever I read this passage from Isaiah, I think of two films. First is the story of Rubin "Hurricane" Carter, who spent almost twenty years in prison before being released in 1985. Denzel Washington portrayed Carter in the 1999 film *The Hurricane*. Second is *In the Name of the Father*, a film about a petty robber from Belfast named Gerry Conlon, whom the British implicate and imprison for an IRA bombing of a pub that kills several people. The film shows Conlon as he is intimidated by the British police and as the police coerce Conlon and four of his friends into confessions. Gerry's father and other relatives in London are also implicated in the crime. Conlon spends fourteen years in prison while his father tries to prove his innocence with the help of a British attorney, Gareth Peirce. *In the Name of the Father* is a true story. Both of these stories flesh out the power of pardoning prisoners.

Pastoral Reflection

It is interesting to explore what pardoning prisoners entails. When the gentlemen who were imprisoned on the basis of coerced confessions around IRA bombings left prison, they met with psychiatrists. After spending all those years in prison they suffered from irreversible, persistent, and disabling post-traumatic stress syndrome. The mental health professionals who evaluated them compared their mental state with that of brain-damaged accident victims or people who had suffered war crimes. "It often made them impossible to live with," one psychiatrist said. Truly, they came out of prison poor, heartbroken, captive, with languid spirits and lives in ruins. What does Good News mean to them?

Toward what does the Good News call us? Surely, it raises ethical questions around wrongful imprisonment. Further, what does it look like to rebuild old ruins, raise new cities, recognize all as God's blessed? Surely, stories of those in recovery from substance abuse could provide concrete and relevant images today of lives "dressed up in suits of salvation" (Isa 61:10 *The Message*).

Fourth Sunday in Advent
December 18, 2005

2 Samuel 7:1–11, 16
Luke 1:47–55
Romans 16:25–27
Luke 1:26–38

"Mother of the homeless, Widowed Mother, Mother of a political prisoner, Mother of an executed prisoner, Unwed Mother, Seeker of sanctuary, first disciple, Pray for us." (Lawrence Cunningham, "There's Something About Mary," *U.S. Catholic* 64 (October 1999): 12–18.

First Reading

I would love to find the exact quote, but apparently somewhere Dietrich Bonhoeffer called the Magnificat the most passionate, wildest, most revolutionary Advent hymn ever sung. One of the great criticisms of the church from those in my particular generation (the so-called Generation X) is that the church domesticated the great and visceral parts of the faith. It is difficult to resonate with that criticism and stand on the preaching side of the pulpit. This day we hold a passionate, wild, revolutionary Advent hymn that we might explore with the members of our congregation. Further, we hold the words of a woman who, though interesting, might be relegated to back-burner status by many congregations who seek to distinguish themselves from Roman Catholics (I have at least one such congregation in my history). I want to persuade you to preach on the Magnificat, as announced by Mary the mother of Jesus.

I am quite fascinated with Mary. Perhaps it was the absence of a humanized Mary from my early Christian education experience. My earliest memories are of Mary of the Sunday School Christmas Pageant. The nicest girl always played Mary, which probably only served to sterilize the person of Mary. In fact, as Bonhoeffer noticed, and we might as well, Mary stood at some of the most powerful turning points in the history of the world. They were not pleasant points but points filled with blood and tears.

People on the margins are fascinated with Mary. Gang members tattoo images of Our Lady of Guadalupe on their backs as a shield against the bullets of rivals. The late German theologian Karl Rahner argued that different ages looked to Mary to express values that were of intense concern to their own cultures. What values are of intense concern to us? To other cultures?

What is your experience with Mary? When people talked about her, which of her qualities did they downplay, and which were lifted up?

Pastoral Reflection

Reading "first disciple" in the quotation, we are reminded that Mary is a model for every Christian and not just for women. When we follow the course of her life—from the acceptance of the Word of God at the moment of the Annunciation, through the public ministry of Christ, to her faithful witness at the foot of the cross and her presence in the upper room on the eve of Pentecost—we see Mary as one who lived with the Word of God in extraordinary loyalty.

Jesus gave these words to his disciples when they were tired and anxious: "Peace be with you." I pass them on with one final thought. During his famed speech in *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, Linus, who is well known to be dependent on his security blanket, actually lets go of it when he recites "Fear not. For behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy. . . ."

Fear not, as you bring tidings of great joy. CGM

Responses
are welcome!

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